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Rethinking deliberative governance: dissecting the Queensland landclearing campaign

James Whelan¹ and Kristen Lyons²

Abstract

Landclearing dominated the political and media agenda throughout the 2004 Queensland state election. The state’s rapid rate of landclearing and consequent contribution to species loss and climate change had gained widespread attention as a result of sustained advocacy by environmental non-government organisations. On polling day, voters were assured that a vote for Labor was a vote to ‘end landclearing’ and protect up to 20 million hectares of remnant vegetation. Labor’s landslide victory, demonstrably assisted by conservationists, cemented the win.

The remarkable campaign that led to this environmental commitment highlights an apparent rupture between the discourses and practices of deliberative governance and adversarial power politics. The orthodox processes of consensus politics were rejected as inadequate by conservationists in favour of a strategic blend of community mobilisation, electoral politics and protest. Environment movement leaders considered the deliberative processes available through government-initiated stakeholder consultation entirely inadequate to deliver required conservation outcomes and sought, instead, to hold government accountable for both setting and enforcing rigorous conservation standards. This approach was at odds with the prevailing emphasis on decentralised and collaborative forms of environmental democracy, and at odds with many of their allies in the conservation movement who opted to participate in government-initiated processes.

The resultant conservation victory emphasises the risks associated with accepting social capital as surrogate for ecological outcomes. This departure from the dominant mode of environmental governance has been explored through in-depth interviews with activists who were central to the decade-long campaign. The interviews are analysed against a framework that draws on contemporary theories pertaining to natural resource management, social movements, public participation and democracy.

Introduction

Queensland suffers one of the most rapid rates of landclearing in the world. During the last two hundred years of white settlement, over ?? % of Queensland’s native vegetation has been cleared. This habitat destruction is linked to biodiversity loss, climate change, as well as increased salinity. Despite international recognition of these environmental problems, landclearing has continued, driven in large part by a productivist ideology that prioritises short-term economic growth above ecological and social considerations. Indeed, such values have historically driven the trajectory of natural resource management in Australia. The victory to end landclearing – an outcome of the 2004 State election – represents a significant turning point in Australia. Indeed, the decision by the Queensland Government to regulate landclearing while remnant vegetation remains represents a departure from other states, which have all acted post-humorously to regulate clearing of native vegetation.

This paper critically examines the campaign that resulted in this environmental victory. Of particular interest are the relationships between environmental non government organisations (ENGOs) and the government sector. We examine the intersections of these actors to assess the place of deliberative governance, and groups’ decision making related to participation and/or rejection of such governance apparatus. This paper demonstrates that while most groups value consultation, they reject orthodox processes of consensus politics. This paper evaluates the basis of this decision by the ENGO sector, and provides a critique of these formal processes for natural resource management. While rejecting deliberative governance frameworks for land use, NGOs point to government as accountable for establishing adequate policy settings for land use regulation. The landclearing campaign illustrates the success of working outside formal processes of NGO/government engagement. While there are some points of collaboration between these actors, overall this campaign points to the significance of contestation in initiating social change. These findings suggest the emphasis natural resource managers place on consensus building, participation and social capital, overlooks the broader range of political and social relations that can affect social change.

Deliberative environmental governance

To appreciate the significance of the strategies through which ENGOs secured legislative and regulatory interventions to prevent broad-scale landclearing in Queensland, it is necessary, first, to briefly examine

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contemporary approaches to environmental decision-making. Who has power to determine land management practices? How is this power maintained and contested? What influence do community groups exercise and how? This examination entails reference to academic literature, social trends that shape governance, and practical illustrations of these trends.

Contemporary Australian environmental politics reflect a pattern of dispersed or decentralised power, whereby government relinquishes legislative responsibility through an elaborate and shifting set of relationships and mechanisms that engage industry and community groups, vested interest organisations and civil society. Daly (2000, p.115-116) characterises the coordination of these public-private interactions by delineating between the notion of government which is “synonymous with a particular mode of societal control (hierarchy)” and governance which implies a “network form of control, to refer primarily to a process and to be associated with its diverse agents.” Governance, according to Daly, consists of “the relationships among local, regional and national levels, the role of the state and its relationship to civil society, the (re) positioning of different interest groups and the framing, orientation and implementation of policy”. Within these relationships, government agencies are constituted as more or less equal partners in environmental management with other stakeholders, including non government organisations and interest groups who are recognised and incorporated into the processes of policy making and implementation (Doyle 2000, p.151).

