



# Chapter 6

## Voices of power

There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective “knowing”; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity”, be [emphasis in original].

(Nietzsche 1969 p. 119)



## 6.0 Introduction

The voices<sup>27</sup> of the various participants involved in rangeland management projects and programs in south-west Queensland are explored in this chapter. Nietzsche (1969) believes that objectivity requires the employment of a variety of perspectives. Consequently, examining the various perspectives of those involved in community participation may provide an “objective”, or more complete, assessment of power relations. Objectivity for Nietzsche is not the same as for Habermas (as described in Chapter 3). Nietzsche is not searching these different perspectives so that each will provide a component part of the “one true” picture — like pieces of a jig-saw — rather, he believes that within this polyphony of voices there is “no one voice ... claiming final authority” (Flyvbjerg 2001 p. 139). Thus, power is not deemed to rest solely in one voice, with one true authority; but by listening to many voices, each with its own history, we will gain a deeper understanding of situations. Clearly, this has implications for the operation of participatory NRM projects in south-west Queensland.

Not only does this chapter examine the participants’ perspectives, it uses different theories and frameworks to gain a richer understanding of power. As Flyvbjerg (2001 p. 138) suggests, both macro-level or micro-level explanations need to be sought if researchers are to make the critical connections between actors and structures. I will look at macro and micro-aspects of power separately. Firstly the chapter is organised around concepts that relate to macrophysics of power, which provides insights about relationships between groups. Then the weaknesses in these ideas, which were exposed during data analysis, are presented. In the latter part of this chapter I will use a more Foucauldian style of thinking to explore the microphysics of power, the individual relations which underpin participatory processes.

Specifically I shall use Habermas’s discourse ethics and Pretty’s typology of participation to discuss the macrophysics of power. Even though Habermas (1991) said that discourse ethics could be applied to both macro- and micro-aspects of power, he tended to focus more on macrophysics. In the latter part of the chapter I discuss microphysics, using concepts such as the fluctuating and contextual nature of power, and power as the structure of actions.

In terms of the participation and power model proposed in Chapter 2, this chapter focuses on the central element, power (illustrated as the “wobbly wheel” in the centre of Figure 2.2). Both macro- and micro-aspects of power relate to the various dimensions of participation. These

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<sup>27</sup> The term *voice* is an extension of the idea of perspective, except that it emphasises the manifest expression of perspective, and is therefore more evocative of the forces of power at play.

dimensions are mentioned in passing in this chapter, as these are the focus of the next chapter. This chapter concludes with the observation that people's expressions of power do not fit solely within the dominant Habermasian or the alternative Foucauldian tradition. To develop a deep understanding of power relations we need to ask "how" power is enacted — as the Foucauldian tradition does — not simply answer Habermasian types of questions about power relations, such as "who" has the power, or "what" level of power exists in which projects.

## 6.1 Discourse ethics

In this case study, government practitioners saw one of their roles as providing participatory frameworks so that better land use management decisions could be made. Consensus was the ideal to which many meetings aspired. While government officers never mentioned discourse ethics, many of the principles they espoused as good practice for participation are those of Habermas's discourse ethics (Table 6.1). The requirements of Habermas's discourse ethics are aimed at achieving consensus and alleviating power disparities within discussions.

These five requirements will now be examined in more detail. Discourse ethics relate to the *who* and *methods* dimensions of participation (Dimension 5 and 7: Figure 2.2). Requirements 3, 4 and 5 could also relate to the *capacity* (Dimension 6: Figure 2.2) of individuals involved in discussion, while the last two requirements refer to *goals* (Dimension 2: Figure 2.2).

The requirement of "generality" or who should be involved was a vexed question for many government staff, as is evident from their comments during government group interviews and from my participant observation. Government staff occasionally referred to policy documents such as the QDPI (1994) "Client consultation guidelines" (see Box 6.1), which are so expansive that everyone could be included.

Even though this document is old (1994), it is indicative of the broad statements in the consultation and participation guidelines in Queensland. The sentiment that consultation needed to be very broad was reiterated by staff from all departments who said that the trend was towards involving a broader cross-section of the community. On the other hand, involving the whole community would not be encouraged by managers because of the cost.

The vague directions in the guidelines mean that the decision about whom to involve is left to project staff. In south-west Queensland, government departments tend to keep returning to the same landholders, so that these groups were not representative, and other groups were omitted from the discussions, which leads to the next requirement.

**Table 6.1 Key requirements of discourse ethics**

Requirement (Habermas 1990 p. 65–66)	Meaning	Examples of comments from government staff (this research)
[1] Generality	No party who is affected by what is being discussed should be excluded from the discourse.	You can end up with one segment of the community, i.e. the graziers, being benefited to the detriment of the rest of the community, which can be the other 99% (Govt G3). We need a wide spectrum of people, [but] we get the same people coming up to meetings ... and we don't get those other unheard-of people (Govt G2).
[2] Autonomy	All participants should have equal possibility to present and criticise validity claims in the process of discourse.	Bad participation can be caused by people coming along with a negative agenda, and depending on the influence of the group, they can totally stuff it up [by not letting others have a say] Equality — it is having everyone contributing equally (both comments from Govt G1).
[3] Ideal role taking	Participants must be willing and able to empathise with each other's validity claims	[Good participation is] all different viewpoints getting heard, really heard by the others (Govt G3). Bad participation can be caused by people when they don't want to see any other way but their way (Govt G1). A lot of times one group romps in there, almost saying, "We've got the boxing gloves on" ... they just shut down and are not prepared to listen to what you have to say (Govt G3).
[4] Power neutrality	Existing power differences between participants must be neutralised such that these differences have no effect on the creation of consensus.	I think you can get bad participation if there's a hierarchy — like if you don't feel like you're actually equal ... I think that leads on to people not being treated like adults too (Govt G1). Where someone can really force their own agenda, then I think it's fairly unwise to have consultation like that (Govt G3). Both parties have got to have an open mind and be prepared to listen to the ... I mean it's really basic stuff, but to listen to the other parties' point of view objectively (Govt G3).
[5] Transparency	Participants must openly explain their goals and intentions, and in this connection desist from strategic action.	Good participation — got to be honesty and transparency (Govt G1). We tried to be clear about our goals in the Feral Goat project (Govt G2).

**Box 6.1 Consultation guidelines**

These guidelines are indicative of the broad statements in consultation and participation guidelines of land management departments in Queensland, even though this particular document is old.

This document emphasised that all parties affected should be included in community consultation, by stating that "it should not be assumed that only those directly affected fall into the 'must be consulted' category ... some clients who may not be directly affected still need to be consulted" (QDPI 1994 p. 13).

Clients who should involved should include those (a) directly or indirectly affected, (b) not affected but needing to be consulted, and (c) likely to be interested (QDPI 1994 p. 13).

The second requirement of discourse ethics is "autonomy", which was mentioned frequently during interviews (examples in Table 7.1 above) and in several of the SWS meetings observed during 1998 and 1999. Government staff tried to ensure that everyone had an equal opportunity to be involved by choosing meeting times appropriate for clients; consideration was given to the shearing season, school holidays and other important events, and the timing, location and type

of meeting with relevant landholders. The SWS Board held several public meetings, sending letters of invitation to key groups encouraging attendance.

Despite this rhetoric of providing equal opportunities for participation, many groups in south-west Queensland were not included. However, the idea that providing *equal opportunities* to participate does not necessarily provide *equitable participation*, was a confusing concept for some, and was debated vigorously during a couple of SWS Board meetings. Equitable participation relates not only to the participation dimension of *method* (Dimension 7: Figure 2.2), but also to the *capacity* (Dimension 6: Figure 2.2) of the individuals and the *context* (Dimension 1: Figure 2.2), including the cultural context. Both urban businesswomen and Aboriginal people spoke informally to me about the difficulty in speaking out during formal SWS meetings; they lacked confidence in their communication skills. Aboriginal people almost never attended SWS meetings. The cultural context has tended to be forgotten — the formal meeting procedures of the SWS Board are alien to Aboriginal cultural norms, where power is played out according to where people are allowed to sit, and who is allowed to speak in public. Since 2004 a specific indigenous group has been formed to cater for the concerns of the large aboriginal population living in and around the regional towns.

Habermas's third requirement of "ideal role taking" was widely discussed by several government staff, who saw the problems associated with people not being prepared to participate in discussions openly and listen to other people's points of view. One of the landholders' most frequent comments during my interviews was that they were "not listened to" by government staff. All landholder groups made comments that indicated that they thought that many government staff were not able or willing to understand their views — nor empathise with their "validity claims" (Habermas 1990) — as indicated by examples of landholders' comments from interviews (see Box 6.2).

Landholders complained about the derogatory and arrogant attitude of some government staff (Box 6.2, Quotes 1, 2, 3), whose language is used (Quote 4), and the lack of value placed on landholder views by themselves (Quote 5) and by government (Quotes 6, 7), and the government's hidden agendas. Government staff also complained that landholders were not prepared to "listen to reasoning" (Govt G2) and such landholders were seen as "problems". Clearly, power differentials do exist in many interactions observed and discussed during my interviews.

### **Box 6.2 Government lacks empathy**

1. They are inclined to talk down to you all the time as if you are from outer space; they have it all up there, they are real super intelligent and you are a nut (LG 10).
2. [Government staff think we are] a dumb mob of silly poor beggars (LG 9).
3. Some of them [government] blokes I would object to having them on the place. It depends on their attitude. We are not some hillbillies from the back blocks who don't know if it's raining. We might be stupid to be here [at these meetings], but we are not that damn stupid (LG 10).
4. They don't try and understand our language, yet at the same time they expect us to understand their language ... we talk two different languages really (LG 7).
5. A lot of landholders don't feel their ideas are valued or think they haven't got anything to offer (LG 3).
6. I don't think it matters whether you get consulted or not; it comes down to the fact that they [the government] want it [consultation]. The issue is what happens to it. I've been mixed up in a terrible lot of workshops; we spent days and days — 30, 40, 50 people — made up lists of what was right and wrong, reached agreement. Top of our list was government interference, but this was not even mentioned in the paperwork we got back (LG 6).
7. Same with the tree guidelines — we [landholders] were supposed to develop guidelines for our little patch 'cause we know the country. But if you look at them [the guidelines for all the different regions in Queensland], they are nearly all the same, word for word [landholders' context specific recommendations were ignored] (LG 9).
8. Well they don't listen, and they've got a hidden agenda all the time ... well, I mean when they go and play with policies behind your back (LG 2; similar comments from all landholder groups).

The fourth requirement, “power neutrality”, emphasises the creation of consensus. Consensus was a widely held goal, seen as a desirable by all government departments in south-west Queensland, even though it was recognised that consensus was difficult to achieve. Examples of interview comments (Box 6.3) were made by government staff and regional landholders, as these groups were the ones who normally set the goals for meetings and projects.

### **Box 6.3 Consensus**

- Consensus was the aim of many meetings:  
It is a consensus; it is really supposed to be a consensus between all of the relevant bodies. (LG-R1)
- You try and be objective, [and reach a] point of compromise. (Govt G1)
- Talking about my project, I'm just trying to get their issues as a group together — so they can bash these issues off each other ... so you have a combined idea about an issue ... and then you could work with that [common agreement or consensus]. (Govt G2)
- In a partnership, where it's not the department making the decision, it's the group that actually makes the decision. They've got a responsibility to make a decision and get a consensus. (Govt G2)
- Consensus was difficult to achieve:  
[Some landholders are] not prepared to listen to any sort of reasoning ... it's confrontation from the word go ... when they get together they just seem to feed off each other. (Govt G2)
- Sometimes one side of the party won't compromise at all; it is difficult to get everyone to agree. (Govt G1)
- Some producers want information, they are always more positive interactions ... some people aren't genuinely there to learn anything ... they're just there to pick you up on something that they don't agree with, and it gives them an opportunity then to confront you. (Govt G3)

Habermas admits that the extent to which consensus, and discourse ethics generally, occurs in practice depends on the effects of power which distort communication within the rational lifeworld. While he saw these principles as idealistic, they were worth striving towards. I disagree, because an unachievable goal leads to frustration. Governments and landholder groups need to recognise that a different approach may be needed if consensus is not possible.

Governments need to make decisions to formulate regulations, policy and guidelines for land management practices, such as water allocation and vegetation management. Such frameworks should ensure that advice provided by government staff is consistent, and that everyone in the community is treated with some degree of equity and fairness. However, trying to force community consensus as a basis for policy decisions may be impossible — the community will simply not agree on all land management decisions.

The fifth requirement, “transparency”, refers to the tensions caused by hidden private goals, as opposed to public and transparent goals of the participants. Transparency was a keystone in many government policy documents, and was widely promoted by the Queensland Beattie government (Davis 2001; QDPI 1994; Queensland Government 2003). However, some resource management projects I observed lacked transparency about if and how landholders’ ideas and knowledge would be used. In the Habermasian tradition, government staff did use scientific information in the hope that this would help people reach consensus, alleviate conflict and minimise the negative influences of power, as exemplified by this comment:

If it is going to be controversial, it’s good if you can get somebody who’s considered an expert or specialist in that field to come along. (Govt G2).

The lack of transparency and tensions about whose knowledge is valued and used in decision-making is further evidence that power struggles are not alleviated when the principles of discourse ethics are followed.

### **6.1.1 Whose knowledge is valued?**

Many government staff in south-west Queensland considered that providing scientific information was a way to achieve rational discussion. From my observation, it almost seemed that the more conflictual the meeting was likely to be, government staff controlled the process more tightly, and the more scientific information was provided. In one meeting I observed, this approach limited landholders’ comment to such an extent that conflict erupted during the meeting. Landholders here, and during my interviews, complained that their input and knowledge were often not listened to. They saw the increase in regulations as an indication that the government neither trusted nor valued their knowledge of, and expertise in, land



management. Examples of government officers' comments about landholder knowledge reinforced this view (Box 6.4).

#### **Box 6.4 Negative views of landholder knowledge**

1. Some of the research projects we have, like that Mulga bug project, could have just gone on without any grazier input whatsoever ... graziers aren't always going to be able to see what is the best research to be doing; often yes, but not always (Govt G1).
2. You've got to get people changing their attitudes and it's going to be a long-term thing, but you've got to get people thinking differently about the environment and the importance of it (Govt G1).
3. A gross generalisation for producers is that they're very much knee jerk reactors; and therefore the projects that are initiated by them are to tackle the problem they have *now*. I think they should also be part of our research or whatever, ... [but the government's role] should be trying to work out ... what the problems are going to be in the future, so we already have the answers (Govt G1).
4. Why have the landholders been asked about what should and should not be kept standing in south-west Queensland? Why does anyone assume they would know? ... They don't accept endangered communities [the implication is that they don't accept what is true according to science] (Govt G3: re vegetation management).
5. But in respect to, for instance, nature conservation plans — you can't just go out and say [to landholders] "What are the issues?" because they're not going to come up with the [real] issues. They're going to come up with what they think the issues are, which are things like there are too many 'roos, which are issues to them, but aren't really issues in nature conservation. They're not the experts (Govt G3).
6. So things where it's really like that [vegetation clearing] or something that's pure science ... I don't think there's a point in consultation because it just muddies the water. I think the government would be better to make a quick, clean decision [based on science] (Govt G3).

Officers from two departments questioned the validity and relevance of some landholder knowledge (Box 6.4, Quotes 1–6). The other departmental group did not specifically discuss the value of landholders' knowledge during interviews, but informal discussions indicated that they held similar views.

The many reasons given by government officers (Box 6.5) about why community consultation and participation were undertaken, indicate that integrating local landholder knowledge in projects was not always a *goal* (Dimension 2: Figure 2.2). Thus landholders in these activities had little power to influence government decision-making.

These comments from all three government departments involved in resource management indicate that consultation was to justify their actions (Box 6.5, Quote 1), teach the community (Quotes 3, 4, 5) or provide an opportunity for the community to have their say (Quotes 2, 6); it was not necessarily to allow landholders any power to influence government decision-making.

### Box 6.5 Reasons for participation

1. What I was thinking [about why we undertake consultation] ... you do the consultation; and then you go and do something. Someone whinges about it, so you say "I asked all these people and they said it was okay" (Govt G1).
2. The submission thing [process for community involvement] is [used when] you don't really need ownership by the community, but you give them the opportunity to say something if they want to, if they feel strongly enough about it. Whereas the conservation projects, [landholders] they've got to own it because we've got no statutory authority ... so submissions are not enough. But for other things where you've got that legal [power] — well maybe submissions will do (Govt G2).
3. You should give information at a workshop too — you can train the community (Govt G2).
4. It's got to be more participation, because you've got to get people changing their attitudes ... a need for good extension of scientific knowledge. (Person 1 in Govt G3)
5. We need education ... they will still be red necks unless someone lets them know the way things really are [in terms of the truth from scientific information]. (Person 2 in Govt G3)
6. We can listen to their views [about water licences], but we define the problems and solutions based on science, and then we issue the licence based on these conditions, and we can take the advice that we received from the community or not (Govt G2).

The role of government knowledge in landholders' decisions was likewise contentious. Some landholders said they did not respect or value government knowledge and expertise, and government staff were aware of these views (Box 6.6). Some negative comments were made because landholders felt powerless in their relations with government; but I observed some incidents where staff were paternalistic and patronising to landholders, both intentionally and unintentionally. Where such attitudes existed, communication between landholders and government staff was not constructive in terms of building trust and fostering learning.

