

Land Use Change and Response in the Gisborne District of Waipaoa:

Summary of a Case Study Using a Multistakeholder Approach

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Landcare Research

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MAF Policy
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
PO Box 2526
Wellington

Telephone (04) 474 4100
Facsimile (04) 474-1163

Requests for further copies should be directed to:

Manager
MAF Information Bureau
PO Box 2526
Wellington

Telephone (04) 474 4100
Facsimile (04) 474 4111

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Preface

The social, economic and environmental consequences of landuse change present significant challenges to rural populations in many parts of New Zealand. In December 1993, the then Ministries of Agriculture and Fisheries, and of Forestry jointly held a symposium to discuss the findings of a number of research projects on this topic (some of these were published as MAF Policy Technical Paper 94/8). It was hoped that strategies might be developed for identifying the most effective approaches for managing landuse change. Representatives of local government; farming, environmental, and women's organisations; universities and Crown Research Institutes; and of Government agencies (including TPK, Parliamentary Commission for the Environment), attended. Key issues identified were also discussed at other conferences and meetings.

It was recognised that landuse change impacted in very different ways on different communities, but that there are some common principles for effectively managing change. These are that processes for managing change should be inclusive (all interested parties may participate as they wish), comprehensive (reflect social, economic and environmental matters), aim for sustainable outcomes (be long term), and most important be owned and driven by the community. In 1995 MAF sponsored an operational research project to test the effectiveness of this approach. Landcare Research was the successful tenderer (involving Dr Graham Daborn, Carole Donaldson, and John Kape).

Discussions had continued with representatives of various groups from the Gisborne District following the original 1993 symposium, and there was considerable enthusiasm for the project to be carried out in the East Coast. In the event, a project to document the feasibility of using a multi-stakeholder approach to help a rural community adjust to the effects of rapid landuse change was begun in the Waipaoa catchment. This area was selected as it involved several land types (hill country and flats) and the community was experiencing difficulty in coming to terms with a change from pastoral farming to forestry. A long-term objective was to find appropriate land use practices that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable in the district. To this end, the Department of Geography at Auckland University (under Dr Willie Smith) became involved in the project, with several Masterate theses undertaken in parallel with the main research project.

While the terms of the operational research project have been met by Landcare Research, the time frame has been too short to assess whether the project has been successful in enabling the community to develop tools to effectively manage landuse change.

Dr Ann Pomeroy
Manager Rural Policy

Background

The Waipaoa Catchment on the East Coast of New Zealand extends over about 250,000 hectares of the central Gisborne region. The catchment includes a number of different landforms, the two most significant of which are steep hill country and fertile flood plains. These account for 92% and 5% respectively of the total land area of the catchment.

The flatlands are intensively farmed, primarily in vegetables and fruit but with a small and increasing area devoted to deer farming and lamb finishing. Maize, sweetcorn and squash are the main vegetable crops and citrus, kiwifruit and grapes are important fruit crops. There have been significant economic challenges in the last decade as regional food processors have closed and as land use changes elsewhere have impacted on the region. The area is also vulnerable to flooding. Subdivision of farming land for life-style blocks and the compaction of superior soils are additional continuing issues for this area.

The hill country is prone to erosion. This has been brought about mainly by the clearance of indigenous forest and the subsequent use of the land for pastoral agriculture. Breeding-cows and ewes are the main livestock types, and farmers breed their own stock replacements. About 40% of the properties are Maori owned. There has been a significant shift from farming to plantation forestry in the last 30 years. In the last decade this trend has accelerated. In the 1960s forestry was sponsored by the government as a soil conservation measure in severely eroding headwater areas. More recently, there has been a growth in new planting by forestry investment syndicates on moderately erodible land closer to Gisborne. Now, some 20% of hill country is planted in exotic forestry (predominantly *pinus radiata*).

This area around Gisborne may be viewed as a model of the close association (indeed interdependence) between land use, economic activity, population and the availability of social services which characterises much of rural New Zealand. Changes in any one of those activities inevitably impacts significantly (either for good or bad) on the others. Specific effects of the interdependence, such as changes in employment opportunities, rural depopulation, the loss of rural services, change in demographic structure and change in social structures are all evident in the area.

Whether for good or bad, change is inevitable and demands a response. Communities have choices as to their responses. They may either accept change and make the best they can of it, or they may attempt to anticipate the opportunities change may offer and channel it so that the community benefits to the maximum extent. Whichever approach is adopted, sustainability is an issue. This is reinforced by the *Resource Management Act*. For that reason alone, if for no other most rural communities must consider the concept of sustainability as a central component in managing change.

