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Opening the black box of stakeholder consultation: The development of planning management tool for the environment agency

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Opening the Black Box of Stakeholder Consultation: the Development of a Planning Management Tool for the Environment Agency

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Abstract
Stakeholder participation in decision making processes promises fairness, effectiveness and efficiency and has become the orthodoxy in a wide variety of policy areas, especially in environmental policy making and governance. Central to stakeholder participation is the identification and engagement of those whose contribution is most relevant in any particular case. This paper reports on a study to develop a stakeholder engagement and consultation tool to prepare the Environment Agency Strategic Planning Function for the introduction of the Water Framework Directive. An important outcome of this study was the realisation of the importance of internal stakeholders within the Agency itself, as well as the need to identify and develop external bodies.

Keywords
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Opening the black box of stakeholder consultation: the development of a planning management tool for the Environment Agency

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder participation in decision making processes promises fairness, effectiveness and efficiency and has become the orthodoxy in a wide variety of policy areas, especially in environmental policy making and governance. Central to stakeholder participation is the identification and engagement of those whose contribution is most relevant in any particular case. This paper reports on a study to develop a stakeholder engagement and consultation tool to prepare the Environment Agency Strategic Planning Function for the introduction of the Water Framework Directive. An important outcome of this study was the realisation of the importance of internal stakeholders within the Agency itself, as well as the need to identify and develop external bodies.

Keywords: environment; planning; stakeholders; Water Framework Directive.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, there has been a growing discussion of and interest in the increasing commitment to integration of a broader set of interests and perspectives in the process of policy- and decision-making generally, and especially within the area of planning, land use and the environment (Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones, 2000). This is set against a broader global context of increasing multi-stakeholder processes (Hemmati, 2002). This development, which has been referred to in many ways (for example, as a move away from government and towards governance and a working out of the process of democratization), gives rise to both challenges and opportunities to all potentially interested parties, but from the perspective of organisations which take statutory responsibility for planning processes it is a development that presents special difficulties.

This paper considers these developments in governance and seeks to identify the problems that organisations with statutory responsibility face when they implement stakeholder engagement in the context of environmental planning. The literature is used to draw out a number of good practice principles which are then used to underpin the development of a planning process tool which was created for the Environment Agency in 2003 (Rigby et al, 2003). The example provides a concrete case of how statutory planning bodies in environmental policy can operationalize governance and stakeholding principles, and demonstrates the difficulties they can face when doing so.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - BACKGROUND

Participation and collaboration by an increasing number of interests and groups in the processes of decision making and knowledge production are now seen as a defining characteristic of modern times (Beck, 1992; Gibbons et al, 1998 Stehr, 2001). Across governments, a large number of policy problems are being confronted through new engaged, inclusive and discursive modes that feature 'co-production of rules', regulations, solutions and decisions (Jasanoff, 2004). Rather than making policy within the customary 'prepare-reveal-defend' model (Bedford et al, 2002), a wide variety of new modes are now under exploration, based on various notions of collaboration that stand somewhere between a market approach and central planning (Phelps and Tewdwr Jones, page 112; 2000). Increasingly there have been valuable attempts based on the comparisons of multiple cases to consider and review the success of such initiatives (Koontz and Johnson, 2004).

Stakeholder engagement, which forms a family of activities within the larger set of public consultation and co-production activities used in the development of policy, is increasingly a central feature of the planning system, where it also plays a leading role in the related downstream processes of implementation and monitoring. Stakeholder engagement is no longer seen merely in terms of securing political commitment and the elusive 'buy-in' that makes a decision capable of implementation, but also as a way of bringing into a decision processes much relevant specific and local information that would not have been available to decision makers within the traditional planning process.

Examples of policy areas using such an approach include several well-known for being politically sensitive, including GM food, nanotechnology, economic re-development, and recently, within the UK, the nuclear waste management issue. However, such modes of governance are rapidly dispersing throughout the whole policy process under the influence of a rhetoric of third-way politics, with the UK Government often promoting 'overtly deliberative' forms of engagement to strengthen democracy at the local level (Speller and Ravenscroft, 2005; page 41). As Lemon et al (2004) have observed: "participation has become part of the language of environmental management".

The movement towards governance and its emphasis on participation and collaboration has led organizations with responsibility for policy to adopt new methods in problem designation, specification, decision making and management. However, organisations with leading roles in planning, and which often act as the competent body under statute, are at an early stage in the development of their approaches, and face serious challenges in operationalizing participation, particularly in respect of engaging with stakeholders (Schedler and Glastra, 2001) and making it worth the effort (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004). Furthermore, as Martin and Steelman (2004) note, planning bodies may contain a variety of interests and preferences about aims and outcomes, creating further difficulty in the attempt to manage stakeholding.

