

Name: Tsang Tsz Hin
SID: 1155175030
Course ID: DSPS3310

Australia's South East Queensland Forest Agreement: A Case Study in Collaborative Governance

Introduction

Background

In Australia, as in many industrialised countries, social and economic conflicts in native forest ecosystems have intensified (Kanowski & Edwards, 2021). On the one hand, with the deepening of people's awareness of ecological deterioration, forest protection has become the focus of political attention. On the other hand, primary forests are increasingly under pressure from extractive industrial use on local and global markets.

Divided government

However, because Australia is a federal system with a high degree of decentralisation and self-government, each state operates independently (Wanna, 2008). Given that forest protection is a national issue, the federal government will inevitably clash with state governments traditionally responsible for natural resources.

Few attempts have been made to integrate collaboration into Australia's federal architecture to put federal-state collaboration on forest conservation into action. Indeed, from a Jeffersonian perspective, federalism might be seen as a purposeful form of decentralised governance with a high degree of decentralised autonomy (Wanna, 2008). All responsibility rests with the jurisdiction. According to this view, neither the chosen form of government nor previous governments placed a high value on cooperation. Therefore, attempts at cooperation are always fundamentally difficult, because they necessarily violate the basic logic of federalism.

Regional Forest Agreements (1995)

The intergovernmental framework aimed at addressing the problem of divided government was the Australian National Forest Policy Statement established in 1992 (Brown, 2002). This became an essential aspect of Australia's National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development. The aims are to guarantee the sustainable use of forests, especially via the building of comprehensive forest

reserve systems and the development of a sustainable forest industry. The National Forest Policy Statement's guiding principles and objectives are put into practice through Regional Forest Agreements (Sranko, 2011). It is the first national program in Australia to conduct strategic bioregional assessments.

However, it was initially only an intergovernmental agreement between federal and state, which does not necessarily mean that other parties will agree on it. The main goal of the Regional Forest Agreement is to end disputes between the federal and state governments. But neither the commercial timber industry nor environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have given it any support (Brown, 2002). While the plan is innovative, it does not address the underlying social and economic tensions between timber businesses and environmentalists.

South East Queensland Forest Agreement (1999)

By the end of 1998, structural flaws in the Regional Forest Agreement process were recognized by key players, including academics and public activists (Sranko, 2011). There was a growing awareness that the current situation was undesirable. The inability of the Regional Forest Agreement process to accommodate creative solutions has disappointed conservationists, timber industries and some state agencies.

As a result, direct negotiations on the proposed collaboration agreement were placed outside the framework of the Regional Forest Agreement. An agreement was reached in September 1999 following an assessment of South East Queensland by the State Government, environmental NGOs and leading timber businesses (A. McAlpine et al., 2005). Through a collaborative effort to renegotiate resource regimes, the assessment effectively resolved organised disputes in the native forests of South East Queensland.

The aim of the study

This case study focuses on the success of the South East Queensland Forests Agreement and contrasts it with the Regional Forest Agreement. In the following, collaboration dynamics are discussed in detail using the Greenwood Collaboration Governance Framework and indicators are used to provide a comprehensive assessment of collaboration.

