



Conditional and resistant non-participation in market-based land management programs in Queensland, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Market-based policy instruments are used in the design of land management programs to provide incentives to landholders to generate efficient ecological outcomes on private land. Despite the increased use of economic instruments, many landholders remain unwilling to participate in these programs. Non-participating landholders can be described, according to the participation spectrum, as conditional (i.e., may be persuaded to participate if the program criteria and incentives fit with their personal circumstances) or resistant (i.e., will not participate, irrespective of the program conditions and administrator). I interviewed 29 landholders in north Queensland, Australia, who had not participated in one of three market-based incentive programs offered in their region. The aim of my research was to understand the characteristics of conditional and resistant non-participants and their context-specific reasons for non-participation in market-based programs. The results revealed different reasons, between the two groups, for non-participation in land management programs. Conditional non-participants were influenced largely by external sources of control (e.g., program characteristics) and structural variables (e.g., farm characteristics). Although some conditional non-participants had a preference for financial incentives, the majority preferred practical and credible programs, suggesting that market-based instruments are unlikely to save an otherwise poorly designed program. Resistant non-participants were influenced by internal sources of control (e.g., anti-government attitudes). These internal controls can be difficult to change and may represent a greater gulf between resistant non-participants and other categories of the spectrum that are more willing to participate. The delivery of market-based programs within the private sector provides an opportunity to sidestep the involvement of government in the administration of programs and thus increase participation of this landholding group. The participation spectrum offers a useful classification to explore the relative influences of structural, external and internal variables on participation, which can be used directly to inform policy instrument choice in the design of land management programs.

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Introduction

Market-based instruments are economic policy tools that are used to internalise externalities, that is, the economic, social, and environmental costs of the production, distribution, and disposal of goods and services that are not reflected in the price of those goods and services. Examples of market-based instruments include price-based mechanisms such as competitive tenders, whereby landholders submit a bid to undertake specific actions; quantity-based mechanisms that create a market, such as cap-and-trade and offset trading schemes; and market friction mechanisms that improve the effectiveness of markets, such as increasing information provision (e.g., eco-labelling) or decreasing transaction costs

(Collins and Scocimarro, 2008). These economic instruments represent “a structured and balanced provision of incentives to provide greater encouragement than moral suasion or the free market, yet avoid complex, prescriptive and penal legislation” (Robinson and Ryan (2002), p. 397 in Cocklin et al., 2007, p. 988).

In the context of biodiversity conservation on private land, market-based instruments have emerged to create a market that values conservation, where one did not formally exist. They represent an increasingly popular (Cocklin et al., 2007; Greiner and Lankester, 2005; Jenkins et al., 2004; Stavins et al., 2003; Windle et al., 2009) and often complex (see Lockie and Carpenter, 2010) approach in the design of land management programs.¹ Economic instruments provide flexibility and incentives to landholders to

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¹ Defined here as programs that aim to protect or improve the condition of ecosystems, habitat and native vegetation, particularly through changes in land management practices and the application of permanent conservation covenants.

explore ways to achieve a given level of ecological quality, usually for the least cost (Hahn and Stavins, 1992). They are used to generate efficient ecological outcomes through market signals that weigh the relative benefits and costs of different actions (Whitten et al., 2007). They can increase the competitiveness of conservation as a land use option by providing an income to landholders, who may otherwise have used the land for production purposes, when they meet specific conservation objectives on their property. Yet, despite billion-dollar investments in market-based programs, there remain problems of insufficient use of scientific information to identify ecological priorities, ineffective monitoring regimes, inadequate evaluation of expenditure, failures to treat the underlying causes of environmental degradation and, of importance to this research, limited landholder participation in some instances (Farrelly, 2005; Hajkowicz, 2009; Mansfield, 2006).

Adoption theory, which “concentrates on understanding the stages of the social process of adoption, the dynamics of adoption and psychological motivation to act” (Crabtree et al., 1998, p. 308), can be used to explore landholder non-participation in market-based land management programs (e.g., Morris et al., 2000; Pannell et al., 2006; Upadhyay et al., 2003). This body of work has come to include technological, economic (i.e., rational choice) and socio-psychological approaches to explain and predict landholder behaviour. Uptake of innovations and new practices was initially examined by estimating uptake rates at different levels of payment; “respondents were assumed to be profit maximising agents responding in an uncomplicated way to the financial incentive on offer” (Morris and Potter, 1995, p. 54). While economists continued to examine the economic barriers to participation (i.e., inability to adopt) (Colman et al., 1992), rural sociologists began to take a more descriptive research approach, and examined the fit between the program and landholders’ personal circumstances (i.e., willingness to adopt) (Morris and Potter, 1995). This effort to incorporate social factors into adoption theory, combined with Bowler’s (1979) identification of socio-economic ‘resistance’ to agricultural schemes, led to the development of the ‘participation spectrum’ (Morris and Potter, 1995), which classifies landholders into four groups: (1) *active participants* who are willing to participate in land management programs because they view them as a legitimate use of their time and resources; (2) *passive participants* who are motivated by financial incentives and will participate at minimal cost and inconvenience; (3) *conditional non-participants* who may be persuaded to participate if the program criteria and incentives are commensurate with their personal circumstances; and (4) *resistant non-participants* who will not participate, irrespective of the program conditions and the program administrator.

