

Notes from Spotlight 6: Regional Production and Conservation Landscapes 21/10/2015

Purpose and approach of the Spotlight Session

The purpose was to explore the proposition that: *understanding the connectivity of water and land systems is an essential framework for examining production and conservation landscapes.*

The purpose was met by:

- Proposing a vision for water for Australia
- Examining carbon in the real world through the proposition: *Don't demonise carbon! It is essential to regional landscapes, rural and remote communities and you*

Two approaches were used: presentations and open discussion.

Water for Australia: Getting a Focus

In the context of the totally degraded state of our freshwater surface and ground water systems Ashley Bland proposed vision that in 50 years' time: *Every Mayor of towns on major catchments can go to a local stream and drink clear safe water that is in abundant supply.*

Max Finlayson's presentation provided key points distilled from collective experience gleaned over a life time of working in various aspects of the water sector. These consolidated points on water sector management and socio-ecological systems. When looking at the level of change in the drainage systems across the catchment systems of the NSW of the MDB it raises the observation that it is: *Not what can we put back but rather what can we do/put there?*

Key points arising included observations that:

- Adequate and safe water is far too often taken for granted in rural and remote Australia and there is abundant evidence that this is not the case.
- With respect to restoring rivers/wetlands: can we gain efficiencies in the use of environmental water? For example can we use the channel system to divert flows to wetlands in irrigated landscapes?
- Legislative measures are often at stopping people damaging the environment rather than fixing it up.
- We need to have specific case material to further examine production and conservation landscapes.

Ken Varcoe provided a case example of appropriate sustainability technology with the disinfection of drinking water using common salt. The approach can be used at a range of scales, is cost effective and operationally safer than handling liquid chlorine. As such this demonstrates that the Australia wide problem of safe water is readily resolvable.

Two outstanding questions are:

- How can we champion the provision of adequate and safe water?

- Who will disseminate information that sustainability technologies are available to disinfect water in rural and remote communities?

Agricultural restructuring and disadvantaged farmers

Ren Hu outlined key issues in Australian agricultural restructuring and disadvantaged farmers and argued the proposition that we need to look now at how we can rely less on fossil fuels for agricultural production.

Carbon in the Real World

Gerry Morvell argued the case that:

- Carbon is not carbon dioxide just as:
 - chlorine is not the salt we eat
 - superphosphate is not phosgene gas
- Water is a more powerful greenhouse gas (but in balance) but we don't pursue an oxygen tax
- Economists, politicians and greens have used shorthand and created a mythology

- Carbon underpins life society and the global economy

With respect to carbon reconditioning of soils the point was made that

- Carbon based fertilisers improve productivity by restoring soil structure and increasing water and nutrient uptake.
- Trials using products from Latrobe Valley brown coal are already underway in Victoria.

Key observations were made that:

- The world is rapidly developing a carbon dependent economy
- Carbon is underpinning new products and industries, new employment opportunities and wealth creation
- Australia is turning its back on the opportunities offered by carbon
 - are we replacing "a fair go" with "hypocrisy"
 - are we "throwing the baby out with the bath water"

And we do we need strong political leadership and political will to act to optimise the opportunities to maximise the use of carbon in our production and conservation landscapes and create new jobs and wealth from the innovative use of carbon in rural and regional Australia.