Our initial review of the field focuses on the key dimensions of this new form of policy making and the broad challenges. It then examines the particular difficulties within the context of environmental planning and brings forward a number of principles that can underpin the making of policy within an important new

environmental planning context (the river basin). These principles are then used to develop a process and planning management tool for the UK's competent body, the Environment Agency.

Stakeholder Engagement – key dimensions

The conduct of policy development, planning and stakeholder engagement is increasingly marked by a reflexivity that places greater emphasis upon how decisions are made and greater awareness of how the process of governance affects the results. There is however, considerable scepticism that this process of widening and democratizing decision making is capable of realization, with some arguing that activities such as stakeholding are simply a ruse to obviate discussion of growing societal differences, a collective self-delusion that elides awkward political questions (Shaoul, 1998), or that, given extreme relativist or Foucauldian notions of power and truth, achieving the goals set is inherently impossible (Stein and Harper, 2003).

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the broad definitions of stakeholder participation imply the principle that if outcomes are to be reached that express more fully common, agreed and therefore more viable solutions to problems, then the process by which decisions are reached must be seen as constitutive of the quality of those

decisions. A discursive system of governance is intended to provide therefore, but not necessarily to guarantee, policies that are based on agreement, that may be fair and equitable, that are based both on specific knowledge rather than expert knowledge alone, and that are more broadly based in their support and more likely in the long term to be implemented successfully (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000).

As Burgess (2005) and Davies and Burgess (2004), have noted about the 'argumentative turn' in comments about deliberative mapping, the challenges thrown up by engagement are various. Not only is there a threat to administrative and government bodies of deferring decisions and opening up the process of decision making with the attendant costs of delay and increased costs of engagement, there are also risks in the discursive process itself; the dynamics of discursive interaction are not easy to predict and a wide variety of factors influence the way in which the discussion takes place, at the worst affecting outcomes but also with the potential to have a significant effect upon the timing of decisions.

Performing or engaging participation

The obligation to open the process of decision-making to new participants with the twin aims of attaining solutions that are both more effective and more broadly based forces upon planners and wider societal interests the difficult challenge of operationalization. This has to be met by considering three inter-linked issues: - a) the definition of boundaries to the problem; - b) the definition of rules and practices under which those involved can work within the participative framework of decision making; - c) and the locus and use of power. While it is often convenient to

distinguish between the issue of how definitions of the object of the planning process are designated and defined and how the roles for engagement and participation are established, managed, resourced and implemented, in practice, this distinction, while analytically useful, must be supplemented by understanding of the issue of how power is held by different actors as this materially affects both the processes of inclusion and the generation of the rules by which participation proceeds.

As Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones (2000) rightly note, "Strategic thinking, distortion, politics and power within interactions amongst individuals and agencies within new areas of collaborative discourse are the norm rather than the exception and attention to them is all the more important" (Phelps and Tewdwr-Jones, 2000; page 117). Similarly, Layzer (2006) notes in her study of New England Fisheries, the risk of strategic action is real and environmentalists can mount effective challenges to agencies by bringing legal action that highlights departures from responsibilities established for the agency and its conduct in practice. The importance of power in planning and participation within the context of consensual policy making, therefore, cannot be ignored as it has profound consequences for the way in which planning and participation are to work (Phelps and Tewdwr Jones, 2000). The challenge for those implementing stakeholder engagement can only be met when participation is perceived as and treated as a discursive activity and not simply as performance. Below we consider the issue of boundary and then process definition.

Choosing boundaries

The definition of boundaries or inclusion criteria in policy making is of paramount importance in planning and participation. Boundaries for policy may be made according to spatial, temporal or sectoral criteria and affect such questions as which interests are relevant, which are not, and how to define the limits of the problem. Rowe and Frewer (2000), writing in the context of science and technology policy, have argued in favour of inclusivity in planning and participation, noting that as value judgements are used throughout the process of risk management, it is inconsistent to reject public involvement in decision-making from even one stage of the planning process. Scott (2002) follows a similar line, but his aim is to underscore the importance of the questions and issues rather than the participants, noting that it is important to ensure inclusivity in respect of the object of debate rather than the participants, arguing that planning must be integrating and synthetic and not confined to single issues.

Briassoulis (2004), focusing upon the question of boundary definition, draws attention to a further difficulty that arises when one considers the boundary-less contexts of many planning decisions. He argues that because planning is concerned with complex systems – complex social environmental and political systems – the solutions which emerge from attempts to integrate different interests and viewpoints are emergent and thus selection of the key interests and participants is not possible before the fact. Furthermore, he notes that there is little chance, given the existence of diverse and conflicting interests and capabilities, that coherence can be achieved.