This decentralised, interactive and inclusive approach to environmental governance reflects and is shaped by the parameters of contemporary western societies within which it has evolved. Doyle (2000, pp.84-85) describes this form of environmental governance as democratic pragmatism: an interactive, flexible and pluralist process of problem solving which involves “cooperation across a plurality of perspectives”. Democratic pragmatism and the power relationships it implies reflect the values and expectations of pluralist democracy, as promoted through the notion of sustainable development which emphasises the concurrent attainment of social and biophysical objectives: democracy and ecosystem maintenance or repair. Brulle (2000) utilises an alternative and comparable descriptor for these deliberative and inclusive environmental decision-making strategies in speaking of reform environmentalism: a “complex system of beliefs whose origins lie in the utilitarian philosophy of providing for the common good through the application of science and law to public problems” (p.174).

In practical terms, these forms of governance engage both government and non government entities in processes described interchangeably as community participation, consultation and engagement, including:

- committee meetings, legislative debate, hearings, public addresses, legal disputes, rule-making, project development, media investigations and policy implementation and enforcement; it can involve lobbying, arguing, advising, strategizing, bargaining, informing, publishing, exposing, deceiving, image-building, insulting and questioning (Doyle 2000, p.92).

These environmental governance mechanisms are common in western democracies including Australia, Britain, the United States, and most European Union member states. They present the opportunity (or obligation) for the active involvement and shared responsibility by ENGOs in monitoring ecosystems (through, for instance, state of the environment reporting, right to know legislation and freedom of information), proposing visions and management options (policy dialogue, public inquiries, committee hearings, environmental impact assessment, local area planning), and negotiating compromises that adequately satisfy competing interests (alternative dispute resolution and the application of environmental law).

The rhetoric of collaborative or partnership-based approaches to environmental management has permeated international fora including the 1992 and 2002 Earth Summits. The former culminated in Local Agenda 21, which proposed the adoption of deliberative environmental governance arrangements by local government. Notwithstanding the limited traction this goal achieved during the following decade, the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Anan urged delegates to the second Earth Summit to pursue sustainability objectives through partnerships inclusive of civil society, business and government (Anon 2002, pp.4-5). In Australia, the values associated with deliberative governance have been used to describe environmental management processes for decades. The veneer of inclusiveness was considered essential to the 1990s policy dialogue that resulted in proposals for Ecological Sustainable Development and is integral to the Natural Heritage Trust (II), a program to distribute natural resource management (NRM) funds to implement regional plans. The funding is purportedly conditional upon plan-making processes that satisfy criteria including collaboration and transparency (National Natural Resource Management Task Force 1999; Queensland Government 2003; Whelan and Oliver 2004).

In rejecting hierarchical and centralised forms of environmental decision-making, proponents of deliberative governance suggest both political or ideological benefits, on the one hand, and pragmatic or operational benefits on the other. In ideological terms, environmental decisions reached through deliberative, democratic and inclusive processes assert democratic legitimacy (Mason 1999, p.12; Dryzek 1997, p.85) and foster civil society (Doyle 2000, p.147). They are also considered by commentators such as Cox (1995, 2000), Putnam (1993, 1995) and Rydin (1999) to be conducive to high levels of social capital as expressed in trust, cooperation, networks, norms, moral obligations and community resilience.
Environmental managers favour inclusive processes to reduce the risk that policy initiatives might get “stalled early in the implementation phase” since “policies that are consistent with the visions, beliefs and aspirations of citizens will have more chance of success in the twenty-first century than policies imposed without consideration of citizen opinion” (Kasemir, Jäger, Jaeger and Gardner 2003: pp.6-7). Deliberative policy processes presume that individuals by themselves cannot achieve the best outcomes (Kingma and Onkyo 2000) and aim to mobilise an expanded set of resources (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). Further, Davidson and Stratford (2001, pp.41-48) consider collaborative decision-making is conducive to enhanced trust between professional experts and non-professional actors and overcomes bureaucratic censorship.

