A Greener Alternative? Deliberative Democracy Meets Local Government in Australia

by

Ivan Craig Zwart (B.A. Hons)

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University of Tasmania
June 2003
Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.

\[\text{Signature}\]

Ivan Zwart
4 June 2003

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Abstract

In recent decades a search has been conducted among democratic theorists to find a decision making form that is both democratic, and able to produce outcomes that may be seen to favour the life supporting capacity of our natural systems. One form of decision making that has gained considerable interest from green theorists is participatory or deliberative democracy. It is suggested that compared to liberal representative structures, a deliberative conception of politics will allow for a more informed policy process that enables the discovery and support of generalisable rather than particular interests. As a consequence, citizen deliberation will produce outcomes that support the pre-eminence of the natural environment, while providing greater legitimacy and compliance with the agreements reached.

These assumptions about the environmental credentials of deliberative forums are not entirely theoretical. In recent decades there has been a gradual movement within local government in Australia towards the use of participatory or deliberative models to support its existing representative structure. In particular, this has been driven by the emerging role of local government in addressing environmental issues. It is shown that despite questions regarding their reliability, many of the assumptions made within the deliberative democratic literature also exist within local processes to deliver favourable environmental outcomes. The thesis therefore tests the purported benefits of deliberative structures. It finds that citizen deliberation can produce more informed policy processes. However, the notion that deliberative structures will produce both environmentally favourable and universally legitimate outcomes is dependent upon a range of contextual factors.

To support this thesis, existing research on public deliberation and two case studies in Australian local government are presented and examined. The first case study inspects the use of a precinct system at the Glenorchy City Council to address issues including waste management, while the second concerns the use of a citizens jury to address stormwater issues at the Waverley Municipal Council. Although a range of factors prove to have significant impacts upon the environmental outcomes that were achieved, the thesis concludes that the deliberative model can facilitate the greening
of decision making, and enable a collective realisation of the benefits of active citizenship.
Acknowledgements

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Enormous thanks must also go to the many people I have interviewed around Australia during the course of this project. In particular, the councillors, staff and citizens at the Glenorchy City Council and the Waverley Municipal Council. Your friendly acceptance of me and my work and willingness to answer many questions is greatly appreciated, given the project would not have succeeded without your assistance. I hope this thesis can justify all the time you gave me.

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Thanks to you all.

Ivan Zwart
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Previously Published Material

Earlier sections of some chapters were presented at a conference or published.

Sections of Chapter Two, Six and Appendix One were used to present:


Sections of Chapter Two, Six and Eight were used to produce the forthcoming article:

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALGA</td>
<td>Australian Local Government Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCP</td>
<td>Bronte Catchment Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPA</td>
<td>Environmental Protection Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>Ecologically Sustainable Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPT</td>
<td>Gross Pollutant Trap</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGAE</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISMP</td>
<td>Integrated Stormwater Management Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUCN</td>
<td>International Union for the Conservation of Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IULA</td>
<td>International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBB</td>
<td>Keep Bronte Beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA21</td>
<td>Local Agenda 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRO</td>
<td>Natural Resource Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSESd</td>
<td>National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFP</td>
<td>Residents Feedback Panel</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSW</td>
<td>University of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>USEP</td>
<td>Urban Stormwater Education Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCED</td>
<td>World Commission on Environment and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCS</td>
<td>World Conservation Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMTF</td>
<td>Waste Management Task Force</td>
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