

**Understanding 'success' in collaborative governance: a
critical synthesis of participants perspectives**

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PREAMBLE

This report is the result of a qualitative investigation into participants' understandings of the 'success' (or otherwise) and outcomes of the Manawatū River Leaders Forum and associated Action Planning process.

The work was commissioned by the Integrated Freshwater Solutions(IFS) research project to evaluate the outcomes relating to the Action Planning implementation processes in particular, as well as evaluate prospects for (and derive learnings from) the use and development of IFS decision support tools such as Mediated Modelling (MM).

While IFS commissioned the research, this study is independent in the sense that it set out to critically evaluate the role of IFS in these processes, and its aim was to facilitate critical reflection and learning for all involved in the MRLF and IFS processes.

Thus, this investigation documents – from the participants points of view – in what ways they think these processes have been successful, how they have added value (or not), and how they might gear up to add more value in future.

Fourteen participants from the IFS process volunteered to be interviewed, providing a range of perspectives, from elected officials and council staff, through to Non-Governmental Organisations and iwi/hapū groups.

Participants have not been quoted by name, but general anonymous quotes have been used. While a major effort has been made to evidence particular claims arising in this synthesis, final interpretation rests with the author, Marc Tadaki.

This document is thus an interpretive synthesis which attempts to critically evaluate the Action Planning and implementation processes, and to add value to thinking about these processes and others moving forward.

1. Aspects of success

When asked to what extent participants agreed with the statement “The Action Planning and implementation process has been successful”, 11 participants responded ‘Agree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’. One participant answered ‘Strongly Disagree’, and one participant answered ‘Slightly Disagree’ (see Figure 1). This reveals that, despite the wide diversity in points of emphases or in ‘styles of success’, there is reasonably wide agreement that the process has been successful overall, and worth the time and effort to contribute to.

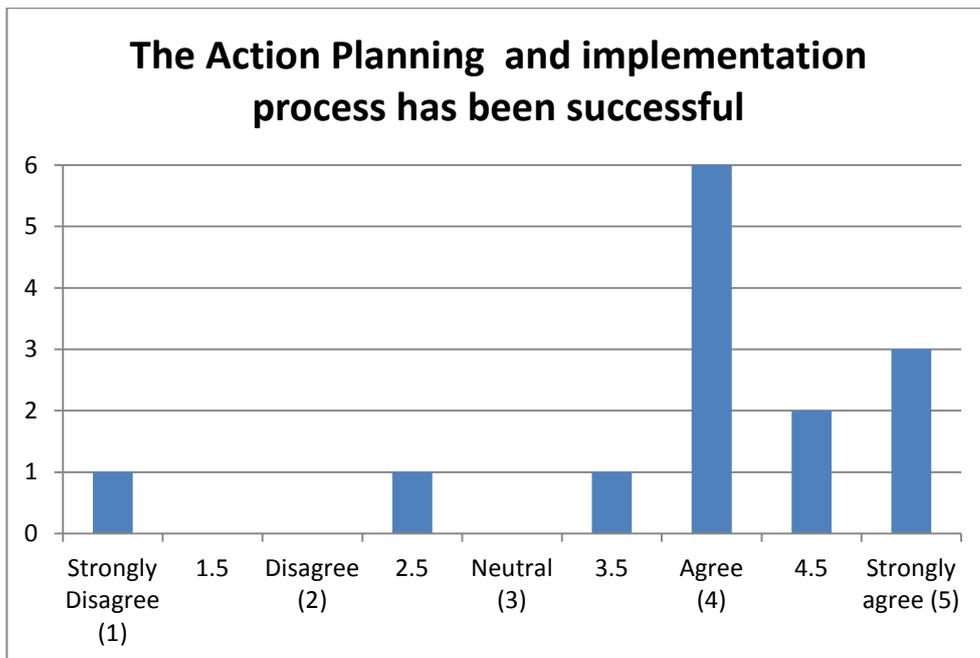


Figure 1: Number of participants using each response.

Success was attributed on the basis of attainment of a range of outcomes noted by participants, here summarised as five themes.

1.1 Action Plan

At least five participants explicitly cited the creation and signing of the Action Plan as a major outcome and success of the collaborative process. The difficulties inherent in reaching consensus were noted, as well as the fact that the document itself has been signed and bought into by a range of governmental and nongovernmental participants, as well as the wider public. The official ownership of actions by organisations was cited as a significant outcome as well.

1.2 Clean-up fund

The successful application for \$5.2M of funding from central government (the Ministry for the Environment) was cited by most participants as a major (if not The major) reason for the success of the MLRF. It was noted that the funding represents one of the clearest outcomes of the process because it would not have been available without the MRLF.

1.3 Having a range of parties involved

At least seven participants argued that getting a range of parties to collectively converse with each other produced a range of outcomes through the MRLF. Bringing together a range of interests into a collaborative – as opposed to antagonistic – setting fostered dialogue which helped to:

- Engage with a wider range of perspectives on the river, such as iwi/hapū perspectives
- Increase understanding about where different groups were coming from, what they cared about and what enabled and constrained their actions

- Create a deeper and shared understanding of the pressures on and state of the river, which helped to reduce finger-pointing and build a shared sense of responsibility
- Increase understanding about what ameliorative and restorative work is already being done on/for the river, and prospects for synergies and partnerships

1.4 A broad range of actions

For at least five participants, the fact that the Action Plan contained a range of actions meant there were actions for most parties, and that all interest groups could get out and ‘do something’ for the river. By highlighting the range of actions already being undertaken by different groups, the Action Plan gives voice and additional meaning to the actions themselves. It also opens prospects for coordinating and resourcing actions in different and potentially better ways.

1.5 Relationship development

Most participants cited relationship-building as a key outcome or success of the MRLF. Often, citations were made to the quality of the platform from which iwi/hapū could converse and contribute in a collaborative context, noting that this seemed more enabling for iwi/hapū to articulate their concerns and values. In a number of cases, the relationships built – and understandings developed – through the collaborative process has led to further ‘spillover’ collaborative projects in other locations and contexts. However, it was noted that not all relationship developments were positive, and that singular positive representations of relationships are not warranted and in fact damaging and alienating to some participants.

1.6 Caveats to ‘success’

While the majority of participants characterise the MRLF Action Planning and implementation processes as successful, they do so for a range of different reasons and with a number of qualifications. For example, it was noted by at least three participants that there were different levels of personal and organisational investment in the process, and that some participation felt largely symbolic (to put it lightly). Another view articulated a lack of faith in councils’ and other organisations’ commitment to follow through with implementation. Yet another view noted that the Action Plan felt incomplete and lopsided, as it was felt that it did give enough effect to supporting the “economic prosperity” of the region, as one of the Accord goals states.

2. Implementation concerns

At least six participants explicitly noted their concerns that implementation of the Action Plan should not be expected or taken for granted – it needs a proactive response and further engagement. One view expressed confidence that interest around the implementation process is growing rather than dying, whereas at least three others expressed concern that momentum is dropping out, as evidenced by declining participation in MRLF follow up meetings.

One view argued that while the government funding would see a few major actions done, the longer-term and harder-to-track actions would fall off to the wayside.

Conversely, one participant cited a lack of progress relating to the implementation of wastewater plant upgrades for Shannon, Palmerston North and Tararua as evidence of declining momentum and commitment to the process. Because these larger projects are not being ‘ticked off’, expectation for smaller projects is even less.

While some groups – such as Muaūpoko – are described as storming ahead, there is not a similar sense of enthusiasm emerging from others.

Another view expressed a deeper cynicism that the Action Plan amounted to a ‘box-ticking exercise’ in order to manage public relations, and expressed concern that with the central government funding, the different groups would simply break off ‘doing their own thing’.

In sum, there is significant concern across participants that the collective responsibility created through the MRLF is continued and cultivated, to create a sense of accountability to both the MRLF and the wider public.

3. Accountability

Participants differ in emphasis on the relevant roles and emphases of accountability surrounding the Action Plan and implementation process. While some rely on public scrutiny to keep implementation accountable, others see representative accountability (accountability to constituents) as an important-yet-fragile mechanism, and there is also a certain kind of accountability linked to the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) funding as well.

