

Collaboration and how it applies in a Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora context

There are many definitions of, and approaches to, collaboration amongst iwi, councils and stakeholders, as well as between different professional groups.

To help chart a path through all this rich diversity, the project partners have used a definition of collaboration recommended by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). The IAP2 is a professional body whose members comply with a strict code of ethics and standards. This is especially important in challenging projects like Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora where lots of different values need to be taken into account.

The IAP2 recommends that any community process considers carefully the best way to include communities in projects by assessing the project against the Public Participation Spectrum:

The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, and most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise (or commitment) being made to the public at each participation level. The Spectrum is widely used and is quoted in most community engagement manuals.

Collaboration is considered desirable for Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora because of the level of complexity in the project and the importance of developing a plan that can be implemented by land owners, consent holders, and implementing organisations like Waikato Regional Council.

The IAP2 goal for collaboration is:

to partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

This means that the commitment by project partners River iwi and council, to the collaborative stakeholder group is to:

...look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible.

The Spectrum is attached, and is also part of Stakeholder Engagement Strategy which can be accessed on the Waikato Regional Council website:

<http://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/Council/Policy-and-plans/Plans-under-development/Healthy-Rivers---Plan-for-Change/The-process>

Council and River iwi partners considered it useful to commit to a specific definition of collaboration which was supported by a professional body. The IAP2 definition of collaboration shows how collaboration might be different from other ways of developing policy that may have been used in the past and can be clearly articulated in the statutory processes that are part of the plan change, such as the Environment Court.

Benefits and challenges of collaboration

Working together collaboratively should not be regarded as an easy choice. Seeking solutions across diverse values can be intense, challenging and tangled. It can take stamina

and persistence to keep talking constructively across these diverse values so that a solution can be found.

On the other hand, collaboration helps us be more innovative, come up with better solutions, and understand the depth and complexity of the challenge in front of us. By collaborating on this plan change, we will come to understand how the plan change will impact on people's lives and develop policy that works on ground.

There are many different examples of collaboration and some participants in the collaborative stakeholder group will be aware of the Land and Water Forum process. Many iwi environmental plans recommend collaborative planning and Environment Canterbury is nearing completion of a collaborative statutory planning process. Lessons have been drawn from these processes in designing the Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora stakeholder engagement strategy.

At the end of the day, our process will have similarities and differences from what has happened elsewhere. We'll learn together what will work for the Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora project and, no doubt, the process will adapt over time.

The decision making process

The IAP2 recommends that good community processes should be clear about the decision making process from the start of the project. That way those participating understand how decisions are going to be made, and who will be making them.

Under the legislation, River iwi and council are charged with making the final decisions on the plan change. Their commitment to the CSG is to "incorporate (the CSG's) advice and recommendations to the maximum extent possible" (Draft CSG Terms of Reference, p2).

The collaborative stakeholder groups' role is to:

- bring stakeholders together early to seek a common path forward
- actively involve those communities affected by the plan review process, so that lasting outcomes are achieved
- act as the central channel for stakeholder and broader community involvement
- intensively review and understand the technical, social, cultural and economic complexity of the project
- inform and guide decision makers (Draft CSG Terms of Reference, p2).

To ensure that structures are in place to support this relationship, an elected representatives group has been formed which includes representatives of the governance bodies of River iwi and council – the Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora Committee.

Collaboration should be purposeful

Collaboration is not just about talking together; it is also about action to achieve a goal. The primary and secondary goals of Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora are outlined below:

Primary project goal:

The primary goal of the Healthy Rivers - Plan for Change/Wai Ora - He Rautaki Whakapaipai project is for Council and Waipa and Waikato River Iwi to jointly recommend that the Council notify a change to the Plan that addresses the adverse effects of discharges in the Waipa and Waikato River catchments (Project Plan, 28/1/13).

Secondary goals:

In order to contribute to achieving the restoration and protection of the Waikato and Waipa Rivers, the Waikato Regional Plan review process should:

- 1. seek, over time, to improve river/water body quality;*
- 2. focus at first on defining the issues and options relating to water quality;*
- 3. develop a range of possible land management scenarios, including options for limits and targets for the river/water bodies. These land management scenarios and limits and targets need to be based on sound environmental, cultural, scientific and economic information;*
- 4. use a mix of methods, which may include rules, education, incentives, including industry self-regulation, that the Waikato Regional Council may use to facilitate the necessary changes on the ground. These methods to be discussed and developed alongside the setting of limits and targets.*

Wherever possible decisions will:

- a. understand the impacts of the limits and targets on the wellbeing of the community;*
- b. maximise the economic and environmental sustainability of businesses;*
- c. minimise financial impacts on the regional community.*

These goals were signed off by River iwi and council in the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, p16.

Conclusion

Finally, there is no one way to approach collaboration. Being part of a collaborative process is to be part of a lively debate in the international, national, regional and local communities about what, how, who and why collaborate.

It depends also on the project partners and the collaborative stakeholder group exploring together the definition of a successful collaboration. The staff on the project will be putting in place processes to review progress and continuously improve the practice of collaboration.

As project staff, we look forward to working together to find the approaches to collaboration that best suit the collaborative stakeholder group, our communities and Council and River iwi partners. The role of the Community Engagement Workstream is to support the CSG to achieve the project goals through high quality stakeholder and community participation in Healthy Rivers/Wai Ora.

Wendy Boyce, Community Engagement Workstream Leader.

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum



Increasing Level of Public Impact 

Inform

Consult

Involve

Collaborate

Empower

Public participation goal

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Promise to the public

We will keep you informed.

We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.

We will implement what you decide.

Example techniques

- Fact sheets
- Web sites
- Open houses

- Public comment
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Public meetings

- Workshops
- Deliberative polling

- Citizen advisory Committees
- Consensus-building
- Participatory decision-making

- Citizen juries
- Ballots
- Delegated decision