This paper synthesises two papers prepared by Landcare Research for the Ministry of Agriculture and submitted in August 1997. Those papers examine the Waipaoa Catchment in the Gisborne District (as a pilot or initial case study) through a 'multistakeholder approach', in an attempt to begin a process of community response to change and to determine the applicability of the process generally.

Multistakeholder processes have evolved as a means of ensuring wide public participation in decision making, particularly in rural areas. The processes are designed to ensure that all interests within a

community have an opportunity to contribute to the its long-term development. Specifically, they offer opportunities to:

- enhance public awareness of environmental, socio-economic and cultural issues and the links between these;
- resolve conflicts within a community and between resource users; and
- ensure that plans developed by central and local government reflect community aspirations.

There are successful examples of multistakeholder approaches to community development in Australia and Canada. In New Zealand, the 1989-1995 Rabbit and Land Management Programme implemented in the South Island used elements of the process. This programme was successful but not completely inclusive from a community viewpoint. The Waipaoa Catchment Project was established to build on such earlier successes and to ‘demonstrate the potential effectiveness of community-based decision making’.

This paper is written quite explicitly for the lay-reader. It focuses on the central core of the work in the original papers. The theoretical frameworks, technical detail of the processes, base data relating to the material, and much of the detail of the work in the area and the decisions reached are in the original papers. These may be borrowed from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry’s Information Bureau.

The Waipaoa Catchment Within the East Coast Region

This region has a long history of land use change, associated at first with the development of pastoral agriculture and later with a shift from pastoral farming to exotic plantation forestry. Both shifts have forced consequent changes on the nature of the regional community and on the relationships within that community. These occurred either directly, where a change in land use impacted on the need for specific services, or indirectly where severe climatic events modified land use, in turn impacting on community resources.

The major changes in land use including the move away from sheep and cattle farming to forestry have occurred both in response to market demands and for reasons of environmental management. Initially, government subsidies were a significant factor in decisions to plant trees to protect the land. Now, the East Coast Forestry Project (under which grants are given for the conversion of erosion prone agricultural land to plantation forestry and itself the successor to schemes dating back some decades) is one of the few remaining land-related subsidy programmes in New Zealand. Since the early to mid 1990s, commercial forestry plantations have become a significant land use in some parts of the area.

Agricultural servicing industries have also changed in the 1990s. Several large food processing plants have closed, both reflecting and exacerbating the decline in agricultural production in the region.

Tension between different land users has been caused by these changes. Many farmers see the forestry companies as ‘bad neighbours’ because of the different requirements of forest and pastoral farming

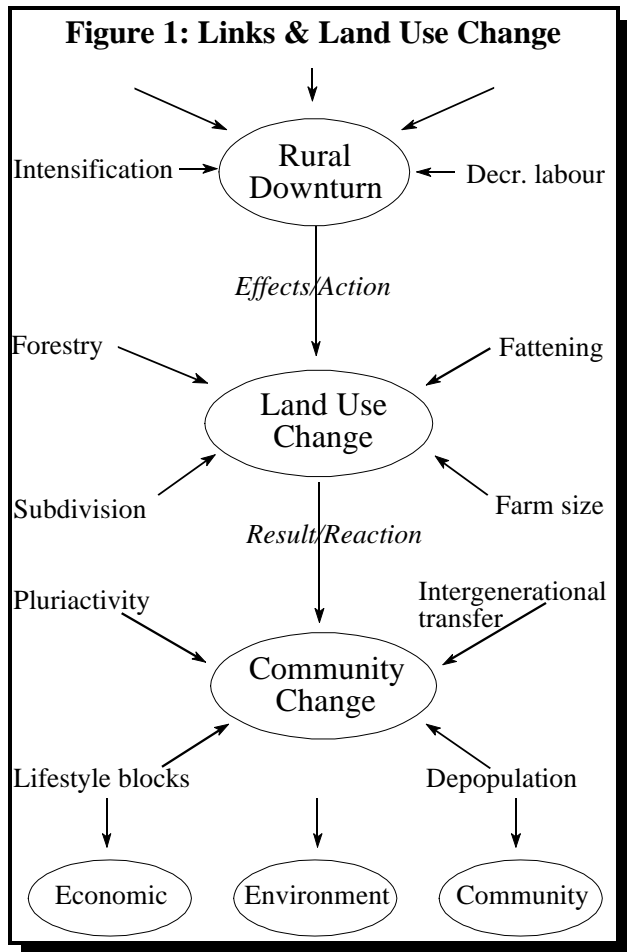
and because of their 'lack of community involvement'. Forestry is broadly viewed by the farmers as having a negative impact on the community's size, structure and economic well being. Despite these strictures, many pastoral farmers have themselves diversified into forestry to some extent as a form of economic diversification, for flood control reasons or to reduce the threat of soil erosion.