The importance of relevant knowledge to decision making is a key concern for the participative process. Participation is thought to provide not only the opportunity for including situated or tacit knowledge, which has long been regarded as under-

valued in decision making (Polanyi, 1966), but also for establishing the credibility of knowledges. Indeed, as Schedler and Glastra (2001) note, with trust in grand narratives weakened, the importance of establishing the viability of the claims made by experts within the context of negotiation is all the greater, and this may only occur when those claims are being "substantiated in the negotiation game itself" (Schedler and Glastra, 2001; page 345). In practice, such an issue is both related to boundary definition and to the form of the participative process.

Defining processes

Much has been written on the form which participatory processes take and by which they attain or fail to attain their goals. Participatory processes reflect not only a choice of methods for decision making and social interaction, but reflect the definition of the boundaries involved in identifying a problem and the power and self-interest of the parties involved within the process.

Participation takes a variety of forms, the most widespread of which are referenda, public hearings, opinion surveys, focus groups, expert groups, citizens' juries and panels and advisory committees (Rowe and Frewer, 2000; page 8-10). The designation of roles and rules is a critical process, just as it is important to determine whether the model of participation adopted is for the purposes of advice, collaboration, or conflict management (Godschalk et al, 2003).

Godschalk et al, (2003) also note that successful planning and engagement is not likely to be a one off, single event, but a process that should have a degree of permanency without which the aims of participation cannot be met. In their example of planning in Florida, there is a requirement to ensure that plans are kept up to date and that they are communicated directly to all stakeholder groups. Without an intention to ensure the relevance of data provided by whichever party to the other interested groups, participation in the fullest sense implied in Godschalk et al's (2003) definition cannot take place. The evidence presented from US cases studied these authors presents lessons that the type of contribution which stakeholders are required to make should determine the type of preparation they receive for the role. For example, in the case of public engagement and participation, they note that education and the elicitation of citizen knowledge are useful; by contrast, where citizen influence is more important, the use of citizen advisory committees is more appropriate.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY CONTEXT

The area of environmental policy making has seen much attention to the question of how planning processes should involve a broader and a more relevant constituency of actors and much has been done to specify what are in effect standards or quasi-standards for deliberative processes. International agreements and concordats of which Agenda 21 (1992) is most often cited but which also include the Aarhus Convention (UNECE, 1998), are pre-eminent statements of how the involvement of stakeholders should be managed within the context of sustainable development with the recent EC Directive 2003/35/EC (2003) on public participation attempting to

give force to Aarhus within the European context. Within the environmental context, Aarhus provides a set of principles and recommendations on openness, dissemination, inclusiveness, timeliness and the appropriateness of information. The declaration notes that those responsible for planning should have an obligation upon them to give information to stakeholders, and that dissemination of information is not discretionary. Aarhus does give a range of conditions under which this principle can be waived, but generally, the Convention intends that disclosure should be the normal course, except under rare circumstances.

In the European Union, a further important development for planning and participation has taken place with the publication of the Water Framework Directive (European Union, 2000) which not only supports the goals of participation but also specifies boundary conditions upon the process. Howe and White (2002) and White and Howe (2003) argue that the WFD marks the dawning of a new era of planning. This new era sees the adoption of continental models of planning with the making of policy on water and the human activities that affect its quality within the context of river basins and regional governance, a development which Mance at al (2002) claim is entirely logical. In fact, under Agenda 21 and through the Local Environmental Action Plans (LEAPS), the movement towards local attempts to address water management at catchment level in particular, the process has been underway for some time (Trenam, 2000).

Those responsible for operationalizing the new modes of planning within this context are the statutory bodies as defined in the WFD. Under UK law, this body is the Environment Agency, an Executive Agency of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The relevant challenges which the Agency

faces comprise three related questions concerning the purpose of the participation activity, the boundaries to be drawn around it and the rules and procedures which should be established to guide and or control the processes by which agreement will be sought.

The needs of Environmental Planning organisations and in particular the competent bodies to manage stakeholder participation are varied and often onerous. Because of the complexity of planning activities, systematic attempts to control and organize the process are desirable and a number of attempts have been documented already within the context of the UK Environment Agency (Pollard and Brookes, 2001). Knowledge of plans under development and the deliberative process which lie behind them can provide the competent body with much useful information. However, as noted above, it is essential to decide the purpose of participation and the extent to which deliberation is likely to be functional and purposive in the creation of the environmental strategy plan. But it is not certain that agreement about the participative mode will necessarily be possible, and in such cases, competent bodies must decide how they wish to act.