Dynamics

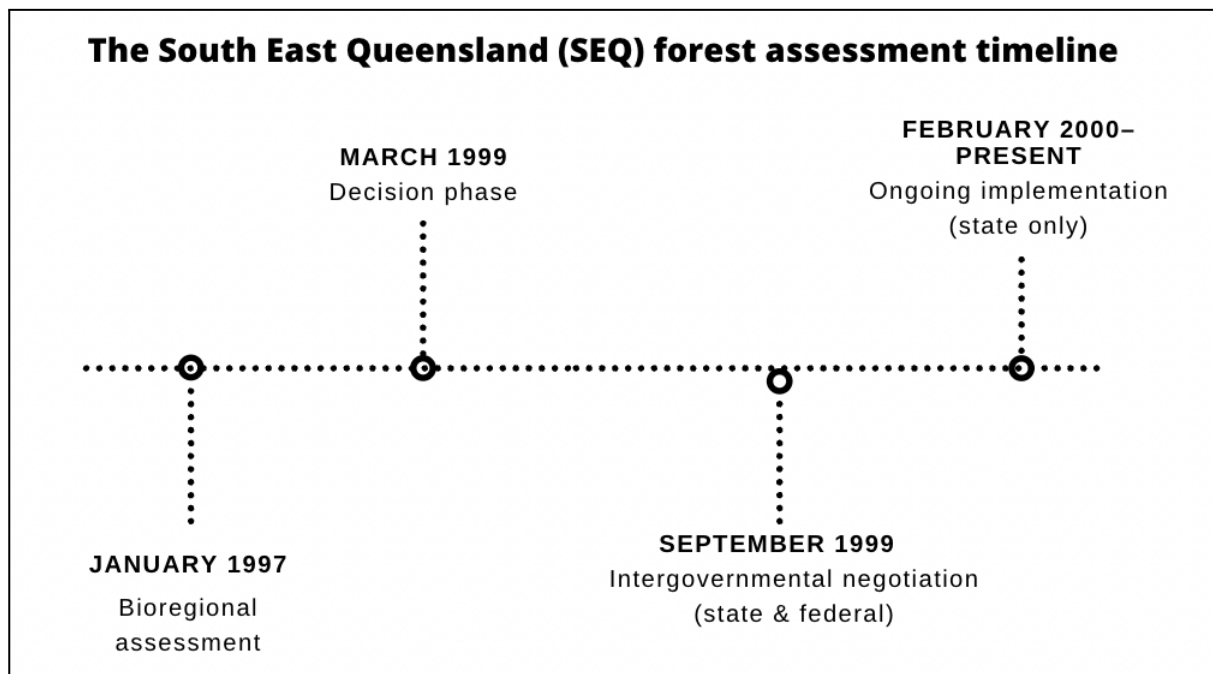


Fig. 1. Four phases of South East Queensland Forest Agreement process

Interest Perspective

According to interest group theory, concentrated interests are usually more influential than dispersed interests (Garceau, 1958). Besides governments, the main interests of this collaboration are the timber industry and environmental organisations. Growing public concern about environmental degradation and sustainability has become universal. On the other hand, the timber industry also recognizes the need for forest conservation programs for its long-term business sustainability.

Regional Forest Agreements ignore the interests of the timber industry and environmentalists and focus exclusively on the interests of the federal and state governments. The primary objective was to solve the inconsistent regulation on forest protection between federal and state (Brown, 2002). During the assessment phase in Figure 1, the Queensland Government assessed potential issues with regional forest agreements. The release of the assessment report sparked intense public debate during the decision phase. First, regional forest agreements prioritise social and economic development over the conservation goals of protecting forests (Musselwhite & Herath, 2005). The public quickly realised that regional forest agreements might fall short of conservation goals because they had no limits on the extent of political compromises allowed. It is believed that regional forest agreements are only favourable for forestry and lack the support of environmental NGOs (Musselwhite & Herath, 2005). Second, regional forest agreements support the traditional “half and half” approach, whereby half of the targeted forest area is used for conservation and the other half for logging (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2020). This approach is not favoured by environmentalists and the

timber industry because the policy is not in their interest and they need a long-term plan for sustainable logging practices.

Two major interest groups: the timber industry and environmental NGOs quickly realised that the regional forest agreement simply would not work (Brown, 2002). So they negotiated a new agreement outside of the regional forest agreement framework. They presented their solution to the Queensland state government during the decision phase, and quickly gained support from the government. Instead of the traditional “half and half” approach, they decided to convert 100% of the targeted area into reserves. The agreement will immediately protect 62% of areas with the highest conservation value, with the remaining 38% phasing out timber production over 25 years (Brown, 2002). From the perspective of environmental NGOs, their conservation goals have been achieved through a sustainable approach to logging. For the timber industry, there is a long-term benefit from this agreement. The industry no longer needs to cut down natural forests and can transition to logging planted trees. Not only does this help them gain support from the public and environmentalists, it also ensures a sustainable logging industry. Ultimately, the South East Queensland Forest Agreement was signed by the State Government, environmental NGOs and leading timber businesses. The agreement is mutually beneficial and will help the interest groups of both sides in "Moving Northeast" (Greenwood et al., 2021).