The theory, largely in response to criticism (e.g., Bowler and Ilbery, 1987; Falconer, 2000; Marsden, 1988; Marsden et al., 1986; Wilson, 1996), has evolved to account for the interactions between structural, external and internal dimensions of participation (Battershill and Gilg, 1997; Burton and Rob, 2004; Defrancesco et al., 2008), which can each play a crucial role in non-participation. Structural variables that influence participation include property variables (e.g., non-farm capital, land size, tenure, property transaction costs, program eligibility) and institutional variables (e.g., the role of the state and its policies) (e.g., Bowler and Ilbery, 1987; Falconer, 2000; Marsden, 1988; Marsden et al., 1989). For example, the structure of land management programs can result in high transaction costs for both the program administrator and the landholder, creating a significant barrier to landholder participation (Falconer, 2000).

External sources of control relate to program characteristics and landholders’ finances and resources. With respect to participation in market-based incentive programs, landholders remain concerned about the extent of administrative work; whether programs have the potential to achieve the stated ecological goals; the

likelihood of receiving funding; the financial outlay and tax implications; time, labour and other resource costs; program funding, duration and the potential that participation will generate long-term gains in production and profitability (Morrison et al., 2008; Rolfe et al., 2006). More generally, program characteristics that can limit participation include a lack of flexibility, profitability, excessive complexity, incompatibility with personal and property objectives, perceived or actual inability to meet the program requirements, insufficient provision of information and concern that participation will result in future government control and regulation of landholders’ properties (e.g., Fielding et al., 2005; Lobley and Potter, 1998; Pannell et al., 2006; Vanclay, 2004; Vanclay and Lawrence, 1994). Common financial barriers to participation include insufficient returns on landholders’ investment, long-term or intangible pay-backs, and the inappropriate use of artificial incentives, such as subsidies, that reduce land management costs only for the duration of the program (Bunch, 1999). Landholders who rely on the land for income may be unlikely to engage in conservation activities when the private costs of conservation are greater than the private benefits (Doremus, 2003).

Internal sources of control include landholders’ attitudes and values towards land management practices, program administrators and other factors relating to participation. These sources of control are predicted to have a stronger and more long-term influence on behaviour (Lepper et al., 1973). Strong pro-environmental attitudes also tend to be associated with participation in voluntary conservation programs (Beedell and Rehman, 2000; Black and Reeve, 1993; Ewing, 2001; Luzar and Diagne, 1999); a formal voluntary commitment is considered to represent a central aspect of internal control (Katzev and Pardini, 1987). Landholders who are motivated by internal controls, however, may provide only minimal additionality (i.e., the extra benefit that is gained from the implementation of the program) because they would probably have protected the local ecology in the absence of the program (Race and Curtis, 2009). When landholders’ attitudes and values are less ecocentric, however, they may be less willing to participate in programs and need external incentives to do so (Maybery et al., 2005; Raedeke et al., 2001; Vickery et al., 2004). The provision of external incentives, however, rarely affects long-term attitude change (Morris and Potter, 1995).

Understanding the interactions between structural, external and internal dimensions of participation may explain landholders’ decision not to participate in market-based land management programs, and may provide a foundation from which to increase the relevancy and value of these programs to landholders. Understanding creates an opportunity for program administrators to move on from the view that landholders who choose not to participate are ‘ignorant, short sighted, recalcitrant and laggards’, and explore the notion that landholders “may be carefully choosing *not* to adopt, or that their reluctance to adopt may have a rational basis” (Vanclay and Lawrence, 1994, p. 74). Low participation rates, for example, may be explained by landholders’ views of economic instruments as “temporary bribes, shallow in operation and transitory in their effect” (Morris and Potter, 1995, p. 52). Identifying landholders’ bases for non-participation can expose their context-specific experiences, needs and fears (Fjellstad et al., 2009), which can inform the selection of policy instruments to increase participation rates and improve ecological outcomes (Moon and Cocklin, 2011a).

Hajkowicz (2009) argues that neither policy approach (i.e., efforts to change attitudes (e.g., educational and voluntary instruments) nor direct payment schemes for environmental stewardship (i.e., economic instruments)) have systematically accounted for the factors that influence participation and, therefore, have failed to engage the policy audience to achieve their intended ecological outcomes. Given that programs that employ economic instruments use landholders as “agents of policy”

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