Notwithstanding these high hopes, the literature on collaborative environmental governance also points to shortcomings and potential for disappointment. Two key challenges are presented. Firstly, critics point to the risk that environmental NGO representatives engaging in “behind the scenes negotiations with industry representatives” are participating in controversial, illegitimate and elitist practices (Brulle 2000, p.190, Doyle 2000, p.158) that potentially isolate them from their constituency and limit political mobilisation. Doyle (2000) suggests that by participating in ‘corporatist’ models of decision-making, ‘reform’ ENGOs temporarily become part of the state: part of politics-as-usual and business-as-usual. This approach, Doyle argues (2000, p.191), has generated “few if any wins since the 1970s... almost no major environmental initiatives.” On the same subject of reform environmentalism, Brulle (2000, pp.192-193) observes the adoption by ENGOs of ‘parallel oligarchic structures’ and their overt influence and cooption by the state and political and economic interests.

A second concern is that deliberative governance may entail a sleight of hand whereby government agencies avoid both the cost and responsibility for environmental protection. Indeed, natural resource management partnerships have been criticised as ‘greenwash’ to allow governments to shirk their responsibilities by passing them off to civil society and business (Kanno, 2002, pp.1-3; Krishnakumar, 2002, p.2). Doyle (2000, p.145) considers this reframing of governance responsibility relies on the logic that government ‘interference’ is actually degrading to the environment, that good business is good for the environment and that the majority of citizens will behave responsibly. This logic, and the implementation arrangements essential to effective collaborative governance, unravel when government agencies initiate collaborative arrangements then fail to implement agreed-upon solutions. (Wondolleck & Yaffee 2000 p.11), exploit voluntary labour or inadequately empower, resources, publicise or continue these new initiatives (Dovers and Wildrivers, pp.494-5).

Clearly, deliberative governance is not universally considered an “abstract, God-and-motherhood notion in which the story ends with all parties walking hand in hand into the sunset” (Wondolleck & Yaffee 2000 p.20). In fact, some analysts pose fundamental questions like, “Is this sort of policy making by interaction appropriate to an ecological context?” (Dryzeck 2000, p.93) and does this trend exacerbate ‘aggressive individualism’, consistent with the spirit of democratic pluralism (Doyle 2000 p.148)? The campaign to regulate landclearing in Queensland testifies to the shortcomings of pluralist democracy and the potential for community action and political contestation to deliver significant ecological outcomes.

Two hundred years of landclearing in Queensland

By the mid 1990s landclearing was widely considered by ENGOs to be the single greatest threat to Queensland’s environment. In Queensland various ecosystems, including native bushlands, savanna woodlands and native grasslands, have all been legally cleared under legislation at a rate of around 500 000 hectares per year. The Queensland economy has historically relied on primary industries, and the majority of clearing in the state has sought to expand land availability for cattle grazing. To give a tangible sense of this magnitude – to a primarily urban-based population – campaigners frequently utilise an analogy of three football fields to describe the rate of clearing that occurs every five minutes. This area represents 85% of the total clearing that occurs nationwide. Landclearing is isolated from their constituency and limit political mobilisation. Doyle (2000) suggests that by participating in ‘corporatist’ models of decision-making, ‘reform’ ENGOs temporarily become part of the state: part of politics-as-usual and business-as-usual. This approach, Doyle argues (2000, p.191), has generated “few if any wins since the 1970s... almost no major environmental initiatives.” On the same subject of reform environmentalism, Brulle (2000, pp.192-193) observes the adoption by ENGOs of ‘parallel oligarchic structures’ and their overt influence and cooption by the state and political and economic interests.

The landclearing campaign grew during the early 1990s, and gained significant momentum in the lead up to the 1995 state election. This was largely due to the work of a number of individuals and ENGOs engaged in lobbying and media activities, including the Queensland Conservation Council (QCC) and the Wilderness Society (TWS). An early victory for the campaign resulted in the development of a draft set of guidelines for management of leasehold land by the Goss Labor Government in 1995 (these were subsequently rescinded by the state National Party in 1996). This was supported by an agreement between the newly-elected Howard Government and the state, which effectively called for an expansion in the regulation of landclearing to include freehold as well as leasehold land. At this point, however, both the state and federal governments were inactive in implementing these plans for land management. The 1996 State of the Environment Report, a Federal Government initiative, provided further impetus for the campaign, by raising the national profile of the extent and impacts of landclearing. This shift from a state to a national issue provided the impetus for the involvement of national and international ENGOs including the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). It also marked the emergence of a community campaign led by TWS which engaged in a range of community campaigning and public awareness raising activities in the lead up to the 1998 State election. Following the election of the Beattie Labor Government,
vegetation management legislation was introduced in 1999 to regulate land management. This heralded a shift in the regulation of land use by allowing the state to intervene in private land use decisions. The introduction of this legislation sparked a furious backlash from rural communities, manifest in rates of ‘panic clearing’ that were previously unseen in Queensland’s history. This devastating response reflected a failure in the legislation to engender strong community support. As such, this marked an important turning point in the campaign.

