Community Participation and Local Government in the Shoalhaven
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Introduction

• This presentation is part of a larger project which aims to assess:
  – the effectiveness of current methods for involvement and participation in the Shoalhaven, and
  – possible alternative methods for participation.

• The project will involve:
  – an examination of written documents including minutes of Council and community group meetings, and
  – semi-structured interviews with Councillors, staff and representatives of community organisations.

• The project should contribute to an understanding of democracy at the local level by identifying methods for citizen participation.
Today’s Presentation

• Today’s presentation will present some of the results of an examination of written materials and will:
  – examine the communities and interests in the Shoalhaven
  – briefly describe existing participation arrangements
  – look at the types of issues that arise
  – consider the extent to which issues affect different communities and groups, and
  – consider the implications for community participation in local government in the Shoalhaven.
Levels of Citizen’s Participation

- This presentation uses the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) three-stage model (OECD Citizens as Partners 2001):
  
  1. The provision by governments of information for citizens.
     - a one-way relationship from Government to citizens
   
  2. Consultation
     - a two-way relationship in which citizens are invited to provide feedback on specific issues, however governments define the issues and provide background information
   
  3. Active participation of citizen’s in policy making
     - a partnership involving citizen’s proposing policy options and shaping the policy dialogue, however the final decision rests with government.

- As Curtain notes, the third type of citizen participation is little practiced in Australia, or elsewhere (Curtain 2003)
Why Look at the Shoalhaven

• The City of Shoalhaven is a diverse area, as the Council states:
  – with 49 towns and villages, there is no one homogenous community in the Shoalhaven.

• Shoalhaven is physically dispersed, has contrasting economic interests and the social and economic status of the population varies markedly in different parts of the Shoalhaven.

• This diversity raises questions for representation and citizen’s involvement, e.g.
  – how to ensure that all relevant groups and interests are considered
  – which groups and interests should be considered in relation to which issues.
Profile of the Shoalhaven: Geographic

• The Shoalhaven is located on the south coast of NSW, about 160 km (Nowra) from Sydney:
  – it stretches about 160 km from just north of Berry to North Durras, mainly coastal with some farming areas a little inland
  – 34% of the land area is national parks, with a further 23% state forest and 11% crown land, and
  – compared with NSW as a whole a higher % of dwellings are unoccupied, e.g. holiday homes (26.8% vs 9.5%).

• The population was about 97,000 (2006):
  – major urban area is Nowra/Bombaderry (about 26,000)
  – other sizeable population areas are Bay and Basin (11,300) and Ulladulla (5,800 or 13,600 including Mollymook, Milton and surrounding areas), and
  – the rest is in scattered coastal and inland villages and rural areas.
Profile of the Shoalhaven: Economic

- Major industries include agriculture (dairying and some vegetable growing), paper production, starch manufacturing, defence (naval bases at Nowra and the adjacent Commonwealth Jervis Bay Territory) and tourism.
- The 6 largest industry sectors, by persons employed, were:
  - retail trade (14.2% of population employed)
  - health care and social assistance (11.8%)
  - construction (10.0%)
  - public administration and safety (9.5%)
  - accommodation and food (8.8%), and
  - manufacturing (8.3%).
Profile of the Shoalhaven: Demographic and Socio-Economic

- Compared to NSW as a whole the Shoalhaven had in 2006, using Census data:
  - more people aged 65 and over (21.2% vs 13.8%)
  - fewer couple with children families (36.0% vs 46.2%) more couples without children (46.8% vs 36.0%) and slightly more lone person households (25.2% vs 23.0%)
  - higher proportion of indigenous people (3.7% vs 2.1%)
  - a smaller proportion of high income households (30.9% vs 46.2%) and a larger proportion of low income families (19.9% vs 14.9%), and
  - a smaller proportion of those aged over 15 in the labour force (48.6 vs 59.0%) and a higher unemployment rate (9.2% vs 5.9%).
Areas Within the Shoalhaven

- There are marked demographic and socio-economic differences between different areas within the Shoalhaven.

- The towns i.e. Nowra, Bomaderry, Ulladulla when compared to the Shoalhaven as a whole are characterised by:
  - high levels of socio-economic disadvantage according to the ABS SEIFA index and high proportions of lone person households, and
  - in addition Nowra and Ulladulla have low proportions of high income earners, high proportions of low income earners and relatively high unemployment rates.

