



The Goliath of Catchment Management Planning

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Catchment Management Planning is the wonderful culmination of the study of all aspects of water in the catchment, and engagement of the catchment's community to prioritise management options. But how do you scope a project like that? How much is too much, or how little is enough to achieve that goal?

Fairfield City Council has recently completed two catchment management plans for overland flow catchments (300-400ha). What started with an enthusiastic collaborative approach has only just finished four years later.

Now that we have completed the Catchment Management Plans, have they been worth the effort? Did they actually manage to integrate all the aspects of water management? And do we think they will be implemented as originally planned?

Council started with an understanding that we wanted to combine floodplain, stormwater and natural resource management. We were also aware that the plans must consider all objectives, contexts, flow regimes and scales while being informed by data, modelling, the community and research. We were looking to have a complete understanding of water in the catchment, past present and future that would guide our planning which would lead to our model catchment – water wise, green and with a reduced flood risk.

Fairfield City Council and our consultants searched for innovation throughout the project, investigating preferred methodologies for flood mitigation and water reuse, but changing tack when we found they did not fit our requirements. But when you are working within a fixed budget, there are only so many paths you can walk down before the funding runs out (even when your consultants are being generous). Additionally, working with the community was a high priority for Council. A consultant specialising in public engagement was brought in, but how much can you achieve in an LGA where the rate of people that do not speak English well or not at all is almost double the national rate (28.9% to 16.5%)?

We have completed the Catchment Management Plans, which are physically very large documents, and operationally may be difficult to implement. They contain the work of many people, and cover a large variety of recommended actions within both the public and private domains. As Council officers, we know that the prioritised actions reflect what our community members recommended. But a plan is only as good as its implementation, and is council (the organisation) and Council (the Councillors) ready to start implementing what the people really want, even if it may unpopular in a larger context?

There are a variety of things that Council will do differently if we approach the catchment management planning process again in the future, and the first place we would start is with our expectations from one

project. Additionally, we now have an understanding of how difficult it is to integrate stormwater, floodplain and natural resource management from the set out, and that another approach is needed for the size of the catchments we studied.