Between 2000 and 2004, a coordinated campaign was waged by TWS, QCC, WWF and the ACF. While these organisations differed in many ways, including social change philosophies and tactics, their alliance was described as “quite unbeatable”, and activities included community advocacy, market research and scientific inquiry. In 2003 Lyndon Schneiders from TWS declared “a turning point in Australia’s environmental history”, as a moratorium on landclearing was declared. This represented a significant departure from clearing laws in other parts of the country, which were implemented when there was very little vegetation remaining. The subsequent introduction of the Vegetation Management Act following the Queensland state election in March 2004 will effectively end broad-scale clearing of all remnant vegetation by December 2006.

The landclearing case study: method and purpose

Much of the research on environmental and social justice advocacy has tended to focus on outcomes and achievements of these organisations, rather than the processes by which these are achieved. In addition, minimal research has attended in detail to the complexity and contestation of environmental advocacy. This paper contributes to this field, through a critical analysis of the Queensland landclearing case.

In order to elucidate detailed data that could highlight the complexity of attitudes related to governance processes (see Minichelli, 1990; Reinharz, 1992), a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with a range of conservationists, advocates and volunteers engaged in the landclearing campaign. Participants were accessed via initial contact with a key informant from the movement. Following this, a snowball sampling technique was employed to contact other appropriate participants. To do this, at the end of each interview participants were asked to recommend further participants for the study. As a result of this sampling technique, interviews were undertaken with a diverse range of individuals representing a broad range of ENGOs involved in the campaign. To date six participants were selected for inclusion in the study, with subsequent interviews planned over the next month. In addition to interviews, participant observation was conducted at community meetings, rallies, demonstrations, ENGO meetings and celebrations. The data collected through this method provided an additional context to identify and examine themes that emerged within the interview data.

Rethinking deliberative governance

Of the four ENGOs central to this case study, QCC most actively and consistently advocated and engaged in consultative processes to influence land management. Imogen Zethoven, QCC coordinator between 1995 and 2000, was a member of committees established under four consecutive state governments to advise on the development or implementation of landclearing controls. These included the State Trees Group, the State Leasehold Review Committee and the Vegetation Management Advisory Committee. Although participation in these and other government initiated consultative mechanisms is a strategy favoured by QCC to advance their conservation objectives, Imogen spoke of open conflict between committee members, screaming matches and intimidation, non-cooperation and deliberate stalling tactics. On some occasions, farmers who held majority membership, “sat there with crossed arms” and “played games in the process”. In addition, there was a “complete lack of political will by the government”. At other times, conservation delegates intentionally stalled decisions while they awaited an anticipated change of government. Zethoven and other conservation movement representatives generally remained part of the processes, but drew the line when the State Trees Group appeared to be a “complete waste of time and space” and “there was an environmental holocaust going on”:

After a while I thought, ‘What am I doing here? This is ridiculous.’ So [QCC Chair] Roger and I quit… we weren’t going to legitimise a process we didn’t support. It wasn’t our job as advocates.

Throughout the campaign, TWS critically considered the merits of participating in stakeholder consultation. Anthony Esposito, TWS campaigner and Brisbane branch convenor, spoke of the organisation’s commitment to “good public policy, good science, good advocacy, plus a sense of fairness and ethics” and a commitment to “help civil society.” This was outweighed, though, by a sense that the ‘goal posts’ or conservation threshold offered by the 2000 landclearing legislation was an inadequate basis from which to negotiate:

There were serious deficiencies with the Act, and I think that’s exactly why TWS and other groups didn’t want to invest time in Regional Vegetation Management Plans. You’re engaging in a process and it’s time consuming, and in the service of legislation that’s flawed, and cannot possibly deliver on your objectives, so why would you put your effort into it? Now, the issue of collaboration and good will and building
relationships, you know, at the constituency community level is an important one, but it can be seen to be subverted by actively engaging in badly constructed, badly run processes.