When asked to what extent participants agreed with the statement “The Action Planning and implementation process is accountable”, seven participants agreed to strongly agreed, two participants strongly disagreed, and five participants hovered around a neutral value (see Figure 2).

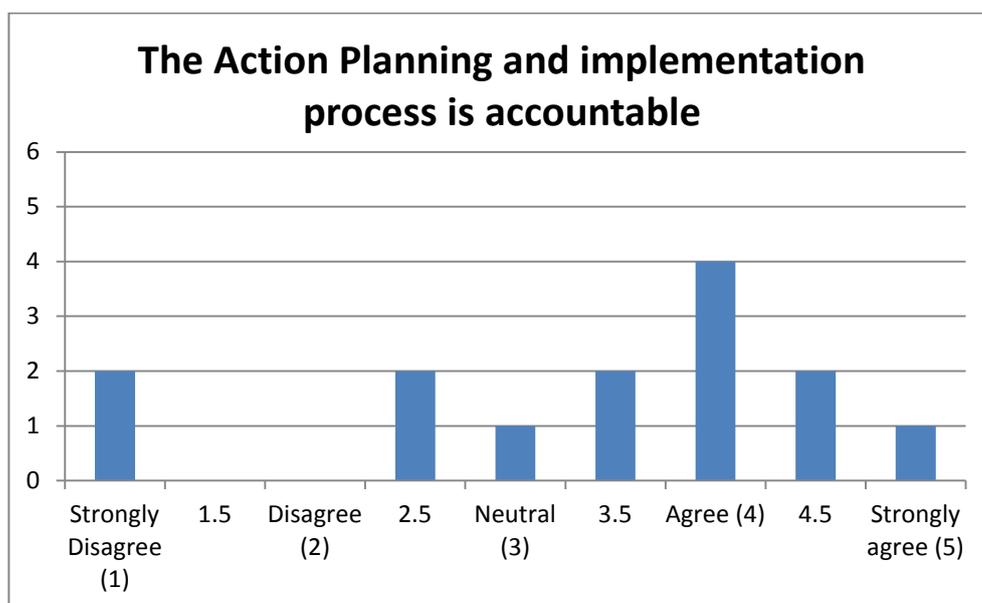


Figure 2. Number of participants using each response.

Those who agreed with the statement generally cited 1) the Action Plan and Accord being publicly signed and endorsed by all parties, and 2) the funding from MfE. The funding was cited as an important mechanism of accountability even by those who disagreed with the statement overall. The idea of accountability as a fair and transparent process was emphasised by a participant who disagreed with the statement, and they pointed out that while the funded actions themselves might be accountable, the *means* by which those actions were chosen were not made transparent or contestable.

3.1 Aspects of accountability

When asked to elaborate on the mechanisms of accountability, a number of notions emerged:

- Accountable to the other MLRF parties by undertaking the Action Plan actions listed
- Accountability to participants representative constituencies, representing their values through the implementation process
- Accountability in undertaking the funded actions from MfE

These are discussed in turn.

3.1.1 *Accountability to the Action Plan*

The most cited notion of accountability is that of undertaking and documenting the implementation of actions listed in the Action Plan. In this sense, accountability is understood as following through on a signed agreement (the Action Plan). In addition to the funding mechanism (which is discussed later), participants are two facets to this kind of accountability. The first is understanding the *existing structures* for evaluation and supporting of implementation actions, and the second is unpacking the *assumptions* which guide the implementation process itself.

3.1.2 *Structures of accountability*

A number of existing structures were cited as providing accountability to the implementation process. These include:

- Semi-regular meetings of the MRLF, where participants are expected to update the group on the implementation of actions
- Actions are tied to specific groups and individuals, and the Action Plan was formally signed
- Some actions correspond with other regulatory functions, which have other mechanisms of accountability

3.1.3 *Questioning assumptions*

Participants expressed mixed levels of optimism that these mechanisms are enough to sustain or fulfil the implementation process, and the universal faith in the MfE funding providing accountability might suggest that without that funding people's perceptions of the implementation process would be significantly more uncertain.

Some participants trust that the mechanism of ‘accountability by embarrassment’ and professional pride will ensure implementation, arguing that the public nature of commitments made will prevent parties from renegeing on their actions.

A more sceptical view, citing a number of cases – the pullback of Horizons to only monitoring the 10 worst-performing farms (contrary to the Action Plan), and the Shannon wastewater plant continuing piped discharges into the Manawatū – argues that there is a tendency toward internal protectionism, where parties do not report and do not hold each other to account because it is not in anyone’s interest to be characterised as a laggard. This view was supported by another which expressed concern that the MRLF reporting sessions were not so much about holding parties to account for their specific actions, as letting them speak about a wider range of things that they are doing which are not linked to the Action Plan.

In sum, while the mechanisms and assumptions are acknowledged, it was also noted that these do not constitute a formal accounting or reporting system.

3.1.4 Representative accountability

The range of participants and interests shaping the Action Plan and implementation are also accountable to their constituents and their attendant political dynamics.

Participants raised a number of ways in which these dynamics have been manifest:

- Accountability for councils is already ‘very high’ and thus they have pre-existing responsibilities to monitor and report progress
- Council staff and councillors are accountable to ratepayers, governed through elections and democratic processes
- There is a ‘tendency’ to enforce regulations on industry over local government
- Iwi/hapū were forced to speak with one voice, unlike other parties
- Parties are accountable to their own organisations for the time and energy they put in to the collaborative effort, so they need to justify it somehow

3.2 Accountability for MfE funding

At least seven participants expressed confidence that the MfE funding will lead to the actual implementation of those actions, because they are confident that the funding will be carefully monitored and evaluated by MfE, and that it will be withheld in future if implementation is not forthcoming. In this sense, MfE acts as an external arbiter whose primary concern is ensuring implementation for money.

However, there is significant disagreement over whether the MfE money was allocated fairly or, to put it another way, the process of allocating the MfE funding has been criticised as being unaccountable to the wider Action Planning and process.

3.2.1 How was the funding allocated, and why?

Most of the \$5.2M was allocated to wastewater treatment plant upgrades at Shannon, Feilding and Dannevirke (see Figure 3). From the interviews, this seemed to have been determined by a

prioritisation exercise run internally by Horizons, and largely allocated around getting the biggest water quality gains by cleaning up large point-source discharges. In addition to the upgrading the wastewater plants, there was some funding allocated to stream fencing, fish habitat restoration and farm plans. Some money – here \$210,000 – was set aside as a contestable pool for community projects. One participant stressed that this was important because this enabled some groups (such as iwi/hapū) to be able to put their projects forward.

| Project plan | Project | Horizons Regional Council | Landowners* | TA's | DairyNZ | MfE Fund contribution | TOTAL | Fund % |
|--------------|---|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------|
| 1 | Woodville sewage treatment plant (STP) upgrades | \$0 | \$0 | \$550,000 | \$0 | \$325,000 | \$875,000 | 37% |
| 1 | Dannevirke land treatment at low flows | \$0 | \$0 | \$375,000 | \$0 | \$350,000 | \$725,000 | 48% |
| 1 | Dannevirke STP upgrades | \$0 | \$0 | \$2,875,000 | \$0 | \$850,000 | \$3,725,000 | 23% |
| 1 | Pahiatua STP upgrades | \$0 | \$0 | \$575,000 | \$0 | \$550,000 | \$1,125,000 | 49% |
| 2 | Feilding STP upgrades + land treatment | \$0 | \$0 | \$10,050,000 | \$0 | \$1,000,000 | \$11,050,000 | 9% |
| 2 | Kimbolton STP upgrades | \$0 | \$0 | \$150,000 | \$0 | \$150,000 | \$300,000 | 50% |
| 3 | Shannon land treatment at low flows | \$0 | \$0 | \$9,479,000 | \$0 | \$1,115,000 | \$10,594,000 | 11% |
| 4 | Stream fencing* | \$300,000 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$300,000 | \$600,000 | 50% |
| 5 | Native fish habitat* | \$80,000 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$80,000 | \$160,000 | 50% |
| 6 | Whitebait habitat* | \$80,000 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$80,000 | \$160,000 | 50% |
| 7 | Environmental Farm Plans | \$230,000 | \$0 | \$0 | \$100,000 | \$300,000 | \$630,000 | 48% |
| 8 | Community support | \$110,000 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$100,000 | \$210,000 | 48% |
| | Total | \$800,000 | \$0 | \$24,054,000 | \$100,000 | \$5,200,000 | \$30,154,000 | 17% |

Figure 3. Allocation of the \$5.2M from the MfE clean-up fund (from Horizons, 2012)

At least four participants expressed sympathy and broad agreement with the allocation strategy. One participant noted that the projects were well defined and costed, so they would be quite measurable in terms of implementation as well as environmental effects. Another emphasised the focus on ‘works on the ground’ which meant the funds would be targeted and used effectively for implementation rather than administration or monitoring.