Other issues related to changes in land use include fear about the long-term agricultural viability of the region because of soil erosion, the increasing number of life-style blocks being developed on farm land and the increasing price of land for agricultural uses. These kinds of issues are seen by the rural population both positively and negatively. Some emphasise the benefits secured by those who gain additional income or profits from changes, others believe that the community as a whole loses from the decline in the agricultural economy.

The linkages of event and land use change are shown diagrammatically at Figure 1.

These issues make the Waipaoa Catchment a microcosm of much of rural New Zealand. For the purposes of the multistakeholder analysis of land use change, the Waipaoa Catchment offered a number of additional distinct advantages:

- the area is a distinct ecosystem in which there is recognition of the interdependencies of different types of land use;



- the area has large areas of erodible soils, forcing land use change for sustainable reasons;
- there is an active afforestation process which is coming into conflict with other land uses;
- the different uses of the land reflect different economic and social trends and show differing economic viability;
- there is some conflict within the community itself over alternative land uses;
- there are diverse views of the area's economic future;
- there is a relatively large Maori community with, in some cases, different positions and cultural values relating to land use;
- the community was aware of the issues

and was prepared to participate in the project; and

- there is extensive information on the area.

The Process

Ideally, multistakeholder processes are established from the ‘bottom up’. That is, the community directly affected by change launches its own initiatives to ensure that all those with an interest (or stake) in the community’s well being are involved in both identifying the important issues and in developing solutions to ensure the community’s long term health. The Waipaoa Catchment project did not follow the bottom up model completely. It was initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture (as it was then) as a consequence of discussions with local groups including the Federated Farmers and Women’s Division Federated Farmers. There was always, however, a clear intent to shift the locus of decision making onto a representative local multistakeholder group, if one could be established.

The community is the building block upon which multistakeholder activities are based. There are three interlinked sets of activities: identification of the community; identification of stakeholders within the community; and community participation.

Identification of community is the most important task. It encompasses the district or region experiencing the impact of change. But that identification is not necessarily simple. There are different definitions of “community”. It may be simply a geographical area determined by political boundaries, it may be the geographical area defined by natural (physical) boundaries within which service delivery can easily be effected and access to services, family and friends, and recreational activities easily achieved, or it may be a wider community of interests in which a range of stakeholders (who may not all live in the same location) affect and are affected by local community decisions and activities.

In a multistakeholder process the preferred definition is of community of interests. This community embraces individuals and interest groups, land owners and land users, providers and consumers, and people from different ethnic groups. Community, then, may refer to any (or any combination) of physical, economic, cultural or emotional relationships between and within these different groupings. Sometimes the community will be readily identifiable, at others it will be less obvious. But how the community is identified is important. It will have a direct impact in terms of the issues to be addressed. Proper identification of community should ensure that community issues can be identified by a representative group and solutions researched and implemented.

Secondly, stakeholders must be identified. Broadly, these are all those who can affect or will be affected by change within the community. At one level that is everyone. At a more workable level it is those specific groups within the community with a stake in its continued effectiveness and sustainability. In this project, stakeholders were identified through preliminary discussions with ‘obvious’ key community opinion leaders and agencies, through community meetings and through the identification of volunteers prepared to meet in continuing working groups. Some potential stakeholders were not identified early in the process. Others were uncertain whether they would gain any benefit from participation. At this preliminary stage the enthusiasm of particular individuals to motivate others is crucial if the process is to continue effectively. The organisations and interests represented at initial meetings are shown at Appendix 1.