Esposito’s assessment is echoed by TWS campaign director Lyndon Schneiders’ criticism of the inadequate “macro settings” for vegetation management and his opinion that the consultative process was an “exercise in futility”; a “long suicide note”. Despite this assessment, TWS campaigners respected the pragmatism of other organisations who embraced consultative opportunities. Esposito reflected that TWS’ attitude was, “there’s no harm in you doing that, if that’s what you want to invest your time and energy in” and that some of these groups subsequently asked themselves, “Where’s all that work gone? We don’t even seem relevant to the issue.”

The QCC decision to resign from the State Trees Group was an exception to their typically pragmatic approach. In order to maintain access to decision-makers, QCC delegates generally espoused flexible and non-ideological positions, though they sometimes resorted to “kicking doors down”. When she assumed the position as QCC coordinator in 1995, Zethoven considered, “there shouldn’t be any landclearing at all. And that's what any coordinator of QCC should be saying.” She quickly learnt, though, that,

If I said that I would be laughed out of the room. There was no way in the world anyone in government, or even anyone in the environment movement who lived in western Queensland could say that and be taken seriously saying that landclearing in Queensland should stop was as wild and insane as saying that we should land on the moon again tomorrow.... It wasn’t within the realm of possibility.

To make the most of deliberative governance, despite arrangements that favoured vested interest groups and poor mediation practices, QCC delegates required “sheer determined negotiation and some really tactful footwork”. Zethoven influenced committee decisions by cooperating with conservation colleagues including previous QCC coordinator Nicky Hungerford:

Nicky’s role was to be the peacemaker. And to calm them down during the break. Then I’d go in during the meeting and be really hard core…. It was good cop, bad cop, really. She would make them laugh and get them relaxed. Disarm them and make them more vulnerable. And I’d …[Interviewer: Kick them in the head?] Yeah.

During the latter part of the campaign, QCC and the other ENGOs involved, unanimously rejected consultative arrangements. Felicity Wishart, QCC Coordinator between 2000 and 2004 described the movement’s rejection of Premier Beattie’s ‘partnership model’ in which all parties “come to the table” to “do the deal” that is then announced and implemented by the “hero” Premier. QCC had observed a similarly consultative approach to vegetation management in New South Wales had effectively 'captured' that state’s conservation movement. Queensland conservationists opted instead for the ‘pain model’ that involved creating a critical level of community reaction to force change. This strategic reorientation acknowledged the gains made through prior advocacy, including Zethoven’s agreement with the Queensland Farmers’ Federation to protect ‘of concern’ vegetation, but rejected the possibility of an acceptable win-win outcome between conservationists and farmers.

**Funding constraints**

This case study provided insights into the influence of ENGOs' funding sources on their advocacy strategies. In particular, the landclearing campaign illustrates the creativity of NGO alliances in negotiating the minefield of funding deals and compromises.

In their recent analysis of WWF’s relationship with the Howard government, Hamilton and Macintosh (2004) observe that NGOs enjoy much higher levels of public trust than industry and government and must earn and maintain their reputation for independence and credibility. Governments work hard to secure NGOs’ endorsement, particularly in the lead up to elections as evidenced during the Queensland and Federal elections this year. The Labor Party’s commitments during these elections to control landclearing and protect old-growth forests have differentiated them from conservative parties and ensured positive media and voter attention.