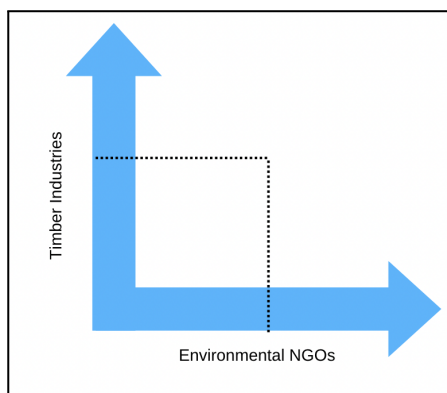


Fig. 2. “Moving Northeast”

Voluntary nature of collaboration

Collaboration is based on joint ventures, in which participants exchange benefits with each other for their unique interests (Greenwood et al., 2021). In this case study, there is a clear conflict between long-term and short-term interests. The timber industry's decision to partner with environmental NGOs and state governments presents a dilemma. There is an inherent short-term incentive for the timber industry to pursue primitive forest logging. However, they understand that unsustainable logging practices in the long term are more harmful than phasing out traditional logging operations and transitioning to timber plantation logging. Additionally, the reputation of the timber industry has

also been tarnished by numerous clashes with environmental NGOs over the decades (Brown, 2002). The timber industry has stated in the South East Queensland Forest Agreement process that they are willing to resolve this conflict and gain environmental support for their industry. So they are willing to start working with environmentalists to create an atmosphere of trust. This voluntary act of giving up short-term benefits is critical to the fundamental dynamics in this case study.

The voluntary nature of the cooperation also stems from the horizontal nature of the partnership in this agreement (Greenwood et al., 2021). In this collaborative process, governance between state governments, environmental NGOs and the timber industry relies on informal social structures. No direct reporting relationship. Each party is dependent on the voluntary cooperation of the other. These agreements are voluntary, rather than enforced by the federal government. The parties to the South East Queensland Forest Agreement proposed an integrated governance framework for managing forest conservation (see Figure 3). With a high degree of flexibility and autonomy, all parties are looking for better solutions for sustainable logging. Although they have no rational or rigid strategy, they cooperate voluntarily and are willing to make compromises. For the timber industry, they eventually abandoned logging in deregulated areas. For NGOs, they allow the timber industry to do one last logging activity in some areas before adding them to the reserve (Brown, 2002).

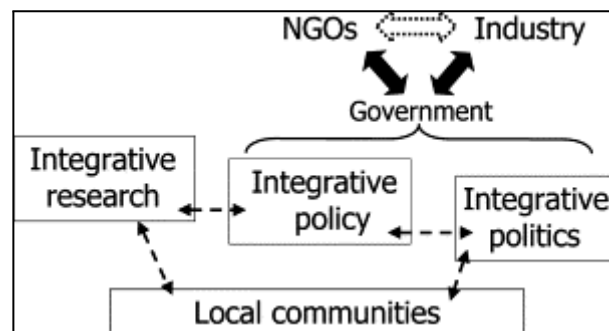


Fig. 3. Integrated governance framework

Assessments

In this case study, it was critical to assess whether the necessary conditions existed to support the success of this collaborative governance approach. The value of the evaluation is to help determine the viability of a consensus-based approach. It provides valuable insights that can help determine whether conditions are appropriate for a collaborative governance approach in the South East Queensland Forest Agreement.

Indicator 1: Common purpose and a workable scope

First, to facilitate a collaborative governance process, participants must be able to settle on a common purpose for the process (Greenwood et al., 2021). As shown in this case study, the state government, timber industry, and environmental NGOs collaborate to preserve natural resources and make commercial logging more environmentally friendly (Brown, 2002). Government and the timber industry agree more with the idea of “ecological modernization”, which is to develop in a more environmentally friendly way. As for environmental NGOs, they support “sustainable development”, preventing the depletion of natural resources and maintaining ecological balance. Although the goals of "sustainable development" and "ecological modernization" are different, they have many things in common. In this case study, both purposes were met. This is because the South East Queensland Forest Agreement not only focused on the economic sustainability of the timber industry, but also placed a strong emphasis on environmental sustainability.

In addition, the South East Queensland Forestry Agreement operates in a feasible and workable scope. The South East Queensland Project began in January 1997 with the signing of a scoping agreement by the Prime Minister and Queensland Premier. The agreement defines the boundaries of the area, limited to southeast Queensland (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, 2020). Although the area managed by the agreement includes a large area of 689,000 hectares of public forest outside the reserve, it remains within the operational boundaries. As the region is predominantly operated by a number of Queensland timber operators, the agreement could focus on these timber operators. Therefore, the agreement, to the extent feasible, could focus on negotiating with these firms in the region (Brown, 2002).