Finally, there must be full participation by the community, and specifically by representatives of the stakeholders. Small community meetings proved to be an effective means of bringing the issues to wider attention and to gain a broader perspective on them. Community meetings involved specific meetings with women's groups, iwi, farmers and other special issues groups as well as with general community groups. In different meetings in the Waipaoa area, the issues covered included impacts associated with the conversion of farms to plantation forestry, how to make farm operations more profitable and why the benefits of forestry were passing parts of the community by. At a greater level of detail the issues raised included:

- the lack of communication between agricultural producers and their forestry neighbours;
- the decline in farm incomes;
- the decline in rural farm-based employment;
- the decline in rural population;
- the future of rural schools;
- funding for rural roads;
- increases in public liability insurance when large-scale forestry concerns come into the area;
- the risk of new regulations imposed on farmers to meet new higher environmental standards;
- reduced representation of rural interests on the local council; and
- the lack of useable information to allow informed decisions.

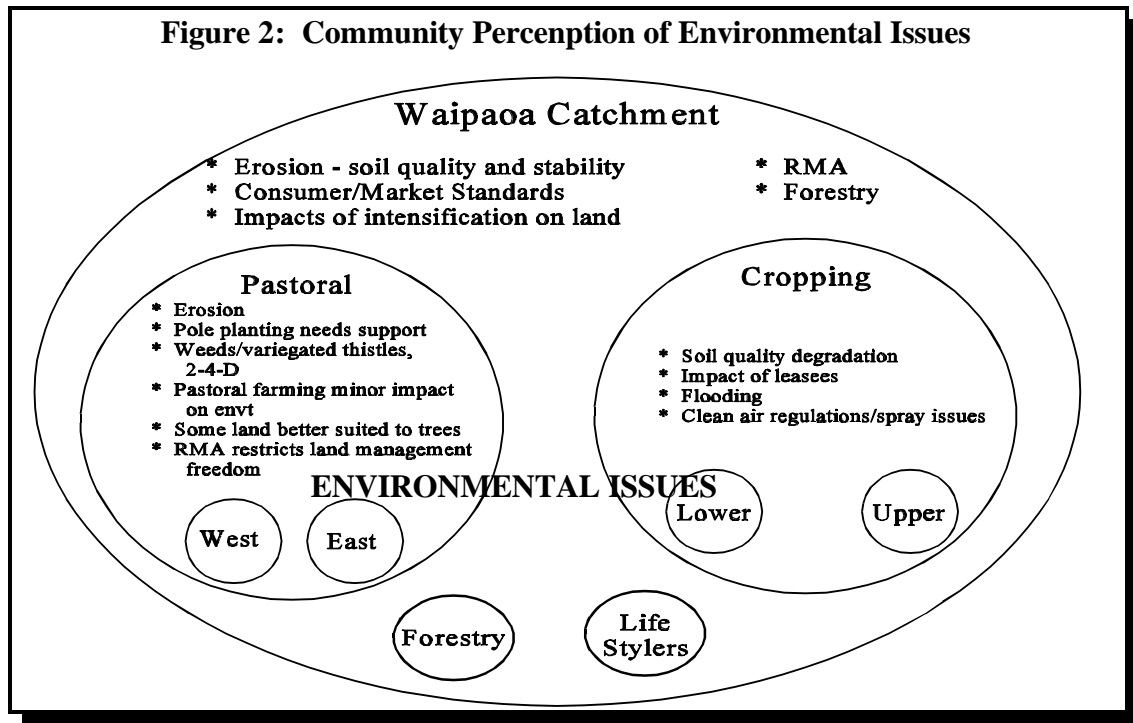
Most of these cover the social and economic effects of change. Other discussions focused on the concept of sustainable land management and the potential role of agriculture and forestry in this.

As identified in community meetings, information is one of the keys to wise decisions. To this end, two surveys were conducted as integral parts of this project. The first assessed the attitudes of hill country farmers to sustainable land use and changes in land use; the second examined the attitudes of land managers and farmers on the flats to flood risk management in these areas and to forestry development in the hill country.

Public information meetings were held to provide information and receive wider public ideas. An expanded range of community issues was identified. These are presented diagrammatically as Figures 2, 3 and 4.

Most members of the community see the issues raised as barriers to the community's sustainability. These issues in turn are translated back through a sequence of links to stresses within the existing community structure, rapid land use change and adverse economic conditions. They identify a rural society caught at the cross-currents of change and bound by contradictory value systems.