Government funds are important to many ENGOs involved in the landclearing campaign. The Wilderness Society, WWF, QCC and ACF all receive recurrent funding through the Grants to Voluntary Conservation and Heritage Organisations scheme, though this represents just one of several revenue streams. Environment movement literature describes a common developmental trajectory whereby NGOs become increasingly bureaucratised and institutionalised over time (Princen & Finder 1994: p.8). Clearly there are acute pressures on NGOs to secure adequate stable revenue sources to build and maintain their institutional capacity. NGOs able to remain largely autonomous of government funding are more inclined to be critical of government policies and practices. As Hamilton and McIntosh observe, WWF and QCC have enjoyed a closer relationship with the Howard (federal) government than TWS and ACF in recent years, due primarily to their endorsement of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 which ran contrary to the strident public criticism of the legislation by ACF and Greenpeace. Since then, WWF and QCC have been appointed to government advisory committees and
government funding to WWF has increased. At the same time, funding to ACF and TWS has fallen. This is part of a broader pattern. Under the guise of ensuring accountability and transparency, the Prime Minister’s office has collaborated with conservative organisations such as the Institute of Public Affairs to measure and minimise NGO influence, with particular emphasis on ENGOs (see for instance Johns and Roskam 2004).

Diversity and specialisation

The activists interviewed in this study unanimously attributed the success of the landclearing campaign to a unified movement effort. Separately, the member groups in this alliance could draw on diverse tactics and overlapping constituencies. Acting together, they were “unbeatable” and managed to establish landclearing as the third election concern beside health and education. Labor’s landclearing commitment provided considerably stronger conservation measures than the government’s prior policies. As noted elsewhere, this movement cooperation contrasted with a history of “back-biting and recriminations” that followed campaign losses and strategic differences during forest campaigns in the 1990s. It was negotiated in a deliberate manner by the participating organisations to draw strategically on each group’s strengths.

The Wilderness Society’s unique contribution, interviewees agreed, hinged on its grassroots capacity and political acumen. Since its emergence during the Franklin Dam dispute, TWS has been recognised for its dynamic community outreach activities, ability to mobilise members and supporters, and democratic internal processes and accountability to members. In this campaign, TWS took a lead in organising rallies and public theatre (stunts and demonstrations), building coalitions, conducting public information nights in urban suburbs, and using stalls, leafleting and postcards to popularise concerns about landclearing.

As TWS is almost entirely independent of government funding, and has strong relationships with philanthropists, the organisation is less susceptible to the pressures of cooption and compromise discussed elsewhere. This, combined with a long history of overt and effective electoral campaigning, helped TWS take a lead role during elections. As Anthony Esposito reflected,

> It’s one thing the Wilderness Society is more capable at for a number of constitutional reasons than any other group in the country… and that’s getting our hands dirty in election campaigns, sticking our head up, you know, and saying things that other groups are sometimes quite constitutionally constrained from.

Interviewees considered TWS had demonstrably influenced the outcome of recent Queensland elections. The Labor Party’s environmental commitments had been rewarded by TWS campaigns in marginal electorates which boosted Labor candidates, notably (in 2004) by reducing the vote of a popular Green candidate who might otherwise have won the party’s first state seat.

Finally, TWS’ scientific and technical capacity was important to the campaign. Dr Barry Traill, bushland campaigner with TWS, brought credibility and access to the scientific community, and the TWS Dozerwatch project involved the analysis of remote sensing data and independently mapping of landclearing to validate conservationists’ claims regarding uncontrolled clearing.

Where TWS was comfortable playing the ‘rebel’ and citizen roles, QCC has historically adopted predominantly reformist tactics. As Queensland’s peak ENGO, QCC has ready access to decision-makers and decision making including a close relationship with the Premier, and actively monitors the fulfilment of policies and legislation. The organisation is also close to non-urban constituencies as it comprises regional councils and member groups throughout the state and employs a rural liaison officer. Rural outreach including regular dialogue with land managers and community education such as slide shows and public meetings enabled QCC to “manage backlash” when landclearing controls were mooted.

The landclearing alliance benefited from the close relationship between the WWF and the federal government. In fact, WWF recruited a former adviser to the Federal environment minister during the campaign and “opened up the doors to conservative politics in a way that hadn’t happened before.” WWF’s links with the scientific community, forged through their conservation program work and convening the Wentworth Group to lobby for water conservation, were also important to the campaign. A group of 480 concerned scientists released the ‘Brigelow Declaration’ in November 2003 as a communique to the Prime Minister.