Once purposes of participation are decided upon, the responsibility for strategy generation will be one of designation, search, identification, and then engagement with the stakeholders. Designation of stakeholders is a key task as it is the way of ensuring that the relevant interests are included and that actors who may play an enabling role are engaged. Enabling actors provide the relevant expertise and knowledge, whether of a contextual or expert kind. The failure to designate as relevant certain stakeholder groups is not only likely to leave a discursive process short of both engagement and power and knowledge, but may also signal to a

broader group that the process is rhetorical and not participative or discursive. Stakeholders should, therefore, choose themselves.

Once stakeholders are engaged, there needs to be assessment of their capabilities to contribute. Where technical issues are under discussion, it may be necessary to provide resources in terms of training to stakeholders after some initial scoping. When stakeholders are likely to have involvement across a range of planning activities, it is essential to involve the stakeholders in the most effective way possible, avoiding a duplication of their activities.

The need to ensure that planning is coherent requires that the management of the participation activities should be systematically managed and be the responsibility of a group, within the competent body, having the necessary vision to view all plan development - existing, current and planned. Without this top-down view of the planning and participation process, a coherent engagement with the relevant stakeholder groups is likely to fail.

Developing a sense of control

All plans should be subject to continual review to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, e.g. by avoiding duplication in planning activities and ensuring the best and most appropriate use of resources. Effective management of the planning process is more likely to result if the following can be achieved by better control of data and greater coherence of Flood Defence (FD) - related planning through use of agreed and defined terms - metadata or data dictionary functions.

The provision of a template for the scoping and development of catchment-wide Plans through identification of common core characteristics is a major step toward control of planning, as is a systematic review to give understanding of the sensitivity of existing plans to changes in legislation and planning cycles. Furthermore, when plans to manage stakeholder engagement process and plan development are scrutinized at this abstract level, rationalization of a range of planning activities including participation becomes possible.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION TOOL

Recognizing the importance of the role of stakeholder management and engagement, but needing help and guidance in the development of an approach, the North West Regional Office of the Environment Agency made a request in 2003 for PREST to develop, for trial purposes, a stakeholder participation, planning and management tool for the strategic control of Agency plan development and plan operation at the catchment level. The work was intended to help with strategic planning and to prepare the way for changes in the way in which Agency planning was to be carried out at the catchment level. The tool was designated the Catchment Hydro Environmental Planning Process Management Tool (CHEPPM).

Agency responsibilities

Environment agency responsibilities extend over a wide range of areas and are not simply concerned with flood defence. The span of the Agency's responsibilities includes, in addition to flood defence, flood warning, water quality including fisheries, nature conservancy and biodiversity, abstraction and the amenity aspects of water courses with responsibilities extending to the coastal zone. The objects with which these plans deal are often common across plans, giving scope for ensuring that different plan objectives are consistent, but very often providing the preconditions for inconsistencies to arise between plans. In the preparation of plans, efficiencies can be achieved by using a common process to support the development of more that one plan. In addition to the development of plans which deal with specific physical entities, there are also strategies that are concerned with how the Agency's staff manage their plans.

The existing planning system

The Agency approach to plan development was generally discursive with regards to the form which plans take and to the formulation of precise objectives. However, the Agency assumed responsibility for a number of key issues such as the selection of stakeholders and the way in which they would take part in the process. In this respect, the approach to stakeholder engagement - based on judgments by Agency staff responsible for an area of plan development - can be seen to be pragmatic and to draw from a "deficit model" rather more than from the deliberative and civic model of interaction. Thus, where stakeholder capacities were viewed as insufficient, the Agency presumed to provide such information and advice to the stakeholder in order to ensure its engagement in the plan development process. In respect of

choosing specific stakeholders, Agency staff would aim to use their tacit and historical knowledge to select contributors on the basis of relevance, their capacity to contribute and with regard to any legal requirements. Nevertheless, the Agency approach is generally not one of pre-defining goals and establishing procedures for legitimation, but rather one of establishing a framework in which stakeholder interactions with the Agency result in a suitable and effective means of realizing broad plan aims and objectives.

The Agency 'philosophy' which underlay the development of the CHEPPM was one of *bilateralism* with the Agency acting as the centre of a hub and spoke network, interacting with individual stakeholders rather than with more than one stakeholder at once. However, some of the mechanisms for engagement which the Agency was proposing to use with which to engage its stakeholders included methods that could be used in more open engagements with more than one set of stakeholders at any one time.

