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Approaches to identifying stakeholders in environmental management: Insights from practitioners to go beyond the 'usual suspects'

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder analysis and engagement processes are recognised as essential in environmental and natural resources management (ENRM). Underpinning these processes is the identification of stakeholders, an often tacit process which finds the practitioner responsible for stakeholder analysis or engagement sifting through all of society to determine who is awarded stakeholder status for the given project or issue. While the ENRM literature provides guidance for stakeholder analysis and engagement, there has not been the same level of examination of the practical approaches to—and assumptions underlying—stakeholder identification by practitioners working in the field. This research extends on the ENRM stakeholder analysis and engagement literature by exploring the approaches to identification as used by ENRM practitioners. Semi-structured interviews ($n = 20$) were conducted with ENRM practitioners, leading to the classification of eight approaches to stakeholder identification. These approaches are discussed as the 'art' and 'science' of stakeholder identification. Practitioners' conceptualisations of the terms stakeholder, community, and the citizenry are discussed, and differences in understandings of these critical terms are outlined based on the broad domain of ENRM in which the practitioner is operating (land use change versus agricultural extension or community engagement). The social structures of relevance to stakeholder identification (individual, social constituency, group, organisation) are presented, and practitioners' perspectives on the role of groups are discussed. Through explicating the approaches to identification of stakeholders, this research offers new perspectives on a significant element of ENRM. These insights provide greater clarity on the practices which shape stakeholder analysis and engagement in ENRM, and highlight the importance of acknowledging the privileged position of the practitioner in deciding who is awarded stakeholder status in a project or issue.

1. Introduction

Stakeholder engagement is viewed as an essential component of good environmental and natural resource management (ENRM) (Billgren and Holmén, 2008; Grimble and Wellard, 1997; Reed, 2008). Within the broad scope of public participation activities, stakeholder engagement represents a concerted effort to involve the people who have a stake in the outcome of the decision being made (Soma and Vatn, 2014). Engaging stakeholders in decision making is expected to yield benefits through incorporating a range of perspectives and fostering social acceptance for the decision outcome (Fischer et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2013). Participation of stakeholders in decision making can also be viewed as a facet of sustainable development (Colvin et al., 2015b; Soma and Vatn, 2014) or a hallmark of morally responsible conduct by decision makers (Parsons et al., 2015). In addition to engagement in decision making, analysis of stakeholders contributes to an understanding of the social dimensions of challenging ENRM issues, often as a precursor to engagement (Billgren and Holmén, 2008).

For both analysis and engagement, a necessary early step is identification of who achieves status as a stakeholder (Billgren and Holmén, 2008; Bryson, 2004; Miles 2015; Mitchell et al., 1997; Prell et al., 2007; Reed et al., 2009, 2013). The literature on identification of ENRM stakeholders has established criteria for selection of stakeholders in pursuit of equitable and socially-representative processes (Billgren and Holmén, 2008; Reed et al., 2009). These criteria include classifications such as: who is affected by or can affect

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an ENRM issue (Billgren and Holmén, 2008; Reed et al., 2009), and; who may be interested in (Soma and Vatn, 2014) or impacted by an ENRM issue (Fischer et al., 2014). Application of these criteria in ENRM can be especially vexed, as the interconnectedness of natural systems can lead to who is considered a stakeholder including "almost everyone and everything" (Billgren and Holmén, 2008, p. 553). This means that for a practitioner undertaking ENRM stakeholder analysis or engagement, in identifying who is affected by, can affect, has an interest in, or may be impacted by the ENRM issue, the practitioner has all of society to sift through in order to determine who achieves stakeholder status for the issue at hand.

When turning to society to select stakeholders for analysis or engagement, ENRM practitioners must navigate through the complexities of society to identify which social structures (e.g., individual people, social categories and constituencies, informal or formal groups, organisations) are emphasised or backgrounded in the search for those who are awarded stakeholder status. The ENRM stakeholder analysis and engagement literature has indicated that: stakeholders tend to be viewed as self-evident (Prell et al., 2007; Reed et al., 2009); there is repeated identification of the 'usual suspects' (Reed, 2008), and; organised groups tend to be drawn on as stakeholders in ENRM (Billgren and Holmén, 2008). Following this, it becomes evident that where in society ENRM practitioners look to identify stakeholders can influence who is awarded stakeholder status for a given issue.

This research examines the process of ENRM stakeholder identification through analysis of interviews with ENRM engagement practitioners based in Australasia, who discuss their practice in Australasia and other Western democracies. This approach has been adopted to extend the ENRM stakeholder analysis and engagement literature through drawing on the experiences of those who are actively responsible for identification of ENRM stakeholders. Through this study, insights into the explicit and tacit approaches used for identification of ENRM stakeholders are presented, and ENRM practitioners' perspectives on the social structures of relevance when identifying stakeholders are outlined.

2. Defining stakeholders

Reed (2008) has distinguished between public participation as a broad movement toward involvement of civil society in decision making, and stakeholder engagement as a focused process involving those who are affected by, or can affect, a decision. Where public participation may attempt to engage all of society in efforts to achieve directly-democratic outcomes (e.g., Carson, 2009), stakeholder engagement necessitates analysis of the social dimension of a given ENRM issue to create an issue-specific strategy for engagement (Billgren and Holmén, 2008). The distinction between public participation and stakeholder engagement is increasingly reflected in the academic literature where stakeholders represent entities which are clearly differentiated from the citizenry or general public (Aanesen et al., 2014; Colvin et al., 2015b; Fischer et al., 2014; Kahane et al., 2013; Soma and Vatn, 2014). This is based on the expectation that stakeholders represent sectorial or focused interests, while the citizenry serves to represent the 'public good' (Carson, 2009; Colvin et al., 2015b; Soma and Vatn, 2014). Stakeholders, then, tend to be defined as formally-affiliated groups with a collective interest and shared preferences for the ENRM issue in question (Kahane et al., 2013; Soma and Vatn, 2014; Colvin et al., 2015b).

