



# fact sheet

*knowledge for managing Australian landscapes*

## Using citizens' juries for making decisions in natural resource management

*Research project number ANU11 of the Social and Institutional Research Program of Land & Water Australia. Completed: June 2001.*

### Background

As part of a worldwide interest in public participation, deliberative methods of involving communities in decision making activities have been evolving in most developed countries. The citizens' jury is one of a suite of deliberative forms of public participation. Citizens' juries were first used in the 1970s in the United States and in Germany to overcome the limitations of standard opinion polling for complex scientific issues. A citizens' jury brings together a group of 16 or so randomly chosen citizens as jurors and provides a forum in which the jurors can consider how best to deal with an issue of public importance. It takes place over a number of days during which jurors are given detailed, balanced information about the issue, hear a wide range of views from witnesses, and are able to question these witnesses as well as seek out any additional information they might want.

The citizens' jury is organised in consultation with an advisory committee and stakeholder reference group whose role includes making sure that witnesses are of high quality. There is a neutral facilitator who ensures that jurors are able to get the information they need, and at the same time takes care that all witnesses are treated fairly. The event concludes with the jurors preparing a report that records recommendations and any dissenting points of view.

### Objectives

The project aims were to:

- investigate the potential of the citizens' jury as a means for informing social decision making about resource and environmental management, and to compare it with standard approaches involving environmental valuation and environmental cost:benefit analysis;



- investigate the perceived usefulness of the citizens' jury to actors in the social decision-making process, in part by surveying members of the advisory panel at successive stages of the project; and
- establish guidelines for the use of the citizens' jury in resource management and environmental contexts.

## Approach to project

There were three stages in the project methodology:

### Stage 1

National and international literature review of deliberative and non-deliberative public participation processes, including the theoretical literature on deliberative.

Citizens' juries are a viable public participation method, probably best used to complement other forms of public participation, budgets permitting.

### Stage 2

Case studies of two citizens' juries dealing with significant natural resource management (NRM) issues. The first case study, which was hypothetical, looked at the issue of community priorities for managing a national park in NSW. The jury assessed options specifying different levels of effort being devoted to the management activities including fire management, control of weeds and feral animals, maintenance of facilities and management of historic sites.

The task of the jury was to choose a preferred management option from the three offered and to consider the maximum amount of money the community could be required to pay to achieve better park management outcomes without it being worse off. A questionnaire was used by each juror at the start and at the end of the jury to track shifts in preferences.

The second case study dealt with a 'real' issue. The task of the jury was to identify the preferred management option for a road development. Testing was used before, during and after the jury to track shifts in general environmental attitudes and beliefs of jurors.

### Stage 3

An evaluation workshop held to disseminate results to potential users of the technique and to gather feedback on its usefulness. Participants in the workshop came from agencies around Australia who were involved in managing: national parks, crown lands, public forests, water, urban and rural planning, local government, environmental impact assessment processes and mining.

## Key findings

The project identified the advantages and disadvantages of citizens' juries. It found that, essentially, citizens' juries are a viable public participation method, probably best used to complement other forms of public participation, budgets permitting. The case studies demonstrated an impressive ability of citizens to grapple with complex environmental issues and to deliberate effectively to reach an agreed jury 'verdict'.

A major advantage of citizens' juries is their ability to provide the views of the community under conditions of far greater information and deliberation than a questionnaire could achieve.

The two major limitations of citizens' juries were identified as being:

- the question of whether a small panel of citizens can adequately represent the views of the whole community; and
- the difficulty of gaining the cooperation and attendance of people and groups for successful execution of the citizens' jury.

The project report identified issues that require further attention:

- minimising self-selection biases when recruiting jurors;
- 'plugging in' juries to the decision making process; and
- risk assessment in potentially controversial case studies.

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## Implications for policy makers

Many current NRM policies advocate strong community participation in decision making and the devolvement of responsibility. The citizens' jury is one of a group of deliberative forms of public participation that can be considered by policy makers and managers at catchment or regional scales.

## Implications for advisory & community groups

Citizens' juries represent an opportunity for a limited number of people from the community to become closely involved in deliberating on NRM issues. Integral to this is the processing of a large quantity of information, which has the potential to further inform and educate those involved. Citizens' juries also represent a way for the community to provide estimates of 'citizens' values' that indicate the maximum amount of money citizens could be asked to contribute to obtain an environmental improvement without becoming worse off than before the improvement.

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