

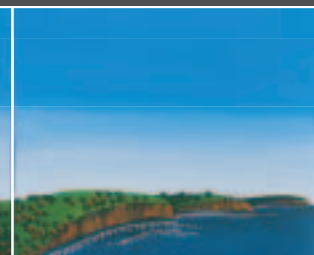
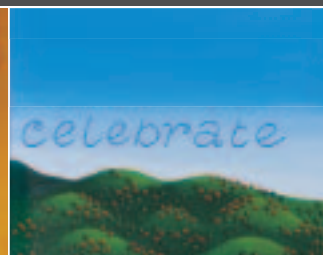
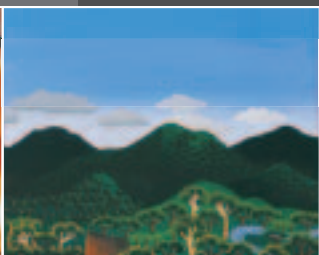


Australian Government

Land & Water Australia

RESEARCH MEETS POLICY

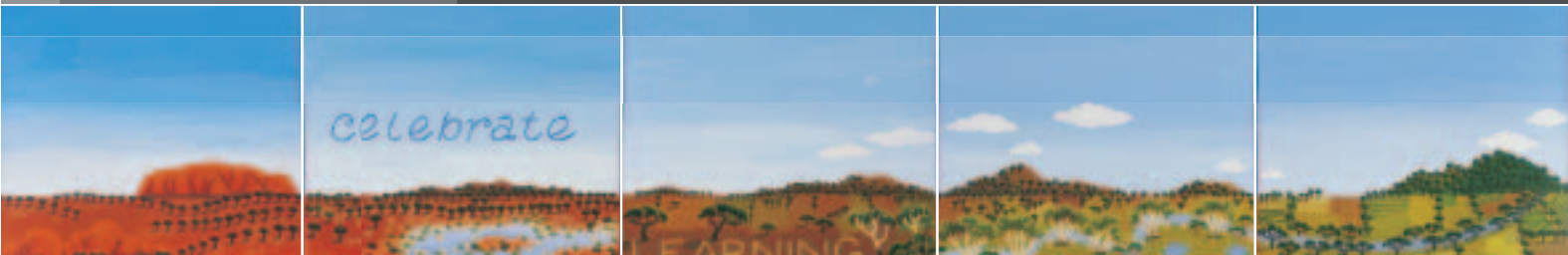
IMPROVING THE UPTAKE OF YOUR RESEARCH



Improved natural resource management in Australia relies upon good public policy and the sound advice that supports it. As a researcher working in natural resource management your research may be useful to inform the development and implementation of policy. For your research output to translate into meaningful policy outcomes, it needs to be taken up by people in government.

Land & Water Australia has devoted considerable effort to developing strategies to improve communication of research findings to policy makers at all levels of government. You also have a critical role to play in assisting the take up of your research.

PATHWAYS TO INFORMING POLICY



There are many pathways by which research results can inform policy. The more traditional techniques of alerting a policy audience to your research findings include articles and reports in appropriate magazines (such as Land & Water Australia's *People Make a Difference* or *RipRap*) or newsletters and email alerts or stories in the mass media.