Defining stakeholders as being representative of specific interests, in contrast to the citizenry who may be seen to represent the public good, highlights a distinction between the operational (strategic) definition of 'stakeholder' with the theoretical (normative) definition of 'stakeholder'. In an evaluation of the definition of 'stakeholder' in the business management context, Miles (2015) outlined different conceptualisations of 'stakeholder' built around this distinction. While the normative definition of stakeholder may include any and all people who have some degree of interest (including moral interests) in an issue, a strategic definition of stakeholder captures only those stakeholders whose engagement can be viewed as a pragmatic requirement for successful outcomes (Miles, 2015, pp. 13–14). Especially in ENRM where the interconnectedness of ecological and social systems is well understood, the normative definition of stakeholder creates the potential for a broad selection of people to be considered stakeholders in any given ENRM issue (Billgren and Holmén, 2008). A shift from normative selection of stakeholders to strategic selection of stakeholders is therefore based on the evaluation of the practitioner(s) responsible for the identification of stakeholders (Miles, 2015). Who counts as an ENRM stakeholder in analysis and engagement becomes not just a question of who has a stake, but who has a stake as recognised by those responsible for the stakeholder identification process. Drawing again from Miles (2015), those who are afforded stakeholder status can be seen to be those who from a normative perspective have a stake in the ENRM issue, and whose stake is recognised by the practitioner undertaking stakeholder identification. In this way, while in ENRM everyone may theoretically be a stakeholder in a given issue, it is only those who are recognised through the processes of stakeholder identification who are afforded stakeholder status.

3. The 'usual suspects' in ENRM stakeholder engagement

While stakeholders can be drawn from a range of social structures and vary according to group attributes, there is evidence of repeated inclusion of the 'usual suspects' (Reed et al., 2009) in ENRM, described by Kivits (2011, p. 320) as "communities, NGOs, government and the private sector". These prototypical stakeholder categorisations emerge across ENRM projects and studies as: industry (the private sector, e.g. mining, energy, agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries, depending on the issue); jurisdictional governments; environmentalists or conservationists (NGOs) and; community (e.g., Kindermann and Gormally, 2013; Silverstri et al., 2013; Treffny and Beilin, 2011; Brummans et al., 2008; Yasmi et al., 2006; Winter and Lockwood, 2005; Lane, 2003; Moore and Koontz, 2003).

An expectation for emergence of stakeholders fitting these categories can influence management actions (Prell et al., 2009). If a suite of stakeholders is expected to be present in an ENRM issue, the practitioner responsible for managing the analysis and engagement process may unintentionally exclude unconventional stakeholders as a result of planning primarily for the 'usual suspects'. This may be through cognitive (facilitators or managers predominantly perceiving the 'usual suspects') or institutional (mandated processes, implemented practices, protocols, and policies directed toward the 'usual suspects') blind spots during analysis and engagement. Similarly, repeated engagement with the 'usual suspects' may contribute to the professionalisation of stakeholders, where for these professionalised stakeholders, participation and engagement can be viewed as an extension of lobbying (Lane and Morrison, 2006). In turn, this may contribute to the reason that some individuals with an interest in an ENRM issue may perceive that the most effective vehicle for obtaining a voice in decision making is through membership of a group (Aanesen et al., 2014; Rydin and Pennington, 2000), reinforcing the divide between stakeholders and the citizenry (Colvin et al., 2015b).

To summarise, in ENRM those who are afforded stakeholder status tend to be viewed as groups with a collective interest, and are considered distinct from the citizenry which can be seen to

represent the public good. The literature indicates a tendency for engagement with stakeholders fitting the prototypes of the 'usual suspects', which may contribute to the professionalisation of some stakeholders with the engagement process viewed as an extension of lobbying. Each of these aspects of stakeholder analysis and engagement can be influenced, reinforced, or subverted by the process of stakeholder identification. For example, a practitioner may preference engagement with "grass-roots" social groups ahead of for-profit businesses, or may seek out key influencing individuals to represent social constituencies rather than representatives of organised groups (Buchy and Hoverman, 2000). While the importance of process is emphasised in the ENRM stakeholder analysis and engagement literature (e.g., Reed et al., 2009), there is currently little discussion or evaluation of the practical approaches to identification of stakeholders, and the potential implications of identification on ENRM stakeholder analysis and engagement more generally.

4. Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine how stakeholders are identified in ENRM, how stakeholders are defined in relation to the rest of society, and the social structures of relevance to ENRM practitioners during identification. This study utilised a qualitative research design which involved conducting semi-structured interviews with ENRM practitioners who had direct experience identifying and engaging with stakeholders. Twenty participants ($n = 20$) were interviewed, after which in-depth thematic, descriptive and content analyses were conducted on the interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2013; Silverman, 2014). Due to the varying conceptualisations in the literature of the term 'stakeholder' (Kahane et al., 2013), and the range of contexts for application of stakeholder engagement in ENRM (e.g., extension, community engagement, environmental and social impact assessments for development, land use change, policy evaluation and implementation), a semi-structured approach to the interviews was taken. This was to achieve some level of consistency across interviews, but to allow for tailoring of the lines of questioning, and deviation from the pre-determined questions, in order to adapt to the information provided by participants during the interviews (Bryman, 2012). The semi-structured interview approach was also adopted to allow participants' views on stakeholders and identification processes to emerge with limited probing or potentially leading questioning. It was expected this would lead to interview content which was directly grounded in the participants' experiences, and not solely for response to an interview question. These methodological choices reflect the interpretivist paradigm through which the research was completed; a perspective which seeks to understand the research interest through attentiveness to the context of the research and participants' experiences, and entails close engagement with a small number of participants (Moon and Blackman, 2014).

Where participants discussed topics of interest without the need for a question to be asked directly, this was considered to satisfy the requirement for a topic-specific question to be asked. The interview guide included six questions followed by an open question for the participant to include any further points which they felt were of relevance and had not been discussed. While the phrasing and order of the questions was responsive to the participant, the questions explored:

- the participants experience in the field, and the types of ENRM issues in which they have undertaken stakeholder engagement;
- the general process followed for stakeholder engagement;
- how stakeholders are identified and the social structures of relevance to identification;
- how these skills were learned by the participant and any tools used;
- the importance of relationships between stakeholders, and;
- whether conflict is an expected phenomenon when undertaking stakeholder engagement.