The planning tool

The tool was developed as a questionnaire with which information could be captured in three areas of Environment Agency activity for the following three purposes: a) to assist with development of Agency plans; b) to identify resourcing requirements for plan development activities and; c) to review, control, manage and resource stakeholder engagement activities. Use of the tool would not only facilitate rationalization of plans and planning activities, but could be used to achieve coherence between plans, particularly to prevent duplication of stakeholder

engagement activities. The tool was subsequently developed in close association with the Agency and then applied within the Region. It comprised a 3-part questionnaire, a relational database for the storage of the information collected, and a network analysis of the plan relationships as defined by respondents. The tool was applied to each of the Agency's relevant plans.

The three sections of the tool were:

- Section 1: Indexical details of the Plan, such as its name, scope, and aims within the Agency's overall FD-related planning activities;
- Section 2: Management of the Plan by the Agency, in terms of its context, its planning cycle and methods, its major resource requirements (both internal and through consultants), and its dependence upon tacit knowledge;
- Section 3: Stakeholder involvement and engagement with the plan scoping and development.

The following table shows the details obtained on the Agency's plans for Section 1. This comprises 18 questions relating to information with which to categorize and locate the plan within the context of the Agency's overall strategy for the Region.

Table 1 Here

The second table, below, shows the information collected concerning the Agency's management of its plans. This information relates to the size of the plan in budgetary terms and also the relationship between it and other aspects of the Agency's work.

We were concerned to note the existence of systematic linking between plans, thus the questionnaire asked for details of the formal links between plans. Data concerning the nature of the plan – whether static, dynamic or currently live and in the process of development was also collected in order to ensure knowledge of plan updating was available.

Table 2 Here

Information collected in Section 3 was used to help the Agency address the question of how best to manage the process of engagement with its stakeholders. The question of engagement is seen as one initially of assessing the role which the stakeholder should play within the plan development process - an assessment which might lead to exclusion from the process if certain criteria were not met. In some cases, formal approval from a stakeholder was required and hence inclusion in the plan development process would be mandatory. Once inclusion is decided, assessment is made of the capacities and motivations of the stakeholder to contribute to the plan to allow the Agency to develop a strategy for engagement that may include the dissemination of information to the stakeholders.

Table 3 Here

The third section of the questionnaire gave Agency staff an opportunity to make a assessment using a quantitative, four-way scale of the capacity of stakeholders to engage with the plan. The dimensions on which information was sought were identified as key variables that would significantly affect the successful development and implementation of the plan and comprised three general categories: a)

participation of the stakeholder in the planning process; b) the nature of the roles which the stakeholder would take in the planning process; c) the form of engagement mechanisms which the Agency thought might be most suitable for that stakeholder in the context of that particular plan.

The assessment of stakeholder capacities and needs sought to distinguish, on the basis of interviews with Agency staff, between the role stakeholders would take ideally, and the role which they were currently capable of performing. By noting the difference between these two assessments, it was possible to assess the need for Action by the Agency in dealing with the stakeholders.

Table 4 Here

The section of the questionnaire used for recording the responses of stakeholders is shown in Table 4. Stakeholder and Plan Rating. On the left hand side of the form is the name of the Plan, in this case the ABP - the Area Business Plan. The individual stakeholder groups which have been identified are: the EA Senior Managers and their total scores for the five activities (Informed / Awareness, Motivation, Data/ info supplied to EA, Advice and opinion sought and information supplied by EA) are -1, 0, 1, 0, and -1 respectively in the figure shown. The sign of these numbers shows whether action is required and the significance of any problem. Where there are large positive values, the indication is that within the consultation process, sufficient amounts of information are being provided. The individual scoring system employed from which the indicators about the effectiveness of the consultation process were calculated used a fourfold scoring system (1=None, 2=Low, 3=Medium, 4=High).

On the right hand side of the scores the set of numbers under the vertical label "Mechanism" are used to indicate the types of mechanisms identified by the stakeholder as those normally used for consultation and participation and those that might be used in the future. The types of mechanisms which Agency staff use to engage with stakeholders are shown in the following table.

Table 5 Here

The CHEPPM tool visual representation also gives overall scores for all the data. This is shown in a separate table at the bottom of the visual representation. Overall scores are the sum of the responses from all the stakeholders in the data set for each activity.

OUTCOMES FROM AN APPLICATION OF THE CHEPPM

Background

The tool was applied in interviews by our research team of two researchers over a four week period to a group of Agency staff responsible for plan development and management. These Agency staff were located in the North West area at two offices on separate sites. As the Agency was conducting this kind of activity for the first time, respondents were helped by researchers to complete the various sections of the questionnaire. Results were obtained on the following areas and the findings are discussed below: plan coverage, mapping and relationships; agency resource

requirements for plan development and plan protection; stakeholder management information. The delivery of the questionnaire to Agency staff was itself a pilot and in a number of instances a debate with respondents took place about the CHEPPM tool, as to its form, usability, relevance to organisational goals, the nature of the information it collected, and the forms of analysis that should be carried out on the information gathered.