3.2.2 How accountable was the funding allocation process?

Not all participants agreed with the allocation strategy. To some, it represented a violation of the collaborative trust that had been built thus far through the process. Yet for others it represented a lost opportunity to think more broadly about community outcomes. These five critiques of the funding allocation can be viewed as questioning the accountability of the funding process to a series of different communities or principles:

1. One participant argued that the community funding pot is too small – since the aim of the Accord is to reconnect the community to the river, the funding could have done more in terms of supporting visible actions rather than significant but behind-the-scenes impactors. The size of the pot (\$210k) doesn't seem enough to be accountable to the community
2. Two participants argued that the funding could and perhaps should have taken a broader view than water quality to think about the community dynamics that shape future growth pathways. In one way, the relevant scale of funding should be locally targeted but more regionally or nationally conceived. In another way, economic processes along the Manawatū contribute to national growth, so strategic investment into the region from the national scale is justified.

3. Two participants argued that paying large polluters was ethically wrong, and that the funds should go to subsidising good exemplars rather than bad past decision making. In this sense, rather than viewing the allocation as ‘best bang for buck’ it might have been distributed on grounds of fairness.
4. At least three participants expressed concern that the funding allocation process was done in ‘back rooms’ and not sufficiently open and inclusive. One view argued that the financial incentive provided a means to pursue particular pet projects, such as the Sustainable Land Use Initiative, rather than being based on a collaborative discussion with the MRLF. While one participant did put forward some ideas that they thought to be particularly innovative, they had the sense that the decisions were already made by Horizons. Thus it was felt that because the funding was already stitched up that it forfeit pursuing other different ways of thinking and doing things.
5. At least three participants found the funding process a violation of the collaborative spirit of the MRLF. The ‘lumping’ of iwi/hapū projects into the (small) competitive community pool was cited as an example of the ways in which a sense of shared purpose and responsibility for the Manawatū was not embodied in practice. Te Kauru, for instance, were apparently promised 3 small projects and this has been reduced to one, even though the projects are only worth a few thousand dollars each. Rangitaane’s allocation consists of \$20k for river signage that perhaps might have been done anyway, and \$6k worth of riparian planting.

4. Adaptive action planning

At least seven participants explicitly qualified the success of the Action Plan and implementation processes within the context of the need for a broader programme of ongoing work. The Action Plan – even if implemented fully and timely – would be an important step toward achieving the Accord goals, but it is just one step. Two participants noted that the Action Plan contained short term ‘outputs’ which it was assumed and hoped would turn into longer term (20 year) outcomes in future. Another participant noted that a major outcome of the MRLF may not be in the Action Plan implementation itself, but in the fact that this process enabled parties to have ‘the next conversation’ after that, which could be more systematic, coordinated and innovative.

Participants cited a range of timelines and temporal cycles as relevant for thinking about the timelines and outcomes of the Action Plan:

- Councils have 3 year elections, and other organisations have their own staff throughput – involvement of individuals (and their mandates) will change with this cycle.
- 20 year timelines are still short term from the iwi/hapū perspective – how can the Action Plan take a longer and wider vision for the river?
- Planning cycles of around 10 years are not enough to maintain momentum, given the relevant timescales of action and community/economic change. 5-year or less iterations of the Action Plan is argued to be more effective.

One participant suggested that the Action Plan by its nature should not have been seen as concrete – to think of it as a static document would have undermined the consensus and arguments would still be raging over the function and content of the Action Plan. In this sense, the provisional nature of the Action Plan lowered the stakes enough to gain participation from a

wide range of groups. This view understood the Action Plan as a living document which would be regularly reviewed so that relevant actions could be changed over time. In this view, having a regular review could also be facilitated to feed into the development of strategic documentation for Council and other organisations.

However, this participant also noted that the Action Plan, as it is currently being played out, is 'not getting looked at', and that there have not been discussions about how to review and revise the document.

Participants cited three broad elements relating to how the Action Planning process might continue (differently) in the future.

1. The need for regular meetings was cited by at least four participants as key to maintaining momentum. Key challenges and opportunities are presented by:
 - The need to have something new and relevant to discuss, to maintain momentum
 - To incorporate new knowledge (e.g. new science or research, community dynamics)
 - To keep enrol and 'bring up to speed' (and keep up to speed) new participants, to reflect the fact that the relevant individuals and organisations will change over time
2. The need for strategic reflection and evaluation to guide future iterations of an Action Plan was cited by at least five participants. This reflection could take a range of forms and contribute to a range of aims, including:
 - Evaluating how actions relate to the wider Accord goals, which might be informed by the evaluation of Action Plan implementation
 - Reflecting on the relative efficacy and/or costs of the actions themselves, and whether they are providing outcomes that had been hoped for or assumed. One participant cited the need for this kind of information as a requisite to help prioritise the actions in this and future iterations.
 - Reflecting on the relevance of indicators or measures of success given the range of actions which have been (or are being) undertaken, and within the wider context of other (beyond the Action Plan) dynamics and pressures. Are these measures meaningful, and in what ways? Should different measures be used?
 - Reflecting on the time- and space-bound nature of the Action Plan, and evaluating whether the relevant time and space scales of costs and benefits might be expanded or reframed for future iterations (e.g. investment returns across what timescale?)
 - Three participants cited the need for external evaluation of both the process and outcomes – having an 'outside' view can offer important insights into the choices made (or not made) and the effects they might have caused. One participant suggested that this could be coupled with an 'internal' reflection and dialogue, to facilitate explanation and understanding of the outside and inside perspectives.
3. The need for rethinking the participatory strategy of the Action Planning was cited by at least three participants. While this Action Plan has been caveated as a 'child of its circumstance', concerns have been raised around:

- The merits and relevance of having elected officials (whose interest, commitment, and knowledge is variable) versus qualified others (who are paid to attend, who are specialists in their fields) in attendance. There have been some tensions noted around elected officials claiming a stronger weight in collaborative decision making, which caused others to feel alienated.
- The exact number and identity of individual participants was unique and a product of circumstance, but it was certainly not an open process. The idea that a small number of self-selected (or selected by Horizons) group of people speak for the region is a proposition that could be contested in future, and having a clear open and democratic engagement strategy would be a valuable thing to develop for future iterations of the Action Plan.
- While participants were expected to ‘report back’ to their organisations and were expected to be able to speak with the mandate of their organisation, concerns were raised that neither was the case. Reporting was criticized as almost non-existent by one participant, and the notion of representation was also criticized as assumed rather than merited.

5. Articulating outcomes

For any project that consumes public resources – time, energy and money – it can be argued that that outcomes arising need to be articulated to the public. To some in the MRLF, it is a ‘miracle’ that the Action Plan happened at all, and that ‘doing something’ rather than nothing constitutes progress because ‘something’ can be moulded and shaped into better forms over time. The question of ‘what would you rather have?’ is posed as a trump to critical inquiries into the value of the process. Another view argues that the Accord and Action Plan themselves are not the relevant outcomes per se, but rather the relationships and future projects and ways of doing things will be the true ‘outcomes’ of the process.

The need to articulate outcomes from the MRLF was expressed in different ways by all participants interviewed, even and perhaps especially when those outcomes may not be positive.

When asked to what extent participants agreed with the statement “I am confident that relationships built through the Action Plan and Accord process will lead to measurable outcomes in the future”, 10 responded in the range from slightly agree to strongly agree. One registered neutral, and two disagreed with the statement.