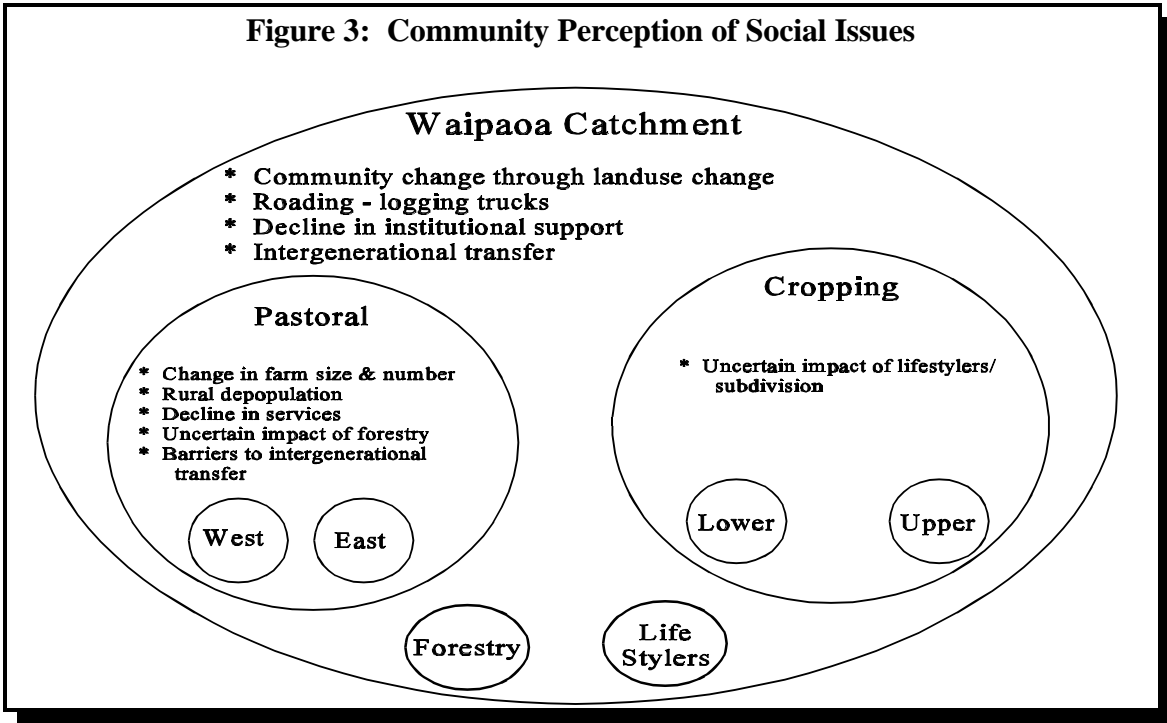
But identification and clarification of the issues also gives the community a greater opportunity to deal with them. A representative Working Group, established as part of the process, identified, from



these sets of issues, the ideal community of the future as one which:

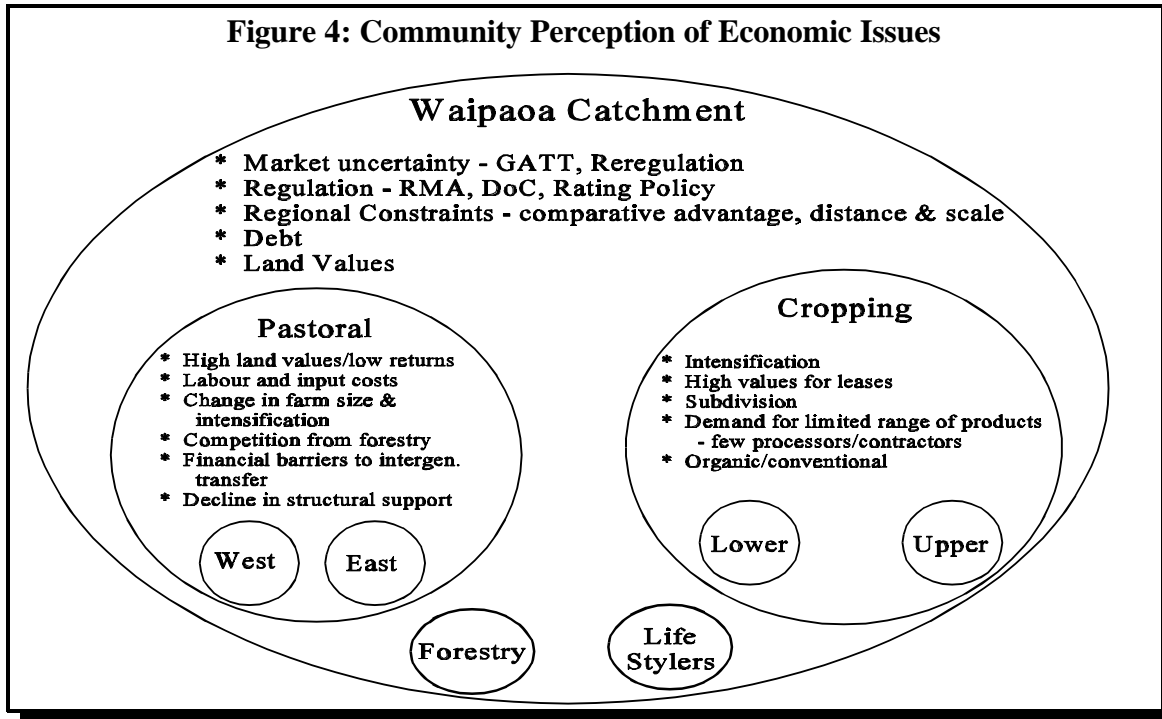
- is a vibrant, vital 'people-place'; with
- a diverse supportive and sustainable economy; and
- a clean, green and pest-free environment.