Plan coverage and mapping

The result of using the tool to identify the focus of the plans from sections 2.04 to 2.12 was to some extent unexpected as the relative positions of plans in the hierarchy were not clear to respondents. Unsurprisingly, as plans had been developed for a range of purposes, at different times but with common themes, they were often found to overlap at a variety of levels. Consequently, there was overlapping in terms of aims (conceptual overlapping), organisational responsibility, and the physical assets and features to which plans referred – both at the geographical and hydrological level.

The review nevertheless made explicit where plans had common requirements in terms of stakeholder interest, information and data needs, and research requirements, disciplinary and professional specialisms needed to support plan development. The following network diagram (Figure 1) identifies the catchment flood management plan of the Agency as a priority plan in that it is dependent upon

and also determines the form and content of many other plans for which the Agency is responsible.

Figure 1 Here

Agency resource requirements for plan development

The use of questions 2.13 to 2.20 of the questionnaire enabled the Agency to identify, scope and schedule future resource requirements in terms of professional specialisations, and to consider how these requirements can be provided more efficiently. It has also highlighted the need for resources to deal with stakeholder information requirements.

The largest personnel resource requirement for the Agency was that of project manager and the need for expertise in the use of GIS and engineers and civil engineers was assessed as high. River modellers and hydrologists were ranked in terms of their overall importance across the whole set of plans. When the Agency staff who had commissioned the development of the tool reflected on the data which had been collected with it, they noted that land use planners were insufficiently valued. Land use planners comprise a heterogeneous group of specialists with skills in ecology, fisheries, landscape, environmental impact assessment and public consultation of the kind which the CHEPPM was intended to support. This raised the question of bias in the sample of respondents, the majority of whom were themselves engineers.

Engaging with stakeholders

The use of the tool provided systematic information about individual plans and the respective levels of engagement with various stakeholders. It was noted that stakeholders exhibited variance in their capacity for providing relevant information to the Agency. Likewise, the motivation and competence of organisations in their provision of information to the Agency was similar across the eight plans to which the tool was applied.

The analysis of stakeholder data confronted the Agency with a number of important. It also offered a means of rating plans against each other in terms of their overall scores and of rating groups of stakeholders in terms of their level and form of engagement with the Agency's plans. Community groups were noted as the stakeholder group requiring the greatest level of effort in terms of resources followed by the business sector, whilst the Government and the public sector were rated most highly by the Agency in terms of the overall effort required to engage with them.

Discovering stakeholders

At the outset of the interviewing process it was not envisaged, by the Agency staff who commissioned the research, that the Agency itself would be designated as a stakeholder, *by its own staff*. However, as the Agency interview process proceeded, Agency staff increasingly nominated each other as stakeholders. .

As a result, the research tool was adapted to allow such 'self-nomination'. In all, nine sub-units of the Agency were nominated as part of the piloting and development of the strategic planning tool. The groups thus identified were not simply classifiable by their function in the Agency but by their position in the Agency hierarchy. In addition, sub-groups of the Agency defined by their geographical location and geographical responsibilities were also identified.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The development and application of the management tool for stakeholder engagement has been successful for the Environment Agency for a variety of reasons and has led to the application of a CHEPPM-style approach to the Agency's pilot of the Water Framework in the River Ribble catchment area.

The application of the instrument was successful in drawing together a large amount of previously unavailable or disparate, information to help with the development of planning. Greater coherence was brought to the work of plan development with opportunities to remove unnecessary duplication from the planning process. It also allowed the Agency to identify where to locate resources for plan development. Sequencing of plan resources was also possible with the CHEPPM approach, allowing the Agency to achieve greater coordination in its management of manpower for specific tasks.

The CHEPPM approach also provides an overview, not only at the level of chronological planning of Agency activities but in terms of the dependencies between different plans. Thus, when plans are due for review, it is possible to identify which other plans will be affected and which plans they are contingent upon. Hence, the relevant Agency resources may be mobilized.

The stakeholder engagement model which CHEPPM implements is systematic and is based on a number of factors relevant to the success of engagement. Thus the Agency response to stakeholders can be based upon a systematic assessment of the relevance of stakeholder information, capabilities and motivations and allows the Agency to measure and plan its engagement with stakeholders in a timely and less fragmentary manner, reducing the number of piecemeal interactions and consequently ensuring that stakeholders experience less inconvenience in their interaction with the Agency.