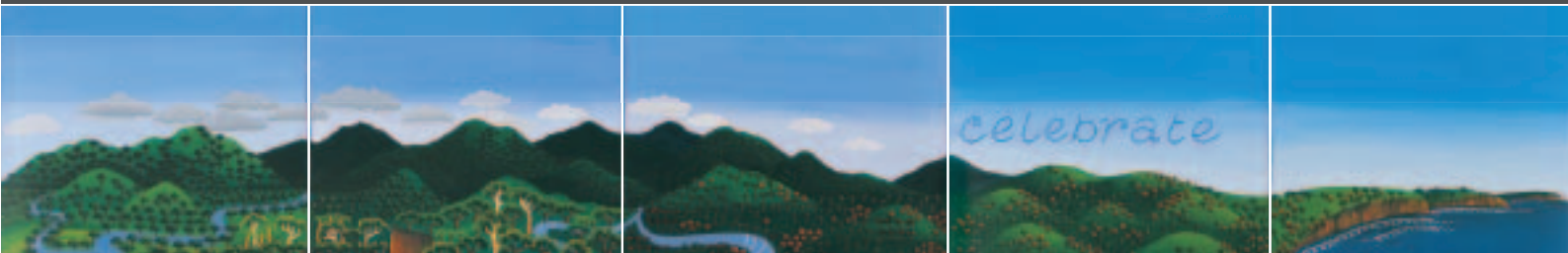
Land & Water Australia also produces a series of 'research project policy sheets' in which researchers are asked to distil their key policy-relevant research findings. Policy Sheets are short and pithy, and seek to make a connection with the policy-making process.

There is also the avenue of directly communicating research to policy audiences through giving seminars to government officers or providing specific briefings to policy makers particularly if policy officers have been engaged through the life of the research project.

All of these are worthwhile as part of a broader communication process which seeks to:

- identify the needs and motivations of potential users in the policy community;
- ensure the message is well packaged and well presented;
- facilitate an ongoing dialogue.

KEY PRINCIPLES



KEY PRINCIPLES

There is more to transferring research into policy than merely producing a research policy sheet or presenting a slide show.

It will be important to shape your project for a policy audience from the outset.

Your research design could include inviting policy officers to join the project steering committee and will require a comprehensive communication strategy. Communication must be considered integral and continuous, not as an add-on or extension activity.

There are many ways to approach the challenge of informing policy but in its simplest form it is all about knowing the audience and preparing your message.

There are 4 key principles:

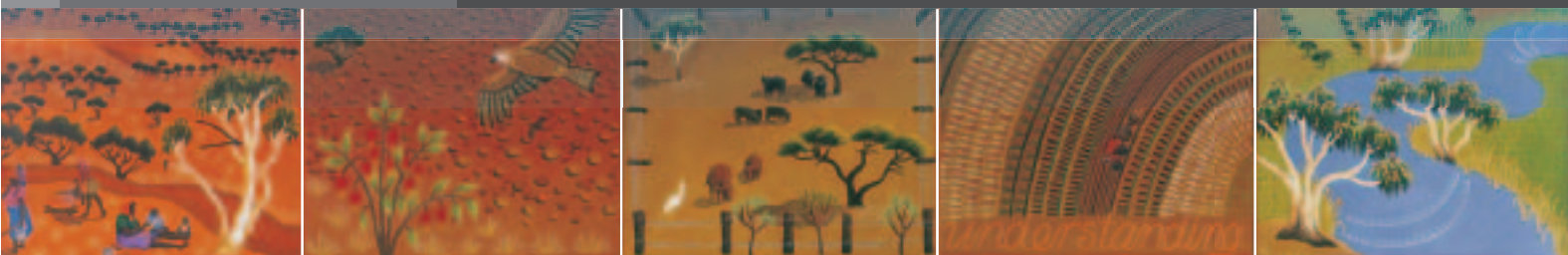
1. **Understand the relevant policy-operating environment**
2. **Prepare your message**

3. **Produce effective communication products**

4. **Facilitate opportunities for follow up interaction with policy makers**

Principles 1 and 2 are about understanding and articulating the context of your research. Principle 3 involves creating actual products, and principle 4 is about capitalising on any opportunity you create. All four principles and associated processes may not be appropriate to your research but if your research has a policy dimension it's worth keeping them all in mind. The principles may seem to be common sense but they provide a useful guide. Test yourself, see how many of the questions posed in the following sections you can confidently answer in respect to your own research.

Some researchers may need other experts to provide advice or to facilitate meetings, briefings and other forms of interaction.