Indicator 2: Incentives for participation

In practice, to work collaboratively, all parties must first act proactively to address the situation (Greenwood et al., 2021). Interest is the underlying reason or motivation for a party to take a stand. In this case study, the timber industry's motivation for signing the South East Forest Agreement was the sustainable development of logging activities. They have faced a series of problems in recent years. Traditionally, the timber industry has considered restricted access to public forests to be a major obstacle to its development. In recent years, however, they have become aware of the long-term problems of obtaining native forest wood (Kanowski & Edwards, 2021). By 2000, 1.08 million cubic metres of logs had been harvested, of which 90% were collected from primary forests (Brown, 2002). The long-term exploitation of natural wood made them realise that wood from plantations was more sustainable for their long-term development and outweighed the short-term benefits of sourcing wood

from native forests. So this is the first potential motivation for the timber industry to join the agreement.

Furthermore, the uncertainty and risks in this case study provide an incentive for key players to engage more in a collaborative approach (Greenwood et al., 2021). The conflict between the timber industry and environmental NGOs has intensified in recent years. This deterioration in their public relations could be detrimental to their business, while the growing conflict could lead to more regulation of their timber activities. They could risk being banned from logging or subjected to strict regulations (Lane, 1999). Thus, this collaboration provides a place for the timber industry to resolve conflicts and demonstrate its commitment to the transformation of the industry. On the other hand, uncertainty about environmental degradation is also relevant to environmental groups. Commercial logging leads to biodiversity loss and changes to natural habitats. During the evaluation phase of the agreement, this concern was confirmed. 35 percent of the regional ecosystem types are listed as "threatened," and only 13 percent are protected by existing protected areas (Brown, 2002). This uncertainty about losing natural habitats and the risk of offending environmental groups creates a lot of incentive for key players to engage in a collaborative approach.

Indicator 3: Adequate resources and time

Collaborative governance processes are often time and resource intensive for the parties involved (Greenwood et al., 2021). Transformation of the traditional timber industry is technically complex and capital intensive. The goal of phasing out timber harvesting for plantation harvesting is a big project. This will affect the entire timber industry and create uncertainty. In this agreement, NGOs and the state government work together to revitalise and develop the plantation. The state government provided \$9.5 million in public investment in reforestation and a \$42 million forestry transformation and restructuring plan (Brown, 2002). This agreement relieves the pressure on the entire timber industry to transform.

Time is one of the most critical resources in this collaboration (Greenwood et al., 2021). In the early stages of implementation, it will take time for the timber industry to move operations out of protected areas. They need time to phase out existing logging camps and relocate their operations. So, in the agreement, the NGO ended up allowing the timber industry to do one more harvest in the targeted area (Brown, 2002). It is imperative that the timber industry has enough time to act and relocate operations, and the agreement takes their needs into account.

Indicator 4: Opportune legal and political context

This indicator is equal to the external environment of the larger legal and political context in which problems arise (Greenwood et al., 2021). In the case of the South East Queensland Forest Agreement, the federal government does not recognize it. This is because it is not part of the regional forest agreement they have ratified. The federal government considers the solution "out of the box" because it is not within the framework of the National Forest Policy (Sranko, 2011). This creates a paradox that the South East Queensland Forest Agreement grew out of the Regional Forest Agreement but failed to gain the support of the Commonwealth Government. The federal government's failure to recognize that at the heart of the agreement is its opposition to the timber industry's "transition strategy" from native forests. In their view, a transformation strategy is simply not feasible and would be damaging to the timber industry. The timber industry should be provided with suitable areas for logging activities. The federal minister even said an "appropriate RFA" must allow the timber industry to sustainably harvest indigenous timber (Brown, 2002). As a result, the South East Queensland Forestry Agreement's ambition to convert native timber harvesting to plantation harvesting has not been endorsed by the Commonwealth.

