

**Factors inhibiting local government engagement in environmental sustainability:**

**Case studies from rural Australia**

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Abstract

The literature on local government management of the environment in Australia has been limited in that it has typically focused on the urban sphere. In contrast, this paper places rurality at the centre of its inquiry. It uses data from fifteen case studies of rural local governments in Australia to identify the main factors that inhibit natural resource management by rural councils. These barriers mobilise around four key themes. They are: capacity, commitment, co-ordination and community. While many of the issues raised in this study of non-urban shires have been described in previous research, the paper argues that the geographic location of the areas under investigation aggravate barriers to engaging sustainability initiatives. It is contended that rural local governments need to be resourced accordingly to ensure that natural resource management at the local government level in Australia is not compromised.

## **Introduction**

Over a decade ago Keen and Mercer (1993-94) noted that ‘it should be emphasised that the focus of interest’ in natural resource management in local governments across Australia was ‘largely metropolitan’. Since this time, however, researchers have demonstrated little interest in examining why this may be the case and in identifying the types of barriers that may impede natural resource management by rural local governments. In light of this neglect this paper makes a specific contribution to the literature on local government and environmental sustainability by placing rurality at the centre of its inquiry. The key purpose is to document and examine the constraints to environmental progress by rural local governments in Australia.

The paper is divided into eight main sections. It begins by providing some background information on local government in Australia before reviewing the literature on the subject of impediments to local government natural resource management. Following this, the methodology for the study is outlined. The next four sections of the paper document the barriers to rural local governments' management of natural resources in Australia around four main themes. These are: commitment, capacity, co-ordination and community. The conclusion emphasises that while constraints to natural resource management may also exist for metropolitan councils, they will be exacerbated in a rural context.

## **Local government in Australia**

There are 721 local government authorities in Australia. There is significant diversity between these in terms of geographic size and population. Typically those with larger areas and a smaller number of residents are those located in rural and regional areas. While the average population of local governing bodies is 26,400, half of the councils have fewer than 6,490 residents (Commonwealth of Australia 2003, p. 5). These sparsely populated councils often have large geographic areas as is evidenced by the very large Shire of East Pilbara in Western Australia which covers a massive 378,533 square kilometres.

Unlike many of their international counterparts, local governments in Australia traditionally were responsible for a set of narrowly defined services provided through property levies (Aulich 1999). This was the source of the axiom that positioned local government as concerned solely, or largely with 'roads, rates and rubbish' Since 1989, however, all states have instigated new local government acts which has resulted in the sector having a much broader brief, including responsibilities for community development, economic growth and natural resource management' (Wensing 1997).

Concurrent with this legislative change has been the growing ascendancy of neo-liberalism across the Australian body politic and the rise of its associated demands for increased efficiency, accountability and economic outcomes (Aulich 1999). Within local government this has led to an increased emphasis on privatisation, service delivery outcomes, fee for service activities and contracting out (Witherby et al. 1999;

Pocock et al. 2001). A further material outcome for local government of the discursive prominence of neo-liberalism in the Australian state has been widespread amalgamations (Mowbray 2000).

As the state and federal governments have devolved a number of responsibilities to their third tier counterpart the financial pressure on local governments has been significant (Johnson 2003). The challenge faced by local governments in dealing with increased responsibilities is aggravated by the fact that they have limited capacity to raise revenue. Over fifty per cent of their funds are gathered through land taxes or rates (National Office of Local Government 2001). While rates clearly differ markedly between rural areas Binning and Young (1999b, p. 32) note that 'the majority of rural rates would lie in a fairly tightly clustered group towards the lower end of the spectrum'. Attempts by councils to increase revenue by raising rates are problematic on two counts. First, any move to increase rates is 'notoriously unpopular' and most typically leads to community outrage (Wild River 2003a, p. 341). Second, some state governments have utilised their power over local government to cap rates.

In these instances the state Minister of Local Government sets the limit by which councils can increase the total income it receives through ordinary and special rates. Councils have complained bitterly about this imposition (Commonwealth of Australia 2003) which contributes to the financial pressure they experience (Johnson 2003). While local government is typically positioned as less important than the federal or state levels of government in Australia, commentators concur on its importance in

environmental matters (Bates 1995; Buhrs & Aplin 1999; Binning & Young 1999a; 1999b; Adams & Hine 1999). They cite local government's proximity to community, its potential to interpret and integrate federal and state environmental policy successfully so that it is meaningful at a regional level and its traditional and well entrenched roles in planning as being indicative of this importance. Given this potential it is important to understand more about the types of barriers that may restrict the environmental activities of local government. The following section of the paper reviews the Australian literature which has considered this question.

