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Day 1, 9.30am

Evidence, values and trade-offs in environmental decision-making

Making decisions about the environment is everyone's business, and these decisions often trade-off a private benefit against a public cost. Understanding and managing the impacts of these costs falls to elected governments through their environment policies and programs.

The history of environmental policy and research in Australia reveals steady advances in reliable evidence of the scale and impact of environmental problems. Alongside this, society continues to demand greater influence over government decision-making through more participatory arrangements that reveal a diversity of competing values and preferences. Moreover, government expenditure on the environment is increasingly expected to deliver a measurable return on investment in the public interest.

Here I will draw on recent examples of decision-making in complex policy situations that illustrate some of the successes and highlight some of the challenges. This policy complexity plays out in a number of ways, including through the institutional arrangements of our federal system of government, the spatial and temporal complexity of ecological systems and the variety of societal values and preferences.

The politics of climate change, water and food security and the global financial crisis will add additional complexities to environmental decision-making, that will both test the effectiveness of existing approaches and open up new opportunities for innovation.

Take-home messages:

1. Building effective professional relationships between research and policy/ management practitioners benefits both: its worth the effort.
2. Understanding the likely and not so likely consequences of different environmental decisions is fundamentally important to government.
3. Government decision-making can be greatly informed by understandable and credible science, but cannot be substituted for by 'black-box' technical tools.

Relevant publications

Gibbons P, Zammit C and 16 others (2008) Some practical suggestions for improving engagement between researchers and policy-makers in natural resource management. *Ecological Management and Restoration* 9(3) pp 182-186.

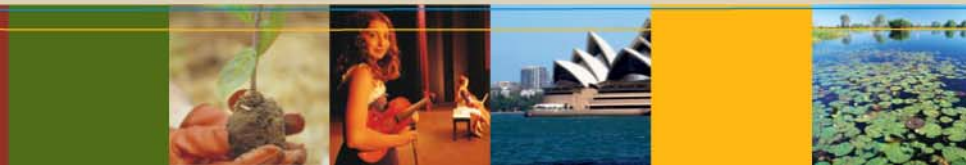
Head B (2008) Evidence-based policy: three lenses. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 67(1) pp 1-11.

Zammit, C, Cockfield G and Funnell S (2000) *A outcomes-based framework for evaluating natural resources management policies and programs*. Land & Water Australia, SIRP Project 6.250/USQ3.

Evidence, values and tradeoffs in environmental decision making

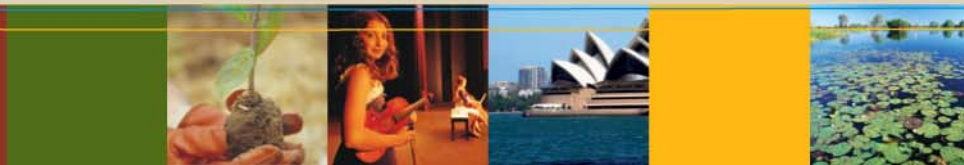
Fenner Conference
11 February 2009

Dr Charlie Zammit
Assistant Secretary
Biodiversity Conservation Branch



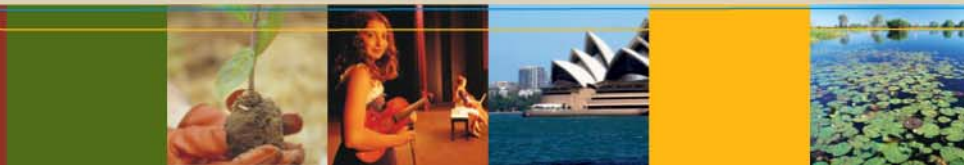
Three things

- categories of environmental decision making
- an example of complex decision-making
- some challenges and opportunities



categories of environmental decision-making

	Legal		Policy/Program	Implementation
International	UN treaties		Global frameworks	Information Know-how Resources Planning Delivery Compliance Reporting Review
National	High & Supreme Courts		Ministerial Councils	
Commonwealth / State	Regulators; Land & Environment Courts		Cabinets; Ministers; Departments	
Regional	Regulators; Land & Environment Courts		Various delegations	
Local	Local councils			



Forest Management – Regional Forest Agreements

Policy problem: *long history of conflict over logging vs conservation (old growth) – need to "balance" these*

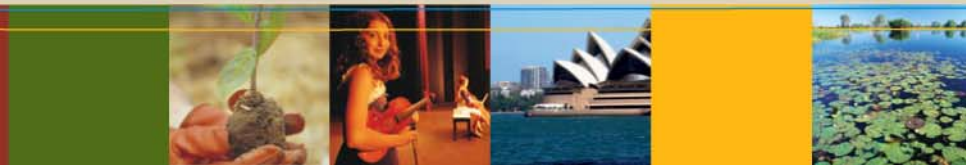
1. National forest conservation criteria (JANIS)
2. Regular and wide-ranging public consultation
3. Comprehensive regional assessments
4. Scenario analysis & options
5. Formal public consultation on scenarios
6. Governments negotiate a 20 yr Agreement
7. Review Agreements

How will current approaches deal with:

- the ongoing decline of biodiversity and ecosystem services
- the transition to a carbon economy and the creation of new markets for carbon and water
- the impacts of the global financial crisis on government investment priorities and allocations?

Environmental decision-making can be improved by

- frameworks for aligning biodiversity, climate change and water policies and programs
- better “valuing” biodiversity and ecosystem services
- understanding the social dimension
- understanding the critical thresholds in the environment
- long-term monitoring and adaptive management
- better aligning research supply with policy demand
- demonstrating timely and cost-effective results



- 9.45–10.00amHow critical is science in designing environmental policy?*John Whittington, DPIW Tasmania*