I. UNDERSTAND THE RELEVANT POLICY OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

There is a wide range of policy-making communities that might be informed by your research. Many of these reside in government departments and agencies but they also include people who are involved in parliamentary inquiries, productivity commission inquiries, ministerial councils, or they might simply be a small group of policy officers with a particular policy problem. They all have their own priorities and processes that you need to be aware of.

The more information you have about the relevant policy-operating environment, the greater your capacity to shape and communicate your research to improve the chances of it being taken up. Knowing the environment will enable you to use appropriate language, identify relevant priorities and address specific concerns. It will also provide the 'intelligence' on when to present your research in a timely and appropriate manner, and who to target.

It helps if your research topic or results can be related clearly using issues and examples that are familiar and of interest to the policy user. It helps if these issues

and examples deal with an issue that policy-makers can do something about, if it can be built into pending decisions, and/or if it offers evidence for a policy effort.

Pay particular attention to priorities of the senior policy makers. If you can present your research outputs in a form that addresses their priorities you have a powerful lever to inform policy. It's unlikely that you will get much opportunity to spend time with key senior staff. In most cases they'll first learn about your research through research policy sheets, policy briefings and what they are told by the officers in their area. If the messages they see and hear resonate with their needs it is likely that you will be asked to provide additional information.

Some of what you need to know will be on the official record but much of the important information is cultivated by building relationships with people in and around the policy-making area of the relevant agency or group. Of course, relationship building takes time and effort but if done intelligently this is an ongoing investment with potential to pay large dividends.

Find people to advise you about who might be an appropriate person to meet with and people who might help arrange a meeting.



BUILD AN INTELLIGENCE FILE ON THE POLICY-MAKING AREA RELEVANT TO YOU

How much information do you have about how a relevant policy area works? Why not start up your own file where you can begin to build a picture about what and who it is you would like to communicate with about your research. Not only will this provide you with a useful record of the information about a specific group of policy makers, it will also highlight holes in your understanding about your target audience that need to be addressed.

Basic questions that your file should address might include:

Which government agency is relevant to the research you are involved in? What is the structure of the policy-making section of that agency? Who are the key people? What processes are involved in developing policy? How are decisions made? What is the timing of the policy cycle? What are the stated priorities of the agency or group? What type of information gaps are apparent in the past in the process of formulating different pieces of policy? What form do they like to receive their information in?

2. PREPARE YOUR MESSAGE

MAKE SURE YOU ARE CONFIDENT AND ARTICULATE ABOUT THE KEY POINTS COMING OUT OF YOUR RESEARCH THAT ARE RELEVANT TO POLICY.

In clear and simple English - what is important about what you do? Can you talk or write about the key points of your own research in plain speak? It can be difficult to reduce complex work into short statements using plain language and will inevitably remove the precision and some of the power of the work. However, you're not seeking to impress fellow researchers. The aim is simply to get the message over to busy people who are not up on the details of your area of expertise and do not have time to be presented with detailed scientific information.

An excellent way of preparing for this is to undertake media training. Many large organisations and universities now regularly encourage their research staff to participate in these courses and if you want to inform policy this is good preparation. The central theme in preparing for interaction with the media is to know your central message and make sure you're 'on message' in any interview situation.

Time is critical, especially for television and radio. You simply won't be given space to explain the full context of your research. When going into any interview



situation it is paramount that you have already decided the key points of the message you want to get across and that you use every opportunity to state and reiterate these points.

Importantly, remember that with media interviews you will have limited time and will need to be clear and sure.

KNOW YOUR MESSAGE, PRACTICE ITS DELIVERY, BE 'ON MESSAGE'

What are the key points (of relevance to policy) of your research?

Can you distil your research down to three main points? (More than this will dilute the clarity of what you are trying to say.) Do you know these points so well that you could rattle them off with confidence and enthusiasm to a group of people who have no knowledge of your research area?

