



ENGAGED Environmental Citizenship

Heather J. Aslin and Stewart Lockie
Editors

Engaged environmental citizenship

**Edited by
Heather J. Aslin and Stewart Lockie**

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Foreword

Andrew Campbell

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.¹

As the human population approaches the carrying capacity of the planet, exceeding planetary boundaries in some dimensions and with little room for further expansion in others, it is increasingly clear that no part of our world is beyond our reach or influence. The landscapes, seascapes and cityscapes in which we live and on which we depend, are shaped by us—by our aggregate and cumulative everyday decisions and actions. These are in turn influenced, constrained and enabled by ‘the system’—institutions, markets, policies and rules and how they are governed.

We may rail about the system as it affects the environment: expecting governments to protect it and fund its management and restoration; expecting corporations to look after it and clean up after themselves; expecting science to find clever solutions to myriad problems; and expecting markets to penalise unsustainable practices rather than rewarding them.

But ultimately, looking after the environment comes down to us.

The smartest environmental regulations in the world or the juiciest incentives won't protect the environment if people are not interested at an individual, family, firm or community level. Reducing carbon emissions, conserving natural resources and biodiversity, minimising ecological impacts, shifting to renewable energy, redesigning cities and moving towards a more sustainable society are everyone's responsibility, not only the responsibilities of governments and formal institutions.

Of course we can't deliver sustainable solutions on our own—especially to macroenvironmental problems like climate change, energy security and biodiversity loss—in the face of hostile or corrupt institutions, inadequate property rights and perverse incentives. We need engaged citizens, committed to more sustainable lifestyles, living and working within supportive institutional frameworks in the broadest sense. Such frameworks are more likely to evolve where people at a grassroots level are committed and engaged, and in turn will work to facilitate that engagement, and so on in a virtuous circle.

If only it were as simple as Margaret Mead's famous aphorism.

Heather Aslin and Stewart Lockie and their co-authors tease out and explore some of the most important ideas of our time—‘citizen’, ‘environment’ and ‘engagement’—and consider how

¹ Margaret Mead, 1901–1978, anthropologist

these ideas apply to people in different ways and combinations in widely varying roles and situations in contemporary society.

Accepting responsibility inevitably raises questions about the ‘common good,’ public versus private benefits, shared obligations and social norms, and consequently our roles as citizens. What can we reasonably expect of individuals and collectives in the public interest as opposed to what they need to be required to do by laws or regulation, or what they may need to be encouraged and supported to do via direct incentives, rewards or compensation? These are questions about the limits of personal and collective moral and ethical obligations, versus responsibilities and rewards, that need to be built into governance systems and supported by public policy.

Australia has a proud track record of citizens’ involvement in environmental movements and action to conserve and protect natural resources, probably beginning with voluntary soil conservation groups during the erosion decades of the 1930s and 1940s, and peaking in recent decades through voluntary citizen engagement in movements like Landcare and Waterwatch.

The landcare model of neighbourhood groups of farmers, other land holders and interested community members working collectively on environmental challenges of common concern, aligning organised volunteer action with citizens’ existing environmental ethics and sense of responsibility, has in recent years spread to more than twenty countries.

The concept of engaged environmental citizenship is explored through diverse lenses and case studies in this book. While the book has an Australian orientation, the spread of Landcare in other countries suggests that most of its content is internationally relevant.

As we grapple with environmental challenges of unprecedented scale and complexity, the idea of engaged environmental citizenship is well worth a closer look. Aslin and Lockie have assembled interesting case studies and attracted thoughtful contributions.

This timely and important book deserves a wide audience among policy makers, citizens and anyone interested in the environment.

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November 2012

Contributors

The editors

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Heather Aslin is currently a senior scientist at the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) in Canberra, Australia, and an honorary research fellow at Charles Darwin University. The idea for this book was conceived while she was working at the Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods at Charles Darwin University, and was inspired by a successful symposium held at an annual conference of The Australian Sociological Association. Heather has a PhD in resource and environmental studies from The Australian National University and more than 20 years' research experience studying relationships between people and their environment. She has worked in government, universities and non-government organisations, and is the author of two national-award winning-books published in a previous career as a biologist.

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Stewart Lockie is Professor and Head of the School of Sociology at The Australian National University and President of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Environment and Society. His research addresses, among other things, public involvement in natural resource management, social and environmental sustainability standards, and social impact assessment. Recent co-authored and co-edited publications include *Going organic: mobilizing networks for environmentally responsible food production* (CABI, 2006), *Agriculture, biodiversity and markets* (Earthscan, 2010), and *Risk and social theory in environmental management* (CSIRO Publishing, 2012).

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Lynn Brake is a senior research fellow at the University of South Australia in Adelaide, South Australia, and has worked on numerous natural resource management projects in the outback of South Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory over the past thirty-five years. He was born and raised in the Rocky Mountains of Utah in the United States. After completing degrees in biology and bio-energetics, he worked for the United States Federal Environment Protection Agency in Oregon. He came to South Australia in 1972. He worked in natural resource policy and management at the University of South Australia (and its predecessors) until he retired from teaching in 1996. Since that time, he has served as a community bureaucrat on numerous boards, committees, and councils dealing with water policy and management in outback Australia. Lynn now works with the South Australian Centre for Water Management and Re-use at the University of South Australia.

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Based in Melbourne, Victoria, Kate Brooks is a social scientist focused on developing understandings of social networks and circumstances to assess and augment rural industry planning options. With a particular focus on sustainability, in the context of both management systems and policy, Kate integrates this work with outcomes focused scientific research and analysis, across a range of industry sectors. Her work assists government and industry clients to identify and understand the social perspectives of blockages in industry or policy, and to create solutions that are economically and environmentally integrated, and sustainable. As an Adjunct Senior Fellow with the Research School of Social Sciences at The Australian National University, and a consultant, Kate has seventeen years' experience working with corporate and government sectors, statutory authorities and research agencies. In addition to her experience in research analysis, strategic planning, network analysis and project management, her key field of specialisation is in social impact assessment, social capital development, community networking and capacity building.

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Dr Fiona Gill completed her PhD in sociology at Edinburgh University in Scotland in 2003, working on the negotiation and performance of gender, sexual and national identity. Since then, her interest in identity construction has been explored through research in the areas of environmental sociology, rural sociology and the sociology of sport, including an interest in issues relating to the construction of citizenship, responsibility and the neo-liberal state. Dr Gill lectures in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales.

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Elery Hamilton-Smith has enjoyed a long career as an academic and planning consultant. He was Professor and Head of School at the Phillip Institute (later RMIT University), and undertook a number of visiting Professorships in Poland, the United States, Canada, Britain, Slovenia, Malta and Hungary. While in the United States, he played a leading role in the Research Service of the United States Forest Service. He was engaged in a leading role on World Heritage with the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the World Commission on Protected Areas. He also taught each year in the International Centre of Excellence in Wageningen, Netherlands. He has produced over 2,500 books, papers and reports.

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Dr Jacki Schirmer is a senior research fellow at the Centre for Research and Action in Public Health of the University of Canberra. Her research focuses on understanding how natural resource management connects to human wellbeing, with a particular focus on understanding the social impacts of changes in land use and access to natural resources, and participatory approaches to managing conflict over resource management. Her research has predominantly focused on issues related to agriculture, fisheries, forestry and biodiversity conservation in Australia. The research reported on in this book was undertaken in her previous role as leader of the 'Communities' Research Project' of the Cooperative Research Centre for Forestry, at The Australian National University in Canberra.

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