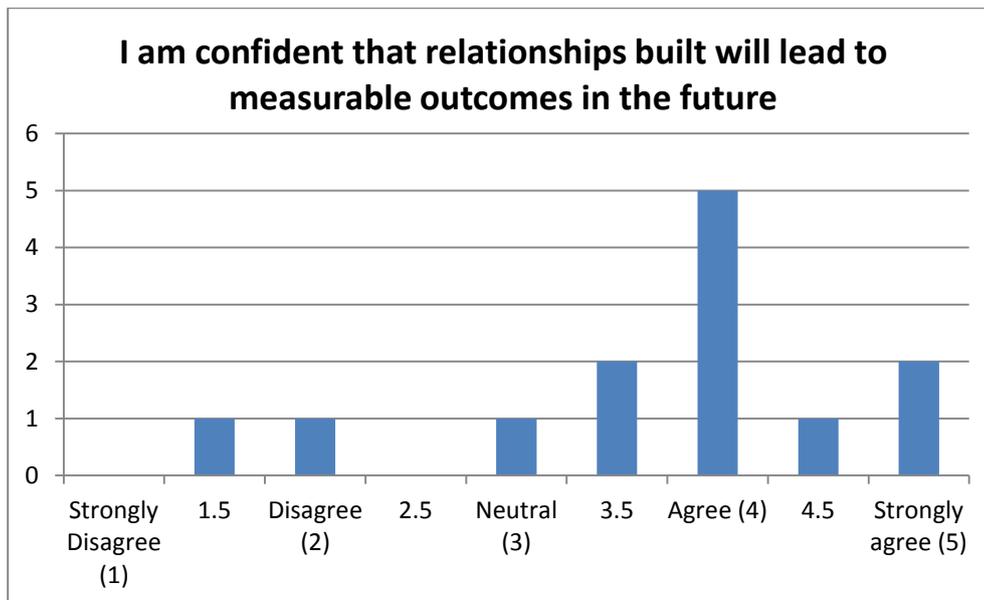


Figure 4: Number of participants using each response. (Note that the total is 13 not 14, as one participant didn't indicate a number)

There are at least two components in this statement that participants drew out for discussion. One was what measurable outcomes might be, and the other was reflecting on the nature of and prospects for the relationships built over the process.

5.1 The need for articulating *additional* outcomes

A major theme emerging about outcomes was a central concern with articulating the *added* value of the Accord and Action Plan (and implementation) processes.

5.1.1 *Bundling and spinning 'business as usual'*

At least five participants noted that the Action Plan contains many actions that were already part of regular activity for the signed organisations, and this could be read as an argument that the Action Plan reflects a 'repackaging' more than adding value per se. In this view, the MRLF is simply claiming credit for actions that were already slated and committed to, and thus it could be criticized for not constituting value in itself. One participant remarked that in some ways a narrative of 'success' for the Action Plan gave an impression of improvement where it wasn't warranted and this could undercut public pressure for future implementation. Another participant felt that their group had embraced genuinely new and different kinds of projects, and they expressed a strong desire for others to do the same. Two participants cited the renewal of consents and strong public opposition to the Feilding wastewater plant as driving the demand for major upgrades, and that this should have been left to happen without giving the polluters money.

5.1.2 *Adding value by drawing actions together*

At least six participants argued that the bundling of actions through the Action Plan adds value over and above the actions themselves, for at least three reasons.

5.1.3 Bundling actions changes perceptions

By centralising and highlighting restorative actions being undertaken on and for the river, it creates a sense of duty (to continue to undertake and account for those actions) as well as encouraging and promoting engagement with restorative actions. One participant suggested that it is a way to help residents feel that they can take pride in and ownership of their river. Another participant highlighted how the extra publicity and scrutiny of actions within the Action Plan would help to ensure implementation. It was well acknowledged by many participants that developing a wider understanding of what work is being done on the river helps to increase empathy and reduce finger pointing (see Section 1).

5.1.4 Bundling widens responsibility

Related to the issue of perceptions is the issue of responsibility. By bundling together a wide range of actions, a larger set of 'responsible actions' is created, and different groups are given tasks to do. One participant used the example of farm fencing, and suggested that if it was seen to be Council's job to maintain fencing then when it needed repair it might be left to Council. But if fencing is seen as a broader community responsibility, it might encourage more pro-action by relevant groups. Another participant expressed a similar hope that through highlighting even basic home consumption habits such as car washing and its effects on the river, that the community might take more ownership of the actions and of the river in a larger sense.

5.1.5 Bundling adds implementation value

A number of arguments have advanced specific outcomes which are cited as evidence of how the Action Plan has added value:

- Timeframes for some initiatives, such as wastewater plant upgrades, have been significantly advanced because of the seed funding
- 150-200k of stream fencing over 2 years may not have been possible without MfE funding
- The Action Plan provides a road map with a focus and different roles for different groups, which allows better coordination of investment and implementation
- Provides a platform through which scientific river data might be centralised and integrated
- Learning that other groups are interested in similar actions/outcomes has led to new projects and relationships moving forward

5.1.6 Bundling can undermine existing progress

Not all were convinced that the bundling of Action Plan actions produced net positive value, and a number of concerns were highlighted.

One participant argued that Horizons essentially reneged on the spirit of their Action Plan action (p32) to "Undertake resource consent compliance monitoring (every dairy farm, every year) and take enforcement action where breaches are detected" by instead only monitoring the worst 10 performers over the previous 5 years. In this sense, the Action Plan is being interpreted to water down actions that were already being undertaken (and resourced).

While recognising the symbolic effects of bundling actions together, at least three participants were wary that the Action Plan was being run more as a public relations exercise than being oriented towards achieving environmental and relationship outcomes. One example put forward was the symbolic nature of improving access to river swimming spots – while it is a valuable initiative, it doesn't increase the health of the river.

A different form of critique was raised by at least two participants, relating to the relevance and additional value of the Sustainable Land Use Initiative (SLUI). It was noted that SLUI was running out of funding, and that this MfE funding was a viable way of keeping the initiative going ("Environmental Farm Plans" received \$300k of the \$5.2M). In this sense, the Action Plan and MfE funding are interpreted as vehicles through which Horizons could fund an ongoing programme. While perhaps a cynical perspective, it is also evidenced in the complaints about the funding allocation process being undemocratic and reflecting specific pet projects. What is clear is that the process of funding allocation is contested and it does not seem to have been opened up for reflection and discussion.

5.2 Complexity of 'measuring' outcomes

While defining the relevant or valuable outcomes from the MRLF may be a challenging and contested process, the measurement of outcomes – even agreed-upon ones – is still a complex task. As one participant noted, the Action Plan actions are not the only actions contributing to achieving the Accord goals. What happens through the Action Plan needs to be cognizant of what is happening outside the Action Plan, if it is to meaningfully add value toward the aims of the Accord. Another participant put it differently, and stressed that there are assumptions that the Action Plan actions will lead to some particular outcome and that it is those *actions* that need to be achieved, rather than pursuing the *outcomes* through more flexible means.

Proportionality is another issue raised by two participants, which points out that when trying to measure the environmental 'outcome' of the large wastewater plant upgrades, care needs to be taken to apportion the *additional* water quality gains provided by the MRLF (and MfE funding) in contrast to the upgrades in their entirety. Thus, since the MfE funding is only paying for small fractions of the upgrades, the water quality gains should not be wholly attributed to MfE funding.

A shorthand way of understanding the complexity around measuring outcomes could be simply acknowledging that things beyond the Action Plan affect what the actions will achieve. These complexities include:

- The economic environment for agriculture. One participant cited an economic downturn as a legitimate reason for non-implementation of Action Plan actions, and another participant suggested that if milk prices spiked then commitment to the entire Accord would become void.
- Regulatory enforcement context. One participant argued that while the regional council would often take individual farmers to court for consent breaches, enforcement is not evident when it comes to Territorial Authorities. Whether implementation of the Action Plan actions would remedy this disparity is unclear, however. Another participant cited the One Plan as another major regulatory context which – if enforced properly – would shape the range of viable outcomes resulting from the Action Plan.

- Environmental context. One participant cited the recent drought as the reason why stock were allowed on the riverside of the fence, which meant that water pollution was even worse than it would have been otherwise.