### **Local government and natural resource management in Australia**

The beginning shift to greater natural resource management by local governments in Australia was first documented by Keen and Mercer (1993) in reporting on a program in the state of Victoria in the period 1988-1990. Under the category of 'inter-governmental relations' they described the problem of limited financial resources as well as the temporary and ad hoc nature by which grants are allocated. Also problematic, they reported, was the lack of trust between governments. Keen and Mercer (1993) also noted the problem of a scarcity of information and resources for local governments concerned with natural resource management. A final barrier to natural resource management in the sector they reported was a fear of change, which they saw as inherent to the culture of local government. In a subsequent paper elaborating on the emergence of LCSs in Victoria, Keen and Mercer and Woodfull (1994) provided further insight into the types of factors that may limit environmental activity at the local government level in Australia. In this work noted that unless the

community is involved in a significant manner at the grassroots level in the development of a LCS its chances of success are limited. Also imperative, they suggested, is having senior managers who support and champion environmental goals.

The majority of the authorities that were the subject of Keen and Mercer's (1993) and Keen et al. (1994) studies were located in metropolitan Victoria. Thus their study tells us little about the particular problems that may be faced by rural local governments in seeking to progress environmental policy. A similar limitation exists with a study by Whittaker (1997), which examined Australian progress with Local Agenda 21 as its methodology provided insight only to those councils which are 'willing and able' to implement the agenda. As Mercer and Jotkowitz (2000, p. 170) comment in reviewing Whittaker's (1997) research, 'what is clear is that "the environment" is very largely a stated policy priority for metropolitan rather than rural councils'. Despite this, Whittaker's (1997, p. 324) identification of barriers confirms the findings of previous work (Keen & Mercer 1993; Keen et al. 1994) in highlighting the importance of a lack of finance, expertise, information and state and federal government support.

In a more recent study again focusing on the state of Victoria, Mercer and Jotkowitz (2000) focus attention on evaluating environmental progress by local government. In the process they necessarily turn to the question of barriers arguing that 'there can be no possibility of genuine progress in making sustainability work at the local level' without a change in state and federal funding to the local level and without a shift in powers to local government (Mercer & Jotkowitz 2000, p. 166). They cite a range of

examples to illustrate the veracity of their claim, but highlight as particularly problematic in disempowering local citizens and local government, forced amalgamations by state government.

The most recent scholarly study of Australian local government management of the environment was undertaken by Wild River (2003). While the study's focus was on local governments that are environmentally engaged it still highlighted some of challenges to sustainability at the local level. She argues that constraints to environmental progress by local government include a shortage of essential resources (e.g. money, time, expertise, statutory powers and political will), a lack of data and knowledge, poor consultation with stakeholders and a lack of coherent environmental powers at the local level. Like much of the previous literature on local government and natural resource management in Australia the Wild River's work is focused largely on the urban sphere. As he notes in summarising her findings, there is still little known 'about the environmental capacity of poor, sparsely populated and geographically extensive local governments' (Wild River 2005).

Emerging alongside the academic literature on local government natural resource management in Australia has been a series of reports on the subject commissioned by various national and state level local government advocacy groups (e.g. Australian Local Government Association 2005; Municipal Association of Victoria 2002; 2003; Local Government Association of NSW and Shires Association of NSW 2003a; 2003b). This body of work has been important on two counts. First, it has confirmed



findings from scholarly published work. In a Victorian study of weed management, for example, the major barriers identified were again those of a lack of staff time and numbers, funding and other resources (MAV 2003). The second factor that has made these association reports useful is that they have drawn particular attention to the need to further investigate the particular concerns faced by rural local governments. This was a key finding of an earlier survey of Victorian councils which reported 'major differences between metropolitan and rural councils' in terms of number of dedicated environmental officers on staff and development of new environmental strategies (MAV 2002, p. 9).

### **Methodology**

Data for this paper were obtained from 15 case studies of Australian rural local governments across the states of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia (see Table 1). When deciding on a methodology Yin (2002) suggests that the case study is most appropriate when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. These three features were present in this research study.

