

Regional authority responses to user group questionnaire

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Explanation

This is a summary of interviews carried out with five of the main Regional authorities with significant irrigation in their regions. An interview based on a questionnaire with the same questions as outlined below was conducted with a range of personnel from each council covering policy makers to field officer type personnel. The responses have been summarised and grouped for ease of explanation.

Headings and specific questions	No of times a response was given
Definition and role	
Q. What is your understanding and definition of a user group?	
Consent holders working together	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Groups already exist but they may not be called user groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Individuals working collaboratively (not necessarily consent holders)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No particular affiliation (across primary sector representation)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Dealing with a range of issues	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Primarily protection of property rights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Industry supported and engaged	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: From the interviews there is no definitive definition of a user group. The common theme is one of individuals and consent holders working together across sectors and issues. This reflects the already diverse range of existing groups and participants and the different emphasis that councils or individual groups put on their specific issues. The lack of definition and wide brief is an opportunity to tailor groups to the issues and area without having to have to fit inside a preconceived box. The expectation for collaboration and working together comes across strongly and is a primary reason for groups to exist.	
Q. What do you see as the role of user groups?	
Delivery of good management practice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Communication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Resource management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advocacy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Knowledge extension	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ensuring individual and group compliance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Problem solving – Local solutions to local problems	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fit for purpose	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Input into statutory plan development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interpret technically heavy and unfamiliar material to members	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Legitimate representative body as a key stakeholder engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Utilisation of expertise within a group	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: Each council outlined a variety of roles and the breadth of roles that groups are expected to fulfill underlines the need for structured groups to exist and the gaps that regional councils see within their resource management strategies in dealing with farmers and growers. The potential roles are varied and leaves wide scope to consider what is needed and then fill that role within an area. The delivery of Good Management Practice (GMP), communications and resource	

management are the key areas that councils see user groups filling. The response of 'resource management' to the question leaves a number of opportunities open. Combined with communication and the ability to have an input into planning processes, this positions groups well to directly influence key decisions and processes that affect the individuals within their ranks. The response, 'delivery of good management practice' is an area that councils have recognised as one that they do not have the expertise in and probably will never be able to credibly do. They are able to promote and help set the parameters that shape GMP but the process of delivering, training and implementing is not a role, as a regulator, that they will excel at. But they do see GMP as a crucial building block for the achievement of aspirations set out within regional plans.

Future roles

Water quality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Roles change over time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Catchment level resource management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Comment: With any organisation changes are inevitable and the transition that occurs as groups become more mature and trusted is a natural progression towards a higher level of management ability and responsibility. The spectre of water quality that has recently come into focus is a role where regional councils want to see user groups take a lead.

Limitations to role

Personalities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Leadership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Relationships between (individuals and other organisations)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Lack of information about resource	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
History	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Expectations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
RMA limitations (legal requirements that are bestowed on councils)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Comments: The limitations that regional councils see are centred on the personnel, leadership and the relationships that exist around a group. This is an important area that the councils have signalled needs to be correctly addressed. Although these are very relevant and legitimate limitations they may stem from the lack of structure that is prevalent in existing groups. Once there is some robust and democratic representation the personality issues are able to be mitigated or sidelined to an extent. The role is always going to be limited by the statutory requirements that the councils have to work under. In all cases the role of consenting and regulatory enforcement is not going to rest with user groups. Compliance however is something that groups could be responsible for to varying degrees depending on individual situations.

Q. What are the reasons to engage with a user group?

Efficiency of engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Efficiency of communication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Definite, considered and moderated position presented and consulted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Local solutions to local problems	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Comment: The overriding reason is the efficiency of both communication and engagement of individual consent holders. The communication aspect is about being able to use the group as a conduit back and forth for information and to keep consistency of messages. The efficiency of engagement is a similar concept condensing a large number of consent holders or stakeholders into a common voice and contact point and being able to reach them and get them engaged.