Recruitment of interview participants was firstly purposive in nature, followed by snowballing. Initial recruitment of participants followed attendance at a practitioner-focused conference, and through professional networks of the authors. Snowball sampling benefitted from the goodwill and volunteerism of participants to assist with further recruitment for the research through their own professional networks.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and imported into NVivo 10 for analysis. From November 2014 to February 2015, 20 participants were interviewed, with interviews averaging a duration of 46 min (87 min longest; 21 min shortest). Interviews were coded using attribute- and descriptive-coding methods (Saldaña, 2013). Interpretation of themes and analysis of findings was conducted through collation of all statements relating to key topics ('queries' on 'nodes' in NVivo), and sense-making of the themes present within those topics.

4.1. Participant domain groups

Participants were categorised into two domain groups (10 participants in each). These groups were based on the types of issues predominantly discussed by participants, and were land use change engagement practitioners (LUC-EP) and agricultural extension/community engagement practitioners (AEC-EP). The domain groups were constructed based on the overarching nature of engagement undertaken. LUC-EP participants undertook engagement in contexts of changes to a landscape or policy with a direct impact on the meaning or potential use of a landscape, often in an adversarial social environment (e.g., resumption of land for transport infrastructure development). AEC-EP participants undertook engagement in the context of incremental changes (e.g., promotion of pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours toward local environmental features), and often were seeking engagement with people who would derive some mutual benefit from the project or issue (e.g., promotion of sustainable agriculture practices).

5. Results

The results are presented in thematic sections. First, descriptive information *About the participants* is presented. This is followed by the findings related to the key research question: *How stakeholders are identified*. Next, the participants' views on who counts as a stakeholder are presented: *Who are the stakeholders?* This leads to insights on *The role of groups* in ENRM engagement.

5.1. About the participants

Between the 20 participants is at least 300 collective years of experience in ENRM engagement (1–5 years: 3; 6–15 years: 5; 16–25 years: 4; 25+ years: 8). Ten participants were classified as being in the land use change engagement practitioner domain (LUC-EP), and ten in the agricultural extension/community engagement practitioner domain (AEC-EP). Substantive ENRM issues as well as sectorial areas where the practitioners have worked included water use and allocations policy change (2), general environmental management (9), transport and infrastructure development (4), agricultural extension (3), and energy development (2). Participants represented four sectors: government (state

or local) (6); academia (5); NGO (6), and; the private sector (3). Ten of the participants' experiences were predominantly in the South-east Queensland area, a further 8 participants' experiences predominantly were in Australia more generally, while two participants reported on experiences both in Australasia and in other Western democracies. While the ENRM issues, sectors and regions were categorised based on the predominant issues of discussion, it is important to note that several participants spanned these attributes in one or several positions in their professional capacities.

The participants gained their experience and skills in engagement in a variety of ways. Twelve of the 20 participants cited learning through experience on the job (six from each domain group), and five of the twenty cited general intuition and interpersonal skills (1 LUC-EP and 4 AEC-EP). Eight out of 20 had undertaken university studies (undergraduate, postgraduate, or both: PR & Communications: 2/20, one from each domain; NRM: 6/20, 2 LUC-EP and 4 AEC-EP) and six out of 20 had conducted their own research, via the university sector, into engagement practices (5 LUC-EP and 1 AEC-EP). Three of the twenty participants had undertaken IAP2 (2015) professional training (1 LUC-EP and 2 AEC-EP). Of the participants who used specific tools or literature to guide engagement processes (6/20), the following were described: in-house engagement frameworks (4/20; all LUC-EP); academic literature (2/20; both LUC-EP), and; IAP2 tools (1/20; LUC-EP).

5.2. How stakeholders are identified

The approaches to stakeholder identification reported by the participants were classified across eight categories. These approaches, outlined below, were used by some in isolation, and by others in combination.

5.2.1. Geographical footprint

The geographical footprint approach to identification of stakeholders was presented by 11 of the 20 participants (5 LUC-EP and 6 AEC-EP). Based on the geographical scope of a given project or issue, this approach to stakeholder identification follows by constructing a footprint of project impact. Within that footprint, all individuals are considered to be stakeholders.

> "Through GIS you'd pick out your area of interest, get all the [residential addresses] out of that, send a list to council and they would send you who you should be talking to."—P06 (LUC-EP)

The geographical footprint approach can also be applied in terms of a community. Where a project is considered to be specific to a local community, the extent of the community is considered the boundary of the project or issue footprint.

> "Our big thing is trying to engage the local community, so the people that live I guess within that area or who might use the locations."—P10 (AEC-EP)

5.2.2. Interests

The interests approach to identification of stakeholders is based on an understanding of the socio-ecological context of a given ENRM issue, and assumptions about the interests triggered by the issue (e.g. financial, lifestyle, sense of place, moral). An analysis of expected and potential interests is conducted to identify relevant stakeholders. This was presented by 9 LUC-EP participants and 1 AEC-EP participant. This approach may occur through a formalised stakeholder or risk analysis process. Alternatively, the interests approach may be more informal; a practice of brainstorming potential interests which may be triggered by the issue.

> "If you looked at the stakeholder interests, and you could certainly align stakeholders with those various interests, they're the people that you need to make certain are aware of what's being done in areas that directly affects their interests."—P12 (LUC-EP)

Following the analysis of potential interests in the issue or project, stakeholders may be sought out to represent those interests in the engagement process.

> "In the [stakeholder engagement phase of project] we were asked as soon as we turned up if we knew anybody who had an interest in the environmental issues of the area because they hadn't managed to find anyone to represent those interests."—P08 (LUC-EP)

5.2.3. Influence

The influence approach was presented by just two participants (one from each domain group). Similar to the interests approach, the influence approach to stakeholder engagement involves analysis or brainstorming of all who may be able to influence the issue or project.

> "It is a really important thing to work out who the people are that influence that issue, whatever that issue is, and it depends but politicians, the media are to me, maybe indirect stakeholders but they're important because they can influence people, the direct stakeholders' attitudes."—P20 (AEC-EP)

5.2.4. Intuition

The use of intuition for identification of stakeholders was presented both explicitly and implicitly by four participants (two from each domain group). This represents both the use of tacit skills and understanding of the social dimension of ENRM issues, as well as a response to a lack of a definitive structure or process for identification.

