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Brent Collett, Ruth Nettle, Mark Paine
Faculty of Land and Food Resources

The Strategic Importance of Irrigation Customer Service Committees in Policy Implementation



PhD title: Changing rural water management: the social dimensions of regional and farm level irrigation technologies

- Qualitative research
- Total Channel Control technology case study
- Studies of technology and society
- Customer committees a key site of negotiated decision-making
- Attended meetings of two irrigation customer service committees



Customer Service Committees

- 1989 Water Act: Water Corporations have the authority to establish customer committees to advise on matters referred to by the board.
- Two functions:
 1. To represent customer views and irrigator needs;
 2. To advise and assist the Water Corporation.

The scope of committees is broadening:

- Unbundling
- Interstate trade
- Essentials Services Commission
- Channel automation technology
- Reduced allocations
- Drought contingency measures
- Contend with political activism

Customer Committees: Strategically significant

irrigators ↔ committee ↔ government



What conditions support irrigation customer service committees to carry out their strategic role in water resource management?



Conditions for Effective Committees

1. Effective internal operation;
2. Appropriate participation in decision making processes;
3. Effective feedback loops between stakeholders;
4. Drawing on community member diversity;
5. Committee earns its place as a central, negotiated decision making body with government;
6. Adherence to high quality protocols for effective committees.

1. **Effective internal operation**

- Committee has unconditional access to pertinent information;
- Transparency from water corporation and committee members;
- Conflict management strategies;
- Gives integrity to committee resolutions.



2. Appropriate participation in decision making processes

- Empowerment by the water corporation;
- Negotiated decision making via resolutions;
- Increases overall responsiveness to irrigator needs;
- Gives committee legitimacy.



3. Effective feedback loops between stakeholders

- Resources to engage with stakeholders;
- Consistency in directing stakeholders through appropriate channels;
- Committee recognised as the constituted irrigator body;
- Overall irrigation governance processes inclusive of committee processes.



4. Drawing on community member diversity

- Broad representation and diversity;
- Robust processes for negotiation;
- Allows effective debate within the committee which leads to well considered resolutions.



5. Committee earns its place as a central, negotiated decision making body with government

- Requires adequate support and resourcing;
- Provides greater consensus in decision making;
- Maintains committee position as the legitimate irrigator body.



6. Adherence to high quality protocols for effective committees

- Strong leadership;
- Regular agenda items;
- Recognition of committee timelines in planning;
- Flexibility.



Conclusion

- Irrigation customer service committees a key interface between irrigators and government;
- Functional committees are critical in the contemporary domain of WRM;
- Six criteria for effective committees;
- Engagement with committees as a routine part of WRM improves their proficiency and supports responsiveness to change.



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