Figure 3: Community Perception of Social Issues



SOCIAL ISSUES

Figure 4: Community Perception of Economic Issues



ECONOMIC ISSUES

Obstacles to achieving the vision (fear of change, inertia, negativity, isolation) were also identified and some solutions suggested.

Commentary on the Process

Because of the short time between the start of the Waipaoa project and the preparation of this report, it is not yet possible to determine whether a multistakeholder approach will be successful in the long-term in providing the community with useable strategies for dealing with externally imposed change. Any final evaluation is still premature.

At this point, however, it is useful to discuss the way the principles underlying the multistakeholder approach were used in the Waipaoa example and how they were modified to meet the needs of the participants.

Rural communities are often (perhaps normally) based on discrete eco-systems. Therefore change will often be related to the environment and responses to change must also take the environment into account. There are many examples (in New Zealand, Britain and Canada, for example) of processes of environmental rehabilitation which have begun using some form of political boundary as ‘the community’, but which have been forced to recognise the interdependencies between the chosen community and wider environmental processes, normally related to the ecosystem of the overall catchment.

However, while the ecosystem may, on the face of it, be a logical basis for understanding certain environmental processes, these processes do not necessarily coincide with either political boundaries or with relevant social, or cultural linkages. Any environmental management plan, therefore, needs to be relevant to the specific locality and its particular needs and must be flexible rather than prescriptive to allow for full community participation and commitment. For these reason, the definition of community (as discussed earlier) needs to be made carefully to ensure that all stakeholders have the opportunity to be included.

This was so in this particular case study. For example, some residents located outside the catchment were included in the project because of their emotional, perceptual and other links to the community and because their experience and viewpoints outweighed any conceptual advantages of limiting the work to a specific physically determined region.

Although inclusiveness is fundamental to the multistakeholder approach, the Gisborne study has not (as yet) included all major Maori groups in the process (because interests important to them have not been identified by the wider community process) and has not included the Gisborne Council. These groups were however, included in initial project meetings. Some Maori groups and the Council have indicated that they will participate in future. As well, because of the nature of the initial consultations and the advice received from different agencies, there was an initial bias in favour of organised groups rather than individuals. During the process the Project Team attempted to identify and co-opt individuals who might represent residents not associated with formal organisations. Small group meetings also had this as one of their objectives.

Comprehensiveness is also fundamental to a multistakeholder approach. But, as the issues are inter-related and interdependent, solutions are not easily found. Understandably perhaps, many of those involved in the Waipaoa project seemed overwhelmed by the complexity of the issues. Rather than analyse the issues as a whole, a number of people believe that further discussion is either unnecessary

or unproductive and that immediate action should be taken to solve one-off problems. They believe that there is sufficient knowledge as to what is needed and that the Council should just ‘get on and solve’ the problems. The Working Group is now endeavouring to meet these demands for immediate action, while initiating a project to ensure that all factors are properly taken into account and simplistic ‘solutions’ avoided.

This leads into the need for long-term perspectives. The success of the first completed stages of the project can only realistically be measured if the actions identified now can be implemented over the next few years. This will need the active and continuing participation of all stakeholder groups. Specifically:

- the District Council will have to support the project;
- the Working Group needs to have access to information about the environmental, social and economic factors relevant to change. This may involve more and different agencies supporting the Working Group; and
- responsible agencies will have to pay attention to the outcomes and recommendations from the Working Group.