While a positivist approach would sample through quantitative means in accordance with the principles of statistical validity and generalisability, the case study uses purposeful or criterion based sampling (Richie et al. 2002). The first sampling decision concerned the choice of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and

Western Australia as sites for the research. The need to cross state boundaries was critical to this project given the key relationship between local governments and their state counterparts. Due to resource constraints, however, it was not possible to sample all states. This was also not necessary given that the four states chosen provided sufficient contrast in terms of some key factors. These included size, environmental problems, historical interest in environmental issues at a state level and types of resourcing provided for local government and natural resource management issues at a state level.

Following the selection of states to examine, criterion based sampling was then utilised to inform the selection of case study sites within each of the states. Burns' (1990, p. 371) explanation of this sampling frame as including the deviant, the unique and the reputational was particularly useful to this task as it highlighted the fact that greater insight into the research questions could be gained by examining those rural local governments currently or potentially facing more significant natural resource management problems. To determine these rural local governments the researchers utilised two different strategies. The first was a typology developed by Wild River (2004). This typology classifies each non-metropolitan local government in Australia according to a range of natural resource management problems. Using this tool, two local government areas with serious natural resource management problems were selected from each of the four states. The second strategy utilised to select case study sites that were either now or soon to be facing more extreme natural resource management problems was to examine demographic data that could indicate whether

a shire was a 'tree change' or 'sea change' area. These are areas that have, in the past decade, experienced a period of major transformation as Australian city dwellers have moved to the coast or inland to escape the city and pursue an Arcadian, nostalgic or alternative lifestyle (Natoli 2004).

The emerging evidence on the 'sea change' and 'tree change' communities is that they are under significant natural resource management threat due to the existing and predicted future increased populations (e.g. Sammels 2004; Salt 2004). It was thus decided to select two such shires for investigation across each of the states. Once these criteria for sampling were determined sixteen potential case study sites were selected. This required further modification as some local governments did not wish to participate in the project<sup>1</sup>.

Each of the case studies involved interviews and document analysis. Sampling procedures for selecting in-depth interviewing used purposeful or theoretical sampling rather than statistical sampling (Ritchie et al. 2002). In this study the informants considered most critical were mayors, CEOs, councillors and particularly those with portfolio responsibilities for natural resource management boards with responsibility for local government. In total sixty-nine interviews were undertaken across the 15

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<sup>1</sup> The difficulties the researchers experienced in terms of access are not just important methodologically. They also provide insight into the study's research questions. They highlight the tensions surrounding local government management of natural resource management. They provide evidence, for example, of the sense of suspicion from the local government sector that they are being monitored by outsiders, but that they are not being sufficiently resource to address natural resource management issues. Also emphasised is the fact that rural local governments are typically resource poor (in terms of time, staff etc) and under increasing demands from a range of quarters (researchers, other tiers of government, rate payers). Environmental problems may be recognised but these are not typically prioritised especially when other operational matters appear to be more pressing.

case studies with an average of 6 to 7 per case study. A final type of data collection within the case study sites was document analysis. Documents sourced included council newsletters, local newspaper reports relating to the council and natural resource management and state, regional and local natural resource management plans and evaluation reports. Analysing documents was important in triangulating the study as well as in providing a more comprehensive understanding of each of the case study sites (Yin 2002).

### **Capacity**

Participants in the study introduced the topic of limited capacity for natural resource management by referring to factors such as agricultural restructuring, the aging of the population, drought and the reduction in the number of people farming. It was common for participants to argue that it was impossible to prioritise natural resource management when they were facing more immediate concerns. In one Queensland case study town (QLD4), for example, which had experienced the closure of three major employers over the last decade losing 2000 permanent jobs the Mayor stated: It's not that the environment isn't a concern but that we've had other more pressing matters. Employment has been the biggest. Just getting people jobs so that some would stay and they would be able to live. The town was decimated economically.

In this case study and elsewhere, the same concern was raised in relation to the devolution of state and federal government roles to local government. Furthermore participants argued that this was causing particular problems for rural councils. That

is rural councils are already under-resourced and overstretched, and yet there is pressure on them to undertake services work that has previously been the responsibility of other tiers of government (e.g. run the post-office, aged care work). With so many demands being placed on rural local governments it was necessary one participant explained to 'draw the line somewhere'. This perspective resonated through a number of interviews as the following quotation from a Queensland mayor (QLD 4) illustrates:

We've had so many responsibilities devolved to us and we just can't deal with everything. We don't have the money for a start or the time. But there is also the problem that we need to be experts in all those areas and we just can't be.

