

# Land and Water Forum

## Note on Collaboration

March 2011

### Introduction

1. The Land and Water Forum is a collaborative process, and many of the recommendations in the Forum's Report suggest collaborative processes, including at the national, regional and local levels. In the course of the engagements the Forum has undertaken round the regions of New Zealand, a number of participants asked what these kinds of collaboration might entail, and themselves made suggestions about approaches and issues. The Small Group discussed this at its meeting on 9-10 March 2011, and suggested that a paper should be prepared reflecting this discussion, and reflecting its own experience and knowledge. This paper has been updated in the light of a discussion in the 24 March Plenary.
2. The Small Group does not see this as a definitive paper, but as a contribution to a continuing discussion. Caroline Miller of Massey University, who came to our workshop in Palmerston North and offered some commentary on the relationship between collaborative approaches and the Resource Management Act, has agreed to prepare a short paper on that topic for the Forum. We are aware of other work in progress including by AgResearch, NIWA, Tipa Associates, Aqualinc and others on ways in which it might be systematized in catchments. A number of Regional and District Councils have also done work on this topic to inform their own practice, and the NZ Landcare Trust has wide operational experience. There is also an international literature, including on the use of collaborative techniques in the US, Canada (especially in British Columbia) and Australia, as well as in Scandinavia, where examples of collaboration at the national level were influential for the Forum.

### Definitions and attributes

3. Many discussions of collaboration take their departure from a definition by Gray (1985, p. 912)<sup>1</sup> of the underlying concept as  
“...the pooling of appreciations and/or tangible resources, e.g. information, money, labour, etc., by two of more stakeholders to solve a set of problems which neither can solve individually.”

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, B. Conditions Facilitating Interorganizational Collaboration. Human Relations 38(10): 911-936.

4. In the experience of the Land and Water Forum, defining attributes of a collaborative process are as follows:
  - a. It is open to all interested groups to send their own representatives (and in the case of a catchment the process should be open to all landholders) and includes iwi representation<sup>2</sup>
  - b. It operates with a consensus rule
  - c. It has a skilled independent facilitator/chair
  - d. Where a consensus cannot be reached options should be set out
  - e. It is supported by the provision of information on economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of resources and their management, and by scientific information about them, in order to allow the participants to come to an integrated understanding
  - f. It has a mandate from a public decision-making body to address an issue or group of related issues, and reports to that body, but it can also be an applicant-led process undertaken in support of an identified development project, or come about through a community or industry initiative.
  - g. It has a realistic timetable within which it is required to complete its work. Collaborative processes take time but need time constraints.
  - h. It is resourced to do its work. Funding may come from the decision- making body and participants may also contribute resources. It is important that the resources that the collaborative process has at its disposal are utilised for the benefit of the process as a whole.
5. In the experience of the Forum, issues for which a collaborative process will be useful are likely to be complex, requiring enduring solutions and involving multiple stakeholders. (That is not to say that they should not be employed in finding adaptive management solutions, where outcomes are expected to evolve over time in response to evolving knowledge or changing conditions of a resource.)
6. We believe that for a collaborative process to be effective there should be a variety of outcomes which the participants might choose. Collaboration should occur early in government or local government planning processes. If it relates to particular applications from developers it should occur early in their exploration of possibilities and while a range of options is still open.
7. Collaboration requires independence. Participants will not reach a consensus unless they feel that their responsibility to do so is real, inescapable and not constrained. They must feel that the decision-makers will have serious regard for it, and will not allow it to be subverted. Parties to a collaborative process must feel that they have been asked to lead.

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<sup>2</sup> Land and Water Forum members largely nominated themselves. If the Forum expands, we may need to consider whether we need criteria for membership, including to deal with any obvious gaps in representation.

8. Decision-makers should be involved in collaborative processes, as well as those that will be impacted by the outcomes. They should see themselves as in some sense servants of the process.
9. Successful collaborative processes generate trust, create social capital and assist in the implementation of the consensuses that they arrive at. They create impetus for further collaborative efforts to achieve agreed goals.

### **An issue**

10. One question that was raised in the course of our discussion concerned the extent authority is shared in collaborative processes. We recalled the public promise around collaboration (as opposed to informing or consulting) formulated by the International Association of Public Participation:

“We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations in to decisions to the maximum extent possible.”

11. We reflected that there can be problems when decision-makers do not fulfill this promise, by paying insufficient regard to collaborative outcomes, or when distinctions between collaboration and co-governance or co-management are not understood. Decision-makers can decide to take a course different from the one that the collaborative process has recommended to them, in the name of a broader public interest. The problem arises on the one hand when the collaborators fail to accept the decision-makers' ultimate right to do so, or on the other when decision-makers exercise the right to decide without proper respect to the weight of the process that has been set up to inform them. If the collaborators aren't listened to they'll feel they've wasted their time.

### **What next?**

12. For all the reasons set out in the introduction to this summary, we think that a fuller reflection on collaboration is necessary. This is a paper for discussion, as part of that wider project, which will involve a great deal of focused and systematic work. This is a paper for discussion, to open up some of the issues. We suggest that after the Plenary, and taking account of the conversation there, we put this paper on our website, to encourage further debate. In doing this, we are conscious of the contribution to our thinking that people in the regions made during our engagements with them, and of the role of technology in facilitating wider conversations.