If these steps occur, the community will own the process. Without that the process is unlikely to be successful.

There are also a number of practical lessons to be learned from the project:

- full participation of all interests was not achieved (specifically of Maori and of ‘flats’ farmers). This could have been because one ‘obvious’ underlying issue, that of sustainable land management, was not raised in consultations and thus not addressed. Researchers in the future might need to be more directive in their presentation of issues in cases where their own analysis has led them to wider conclusions than those raised by the community itself;
- a number of participants expressed concern at the short notice given for meetings. For rural people a month or more notice may be necessary;
- community meetings are an important tool to ensure that even the most isolated of communities are involved in the process;
- follow-up meetings were poorly attended. This could have been that information distributed through the mail was sufficient after an initial meeting and discussion. Possibly, second and third meetings for the whole community should only be called if there is new information to present or new issues to be discussed;
- additionally, it could have been that this project just did not interest sufficient people from all the possible communities. It is not unreasonable to have asymmetric levels of interest between different communities with competing demands on their time;

- the need for the stakeholders to ‘own’ the process was reinforced as the facilitation team based outside the region did not generally have an entree into informal community networking, which is an important means of passing information and forming opinions;
- some communities (particularly women and Maori) seemed to have completely different interests in and solutions to problems from those expressed by dominant or mainstream participants. It may be that there is a need to develop processes to ensure that these alternative views are heard.

The Way Ahead

All participants recognised that merely identifying a vision, obstacles to achieving that vision and solutions to these obstacles is insufficient. There needs to be follow-up in the form of a wide circulation of information, the inclusion of a larger circle of participants and, most importantly, the project needs to be advanced to the next stage. This would require a further working group to prepare background material and, again, wide community consultation.

A Working Group (a multistakeholder group) has met twice and begun to prepare a strategy to deal with the issues of concern. This group has refined the vision, developed goals and identified detailed and specific objectives and actions. The strategy will use the community’s already identified social and economic issues to address sustainable land use. This process is continuing.

Conclusions

By using social and economic issues as the entry point to understanding change in a rural community, the important but perhaps underlying issues such as sustainable land management can be addressed as an integral part of the community’s overall future. It is important, therefore, to have some understanding of the community and concerns before designing ways in which participation can be ensured.

The multistakeholder approach is a robust way of ensuring that all interests are involved in identifying problems within the community and in developing solutions. However the success of such an approach requires perseverance, commitment by a core group of ‘activists’, a willingness to listen to and take into account the interests of diverse groups within the community, and maintain a long-term perspective. These elements may not always be present.

The multistakeholder approach was shown to be an open, flexible and responsive way of addressing the needs and ideas of the participants. The approach not only reinforces solutions for the specific community but may establish models to allow specific activities and events to be considered ‘in theory’ before they occur or are implemented. These could include:

- development of community decision support models at the catchment or district level to integrate multi-objective development and environmental values;
- identification of how different land management structures respond to environmental and social

issues;

- development of models for the improved transfer of information to integrate market opportunities with environmental benefits;
- development of models for the improved transfer of environmental information including the interpretation of relevant environmental indicators for farms and the subsequent development of best practice management options;
- development of frameworks to ensure that all interests are fully incorporated into the decision making process; and
- development of monitoring processes to identify the level of voluntary response to incentive assistance for conservation outcomes, and to develop alternative strategies based on the results.

Overall, the project has shown that the multistakeholder approach to issue resolution is an effective method of achieving wide participation on fundamental questions such as ‘what kind of society do we want?’ However, the process requires time and commitment. Without those, decision making, in the future as in the past, may remain in the hands of individual interests and organisations (for example local government, industry, farmers, iwi) who want short-term solutions, no matter whether those solutions are compatible with their own long-term interests or the community’s long-term goals.

Appendix 1: Organisations and Interests Represented

Gisborne District Council

Women's Division of Federated Farmers

Federated Farmers

Te Puni Kokiri

Ministry of Forestry

Ministry of Agriculture

Department of Conservation

East Coast Forestry Industry Sector Group

Agriculture New Zealand

Te Ruananga o Turanganui a Kiwa

Wi Pere Trust

ECO 2000

Turanganui a Kiwi Tangata Whenua environmental working group

Te Aitanga a Mahaki research unit

Mangatu Blocks Inc