



Water Management at the Interface of Government and Society

The Role of Participatory Catchment Organisations - Implications for Policy Development

Introduction

Increasingly non-governmental Participatory Catchment Organisations (PCOs) are being seen as central to the delivery of both water-related statutory legislation and community desires. Whilst this is particularly true in the UK as the devolved governments take forward the requirements of the European Water Framework Directive (WFD), it is equally true in other countries where a focus on integrated catchment management (ICM) and stakeholder engagement has taken centre stage.

PCOs, by their very nature are seen to have certain features that differentiate them from government and their agencies, particularly as regards stakeholder engagement and participatory management. These include:

- a local perspective;
- perceived independence and neutrality;
- a facilitation role;
- the ability to deliver on the ground;
- a mixture of both pragmatism and idealism; and
- effective communications, enabling them to act as an information exchange for and by the local community

Taken together, these features position PCOs to be able potentially to act as “trusted intermediaries” between government and society; thus playing a key role in delivering environmental improvement

Developing a new PCO, and then sustaining it in such a position however brings many challenges. Prominent amongst these is the inevitable tension between the “pull” of central government, its agencies and legislative programmes, and the “push” of community needs, priorities and aspirations. If a PCO moves too far one way, it risks being seen by the local community as yet another agency of government; if it moves too far the other way, it risks being seen by government as little more than a loose grouping of local activists pursuing their own agenda.

In effect, PCOs can and in many cases do become the “gatekeepers” of participative management within a catchment context. Our research programme looked to explore these issues through working closely with four PCOs and representatives of the stakeholders with whom they work and interact.

Knowledge Exchange Methodology

We brought together key participants involved in policy-making and delivery of catchment management for a week-long series of independently facilitated, interactive workshops in May 2011. These were centred on the experiences of four non-governmental participatory catchment organisations and the stakeholders with whom they interact. Academic input from the Universities of Dundee and St. Andrews was directed at setting up the programme, identifying key participants and introducing knowledge and experience from other studies and

organisations with which they had worked. In addition, they were able to ensure that the issues raised by the PCOs informed and directed the debate, and a focus was maintained on outputs of relevance to PCOs and policy-makers, as well as to academic findings.

Prior to the workshops, we circulated questions to the four collaborating PCOs - in the Tweed (Scotland/England), Dee (Scotland), Motueka (New Zealand) & Fraser Basin (Canada) - to identify key issues. Each PCO was represented by three members working at different levels within their organisation: director, catchment project management and community engagement on the ground. We also met with policy-makers and practitioners in government and agencies, to help identify potential themes and outputs as they saw them, as well as asking the same questions of the PCOs themselves.

In addition to multiple representation from each of the four PCOs, the workshops and field visit were attended by over 40 others, representing the UK (Department for Environment & Rural Affairs) and Scottish governments (flooding, river basin management planning, water quality, research); as well as other governmental agencies (Environment Agency, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission); NGOs (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Rivers & Fisheries Trust of Scotland); National Farmers Union (Scotland); Scottish Water; Local Authorities (Borders Regional Council, Grampian Regional Council); the Macaulay Institute (now James Hutton Institute) and academia (Universities of Dundee, St.Andrews, Lancaster and Sheffield).

Subsequent evaluation of the outputs from these sessions was used to produce further requests for clarification, analyses and specific examples from the PCOs. This in turn informed the co-production of draft reports and papers, which were subsequently discussed and refined via electronic communication, and through a second workshop in October 2011. This just involved representatives of the four PCOs and Dundee University.

This work was funded by and hosted at the Scottish Universities Insight Institute in Glasgow, with further support from the Scottish government and the University of Dundee.

Key Themes and Areas of Policy Relevance

The workshops covered a number of key themes shaping catchment management and catchment management organisations (PCOs), building on the lessons to be learned from the experiences of the 4 PCOs and the issues that occupy them in relation to:

- incentivising behavioural change;
- prioritising actions;
- successful implementation tools; and
- gaining the involvement of stakeholders.

We also subsequently examined:

- the emergence, operation and survival of PCOs;
- the factors that promote or hinder PCO development and progression;
- the relationship between PCOs and others involved in catchment management; and
- the evidence and knowledge with which PCOs use to make decisions.

From this, we were able to draw out the commonalities and uniqueness of different PCOs, including: different institutional structures & legislation; factors that inform the design of their catchment management approach; and methods for measuring the outcomes achieved by PCOs. Finally, we covered the unanswered questions, research and knowledge gaps.

We identified 8 themes of relevance to policy issues, the key points of which are given below, though for each further details are also available:

Science and Knowledge

- There is a need for land management cost/benefit tools to help PCOs and communities choose between different scenarios for delivery of multiple benefits within a catchment
- Better integrated systems are needed to plan the rural landscape, whilst recognising that optimising overall catchment outputs will raise sovereignty issues for individual farmers and land managers
- Communities value and want to see real data much more than modelled data, and this needs to be subjected to public scrutiny
- There is a need for PCOs to be able to provide clear evidence of improvements at sub-catchment scale, with recognition and support for better annual reporting, measures and indicators

Leadership

- PCOs need leaders with energy, vision and resources to enable them to build support, trust and delivery of local initiatives
- There is a need to develop a “community of landowners” to jointly decide priority areas for action