Despite the myriad of negative reports about differing knowledge systems, my in-depth interviews revealed a recognition by many landholders and government staff that different types of knowledge were in fact needed. The value of both local experiential and theoretical scientific knowledge was acknowledged (see Box 6.7). Overall, participatory approaches were recognised by many landholders and government officers as leading to better decisions.

These positive statements balance the negative comments. While there were plenty of negative comments, some of these came early in the interviews when people needed to express their frustrations. To understand what people really thought, questioning needs to establish a positive atmosphere where people felt comfortable about being truthful. Towards the middle of one interview, the group admitted that government regulations were necessary. Landholders frequently said that they valued the knowledge and expertise of government officers, and this was their first point of contact when they wanted information. The Department of Primary Industries newsletter, prepared in the region, the *Mulgaline*, was considered a very valuable

source of knowledge. Landholders tended to make the most positive comments about the department that offered production advice.

### **Box 6.6 Negative views of government knowledge**

#### **Examples of landholders' comments:**

They [government staff] tell us, "We've got the scientific facts", but we don't see this scientific fact. Where the hell are they, some secret turnout or something? ... But if we got any, they'd want to analyse them and they would cut you off [discount our facts] ... Yet we gotta accept theirs ... their scientific facts. They've got to put us on an equal playing field with them; not be some superior being (LG 10).

Because they go and do a college degree and come back out, it doesn't mean they understand the country out here (LG 2).

I know I would take any research if they [government staff] do it in a hands-on manner in partnership with someone [landholder] on their place ... because somebody has got to make a living on the results (LG 8).

The way the DPI people come out and look down their nose and say, "I am a Veterinary Scientist; I have been at University for 7 years I know what I am doing". Because I suggested to her that it was mulga, there was nothing in all the rice in China would she write down and say that the cattle had been poisoned by mulga then. That is the only time I have ever used them, and they were absolutely useless (LG 8; similar comments by LG 7, LG 10).

To me there is just not enough experience there ... they haven't got any of life skills at all. They know it out of a book (LG 10).

Half the problem is that most of the government people ... [their knowledge] comes out with a text book idea of what should be done, but it is completely impractical for our sort, type of country — it might be alright in a text book, but it doesn't work for us. You know they can go and learn and get as big a degree as they like, but it is not going to help unless they go out and do something practical first, so they have got a little bit of experience (LG 9).

#### **Examples of government staff comments:**

They [landholders] only recognise our expertise when it suits them, and when it doesn't suit them they know the issues (Govt G3).

I think in the past, a lot of things that the DPI have gone out and said ... you know, "Do this and it will be good for you" ... there has been a very — has focused on very narrow things within the whole production system — the whole business — the whole property business and therefore because it's only focused on one thing, it's had very adverse effects on other things ... And that's why they're suspicious (Govt G1).

They [landholders] think that you've been made irrelevant or ignorant through going to university. Anyone can go to university and it extracts your ability to be practicable (Govt G2).

Likewise, most government staff did appreciate landholders' knowledge and input, agreeing that better decisions were reached when both forms of knowledge were respected and incorporated (see Box 6.7, Quotes 8, 10, 12, 13), that government staff could learn from landholders (Quotes 7 and 9) and that landholders grounded decision-making in reality (Quote 11). Knowledge needs to be understood as being socially constructed, rather than being an ideal or a truth.

### Box 6.7 Need to integrate knowledge

Examples of landholders' comments:

1. You want someone from the outside looking in, we are inside looking out ... local people's knowledge is needed as well as scientific knowledge (LG-R2).
2. It is good to see that ... scientific experience backs up long-term experience [gives local knowledge more credibility] ... It is interesting, but it did not change your management. It just backed up what we had always done ... I just want the government to know that we are doing it right for a long time. I wasn't trying to get anything out of the government, I was trying to keep the government happy [when discussing the SCC project] (LG 8).
3. I think a lot of times ... growers need some assistance and direction, need some guidance ... it's not that they are not enthusiastic, but they ... don't have the skills in organising and obtaining information that is going to be helpful ... we are notorious for going off the track ... it is beneficial that they have some sort of guidance (LG 6).
4. The DPI is fairly valuable if you want to know specific things, we reckon. They are there so that you can ring up and find out some specific things (LG 1).
5. Mulgaline is a good paper [newsletter prepared by DPI] (LG 3; similar comments L1, L8, L10).
6. In our area, land was flogged to within an inch of its life ... so you've got to have some sort of control in place for idiots like that (LG 2).

Examples of government staff comments:

7. It's not just one way, like it's improving your knowledge. It's sharing information and hopefully all of the community and the government benefit from it ... if we don't go out there and learn, we've got nothing to offer (Govt G1).
8. They [landholders] have skills and knowledge ... it might be geographic or industry [knowledge] or ... it might be in-depth knowledge of a particular subject (Govt G2).
9. It's saying, "Okay ... we want to learn from you as well". So they're seeing what we're doing as a value, and we're acknowledging their knowledge and expertise as well (Govt G3).
10. From a government perspective, better decisions are fairly important ... that's the reason why government is placing more emphasis on community involvement (Govt G1).
11. To anchor things in reality I think. You know, we can come up with these ... ideas on paper for a strategy ... or whatever, but [landholders] are there to make sure that there's realism in what we're trying to do (Govt G2).
12. It's offering more alternatives to problems as well, rather than our thinking that we [government] know the only way; and their thinking they [landholders] know the only way (Govt G1).
13. When they come to us as a government department seeking knowledge; like bringing in a plant specimen to get it identified ... they come to you with a certain deal of respect; in terms of accepting that you know something; and that's when you can really positively interact with them (Govt G3).

The question of whose knowledge is valued is frequently discussed in the literature (Andrew et al. 2003; Blesing et al. 1996; Chambers 1999; Chambers, Pacey and Thrupp 1989; Childs 2002; Pretty 2002a; Pretty and Uphoff 2002; Scoones and Thompson 1994; Slocum et al. 1995). The forms of knowledge that are most influential (whose knowledge it is that is heard) are usually those of the group or sub-group within society that has the power to be heard. However, in

practice little attention is paid to the connection between power and knowledge. Therefore, most discussions about power and knowledge within south-west Queensland, and in Australian agriculture generally, ignore Foucault's revelations about the effect of power on knowledge.

Foucault's view of discourse is that "it conditions the way people think" (Dryzek 2000 p. vi). Discourses can be obscure and unseen by those who are influenced by their power. As indicated in this section, the scientific discourse does tend to dominate discussions about land management. Landholders seemed to succumb to this dominant discourse at times, respecting the value of science (e.g. Box 6.6, Quote 1).

Because of the invisible nature of many discourses, direct quotes from landholders or government staff are difficult to find. Nonetheless other discourses do influence rangeland management, for example economic rationalism:

I don't believe governments should get themselves involved in areas that are not linked to productivity. (LG 8)

We should only help those who want to be helped, those who want to be profitable. (Govt G2)

Other authors working at rural Australia have discussed the influence of discourses on government policy (Higgins and Lockie 2001; Stewart and Armstrong 1998). Self-reliance and economically rational decisions are the basis of programs such as FutureProfit. This style of thinking permeates the approach taken by many government staff in SWS, for example:

We want to get people to become less dependant on government assistance ... less reliant ... I'm talking about people becoming much more pro-active in their business, taking a more businesslike approach, rather than being reliant on drought handouts, bloody drought subsidies, all those sort of things that we've seen as measures to improve. I think that's a big ... all those things are a big message. (Govt G1)

The discourse about rurality (Section 5.2.5 *Cultural context: rural identity and rurality*) also has a profound but even more obscure influence on rural people's attitudes to themselves, and to welfare:

No one wants to be seen to accept hand-outs; that's failure. (LG 1)

The Rural Adjustment Scheme (RAS) was not well accepted here. (LG-R2)

Look at Charleville, 5-6 million dollars goes into ... that community centre; that's a lot of money. To service the sheep industry in Queensland there's 4 million dollars. Now if that's not a gross wrong doing, what is? (LG 2)

Spending money on welfare was seen as waste of resources, and several SWS meetings reported the very low up-take of assistance measure such as drought relief or RAS. These findings are similar to a case study by Woodward (1996), who found that the discourse of rurality denied the existence of deprivation because their enjoyment of the place where they lived precluded

negative comments. This impeded the recognition that the economic situation was dire, because admitting this implied a loss of power and being subservient to the government system.

In the next section, I discuss the opinions of people in south-west Queensland about how power was shared during resource management projects, and the preferred level of power sharing for landholders and government officers.

## **6.2 Pretty's typology**

During interviews, the main question that was asked after the presentation of the typology was, "*Which projects fit with which levels of power sharing as suggested in the typology?*". This always stimulated an animated debate about the projects.

In this section, I shall firstly present the stated preferences of landholders and government officers about levels of power sharing. Secondly, I discuss how participants saw power sharing levels being associated with projects, and whether or not landholders could influence the directions of government projects, policy and regulations. The differences in perceptions about power are highlighted with people's views about how the SWS Board operated.

### **6.2.1 Preferred level of power sharing**

Both landholders and government staff were unanimous in saying that landholder participation with government in land management programs was desirable. Everyone indicated that power should be shared between the community and government. The results need to be treated with some caution, as one of the problems with the typology presented to interviewees is that the language suggests a graded scale, where Level 7 (*Self-mobilisation*) is more desirable than Level 1 (*Manipulative participation, where representatives sit on Boards*). Comments from government staff were probably more influenced by the wording, as the "lower" levels painted their approach to participation in a negative manner. However, most discussions were very open and encouraged people to question the validity of the typology.

Government officers all agreed that community involvement in NRM and agricultural programs and projects was essential to develop sustainable rangeland management practices. Even the staff from the department that was most concerned about the extent of landholder empowerment said:

If they [government] want it [sustainable land management] to work properly, interactive participation [Pretty's Level 6] is the way to go. (General agreement from everyone in Govt G3)

However, some staff from one government group were concerned that during the past 10 to 15 years, landholders had become more empowered and in some situations had too much power:

I don't know whether we want too much more empowerment ... because it makes them [landholders] really hard to deal with. (Govt G3)

Some of the staff in this department found landholder interaction difficult because they often represented views that were not shared by staff from other government departments or by landholders, and they were often a lone voice in the crowd at meetings. These differences in views about power sharing are understandable when the roles of the departments are considered: DPI is interested in rural industry and improving productivity; EPA is interested in conservation, national parks, reserves and native wildlife; and DNRM is involved in regulation and management of natural resources such as water.

Nonetheless, all government staff wanted to share power and — in some situations — to be seen as equal partners. As one government group explained, choosing the appropriate level of power sharing “depends on the situation” (Govt G1). To me, this refers to the various dimensions of participation: *Contexts, Goals, Scale, Stage, Who, Capacity and Methods* (as in Figure 2.2).

Despite their many negative comments about government, landholders from both local and regional groups wanted some level of government involvement (see Box 6.8). Without prompting, half the groups suggested that Pretty's Level 6 (*Interactive participation*) or Pretty's Level 7 (*Self-mobilisation*) was a desirable level. Interactive participation was preferred by slightly more people than was self-mobilisation because those landholders wanted some input from government.

Some landholders (a few people in about half the groups) were cynical about Level 7 (*Self-mobilisation*), suggesting that either the government would take no notice of them or that the government would promote equality but would take over the project, especially if it became successful. They offered comments such as:

I've never seen [Level 7] ... put into practice; they [government] just take it over, seems like another public relations exercise where they get control of the direction; they don't even give you a chance to control it. (LG 10)

Well they don't listen, and they've got a hidden agenda all the time. They don't give you the full picture. How can you advise without the full picture? [talking about an Advisory group on kangaroos]. (LG 7)

These (and other comments) imply that the *public* face of government power is different from the *private* face. In public, the government espouses sharing the power equally with landholders, but landholders are concerned about a hidden agenda — that the government staff want to

control the project because they do not trust the landholders or because they want to take the credit for any successes.

### Box 6.8 Preferred level of power sharing

Interactive [Level 6: *Interactive participation*] is the way to go. If it's interactive you get a lot more out of it, you know? If you get to know someone and you can talk to them, you end up throwing more ideas around (LG 1).

The last one's the ultimate [Level 7: *Self-mobilisation*], but the second last one [Level 6] you've got to have (general agreement from LG 2).

I think we might like interactive participation [Level 6] ... and I'm beginning to think that our say is actually being taken on board (LG 3).

It's a two-way flow [i.e. Level 6]. (Person 1, LG 5)

Bestprac is controlled by the group [Level 7] ... In some ways it's the way to go ... but there are a lot of things that we wouldn't want to get in and control 'cause we would probably make a terrible mess of it ... like overseas marketing and stuff like that (Person 2, LG 5).

I would have said number 6 [is the best] ... or number 7 ... but, no, we need some actions from the government. I mean we don't know necessarily everything that's going on [and later in the discussion] ... but Number 3 [Level 3: *Consultation*] is a top one too (LG 7).

Levels 6 and 7 are the only two that are useful (LG 9).

I would have to say number 6 [is the best] because they actually listen to you and what you say (person 1, LG 10).

But, number 4 [Level 4: *Material goals*], yeah, it would be useful (Person 2, LG 10).

[and later] Number 7 is how it should be, but I've never seen it implemented ... I've seen it being tried to be put into practice, they [government staff] just take it over. Seems like this is another public relations exercise where they [government] get control of the direction (Person 3, LG 10).

In summary, out of the twelve<sup>28</sup> groups interviewed (10 local scale and 2 regional scale) the above seven groups said that Levels 6 and 7 were preferred. Three groups did not state their preferred level of power sharing.

The first two groups interviewed were not presented with the typology (as explained in Chapter 4). One of these groups was the only group to consistently maintain that government was not useful. The other group said "We need interaction with government" (LG 6), which suggests they would have nominated interactive participation (Level 6) as the ideal. In one group, I omitted to specifically ask what was ideal, and they did not offer this information. This group discussed many of the problems with the current interaction between government and community, but they were positive about various levels of interaction saying, "We have to select what to go to, what will benefit us most".

One of the key factors motivating landholders in south-west Queensland to participate in land management projects is the degree of power sharing. As one landholder said privately (not in a group interview), "I will go [to meetings] if I do not agree with them [government] to educate them". While some landholders attend meetings to "educate the government", government staff can be at the same meeting to educate the landholders. From observation, this occurred at some

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<sup>28</sup> For the purposes of analysis, I combined the five families interviewed in the west of the region into one group. If distances had not been so great, they would have come together with each other in one location, but they asked that I go and see them individually, to save them time. They all knew one another and had discussed the "meeting" before I arrived.



vegetation management meetings, and this difference in unstated goals proved to be a recipe for argument.

Despite comments that some level of power sharing was preferred, in several discussions landholders said that providing information (Pretty's Level 2) was the appropriate level in many situations. Again the level of power sharing preferred is dependent on the many dimensions of participation, including context, goals etc. (as illustrated in Figure 2.2).

Many of these quotes indicate that landholders see government agencies having an important part to play in managing NRM issues. Clearly, the legitimacy of government in NRM is founded on the agreement of most landholders. Thus, in Habermasian terminology, such landholders support sovereignty — the legitimate power of the state (Habermas's communicative power) and its institutions. Support from the landholder community for institutions (Habermas's administrative power) is particularly evident in these quotes. However, the exact role of government is being questioned, as one landholder from the SWS Board explained:

There is great controversy over what the role of government actually is. There's a lot of people that will take a very minimalist approach to government and they'll say the government is just there to provide a framework, and the rest of it should just be let go. And then there's a whole group of people that will say that we should be in there with government, working out solutions and going through that whole process. So, that's basically the difference between 6 and 7 [levels in Pretty's typology]. So there won't be a clear answer. (LG-R2)

A division of opinion arose within the landholder community and amongst the government staff. Some wanted the bureaucracy to stay, as it had a valuable role:

And so in a lot of cases it [involvement of the community/landholders] just makes a big mess out of something that the government, I think, has a right to legislate on — and to tell people what they can and can't do. (Govt G3)

Government is elected to govern, and sometimes they should just make the decision. On more complex and difficult issues it is important to consult — e.g. vegetation clearing or policy — but government should not consult on everything. It is a waste of time to consult on everything. (LG 3)

Others thought bureaucracy should be scaled back:

Bureaucracy has the ability to spring up overnight — it grows faster than mulga [implication is that we need smaller government] (LG 6).

Government intervention always leads to inefficiency; they should keep their noses out of things more (LG 7).

Landholders' comments about the desired levels of power sharing (see Box 6.8) support the argument that some people, in some situations, want the government to maintain control, but sometimes landholders want to have an equal say in decisions. This debate reflects Rose's discussion about "new lines of power" within advanced liberal governments, as outlined in

Chapter 3 (Section: 3.3.2 *Governmentality*). While local landholders did seem to support the overall legitimacy of some role for government in NRM, conservation and agriculture, not all projects were endorsed.

### **6.2.2 Landholder and government views**

Landholders did not agree amongst themselves about the level that any project might fit; their experiences varied because of several of the dimensions of participation (Figure 2.2). For example, the context changes as projects start at different times in several locations; who and how many people were involved changes, both the facilitator and landholder participants; methods used may be the same, but the way these are implemented changes according to the circumstances and the individuals.