5.3 Environmental outcomes

When asked about which environmental outcomes can or should be measured, one participant offered the following as possible examples:

- Length of stream fencing completed
- Reduction of nitrogen going into the water
- Length of riparian planting
- Amount of shade provided over the river
- Improvement in fish habitat due to the shade

What these examples reveal is that how the actions undertaken (e.g. riparian planting) can contribute to a range of ‘measures’ (such as length planted, shade provided) but that when thinking about what the ultimate ends might be (improved fish habitat) the picture gets more complicated. It is perfectly possible to have a shaded stream with no fish (because nutrients are too high) or a planted stream with no shade. In this sense the reductionist focus on actions needs to be complemented with a holistic concern for the aims and desired outcomes across a larger space and time scale.

At least four participants noted that the temporal scales of ‘outcomes’ needed to be thought through carefully. One participant cautioned that rivers have long lag periods, and that present day changes to sediment supply (for instance) would take some time to be detected in a catchment context. As a corollary to this, present changes in the river need to be understood within their historical context – the river’s present state and function are heavily shaped by historical changes in land use and the environment which are still influencing the river today. Another participant suggested that because of the SLUI project and the historically large point source discharges of the 1990’s that improvements in water quality or erosion rates due to the Action Plan would be significantly masked by these past efforts. Another view argued for yet a longer term view, thinking about development and water quality trends since the 1970’s as one benchmark.

The particular combination of spatial and temporal scales embodied through the MfE-funded actions had different levels of support. For example, two participants argued that the focus on point sources, fencing and farm plans was strategic and delivered the best value in achieving the Accord goals with the money available. Another view looked at the Action Plan more broadly and argued for a more spatially coherent programme of action – from the headwaters down. It was argued that this could deliver more systematic measurable outcomes at particular locations, rather than a spatially diffuse approach.

At least eight participants weighed in with what environmental outcomes they considered already visible or important to measure moving forward. Responses included:

- The presence of red cod near the estuary
- Water is clearing visibly down by the estuary

- Discharges are already improving because of ongoing work on the wastewater treatment plants
- Removal of fish barriers
- Measurements at the subcatchment scale (rather than the main stem of the river) including:
 - Water quality
 - Macroinvertebrate (bugs) abundance and diversity
 - Fish abundance
 - Metrics for land use intensity
- Measures should be easy and objective
- Phosphates
- Water quality
- Macroinvertebrate counts
- Use different tools for different parts of the catchment to reflect the land use and environmental difference
- Estuarine and nearshore monitoring
- Retirement rates in the upper catchments
- The need to derive indicators with the community to reflect their values, such as swimming suitability indices, fishing suitability indices, and so on, coupled with action pathways for improvement and specified timeframes
- The need for objective measures around cultural perceptions, such as the extent to which the community ‘screw up their nose’ at the river
- Environmental outcomes should be environmentally based, not related to production. For example, the Feilding wastewater treatment plant is increasing in scale although their productivity-pollution relationship will improve. There is concern that it could amount to more pollution going into the river in an absolute sense.

5.4 Relationship building

At least eight participants explicitly cited the relationships built through the MRLF as significant positive outcomes of the process. The nature of these relationship developments range from simply meeting so many people connected to the river and understanding where they come from, through to teaming up to work on projects together. However, some emphasised that relationship developments were not all positive, and there was a significant amount of damage and alienation to be worth reflecting on a simple ‘success’ framing of the Action Planning and implementation process.

On the whole, three broad categories of relationship building were identified as potentially positive outcomes.

5.4.1 *A different context for dialogue*

At least four participants cited the collaborative dialogue format as valuable and new, particularly when compared to more combative and antagonistic planning processes (see Section 5.4). For one participant, the river focus of the forum meant that key parties were forced to address the ‘elephant in the room’ around questions of the environment and development.

Because it was a 'softer' or novel space, it allowed conversations around new topics and the communication of worldviews in ways that were not structure strictly by court procedures, for instance. As an example, the meaning of wastewater discharges to iwi/hapū were able to be more clearly articulated.

5.4.2 *Relationship spillover*

A claim made by at least five participants was that the relationships established through the MRLF led or could lead to further actions additional to the forum and Action Plan. Examples put forward include:

- A new 'mini Accord' has been set up to clean up Lake Horowhenua, led by key parties from the MRLF. This has been supported by a number of university-assisted research projects, such as fish and river flow monitoring
- Knowing 'who's who' in a range of organisations has led to opening up opportunities and easing communication for getting projects off the ground. For instance, two iwi/hapū groups reported making positive connections with environmental groups that have been a part of the MRLF, and there are prospects for future collaboration. Another participant expressed confidence that they could contact a range of people within the MRLF if they needed to.
- Regional and district councils have been working together on the wastewater plant upgrades, sharing in the outputs of some university research and constructively dialoguing through consenting requirements

While these examples are positive, some have expressed disquiet in relation to a range of relationships observed over the course of the MRLF, even those labelled as positive. Two participants noted that certain (sometimes high-level) decision makers did not appear committed to building meaningful relationships, and that some of them didn't pay attention and left the workshops after within the first hour. This could be reason for critical reflection about how further positive relationship spillover might be encouraged in future.

5.4.3 *Iwi/hapū relationships*

Reports on the net value of relationships developed with iwi/hapū depend greatly on who you ask – not only the partners, but across iwi/hapū as well.

There is a general sense from iwi/hapū participants that participating in this new collaborative space allowed for a different way of communicating a wider sense of connection to (and vision for) the river. One non-iwi/hapū participant remarked that there now seemed to be iwi/hapū relationships with other organisations existing where no relationships existed before. Another participant found the collaborative forum a 'better way' of doing business, especially in contrast to submissions and hearings processes. For one iwi/hapū in particular, a series of new projects were recounted as further relationship spillovers from the MRLF, but such spillovers were not as evident for the other iwi/hapū. For example, one participant noted a lack of willingness of Horizons to meet on the marae to discuss the river in more a culturally meaningful context.

5.4.4 *Hearing and listening*

A range of iwi/hapū and non-iwi/hapū participants explicitly pointed out that iwi/hapū voices and perspectives were having trouble ‘being heard’, especially at the start of the process. One iwi/hapū participant recounted that while iwi/hapū perspectives were verbalized in the early parts of the process, the facilitation and dynamics of conversation left points unattended and recognised, as notes were not being taken and developed with the same consistency and engagement with iwi/hapū perspectives relative to other participants. In this sense, the iwi/hapū ‘way of thinking wasn’t being heard’, as one participant put it. As one example of this, Te Kauru have been strongly concerned about restoring longfin eel (tuna) habitat in the upper parts of the Manawatū River, and farmland retirement in these areas relates to a standard industry definition of a ‘stream’ in terms of creating certain kinds of riparian (habitat) buffers depending on whether or not a stream is ‘present’. So a request was made to the Action Planning group to discuss the definition of a stream in order to dialogue about habitat restoration for this important taonga (treasure) species. In response, a ‘two or three lined’ definition was flashed on a projector and the discussion was moved forward. In this way, the concerns and meanings of iwi/hapū were dealt with in a superficial manner which created some tension and alienation within the group. In another example, it was highlighted by a number of participants that the location and particular functioning of specific sewage plants embody a cultural injustice and violation of basic principles – in one case a treatment plant was located physically adjacent to a school and marae which was alienating the local community, and in another case a plant was reducing its pollution discharge in the short term while expanding its capacity for the long term. In all of these examples, the Action Planning framing and discussion (and MfE funding) serve to render these concerns invisible by not meaningfully engaging with the questions they raise.

However, there were also efforts made by iwi/hapū and non-iwi/hapū participants – including the facilitators – to discuss in side-meetings how iwi/hapū concerns might be more meaningfully engaged and addressed within the Action Planning process, and most participants who noted this also agreed that it led to significant improvement in terms of facilitating a fair and sensitive conversation.