Besides these organisation-specific tactics, the aligned groups effectively collaborated to develop and refine their political strategy. This analysis and the ensuing communication strategy was shaped to a considerable extent by professional attitudinal research. Focus groups held in rural and urban communities suggested that a campaign to “control landclearing” would galvanise community concern and action, whereas efforts to “stop landclearing” might arouse feelings of guilt or sympathy and the perception that conservationists were “bashing farmers”. Polls were used both passively, to gauge public opinion, and actively to influence the concerns and commitments of specific sections of the community in ways that would be detected by government in marginal electorates.
Collaboration and conflict
As reiterated above, a distinct feature of the landclearing campaign was the high level of collaboration amongst conservation groups. This collaboration provided a “winning team”, by engaging a range of campaign tactics. Louise Mathieson from TWS stated, “you need to be both inside and outside the tent” to effect social change, and collaboration amongst ENGOs provided an integrated and diverse campaign that encompassed both insider and outsider tactics. This collaboration marked a significant shift from some earlier campaign approaches. During the 1995 Queensland Election, for example, there was open conflict between groups with some opposing the conservative parties’ proposal to link Queensland to the national power grid, while others were more concerned by Labor’s commitment to duplicate the Brisbane–Gold Coast motorway through remnant bushland. The ability of groups to work together throughout the landclearing campaign, according to QCCs Zethoven, demonstrated the movement had fully recovered from these earlier “deep ruptures”.

In addition to this collaboration between groups, the landclearing campaign demonstrated the conservation movement’s engagement with science discourses generated through governance processes. While we do not suggest this represents collaboration between the ENGO and government sector, it does illustrate, at some level, communication and cooperation between these actors. An illustration of this included the use conservation groups made of the ‘State of the Environment Report’, released by the Federal Government in 1996. A key finding of the report was that nationwide, broadscale tree clearing posed the greatest single threat to biodiversity. Biodiversity loss from landclearing proved a powerful discourse to garner national interest, and in particular, urban-based community support for the campaign. The ‘State of the Environment Report’ thus appeared to significantly shift understandings of the campaign, in turn affecting campaign strategy. In addition to the ‘State of the Environment Report’, a number of other government generated science claims were also effective in bolstering the strength of the landclearing campaign and shaping the contours of the campaign. The Department of Natural Resources salinity hazard mapping, for example, was vital in highlighting the extent and severity of salinity problems in Queensland. In this sense, government funded science was an effective tool in legitimating claims that would inform the landclearing campaign.

These sites of collaboration represent an apparent engagement with science claims generated by government – at least to the extent they reaffirmed and/or shaped campaign agendas and direction. While collaboration was characteristic of this campaign, so too was conflict. This was particularly evident in the later part of the campaign, as discussed above, and related to participation in Vegetation Management Advisory Committees. In addition to criticisms of the legislation that underpinned these committees, many conservationists understood that participation in this process would withdraw limited resources from other campaign strategies. The rejection of committee participation thus ensured conservationists could engage in a range of other campaigning approaches. Conservationists believed that attempts to reduce conflict – for example, by acquiescing to participate in deliberative governance processes – would have reduced the effectiveness of the campaign, by directing limited resources towards participation in (ineffectve) committee meetings.

In contrast to this tension, throughout the landclearing campaign conservationists also made overt attempts, at times, to minimise such conflict. This was noted in regard to ENGOs’ relations with farmers and rural lobby groups, and was largely a response to the devastating outcomes of panic clearing by rural landholders following the development of legislation in 1999. Conservationists stated the importance of building alliances with the rural sector, to temper future backlash of legislation to regulate land management practices, and to ensure effective implementation of legislation. According to Felicity Wishart from the QCC:

\[
\text{There was a strong feeling in parts of the environment movement that we needed to work with the farmers. But that we needed to stop clearing. Simply making legislation wasn’t going to solve the problem.}
\]

The importance of collaboration with farmers, according to conservationists, shaped the use of language throughout the landclearing campaign – for example ‘control landclearing’, rather than ‘stop landclearing’ – and campaign tactics – including avoiding the rebel role as described Moyer, to avoid conflict with the rural sector.