> "That's just really how I've figured it out, rather than someone telling me how to do it."—P17 (AEC-EP)

5.2.5. Key informants and snowballing

The key informants and snowballing approach to identification of stakeholders was presented by 14/20 participants, and was the most consistently presented method (8 LUC-EP and 6 AEC-EP). The use of key informants could occur at the outset of an engagement project, particularly where there was a localised scope to the issue, to inform subsequent processes of stakeholder analysis and engagement. This approach when used at the outset of the identification process outset could bypass top-down style identification of stakeholders all together, but this requires some degree of cohesive social network within which stakeholders can identify other stakeholders.

> "Key community leaders, I guess you'd call them, or people you know of who are influential in one way, shape or form in their neighbourhood. So you'd obviously use them as a sounding board, use their network connections, obviously with their permission, and help to get involved more, stretch your wings through that community."—P19 (AEC-EP)

Snowballing as an iterative approach throughout the process also could be used to identify stakeholders through established networks. In this way, each stakeholder encountered can serve as an informant for identifying other stakeholders in the project or issue.

> "It's often good to have a bit of a snowball technique so you make sure that you follow different suggestions that people have."—P01 (LUC-EP)

5.2.6. Past experiences

As with the use of intuition, reflection by the participants on their past experiences was presented as an approach to the identification of stakeholders. Past experiences were presented by 7 of the 20 participants (3 LUC-EP and 4 AEC-EP). This could be through a general strengthening of the participants' skills and understanding over the time of their professional career.

> "I know if I give a junior the job of doing a stakeholder group list, they're not going to go as wide as I will, and they'll miss some of the nuances because they haven't got that experience. So I think it's a factor of being more experienced, understanding who's involved in your projects and then being able to do it quicker, faster, more informed."—P11 (LUC-EP)

Alternatively, past experiences could exert a more direct influence on the identification of stakeholders, with past issues used like a template for identification of stakeholders in emergent issues, or past experiences with stakeholder groups used as a prompt for relevant groups for engagement in a current issue.

> "There's a bit of here's-one-we-prepared-earlier."—P06 (LUC-EP)

5.2.7. Stakeholder self-selection

Half of the participants (4 LUC-EP and 6 AEC-EP) indicated that stakeholders can self-select for engagement in projects or issues of concern. In this way, stakeholder self-selection is not so much an approach to identification as a phenomenon.

> "I didn't select stakeholders, they selected me."—P18 (AEC-EP)

For the AEC-EP participants, the self-selection of stakeholders tended to be through individuals or groups choosing to engage with an established project or programme. Generally, this had some form of benefit for the participant which led to the desire to be engaged.

> "People who were interested could approach and develop a relationship or find out what was going on and we could proceed or not."—P20 (AEC-EP)

For the LUC-EP participants, self-selected stakeholders did so in a less collegial manner.

> "Opposers can be relatively easy to find because they write letters to the editor, and instigate legal actions. And tend to get known."—P01 (LUC-EP)

5.2.8. Use of the media

The use of the media as an approach to identification of stakeholders was presented by five of the 20 participants, four of which were LUC-EP participants, and the one AEC-EP participant discussed use of the media in the context of an LUC type-issue. The use of the media approach involved looking to the traditional news media, general online searching for statements or evidence of interested parties, and the use of social media. This may relate specifically to the project or issue of concern, or may be media research conducted on similar issues which could inform the engagement process at hand.

> "We do a media screening, you know for other projects that have been in the area."—P14 (LUC-EP)

5.3. Who are the stakeholders?

The question of who counts as a stakeholder and what defines a stakeholder was discussed by all participants. Differences emerged in the themes presented by LUC-EP and AEC-EP participants, and as such the domain groups' responses are outlined separately.

5.3.1. Land use change engagement practitioners (LUC-EP)

5.3.1.1. Stakeholders (LUC-EP). For those LUC-EP participants, all ten stated that having an interest in the issue is a requirement for being considered a stakeholder. This was communicated explicitly as having an 'interest', or implicitly through being impacted by the project or issue.

> "Stakeholders I would normally take as being people who are seen as representing a particular interest."—P12 (LUC-EP)

Two LUC-EP participants explicitly added that all people conceivably could be considered stakeholders. However, in practice the scope must be limited to those with recognised tangible interests in the given issue. This indicates that while the concept of stakeholder, philosophically, is viewed by some as being all inclusive, in practice the scope requires limitation by the recognition of tangible interests by the practitioner.

All LUC-EP participants illustrated their discussions of who is considered a stakeholder, or provided examples of issues they've worked on, with a tendency to list organised groups or social constituencies. These included those considered to be the ENRM 'usual suspects': environmental interest groups; the private sector/industry; the agriculture sector and farmers; government and politicians, and; community.

5.3.1.2. Community (LUC-EP). The concept of community was presented by all LUC-EP participants, and all presented a shared understanding that communities are in some way geographically scoped. A complex relationship between the notions of community and stakeholder was evident. Community was considered to be a special type of stakeholder, and communities were considered to be stakeholders when the community could be seen to have an interest in the issue. Individuals from a community could serve to represent the community as a stakeholder, or a range of stakeholder interest representatives—drawn from the community—could be considered representative of the community.

> "So I would see stakeholder as anyone with some sort of stake, or claim, in a development. And that would include community members of course because they're going to see it, hear it, maybe benefit from it, maybe work there, so all the local community would be there, but that would be a sub-category of stakeholders."—P01 (LUC-EP)

Stakeholders were seen to intersect with community where an individual was both considered to be 'part of' a community, and associated with a specific interest. Community groups were raised in the context of community, by some participants as being representative of the community, and by others as being potentially representative of only specific interests within the community. Indigenous peoples and Traditional Owners were presented by some participants as being a type of community, and by others as a type of interest group.

5.3.1.3. The citizenry (LUC-EP). 'Community' was seen to be a special type of stakeholder—a group of people within a shared geographical boundary upon which a project or issue would impact - though not defined by any specific interest aside from that which is by virtue of the location of the community and the issue. In contrast, those LUC-EP participants who discussed the general public or citizenry (5/10), indicated that the citizenry is seen to be 'everyone else': those without a clear interest, and not considered part of an impacted community. However, one LUC-EP participant highlighted the potential for the citizenry to be recruited into special interests.

> "You might regard them as latent or potential stakeholders, in that pretty much anyone's a latent stakeholder, and when

Table 1
The social structures of relevance in stakeholder identification as reported by participants, with illustrative examples from interviews.