5.4.5 *Co-management expectations*

Rangitaane o Manawatū entered the MRLF and Action Planning processes with hesitancy but also with hope that new collaborative frameworks for environmental management were being tabled and discussed. In a sense, these hopes were affirmed by the receipt of strong ‘signals from lead agencies’ of a willingness to become more collaborative with respect to managing sites and resources of cultural significance to them. The Rangitaane representative took time to carefully write iwi/hapū aspirations into the Action Plan, with the expectation that iwi/hapū could contribute through new comanagement roles. In the end these framings were ‘cut away’ from the Action Plan, and Rangitaane have been assigned two small projects from the MfE funding – river signage worth \$20k and some riparian planting worth \$6k, and none of the ‘signals’ from lead agencies with respect to management of cultural sites and resources have been followed through.

5.4.6 *Funding, 'lumping' and feelings of exploitation*

The application for the MfE funding was noted by a number of iwi/hapū and non-iwi/hapū participants to have included an iwi/hapū involvement component as a way of boosting chances for success. Three iwi/hapū participants noted this explicitly and thus felt iwi/hapū should have had a greater involvement with the MfE funding allocation. Instead, it is public knowledge that no funding was allocated specifically to any iwi/hapū projects, and that iwi/hapū had to instead apply for funding through a competitive 'community' projects pot. From this perspective, iwi/hapū – as Treaty partners who have never given up the right to manage the river – have been symbolically exploited to acquire funding from central government, funding which iwi/hapū have not had a say in allocating and which iwi/hapū projects do not even have guaranteed or reliable access to. Iwi/hapū involvement was promoted in the context of the application, even though iwi/hapū involvement was 'lumped' into a competitive pool which required further application. One participant apparently raised the issue with those preparing the application, and said that 'there was no feedback, no response'. One participant claimed that although they had understood that they would receive funding for three small projects, this had later been cut down without prior discussion. From these kinds of reflections, another participant remarked that in the context of a particular wastewater plant dispute it felt like the relevant Council was looking to solicit small projects with them in order to convince them away from criticizing the ongoing piped discharge flowing into the river. There is a concern about exploitation from iwi/hapū perspectives, but there was also an alternative – one perspective highlighted the opportunities that came with helping organisations to earn iwi/hapū 'brownie points' by collaborating on projects, and noted how this expanded the range and resources for potential projects for iwi/hapū into the future.

5.5 **Regulatory versus voluntary implementation**

Participants made a number of points relating to the merits, challenges and prospects for developing voluntary and non-binding (or 'soft') collaborative spaces in synergy with formal planning processes. All who agreed that the Action Planning process was to some extent 'successful' also agreed that the soft and non-binding nature of the space proved a valuable addition and complement to other planning mechanisms.

5.5.1 *Merits of soft collaborative spaces*

The soft or non-binding (in a regulatory sense) nature of the Action Planning process was cited as valuable by at least five participants for a range of reasons, including:

- Not having a formal voting/veto system enabled normally-marginalised groups to come to the table to converse in more pluralistic (and not strictly legalistic) language about visions for the river
- New information could be embraced more readily and new understandings developed, rather than my-expert-versus-your-expert framings of 'true' or valuable knowledge. Suspension of judgement in favour of empathy is encouraged
- The development of new understandings of the river could lead to new ways of doing things, rather than being shackled to conventional regulatory categories, responses and mechanisms

- The Action Plan process produced a much greater collective understanding of the river, its communities and their values and challenges than was possible through the One Plan proceedings
- Horizons has now agreed to hold prehearings, soft spaces in which participants can raise relevant information and points of law, which can help to get things ‘right’ the first time and thus save money otherwise spent on litigation
- Conversations about implementation can be more experimental and open because the outcomes are not set into stone – new and innovative approaches can be explored because the stakes are non-binding

5.5.2 *Debating merits of a voluntary approach*

One participant argued that because the Accord and Action Plan was voluntary, it meant that buy-in was much better and the collaborative spirit of the group was probably stronger than if parties were forced to participate. The voluntary and ‘additional’ nature of the Action Plan (additional to compliance with the operational Regional Plan) also meant that the mana or ethos of the effort could be more genuinely restorative and virtuous in character, instead of being something that people ‘have to do’. In this sense, it raises the spiritual integrity of the effort, and makes it about civic responsibility in a broad sense.

A different view argued that changing perceptions about the river and voluntary initiatives will only contribute a small amount toward reaching the Accord goals. With agricultural intensification and population growth driving environmental pressures in a negative direction, there is a need to formally cement certain norms in order to sustain particular relationships and values with the Manawatū. For example, one participant used the example of an Environment Court judge ruling that stream fencing should be mandatory because eroded and degraded waterways impose a cost to the community at large. Thus, ‘hard’ regulations are also needed to recognise that voluntary degradation also leads to social costs which need to be recognised.

5.5.3 *Thoughts on linking voluntary and regulatory processes*

At least eight participants made explicit mention of how and why the Action Planning process did, could and should relate to the One Plan process.

In reflecting on how the Action Planning process did relate to the One Plan, three participants offered:

- Involvement in the Action Plan felt a bit lopsided in terms of not placing weight on the ‘economic prosperity’ goal in the Accord, and this matters particularly as some groups are feeling hard hit by One Plan regulations yet still being asked to do additional voluntary projects
- With the uncertainty around the status of the One Plan, the Action Planning process provided a space to engage and build working relationships in a context which may spill over to provide more empathy and trust between the regulator and consent applicants. For groups concerned with improving the health of the river, the Accord and Action Planning processes provided new avenues to ‘get some traction’ without having to wait for the formal planning process

- The Action Planning process opened up thinking around information requirements in ways that One Plan proceedings were not able to. The example of Fonterra was noted, where Fonterra put an action into the Action Plan which was about assessing nutrient losses from dairy farms. This is not a regulatory requirement per se, but it is a new form of information which can be used in the Action Plan as well as other more regulatory for a

Participants also reflected on how an action planning process could or should relate to the One Plan into the future:

- Three participants highlighted that having a **unity of vision** between the One Plan and Action Planning processes is important. One participant argued that the regional plan is both regulatory and non-regulatory, and that better coordination between the non-regulatory One Plan aspects with the Action Plan could see better outcomes and synergies realised. However, the different origins of the Action Plan and the One Plan are no doubt reflected by their content, and there are different levels of ownership (and perhaps implementation rates of) of the Action Plan actions relative to the One Plan. Two participants stressed the need for the Action Plan and One Plan to be functionally compatible and not undercutting each other, and a third participant stressed that the economic goals built into the Accord should thus be given better due in the Action Plan as well as the One Plan. One participant suggested the two processes might be thought of as interlinked ways of understanding and enacting community values, where the collaborative process might prove more helpful in terms of understanding what people care about and why.
- At least four participants argued that when the One Plan is revised, a collaborative Action Planning process should take place **before** the Plan changes are undertaken. This could allow Council to converse with the community in an informal space and to map out different viewpoints and values, which can *then* be undergirded by the One Plan and supplemented by the Action Plan and the two will be more in line and based on a shared foundation of trust and understanding. This, it is argued, would lead to 'more lasting outcomes' as it is more likely to reflect 'something that everyone can live with' instead of something that is good for a few but undesirable for many. One participant suggested that the exact shape of a future Action Plan-One Plan relationship should be built from learning about issues arising through the implementation of the One Plan, as well as a thorough evaluation of the Action Plan process and implementation as well.
- One participant suggested that one reason the One Plan was being fought against so hard was because it was so 'new' and unfamiliar, and that parties were uncertain and concerned about potential losses they might have to sustain. In this way, a soft collaborative process provides value in creating a safe space to troubleshoot issues and understandings in a less formal and combative manner.
- Finally, one participant highlighted that in the end, the value of 1) collaborative processes and 2) resourcing restoration actions are contingent on what ratepayers will afford. In the context of collaboration, these are expensive processes in terms of financing as well as time and energy, and in terms of actions (whether borne by individuals or the community). In all cases, ratepayers should be informed and consulted with respect to how these new forms of governance may roll out.

6. IFS tools

The Action Planning process was originally going to take place through the IFS project and associated Mediated Modelling framework, but after a few workshops it was agreed that a more linear Action Plan process would be pursued.

This section documents reflections by participants on the reasons and effects of this redirection over the process.

6.1 Reflections on the IFS trajectory

Participants expressed a range of views relating to why the IFS process took its turn, and what some of the implications may have been. Three major perspectives emerged to evaluate the changing nature of the process.