The quotation above highlights the important point that capacity does not, or course, simply refer to financial resources. Also critical are human resources in terms of knowledge, skill and community involvement. These may always have been issues for rural local governments. However, the changing demographics of rural local communities and the hardship facing many people on the land have aggravated the problem according to participants. This was well illustrated in one Victorian case study town (VIC1), which had experienced a period of severe and prolonged drought. In the past the shire had a reputation for being at the forefront of proactive natural resource management, having won numerous state and national land care awards. With economies of scale and aggregation of properties, however, the local population

is both diminishing and ageing and the pool of volunteers becomes smaller all the time. Five years ago there were 16 local environment groups. In 2005 there were twelve. In this context there is not the 'necessary human, social and economic capital' required for community involvement in natural resource management (Lane & McDonald 2005, p. 718).

Rural local government participants acknowledged that there was money available for natural resource management through state and federal grants. However, they saw these as problematic for two reasons. First, they required resources in terms of personnel, expertise and time to access the grant. Second, and perhaps more importantly they expressed distrust that funding would continue into the future. Participants argued that when the funding that was now being directed at regional natural resource management organisations ceased, local government would be left with the responsibility of resourcing all natural resource management programs. There was also concern that a change in government at the state or federal level could mean the withdrawal of funding. The lack of trust local government personnel expressed in relation to financing from the state and federal governments is intricately connected to two features of the limited capacity of Australian local governments outlined earlier in the paper. That is, their political and financial capacity compared with state and federal governments. As one CEO stated in discussing the lack of legislative and revenue raising power of his sector of government, 'At the end of the day there's only so much we can do'.

An extensive literature has documented the decline in rural Australia over the past decade (e.g. Gray & Lawrence, 2003; Cocklin & Dibden 2005). The negative impact that this has had on rural local governments has also been noted by scholars (Daly 2001; Tonts 2005). The data in this study have taken us one step further. That is, they have shown natural resource management to be another casualty of the reduced capacity of rural Australia, and particularly, the reduced capacity of rural local governments.

### **Commitment**

It was positive that there were only two case study sites where an environmental officer was not on staff (See Table 1). However, interviews with environmental officers revealed that their presence was not enough to facilitate change. This is because the achievements of an officer are mediated by the extent to which there is a clear commitment to sustainability articulated by senior council members. A limited commitment resulted in a lack of resourcing, a failure to challenge less supportive staff and elective members and the positioning of the officer in a low level in the organisational hierarchy. Without committed senior officers environmental staff also found themselves with impossible workloads as was the case with one officer who works across four shires. They also found themselves responsible for a very narrowly defined agenda, such as weed management, or stock route maintenance or management of feral animals.

The challenges facing an environmental officer working in a council, where there is limited commitment to sustainability were strongly evident in QLD1. The environmental officer in this case study is restricted in achieving outcomes by the fact that she has very limited senior management support, is employed across four western shires, has no budget allocation and included in her roles are a large portfolio of responsibilities beyond a focus on sustainability. Her attempts to advocate for change had, however, not been taken seriously by senior management. She explained:

*The thinking is: That's not an issue. It will be alright. We don't really need to look into that or we don't have that problem in our shire. We haven't had it in the past and we don't have it now.*

Those case study participants who expressed a low level of commitment to natural resource management justified their position in a number of ways. The first was to argue that local government has no legislative responsibility for natural resource management. It was, in contrast seen as a state role. These participants used terms such as 'core business' and 'real work' to dismiss the importance of a natural resource management focus. The second was to contend that there is a commitment to the environment, but that this could not be addressed because of other more pressing commitments such as economic development. Implicit in this argument is the belief that natural resource management goals are not necessarily in sympathy with these other commitments. Also integral to this argument is the belief that natural resource management goals are a luxury or an added extra rather than critical to the future



well-being of the community and the district. In these councils it was stated that the only way funding would be allocated to meeting natural resource management goals would be if these were tied to a development project. The subordination of the natural resource management agenda to other agendas in this shire and in other case study shires was thus connected to a limited understanding that there is a link between the health of the natural systems and the economic well being of a shire. Thus, this also operates as a key constraint to the engagement of a natural resource management agenda in rural local governments.

In her work on local government management of natural resources in Australia Wild River (2005, p.13) argues that critical to the success of a local government sustainability agenda was 'the presence of passionate individuals with a long-term connection to the local area and commitment to the environmental work'. This was mirrored in the present study. However, in rural local communities small populations and the prevalence of conservative values may result in fewer natural resource management champions. These champions may also be ostracised in their rural towns for their views. As one participant argued 'a green councillor can be really isolated'.