Have you practised delivering your message to an audience outside of your research area? Communication and marketing officers within your organisation are a good audience for testing your approach. Encourage their constructive criticism. It's only through practise that you can be confident of your ability to stay on message.

3. PRODUCE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PRODUCTS

The first principle is about cultivating an understanding of where and how your research might inform policy. Principle 2 is about distilling the key messages from your research. The third principle guides translation of that message into appropriate communication products. What's appropriate depends on the policy audience you are dealing with and your relationship with that audience.

Where possible deliver your message in such a way that it offers solutions to key issues or questions, be practical and pragmatic and avoid telling the target audience they are wrong. It helps to draw on present real-world examples and to attempt to quantify the impacts of options.

As already discussed there are many pathways you could choose (e.g. articles, briefings, seminars). An excellent initial strategy for presenting significant research findings is with a research policy summary. Good templates to consider for this are the Research Project Policy Sheets produced by Land & Water Australia's Social and Institutional Research Program. These information sheets are very succinct (not more



than one or two pages) and developed in a format similar to a ministerial brief which is familiar to natural resource management policy decision-makers.

In the first instance researchers draft these policy sheets. They are intended to be pithy, focussed and easily digested. The policy sheets aim to encourage policy-makers to seek further and more in-depth information. They might also be used to communicate with a range of secondary targets including resource managers, investors and the media.

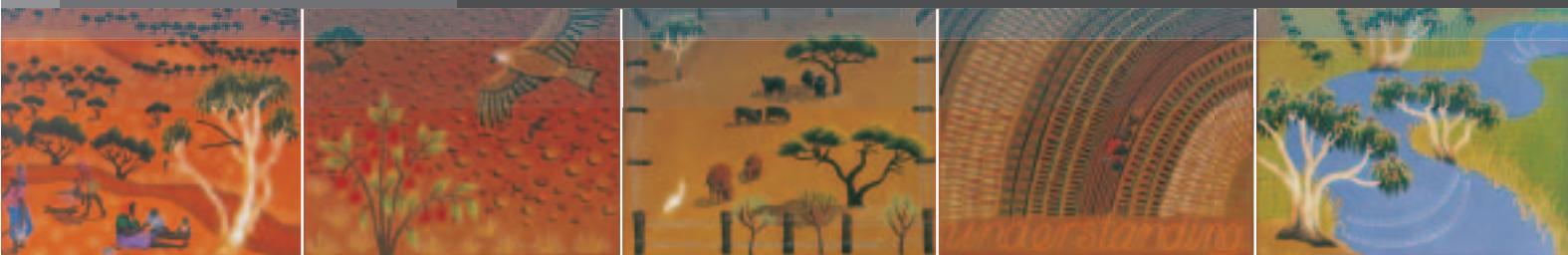
In framing a policy sheet to engage policy-makers in the findings of your project, the following set of target questions may help you to put yourself in the shoes of the target audience:

- How do the findings contribute to thinking about selection, design or application of policy instruments?
- How do the findings assist the creation of more effective institutions?
- Do the key findings address on-ground management issues or the policy, social, legal, economic and institutional settings of these? Do they operate across a wide range of contexts (sectors, jurisdictions, places)?

- Are the key findings suitable and relevant to the particular attributes of policy problems in ecologically sustainable development/natural resource management (eg. spatial and temporal scale, connectivity between problems etc.)?
- Where the project has examined past events or arrangements, how will the key findings contribute to future natural resource management demands?
- Is there an identified adoption pathway for implementation of recommendations? What action is required and by who?

Land & Water Australia has produced a template for researchers to follow when putting together a Policy Sheet.

For examples of policy sheets please visit the Land & Water Australia website at <www.lwa.gov.au/sirp>.



POLICY SHEET FORMAT

Project title

- A concise and catchy title attracts readers.

