

Transformation for Resilient Landscapes and Communities Partnership

Social-ecological planning

Resource Sheet 8 (RS 8)

Conceptual origins

Social-ecological planning is an emergent form of adaptive planning that draws on synergies between: resilience science (RS 3); collective and social learning frameworks (RS 4) and governance for adaptation and transformation (RS 5).

It also draws on adaptive management, transition management, social innovation and organisational learning theories.

Key assumptions

- Many NRM issues are wicked, persistent or intractable problem spaces (RS 2). Quick fixes are rare and command and control approaches usually fail. A learning approach is required to seek improved situations
- Landscapes, communities, industries and even problem spaces can be conceptualised as multi-layered, complex adaptive or self organising social-ecological systems (RS 7)
- Landscapes and the way they function are products at any point in time of cumulative social and ecological interactions or co-evolution
- NRM is as much about people as it is about natural resources and more about futures than pasts
- The extent of change required to improve situations is significant. Business as usual is unlikely to achieve this required scale of change – going beyond business as usual may involve transformative action (RS 6) and therefore innovation
- NRM plans need to be strategies for change (RS 10) focused on the causal processes that

matter most and based on workable change processes

- Who decides what matters most, how those decisions are made and how power is used will shape landscape functions and futures highlighting the importance of governance.

Development of SES planning in Australia

Timeline	Key SES planning initiatives
Early 2000s	Studies in Goulburn-Broken, Rangelands and WA Wheatbelt regions primarily by CSIRO researchers
2005	Resilient landscapes introduced as a goal in NSW
2008	Understanding of resilience included in NRC audits of NRM regional bodies in NSW
2009	NRC trials on riverine vegetation futures Strategic NRM planning pilot processes undertaken in Namoi and Central West regions in NSW Murray case study commenced (RS 1)
2011	Australian Government policy investigations Cape York & FNQ case studies began (RS 1) Eleven regional CAP upgrades in NSW carried out in 2011/12 Paper by Kingsford on Strategic adaptive management, <i>Biological Conservation: 144</i>
2013	Climate ready planning processes commenced in 10 additional regions in QLD, SA, VIC and WA <i>A Community of Practice</i> formed to share knowledge, tools and experiences

Planning units

Social-ecological systems (SESs) are the basic units of *social-ecological planning* (RS 7). In practice, planners mainly use landscapes as SESs but they have also tried problem spaces, individual assets, industry systems, landuse systems and other types of systems.

Development directions

The development of *social-ecological planning* has been taking place in over 25 NRM regions around Australia. The most common application is a resilience assessment based approach guided by the 'clouds' heuristic (see Practice Guide and RS 9). However, it has not been a one size fits all process. Regional planners have followed several different development directions which suit the variations across regions in context, culture and capacity.

An alternative model, which we have labeled *planning by doing*, focuses on rethinking the idea of adaptive planning and draws more on collective learning and adaptive governance principles with resilience science as just one way of constructing knowledge. This model is being developed in far north QLD in the Cape York and Wet Tropics regions.

Best practice regions

- Transformed to adaptive governance
- Built an ongoing planning function prepared for surprise
- Transparently documented assumptions
- Stopped to reflect on past and present actions
- Involved communities in defining SESs and scoping problem spaces
- Reframed problems as opportunity spaces
- Used collaborative, learning-based processes to explore alternative system states and trajectories
- Explored potential change pathways and unintended consequences of interventions
- Focused investment on variables that matter in a system context
- Developed modular, living plans with inbuilt

monitoring targeted to testing assumptions and structured around triggers for change.

Relationship to assets

Social-ecological planning covers both parts i.e., sub-systems and whole systems. It is useful to think of biophysical assets as ecosystems that sit in a bigger social-ecological system like a landscape. In a modular set of adaptive plans individual asset management plans would sit underneath a strategic level plan for the landscape or region. So an assets approach including tools like INFFER and spatial mapping can be an integrated part of *social-ecological planning* as can particular plans for threats like feral animals and weeds.

Identified benefits

- New narratives of NRM are emerging which are broader in scope
- New insights into existing problems
- Farmers 'get' systems – allows new engagement and partnerships around issues that matter to all parties
- More socially and institutionally aware plans are being produced that link people to landscape by focusing on social-ecological relationships
- Enables practitioners to understand and provides tools for adaptive management.

Further information

Partnership Study Resource Material: including
Short report: Re-imaging NRM planning: The emergence of social-ecological planning
www.ausresilience.com.au/research/transformation

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Resilience Planning Community of Practice website
www.rpcop.org.au

Project Partners: Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation, Natural Resources Commission,
Charles Sturt University, Murray Catchment Management Authority,
Cape York Natural Resource Management Ltd, Terrain Natural Resource Management