### **Co-ordination**

Australia's three tiered system of government makes for a complicated natural resource management policy and legislative arena. In fact, Morrison 2004 et al have referred to 'fragmentation' as an 'enduring problem' in Australian natural resource management. It is no surprise then that the local governments that participated in this

research argued that there are too many agencies to which they are answerable and that there is too much policy ambiguity surrounding the environment. The lack of integration between the different agencies and approaches and the inconsistent consultation between the state and federal governments and the local authorities were recurring themes in the interviews. When asked how he saw his natural resource management responsibilities as a local government representative differ from those of the state and federal governments one mayor joked, 'If you find out tell me'.

Rural local governments consistently complained that they may be consulted but rarely engaged in the higher level programs and decisions made about issues that will have a direct impact on their area and constituents. This was a particular issue in terms of grant programs. Participants argued that the terms and conditions of these were dictated at state and federal levels but did not always reflect what was needed at the local government level.

Rural local government participants expressed the view that there is limited recognition from other tiers of government of their efforts in terms of natural resource management. They argued state governments were more interested in having a punitive rather than a collaborative relationship with local governments when it came to the environment. In these discussions participants again highlighted their legislative and financial powerlessness compared with the state and federal governments. One environmental officer explained that this legacy of a sense of

inferiority coloured intergovernmental relations in terms of the environment. She noted:

It's real chip on the shoulder stuff because they feel, and rightly so, that they are not actually brought into discussions. They're not represented in the constitution. There's a whole lot of baggage that makes this stuff highly problematic.

To complicate the issue, over the last two decades in Australia natural resource management issues have increasingly been viewed on a regional or catchment scale because, logically natural resources are not bound by an artificial line that delineates one local government authority from another (Conacher & Conacher 2000; Brunckhorst 2004). A significant barrier to sustainability in rural Australia surrounds these new institutions and their relationship with local governments. In some instances this is because the arrangements are not yet finalised. As one NSW mayor noted, 'We don't fully understand our role in the catchment management authority plan as yet ...It's really unclear'.

In other instances shires were clearer about their roles but demonstrated low levels of engagement in their regional natural resource management authorities. There were a number of reasons participants expressed negativity towards regional natural resource management authorities. The first was a belief that this was a top down strategy that had been imposed on local government rather than initiated by them. This was

connected to their perception that other tiers of government deemed them incapable of dealing with natural resource management. The second concern related to the significant funding participants saw being directed to regional bodies which they thought would be better directed at local governments or through local governments. A third criticism concerned the perception that the regional authorities simply added another unnecessary and unproductive bureaucratic layer to what was already a complex institutional arena. A final criticism of the regional authorities was that local governments had not been resourced to facilitate their interaction with these bodies. It was not unusual for some shires to have to work across two regional authorities. With a small staff and a smaller number of unpaid councillors who were in full-time work attendance at meetings was problematic particularly with the large distances involved. The large geographic areas of some of the rural shires mean that a number are part of more than one regional catchment group. This again extends their workload despite their limited resources.

### **Community**

The final group of barriers to local government engagement in natural resource management identified by participants focused on the community itself. Participants advocating this view believe there is not broad public support for council taking a more active role in relation to the environment. There a number of dimensions to this argument. The first is that rural shires are traditional and conservative and therefore unlikely to be interested in what may be seen as radical green agendas. The presence, in rural areas of a large population of farmers, was also seen to negate community

interest in the environment. In one western New South Wales case study (NSW4) two newly employed environmental officers lamented the fact that there had not been a strong historical community interest in the environment. One stated, 'In the far west the problem is there's not a lot of pressure for change. Not like on the coast where the impacts are really obvious or recognised.'

Councillors and staff interviewed also expressed the view that a focus on the environment could lead to public criticism as the public would want to know why resources were being diverted away from services and infrastructure when they clearly needed attention. There was also speculation that a natural resource management agenda could result in community disapproval as it could be associated with a radical agenda.

Few strategies are utilised by the majority of rural councils to engage the community in natural resource management. In arguing community involvement and consultation was unnecessary, unneeded and unproductive participants highlighted their rurality. That is, rural residents are typically farmers and therefore less interested in environmental issues. Further, rural people are usually more practically oriented and interested in outcomes rather than what were labelled 'talk-fests'. Finally, rural people and their councillors are well known to each other and have ready access to each other so formal arrangements for consultation are unnecessary. Echoing this sentiment was a councillor in NSW4 who state, 'Consultation is nearly irrelevant here. Broadly we

know what the (natural resource management) issues are and what a lot of the priorities are’.