	LUC-EP		AEC-EP	
	Number	Examples	Number	Examples
Individuals	7	Politicians; outspoken people	6	Politicians; individuals running news media; community leaders; outspoken people
Social constituencies	10	Indigenous people; conservationists; retirees; young people; farmers	10	Cultural groups; landholders; socio-economic groups; farmers
Groups	10	Community groups; environmental groups; transport advocacy groups; church groups; rate payers' associations	10	Community-based environmental groups; activist groups; primary production groups
Organisations	7	Governments; industry; NGOs	10	Governments; industry; research organisations

people seek to recruit them to their interests, they actually overcome their latency by basically trying to pull out a potential, real, or imagined outcome for them. Yeah, pretty much everyone's a potential stakeholder.¨—P04 (LUC-EP)

5.3.2. Agricultural extension/community engagement practitioners (AEC-EP)

5.3.2.1. Stakeholders (AEC-EP). While LUC-EP participants presented community as being a special type of stakeholder, AEC-EP participants presented stakeholders as being entities within the community. All ten AEC-EP participants indicated that a stakeholder is anyone with an interest, with no limits on whom that may include. When being described in terms of how stakeholders are identified and engaged with, stakeholders were bounded by the relevant community and organised based on pre-existing social groupings or constituencies.

"Trying to identify the stakeholder groups, just anyone, everyone in the community, try to get them involved. So that was basically just starting with schools, identifying church groups, I found a local [recreational vehicle] club there, just starting to map everybody out . . . we have church groups, we have various community groups, neighbourhood watch groups . . . the [cultural] groups, the [religious women's association], a really wide range of groups.¨—P03 (AEC-EP)

These pre-existing social groupings or constituencies within communities which were seen as the stakeholders tended to be based around interests, generally not specific to the ENRM issue of concern. Once parts of the community were viewed as stakeholders, they were considered distinct from the rest of the community. All AEC-EP participants illustrated their discussion about stakeholders by providing example stakeholders drawn from their experiences. These examples were individuals, social constituencies, groups, or organisations, and included: landholders; government departments; community-based environmental groups, and; prominent individuals in the community.

5.3.2.2. Community (AEC-EP). The concept of community was presented by all AEC-EP participants as the geographically-defined context within which they would conduct engagement. Of the ten AEC-EP participants, six explicitly outlined community as being distinct from the concept of a stakeholder. The other four AEC-EP participants did not make this point explicitly, but discussed community within the context of community being the social context from which stakeholders are drawn.

"Community to me is just the broad group out there, and they can be local or regional or state-wide or something like that, so you can stratify it that way, and within that is your potential people who could be stakeholders or who could be influenced by the decision.¨—P15 (AEC-EP)

Within communities, the pre-existing social groups and constituencies can be viewed as stakeholders, just as are organised groups (e.g. community-based environmental management groups).

"There are some informal groups, but they may not realise they're in the informal group, that's a mental compartmentalisation that we might do to actually change our engagement strategy with people depending on what we have arbitrarily, whether arbitrarily on values or whether it's on land management practices, put them into that group.¨—P09 (AEC-EP)

Unlike the LUC-EP participants, there was no distinction made by the AEC-EP participants between community and the citizenry. As the AEC-EP participants presented the community as the broad context within which stakeholders exist given a locally bounded issue, a distinction between the community and the citizenry did not emerge.

5.3.3. Social structures of stakeholders: LUC-EP and AEC-EP

The social structures of relevance to the participants included individuals, social constituencies, groups, and organisations (Table 1). Individuals tended to be those with relatively high access to power or influence. The term 'social constituencies' refers to sections of society, and is used to stratify and make sense of the complexities of social interactions. These are categories in society, but do not in themselves necessitate a formal group. Groups were generally formalised, in that the members were involved through virtue of their desire for some degree of recognised affiliation. Organisations were formalised, and the membership of organisations are those who are remunerated for their involvement. In contrast to groups who may be viewed as being comprised of people-as-themselves, organisations can be understood to be constituted of people-representing-organisation. The LUC-EP participants more consistently listed social constituencies and groups as opposed to individuals and organisations as being the relevant social structures of stakeholders. AEC-EP participants consistently included social constituencies, groups, and organisations, more so than individuals.

5.4. The role of groups

In discussing stakeholders and identification, some participants also provided insights into the reasons and processes associated with people forming and joining groups. Six of the 20 participants (4 LUC-EP and 2 AEC-EP) indicated that groups are used as a way to achieve a stronger voice when pursuing a particular agenda or interest, and four presented groups as a way to improve skills and resources for achieving objectives (1 LUC-EP and 3 AEC-EP). There was also discussion of the potential for groups to be a pathway into involvement in stakeholder processes (1 LUC-EP and 2 AEC-EP).

"They were trying to do something about it, it seems more likely you'd be able to do something about it [as a group] than on your own."—P08 (LUC-EP)

For those who discussed the formation of groups, two LUC-EP participants indicated that one highly passionate person can rally support around them to form a group. Similarly, a small number of individuals may meet informally around a shared interest, and subsequently form a group (1 LUC-EP and 1 AEC-EP). Five of the 20 participants (3 LUC-EP and 2 AEC-EP) indicated that becoming a group member offers opportunities for personal enrichment of those people, through building friendships and providing a sense of purpose. Two LUC-EP participants also indicated that groups will attempt to recruit more members to their groups in order to add strength to their cause.

All (20/20) participants indicated that conflict between groups is a factor in their engagement processes. Specifically, 5 participants (3 LUC-EP and 2 AEC-EP) presented the form of conflict explicitly as being an 'us versus them' style conflict. Six participants (3 LUC-EP and 3 AEC-EP) indicated that within groups there is evidence of conforming and consensus seeking (leading to polarisation and/or extremism of views), and 5 (3 LUC-EP and 2 AEC-EP) explicitly presented stereotyping by one group of others.

"Getting all the people of one point of mind into a room and getting them to gallop towards the extreme of their own views."—P07 (LUC-EP)

Extending on this, two participants (one from each domain group) described the tendency of groups to be defensive of their reputation when stereotyped negatively by others. Some participants further elaborated on the role of stakeholder groups by discussing the ongoing presence of the groups in terms of advocacy (campaigning and/or lobbying) (6 LUC-EP and 4 AEC-EP) outside of the formal engagement processes. Two participants (one from each domain group) also indicated a degree of institutionalisation of environmental groups into the decision making space of ENRM, this may be viewed as an extension of lobbying actions.

