



Approaches to identifying stakeholders in environmental management: Insights from practitioners to go beyond the ‘usual suspects’



R.M. Colvin^{a,*}, G. Bradd Witt^a, Justine Lacey^b

^a School of Geography, Planning and Environmental Management, The University of Queensland, St Lucia, 4072 QLD, Australia

^b Commonwealth Scientific & Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Land & Water Flagship, PO Box 883, Kenmore, QLD 4069, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 September 2015

Received in revised form

15 December 2015

Accepted 27 December 2015

Available online 7 January 2016

Keywords:

Natural resources management

Participation

Citizenry

Community

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder analysis

ABSTRACT

Stakeholder analysis and engagement processes are recognised as essential in environmental and natural resources management (ENRM). Underpinning these processes is the identification of stakeholders, an often tacit process which finds the practitioner responsible for stakeholder analysis or engagement sifting through all of society to determine who is awarded stakeholder status for the given project or issue. While the ENRM literature provides guidance for stakeholder analysis and engagement, there has not been the same level of examination of the practical approaches to—and assumptions underlying—stakeholder identification by practitioners working in the field. This research extends on the ENRM stakeholder analysis and engagement literature by exploring the approaches to identification as used by ENRM practitioners. Semi-structured interviews ($n=20$) were conducted with ENRM practitioners, leading to the classification of eight approaches to stakeholder identification. These approaches are discussed as the ‘art’ and ‘science’ of stakeholder identification. Practitioners’ conceptualisations of the terms stakeholder, community, and the citizenry are discussed, and differences in understandings of these critical terms are outlined based on the broad domain of ENRM in which the practitioner is operating (land use change versus agricultural extension or community engagement). The social structures of relevance to stakeholder identification (individual, social constituency, group, organisation) are presented, and practitioners’ perspectives on the role of groups are discussed. Through explicating the approaches to identification of stakeholders, this research offers new perspectives on a significant element of ENRM. These insights provide greater clarity on the practices which shape stakeholder analysis and engagement in ENRM, and highlight the importance of acknowledging the privileged position of the practitioner in deciding who is awarded stakeholder status in a project or issue.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Stakeholder engagement is viewed as an essential component of good environmental and natural resource management (ENRM) (Billgren and Holmén, 2008; Grimble and Wellard, 1997; Reed, 2008). Within the broad scope of public participation activities, stakeholder engagement represents a concerted effort to involve the people who have a stake in the outcome of the decision being made (Soma and Vatn, 2014). Engaging stakeholders in decision making is expected to yield benefits through incorporating a range of perspectives and fostering social acceptance for the decision

outcome (Fischer et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2013). Participation of stakeholders in decision making can also be viewed as a facet of sustainable development (Colvin et al., 2015b; Soma and Vatn, 2014) or a hallmark of morally responsible conduct by decision makers (Parsons et al., 2015). In addition to engagement in decision making, analysis of stakeholders contributes to an understanding of the social dimensions of challenging ENRM issues, often as a precursor to engagement (Billgren and Holmén, 2008).

For both analysis and engagement, a necessary early step is identification of who achieves status as a stakeholder (Billgren and Holmén, 2008; Bryson, 2004; Miles 2015; Mitchell et al., 1997; Prell et al., 2007; Reed et al., 2009, 2013). The literature on identification of ENRM stakeholders has established criteria for selection of stakeholders in pursuit of equitable and socially-representative processes (Billgren and Holmén, 2008; Reed et al., 2009). These criteria include classifications such as: who is affected by or can affect

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: r.colvin2@uq.edu.au (R.M. Colvin), bwitt@uq.edu.au (G.B. Witt), justine.lacey@csiro.au (J. Lacey).

an ENRM issue (Billgren and Holmén, 2008; Reed et al., 2009), and; who may be interested in (Soma and Vatn, 2014) or impacted by an ENRM issue (Fischer et al., 2014). Application of these criteria in ENRM can be especially vexed, as the interconnectedness of natural systems can lead to who is considered a stakeholder including “almost everyone and everything” (Billgren and Holmén, 2008, p. 553). This means that for a practitioner undertaking ENRM stakeholder analysis or engagement, in identifying who is affected by, can affect, has an interest in, or may be impacted by the ENRM issue, the practitioner has all of society to sift through in order to determine who achieves stakeholder status for the issue at hand.

When turning to society to select stakeholders for analysis or engagement, ENRM practitioners must navigate through the complexities of society to identify which social structures (e.g., individual people, social categories and constituencies, informal or formal groups, organisations) are emphasised or backgrounded in the search for those who are awarded stakeholder status. The ENRM stakeholder analysis and engagement literature has indicated that: stakeholders tend to be viewed as self-evident (Prell et al., 2007; Reed et al., 2009); there is repeated identification of the ‘usual suspects’ (Reed, 2008), and; organised groups tend to be drawn on as stakeholders in ENRM (Billgren and Holmén, 2008). Following this, it becomes evident that where in society ENRM practitioners look to identify stakeholders can influence who is awarded stakeholder status for a given issue.