Differences of opinion were voiced about many projects, and it is impossible to get agreement about any one project for several reasons. Firstly, people in the group interviews made comments about many projects, yet it was not clear whether or not they had been involved in them personally. Thus, some comments were based on hearsay, and are of questionable reliability. Secondly, several groups had transformed from one type of group to another, sometimes several times. For example:

Actually when our group started off, it wasn't a Landcare group. It was a drought initiative scheme, but we've changed our name to Landcare. (LG 6)

Well the FutureProfit group and the Landcare group are basically the same people ... the Landcare group decided that we would have a go at FutureProfit, as we were getting nothing out of anything else, so we thought we'll have a try of this and see what we get out of it. (LG 9)

Similarly, government staff in the interview groups had experience with a number of different projects, as three government interviews were held with each of the key state departments involved in NRM, conservation and agriculture. Some government staff had been involved a number of different groups as they changed jobs within government. Also, some of the more experienced facilitators were called on to work across projects.

Therefore, it was impossible to develop a matrix of the projects and a related power sharing level (from Pretty's typology) for each project. For example, even landholder comments on the Safe Carrying Capacity project in which they were involved personally are inconsistent, suggesting Levels 4, 5 and 6 from Pretty's typology (Box 6.9).

The results of what landholders from local groups (rather than the regional groups) thought about the degree of power sharing in existing NRM, conservation and agriculture projects are

shown in Table 6.2. Responses from the group interviews are separated from the individual interviews to avoid bias arising from grouping the data.

### Box 6.9 Safe Carrying Capacity project

The Safe Carrying Capacity — that would have been 6 [Level 6: *Interactive* from Pretty’s typology], that was a good one, really good ... all fairly interactive ... I reckon that’s where it [power level] should be. I think the government’s starting to listen to people, because they’re waking up that local people have a lot of knowledge. Sometimes it’s pretty hard for us to put it on paper, but if they come and have a meeting, people can talk it out. (Person 1 from LG 10)

It was set up by DPI and we were invited to take part, so functional [Level 5 from Pretty’s typology] ... and material [Level 4 from Pretty’s typology] ... we got some materials in kind, but we never actually got any money ... it was a pain in the bloody arse at times! We were getting pushed to get it done and we were busy ... it worked out alright ... but it was something that [the government officer] wanted to get going and he thought it was relevant to some country that was harder to muster. (Person 2 from LG 10)

Table 6.2 indicates that landholders (both individually and in groups) thought that in many existing projects, at least at some stage, government staff *did* share the power of decision making with landholders (Pretty’s Level 6) — one of the levels that landholders considered desirable. Some of the projects mentioned at this level included Safe Carrying Capacity, Bestprac, Landcare, FutureProfit and the Feral Goat Project.

**Table 6.2 Landholder views about power sharing levels in projects**

Pretty’s levels (Pretty 1995b)	Group responses	Individual responses
	No.	No.
1 Manipulative participation	6	0
2 Passive participation	10	2
3 Participation by consultation	18	4
4 Participation for material goals	14	3
5 Functional participation (to achieve agency’s	6	3
6 Interactive participation	32	5
7 Self-mobilisation	3	1
Total number of responses	94	10

Another cluster of projects focused on consulting with landholders (Pretty’s Level 3), material goals (Pretty’s Level 4), and on providing information (Pretty’s Level 2). Landholders did not necessarily like all of the projects in this cluster. As a principle they liked being asked for their ideas, but there were several complaints about participation by consultation (Pretty’s Level 3). Landholders had negative experiences of providing information that “disappears into a black hole”; they wanted to know where their information went, and they feared that information could be used against them in future. This had occurred when information from the Safe Carrying Capacity project was used to prevent some landholders obtaining grants from the SWS

group. They also had difficulty understanding when their localised information became “camouflaged” with other localised information in a document written about the regional scale.

However, landholders tended to like being provided with information and spoke highly of the *Mulgaline* newspaper produced by government staff in Charleville, one of the projects mentioned at Level 2. Generally they liked material incentives, and Landcare was associated with grants (Pretty’s Level 4) — landholders provided comments such as, “the projects around, like Landcare, where you get money if you do something, so it’s material incentives to actually encourage people”.

Very few projects were thought to be community driven (Pretty’s Level 7) — the “ideal” for many landholders, but considered unrealistic. Manipulation (Pretty’s Level 1) was mentioned occasionally, but it was difficult to understand whether these were cynical comments about bad experiences from individual landholders, as there was little consistency in people’s answers about which projects did not allow people to influence decisions.

To summarise the landholders’ views, they wanted to be able to influence government decision about issues which they considered important; for example “water is a very touchy one at present...I feel that landholders should have some say” (LG 1). On other issues, simply being provided with information was sufficient. Understanding which issues required a more participatory approach is the most difficult, and negotiation about this with landholders is essential.

Government officers from all departments agreed that the involvement of the local community was necessary to achieve sustainable land management. In general, government staff interpreted Pretty’s typology as the “higher” the level the better the participation. They all claimed that most of their projects had some level of equity in interaction — *Interactive participation* (Level 6), with equity in interaction between landholders and government staff, where roles and responsibilities are negotiated (Box 6.10, Quotes 1–4).

On the other hand, government officers from all departments were reluctant to say that their department might have been involved in manipulation (Pretty’s Level 1). All departments pointed the finger at a project from another department or local government or people from outside the region. Only one department voluntarily admitted to participation which was a pretence (Box 6.10, Quotes 5, 6). No one wanted to be seen as manipulative.

### **Box 6.10 Government views about levels of power sharing in projects**

#### **Mostly interactive participation:**

1. You've got a whole suite of projects sit under 6 [Pretty's Level 6], but if you really look at what we're trying to do, we're providing incentives to landholders to pipe their bores, and that to me is exactly what it says in 4 [Pretty's Level 4]. (Govt G2)
2. Parts of all projects fit into 6. I wouldn't agree that the landholder has no say in things — I mean, they have a lot of say in what happens there. (Govt G2)
3. I've spoken to the people (landholders) and said, "This is what we would like to do," and they say, "Oh, no, we can't actually do all of that, we'll do this part of it". So, I'd say, "OK, this is where the government could fit in". That's interactive participation. (Govt G1)
4. Well you need to have flexibility for participation and also be willing to participate, but with boundaries. Structured flexibility. (Govt G1)

#### **Sometimes manipulation:**

5. There are probably situations where we have been guilty of manipulative participation. (Govt G1)
6. The way government participates, it is very Clayton's ... we'll talk to these people [landholders] about this, but we don't take any notice of what they tell us. (Govt G1)

The differences between government staff and landholders' understanding of power relations in participatory projects are not really obvious from examining the range of power levels attributed to projects in south-west Queensland. However, marked differences in perceptions about power are obvious when government staff and landholders are discussing the same incident or the same project.

### **6.2.3 Perceptions about the South West Strategy Board**

The views and understanding of government staff and landholders about levels of power that exist is clearly quite different because of the contexts within which they operate. From my perspective, at least half the programs and projects in south-west Queensland seemed to lack a strong dialogue process to enable a genuine understanding of each other's goals and values. These differences in perceptions about power were clearly illustrated in discussions about the South West Strategy (SWS) Board group. Government staff (see Box 6.11) usually saw the Strategy as being quite interactive.

The staff from one government department (Box 6.11, Quotes 1, 2, 3) said that the SWS is widely considered to be highly participative, either Level 6 or 7. One government officer from another department (Quote 4) suggested that the landholders on SWS Board had control under a pretence. This view arose because of *who* (Dimension 5: Figure 2.2) and by what *methods* (Dimension 7: Figure 2.2) landholders were appointed.

### Box 6.11 Government views about the South West Strategy

Some components of South West Strategy [i.e. some projects], I think is 7 [Level 7: *Self-mobilisation*]... the folklore now is that it's a 7 (Govt G2).

I think it is folklore though! I think it is 6 [Level 6: *Interactive participation*], because federal government still has a strong say in what happens (Govt G2).

Groups go through different phases of each of those. Like initially you could probably say the South West Strategy group was number 7, like local people took the initiative and approached the government to ask for some change; but now they're probably back in 6 where local people participate in saying what their needs are and this leads to actions planned by local people and government (Govt G2).

South West Strategy's got a lot of levels ... even manipulative, because participation is a pretext. Local people have representatives on boards or at meetings and that's how the South West Strategy group is set up. The UGA have so many representatives (on the board), Cattleman's Union has so many representatives, Landcare has so many representatives and people are appointed to go along. So that's manipulative participation from that point of view (Govt G1).

[The SWS] is probably in manipulative participation and self reliant participation ... and who is being manipulated is the government ... by landholders who are involved in self-reliant participation (Govt G3).

(Most of the comments in this box came from officers from Govt group 2. This reflects the interviews. Comments by officers in Govt group 2 exceeded those of other government groups because the strategy was managed at that time by Government department 2)

The Board was considered manipulative in two ways. Firstly it was not representative, as members were not chosen in a democratic fashion. Usually, someone was asked by the local industry group or Landcare group to be their representative; occasionally landholders were asked by a government officer. Secondly, officers from one department thought the Board was manipulative, but in another fashion. They thought that the Board of landholders was able to manipulate the government (Box 6.11, Quote 5). There were only two government representatives on the Board, and their department did not have a representative.

Conversely, the landholder members of the SWS Board thought they were manipulated by the government. They thought the SWS was started by the community (Level 7), but degenerated into a game where the landholders pretended to go along with the process simply to achieve what they could for the region, and for themselves (Box 6.12).

The landholder members of the Board acknowledged that they had acquiesced to the government's manipulative game rather than fighting it, as explained in the analogy about the closed gate (Box 6.12, Quote 7). When this is interpreted within the dominant tradition of thinking about power, it can be seen that the collective of landholders did consent to the legitimacy of the Board's structure. However, they did not feel completely disempowered by the process because they were fully aware of what was actually happening — they were probably more aware than most of the government staff involved! This position corresponds to elite or

reformist views of power, where there are both private (covert or hidden) power relationships and the public face of power (see Chapter 3), as was on display during Board meetings.

### **Box 6.12 Landholders' discussion about the South West Strategy**

1. I think we started at 7 [Pretty's Level 7], and then drifted out of it a bit. The Mulga Build-up scheme [a project which preceded the SWS] really started from the community.
2. Seven should be our goal, but we are not at 7 [Level 7] at the moment.
3. The board is really just a review process [pointing to Level 3 — the government asks for landholder opinion].
4. We have only ever been an advisory board. We've never had decision-making power ... that's all very well, providing you don't want to achieve anything.
5. The power lies with the core — what do they call themselves? — management group ... they have the power ... the management group is the Strategy manager and other DNR staff, the government people from different government departments actually.
6. When we go to meetings we've been skilfully manoeuvred around and it's going to be what they say — they've been trained for a hundred years these government people ... but I mean I've heard the Chairman [of the SWS] say "we're strong, we're powerful, and we've got everything we asked for", but we were told before what we could get and that's what we asked for ... so everybody goes away from the meeting thinking they've just worked out this big scheme — what a joke! And it's already been bloody pre-conceived before we even started the meeting and I've seen it with my own eyes.
7. But — if you want to go ahead through that gate and it's closed, are you better crashing into it, or going up the road here and going around the corner?
8. We've paid lip service to it too, saying, "It's a great regional initiative, it's wonderful."  
(All quotes from landholders involved in the SWS Board).

From a Foucauldian perspective, power is inherent in all of the relationships between members of the Board — both landholder and government members. According to this approach, all members are free — which assists in explaining why the landholders do not feel disempowered within such an apparently disempowering structure: they simply say that they are playing the game to achieve their own ends, which are different from the government's *goals* (Dimension 2: Figure 2.2). To me this indicates multiple realities and multiple solutions. The landholders seemed to be aware of this multiplicity, whereas it seems that not all of the government staff shared this awareness as this program was promoted in government documentation as one of the leading community-driven land management strategies.

One aspect on which landholders and government staff did agree was that the SWS had many levels of participation, and that the program had fluctuated between levels over time. This recurring theme — that each project contains many levels of participation — is explored further in the next section.

### 6.3 Fluctuating power

It is evident that the degree of power sharing fluctuated between the different levels on Pretty's typology throughout the life of many projects. Landholders and government officers frequently suggested that each project fitted several levels at different *stages* (Dimension 4: Figure 2.2), as these comments by government officers indicate:

I think there are groups that go through different phases of each of those. Like initially you could probably say the South West Strategy group was number 7, like local people took the initiative and approached the government to ask for some change but now they're probably back in 6 where local people participate in saying what their needs are and this leads to actions planned by local people and government. (Govt G1)

Each time they [landholder group] met it was a different level ... no two meetings were the same; the initial meeting was ... explaining their intention. (Govt G2)

We have different participation levels and sometimes it's a structured type progression through this table and other times it's not. You just jump and swap and change depending on where you are within the project. (Govt G2)

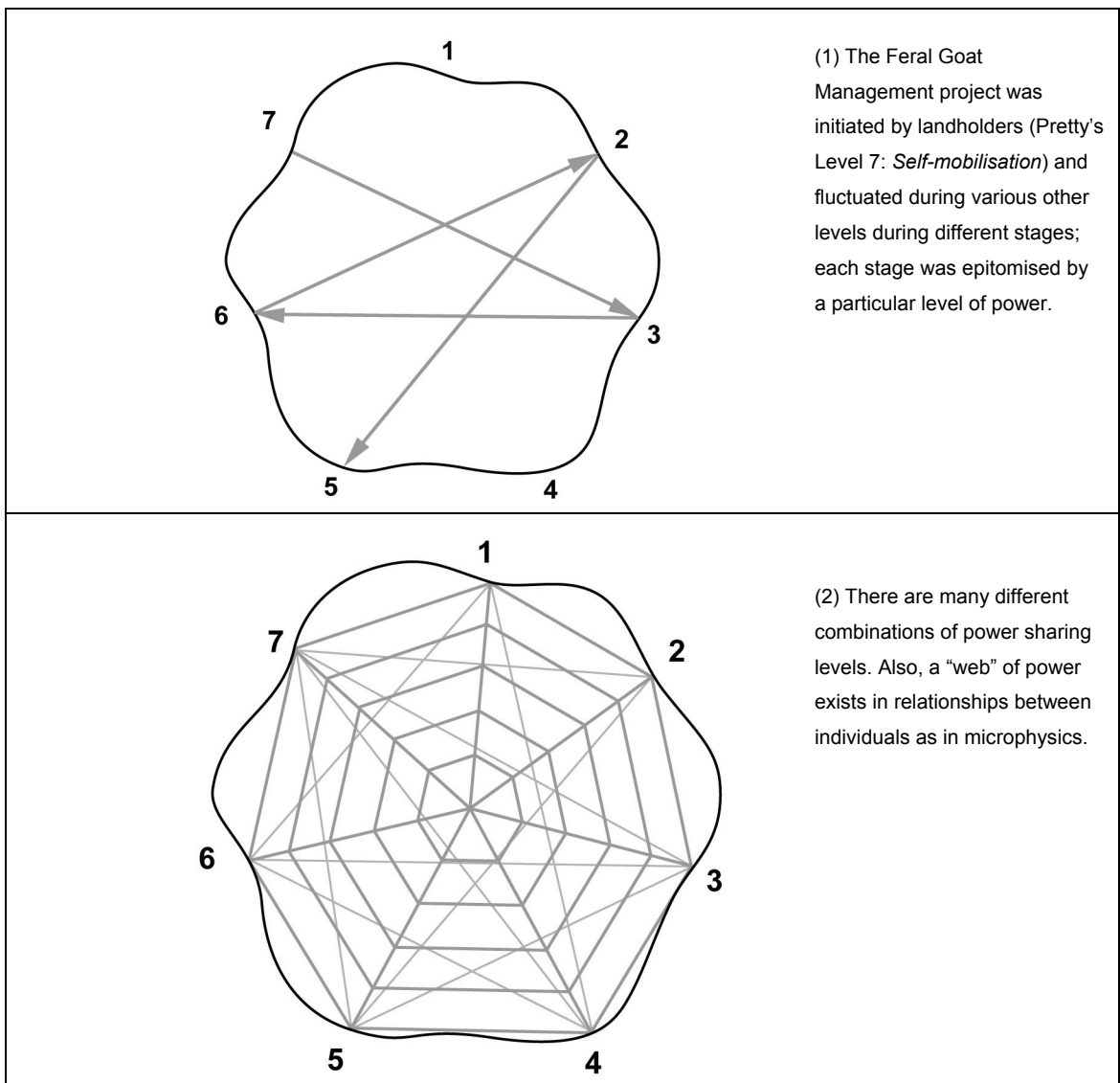
Clearly, power levels fluctuate over time. For example, in the Feral Goat Management project (see Figure 6.1, [1] top diagram), the initial power sharing started at Level 7, then moved to Level 3, then to Level 6 and so on as the project progressed. However, the earlier levels of power sharing remained evident to some extent, which means that multiple levels of power sharing can exist at the same time.

Power level changes in one project would not be the same as in another project. For example, in another project, a different set of levels may be used, and in a different order. The concept of fluctuating power is illustrated (Figure 6.1, [2] top diagram) as a "wobbly wheel". The wobbly wheel demonstrates that power sharing levels do not follow a pattern, the wobbly wheel is never the same shape, but is different for each project, and is ever-changing over time in any one project.

During each of these stages, power would also fluctuate in relationships between individuals. The second illustration (Figure 6.1, bottom diagram) represents the network of all possible power relations as a web. By extension from the above, it is clear that many of these elements of the web will be operating at the one time, yet will be also changing, so that the web represents a constantly fluctuating, complex set of power relations.