6. Discussion

6.1. How stakeholders are identified

This study examined ENRM practitioners' approaches to identification of stakeholders, their conceptualisations of stakeholders, and the social structures of relevance to ENRM practitioners during identification. Key insights into the practical approaches to stakeholder identification by ENRM practitioners emerged as well as some distinctions between perceptions about stakeholders from different domains of ENRM. The methods and approaches to identification of stakeholders by ENRM practitioners were classified into eight categories: geographical footprint; interests; influence; intuition; key informants and snowballing; past experiences; stakeholder self-selection, and; use of the media (Table 2). These eight approaches to stakeholder identification can be understood through grouping based on like processes. *Seeking* approaches to stakeholder identification see the practitioner looking outwards into society to find stakeholders. These approaches include the use of key informants and snowballing and the use of the media. *Creating* approaches to stakeholder identification involve the practitioner looking toward the landscape of relevance and the project or issue to construct templates for stakeholder identification. Geographical footprint, interests, and influence are all *creating* approaches to stakeholder identification.

Where *seeking* and *creating* approaches may follow explicit processes and be perceived of as a 'science' for stakeholder identification, the use of intuition and past experiences as tacit skills for guiding stakeholder identification may be viewed as the complementary 'art'—or in some cases the sole driver of identification without any accompaniment by a 'science'. Just as Lacey et al. (2015) argued that science-based decision making is underpinned by the values and beliefs of those making decisions, the 'art' of stakeholder identification represents the idiosyncrasies unique to each individual practitioner which guide the application and interpretation of the 'science' of stakeholder identification. To elaborate, intuition as an 'art' of stakeholder identification may be the gut feelings which inform the interests approach or define the stakeholder boundary in the geographical footprint approach. Past experiences may serve to expedite identification processes, through familiarity with likely stakeholders, though if used as a prescriptive heuristic for understanding future issues, past experiences also may direct practitioners toward the repeated identification of the 'usual suspects' (Billgren and Holmén, 2008; Prell et al., 2009; Reed, 2008). This may lead to use of the *ex-ante* approach for stakeholder identification as discussed by Reed and Curzon (2015), where lists of likely stakeholder categories are used as a template for stakeholder identification.

Stakeholder self-selection by definition arises outside of the practitioners' direct efforts for identification. As such, this may be viewed as a phenomenon, rather than as a 'science' or 'art' of stakeholder identification, however those who attempt to self-select must do so in a way that they are recognised by the practitioner responsible for identification of stakeholders as having stakeholder status, i.e. presenting as having attributes which would trigger the practitioner to award stakeholder status if the would-be stakeholders were not attempting self-selection. This has been recognised by the ELD Initiative (2015) and Reed et al. (2009) as a means for stakeholders to become involved ENRM processes (particularly when in response to an advertised process), and Martin and Rice (2015) utilised stakeholder self-selection to decide who had stakeholder status in their analysis of written submissions to a government review of renewable energy policy. Self-selecting stakeholders are presenting themselves to the practitioner for potential elevation to stakeholder status, replacing the need for the practitioner to use their 'art' or 'science' of identification.

The *creating* and *seeking* approaches to stakeholder identification, which can be underpinned and informed by intuition

Table 2
The 'art' and 'science' of stakeholder identification by ENRM practitioners.

Approach to stakeholder identification			Description
Science	*Seeking*	Key informants & snowballing	Utilise knowledge and networks of stakeholders
		Use of media	Use of a range of media to find evidence of stakeholders
	Creating	Geographical footprint	Determine geographical scope of issue as stakeholder catchment
		Interests	Analysis of interests triggered by issue to identify corresponding stakeholders
		Influence	Analysis of those with power to influence issue and other stakeholders
Art		Intuition	The use of tacit skills and understanding to identify stakeholders
		Past experiences	Reflection on past experiences to inform identification of stakeholders
Phenomenon		Stakeholder self-selection	Stakeholders approach practitioner for engagement in issue

and past experiences, and complemented by stakeholder self-selection, present an overview of the different approaches at work in the ENRM field. The distinction between *creating* and *seeking* approaches reflects the divide between bottom-up and top-down approaches discussed by Prell et al. (2009). Prell and colleagues argue that *creating*, or top-down style, approaches mean that the expectations, beliefs, and past experiences of practitioners can influence the range of stakeholders identified. This also implies that the understanding of the landscape and project or issue held by the practitioner (and presumably informed by the practitioner's organisation) may be privileged over other understandings of the landscape and project or issue, which are held by other people or groups (Lacey et al., 2015; Prell et al., 2009). These understandings will invariably inform the types of interests, form of influence, and the boundaries to a geographical footprint considered reasonable and of relevance when conducting stakeholder identification. For those with differing perspectives on the landscape or issue, a top-down approach to stakeholder identification may lead to challenges for ENRM such as disenfranchisement (e.g., Witt, 2013), potentially leading to a reluctance toward future participation. Following the benefits of a bottom-up approach to identification of ENRM stakeholders, the use of the key informants and snowballing approach is prevalent in the ENRM literature as it is considered a means to avoid identifying a non-representative contingent of stakeholders (Couix and Gonzalo-Turpin, 2015; Rizzo et al., 2015; Young et al., 2013; Stanghellini, 2010).

The *seeking* approaches, however, are not free of potential pitfalls, as these approaches may direct practitioners toward pre-existing social structures within society, and may as a result lead the practitioner into pre-existing social tensions and divides which can undermine efforts for cooperative and solutions-focused stakeholder engagement processes (Colvin et al., 2015b; Dougill et al., 2006). Where the use of the media serves as a *seeking* approach to stakeholder identification, the practitioner is at risk of receiving a narrow perspective on potential stakeholders due to the tendency of the news media to overemphasise conflict and oversimplify contexts to adhere to 'standards' of sensational reporting (Lankester et al., 2015) and to reproduce interest groups' agendas rather than conduct informative and objective journalism (Corbett, 2015). There is also the risk of identifying the 'usual suspects', or those stakeholders who have become professional participants – agenda driven social entities making use of engagement processes as an extension of lobbying. Reed and Curzon (2015) promote the use of the media (and other secondary data sources) in combination with key informants and snowballing to address this risk, an approach adopted by Bryson (2004), Mason et al. (2015), and Steinhäußer et al. (2015). Additionally, a reliance on the *seeking* past experiences approach to stakeholder identification means that upon a practitioner leaving an organisation, the organisation will lose not just the skills of the practitioner, but the entire process for stakeholder identification.