- In contrast, suburban and semi-rural areas near the towns, e.g. Bangalee, North Nowra, West Nowra and Worrigee have:
  - low levels of socio-economic disadvantage
  - high proportions of high income earners and low proportions of low income earners, and
  - high labour force participation and low unemployment.
Areas Within the Shoalhaven(2)

• The rural Areas including Kangaroo Valley are characterised by:
  – low levels of socio-economic disadvantage
  – high proportions of high income earners and low proportions of low income earners, and
  – high labour force participation and low unemployment.

• The larger coastal villages, Vincentia, Husskisson and Mollymook have:
  – low levels of socio-economic disadvantage
  – high proportions of high income earners and low proportions of low income earners, and
  – in addition Mollymook and Vincentia have low proportions aged <17 and high proportions aged 60+. 
Areas Within the Shoalhaven (3)

- Smaller Coastal Villages vary but include areas such as Culburra Beach and Shoalhaven Heads which have:
  - moderately high levels of socio-economic disadvantage
  - low proportions aged <17 and high proportions aged 60+, and
  - high proportions of low income earners and low proportions of high income earners.

- Areas around St Georges Basin, especially Sussex Inlet and Sanctuary Point have:
  - high levels of socio-economic disadvantage
  - high proportions of low income earners and low proportions of high income earners, and
  - high levels of unemployment.
Shoalhaven City Council

• Shoalhaven was formed in 1948 by amalgamating 7 smaller councils:
  – increased efficiency by having a larger area the reason given for the amalgamation.

• Currently Shoalhaven has 3 wards each electing 4 councilors and a directly elected mayor, totaling 13 councilors:
  – clearly direct representation does not occur for each of the 49 separate towns and villages
  – the Berry Progress Association was formed in 1948 to provide a voice for Berry as a result of the inaugural Council having no-one from Berry.
Existing Arrangements for Citizens Involvement in the Shoalhaven

• Existing arrangements are mainly informational and consultative and include:
  – meetings and seeking submissions on specific issues and proposals, e.g. development proposals
  – advisory committees, including for specific population groups, e.g. youth
  – Council development officers working with specific groups, e.g. indigenous
  – geographically based Citizen’s consultative bodies (CBB’s), and
  – posting information and inviting feedback on the Council’s webpage, despite relatively low internet take-up and poor availability in some areas.
The Shoalhaven CCB’s

- CCBs are officially recognised by Council:
  - only one recognised for a given area
  - Council does not create CCBs, must come from community
  - Councilors and Council officials regularly attend individual CCB meetings, and regular area based meetings of representatives from CCBs and Councilors are held
  - issues considered by the CCBs are both referred by Council and initiated by the CCBs.

- 24 CCB’s covering 45 distinct areas:
  - not all areas are covered, areas without CCBs include the main urban area, i.e. Nowra and Bombaderry
  - in particular CCBs give a voice to the villages, geographically spread, often discrete, communities
  - without CCB’s difficult to see how local concerns of small communities would be brought to Councils attention.
Issues Raised by Existing Arrangements in the Shoalhaven

• Consultation is undertaken with different groups in different ways, Council then has to weigh inputs and make a decision:
  – this makes it difficult for the OECD’s third level of participation, i.e. partnership involvement with citizens on policy
  – different groups may have limited interaction with each other and thus developing a total community position becomes difficult.

• Groups consulted separately may resent their views not being accepted, e.g. CCBs may see themselves as equaling the community:
  – “The general opinion of the CCBs was that Councillors didn’t give sufficient consideration to the views of the CCBs and it was reported that one Councillor even said that the CCBs do not represent the community.” (minutes of meeting between CCBs and Council 8 April 2011)
Proposed Arrangements for Citizens Participation in the Shoalhaven

• In April 2011 the SCC published a draft Community Engagement Strategy. It included a large range of possible information and consultation strategies but less that would lead the OECD’s 3rd level of participation.

• The draft strategy mentioned consensus building among communities, citizen juries ballots and delegated decisions but no details as to how these might operate were given.
Prospects for Future Citizen’s Participation in the Shoalhaven

As different groups are consulted in different ways, participation at the OECD’s 3rd level needs to be either:
- confined to issues only affecting one group, or
- involve all the relevant groups coming together to develop a joint position.