Q. What is the end goal/ideal outcome that groups will be a part of?

Self management of resource	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Local solutions to local problems	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
GMP development, encouragement and extension	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Community engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: The responses to this question were very focused on enabling local problem solving and management of the resource, inclusive engagement and the ability to use groups to enable adoption of Good Management Practice. The response was very consistent and encouraging that each council was thinking along the same lines.	
Range and scope	
Q. What scale of groups exist / are envisaged?	
Scale depends on scale of resource – fit for purpose	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Graduated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Groups exist in varying scales (commercial, catchment, issue, area)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: In line with the wide range of definitions and potential roles there is no set scale of groups envisaged. The fit for purpose model was the most preferred with open ideas on scale, graduation and driver of group.	
Q. What will the level of responsibility/degree of independence be?	
Depends on personnel, trust, history, structure, MOU	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fit for purpose	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Limited	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: Caution was the overriding consideration that councils expressed when asked this question. There were many variables that would have to be satisfied before responsibility and independence for resource management was devolved. But they were all quite open to the concept in principle.	
Process	
Q. Is there a process to enable groups	
No formal process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Model existing groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Partnership model with council support or regulatory backstop	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes council directed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Delivery of process	
Fit for purpose (end result orientated)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Open but supported with resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Prescribed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: This is an open ended book in most instances with the outcome more important than any prescribed process. The councils are either willing to leave everyone to their own devices when enabling groups, dont have the reosurces or have not prioritised this activity. However support is forthcoming in many cases.	
Q. Minimum requirements needed for confidence in ability of group?	
Robust structure and governance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Good relationships	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Auditability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Capable and motivated personnel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Willingness to accept responsibility	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Relevant level of knowledge and understanding (resource and process)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Effective leadership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mandate, democratic representation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Progression	
Q. At what point does the authority deem that a group is ready to take on increased responsibility?	
Satisfactory levels of minimum requirements (as above) trust and history	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Credible third party audit ability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Unsure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: The two most critical aspects required are a robust and credible governance structure providing auditability and working relationships. The individual abilities, attitudes and personalities of the people involved, particularly leadership, is seen to be a very important component of the working ability of any group. In this regard user groups are no different to any other organisation that has to deal with potentially contentious issues with personalities and the suitability of them to the situation the underlying factor that determines working relationships. None of the responses indicated that there is a set point and that evolution is always going to be a combination of factors that depended on each circumstance. The credibility and auditability were important factors.	
Q. Is there intention to give groups recognition/status	
Recognition with written and named within regional plans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Status would be given once working models existed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Once requirements (as above) were met keen to give recognition and participation but status requires group to become part of council structure. E.g. community board	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Not to groups as such but the MOU would be binding document and have status in plans same as a consent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Q. Checks and balances needed for confidence of group effectiveness?	
Detailed plans, robust structure, open and fully disclosed practises and reasons and justification for decisions.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Third party audit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Capability of personnel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Capability of structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Compliance action that supports MOU. Detailed in plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: Recognition is the easy component to give with status being more difficult to achieve. Recognition by naming groups within regional plans is the preferred mechanism to gain recognition. But recognition is not just given it has to be earned by gaining trust. Similar to requirements for confidence to gain responsibility a robust structure, auditability and the capability of the personnel were high up the list of checks and balances required. The fact that recognition and status is not a given puts the onus back onto the groups to perform in a professional manner to gain the trust required.	
Resourcing	
Q. Are there support resources in place?	
None specific for user groups but support available if asked	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes dedicated personnel as liaison and facilitation roles	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Developing planning framework to enable easier consents transfer and conditions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Q. Challenges with regard to capability to resource the development of groups?	
Competing demands for funding and resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Difficult to justify to political component of council	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Lack of network within and with other councils and industry, INZ, Landcare	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Already have experience and capability in house	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: The biggest issue for council staff in resourcing is the competing demands for personnel and resources and personnel. The difficulty of justifying the cost to political masters is another significant hurdle. With the change in water management moving to a collaborative space this may alter but the fundamental competing demands will not go away so it is imperative that groups are able and willing to resource themselves to become and stay more visible and relevant to council processes.	
Q. Communications strategy	
None	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Personnel ongoing communications (critical aspect)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Differences between how farmers and councils communicate need to align	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Information pamphlets	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: Some fundamental differences in how council versus how farmers communicate needs to be addressed from both angles. The communication is the most basic of necessities in the whole process but in many cases there is yawning gaps of understanding of each other positions and preferences on how to communicate. The onus is not on one party but both to get better at talking. Being able to have ongoing discussion at a personal level is seen as critical to success. This aspect is either a make or break to any process.	
General	
Q. On a scale of 1 to 10 what level of importance is being placed on the development of groups?	
4 moving to 8 over a ten year time frame	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9-10	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Justification for these values	
Vision won't be achieved without groups	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Want to get the process and models in place first. Need to ok with the council to put a higher priority on it.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Groups are seen as fundamental to catchment management.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Important to gain community engagement and a structured group that has a mandate to speak for a wider collective makes the process of community engagement easier and more robust.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comment: Universally the councils see user groups as fundamental to catchment management, necessary to achieve their vision and to be able to communicate effectively with the community. Each council gave a high or moving to a high ranking on the level of importance for developing groups.	
The opportunity to develop groups and gain some traction is now but this is tempered with the reality that there is always competing demands for resources. There is certainly a conflict with the desire to see groups developed and involved with the ability and willingness to resource and help facilitate them. The other constraining factor is the communication differences and indeed some fundamental belief differences that exist between the council and resource users. The reasons to	

exist are many and varied but the communication and resource management possibilities are the main driving forces that the councils see groups fulfilling.

Summary

The opportunity to develop groups and gain some traction is now. With no definitive definition of a user group given, the common theme is one of individuals and consent holders working together across sectors and issues. The lack of definition and wide brief is an opportunity to tailor groups as a fit for purpose model to the issues and area.

The variety and breadth of roles that groups are expected to fulfill underlines the need for structured groups to exist and the gaps that regional councils see within their resource management strategies in dealing with farmers and growers. The desire expressed for groups to have a role of extension of Good Management Practice is a crucial building block for the achievement of aspirations set out within regional plans. To enable this and other roles the two most critical aspects required are

1. robust and credible governance structure providing auditability and
2. working relationships.

Alongside this the individual abilities, attitudes and personalities of the people involved, particularly leadership, need to be sound. A combination of structure and personnel will give the group the credibility and auditability needed. Once these essentials are in place transition can occur, as groups become more mature and trusted, towards a higher level of resource management and responsibility.

The overriding reason to have groups within resource management framework is the efficiency of both communication and engagement. Condensing a large number of consent holders or stakeholders into a common voice and contact point and being able to reach them and get them engaged is seen as a huge advantage for councils. Having stated that there is competing demands on council resources to enable and facilitate groups so often everyone is left to their own devices. The competing demands will not go away so it is imperative that groups are able and willing to resource themselves to become and stay more visible and relevant to council.

Universally the councils see user groups as fundamental to catchment management. There are many variables that would have to be satisfied before responsibility and independence for resource management was devolved. But they were all quite open to the concept in principle and are actively promoting and writing references to groups into plans. The reasons to exist are many and varied but the communication and resource management possibilities are the main driving forces that the councils see groups fulfilling.