Among the LUC-EP participants, given that nine of ten reported the use of the *creating* interests approach and eight of ten reported the use of the *seeking* key informants and snowballing approach, it is likely that a combination of approaches is being used to find a balance between the strengths and pitfalls of *seeking* and *creating*. (It is less appropriate to speculate in regard to the AEC-EP participants due to the more widely spread and less internally-consistently reported approaches.) Forrester et al. (2015) promote a mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches to knowledge generation in participatory processes; a mix of *seeking* and *creating* approaches would reflect this in the process of stakeholder identification. Pairing the expertise of the practitioner with direct input from stakeholders in an iterative stakeholder identification process further reflects the shift in some sectors of ENRM toward collaborative processes, such as participatory modelling—a bottom-up process where stakeholders are engaged throughout the process to develop a shared understanding of the 'problem' (Allen et al., 2001; Prell et al., 2007), with additional long-term outcomes such as trust-building and conflict resolution (Hahn et al., 2006; Pahl-Wostl and Hare, 2004; Reed et al., 2013; Richardson and Andersen, 1995). In participatory modelling and other collaborative approaches (Colvin et al., 2015b) where input from stakeholders is sought throughout the process, successful outcomes are predicated on identification of the 'right' stakeholders (Prell et al., 2007; Reed et al., 2013). According to Prell et al. (2007, p. 268), this requires "a rigorous and sensitive approach to stakeholder identification and selection", necessitating a diligent and conscientious practitioner.

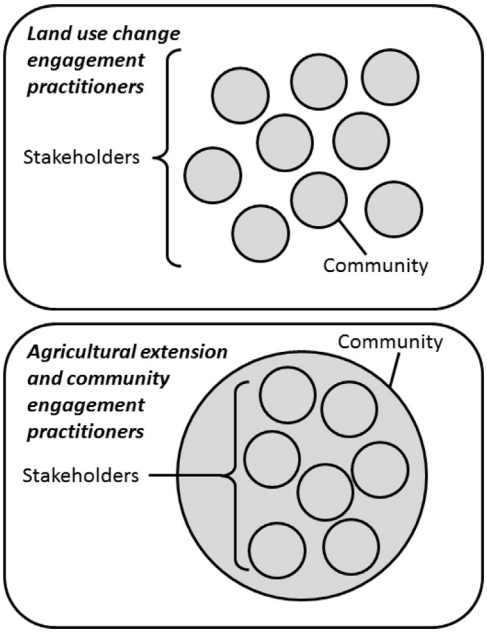

Fig. 1. The different perceptions of community: LUC-EP participants viewed community as being one of many stakeholders; AEC-EP participants viewed community as the social context from which stakeholders are drawn.

In cases where stakeholder analysis or engagement may yield less than desirable outcomes (e.g. seemingly insurmountable conflict or an incomplete contingent of stakeholders), practitioners may benefit from reflecting on their practice of stakeholder identification. Following Lacey et al.'s (2015) recommendations for researcher self-awareness of factors which may steer them toward specific outcomes at the expense of others, practitioner self-reflection may bring to light potentially unidentified biases which limit the effectiveness of their approaches to stakeholder identification through shaping where they look in society, and to whom they award stakeholder status.

6.2. Who are the stakeholders?

The analysis of participants' perspectives revealed a difference in the two domain groups on who is viewed as a stakeholder, particularly regarding community. Where the LUC-EP participants indicated community is a special type of stakeholder among many others, the AEC-EP participants saw community as the social milieu within which stakeholders reside (Fig. 1). Additionally, the LUC-EP participants distinguished the citizenry, while the AEC-EP participants did not. This may reflect the differences in scale of engagement. The LUC-EP participants saw the concerns of community as a stakeholder as being specifically place-based in comparison to the interest-based concerns of other stakeholders. Through this concern for place (e.g., Devine-Wright, 2009), community was viewed as being a special type of stakeholder. This

differs from the AEC-EP participants who saw sectors within community as being the stakeholders. Community groups may span this divide, representing an intersection of specific interests with place-based concerns. To AEC-EP participants, the place-based concerns of community would therefore not be attached to a specific stakeholder, but would be expected to be somewhat consistent across all stakeholders.

The differences in understandings of terms as ubiquitous as stakeholder and community may contribute to misunderstandings and differing expectations about the role of ENRM engagement (Kahane et al., 2013; Miles, 2012). For example, an individual who has experienced agricultural extension and community engagement may have an implicit expectation that stakeholder engagement will involve social entities only within their community (e.g., Parsons et al., 2015). However, if a land use change project is proposed and engagement follows, the same individual may be agitated when 'outsiders' (e.g., interest groups) are considered to be stakeholders, too. Misalignments of understandings and expectations such as this have the potential to undermine trust in ENRM engagement programmes, an attribute which is considered necessary for successful outcomes (Hall et al., 2013).

The theoretical distinction between normative and strategic stakeholder identification emerged through participants' discussions of who they view as having stakeholder status. The sentiment that any and all people may be stakeholders was present, though stakeholders were more readily and consistently described as defined social entities with a specific interest in the project or issue. Especially in ENRM where the interconnectedness of ecological and social systems is well understood, the claim that all people may be stakeholders can be argued based on diffuse impacts of localised projects or issues, or through a moral claim on the state of the environment or governance of society (Billgren and Holmén, 2008). However, the need for parsimony in, and resolution of, stakeholder analysis and engagement processes necessitates elevation of some potential stakeholders to stakeholder status by practitioners (Miles, 2015). It is the achievement of stakeholder status which elevates an individual, social constituency, group, or organisation from being part of the citizenry to being a stakeholder. As stakeholders are defined by possessing an interest in the project or issue, or holding a place-based concern, elevation from the citizenry into stakeholder status can occur through recruitment by interests e.g. joining a group or being perceived of as one who possesses specific interests, or through proximity, which is by virtue of residing in some form or other near to the geographical footprint of the project or issue (Fig. 2).