This model attempts to convey a more Foucauldian way of thinking, in which power is dynamic and fluid within conversations between individuals involved in a project, as well as between stages of power sharing levels in the project.





**Figure 6.1 Fluctuating power**

Various comments from landholders and government officers supported this concept of fluctuating power levels between landholders and government officers during various projects, including Bestprac, Landcare, the Bore Drain Replacement project, Strategic Weed Eradication and Education project and FutureProfit programs (Box 6.13).

Different levels of power sharing seemed to be considered as desirable and appropriate by landholders, and also by the more experienced staff from two departments. Power relationships and the level of power sharing in decision-making are linked to the various dimension of participation (Figure 2.2), and power relationships are contextual and dynamic over time and place.

### Box 6.13 Cases of fluctuating power in projects

#### Bestprac:

Some government staff suggested that Bestprac began at 5 [functional participation: following government goals] because “you set them up and you get them together to a group, you go in there the first time and you’ve got the goals and the function of the group ... I would say it was driven initially by government.”

Another officer thought Bestprac “starts straight from there (pointing to 2: passive participation where landholders receive information from government)”.

Then landholders participate in saying what their needs are”, which is Level 3 [*Participation by consultation*].

Afterwards the group often moves to 6 [interactive participation]; and then “Once it gets rolling then it becomes self-reliant” [Level 7] (Govt G1).

Landholders said that “Bestprac spends more time at the 7 stage” [self-mobilisation], than many other projects; but further landholder discussions revealed that power levels varied over time (LG 7).

#### Landcare:

Documentation suggested that this Australia-wide program was based on interactive participation, or even that it was a grassroots program. Landholders said that it “starts back with participation for material incentives [Level 4] and builds towards Level 7 [Self-reliant participation] from there” (LG 9).

#### The Bore Drain Replacement project (BDRP):

BDRP also “starts with participation for material incentives” [Level 4], according to landholders and government staff. In the BDRP, landholders said that once the government finished laying the poly pipe “they’re off to another place” or property, and the project finished there, so there were really no other levels in this project. Landholders were happy because “We’ve got six hundred miles of poly pipe, that’s all we need out of the government.”

This project was well received by most landholders. Most complaints were about the selection process when people had missed out on grants to assist them in piping their bore drains. Landholders were involved in an Advisory group and could have some influence on the criteria for selecting properties. Even some of those who had missed out admitted that the project was in the best interests of the rural community as a whole and that it was well run (Govt G 1).

#### The SWEEP project (Strategic Weed Eradication and Education project):

According to several government officers, incorporated Levels 2, 3, 4, and 6 depending on the aspect of the project; for example:

[1] “across a couple of levels, I think 3 and also 6, but it’s definitely in 6 as an interactive one; but then they are trying to develop more legislation, and ... that could fall into 3, or even 2” (Person 1: Govt G2).

[2] “It’s a hard one this one, it’s almost four ... at the end of the day the government may listen to local people’s views, but it may or may not use those views and just go ahead if that’s necessary (Level 3) ... and sometimes we just give them information (Level 2)” (Person 2: Govt G2).

#### FutureProfit:

In this program of training courses for graziers, the government staff who run the courses suggested that: “In the initial stages of setting up FutureProfit groups and things like that, we start functional because basically what we have some goals and some functions that belong to the project that are chiselled in tablets of stone, at a project level. With regard to working with the group ... we move to interactive, whereby we do have some stuff that we have to actually deliver to them; but in doing that, we also look for what they want to get out of it and gear it that way, which is then moving us towards a self-reliant participation at the end where we look to try and get them to keep going — an ongoing learning experience whereby they can say “This is what we would like to learn. This is what we need to know”. So we will start at 5 and move to 7” (Govt G1).

Landholders (mainly LG 9) seemed to agree that the Levels in FutureProfit started with Level 5; but some would not agree that the program ever moved to Level 7, probably suggesting that it stayed at Level 5.

This research suggests that in some circumstances traditional transfer-of-technology methods (*Methods* Dimension 7: Figure 2.2) are appropriate, and desired by landholders. Transfer-of-technology can use extension techniques such as media, brochures, field days and information days — this relates to Pretty’s Passive participation (Level 3) where government officers give information to landholders. For example in the Bore Drain project, landholders said, “Just give us the information. We only want information, and we can do the project”. Clearly, equity in communication and high levels of power sharing are not always needed.

This is supported by the agricultural extension literature to some extent. It is recognised that extension approaches change according to the type of project; for example, the traditional transfer-of-technology model is considered appropriate for simple technological information, while more-complex situations usually require an interactive approach with a “higher” level of community involvement (e.g. Woods et al. 1993; and Figure 2.1). From the literature and practice observed in south-west Queensland, extension officers tend to focus on finding the best or “one right” methodology for particular types of projects. Such thinking seems to fit within a Habermasian approach to power and finding the framework for ideal communication.

However, the implication from this research for designing participatory processes is that it is important to negotiate what level of power sharing is appropriate for each project with the participants. Assuming there is “one right” methodology or one level of power sharing for the whole of one project is incorrect. Importantly, when programs are being evaluated, it must be understood that the demonstrated level of participation will depend on *the time at which* the evaluation is undertaken.

The pattern of wildly fluctuating levels of power within projects found in this research was not anticipated from the standard participation literature. The classic model of power levels within participation is presented as a ladder — first made famous by Arnstein (1969). Subsequent typologies are, in essence, variations on the same theme (Buchy, Ross and Proctor 2000; Cornwall 1995; Creighton 1986; Jiggins 1993; Pretty 1995, 1995b). Ross, Buchy and Proctor (2001) proposed laying down the ladder so that the types of participation could be considered laterally, and types chosen according to the *context* (Dimension 1: Figure 2.2). This research supports the suggestions of Buchy et al. (2000) and Ross et al. (2001) that the ladder-like spectrum of low to high levels of power sharing is too simplistic. They propose a typology based on *goals* (Dimension 2: Figure 2.2) rather than power-sharing, and do emphasise the complexity of participatory processes. However, they do not refer to the fluctuating and dynamic nature of power.

The participation model proposed in this research (Figure 2.2) combines several dimensions of participation, with fluctuating levels of power relations (illustrated in Figure 6.1) which operate within a dynamic and changing context. Coincidentally, both participation and power relations have seven levels: seven dimensions of participation and seven levels of power sharing in decision-making. These levels may be linked and interact, but they move independently, as will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

The importance of the dimensions and their relevance to power relations also change over time, and with the particular project. For example the importance of scale varies; to improve marketing within the Feral Goat Management project, regional and state-wide networks were required, while the local property and district scale was more appropriate for improving the design of feral goat yards. Added to this complexity of participation is the driving force of power relations which are also highly dynamic and fluctuate between stages of the power, and even within conversations between individuals.

The fluctuating power found within these projects clearly defies the logic of the Habermasian tradition. It seems analogous to the Foucauldian understanding of dynamic, fluctuating and contextual power as the “structure of actions” for relationships. The importance of the micro-political aspects of power is often forgotten within the dominant tradition, and yet these can be fundamental, influencing the outcomes of participatory activities.

## **6.4 Micro-political power relationships**

Landholders seemed to be more concerned than government officers were about the micro-politics of power relationships. They discussed power issues that impinged on relations between individuals. The job someone held within government was of less importance, especially as most of them distrusted government to some extent. For them, individuality and personality were more important. In this sense, landholders seemed to understand power as the structure within which people relate to each other — the Foucauldian way of thinking about power.

Power relations can be identified between individuals, or between groups or classes of individuals. In south-west Queensland, this means (a) between individuals within the landholder community, (b) between individuals within government, (c) between landholders and broader community stakeholders in NRM such as conservationists, and (d) between landholders and government officers. Foucauldian thinkers tend to advocate examining power at the level of relationships between individuals, as well as elsewhere; whereas those in the dominant tradition tend to assume that power is consistent within each class of people. As the landholders in this

research highlighted, relationships at the individual level do impact on the way that participatory activities operate.

Communities and groups are rarely homogeneous, and power differentials do exist within groups. Hierarchies tend to be obvious within government departments, with local and regional staff answerable to Head Office managers.

#### **6.4.1 Power within the landholder community**

Hierarchies of power also exist within rural communities, but this was rarely discussed. Relationships between individuals within the landholder community in south-west Queensland were discussed during only a few interviews. In two local groups, some landholders complained that others who were highly involved with government and spoke the “government language” had been co-opted by government. These others were often those in regional groups, or representatives on rural industry boards.

Landholders who attended numerous government meetings were sometimes ostracised by their communities. They were often seen as having “lost touch” with the rural community, and were suspected of obtaining grants and privileges for their friends and families. This may simply be because they understood the system and knew whom to contact. Power here was discussed in two ways by landholders: firstly, power was seen as linked to knowledge, as “insiders” received preferential treatment through having better knowledge of the institutional system; secondly, the “insider group” was thought to have the capacity to exert power over government staff, and to use power for their own ends. These accusations were denied by government officers who were accountable for the distribution of funds. Nonetheless, power differentials did have an impact. For example:

When this [SWS] first started it was supposed to help the smaller people ... but it's helped more probably big ones than little fellas, really. (LG-R1)

The extent of the problem was unclear, but these perceptions existed and impacted on the relationships within the rural community.

Different points of view and different power bases exist within rural communities, as in any community. Sometimes these power dynamics can have a positive influence on land management practices, reinforcing the view that power has both positive and negative impacts. Landholders said that peer pressure could have a positive influence on land management practices, as the first two quotes below indicate (Box 6.14).

### Box 6.14 The influence of power

You get pressured to do things so you will be socially acceptable. (LG 3)

It could just be having a bunch of neighbours who are always up your ribs at the pub because you're such a slacko and have not bothered to pipe your drains [pipes refers to plastic water pipes which replace open flowing artesian bore drains]. (LG 9)

There are power plays where people over [30 years of age] have got the power and are not prepared to release it to the people under 30 ... so different ideas are not aired ... no new ideas to challenge the old ideas. (LG-R2)

Older members of the SW Strategy say time and time again, that they've now built their property up to a certain stage and they want to do this sort of political stuff and consultation stuff ... the next lot [generation of graziers] are meant to be working on the properties now. (LG 9)

It is the professional meeting goers that are representing all of us [on committees such SWS or Rural Industry groups], whereas the majority of people that are trying to do a good job are at home working hard ... whereas the people who are making major decisions up there for us ... but some of these people, their places are so run down ... they don't necessarily have the views of the majority of the people ... A lot of them are professional whingers, because they like to go and have their gripe ... I'm not saying all of them. (LG 4)

And a lot of them [members of the SWS] are well-to-do people. (LG 3)

These reasons for asymmetrical power relations were clearly enunciated by landholders in the regional groups, and seemed to be based on age, financial situation, stage of life, and the personality of people who like attending meetings and “being political”. These characteristics of individuals which help people to influence others relate to who is involved (*who* Dimension 5: Figure 2.2). According to a Habermasian perspective, people at meetings can achieve consensus through informed argument and discussion in a controlled situation. However, only the views of the one group of landholders will be right; perhaps the younger landholders will be wrong and the older ones right. A Foucauldian perspective seems more appropriate because in this conception, the younger landholders have a rationality that is different from that of the older landholders — the “over 30s”. Neither need be wrong; each group has “different ideas”, and some conflict is inevitable as the individuals work through their ideas during discussions.

People in rural communities do try to avoid conflict, and often avoid discussing potentially controversial issues such as power relationships — part of the cultural *context* of south-west Queensland (Dimension 1: Figure 2.2). Overt acrimonious conflict between such landholders is rarely obvious. Much of the real debate occurs in private, during the tea breaks rather than being part of the meeting agenda. They explain this by saying things like “it is not very good when you're arguing with the people that are actually your peers” (LG-R2). South-west Queensland has a small community, and landholders prefer to be friends with others in their community, because they rely on one another during difficult times, such as during bushfires. At times,

government staff also avoided discussing power relationships in public forums, probably for similar reasons to landholders' — they, too, have to live in the community.

This way of communicating — and the often unspoken rules surrounding what can and cannot be said — reflects a rural cultural etiquette. In one sense this is a kind of discourse ethics, not unlike Habermas's Discourse Ethics, in as much as it is a set of rules about how people should communicate with each other. What is forgotten in these norms is that people are individuals who can interpret these rules in different ways, and can decide to break them. Power relations operate at the public level within NRM meetings in south-west Queensland, and at a more private level between individuals. This focus on relationships between individuals is missing from the Habermasian approach.

#### **6.4.2 Focus on the individual**

The personalities of the individuals within government departments were seen as paramount by landholders. Bureaucracies were viewed as being cumbersome and inefficient, and landholders saw that the individuals within the departments could make a difference. Some individuals were seen as able to operate “more effectively” within the bureaucratic structure, while other staff were seen as more likely to “toe the line” and operate strictly within the rules — much to the disgust of the landholders who had little respect for hierarchical power structures. They wanted government regulations to be interpreted flexibly to accommodate localised differences — sometimes too flexibly for the government officers! Even participatory methods need to be able to accommodate contextual differences. Here, the *Who* issues relate to *Methods* and *Context* of participation (Dimensions 5, 7 and 1: Figure 2.2).

For landholders, the effectiveness of participatory activities depended not on what methods were used, but on how the methods were used by the person who ran the activity. Some characteristics mentioned by landholders as essential personal traits were having the ability to listen, speaking their language, treating others with respect, not having a condescending attitude, and being able to understand rural people and their lifestyle. These are illustrated in Box 6.15.

Some government officers acknowledged the problems of individual characteristics, including technical and bureaucratic jargon, people's knowledge base and the need to build relationships with landholders. From my observations, these problems are widespread, especially with staff new to the region; and with the high rates of staff turn-over, new staff are prevalent. While most landholder groups made similar comments, only one government department discussed these micro-level issues at length. The other departments would probably agree if asked specifically.

### Box 6.15 Personality characteristics of government staff

1. They don't really listen to what you're saying ... they say they want community participation and you go in and say, "This is what the community wants" and they say, "No its not, this what you're going to get" (LG 9).
2. It [the Rural Leaders Program] has mixed success ... depends on who the presenters are (LG 4).
3. The facilitators, you have to have a rapport with them ... your facilitators, they are very important ... not a domineering character (LG 7).
4. You can't get government people to listen, because they can see what they want to see and the hell with the people (LG 7).
5. Some government people can't express themselves. Often the really educated ones cannot communicate: "Told us nothing we wanted to know" (LG 3).
6. They don't try and understand our language, yet at the same time, they expect us to understand their language ... we talk two different languages completely (LG 6).
7. I guess we use jargon and various academic terms, and they get interpreted in different ways, and unless people communicate and talk about exactly what they mean then there's confusion (Govt G 1).
8. Government wording and jargon is hard for bush people, country people to understand. They don't get to our level, not necessarily that we are at a lower level [intellectually] but we are not used to their words (LG 8).
9. They are inclined to talk down to you all the time as if you are from outer space; they have it all up here, they are real super intelligent and you are a nut (LG 10).
10. Drinking with them, having a beer, saying g'day to them [because this] helps you understand what they're going through and what their constraints are (Govt G1 & Govt G3 said something similar).

However, government staff had an interest in methodological issues that the landholders did not share — they made far more comments about the macro-politics of power, the scale at which they tend to operate (*Scale Dimension 3: Figure 2.2*). They were more attuned to thinking about power in a hierarchical sense; for example, with the managers having more institutional power than field officers to make decisions. Principles of discourse ethics were often discussed. This is a more Habermasian way of conceptualising power.

Landholders focused on the power that individuals had to influence participatory processes, rather than on the structure of the activity. As such, their thinking is more akin to the micro-aspects of the Foucauldian tradition, rather than an understanding of the macro-aspects of power.

The importance of examining power from different perspectives, particularly macrophysics and microphysics of power relations, is illustrated in a paradox of participation.



## 6.5 A paradox of participation: using macrophysics and microphysics

This research highlights a paradox of participation. On one hand, landholders are overwhelmed by the number of issues on which they are asked to comment; on the other hand, landholders demand a greater say on key issues. To fully understand this paradox, both the macrophysics and microphysics of power need to be explored. Firstly, comments about the microphysics of relations between individuals highlight the problems of over-consultation and under-consultation — these are mainly from landholders, but some are from government officers (Box 6.16).

### Box 6.16 Over-consultation and under-consultation

I've been consulted blind over the last 2–3 years. I would have been to at least six consultative meetings over the one issue in the last 3 years ... and the list goes on [this person also mentioned involvement in the South West Strategy, Bestprac, Safe Carrying Capacity project, Strategic Weed Eradication and Education Initiative, United Graziers Association, and many other projects]. (LG 9)

We are a bit meeting'd out. (LG 10)

Same poor buggers doing it [participating in government groups] all the time ... [other landholders] won't take it on because they know it takes too much time. (LG 4)

They still have to listen to the people more, and then do something about it. (LG 8)

No one has even come and talked to us ... no, this project is the first. (LG 5)

The people that are fronting up over-commit themselves 'cause they take on too much. (Govt G1)

The time that people put into participating in the group is a big commitment ... they almost get one [invitation to attend a meeting] each week, and at times almost daily. (Govt G2)

Some groups complained about over-consultation, but other groups spoke of the lack of consultation. The reasons for this paradox are revealed by examining the macrophysics of relationships between government and landholders, and the structural aspects of institutions.