A research outcome that you can use

The key findings (from a policy perspective, not from an academic perspective) are the most important part of the policy sheet. While the main audience is policy makers the language should be accessible to others. Each of the questions under this heading should be answered in no more than two concise sentences.

- What knowledge or product have you developed?
- Who will find it useful and how?– i.e. you will find it useful in/for....
- What is the significance of what you are offering? i.e. It will enhance.....

How can you use the research output?

This explains through clear dot points where and how the knowledge/ product can be applied and how it will be helpful to the policy-maker/advisor/decision-maker.

How was the knowledge or product developed?

This brief section will help the reader understand the context of the research and the methodological

approach. It is important here to use clear plain English and no more than a couple of sentences.

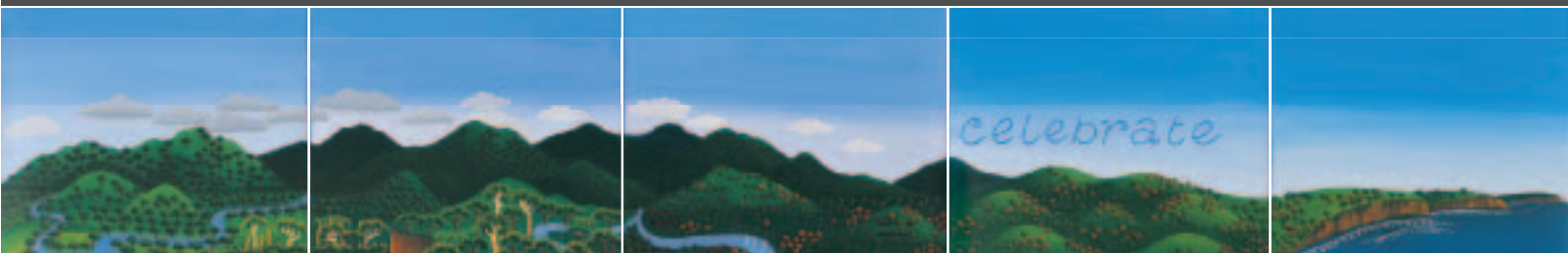
- What did you set out to find out?
- What were the problems/issues/information gaps that led to the idea for this project?
- What methodology was used (simple, concise language)?

Can you rely on it?

- Explain what gives the knowledge credibility and reliability
- Why was this the most appropriate/useful approach?

Further Information

- Provide details of where you can be contacted
- Acknowledge your sponsor/s and provide contact details for them
- Offer to arrange a face to face policy briefing or other option for further communication
- Provide links/access details to final reports, published papers, relevant communication products from your project



If you are preparing a Policy Sheet attempt to follow this template but then test it against these questions:

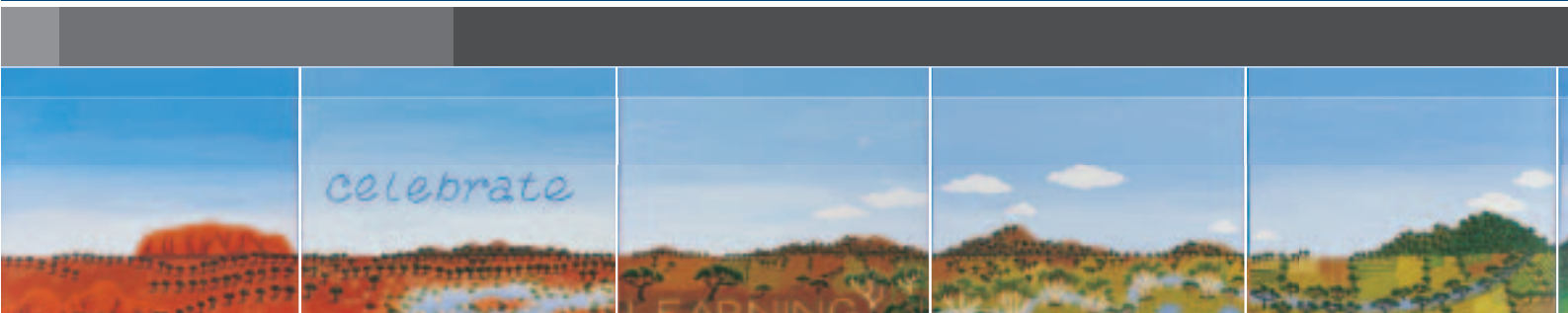
- Will it work in the policy-making environment that relates to your research?
- Does it address the priorities of senior policy makers?
- Having written the Policy Sheet do the key points leap off the page at you?
- Can you spot the key points within seconds?
- Do they make sense to someone outside of your area? Have you tested this?