Which groups are affected by a given issue needs to be determined:
- geographical location is not the only factor, e.g. development in a small community may be of benefit to those elsewhere through the creation of jobs etc.
Do Issues Affect Only One Group?

- The issues raised at the 2010 meetings between Council representatives and representatives of the CCBs were analysed by whether they were general, local but with broader implications, or purely local:
  - 20% (n=59) were general issues applying throughout the Shoalhaven, e.g. tree policies, developmental plans covering the whole municipality
  - 17% were local issues with broader implications, e.g. developmental proposals that could give rise to employment for people living in other areas of the Shoalhaven
  - 63% were purely local issues with few implications outside the immediate area, (apart from sometimes expenditure of Council funds), e.g. footpaths, cycle paths, children’s play equipment and local planning issues such as degree of setback for a particular site.
General Issues

• 3 of the 12 general issues were on formal development plans, the Local Environmental Plan (LEP) and Developmental Control Plans (DCP):
  – these control zoning, land use and types and details of possible developments
  – DCPs may apply to specific areas or types of development, e.g. dual occupancy
  – likely to be the issues that generate the most controversy.

• 6 issues were general policy issues:
  – developmental policies that lead into formal plans e.g. growth management strategy
  – non developmental issues, e.g. dog, cat and tree policies.

• 2 related to Council Operations, its website and the maintenance hotline.

• 1 was information and liaison, State Government grants available for community groups.
Citizens Participation with General Issues

• The normal consultation methods on development plans and policies do not bring different interest groups together:
  – plans are displayed, public meetings called and submissions invited
  – separate consultations are held with CCBs, business groups etc.

• For a recent Ulladulla development plan the local CCB initiated networking and negotiated with other interests groups to try to reach a consensus position to take to Council:
  – this was reasonably successful in that most of the agreed recommendations were adopted by Council, however one interested party was not included in the negotiations and went separately to Council, this resulted in some changes from the consensus position. (paper presented to Local OpenGov Innovation Summit 2011, Nowra May 18 2011 available online at: http://opengovinitiative.wikidot.com/ulladulla-and-community-forum-presentation)
Citizens Participation with General Issues(2)

• Negotiation between all interested parties, whether formalised as a working party or advisory committee or not:
  – can be successful but this varies, partly depending on the attitude of those taking parts
  – applies to existing issues, but may not assist in formulating issues.

• Dialogue between interest groups outside of consideration of particular issues is desirable:
  – to help frame issues
  – to build understandings that can assist when issues arise
  – however encouraging diverse people to engage in dialogue without an apparent pressing need may be difficult.
Local Issues with Broader Implications

• Of the 10 Local issues with broader implications:
  – 7 concerned the provision of facilities or developments with tourist implications e.g. marinas, redevelopment of an old lighthouse site, caravans parks
  – 2 were maintenance issues e.g. roads used by the broader as well as the local community, and
  – 1 concerned liaison about State Government controlled land.

• Participation approaches include steering committees with representatives from all interested parties:
  – this was done for the lighthouse site.

• Another possible approach is citizen’s juries:
  – they would need to be drawn from all affected groups
  – citizen’s juries do not always reach consensus on controversial issues.
Purely Local Issues

• Of the issues classified as purely local:
  – 49% concerned local facilities, e.g. foot and cycle paths
  – 13% maintenance and repairs, e.g. roads
  – 6% local planning issues
  – 22% involved other non-Council agencies, e.g. police, main roads, water etc
  – 14% concerned enforcement of planning and other requirements in individual local cases.

• There is some scope for increasing citizen’s participation in local facility provision:
  – e.g. budgets for local facilities could be allocated to areas, with participatory budgeting processes, or other balloting arrangements, for citizens to decide priorities.
Conclusions

• The geographic, economic and socio-economic status diversity in the Shoalhaven makes citizen participation desirable as Council members can not cover all communities, however this leads to challenges for participation at the OECD’s third level.

• There is scope for such participation on issues that only affect local communities:
  – these include local facilities, amenities and small scale developments
  – appropriate methods could include local ballots and participatory budgeting.

• However the issues that cause the most controversy usually affect more than the immediate community, e.g. large scale developments:
  – participation requires methods that bring diverse groups together
  – single issue working parties and citizen juries are possible approaches
  – regular dialogue between different interest groups outside of specific issues is desirable to build understandings.