Stakeholder status matters, because while any social entity may perceive of itself as a stakeholder, it is recognition by the practitioner of that social entity's stakeholder status which provides the opportunity to be engaged. This is the privileged position held by ENRM engagement practitioners (Lacey et al., 2015): while approaches to stakeholder identification in ENRM can capture all social entities as prospective stakeholders, the evaluation by the practitioner of who achieves stakeholder status defines the contingent of those who are included in subsequent stakeholder analysis or engagement. Several participants identified the role of groups in strengthening the voice of comparatively powerless stakeholders or providing a vehicle for participation in engagement (e.g., Mihaylov and Perkins, 2014), indicating that group membership may be viewed as a direct and accessible way for members of the citizenry to achieve stakeholder status. Given that participants less readily presented individuals as potential stakeholders compared to groupings of people (social constituencies, groups, and organisations), it may be the case that the citizenry looks to groups as a way to be engaged, and practitioners too look to groups for whom to engage.

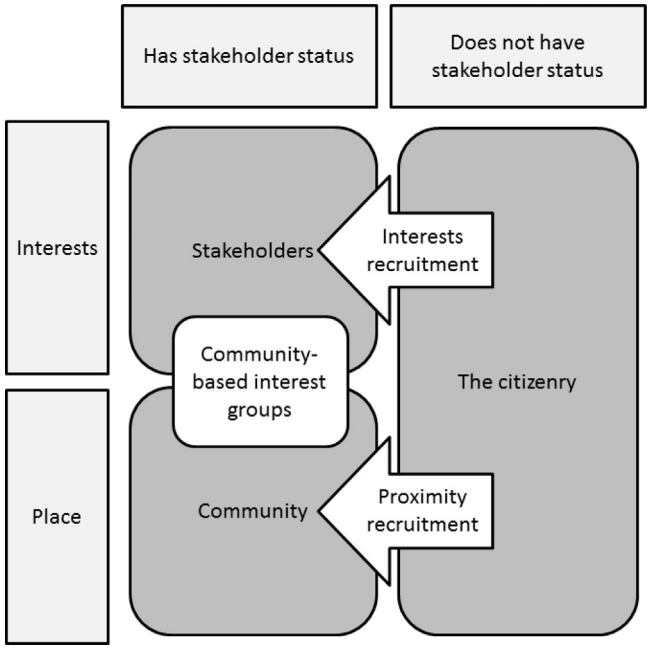

Fig. 2. An illustration of stakeholder status across stakeholders, the community, and the citizenry. Members of the citizenry achieve stakeholder status through interests recruitment into stakeholder groups, or through proximity recruitment, by residing in a locale considered within the geographical footprint of the project or issue.

6.3. *Limitations of the study and future opportunities*

As the number of participants in this study presents a relatively small sample (though not dissimilar to other qualitative studies of ENRM practice based in Australia, e.g., Morrison et al., 2015), further verification of these findings is necessary before any definitive generalisations are applied to the field of ENRM. As this study adopted a qualitative research design in order to develop a 'ground-up' understanding of the practical approaches to ENRM stakeholder identification, there are opportunities for future research to build on these findings by examining the incidence of these approaches across a larger group of ENRM practitioners. Further, a study of the uptake of approaches to stakeholder identification and categorisation not found in this study (e.g., ENRM stakeholder segmentations based on land-use preferences (Brown et al., 2015), human values (Colvin et al., 2015a), or social identity (Colvin et al., 2015b; Crane and Ruebottom, 2011; Rowley and Moldoveanu, 2003); and the application of social network analysis (Prell et al., 2009)) may contribute to ongoing developments across ENRM stakeholder engagement in both academia and practice. Additionally, extending on these findings through analysis of the merits and pitfalls of various combinations of ENRM stakeholder identification approaches (e.g. a suite of approaches across the *art* and *science*) can contribute to explication of best practice ENRM stakeholder identification which is cognisant of stakeholder status and the complex understandings of terms such as 'stakeholder' and 'community'.

7. Conclusions

Approaches to identification of stakeholders in ENRM is an under-studied but important phase in engagement processes. This study has revealed that approaches to identification can find practitioners *creating* or *seeking* their contingent of stakeholders, processes which may be informed by intuition and past experiences. The 'science' and 'art' of stakeholder identification can also be complemented by stakeholders self-selecting for participation, a

phenomenon which may reflect professionalisation of some ENRM stakeholders. With more research on the approaches to stakeholder identification, the 'science' may be made more robust and transparent, and the 'art' may be made more available for interrogation and evaluation. Such explicit discussion of approaches to stakeholder identification can assist practitioners by facilitating professional self-reflection to avoid blind spots in stakeholder identification and subsequent analysis and engagement.

Evidence of different definitions of stakeholder and community among the participants may reflect broader inconsistency in ENRM of the use and understanding of these terms critical to ENRM stakeholder analysis and engagement. This inconsistency has the potential to contribute to misunderstandings about the scope of engagement, which may undermine trust in the field from those who may be variously described as stakeholders, the community, or the citizenry. Stakeholder status as a concept can help to alleviate misunderstandings by describing the recognition of a stake by the practitioner responsible for stakeholder identification, as opposed to the potential for any self-proclaimed social entity to assert their stake in a given issue. The use of the term stakeholder status additionally emphasises the privileged perceptions of the person or organisation responsible for identification—when this responsibility rests with a self-reflective practitioner, it may serve as a reminder that who is a stakeholder and who is not is a question of perspective.

There was broad agreement among the participants that those with stakeholder status usually are some form of group. This reflects the potential for groups to be seen as the pathway toward achieving stakeholder status, especially for those members of the citizenry who wish to further specific interests through participation in ENRM engagement. Relating to incidences of stakeholder professionalisation, when specific groups are drawn on repeatedly for participation in ENRM engagement processes, and when these same groups are seen by the citizenry as the vehicle for participation, some specific interests and norms of engagement may be amplified at the expense of others.

These insights into stakeholder identification can help ENRM practitioners and academics to reflect on their own identification processes, ideally leading to enhanced practices and improved outcomes for ENRM. Clarification of ubiquitous but fuzzy terms can improve communication across domains in the broader ENRM field, and can offer greater clarity to those who may at some point find themselves in the exigent position of achieving stakeholder status.

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