However, at the state level, the Queensland Government has recognized and signed the South East Queensland Forests Agreement. Because Australia is a federal system, states are able to operate independently of the National Forest Policy Framework. Collaboration has therefore become a bottom-up effort that begins with a mutual agreement between the timber industry and environmental groups and is signed off by state governments (Brown, 2002). In addition, the agreement has been incorporated into state legislation. The importance of the agreement has been recognized by the Queensland Government and marked by the formal inclusion of its text in every timber supply contract. All in all, the collaboration has strong support from state governments, although they have failed to gain federal recognition.

Limitation

A key limitation of the South East Queensland Forests Agreement is the aforementioned legal and constitutional political constraints. The South East Queensland Forest Agreement does not meet federal legal requirements and does not operate within a regional forest agreement. The Queensland government has been told by the federal government that they will not fund such an ambitious project because it falls outside the scope of the regional forest agreement. The lack of federal support leads to budget problems (Brown, 2002). And because the South East Queensland Forestry Agreement is a big project to transform the timber industry, they need federal funding to make something like this

happen. While state governments can still pass agreements outside the federal framework, cooperation will be more difficult.

In order to improve collaborative governance and solve the budget problem, the federal and state governments must also understand each other and make compromises. For the Federal Government, it is imperative that they understand the needs of the south-east Queensland timber industry and environmental organisations. The ambition to transform the entire forestry sector is a long-term process that benefits the long-term development of the timber industry without compromising its interests. To address the concerns of the federal government, state governments should have a thorough discussion and platform for all major parties to express their needs to the federal government. The South East Queensland Forest Agreement can only work with the leadership of the Federal, State, key environmental groups and timber industry leaders. Therefore, a more comprehensive collaborative governance with the backing of the federal government can be achieved.

Conclusion

Finally, this case study analyses the case of the South East Queensland Forest Agreement as a successful collaboration. Compared with regional forest agreements, the former do not solely address the problem of divided governance in forest protection. Instead, it focuses on the interests of timber producers and environmental NGOs. A voluntary collaboration between two conflicting interest groups has been remarkably effective in resolving the conflict between the two. The result of the agreement was a transformation of the timber industry, agreeing to phase out local timber harvesting over a 25-year period and switch to plantation timber extraction.

Reference

- A. McAlpine, C., Peterson, A., & Norman, P. (2005). The South East Queensland Forests Agreement: Lessons for Biodiversity Conservation. *Pacific Conservation Biology*, 11(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.1071/pc050003>
- Brown, A. (2002). Collaborative governance versus constitutional politics: decision rules for sustainability from Australia's South East Queensland forest agreement. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 5(1), 19–32. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1462-9011\(02\)00022-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1462-9011(02)00022-9)
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. (2020, October). *Regional Forests Agreements*. Retrieved December 21, 2022, from <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/forestry/policies/rfa/regions/qld/rfa>
- Garceau, O. (1958). Interest Group Theory in Political Research. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 319(1), 104–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271625831900112>
- Greenwood, S., Singer, L., & Willis, W. (2021). *Collaborative Governance: Principles, Processes, and Practical Tools* (1st ed.). New York. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003172062>
- Kanowski, P., & Edwards, P. (2021). Forests under the Southern Cross: The forest environmental frontier in Australia and New Zealand. *Ambio*, 50(12), 2183–2198. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-021-01636-5>
- Lane, M. B. (1999). Regional Forest Agreements: Resolving Resource Conflicts or Managing Resource Politics? *Australian Geographical Studies*, 37(2), 142–153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8470.00075>
- Musselwhite, G., & Herath, G. (2005). Australia's regional forest agreement process: analysis of the potential and problems. *Forest Policy and Economics*, 7(4), 579–588. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2003.11.001>

Sranko, G. (2011). Collaborative governance and a strategic approach to facilitating change: lessons learned from forest agreements in South East Queensland and the Great Bear Rainforest. *A Journal for and About Social Movements*, 3(1).

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiVsvaBoIr8AhUds1YBHT1CCrcQFnoECA0QAAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.interfacejournal.net%2Fwordpress%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2011%2F05%2FInterface-3-1-Sranko.pdf&usg=AOvVaw06SrUK8IuHUP4GgJ-AkcGJ>

Wanna, J. (2008). Collaborative government: meanings, dimensions, drivers and outcomes. *Collaborative Governance*. <https://doi.org/10.22459/cg.12.2008.01>