From government to governance: Logistical consequences for Australia on communicating natural resources knowledge

[A] ***Dick Osborn***

[A] Centre for the Public Awareness of Science, Building 38a, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, 0200.

The 1944-46 Rural Reconstruction Commission and the 1975-77 Commonwealth–State Collaborative Soil Conservation Study produce natural resources knowledge primarily for communities-of-place at two levels: the state/territory jurisdictions and the national government. The 1978-86 Australian Environmental Statistics Project was designed to inform policy analysis within and between communities-of-place at five levels: local government areas, their aggregates as intra-state biophysical regions, the Murray-Darling Basin as a multi-state region, the state/territory jurisdictions, and the nation.

The 1997-2002 National Land & Water Resource Audit also identifies regional communities-of-place at intra-state and multi-state levels; but goes further by recognising needs for natural resources knowledge at levels below government jurisdictions. The 2006 Population and Housing Census introduces a new statistical geography of some 300, 000 to 400, 000 Mesh Blocks, relatively close in number to the place names within the national gazetteer.

The four examples seem sufficient to demonstrate Australia's perceptions of its communities-of-place hierarchy have changed significantly in recent past. The paper reflects on the logistical consequences of such perceptions. It does so by using a morphological box to judge the upper limit of nodes and ties in a communications network connecting stakeholders, and thus clarifies the meaning of engaging publics in natural resources decision-making.

200 words