These same questions may also be relevant to other communication products you might prepare.

BRIEFINGS ARE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

For briefings good preparation is especially important. Being prepared for a presentation means being confident. Is the amount of information you are presenting appropriate for the time that has been allotted? Are you familiar with the technology you will be using? (The best presentations can be undone if the presenter is not able to operate the computer or their props fall apart.) Have you done a test presentation? After your practice run did you ask the test audience what they thought were the key points? What feedback can they give you on the clarity and interest of your presentation?

Briefings take time and energy to arrange. If you are asked to give a policy briefing you have a golden opportunity to demonstrate the policy relevance of what you do to people who are interested enough to give you the opportunity to talk about your research.



4. FACILITATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOLLOW UP INTERACTION WITH POLICY MAKERS

You've done the hard yards - made the effort to understand the policy-making environment, worked on your message to make it relevant and concise, been successful in presenting your work. It would be tragic if after all this effort nothing happened, if despite all the positive noises made your research is not helping to inform policy. Yet that is frequently the outcome because informing policy is not something that happens quickly or easily. It requires patience and persistence.

After meetings make sure all agreed follow-up actions are put in writing and followed through. Make sure policy people are able to contact you should further details be required. Keep the avenues of communication open. Make yourself as accessible and as valuable as possible to policy people.

Informing policy is an iterative process in which both sides learn as the interaction progresses.

CULTIVATE A CHAMPION

Is it possible to cultivate a champion for your research within the policy-making section of the relevant agency? This would be someone who was prepared to create opportunities for your voice to be heard, ensure that the right people are present at appropriate meetings and who might carry your messages for you.

Cultivating a champion is a two-way street in which you are building relationships, learning about the policy-making organisation and feeding your research to people who will be influencing the manner in which policy is formed. Your champion will only work for you if he or she sees the value in your work. For that value to be there you need to know what drives the formation of policy.

A CONCLUDING NOTE



The process outlined here will assist you to more effectively inform policy with your research. The more you build your relationships and cultivate your messages the greater the chances of your success.

An excerpt from a paper on communicating to policy makers demonstrates the 4 principles in action. The extract illustrates that successfully making strategic connections between research and policy is a result of continuously adopting a range of strategies.

"I appeared in the national media (print and electronic) and gave numerous talks to a wide range of audiences in all relevant states, including senior public servants in Canberra. I spoke and emailed with various policy makers or policy advisors in Canberra and in several states. I learned a lot about inter-agency rivalries, State-Commonwealth relations, Ministers' personalities, and so on. In June 2001 the new Labor State Government (WA) established a Salinity Task Force reviewing the State's policy directions, and I was included on the Task Force, allowing me to interact further with Ministers, senior public servants, lobbyists and the community. All in all, it was quite a crash course in the way that governments work. At times it appears my influence has still been

rather small, but I believe it has been non-zero, particularly at the state level. In any case, one of the key points is how slow the process of policy change can be and how important it is to be persistent."

Professor David Pannell,
University of Western Australia

From a paper presented to the 47th Annual Conference of the Australian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society in 2003.
See <http://www.general.uwa.edu.au/u/dpannell/polmkrs.pdf>

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