

Submission to panel: Transitions in Water Management

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Abstract:

Achieving sustainable water transitions in Australia involves a knowledge and inclusion of a diverse array of actors and interests within governance institutions; from federal legislation to corporate structures to local agricultural and urban water users. Each of these multiple levels of governance contribute to the pace and shape of transition, including the achievement of the goal of “environmentally sustainable development” for water resources. By evaluating these three components of Australia’s water governance through the lens of institutional interplay and adaptation, we hope to identify key drivers and obstacles to water transitions that build on existing policy structures and promote sustainability and equity among Australia’s water users. This draws from document analyses of the legislation of 200 bodies in all Australian States which resulted in about 24 types.

These express the water history of Australia and the impact of the CoAG reforms after over 160 years of operations. Each piece of legislation is also reviewed using the Legal Coherency and Legal Consistency analysis methods from the Centre for Comparative Water policies and Laws for the type and measurement of environmentally sustainable development that is required of key actors. Water company CEO’s are particularly key actors, and interviews were conducted to determine problems with achieving environmentally sustainable development from their perspective; this analysis also includes the relationship between ESD achievement and corporate governance structure.

Finally, water users in the urban and agricultural sector play a key role in determining the outcomes and effectiveness of any type of institutional transition. In addition, incorporating local institutions and even norms into national, state, and corporate governance systems is critical for long term sustainability. We use interviews and institutional analysis to add this third layer to our understanding of water transitions in Australia, both recent (CoAG reforms) and for the future.