Government officers needed to involve landholders for many reasons (*Goals* Dimension 2: Figure 2.2) involving national, state, regional and local issues (*Scale* Dimension 3), at different stages of projects. They are constrained by their bureaucracy — governments have short timeframes and limited financial resource (*Capacity* Dimension 6).

As government officers in south-west Queensland explained, they tended to work with the same groups over and over again, a practice that contributes to some individuals being over-consulted. Officers from all departments explained that they spent a lot of time breaking down barriers and building trust, instead of:

... bashing our heads against a brick wall ... we'll go back to the people that we know want to work with us. We know they want to participate so we'll stick with them. (Govt G1)

We usually work with "tame" landholders. (Govt G3)

Other reasons given for using existing groups included (a) their members were assumed to be interested because they were already participating; and (b) this approach saved the landholders' time and money by not having to come to yet another meeting:

They're always a source of membership (Govt G2)

Because of the fact of distance and time ... it's important to try to tap into those activities that are going on, rather than trying to set up your own series of special meetings for your particular issue. (Govt G1)

However, using the same people has several consequences: (a) the views presented might be biased and not be representative of the broader landholder community, (b) the power to influence government agencies tends to become vested in the hands of a few, and (c) other landholders tend to become distrustful of the intent of the "meeting-goers". Some landholders accused frequent "meeting-goers" of benefiting personally from their involvement on government committees. Certainly, the "meeting-goers" were seen by many landholders as having been co-opted by government; because they were more likely to be understanding about the *goals* (Dimension 2: Figure 2.2) of government.

However, as this chapter has indicated, landholders and government officers tend to have similar views about land management and participation at a superficial level, but there are significant differences in their perceptions about participatory activities and power relations.

## 6.6 Conclusions: the complexities of power

This chapter has highlighted the complexity of power relations within rural communities. Power can be subtle and diffuse. It means different things to different people. It is expressed in a myriad of forms. Landholders' perceptions of power are at times similar to those of government staff. Most people in this case study spoke about power in terms similar to those of the dominant tradition, but some expressions of power did fit into the alternative tradition. Some significant differences in perception about power in participatory resource management were also evident. Landholders and government staff did not perceive the power sharing relationships to be the same in the same projects, such as the SWS Board.

On the whole, landholders wanted to share the decision-making power with government agencies. However, landholders did not always *want* to share power in all aspects and all stages

of a project. Clearly, when participatory projects are being planned, flexibility is needed in deciding on the appropriate level of power sharing.

One of the key findings to emerge from this research is that power levels fluctuate. Projects in south-west Queensland do not fit neatly within one level of power sharing. Over the duration of any one project, several different levels of power sharing were found to occur. Discussions with landholder participants highlighted the fact that fluctuating levels were what landholders preferred and believed to be proper. They did not have the time, resources or the desire to be involved in decision-making about every aspect of every project. In some projects they did not want to be involved at all, and the “low” levels of power sharing were considered appropriate.

This pattern of fluctuating power within projects seems to fit more with a Foucauldian conception of power relations as ubiquitous and contextual; this observation encourages us to look at individual relationships and the context within which participation occurs. Landholders, perhaps more so than government staff, voice ideas which may fit within this way of thinking, rather than the ideas about universals which stem from the Habermasian tradition. From working in a context of needing to understand the broader trends, and where consensus decisions are needed to formulate policy, government staff usually look for participatory approaches which can be applied to many communities. In this environment, the micro-politics of individual relationships tend to be overlooked.

In this chapter, we saw that landholders and government staff have different understandings about participatory activities, with government staff being more focused on methods, and landholders more focused on personal attributes. Also, power relations are dynamic and fluid: not always do government staff have the most influential voices, and not always do landholders dominate, or even want to influence, the decision-making process. While this chapter has focused on the central element of the participation model, power, the next chapter further explores the links between power and dimensions of participation.





# Chapter 7

## Linking participation and power

Foucault and the Frankfurt School should be located rather close to one another on the map of contemporary theoretic opinions...the point is not to choose between them but to unite them.

(McCarthy 1990 pp. 441 and 464)



## 7.0 Introduction

In this chapter, we examine some of the complexities of power, and how power relates to the various dimensions of participation. This analysis is guided by conceptions of power based on a combination of the Habermasian and Foucauldian views. Using these integrated views provides a richer “lens” by which we may obtain an enhanced understanding of power’s complexities.

Despite some fundamental differences between Habermasian and Foucauldian thinking, authors such as Flyvbjerg (2001), Hillier (2002) and McCarthy (1990) have found sufficient commensurability to allow for some level of coexistence. Some of the Habermas–Foucault debate has been outlined briefly in Chapter 3, but this thesis is not focused on this theoretical debate; rather, it seeks a way to better understand power relations so as to improve community engagement within rangeland management. Several authors argue for a new way of “articulating common concerns and finding a language which becomes accepted as a way of talking about social situations, while leaving open the possibility of ... a conflict of interpretations” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1986 p. 115). Foucault himself points to similarities between his ideas and those of the Frankfurt School<sup>29</sup>, warning that “nothing hides the fact of a problem in common better than two similar ways of approaching it” (1983 as cited in Hillier 2002 p. 64).

This conception of power that is characterised by several features, based on both Habermasian and Foucauldian interpretations of power relations (after Flyvbjerg 2001: note, however, that Flyvbjerg’s list has been augmented with citations from other authors).

1. Power is seen as “productive and positive, not only as restrictive and negative” (Flyvbjerg 2001 p. 131; also Foucault 1979<sup>30</sup>; Habermas 1996<sup>31</sup>; Hillier 2002);
2. Power is omnipresent, circulating through a net-like organisation in which individuals are both vehicles for and subject to its effects (Foucault 1986; Flyvbjerg 2001); as well as being an entity which one can possess;
3. Power is ultradynamic and fluid, exercised rather than possessed (Foucault 1979; 1980a); where “power is not only something one appropriates, but also something one re-appropriates and exercises in a constant back-and-forth movement in relations of strength, tactics and strategies” (Flyvbjerg 2001 p. 131);

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<sup>29</sup> The Frankfurt School is a group which debated philosophy in Germany during the 1930s. Their philosophy is founded on the idea that “reason is the highest potentiality of human beings [and through reason] to criticise and challenge the nature of existing societies” (Blaikie 1995 p. 52). The School was influenced by Marx and others; and later included Habermas.

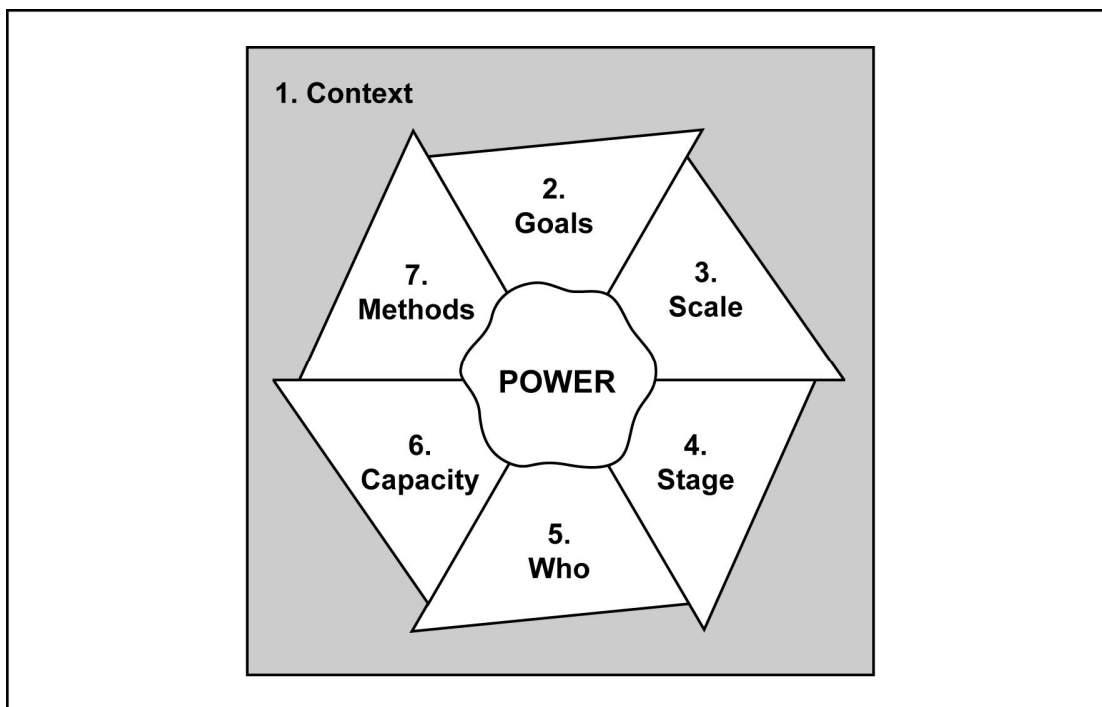
<sup>30</sup> *Discipline and Punish* (1979; 1<sup>st</sup> published 1977) was the first time Foucault saw power as positive.

<sup>31</sup> In his later works, Habermas recognised the positive influence of power; what he previously called “power” is now called “violence” (Habermas 1996; Shabani 1998).

4. Power is constitutive of acts of knowledge (Best and Kellner 1991; Lennie 1996); “power produces knowledge” (Foucault 1979 p. 27), and “knowledge produces power” (Flyvbjerg 2001 p. 131).

As Flyvbjerg (2001 p. 132) says, “The central question is how power is exercised ... the focus is on process *in addition to* structure [my emphasis]”. Hillier (2002 p. 215) also stresses the interdependence of structure and agency. In the dimensions of participation (Figure 7.1 below), the process of exercising power is seen to influence the various dimensions of participation, but these dimensions can also influence the nature of power relations amongst people involved in participation.

On the basis of these considerations, this chapter explores the key question: How does power relate to the various dimensions of participation?



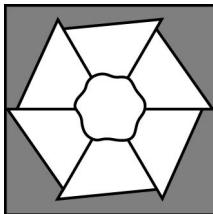
**Figure 7.1 Dimensions of participation**

The dimensions of participation to be considered are those from the model (Figure 7.1: repeat of Figure 2.2). These dimensions are power (as the key element), context, goals, scale, stage, “who” (the people involved), capacity and the design or methods of participation. This chapter uses the data from this research to highlight how each of the dimensions of participation interrelate with power in government agricultural and NRM programs in south-west Queensland. The interaction between power relationships and community participation is essential for improving rangeland management.



One cannot simply use Foucault's framework. My thinking about power may be informed by Foucault's ideas, but as Rose (1999b p. 4) points out, "I think it is useful to take Foucault's ideas ... as a starting point ... but I do not think that there is some general theory or history of government, politics or power latent in Foucault's writings, which should be extracted and then applied to other issues." Foucault himself said that he did not provide schemas, as "there can be no question for me of trying to tell 'what is to be done'" (Foucault 1991c p. 84). Foucault was often criticised for not giving specifics, but he did this intentionally. I therefore use a conception of power which integrates several ideas — as Flyvbjerg (2001) suggests — combining the best of different traditions.

Foucault did not wish to "tie down or immobilise" those who could make changes. For him "what is to be done" ought not be determined from above by "the reformers ... but by a long work of comings and goings, of exchanges, reflections, trials, different analyses" (Foucault 1991c p. 84). He encourages a time-consuming dialogue between all of those involved, and he certainly encourages the participation of local people in decision-making. It therefore seems to me that he would support "genuine participation" where local people have the power to influence decisions, and where scientists and others also have a role to play.



## 7.1 Context

The context of power relations is the particular circumstances in which the participatory activities take place. In general terms, this means rural Australia; but more specifically, the context for this thesis is the rangelands of south-west Queensland, including the existing environmental, socio-economic and cultural aspects, as described in Chapter 5.

For several reasons, it is important to consider context when participatory approaches are being designed. Our knowledge, discourses and consequently our actions are culturally determined by the episteme<sup>32</sup> of the day (Foucault 1991a). More simply, our discussions and behaviour are a product of the context — the body of ideas that shape the perceptions of knowledge at any one time — which is specific to that time in history. However, it is not a one-way interaction: the deeds of the actors determine and are determined by the context. This mutual dependence of

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<sup>32</sup> Episteme is defined as "a complex relationship of successive displacements ... not a general developmental stage of reason" (Foucault 1991a p.55); and "universal, invariable, context-dependent. Based on general analytical rationality. The original concept is used today in the terms "epistemology" and "epistemic" (Flyvbjerg 2001 p. 54).

structure and agency, which recognises that actors are engaged in producing and reproducing their social world, is also the basis of some of Giddens's (1981) work. Contextual issues are influenced by, and influence, power relations.

As previously mentioned, the same participatory program, even with the same facilitator, will never have the same outcomes, because of fluctuating power relations and changing contexts. The dynamic nature of social and cultural contexts are the most obvious: the people, their history and the relationships between them all make a difference to the participation. For example, Bestprac groups all have the same process and, in south-west Queensland, usually have the same facilitator; but each operates in its own way, quite differently from others (as is evident from the first two quotes in Box 7.1).

### **Box 7.1 Landholders' comments about Bestprac**

1. Maybe with the Bestprac, maybe there will be some gains ... at some stage ... I think it's a good idea, but I didn't get much out of it (LG 8).
2. It's what we want, Bestprac ... a good tool ... because it's producer-orientated. You tackle the problems you're affected by ... [and later in the same meeting] Bestprac, I think I've been to most of the meetings ... it really is very exciting (LG 9).
3. If someone has got a totally different bent ... well, all that's going to do is bring aggravation to a group, so there's no point in having them involved (LG 7).

The first group seemed to be cynical about government programs generally, and their Bestprac group was not particularly successful, whereas landholders in most Bestprac groups were very enthusiastic about the process (as in quote 2). A couple of landholders mentioned the importance of the social context within Bestprac groups. Particularly, they mentioned the individual characteristics and how the power exercised by one individual could be negative (quote 3). The social context, both the history of relationships and day-to-day dynamics of power relations, was probably the most important factor influencing the operation of groups.

The environmental, geographical and economic contexts were also important. These contexts were related to one of the foremost concerns about participation voiced by landholders: the cost. This was expressed in terms of both time and money. The cost of attending meetings is increased by the great distances between properties and locations where meetings were held (see the first quote about distances and diversity of contexts in south-west Queensland: Box 7.2).

In south-west Queensland, long distances impact significantly on landholders' ability to attend meetings. For some, a one-day meeting at Charleville can mean two evenings away from their businesses and homes. Night driving is avoided because of kangaroos, which are so much a part

of the environment in most rural areas. Financial costs are linked to the geographical distance, the costs incurred including the actual travel and accommodation costs, and the opportunity cost of being away from a business. These costs are exacerbated, not only by the geographical and environmental context, but by factors in the economic and social context of the rangelands.

### **Box 7.2 Landholders' comments about the cost of participation**

#### **Distance: relates to geographical and environmental context**

You've got your old adage, "the tyranny of distance", too far away, too big an area under too many diverse circumstances, I mean ... the area that the South West Strategy covers doesn't look very big on a map, but south-west Queensland is a heck of a big area with an awful lot of different country in it (LG 7).

Some meetings are up to 300 km away and you don't do that for nothing, plus the fact that you've probably got to stay overnight, if they [meetings] go till 5pm ... you're not going to come home at 5pm through the 'roos (LG 9).

#### **Money costs: often relates to economic context**

You can't go anywhere out here for nothing (LG 1).

It's time, it's distance ... it's just getting people to actually come to a central point or actually take time away from their business to get themselves up to speed with just what government is doing (LG 3).

One of the reasons why my husband doesn't get involved is that you can't employ anybody ... the cost of employing people now ... so everything is done by yourself (LG 4).

I put up with the time lost, but the travel cost is too much ... most departments will not pay (LG 1).

#### **Time costs: often relates to social context**

The distance beats you too ... I mean, not wasting our time, but losing valuable time (LG 6).

But they [government] assume that you've [landholders] got plenty of time. It's their assumption and that's where they're wrong because people are too hard pressed. Most of them have never been out here, they have no idea of the distance ... [they ask you to attend] a meeting tomorrow morning, and you say, "I'm sorry we're a thousand miles away" ... [and they say] "Oh, but you couldn't be" (LG 7).

#### **Cost contributes to inequalities**

If more of these positions were paid, some of the better producers would be taking new positions and better decisions would be made up top ... [the landholders who go to meetings] ... they go because they can afford to, I think ... a lot of them are well-to-do people (LG 3).

The small, declining and ageing population of this part of rural Australia often struggles to maintain viability, with reducing social and economic capital (see Chapter 5). The poor economic situation has resulted in a lack of staff compared to 10–20 years ago, and both husband and wife often work on the property. As attending meetings is expensive and time consuming, it is difficult for even one person to get away, particularly as there is no one to care for things when they are absent. Difficulties increase during droughts when watering points have to be checked daily. Thus, participation is interrelated with geographic, economic and social aspects of people's lives.

The huge distances and the cost of participation in the rangelands contribute to power inequalities in rural communities. As the last quote in Box 7.2 suggests, some landholders have a perception that the SWS and other regional groups, such as rural industry organisations, are dominated by wealthier landholders, and that they can afford the financial cost and the time required. While some of the landholder members of the SWS do seem to belong to the “blue-bloods” of rural society, from my observations this is not true of all members of the strategy. However, these comments indicate a frustration that the SWS is not representative of the whole community, and some members are being systematically excluded.