The CHEPPM-based approach uses Agency staff to identify resources and to rate stakeholder capabilities. This offers a less discursive but potentially more cost-effective way of developing plans than the deliberative mapping activities. An added benefit is that the CHEPPM links stakeholder interaction with the Agency's resource planning and, conceivably, its budgeting process.

The CHEPPM approach could also be extended incrementally to stakeholders themselves, giving them the opportunity to identify their preferences for engagement, in particular their own resource requirements and their assessment of the most appropriate modes of engagement. While this would move the process of consultation from a more narrowly focused form to a more deliberative form, the

process can still be constrained within limits and should be undertaken where the marginal benefits of doing so are likely to outweigh the costs.

The application of the CHEPPM provided evidence on the extent to which plans were operating successfully and on the potential resource requirements for different stakeholders to contribute to plan development. In terms of individual plans, the Local Flood Warning Plan and the Shoreline Management Plans scored highest, while the Flood Warning Management Plan was thought to present, potentially, the greatest difficulty in preparing for stakeholder engagement.

The stakeholders considered to be those most likely to contribute successfully to the development of plans were public sector stakeholders, government sector stakeholders and Environment Agency stakeholders, in that order. Community groups and business sector groups were thought to be the stakeholders that would require the largest effort to achieve successful engagement in plan development.

The Agency is perceived by its own staff to be a multi-constituent organisation with different parts whose views about a particular issue cannot be assumed beforehand. This is not however to say that the managerial approach and strategy of the Agency is unclear to its staff; rather, the finding suggests that staff are considerate of and willing to entertain a diversity of views which exist within the Agency. A discursive approach to planning is therefore to some extent a characteristic of the Agency's own internal planning and implementation processes.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of governance and away from government – towards consensual policy making and implementation – provides a major societal opportunity; but it poses a difficulty for agencies that carry forward strategies of public and stakeholder engagement because they assume the major responsibility for structuring, managing, and in some cases resourcing the discursive process, an activity in which they are yet to acquire many of the relevant capabilities.

Developing the CHEPPM tool to support stakeholder engagement provides strong evidence that the planning and stakeholder engagement activities of the Environment Agency can be effectively managed when fully resourced. This successful management depends upon a number of factors the most important of which is the identification of and understanding of the various stakeholder resources and constraints. The tool also provides a way to estimate and phase the required resources, to help with the strategic planning activities, to show how different plans depend upon each other at a functional level and to identify common resource requirements to avoid duplication. Additionally, it provides a way of seeing how well engagement activities themselves are working in practice, giving scope to work out how to change engagement strategies and practices if necessary. The need for a systematic approach to stakeholder engagement appears now to be even greater as statutory bodies, such as the Environment Agency in the UK, acquire planning and consultation responsibilities at regional and catchment levels, leaving them to face further levels of complexity.

The experience of developing and testing the planning tool also revealed the severely problematic nature of stakeholder definition in the attempt to generate more coherent plans. The Agency staff themselves were surprisingly ready to identify each other as stakeholders in the development of the plans covered by the tool. Thus, Agency staff see each other as willing contributors to the development of plans, albeit constrained by their respective specific and expert knowledges, their willingness to participate and their other resource requirements.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Key Attributes of Catchment Planning – Taken from the CHEPPM Questionnaire

Ref	Questions from the CHEPPM expressed as Catchment Planning Attributes
SECTION 1 – Indexical details of the Plan	
Q1.01 to 1.06	Name of Plan; Start of Plan development process; Plan development duration; Plan start date; operational life of Plan; details of Plan succession
Q1.07 to 1.09	Number of Plans in UK; number of Plans in North West Region; unique reference number for the Plan in the EA's FD Business Plan
Q1.10 to 1.12	Principal function of Plan; sustainability outcomes of the Plan; guidance documents for development of the Plan
Q1.13 to 1.14	Geographic entity covered by the Plan; source of hydrological or geographical boundaries for the Plan (regional and national)
Q1.15 to 1.16	Mandatory requirements for the Plan; internal or external client(s) for the Plan development
Q1.17 to 1.18	Plan's expenditure profile for examining the effectiveness of the Plan (i.e. earmarking resources for future review of its implementation and monitoring); delivery of expenditure information into medium to long term business plan