The first view is that the modelling process was not bought into by the majority of participants, and therefore was only useful to the extent that it supported the wider aims of the exercise. One participant suggested that there was some ‘advocacy’ going on around the modelling, with stakeholders accepting the modelling process so long as it supported their view or reflected their understandings, rather than being invested into the model per se. Another participant noted that there were some ‘hideous’ politics in the room which needed to be engaged with as directly as possible rather than rerouting discussion through a modelling exercise. It was argued that the situation called for action and a very specific kind of output – an Action Plan - and that this needed to be reached as soon as possible. It was noted that the composition of the clean-up fund reflects a more directly political understanding of freshwater pressures (i.e. emphasis on obvious impactors such as wastewater plants). Since the model was not embraced by participants as carrying scientific weight beyond the realm of what is already known or accepted, its potential role in aiding the Action Plan process was not explored in further depth.

The second view emphasises the potential value of the MM process, and wonders what value it might have added to the Action Planning process had the original pathway been continued. While conceding for the need for things to ‘happen fast’, one participant wondered whether in making a ‘leap’ from the academic modelling to the concrete Action Planning, whether something might have been missed out in between. This participant argued that the concreteness of the Action Plan was its merit, but it lacked structure, and thus amounted to addressing ‘a bunch of known problems with a bunch of known solutions’ rather than trying to be truly innovative.

The third view acknowledges the potential value of the modelling, but generally notes that its practical application didn’t quite suit the context. One participant noted that while they enjoyed the modelling exercise, they found difficulty translating it back to their constituents who wanted fast and direct answers. Another participant suggested that the modelling might have better been ‘parked’ to the side and be developed alongside to support rather than drive or dictate the Action Planning process. Another view suggested that the modelling helped to start and frame discussion, but it needed to allow discussion to proceed more quickly after that.

6.2 Criticisms of the IFS modelling

When asked about the relevance and value of the modelling for the Action Planning process, four broad categories of critical responses emerged.

6.2.1 *MM confusing, complicated*

Seven participants explicitly expressed that they found the modelling process to be too complicated to understand, and thus were not convinced it would add value to the Action Planning over and above a what a linear process could achieve. Specific comments included:

- It was 'boring'
- It was 'a bit tedious'
- It was 'mind-numbing'
- The interface was alienating to participants who are less confident in working with computers
- The diagrams were huge and made even small/simple system aspects unpredictable because of the sheer number of variables involved
- The complexity of the modelling meant that became hard to identify which effects were due to which causes, or whether certain outcomes were explainable merely by small variations in the assumptions about the relationships
- It was a long way of arriving at 'what we already knew' about the river, such as confirming the effects of nitrate leaching
- Simpler reasoning is available to decide on actions, such as 'if you stop putting sediment into the river, you its going to be better'

6.2.2 *Not central to task*

At least three participants explicitly argued that the modelling process needed to be shelved because it was not central to the task of Action Planning, and it was slowing progress toward that end. One participant said it felt like the IFS research team aims were a 'bit different' from their reason for being in the room, which was not a bad thing but which needed to be understood in the wider decision making context. For another participant, the fact that some participants were volunteers gave them reason to emphasize why time should be spent Action Planning instead of modelling. Yet another participant noted that the IFS project *felt* like an academic exercise because it was supposed to be one, but also noted that the Action Planning group wanted a more utilitarian outcome and that Horizons had to action these concerns. It was also noted that it didn't feel like other participants knew what the IFS project was about and what it was trying to deliver, in which case the merits of the modelling were not fully and clearly articulated and understood. At least two participants suggested that the merits of the modelling process might have been more complementary to the Action Planning process if it had been conducted as more of a side-project for those interested rather than taking up centre stage for all participants.

6.2.3 *Hesitancy to commit to official model*

At least two participants expressed a clear hesitancy to commit to the mediated model as a kind of official representation of the river. One participant noted that the number of variables and their interrelationships meant that even an answer to a simple question could not be 'guaranteed', which mean that understandings could not be neatly or faithfully translated into the

model without creating uncertainty. As another participant put it, ‘if the assumptions are out by a little bit then by the time they get multiplied through a model it can screw up the results.’ Another point was raised about the specificity of the modelled variables and relationships – knowing that the model could not apply beyond the Manawatū made it less relevant to learn as a methodology.

6.2.4 *Modelling is redundant*

Two participants suggested that the modelling exercise was redundant in the sense that it was trying to do in a less rigorous way what was being done by the Regional Council by experts in an operational (and more relevant) context. They highlighted that lots of information already existed and had been modelled in the context of management scenarios, both for SLUI as well as the One Plan. In this sense it was felt that the exercise seemed to ‘reinvent the wheel’. One participant further emphasized that the strength of ‘internal’ modelling done by the Regional Council was 1) that it was done in a multiple-operations context, where it served information and policy needs across multiple levels and to specific users, and 2) that it uses more detailed spatial and temporal modelling data. A final concern was that the internal modelling has complicated mechanics, and as such this needed to be an expert domain where assumptions could be approached scientifically. However, it was also noted that the IFS modelling could complement internal modelling but only if the IFS modelling seeks to develop its strengths – iterative and interactive catchment scale visioning – rather than seeking to supplant existing infrastructure.

6.3 Value of IFS modelling

Seven participants conveyed positive reflections on the IFS modelling process, both for the value that the tools *did* add but also for what the tools *might have* provided or *might yet* provide.

At least four participants argued that the IFS modelling process and other tools proved helpful for the Action Planning process, because:

- It confirmed what was already understood with respect to the degradation of the river, but framed it within a wider scientific context of pressures and dynamics
- It provided a template with which to understand the river system and bring other people up to speed with respect to a systematic catchment scale perspective
- The modelling process helped to frame the Action Plan and build confidence in some participants’ understandings
- The Bayesian Belief Network and MM provide ‘a language for interconnectedness’, and it is very difficult to map and explore that interconnectedness through a linear conversation

Three participants offered explicit suggestions for what they thought the IFS modelling and tools might have been able to provide:

- More than just shorthand reasoning for cause-effect relationships, the mediated model could allow a quantification of effects. ‘[R]ather than just saying it will be better’ from doing a particular action, the model might have been able to provide an indication of *how much better*

- MM presents a new way of developing management frameworks with collaborative partners such as iwi/hapū. The modelling process helps to identify the problem and the vision, and then the identification of the variables, effects and interlinkages leads on to discussion about biophysical and then political drivers of the system.
- MM provides a template to bridge the scientific and the cultural, and presents a way of thinking more holistically about actions which achieve scientific *and* cultural outcomes

7. Communicating the river

A number of participants reflected on the nature and value of ‘communicating the river’ in a broad sense, in terms of articulating the historical and catchment scale pressures and trends relating to the Manawatū River. Essentially this could function of conveying the learnings of the Forum to the public in terms of:

- The whole spatial and temporal picture of the river and its pressures
- The location and effects of the proposed Action Plan actions
- The location and effects of the implemented Action Plan actions

7.1 A communications problem...

At least six participants explicitly noted that communications about the river could have been improved, with four of these expressing a strong disapproval of the way that communications became a ‘missed opportunity’ in this sense. Two participants felt that it was clear that Horizons didn’t want to accept and lead a communications programme, which is why it was left unattended. One participant offered that this was because Horizons didn’t want to be seen as the ‘policeman’ and thus be relied on to enforce implementation.

Two participants reflected on the lack of communications as a lost opportunity to build public support for the Action Plan and also which might have helped encouraged other members of the public to engage and take ownership of the Action Plan and Accord visions. One participant argued that since public concern with the state of the river is what catalysed the MRLF in the first place, that communication of the state of the river should have been a primary task of the group.

A number of participants noted that Horizons did actually have lots of relevant information, but three participants (all professionals) complained that it proved extremely difficult for them to access the information, despite taking significant time to look for it. As such, while it was accepted that the information existed in some form, claims that ‘it is available’ are strongly contested by qualified people who have tried to search for it.