This research examines the process of ENRM stakeholder identification through analysis of interviews with ENRM engagement practitioners based in Australasia, who discuss their practice in Australasia and other Western democracies. This approach has been adopted to extend the ENRM stakeholder analysis and engagement literature through drawing on the experiences of those who are actively responsible for identification of ENRM stakeholders. Through this study, insights into the explicit and tacit approaches used for identification of ENRM stakeholders are presented, and ENRM practitioners’ perspectives on the social structures of relevance when identifying stakeholders are outlined.

2. Defining stakeholders

Reed (2008) has distinguished between public participation as a broad movement toward involvement of civil society in decision making, and stakeholder engagement as a focused process involving those who are affected by, or can affect, a decision. Where public participation may attempt to engage all of society in efforts to achieve directly-democratic outcomes (e.g., Carson, 2009), stakeholder engagement necessitates analysis of the social dimension of a given ENRM issue to create an issue-specific strategy for engagement (Billgren and Holmén, 2008). The distinction between public participation and stakeholder engagement is increasingly reflected in the academic literature where stakeholders represent entities which are clearly differentiated from the citizenry or general public (Aanesen et al., 2014; Colvin et al., 2015b; Fischer et al., 2014; Kahane et al., 2013; Soma and Vatn, 2014). This is based on the expectation that stakeholders represent sectorial or focused interests, while the citizenry serves to represent the ‘public good’ (Carson, 2009; Colvin et al., 2015b; Soma and Vatn, 2014). Stakeholders, then, tend to be defined as formally-affiliated groups with a collective interest and shared preferences for the ENRM issue in question (Kahane et al., 2013; Soma and Vatn, 2014; Colvin et al., 2015b).

Defining stakeholders as being representative of specific interests, in contrast to the citizenry who may be seen to represent the public good, highlights a distinction between the operational (strategic) definition of ‘stakeholder’ with the theoretical (normative) definition of ‘stakeholder’. In an evaluation of the definition

of ‘stakeholder’ in the business management context, Miles (2015) outlined different conceptualisations of ‘stakeholder’ built around this distinction. While the normative definition of stakeholder may include any and all people who have some degree of interest (including moral interests) in an issue, a strategic definition of stakeholder captures only those stakeholders whose engagement can be viewed as a pragmatic requirement for successful outcomes (Miles, 2015, pp. 13–14). Especially in ENRM where the interconnectedness of ecological and social systems is well understood, the normative definition of stakeholder creates the potential for a broad selection of people to be considered stakeholders in any given ENRM issue (Billgren and Holmén, 2008). A shift from normative selection of stakeholders to strategic selection of stakeholders is therefore based on the evaluation of the practitioner(s) responsible for the identification of stakeholders (Miles, 2015). Who counts as an ENRM stakeholder in analysis and engagement becomes not just a question of who has a stake, but who has a stake as recognised by those responsible for the stakeholder identification process. Drawing again from Miles (2015), those who are afforded stakeholder status can be seen to be those who from a normative perspective have a stake in the ENRM issue, and whose stake is recognised by the practitioner undertaking stakeholder identification. In this way, while in ENRM everyone may theoretically be a stakeholder in a given issue, it is only those who are recognised through the processes of stakeholder identification who are afforded stakeholder status.

3. The ‘usual suspects’ in ENRM stakeholder engagement

While stakeholders can be drawn from a range of social structures and vary according to group attributes, there is evidence of repeated inclusion of the ‘usual suspects’ (Reed et al., 2009) in ENRM, described by Kivits (2011, p. 320) as “communities, NGOs, government and the private sector”. These prototypical stakeholder categorisations emerge across ENRM projects and studies as: industry (the private sector, e.g. mining, energy, agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries, depending on the issue); jurisdictional governments; environmentalists or conservationists (NGOs) and; community (e.g., Kindermann and Gormally, 2013; Silverstri et al., 2013; Treffny and Beilin, 2011; Brummans et al., 2008; Yasmi et al., 2006; Winter and Lockwood, 2005; Lane, 2003; Moore and Koontz, 2003).

An expectation for emergence of stakeholders fitting these categories can influence management actions (Prell et al., 2009). If a suite of stakeholders is expected to be present in an ENRM issue, the practitioner responsible for managing the analysis and engagement process may unintentionally exclude unconventional stakeholders as a result of planning primarily for the ‘usual suspects’. This may be through cognitive (facilitators or managers predominantly perceiving the ‘usual suspects’) or institutional (mandated processes, implemented practices, protocols, and policies directed toward the ‘usual suspects’) blind spots during analysis and engagement. Similarly, repeated engagement with the ‘usual suspects’ may contribute to the professionalisation of stakeholders, where for these professionalised stakeholders, participation and engagement can be viewed as an extension of lobbying (Lane and Morrison, 2006). In turn, this may contribute to the reason that some individuals with an interest in an ENRM issue may perceive that the most effective vehicle for obtaining a voice in decision making is through membership of a group (Aanesen et al., 2014; Rydin and Pennington, 2000), reinforcing the divide between stakeholders and the citizenry (Colvin et al., 2015b).

To summarise, in ENRM those who are afforded stakeholder status tend to be viewed as groups with a collective interest, and are considered distinct from the citizenry which can be seen to

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6547470>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6547470>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)