Table 2. Management of Plans by the Agency – Resource Requirements

SECTION 2 – Management of a Plan by the Agency	
Q2.01 to 2.02	Obstacles to implementing the Plan; strategies, techniques and methods to manage or overcome obstacles to implementing the Plan
Q2.03 to 2.06	Existence of formal / written guidance on identifying links between Plan and other Plans; details of existing or emerging Plans upon which the Plan depends; details of Plans that depend upon the Plan (i.e. that it controls); details of Plans that are horizontally linked to the Plan
Q2.07 to 2.08	Dynamic nature of the Plan (static, cyclic review or dynamic / live document); procedures for identifying action needed to revise a Plan
Q2.09	Cost of the Plan (Agency cost and consultancy spend)
Q2.10	Availability of guidance on staff and capabilities required for Plan development
Q2.11 to 2.12	Existence of Communication Plan for Stakeholder participation and its effectiveness; existence of Agency process for reviewing the effectiveness of the Communication Plan
Q2.13 to 2.20	Importance and resource commitments (in Full-time Equivalents) of project managers; river modellers / hydrologists; geomorphologists; engineers / civil engineers; GIS; land use planners; environmental specialists (including ecologists, fisheries specialists, landscape, EIA, consultations etc); other (can be specified)
Q2.21 to 2.26	Plan development dependence upon tacit / intangible resources (giving sources of knowledge and their level of importance)

Table 3. Stakeholder Characterisation – Tabulation of Questions and Themes

Stakeholder Characterisation – Questions on the Plan Development / Shaping
PARTICIPATION SECTION
How **informed** / **aware** is the Stakeholder to contribute to the Plan development?
To what extent may the Stakeholder **impact** upon the **effectiveness** of the Plan development?
How **motivated** is the Stakeholder to contribute to the Plan development?
DIFFERENT ROLES SECTION
How much of a role does the Stakeholder have as a **provider of information / data** for the Plan development?
To what extent is the **advice** and / or **opinion** of the Stakeholder sought?
How much **information** is **supplied by the EA** to the Stakeholder?
Is formal **consent** / **approval** of the Stakeholder **required**?
MECHANISMS / METHODS
What is the **main mechanism** or **method** for **involving** this Stakeholder in the Plan development?
STAGES
How much is this Stakeholder involved **overall** with the **SCOPING** stage of the Plan?
How much is this Stakeholder involved **overall** with the **DEVELOPMENT** stage of the Plan?

Table 4. Stakeholder and Plan Rating

	Informed / aware	Motivation	Data / info supplied to EA	Advice / opinion sought	Info supplied by EA	MECHANISM
ABP	EA Senior Managers					
	-1	0	1	0	-1	1,2,8

Table 5. Stakeholder Consultation/ Participation Mechanisms

KEY TO MECHANISMS			
1	Meetings	**6**	Consultation document
2	Written contact / formal letters	**7**	Questionnaire
3	Public display / exhibition	**8**	Site meeting
4	Scoping document	**9**	Develop understanding
5	Steering group	**10**	Memos / emails
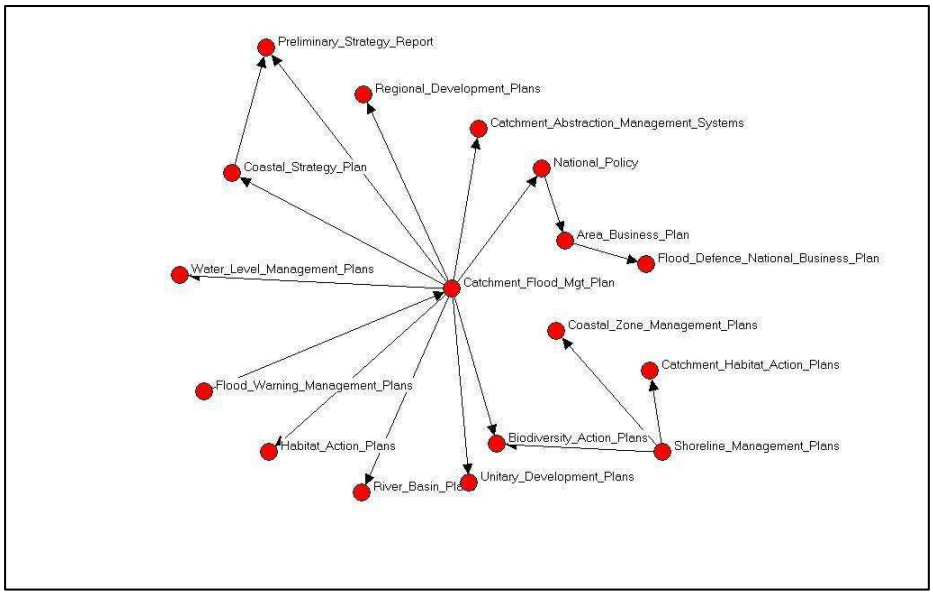
Figure 1. Relationships Between Plans Noted by Respondents