The most commonly utilised is a traditional open community forum held every 2 to 5 years to identify priorities for council action. These forums are not solely focused on the environment, and participants in the research noted that environmental concerns were rarely, if ever, raised by citizens at these meetings. They are also, by participants’ own admissions, typically poorly attended.

An important body of scholarly work has now documented the importance of community involvement to achieve environmental outcomes (Curtis et al. 1999; Gooch 2004) as well as the need for innovative strategies to engage the community (Broderick 2005; Lane et al 2005; Pini & Haslam Mckenzie 2006). There was, however, little support for sentiments expressed in this literature in the case study sites.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has described findings from 15 case studies of local government management of natural resources in rural Australian in order to highlight the barriers to environmental engagement for non-metropolitan shires. Data from the case studies have been analysed according to four key themes; community, capacity, coordination and community. The types of barriers discussed in the paper echo findings from research on impediments to local government environmental engagement

internationally (e.g. Voisey et al. 1996; Tuxworth 1996; Vigar 2000; Enticott & Walker 2005). They also confirm findings from previous Australian literature examining the factors that may frustrate sustainability efforts at the local level (e.g. Allan & Lovett 1997; Crowley 1998; Bulkeley 2000; Atkinson et al 2003; Australian Local Government Association & Biological Diversity Advisory Council 2000; Keen & Mercer 1993; Keen et al, 1994; Whittaker 1996; Mercer & Jotkowitz 2000; Morrison et al. 2004).

What is different about the research reported in this paper is that it has given particular empirical emphasis to the problems experienced by rural local governments. Given the resonance between the findings of this study and the broader literature it seems that there may be little difference in the types of problems faced by rural and metropolitan municipalities either nationally or internationally. However, there is likely to be a difference in both the magnitude of the problems faced and the capacity of the local government areas to address these problems. This is of particular concern given that reports indicate that rural and regional areas in Australia face extensive natural resources management problems (Gray and Lawrence: 2003; Beer, Maude and Pritchard 2003). Clearly, unless state and federal governments recognise the particular impediments non-metropolitan local councils face in addressing the environment and resource them accordingly, there is little hope of reducing or preventing further natural resource management degradation in rural Australia.

Table 1: Case study summary table

Case Study	Pop	Size square metre	Council size	No. of Council Staff	Environ-mental officer
QLD1	1 000	3955	8	65	Yes (quarter time)
QLD2	16 000	13 660	10	130	Yes (quarter time)
QLD3	15 900	2 644	9	160	Yes
QLD4	13 000	21 121	9	140	No
NSW1	13 000	6 000	13	170	Yes
NSW2	15 000	6 000	10	180	Yes
NSW3	4 000	2 000	7	70	Yes
NSW4	13 000	3 970	9	100	Yes
WA1	750	10 130	7	30	Yes
WA2	1 200	2 000	11	27	Part-time
WA3	4 400	3 300	10	50	No
WA4	25 000	1 400	13	200	Yes
VIC1	6 200	7 500	6	110	Yes
VIC2	9 000	4 500	5	80	Yes
VIC3	15 000	2 000	7	143	Yes

Table 2: Summary of barriers to rural local government environmental

Management



Theme	Barriers
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other priorities seen as more important e.g. economic priorities/services priorities</li> <li>• Lack of support from key staff such as mayor or CEO</li> <li>• Lack of support from critical mass of councillors</li> <li>• Narrow definition of environmental sustainability</li> <li>• Environmental officers not placed in key positions in organisational hierarchy</li> </ul>
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of financial resources.</li> <li>• Lack of expertise, skills and training.</li> <li>• Limited readily available and accessible data on natural resource management for planning</li> <li>• Limited political and legislative power of local government in relation to natural resource management</li> <li>• Short political cycles make planning problematic</li> <li>• Increased devolution of responsibilities from state and federal governments to local government</li> </ul>
Co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor coordination between three tiers of government</li> <li>• Variable coordination and collaboration between regional and local spheres</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of the multiple roles of local government</li> </ul>
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of interest in natural resource management in</li> </ul>

community

- Competing priorities for community
- Limited resources for community engagement (time, money, expertise)
- Limited understanding of the need for and benefits of community engagement by council staff and elected members
- Utilisation of a narrow range of strategies to engage public.
- Increased work demands on rural people due to factors such as agricultural restructuring and drought means less time for community involvement.

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