The social networks within the community did influence the way people were chosen or nominated for SWS positions. Many people were nominated from existing groups, as representatives came from groups such as Landcare and AgForce (rural industry organisation). While this was done to facilitate feedback between groups at different scales, it also perpetuates the problem of the same people being consulted over and over. As discussed previously (Section 6.5: *A paradox of participation*), many contextual issues contribute to over-consultation becoming a problem: short time frames of government programs, distrust within rural communities, and small populations.

Small and declining population also contributes to inequalities of power at a broader scale. Landholders commented on their declining power in the political sphere, which is influenced by the social context of declining rural populations.

I think the greenies have got too much influence in Landcare nowadays, don't they. They are calling the agenda more or less. (LG 6)

With fewer votes in rural areas than in urban areas, governments let urban attitudes towards conservation dominate the government agenda. Many conservationists and urban-based people perceive rural landholders as “raping and pillaging” the land. Such perceptions of each other cause tensions between individuals, which was evident when conservationists visited south-west Queensland. The perception of unequal power to influence the government agenda, and preconceived ideas about each other's values influenced the power relationships between individuals. Declining political power was usually linked to comments about city people not understanding the way things are in the bush.

Landholders frequently complained that government staff did not understand their situation and the various rural contexts: social, cultural, environmental geographic and economic. This recurrent theme was also mentioned by government staff, and the lack of understanding was seen as a key barrier to effective participation.

Rural people tended to look down on people who lack an understanding of rural life (such as townies: Box 7.3, Quote 1; upper echelons of government: Quote 2; those with degrees: Quote 5; or Brisbane government staff: Quote 8) because of their lack of understanding of rural life. Rural people said here that they wanted people who understood the practical context (Quotes 5, 7, 9), who understood what drives rural people (Quote 4) and who did not talk down to them (Quote 3). Government staff who lived in the regional towns usually had a better understanding of rural life and were more aware of contextual factors than government people from further afield.

### **Box 7.3 Lack of understanding of rural contexts**

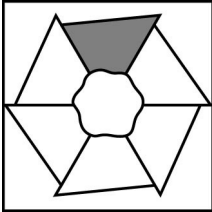
1. Conservation groups, townies<sup>33</sup> and people from the east have little understanding of life in western Queensland (LG 1).
2. The upper echelons of government hierarchy have less understanding of rural life than the local people [government staff from the local area] (LG 4).
3. I did not go to the Future Profit school, but from what I understand it was slow going, they [government staff] were telling them [landholders] things that they were not benefiting from, simple sorts of things they knew a hundred years ago anyhow (LG 10).
4. You know in this job ... fair enough, they want to make a living, they want to have bread on the table and have a ... but it's not pure economics that drives us, and that's what a lot of them don't understand (LG 2).
5. We don't necessarily want someone out here with a string of letters after their name that long; we want a practical person ... someone who's interested, who knows what they're doing ... understands the bush ... [several murmured agreement] (LG 7).
6. Graziers out here don't take a lot of notice, because they [government] come up with stupid ideas that just would not work. Like they turn around and tell you to get your sheep in every day; well it takes us three days to muster the paddock (LG 8).
7. They don't understand the country and the management of it and they cause mega problems ... [and later] ... They've got to listen, but how do you get them to listen? They don't understand what life's like in the bush (LG 9).
8. [The government people] they're not actually coming out here and finding out ... [or employing people] who know a bit about what is going on out here. They're trying to educate people in Brisbane ... [and that is] it's impossible, totally impossible (LG 9).
9. ... tell us what to do when they're living down there — and they don't understand how we live and what we do out here (LG 3).

The lack of understanding of contextual factors is far more complicated than simply not knowing each other as individuals. To me, cultural differences<sup>34</sup> between landholders and government officers are an important factor underpinning the lack of understanding of rural

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<sup>33</sup> The “townies” were the people who lived and worked in Charleville and other regional towns in south-west Queensland — the government people, school teachers, small business owners and abattoir workers.

communities. As discussed in the previously (Section 5.2.5 *Cultural context: Rural identity and rurality* and 6.1.1 *Whose knowledge is valued?*), the discourses that divide rural and urban communities are fraught with difficulties; the groups are not homogenous and do not have defined boundaries, and there are many criteria which characterise the many “rurals”.



## 7.2 Goals of participatory approaches

The goals of participation, or involving local people in rangeland management programs, are often unclear, especially for landholder participants. Firstly, the goals of participation are not the goals of the project itself. This distinction was sometimes a little confusing for agency staff, and also for landholders. The goals of the program or project were readily stated by agency staff, as usually these were written in project documentation. However, they often did not know the goals of participation, as these were rarely stated in project plans or designated by the government. Sometimes, agency staff stated that they developed the goals for participation themselves. This reinforced the landholders' impressions that the individual staff had made the decision to make the project participatory. In reality, the participatory goals depended largely on the attitudes, philosophies and skills of these individuals:

He knows nothing. I mean ... they had a really good project team and now they put a clown on [employ]. We've got to educate him for bloody four years until his contract runs out. (LG 3)

We have been very lucky with the local people in DPI; they are practical people and understand what we are trying to achieve. (LG 7)

Other reasons for participatory goals not being made explicit to the participants related to the character and skills of the government individuals. Government officers generally lacked an understanding of the different levels of power sharing in participation (refer to Chapter 6). Often, they were reluctant to make the participatory goals explicit because (a) government policy changed so frequently that the level of decision-making power could change from one week to the next; and/or (b) their lack of facilitation skills meant that they were not comfortable sharing decision-making power, as they feared they might lose control of the project. However, “losing” control of a project through participation may be one way to achieve sustainable outcomes (World Bank 1998).

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<sup>34</sup> Culture was defined in Chapter 5: section 5.2.5 *Cultural context*.

The implications of leaving unclear the goals of participation in project documents can be positive or negative. If the power to determine the goals rests with regional staff, the goals could be adapted to fit the local context, or even determined in conjunction with locals. Unfortunately, the lack of clarity fuels landholders' confusion and their suspicions about hidden government agendas. Landholders, too, have their hidden agendas, but these are seldom revealed in an atmosphere of distrust. In the current atmosphere, building trust in participatory activities is very important, so goals need to be clear or explicitly negotiated at an early stage. This call for institutions to strive for greater clarity in participatory approaches is not new (see Chapter 2: Guijt 1998; Landre and Knuth 1993).

Overall, in south-west Queensland, agency staff and landholders had very different views on what participation should achieve. As one landholder explained:

The dichotomy of purpose between landholders and government means a different starting point. Landholders are accountable on a daily basis, are emotionally involved in issues ... this is the grass root approach. The government situation is the opposite. It is generally the big picture, not touched by the reality of daily events such as rain. It is a difference in purpose, rather than a lack of understanding that cause many of the problems. (LG-R2)

This quote highlights another basis for confusion. Landholders tended to have a clearer understanding of the goals of the issue-specific projects that relate to their properties, rather than those that are more broadly focused or general "big-picture" programs (for example Bestprac was more easily understood than the Regional Strategy for the SWS; see Table 7.1 Col. 4).

Some projects had multiple goals, and some goals were seen as prerequisites for other goals. The four participation goals for projects (see Table 7.1 Col. 2) most commonly suggested by government staff were (a) improving knowledge and understanding, (b) increasing skills and capacity, (c) changing management practices and (d) encouraging ownership. Learning in its broadest sense encompasses all of these goals.

In most projects, government officers, not landholders, exercised the power to determine the goals (Table 7.1 Col 3<sup>35</sup>). This accords with the Habermasian approach of landholders being involved in decisions about the content only — not the process of participation. Only a few projects were specifically designed to capture and incorporate landholders' knowledge with some sense of equality between the knowledge systems (from the projects listed above, Bestprac, Landcare and Total Grazing Pressure projects).

**Table 7.1 Examples of participatory goals for projects**

<b>Projects</b>	<b>Goals for participation</b>	<b>Level of power sharing</b>	<b>Scope of project</b>
FutureProfit	To learn; enhance skills; improve knowledge	Medium – mainly providing and receiving information [content]	Issue-specific and general
Bestprac	To learn; share information between landholders; improve knowledge, attitudes and skills leading to; improve practice	High – interactive participation [content only]	Issue-specific
Safe Carrying Capacity	To improve knowledge; change stock management practices	Medium and low – locals receiving and providing information [content only; except employing graziers to ground test results]	Issue-specific
Landcare	To learn; use local knowledge; share information between landholders; Improve practice	Medium or low – participation for material incentives and functional to achieve agency goals (but high according to government policy documents) [content and process]	Issue-specific and general
Total Grazing Pressure (TGP)	To provide information; use local knowledge; encourage ownership; change management practices	High and medium – locals receive information and achieve agency goals [content mainly, some process]	Issue-specific
Water Allocation Management	To change water management practices through education and commitment	Medium and low – locals receive and provide information; and achieve agency goals [content only]	Issue-specific
South West Strategy (SWS)	To develop synergies through diverse stakeholder input, not just landholders, that ensure wide community ownership of goals and activities of SWS	Low – tokenistic participation, a pretence; and locals receive information [content only]	General (some projects within SWS are issue-specific)
National Park Planning	To develop ownership of park management by park neighbours; reduce conflict	Medium – to achieve agency goals; locals receive and provide information [content only]	General and issue-specific
Community Nature Conservation	To encourage conservation principles within land management	Low to medium – achieve agency goals; locals receive and provide information [content only]	Issue-specific and general
(Source: Goals for participation are from discussions with government officers from relevant projects)		(Source: Level of power sharing and scope of project are my assessment)	

Goals of participation are often the basic cause of conflict and confusion within projects. Many projects have multiple goals and these can be incompatible; also discrepancies occur between government (Box 7.4) and landholder (Box 7.5) reasons for wanting community participation. Power relations within departments influenced the importance placed on goals. For example, all government departments agreed that reducing landholder antagonism — “breaking down the barriers” of suspicion and overcoming lack of trust — was an essential prerequisite for any project. However, staff said that head office managers did not recognise the time and effort

<sup>35</sup> The power-sharing levels (column 3) indicate whether or not landholders influenced the way the participation was undertaken (the process), or the topic discussed (the content).



required to build trust, as easily measurable, on-ground land management changes were preferred as outcomes.

#### **Box 7.4 General government goals of participation<sup>36</sup>**

- Goals of participation suggested by government officers in this research include to:
1. improve government decision-making and policy with input from various sources,
  2. inform the community about government policy and processes for decision-making,
  3. increase awareness of natural resource management and conservation issues,
  4. enhance individual and community capacity,
  5. improve knowledge and understanding about land management issues,
  6. build landholder support and ownership for implementing land management practices,
  7. encourage landholders to learn,
  8. encourage changes to management practices,
  9. foster positive relationships between outside groups and the local community,
  10. reduce the potential for conflict about proposed changes, resolve existing conflict,
  11. develop agreement or consensus about land management policy, regulation or practice, and
  12. empower communities to become more self-reliant.

(Source: government officer interviews, and discussions about projects)

Many of the goals for participation exist simultaneously within projects, but some are incompatible. During this research, facilitators created a positive atmosphere to enhance learning, but in doing so they tended to hide divergent views and minimise conflict. Learning also tended to rely on scientific information and looked for consensus (a Habermasian trait). Such an approach actually stifles creative and lateral thinking, and hinders debate and learning. In situations of potential conflict, facilitators often tried to limit the time for debate. Landholders then felt that the government staff were not prepared to listen to them, fuelling the incipient conflict which then erupted. Resolving conflict requires that it to be allowed to emerge and be managed. Consensus is not always possible, even though it was the aim of some government meetings.

Conflict also arose when landholder and government goals worked against each other. Learning was one of the key factors motivating landholders to become involved in government groups. Government officers usually assumed that landholders wanted to learn about their business and their land, but this was not the only reason (Box 7.5). Some people would not attend government activities unless there was a “real chance for change” (LG 8) because “if there is no opportunity to influence then participation is a waste of time” (LG 10).

In simple terms, both landholder and government officers wish to “teach” the other something, but this is not made explicit during meetings. In Foucauldian terms, the power plays in the

relationship cause resistance (Foucault 1988). Power relationships are confused in this situation and tensions tend to arise — at times individuals vie for the dominant position in the relationship, and the other party is not listening, but trying to combat the “attack” and maintain their control of the meeting or situation. People’s agendas are not explicit and individuals often do not listen to each other.

### **Box 7.5 Goals for participation from landholders**

#### **Learning for productivity:**

1. We don’t get too excited unless it hits the hip pocket (LG 4).
2. I’m after knowledge. If there is any knowledge to help with my business, I’ll go (LG 6).
3. It depends where your focus was ... we were trying to get the most productivity out of our domestic stock (LG 1).

#### **Learning for other reasons:**

4. The different drivers that we have, and at different times different things happen too ... someone has a young family, someone buys a place and he wants to get all the timber treated, another bloke wants to get a good mob of sheep and another bloke wants to buy a house at the coast — different drivers at different times (LG 2).
5. Come to cover your own backside, to represent your groups — if you don’t come you are seen as not interested (LG 6; similar comments from LG 9).
6. Get themselves up to speed with just what government is doing (LG-R2).
7. If you want to learn how the bureaucracy works, get on the likes of the Strategy — because you’ll soon work it out, it will educate you for life (LG-R1).

#### **Learning from others:**

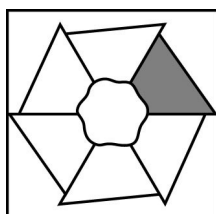
8. The main thing is that we’re learning from one another [in Bestprac groups] (LG 7).
9. I know I would take any research if they [government staff] do it in a hands-on manner in partnership with someone [landholder] on their place ... because someone has got to make a living off the results (LG 10).
10. We just want to be able to pick up the phone [to government] and say “I want to find this out”, boom [and receive an immediate answer] (LG 8).

Learning to teach government, to understand how government does business (Box 7.5, Quotes 6, 7) and to improve their businesses were stated as goals (Quotes 1, 2, 3, 4). For landholders, the people from whom they learn is also important (Quotes 8, 9). Some trust and believe their neighbours more than government staff. While this has long been recognised, it is not surprising in today’s climate of distrust of government. Many government staff did not seem to recognise the subtlety and complexity of the landholders’ goals for participation. The topics that landholders want to learn about are important. As the quotes above indicate, not all landholders saw the purpose of learning as economic gain, as is widely assumed by government (Box 7.5, Quotes 4-7). This data supports Syme and Nancarrow’s (1999) findings that rural people are not only focused on self-interest and economics.

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<sup>36</sup> Because many of these participatory goals are unwritten, it is difficult to ascribe goals to projects, as government officers mentioned different goals for the same projects.

Landholders admitted that it was sometimes difficult to understand what motivated them, as factors change over time (Box 7.6, Quote 4); the dynamics of life relates to the dynamics of participation and the dynamics of power relations. Thus, landholders' and government's goals may superficially sound the same, but the subtleties of who is learning, and about what, and who can exercise power to choose the goals are all important. The goals of participation and of the project are related to the scale, which is explored next.



### 7.3 Scale

The need for community participation to encompass several scales adds complexity to power relationships. Different types of participatory methods tend to be used at the local and regional scales. At the larger scales, regional, state and national programs tend to use representative models; for example the SWS Board (regional scale), the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC 2002: several states) and National Action Plan for Salinity (COAG 2000: national scale). The choice of representative methods at the regional scale was inevitable for pragmatic reasons, as the distances involved made prohibitive the time and cost of including everyone.

At the local scale, considerable variation existed in the methods used, but representative models were not as common. Also, landholders had more opportunities to be involved at the local scale (see Table 7.2), as this was the scale at which many projects in south-west Queensland operated.

Difficulties tend to occur when there is a mismatch of scales. Many projects were planned at a scale different from the one to which they were implemented (Table 7.2: compare Cols 2 and 3). From the perspective of the landholders, it was the paddock, property or sometimes district scale that was important. In the Feral Goat Management project, the funding agency at the state scale determined that goats should be controlled in areas where their numbers were high; co-ordinated control was attempted. A problem arose when these areas comprised adjoining properties whose owners had never met because a river formed their boundary and there was no easy way of crossing the river. Here, the boundaries chosen for goat control did not correspond to the social boundaries. Such problems may have been avoided if local landholders had provided input into the state-scale planning. Local participation becomes tokenistic if it is not well nested within higher levels.

**Table 7.2 Scale at which participation is undertaken**

Project	Planning scale	Implementation scale	Topic area (in priority order)
FutureProfit	National and state	Local: Property	Economic Environmental Social
Bestprac	National, state, district and property	Local: District and property	Economic Environmental (now incl. social)
Safe Carrying Capacity project (SCC)	SWS Region and local	Local: Property	Environmental (flow-on economic effects)
Total Grazing Pressure project (TGP)	SW Qld region and local	Local: Property	Environmental Economic
SWS Board and Natural Resource Management sub- group	Federal, state and SWS region	Regional and local: district and property depending on the project	Economic Environmental Social
Bore Drain Replacement program and Bore capping program	Great Artesian Basin; multi-state in Qld, NSW and SA	Local: Property	Environmental (has economic implications)
Feral Goat Management project	State, SWS region and local	Local: District and property	Environmental Economic
Landcare	National	Local: District	Environmental
Water Allocation and Water Management Plans (WAMP)	National and multi- state	Region — catchment (property water licences)	Environmental
Nature conservation planning project	State and region	Region	Environmental
Vegetation management guidelines	State, with local groups	Region — Bioregion	Environmental
National Park planning	State and region	Local: Properties surrounding the parks	Environmental
Leadership program	State; but responsive to individuals	Local: individuals	Social
South West Financial Counselling Service	Federal, state and limited regional	Local: individuals and enterprises	Economic Social
Rural Partnership Program	National and region	Region	Economic Environmental Social
Rural Adjustment Scheme	National and region	Region	Economic <sup>37</sup>

Various rationales were given for programs being planned at a scale broader than those at which they were to be implemented. These included (a) “expert” extension staff based in head office having more skills in developing the design, (b) central planners ensuring consistency between regions and (c) some land management problems crossing regional boundaries, so that people from other regions had to be included. While these reasons might have been admirable, a centralised approach usually lacks the opportunity for local people to be involved in the planning stage.