Stakeholders and Participation

- Issues must be real to engage stakeholders, and to get continued involvement and investment, priorities must reflect their local concerns, not just national government priorities
- Organisations need to understand and support what people value from a river system and catchment
- Community capacity for engagement in catchment management must be strengthened, including the facilitation of stakeholder appraisal of multiple options
- The ability of PCOs to undertake 1:1 consultations is a key strength that should be promoted

Organisational factors

- Adoption of a principles-based, national approach to integrated catchment management must recognise that context (place, culture, history and governance) will require local variability
- PCOs, governments and local communities need to be able to measure progress towards integrated catchment management, and to assess the effectiveness of PCO delivery
- PCOs that are too small will lack capacity, competency and continuity
- Boundaries may need re-organising to encourage work between organisations

Government and Governance

- PCOs deliver stuff agencies and governments cannot – local perspective; neutrality; facilitation; delivery; realism and idealism; information exchange; appropriate communication mechanisms, etc.
- Governance of PCOs must balance local decision-making, community desires and individual catchment issues with national direction and priorities
- Governments need to bring new resources to support PCOs, but not themselves take top-down control, so that PCOs retain local relevance and independence
- Failures often occur where individuals or organisations are perceived to win at the community’s expense

Funding

- PCOs need secure, long-term core funding from a variety of reliable sources
- Financial incentives for behavioural change are vital – alongside other support, information, peer pressure, market advantage and advice from PCOs
- Support systems for land management must be re-aligned to help deliver multiple benefits to society and catchment ecosystem outputs

Communications

- Focus should be placed on improving understanding by land managers of the impacts of their actions on other parties and ecosystem services, and how this relates to upstream/downstream stakeholders
- Pilot Demonstrations of what succeeds/what fails are important learning tools for PCOs, governments, communities and others
- PCOs can play a key role, using a simple “common language” to facilitate communication and to enthuse communities, researchers, policy-makers and practitioners
- Better connections need to be made between healthy ecosystems and quality of life.

Time

- Incentives for change need to be sustainable and to be targeted and grouped in the correct geographical locations to achieve sustained impact
- Economic drivers change people’s behaviour quickly, but need to recognise different stakeholders have different timescales
- PCOs develop overtime through financial consistency, by being consensus based, by building trust and by providing proof of delivery through, e.g. report cards and reports

Policy Implications

By their very nature and positioning within the catchment, water management issues and the role of PCOs spread across many policy sectors. The work has implications for policies covering elements of environment, health, education, planning, research, water, agriculture, urban and rural affairs. However, whilst the research has highlighted individual sector issues, here we focus on general priorities for policy action:

Key issues which will need to be considered in policy development include:

1. [Establishing a generic governance framework for catchment management](#) within which PCOs can retain their independence, but assist delivery of both national and local priorities: - for example, recognising the importance of locally-set priorities alongside national legislative requirements and “top-down” setting of the participative agenda
2. [The involvement of PCOs, land managers and other practitioners more directly in the development of policy and the design of land management and planning support schemes](#): - for example, in the prioritisation, alignment and funding of local and national agricultural support and development programmes to deliver multiple benefits
3. [The development of new methodologies, processes and tools for catchment management](#): - for example, the need for cost/benefit methodologies to help PCOs and communities choose between different planning options and scenarios for the delivery of multiple benefits within their catchment
4. [The provision of support to PCOs, local communities, agencies and policy-makers for capacity building and training](#): - for example, to improve their competencies and resourcing to be able to respond to consultations and to multiple benefit analyses of different catchment planning scenarios
5. [The development of operational examples of integrated catchment management \(using existing, accessible information\)](#): - for example, the need to develop pilot studies of the potential for an ecosystem services approach to be delivered through PCOs and other organisations involved in water-related activities within a catchment

6. **Linking national and local priorities for catchment management outcomes:** - for example, aligning optimum land use decisions at a local scale with a national rural land use strategy
7. **Provision of core funding for PCOs:** - sustaining the core work of existing PCOs and facilitating the development of new ones requires multiple sources of sustained financial contribution
8. **Linking urban and rural development policy at the catchment scale:** - for example, identifying where urban planning and development policies impact on the water environment (and vice-versa) at a catchment scale, and so avoiding potential perverse subsidies and policy direction
9. **Establishing more direct linkages between environmental health and community health:** - for example, promotion of the linkages between the water environment and locally-based industry, employment and social well-being within the catchment, such as fisheries and regional culture
10. **Developing a common communications strategy and language:** - for example, PCOs and government need to utilise the same language around sustainable development and catchment ecosystem health as individual policy and business sectors, so as to highlight interactions and opportunities for complementary delivery of objectives
11. **Aligning timescales and geographical areas for policy development and delivery across different sectors within a catchment context:** - for example, replacement of short-term funding packages (e.g. farm and forestry support schemes) with long-term, sustainable options at the appropriate geographical scale to deliver sustained catchment-wide benefits
12. **Comprehensive and integrated reporting:** - for example, the development of a set of integrated indicators of catchment health across relevant sectors, including the assessment of the added value provided by PCOs themselves.

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Links to relevant organisations

UNESCO Centre for Water Law, Policy and Science: www.dundee.ac.uk/water

Tweed Forum: www.tweedforum.com

Dee Catchment Management Partnership: www.theriverdee.org

Fraser Basin Council: www.fraserbasin.bc.ca

Motueka: www.landcareresearch.co.nz

For further information on the Scottish Universities Insight Institute please visit: www.scottishinsight.ac.uk , contacting Insight staff using the details provided there.