Criticisms of deliberative process
The relationships formed between the ENGO and government sector outlined above demonstrate that conservationists placed value on collaboration with a range of actors engaged in the landclearing dispute. Indeed, conservationists identified both political and pragmatic benefits from fostering positive relations with government and rural landholders. It could be assumed that participation in deliberative governance processes would further assist to build relationships vital for effective implementation of the legislation. This, however, was not the case. In contrast, conservationists directed many criticisms at partnership-based approaches to governance, particularly during the later part of the campaign when conservationists were asked to participate in Vegetation Management Advisory Committees.
Over forty committees were established throughout Queensland to negotiate effective implementation of the legislation drafted by the Beattie State government. Many conservationists refused participation in these groups on the basis that it would be a “waste of time”, and would re-direct limited resources away from other campaign activities. Conservationists described the importance of “looking at what is achievable with minimal resources”. Participation in vegetation management committees would be resource intensive, with questionable outcomes. Furthermore, participation in these groups was perceived as beyond the scope of some ENGO’s, and not the role of advocacy organisations. Anthony Esposito from the Wilderness Society, for example, stated:

Groups like the ACF tend to be seen as major political players who are meant to work at that establishment level in a way, so that leaves groups like The Wilderness Society and lots of groups like us, you know, where we work from the grassroots . . . there is an engagement with our constituents and members of communities, and I think that’s really important.

Conservationists stated that participation in management committees was neither a strategic use of resources, nor an effective campaign strategy. More specifically, they believed these consultative processes were unable – within a feasible timeframe – to produce the results they were campaigning for. Like Lyndon Schneiders earlier, Anthony Esposito also pointed to deficiencies in the act, and the inability of regional processes to address the limitations of this legislation to deliver beneficial environmental outcomes. He states:

You’re engaging in a process and it’s time consuming, and in the service of legislation that’s flawed, and cannot possibly deliver on your objectives, so why would you put your effort into it? Now the issue of collaboration and good will and building relationships, you know, at the constituency community level is an important one, but it can be seen to be subverted by actively engaging in badly constructed, badly run processes.

Participation in regional processes of consultation was subsequently understood by many conservationists as detrimental to campaign objectives. Ian Gittus described this government process as a distraction that keeps organisations busy, and “leading people of the track”. Without reframing the terms of reference that would form the basis of negotiation, Lyndon Schneiders stated the best thing TWS could do “was to throw bloody stones at the process”, and at the same time, to direct resources into those aspects of campaigning that groups did best. While Lyndon was highly critical of these current macro settings, he did indicate a very clear role for Government to govern. This was reaffirmed by pressure from the community sector, who increasingly supported the view that “farmers have had a good run”, and that Government should intervene to ensure sound land management.

Conclusion
The landclearing campaign victory in early 2004 represents a significant turning point in land use management in Queensland. The culmination of campaigning by the conservation movement over at least the last decade will halt all landclearing by 2006, effectively saving 20 million hectares of Queensland’s remnant vegetation. This was achieved through unified collaboration by a range of ENGOs, forming an “unbeatable” campaign that engaged in a strategic range of grassroots community mobilisation, rallies, protest, science and technical research, lobbying and electoral politics.

This conservation win provides various insights into processes of environmental governance in Australia. Firstly, it represents a significant shift in Queensland, and indeed Australian history, by establishing a framework for the regulation of land use on both leasehold and freehold land. This represents a significant departure from dominant ideologies that accept private landowners retain sovereignty over land management. Secondly, it indicates conservationists support regional governance processes, however they are unwilling to support those with limited and/or flawed terms of reference. The collaborative partnership based models of natural resource management undertaken throughout the landclearing campaign suggest attempts by government to ensure what Dryzek defines as democratic legitimacy. However, such attempts failed due to the frameworks for negotiation, which attracted much critique from the conservation movement. Regional processes, and in particular the Vegetation Management Advisory Committees, demonstrated a “business as usual” approach to land use, by establishing a narrow framework of policy setting that limited the possibility of achieving significant positive conservation outcomes. Many ENGOs were highly critical of these so-called collaborative models for this reason, and refused to participate. It is important to note that while government rhetoric suggested these models of governance would ensure community participation in natural resource management, this was not the case due to the rejection of frameworks by conservationists. As such, thirdly, community action and political contestation by ENGOs was central to this campaign victory. Rather than building social capital through partnership models of governance, the landclearing campaign was characterised by conflict and contestation. Rather than directing energies into getting along, and in the process risk being captured by a process with a narrow and restricted agenda, ENGOs engaged in a diverse range of campaign strategies to pressure government to govern. The success of this campaign indicates the emphasis placed on building social capital alongside governing natural resources overlooks the broader range of political and social conditions that can facilitate social change.
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