Power relationships were not equal at all scales within the NRM projects, as decreasing opportunities for participation existed as the scale of projects increased. Landholders had more power to influence projects that were developed and implemented at smaller scales (such as the regional and local scale: Bestprac, SCC, TGP, SWS and Feral Goat projects) rather than projects (such as WAMP) that were initiated and planned by national and multi-state committees. My observations and landholders' comments suggested that projects that were planned and implemented at the local scale were more highly regarded. As several landholders in one meeting said:

At the regional level the language goes way over our heads [lots of agreement and laughter] ... Some of the regional local stuff doesn't apply to our situation ... Things more practical are more interesting. (Several landholders in LG 6)

Part of this feeling of powerlessness might have been caused by the language used to describe regional scale issues, and part by lack of experience with issues beyond their property boundaries. In the SWS, a bus trip through the catchment dramatically improved people's understanding of regional problems. Their new knowledge contributed to an increased feeling of power and translated into some practical projects such as weed management.

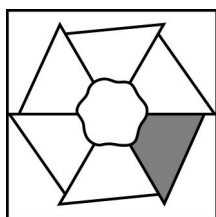
Clearly, the effects of scale can be significant. Participatory activities in natural resource management programs need to incorporate several scales, but the power to influence projects is not consistent between scales. Issues of equity and effective representation of all interests are not always achieved at the larger scales. Improving feedback mechanisms with iterative cycles was suggested by landholders as one way of overcoming these problems. Better nesting of local projects within larger scales and formalised communication networks between scales are needed. Reliance on omnipresent, but dynamic, power relations between individuals is not sufficient for communication between scales; structures are needed to support individual efforts.

The advent of new regional arrangements since these interviews has changed the scale at which funds for NRM are allocated — from state government to regional groups (COAG 2000; Queensland Government 2003). While this has changed the power dynamics in terms of money, it is not yet clear whether or not the outcomes for land management projects will change. The mismatch of scales will probably still remain a problem, with the complexity of operating across many scales and scaling-up dilemmas still to be addressed. These new federal government

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<sup>37</sup> Social projects are well represented in this data, as the questioning focused on NRM projects — the DPI Leadership Programs not and the South West Financial Counselling Service being the two most frequently mentioned during interviews. However, the silence about social projects does indicate poor links between social, economic and environmental projects.

arrangements mean that landholders should always be involved at the planning stages of projects, and this dimension of participation is addressed in the next section.



## 7.4 Stage

Landholders in south-west Queensland have been involved in stages or time periods during projects in different ways. Not surprisingly, landholders in this study were often expected to be involved in the implementation stage, as changes in land management practices were part of almost all of the projects discussed during interviews. The social programs related to the Rural Counselling Centre and the DPI Rural Leaders Programs were the exceptions.

Many landholder groups expressed frustration with the numbers of programs for which their contributions were requested, particularly those groups whose members were also associated with regional groups. Many projects were evaluated as part of the SWS, and accountability requirements under the Rural Partnership Program; for example, the Structural Adjustment Program was assessed annually. Most complaints referred to the needs-assessment and review stages of projects. These relate to the increasing importance of auditing (see Section 3.3.2: *Governmentality*). For these, programs were justified if sufficient people requested them, and a record was required of how the money was spent. Landholders frequently complained that departments and other agencies often asked the same questions, and even undertook the same tasks (Box 7.6).

### Box 7.6 Inefficiency within government

With the mapping thing [in the SCC project] ... they rang us up a couple of times, and sent out a GPS for us to run around and get a lot of points ... they produced a map that listed your waters, boundaries, told you about the vegetation. The maps are good (LG 10: person 1).

Then there were these other fellows who came out here from Charleville with a GPS ... they had a go at this mapping thing again [lots of agreement from other members of family]. Their offices are in the same building [as the SCC fellows] and I suggested that they just use their map, but no no, they were here for a week doing exactly the same thing again. Blow me down if a fortnight later they lost one section of it and they had to come back and do one section again (LG 10: person 2).

But he only had to go to the office next door and they would have had the whole thing — very annoying! This all happened within a month of one another, it is sad [the lack of co-operation between government departments] (LG 10: person 1).

More cooperation between departments would have been enormously time-saving for local communities. However, the unwillingness of departments to share data with one another points to interagency rivalries and power games between EPA, DNRM, DPI and AFFA.

In the numerous SWS evaluations, landholders tended to participate simply by answering survey questions (i.e. evaluations were usually summative, being performed at the end of projects, rather than formative, which would have enhanced learning during the project). Local communities were rarely involved in designing the evaluation, or adapting projects in response to evaluations carried out while the projects were being undertaken. Dale and Bellamy (1998) and Dart, Petheram and Straw (1998) also found that participatory evaluation, where landholders shared in decision-making about the evaluation, rarely occurred in any substantial way in Australian agriculture. This is contrary to the concept of participation constructively contributing to learning and empowerment through ownership and understanding.

Among the common land management projects, Bestprac, was one of the few in which landholders were consistently involved at all stages of activities. However, Bestprac had a pre-determined process and landholders were involved only in “unconstrained dialogue” about the content, not about the process. This follows a Habermasian style. When government officers determine the process, they choose the stage at which the project community people are “allowed” to become involved.

In contrast, landholders in this study complained that the content of Landcare projects was constrained by the funding guidelines set by the federal government. Here, landholders determine the process, but do not totally control the content.

While the power in this relationship was largely exercised by the government system, landholders resisted. For example:

A lot of people that deserve to get help or assistance aren't getting it and the ones ... who can, tell the biggest fibs ... The way government makes things now, to get anything you have got to lie ... they are encouraging people to lie on these forms ... otherwise no one would be able to get anything. (LG 7)

Those groups who employ the best consultants to write the applications, they get the money — it's got nothing to do with how good the project is. (LG 3)

Their resistance took the form of writing the funding proposals using the “correct” words, so they could continue to do what they wanted to do by manipulation. Outright conflict was avoided, the tensions were not resolved and the power struggle continued in more and more subtle and devious ways. As one landholder said, they play the government game to get what they want, which meant that people are focused on playing power games rather than honest and transparent communication.

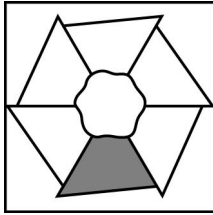
Theoretically, to overcome these problems, a high level of decision-making power should be shared with the community from the earliest stage through to the evaluation stage. This view is espoused by many (e.g. Mitchell 1989; Dovers 2001; Pretty and Uphoff 2002). In my experience some of the conflicts can be avoided when community engagement begins in the early stages of a project. However, involving local people at all stages of projects can cause problems. During the conduct of this research, “burnout” and the cost of participation for local people were frequently mentioned problems.

High levels of involvement occurred in the early stages of some programs (such as the Regional Strategy groups) but dropped off as time passed. This tendency of involvement to diminish over time has been highlighted by Guijt and Kaul Shah (1998) and in Australia by Curtis (1999) who noted that a high level of participation by local people often occurs in early stages of projects. As one landholder said of the Strategy (with nodding agreement from others in the group), “We had pretty good representation from all the areas, but down the track some have dropped out because they find the process a little frustrating” (LG –R2). However, the research suggests that frustration and burnout are probably not simply a consequence of involving people too early, but could also result from inappropriate power-sharing within participatory processes. One way of alleviating the problem of burnout is to negotiate with local communities to determine the stages at which they wish to become involved, and how they wish to be involved at that stage, including power sharing relations, for each stage.

The same level of power sharing for each stage of the project is not realistic, as has been demonstrated in this research (Chapter 6). Landholders did not always want to have the power to make decisions or spend time discussing some issues. One key factor seemed to be that landholders wanted to be involved in choosing the level of power sharing for different stages.

The stage of a project is linked to the various other dimensions of participation. As indicated above, project planners need to consider the degree of public involvement that is desirable and feasible for (a) government agencies and (b) the local community. This latter consideration includes the time available to local people to share the power in decision-making, and the question of who should be involved. It is this question of selection of participants that is discussed next.





## 7.5 Who is involved?

Who should be involved in participatory activities? This question, and others like it, are fraught with power dynamics. Who should be invited to participate? How many should be invited to participate? Who, at public meetings, feels comfortable participating? Answers to all these are affected by power relationships between government organisers and community members, as well as the power plays within the communities and community and industry organisations. Hierarchies always exist between facilitators and participants “no matter how participatory the exercise” and it is “very important to be conscious of this hierarchy and to deal with it” (Murthy 1998 p. 90). Government facilitators in these interviews did not always seem to be aware of the power they held — simply because of their positions — in their relationships with landholders.

### ***7.5.1 What types of people are involved?***

Of course these power relationships and the participatory processes are set within the power of the dominant discourses of the day. In SWS regional-level meetings, I observed that most members were white middle-to-older aged men with a primary production background. Even though they were discussing the future of the general community in south-west Queensland, many other rural groups, such as Aboriginals, town business people, youth or urban people, were not represented. While the regional groups were dominated by men, almost equal numbers of men and women attended local meetings.

An explanation for the lack of women at regional meetings could be that women are seen as having an accepted role in property management, but not in public affairs, and therefore they cannot easily exercise power to influence the direction of regional funding. I suspect that not many landholders would agree that regional meetings were more “important”. A couple of women explained that it is was difficult for them to spend the time required to attend regional meetings, especially when they had families, and these meetings were further from home. Many said privately to me that they exercised a lot of power over property management.

The uneven representativeness of people commonly participating in groups was widely discussed among landholders and government staff, both during interviews and in general discussions (Box 7.7).

## **Box 7.7 Landholders' comments about representativeness**

### **Groups not always representative:**

You're only hearing one point of view here, because we're the people that cover the meetings. That's another way of looking at things (LG-R1).

We're talking to the converted. The five per cent that put themselves there [in meetings], that is against the 95% ... but, if we don't pick the ball up it's our own problem. If someone else doesn't pick the ball up that's their problem; whether we pick it up or not, is our choice (LG-R2).

You go to a meeting in the Warrego Grazier Association and they say, "Oh we need two representatives to go in the South West Strategy. Who wants to go on it?" You know, someone turned up to the Grazier Association meeting that day, so they are on it ... The Sheep and Wool Institute is different in that it's small, it's tight, they've applied, the people that have been selected to go and do the job (LG 8).

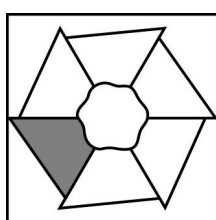
The difficulties in contacting people from outside the normal range of groups were discussed at SWS meetings. The Strategy members did make an effort to involve other stakeholder groups, but many stakeholders, including town businesspeople, still tended to be poorly represented. A small group of Aboriginals attended their first Strategy meeting while I was in Charleville. The structures and types of meeting processes were not very welcoming, and the atmosphere provided little support for newcomers to express their ideas. This is an example of Foucault and Habermas's restrictive and negative use of power (see Section 7.0 *Introduction*) which can exclude some groups.

Power relationships influence how the locals were invited or selected to attend meetings. As previously mentioned, landholders were frustrated at how some of their number were appointed, either by their own groups or by government staff, who "suggested" specific attendees (above Box 7.7). Government departments contributed to this tendency towards limited inclusiveness as they frequently went to existing groups or to rural industry organisations for comment, because that approach was more time efficient. However, in south-west Queensland, producer organisations themselves estimated that only about 40% of producers were members and, as one government staff member from Charleville said, "They're not necessarily representing a lot of people in terms of the broader community". Many regional departmental officers and landholders questioned the appropriateness of using producer organisations to comment on behalf of rural people, but the problem of using existing groups such as Bestprac was less recognised. (Informal interviews with non-participants in previous work support the view that existing groups are not representative of the broader landholder community.)

### **7.5.2 How many should be involved?**

The question of how many people need to be involved is a vexing one for many agencies. The number who are to be encouraged to participate is often related to scale and goals.

If the goals are to achieve learning about complex land management practices, then direct involvement of individuals is preferable, or perhaps essential; thus local groups are more effective than regional groups. The traditional assumption that representative regional groups can facilitate widespread practical change relies on the diffusion-of-extension models, which have been largely discredited, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Blacket 1996; Jiggins 1993; Pretty 1999; Van Beek and Coutts 1992; Waters-Bayer et al. 1999). It must be recognised that only the people directly involved in activities are likely to learn; very few people who do not participate will develop an understanding of complex rangeland management issues. Not only power relations, but the capacity and skills of those planning participatory programs influence these decisions. This capacity of both government staff and landholders to plan, implement and participate in land management programs is discussed next.



## **7.6 Capacity**

Landholders, local communities, government agencies and their staff all need to have the capacity to be involved; participation requires skills, abilities, knowledge and resources. Capacity relates to many of the previously discussed dimensions of participation; for example context and culture certainly influence capacity. The communication factors that enhance participation are subtle, and attention to detail in communication and facilitation is important.

### **7.6.1 Government capacity**

Most government departments still value technical skills the most, yet communication, facilitation and community development skills are essential components of capacity (as stated in the literature, Chapter 2). As one government officer said:

The facilitator skills and community skills are the real constraints. On technical skills, generally we don't do too badly. (Govt G2)

However, this research found that training in communication skills, or any training in any aspect of participation, was not a priority for state government agencies in Queensland.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the capacity required of government staff and institutions to support participatory approaches is sometimes underestimated. Participation takes considerable time and costs money, usually more than is expected. The process of social change is slow, particularly when barriers of mistrust need to be broken down. Also, participatory approaches are more

time-consuming than traditional approaches. Thus organisational commitment needs to be long-term, and bureaucratic arrangements need to be very flexible and adaptable to respond to the requests of local participants — a key requirement of participatory approaches.

Many institutional arrangements actually work against effective participation. The accountability requirements of government agencies, discussed in the previous chapter, impact on the types of participatory processes that are employed. Many factors limit the building of trust, including (a) the lack of transparency about why participation is undertaken, (b) rapid, politically motivated changes in policy and (c) the need for short term outcomes. Current short-term funding cycles, often three years or less (see Table 7.3), tend to work against effective participation by limiting flexibility, truncating commitment and hindering staff from developing strong relationships.

**Table 7.3 Funding cycles for projects in south-west Queensland circa 1995-2000**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Funding cycle</b>
FutureProfit (evolved from Property Management Planning)	Initially 3 year funding (through NLP, then NHT and later NHT2) By 2002, became project based; funding for specific workshops. By 2004, became a service on demand; funded through FarmBis.
Bestprac (evolved into Better Practices; Good Practices; and Look at Wool) <sup>38</sup>	Initially 3 year funding (through Woolmark) Landholders received money for specific actions, usually less than 1 year
Safe Carrying Capacity (SCC)	Project provided for landholder free on one-off basis; no direct funding to landholders
Total Grazing Pressure (TGP)	3 years, one-off
South West Strategy	Variable depending on the project; often 3 years
Bore Drain Replacement program and Bore capping program	Annual applications, one-off
Feral Goat Management project	3 years, one-off, funded by Commonwealth through Bureau of Rural Sciences
Landcare	Annual funding applications; annual reporting requirements Projects usually funded for 3 years
Vegetation management guidelines	Variable, on-going
National Park Planning	Usually annual time-frame

One landholder from the Strategy group explained that the consequences of inappropriate communication and lack of government facilitation skills were far reaching. Agencies often created confrontation unintentionally, because of poor skills. Therefore, poor participation can be worse than none at all; it is better not to involve the community, rather than to do it badly. Consequently, if agencies decide to embark on participatory approaches, then appropriate skills,

<sup>38</sup> Bestprac evolved to become more of a benchmarking project in many cases; whereas “Look at Wool” in South Australia retained the original intent, encompassing action learning principles.

time and financial resources need to be allocated to the task. Agencies initiating participatory activities need to recognise that participation is not always appropriate.

Before initiating participatory activities, agency staff need to evaluate their own skills and the institutional constraints within which they are operating. Even with careful planning and the best of intentions, individual staff cannot implement participatory activities effectively without institutional support. Change is needed within government to remove impediments to participation. Power games within and between institutions must be overcome, to allow greater coordination between departments. Power relations between head office managers and regional staff were seen as an impediment (Box 7.8), by both regional government staff and landholders.

These quotes point to different approaches to participation between head office and the regional government staff: regional people understand the need to build relationships, and that the quality of relationships is more valuable than the number of people attending in terms of achieving sustainability outcomes.

#### **Box 7.8 Relations between the region and head office**

I'm just thinking about the South West Strategy in the early days. When local participation from our department was virtually banned by the department and the regional director was the only person who [went] to the South West Strategy meetings in the early days ... they don't know the issues, the people or anything ... Whereas once the local people got involved ... it's just worked so much better. You'd know what was going on (Govt G3).

