

Finding bedrock for rangelands policy.

by Geoff Edwards

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*These are personal views:
Chatham House Rule prevails for this Dialogue*

(no attribution without consent)

So much for “Food bowl of Asia” orthodoxy.

This year:

- ❑ Australia is importing molasses from Vietnam
- ❑ Australia is importing wheat from Canada
- ❑ Eastern States trucked grass from WA to keep stock alive
- ❑ 500,000 head reportedly died in one rainfall event.

Origins of Dialogue

- ❑ Stewardship paper *From Red to Green to Black* – Fred Tromp
- ❑ Collaboration between AgForce, Royal Society and NRM Regions – Dr Greg Leach
- ❑ Idea of a “summit” round-table dialogue – John Brisbin
- ❑ Widely held view that current policy settings are failing
- ❑ Trigger – failure of October 2018 Drought Summit to engage widely.

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Mainstream policy is failing us all (1).

Because:

1. Farmers are left to their own devices: if businesses fail, their fault.
2. Failure brings shame. Shame destroys breadwinners and families.
3. Unilateral free-trade and free foreign investment policies transfer power to global agents and companies.
4. Commodity markets are disconnected from the cost of production.
5. The landscape needs far more people living there to maintain it.

Mainstream policy is failing us all (2).

Because:

6.National policy is dominated by a narrow economic rationalism uninformed by understanding of social complexity.

7.Few economic analysts are focusing on rural sustainability. And very few farm leaders are articulate in heterodox economics.

8.Looming catastrophic effect of climate change not factored in policy.
This changes everything.

Policy needs scientific foundations.

1. Prudent policy judgement requires more than scientific knowledge.
2. However, scientific method is essential to policy as it accumulates evidence and traces cause (pre-conditions) and consequence.
3. As capacity of public service declines, greater burdens of technical analysis gravitate up to MPs, for which they are not pre-selected and usually not trained.

Lenses (world views) for shaping policy.

- ❑ *Scientific* (based on evidence + logic) – prospered from Enlightenment mid-1600s* to 1970s – led to enormous progress, freed pursuit of knowledge from religious and class rigidity.
- ❑ *Economistic* – prospered from 1980s.
- ❑ *Tabloid populism* (Murdoch peculiar world view) – prospering from 1990s.

* Royal Society of London 1660

There is a common enemy.

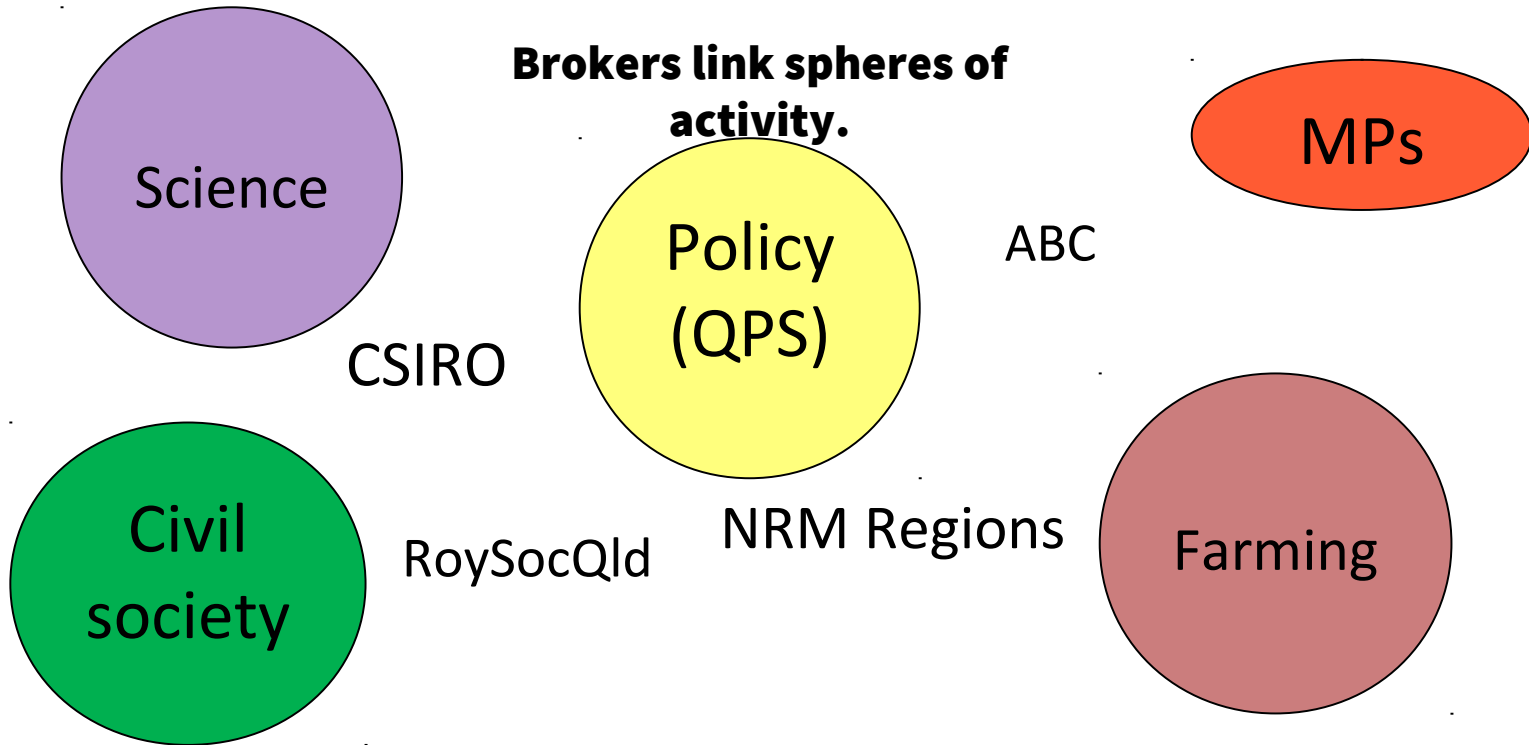
The tabloid populist world view is making prudent policy impossible:

- ❑ Promotes neoliberal economics including free trade, low taxes, deregulation, privatisation, minimalist role for governments.
- ❑ Business is the engine of the economy, so deserves favours.
- ❑ Environmentalists are all extremists.
- ❑ Farmers and environmentalists are natural enemies.
- ❑ Climate change isn't happening.

It is an angry, divisive, "look over there" agenda.

Communication circles.

Science, farming, public servants, politicians, civil society operate in semi-independent circles, using different methods of dialogue.



Conclusions

- ❑ Analysts who take a sceptical view of economic orthodoxy are sparse.
- ❑ There is no enduring forum to bridge Queensland and national policy, with COAG firmly in the grip of neoliberal economics.
- ❑ There is no funded forum to conduct integrated landscape planning.
- ❑ The campaign to destroy the ABC as the headline broker into farming is perilously close to success.
- ❑ There is no enduring forum to bridge the silos between science, policy, politics and practice.

Case study: The climate science is not settled!

Of course it isn't.

No question in science is ever settled.

But climate science has been settled *to a standard adequate for policy-making for more than 25 years.*

First paper outlining the theory was to Royal Society *in 1863*

Not just one discipline, but dozens, all converging.

Finding public interest.

Elements of bedrock from science:

- ❑ There is only one planet available to support human life.

Its capacities have already been exceeded.

- ❑ Economic growth in a finite world is unsustainable.

Growth = accelerating throughput of materials and energy

- ❑ Human societies are complex systems, not machines.

Cannot be modelled as self-interested individuals

- ❑ Many (even most?) values of rural landscapes are not marketable.