The consumer survey results came out a few months ago. The major thing that our customers want, our clients want, is to have credibility and a personal relationship with an extension officer or research officer, stock inspector or somebody. So I think that partnership or trust or cooperation or whatever you want to call it is very important ... and often the only way of getting that is to do it in a labour intensive way ... you know ... one-on-one, and it's not cheap, it's high cost. We're in a day of trying to cut costs ... so you've got to do it as a whole group or it's not good ... [that is what] our managers want (Govt G1).

Inappropriate consultation is usually generated from outside the region (LG 2).

Locally based staff understand well, but communication breaks down the higher you go in the agency (LG 3).

Departments just don't talk to each other; even sections within departments (LG 6).

Poor vertical participation and the hierarchy of power within the department is well recognised by landholders. Power plays occur within and between departments, so there is poor horizontal participation, as is indicated by the last quote (Box 7.8). Other authors have pointed to this as a problem throughout rural Australia (Dore and Woodhill 1999; Syme 1991).

Power games between landholders and government officers also impact on participation. The negative and critical attitudes of landholders towards government staff can influence the capacity of the government to do its part. As one extension officer explained:

For young agency staff, working in the bush can be a thankless task; the wins are few and far between. Landholders are usually unresponsive, reluctant to change and keen to shoot down new ideas [particularly from young government staff]. Staff are not appreciated even though they want to help people ... and this is very deflating. (Govt G1)

Many landholders said that young staff were a particular problem, as “many arrive with an attitude problem, but you can educate them.” Government staff, particular younger ones, need on-going support from their institution if they are to understand the nature of participatory processes and change. Also, they need training in communicating with landholders, in facilitation and in conflict management. One successful initiative was the informal mentoring role that some landholders undertook for new staff; this helped newcomers to understand the rangeland context and rural way of life. Clearly, landholders also need these sorts of skills, and it is this aspect of communication that will be discussed next.

### **7.6.2 Landholder capacity**

Community capacity was rarely mentioned in interviews, but I believe it is an important issue. Dick (1991 p.255) stated that it is important in data analysis to look for the “dis-confirming” evidence, as key insights may be mentioned only occasionally. My assessment is supported by the rural community development and some NRM literature, which recognises the need for community capacity in terms of skills and strong networks (as discussed in Section 2.3.1(6) *Capacity*; Cavaye 2004; Claydon et. al. 1999; Comber and Pullar 1995; Putman 1993).

Only two landholders, both women, commented in private that rural communities lacked the skills and the confidence to get involved. They agreed that landholders had low self-esteem and lacked confidence in presenting their ideas during meetings. Several reasons were given: some people feared that their argument would be “blown away” by others who were better speakers; others did not want to draw attention to themselves by speaking. Part of this reluctance can be attributed to the machismo rural culture, where men did not want to be seen to “lose” power by showing weakness. One woman explained that some people were embarrassed about their lack of education.

Supporting this idea from a positive perspective, several groups talked about the Building Rural Leaders course, run by the Department of Primary Industries (Box 7.9). This course is well recognised and respected among rural people as being particularly effective in assisting people to develop the capacity to participate more effectively in their communities. Another program

that also seems to be effective is “Working with Groups”, run by the rural industry group Meat and Livestock Corporation.

### **Box 7.9 Building Rural Leaders Program**

The Building Rural Leaders program assists people, industries, communities, and agribusinesses to build a critical mass of people, men and women of all ages, skilled in leadership and strategic thinking. These courses use well-developed “action learning” principles. Participants work on their own projects or problems and are supported and encouraged by other participants in a small group setting.

The Program aims to assist individuals to deal with change affecting rural people at the business, industry and community levels. Building Rural Leaders challenges existing ways of thinking, develops new skills and encourages greater self-confidence in participants. (DPI&F 2004)

Some individuals were more experienced than others, and some regional groups were more skilled than others — a fact mentioned by government staff from state and federal agencies during general discussions. Groups who had more experience in dealing with government and being on government committees tended to be more effective in achieving outcomes for their own communities.

As well as lacking individual skills, landholders in four groups (LG 3, 7, 9, 10) suggested that rural communities did not feel valued by society. The increase in government regulations over many aspects of rural businesses and rural life was one indication to landholders that they were not trusted. The perception of powerlessness among some rural people was exacerbated by factors such as not being listened to, their knowledge not being valued, and their having less political voting power. One perception was that landholders were frequently accused by conservationists, urban people and some agency staff of “raping the land”. Many felt that society no longer considered rural industry to be a worthwhile use of the rangelands. Conferences such the Fenner conference in Port Augusta (Blesing et al. 1996) and papers (Abel 1999; Childs 2002; National Natural Resource Management Task Force 1999) that voiced ideas about alternative land uses for the rangelands certainly reinforced this view.

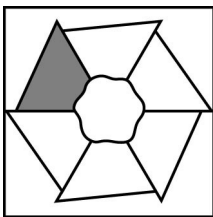
Several landholder groups suggested that the widespread apathy in rural communities was related to landholders feeling marginalised in society. The fact that some rural people are recognising these problems (lack of confidence and capacity to participate), is a step towards finding solutions. The widespread sense of victimisation and negativism, which characterised many of the discussions in this study, can be overcome.

Some rural groups have taken control of their own destiny and are an inspiration to others. One example in the south-west rangelands is Obi Obi Beef, an organic beef company. Here, landholders initiated a scheme to process their own produce, which they now market directly

overseas. This emerging energy was reported in a review of Rural Community Development initiatives in south-west Queensland (Comber and Pullar 1995). This indicates that some rangeland people still feel optimistic about the future of rural industries and rural communities.

To summarise, one of the key differences between government officers' and landholders' views was that landholders thought *the* most important factor was the individuals who were involved. The landholders focused on various aspects of the capacity of the government staff who were involved — communication skills, integrity and attitudes of the individual government staff were the key factors influencing participatory activities. Landholders wanted government staff to have good communication skills so they could develop a rapport with landholders and “be on the same wavelength as us”, as one landholder requested. Government staff tended to focus on searching for ways to improve participatory approaches and finding new methods. Yet it was the capacity of staff — the intent and principles, and the way in which methods were used — that influenced the effectiveness of participation.

In the next section, we look at the issues that were more important to government staff: the design and choice of method and processes for participatory activities.



## 7.7 Design, methods and processes

The design of participatory activities links to all of the other dimensions of participation. Government staff tend to think about the design and methods first, when planning participatory activities; preferably, all of the other dimensions need to be considered *before* developing the design, as the choice of design profoundly influences the extent and type of power sharing that is possible between the government and the community. As such, this section examines how power relationships influence participation and how the design of participation influences power relationships. First, however, we shall review recent changes in the approach to the design of participatory activities.

Despite the rhetoric of community engagement, many land management programs in south-west Queensland are still top-down, or have only token participation, the power resting with government and being organised *for* local people rather than *with* them (refer Table 6.8 for landholders' assessments; and Table 7.1 for my assessment). Government staff tended to claim that their methods were participatory, but the landholders' perception was that less power



sharing was occurring than the government staff thought (see Box 6.11 and 6.12 regarding the SWS). Overall, landholders liked the trend towards greater power sharing. Government staff in south-west Queensland varied in their ideas about this change of focus. Most liked the trend towards more participatory activities, but some did not. Rarely, however, was a focus on power-sharing the basis of designing participatory activities.

In line with the general trends identified above, government facilitators in south-west Queensland tended to first mention methods when discussing participation, and this was reflected the way they designed participatory activities — other dimensions were often not considered in detail. Sometimes, the government focus on methods meant that instead of choosing a design to suit the specific situation, people tended to search for confirmation that the desired method was appropriate.

Several landholders commented that “all processes look the same”. My observations indicate that meetings often started with the same set of ground rules: (a) participants expectations were often collected, then (b) agency staff usually claimed that they wanted to know what landholders thought about an issue, and (c) at the end, “happy sheets” were used to evaluate what people thought of the meeting.

One of the reasons for such similar designs of projects is that government staff have limited skills and experience with participatory methodologies. They tend to choose methods with which they are familiar. Also, particular methods become fashionable for a time and then tend to be used regardless of the situation. One of the implications of these similar looking structures for many meetings was that landholders tended to become confused about the purpose of the meeting. They often suspected hidden agendas even when facilitators tried to explain the purpose of the meeting.

These findings are supported by the literature in Australia (Boyd 2003; Ife 1995) and overseas:

The manual and method mania has led to many to claim successful participation, despite only a superficial understanding of the underlying empowerment principles that were at the root of much of the pioneering work ... [but there is] a move back to empowerment-orientated and context-specific approaches. (Guijt and Kaul Shah 1998 p. 5)

This seems to echo the situation in south-west Queensland: (a) claims of successful participation, (b) lack of theoretical understanding of participation while (c) the trend is towards greater devolution of power to the community. Unfortunately in practice, the importance of context is often forgotten.

Instead of focusing on finding the “right” method, this research recommends more context specific approaches. Planning participatory activities requires an iterative process because of the changing contexts. Changes may influence one dimension, which in turn influences the implementation. Flexibility is required during implementation as new information emerges or as some of the dimensions change over time. Recent literature on land management also emphasises flexibility and adaptation (as highlighted in Chapter 2). These design principles, and the choice of methods, can determine the level of power sharing within projects, just as power relations can influence the design. These are both addressed in the next section.

### ***7.7.1 Power relationships influence design***

The choice of design and the implementation of participatory methods are influenced by all of the other dimensions of participation. As such, the design is influenced by the power relationships already discussed, for each of these dimensions.

During the progress of this research, decisions about the design of participatory methods were sometimes made outside the region, partly because the more senior people in the hierarchy of government had more influence. For example, FutureProfit, Bore Drain Replacement, WAMP, Vegetation management guidelines and the Leadership program were largely planned outside south-west Queensland (refer Table 7.2). The disadvantages of a centralised approach are that (a) it lacks flexibility and is slow to respond to changing on-ground circumstances, and (b) it does not necessarily cater for the needs of particular local communities, with its group dynamics, the complexities of individual personalities and the capacity of the staff.

It was obvious that many staff lacked an understanding of the complexity of the theory about participation. The skills, expertise and views of individual staff about participation varied considerably. However, many extension officers and facilitators had technical training and yet were expected to undertake community participation in addition to other tasks. Often they were provided with methods which they used as recipes rather than having an understanding of the frameworks to link theory and practice and then adapt the methods to suit their circumstances. Staff from one department used a greater diversity of methods and had a more sophisticated approach because they were more skilled: their department provided more opportunities for training. This department also had a network of extension specialists to provide information and share knowledge about designing participatory land management activities.

Power relationships within the departments also influenced the choice of methods, as illustrated in the on-going debate over one-on-one extension. Power relationships between regional field

officers and head office managers influenced the ability of regional staff to use one-on-one activities and to adopt more flexible participatory methods.

Field officers complained that the power to make decisions rested with the government “bean counters”. The benefits of one-on-one extension are not easy to quantify, especially not in the short term when extension activities involve building relationships and trust with individual people. As discussed in the previous chapter, accountability requirements had become institutionalised. The power of regional staff to change the rules of this system and the related discourse was limited. Flat hierarchical institutions tend to be better at encouraging institutional learning (Argyris and Schön 1996) and overcoming the negative impacts of power hierarchies within departments.

In summary, power is inherent in all dimensions of participation, and thus it is vitally important that the impact of power relations be considered when participatory activities are being designed and implemented. There are two facets of power that influence participatory methods. Firstly, the power of the system or institution, which is independent of individuals, but can influence and limit the types of methods used when participatory activities are being designed. Secondly, power relations between individuals influence the way in which methods are designed and implemented. As landholders explained, the individual is fundamentally important during implementation — the personality, attitudes and skills of the people facilitating the participatory process, not the type of method *per se*. Therefore, participatory processes need to aim for an appropriate level of power-sharing, while accepting the ultradynamic nature of power within ever-changing contexts.

### **7.7.2 Design influences power relations**

While this thesis has emphasised the landholders’ view that individuals and power relations between individuals must be considered, the structure and design of participatory activities also influences power relations. In this model (Figure 7.1), the term *design* refers to the philosophical approach, the methods chosen and the order in which they are used. The order in which methods are used influences the stage at which local people can influence the decision-making process, as discussed previously under *Scale* (Section 7.3 *Scale*). The philosophical approach to participation is linked to the institutional policy, procedures and systems of organisations. In this way, institutions also have a profound effect of power sharing relationships within participatory land management programs. This section reviews how methods and institutional factors influence power relations.

Often, government officers did not consider levels of power sharing when choosing participatory methods (as highlighted in the previous section). In fact, the link between methods and levels of power sharing did not seem to be appreciated, as in the Water Management Planning (WMP) process. This program used the method of public submissions to government, which allows local landholders only limited influence over decision-making. A few landholders suggested that such a process paid only lip service to participation, was not genuine participation, and was used when the government did not really want to take landholders' views into account. The project staff suggested that (a) criticism of the process came from a small group of disenfranchised landholders who felt they had been ignored when their views were not adopted, and (b) government could not adopt everyone's views because of the divergence of opinion within catchments. While this latter observation was true, government staff seemed reluctant to appreciate the link between the processes chosen and the resulting power sharing arrangements, and the landholders' reaction of this situation. This and other scenarios are outlined later, in Table 8.2, which demonstrates how different methods influence the level of power sharing.

Not only does the choice of method, or technique, influence power sharing; also important is the way in which the methods are implemented. These are influenced, at least in part, by broad institutional philosophies and systems. For example, a group discussion could be used simply to collect information; alternatively, it could be used to ensure that the farmers' voice is heard during an interactive dialogue between government staff and landholders, where their knowledge is integral for project development, such as in the Bestprac programs. However, engaging in interactive discussions is pointless, and can cause frustration, if the institutional system does not allow these discussions to be integrated into the project. Institutional accountability requirements can enforce short time-frames, thus limiting flexibility and responsiveness to landholders' discussions.

The government's focus on designing consistent systems across all regions ignores the contextual factors and micro-relations of power, which landholders highlighted as fundamentally important in participatory land management. The "structure of actions" (Foucault 1980) cannot be mapped or even easily predicted before power is exercised. The one aspect which is certain is that these relations are ultradynamic and exist throughout the networks of relationships between individuals in all organisations and in the community. Structures, rules, regulations, or communication principles such as Habermas's discourse ethics, cannot contain power relations totally, even though institutional structures, systems and principles can, and do, influence these power relations.

Other design principles can be used to assist in managing the negative effects of power. Negotiating the design of participatory land management projects with landholders does influence the power relations between all of those involved, as it clearly demonstrates a willingness to share decision-making power about all aspects of the project. Beginning a project in this way helps build trust and positive communication between people. The levels of power sharing planned for a project can be made explicit, and this will ease frustration because this helps manage people's expectations. Also, making existing power relationships explicit can help facilitators and landholders understand the context within which they will operate. Many of the requirements of discourse ethics (Habermas 1990; Section 3.2.4 *Discourse ethics*) can help to manage the negative effects of power, but these should not be seen as obliterating power relations.

No design can completely control power relations. During implementation, it is exemplary communication skills and personal attributes which are critical for managing power. As Williams (2002) argued, our relational and interpersonal attributes are the boundary spanners; these attributes are needed to build links between individuals through understanding and respecting others, and to build networks and trust. Integrating appropriate design with excellent communication skills are essential if we are to develop effective participatory processes and achieve rural communities with sustainable rangeland management practices. However this is done, we need to respect contextual sensitivities and use wisdom and common sense.

## **7.8 Conclusion**

The interactive nature of power relations with all aspects of community participation has been highlighted. Power relations influence the design of community participation through each of the dimensions of participation, and the design of participatory activities influences the level of power sharing. Each of the other dimensions may have an interdependent relationship with power, depending on the project.

This analysis demonstrates that power relationships are very complex. Each dimension interacts with each other dimension, and power relationships interact with each dimension as well. Within this net-like web, some power relations are productive, others negative. However, the nature of these relationships and the importance of the links depend on the specific project and program and on the contextual factors at that time and place. The context is dynamic, and the power relations within these contexts are ultradynamic, sometimes changing in minutes within the ebb and flow of conversations.

This research suggests that we need to accept a coexistence between the various ways of thinking about power. Power is important not only in government procedures, but also in individual communication; power relations influence consensus and conflict within community participation. We need to consider both structure and agency, informal and formal, public and private faces of power. Foucault's focus on context has been seen to be essential, and yet to allow for some procedural justice and consistency of government policy, some form of normative guidelines are required. Foucault's revealing style of critique provides us with insights about power; at the same time the role of science, and scientific rationalism, contribute enormously to our understanding of rangeland management. Local communities do have greater power to influence projects and activities at the local level, as sheer pragmatics means that fewer people can be involved at larger scales. Localised action and the importance of power at the micro-level need to be incorporated into changed institutional arrangements which facilitate genuine participation.

Making power relationships more explicit would improve participatory activities. Planners of participatory designs could be more aware of the explicit and implicit power relationships with the people involved. Such an approach would allow facilitation and communication to be more sensitive to the needs of the individuals, and would assist in removing some of the inequities. Power relations should, where possible, not be left as a shadow play; they should be made explicit.

Power relationships are complex, and using different theories and different "lens" to view and critique the current situation may help us to understand, and improve, our management of power relations in community participation.