7.2 The value of a common vision

Participants noted a range of potential functions for a publicly communicated ‘vision’:

- While there may not be agreement on the exact detail of the final vision (e.g. what achieving the Accord would look like environmentally), it could provide a **foundation from which to discuss options** or scenarios and their implications, such as ‘if you do these actions, you could expect these environmental gains’

- **Clarifying the environmental state** in a spatial context and its associated risks, for members of the public. For example, many people want to know if and where the river is swimmable, and how other things such as algae affect this (or don't), and how visible pressures relate to invisible ones
- **Informing the public of a broader range of issues of concern** relating to the river, beyond the news headlines. For example, gravel extraction is an important pressure which is not generally part of conversations about river health, even though it should be
- **Informing the public about the wide range of restorative actions underway** and what effects these have been having on improving the health of the river, such as SLUI
- **Aligning public perceptions of the river with the best science available.** At least four participants argued that popular perceptions about the health of the river were exaggerated in a negative way, and that these notions needed proper scientific contextualisation. This contextualisation needs to further clarify that the state of the river varies along the length of the river and across different land uses at different spatial scales.
- **Informing public discourses about environmental effects and the scale of responsibility.** Having a public vision of the river (informed by the robust science that facilitated the MRLF) could help to communicate and clarify knowledge about the relative causes of degradation in and along the river. Some participants felt that at the start of the Action Planning process, the blame attributed to particular parties (such as dairy farming) was overemphasized relative to their environmental effects and that other parties were consequently underemphasized, which led to an incorrect assessment of biophysical processes. In this sense, it might provide a platform from which to think about community action differently and moving beyond polarised attributions of responsibility.

7.3 Existing information foundations

While most participants who discussed communication concerns felt that much more could and should have been done, there was a strong agreement that the information foundations for constructing the river publicly already exists. Participants cited what they felt to be a wealth of information built up through and contained in:

- The SLUI project and its associated modelling and effects analysis
- The One Plan hearings, and associated modelling and analysis
- The Horizons 2013 State of the Environment report
- Horizons' extensive monitoring and internal modelling

The key message emerging from participants' reflections here is that while relevant information may already exist and may be nominally available, this should not excuse the MRLF from trying to build a public vision of the river as a way for accounting for its present and proposed future states to the local community.

8. Recommendations

Participants were asked what lessons they would draw from the Action Planning process to inform other councils as they look to create their own collaborative processes. Learnings and recommendations included:

Context matters. The nature of the issues, the people and the organisations involved in any collaborative process will heavily shape what is possible to achieve through it. In this case, former Horizons Chairman Garrick Murfitt catalysed the MLRF and was able to enrol a wide and inclusive range of parties, and this was enabled by the trust that these organisations placed in him. The issues around the One Plan and the ‘River of Shame’ headlines also heavily shaped how people felt about the river and what kinds of ideas were circulating at the time. As one participant put it, ‘people are going to come in with their baggage’ and there needs to be a constructive strategy for moving forward through it. A collaborative process needs to be conscious of the opportunities and also the constraints presented by the particularities of any particular situation.

There needs to be a genuine commitment to reframe and think differently. Collaborative processes may not add value if no one is willing to embrace what comes out of it. Whatever the context may be, for the collaboration to work it needs to be resourced by individuals and organisations in order to work, and this won’t happen if no one commits to the process. While there may be some uncertainty with going into a new kind of process, it can be turned into a safe and supportive space where people can go to troubleshoot and ask for help and explore new kinds of ideas and possible solutions. This norm of ‘commitment to reframing’ needs to be explicitly stated and cultivated through the process itself.

Be flexible and sensitive to participant context. In addition to differences in the organisational interests of participants, there are also important differences in the roles and mandates of participants and the ways that these shape expectations and values within the collaborative process. In the MLRF and Action Planning processes, important distinctions arose in relation to:

- (a) **Paid versus unpaid participants** – time and energy spent on modelling (instead of Action Planning) was one example cited of the ways in which paid participants may feel that their time (in terms of money and opportunity cost) is not being well spent. Two ways of levelling these concerns are by 1) resourcing voluntary participants to attend, and 2) making ‘time efficiency’ an important factor for paid participants involvement
- (b) **Hearing versus listening** – with iwi/hapū groups in particular, there was a sense that while they were able to speak and be heard, they did not necessarily feel that they were being listened to and understood. Different people and groups will have different ways of communicating, and these differences should be meaningfully engaged rather than ignored or written off.
- (c) **Claims to representation** – there was a sense from a number of participants that a distinct tension emerged with respect to *who was allowed to represent* the community. While the collaborative was drawn together to build on peoples diverse knowledges and organisational interests, it was felt by some participants that elected officials seemed to claim a stronger mandate to decision making within the collaborative than other participants.

- (d) **Collaborative versus organisational identities** – another tension existed between the emphasis on collaborative versus interest group identities. On the one hand participants were expected to be official representatives from their organisations, endowed with the mandate to sign agreements and commit their organisations to actions. On the other hand, it was also expected that reframing within the collaborative process would be embraced by individuals, and thus that individuals needed to let go of their ‘party line’ of official organisational position in order to effectively collaborate.

In all of these examples of distinctions between participation capacities in the collaborative process, the procedural consequences of participant roles need to be clearly stated and understood.

Commitment of key people and groups is needed. In order to reach the critical mass needed to kickstart a collaborative process, a reputable champion may be needed to assemble key individuals and organisations and get them to commit to a process. Not only organisations, but the ‘true leaders’ of those organisations and in the community might be valuably enrolled into the process and to give it momentum. However, in addition to starting the process, the commitment of key organisational champions is needed in order to keep the process going and keeping those ‘of a lesser interest’ involved.

A careful involvement strategy is needed. There was broad agreement that iwi/hapū involvement was later than desirable and that it also had its own hiccups and tensions (e.g. demanding that iwi/hapū ‘speak with one voice’). The nature and approach for iwi/hapū involvement is something that should be carefully thought through from the outset, perhaps drawing on experiences of successful co-governance collaborations elsewhere. Beyond iwi/hapū involvement however, there were a number of reflections that the Accord and Action Planning processes were particularly constraining by the nature of the people involved, and that the particular involvement strategy deployed was pragmatic but not necessarily procedurally democratic and open. Action Planning involvement was shaped by involvement with the Accord, which was shaped by the particularities of the former Horizons chair and the organisations who contributed to that. There was no open invitation and while the Action Planning process used quotas and sought balance across interests, it was essentially composed of an inner circle of practitioners, many of which who were involved with the One Plan disputes. Any future iterations of the Action Plan should consider a way of engaging more widely than selectively inviting a small number of interests to be involved.

Clear aims and objectives need to be formed and stated. This prevents cross-purpose discussions and allows participants to settle in to clear (and new) roles. While the Action Plan as an outcome was clearly defined, there were three dimensions along which the Action Plan could have still had further clarification. First, the static versus live nature of the Action Plan was not explicitly addressed. While most participants agreed that the Action Plan is not complete and should be updated/revised over time, there was no explicit statement or process defined from the start with respect to how these decisions would be made. As such, having different (unstated) assumptions about the nature of the Action Plan could lead organisation to contribute across purposes. Second, within the Action Planning process it was suggested that having smaller focussed subgroups to work on particular areas or types of actions could have been a more targeted and efficient way of reaching the Action Plan sooner and with additional precision. Third, the relevant timescale over which the Action Plan investments are intended to derive value were

not explicitly stated or understood. While 5 and 20 year horizons were discussed, the nature of relevant actions and investments (for multiple reasons, including environmental outcomes) would change with wider timescales and thus the timescale effectively bounds the discussion and can exclude certain groups or priorities from the conversation, such as very long term iwi/hapū visions or wider conversations about regional economic development.

An independent facilitator is needed. Because there will always be ‘agitation’ around issues in a collaborative process, care and strategy is needed to meaningfully engage with concerns arising from participants, and constructively linking these concerns to the aims and reframing capacities of the collaboration. *Independence* is important because an internal facilitator may be more likely to be accused of bias, and of intervening in favour of particular participants and interests. Having a *strong* facilitator is also important, for keeping the process productive and moving toward the end goal and not being constantly sidetracked. However it is also important to have a *sensitive* facilitator who will not just ‘bulldoze’ through discussions and will create a safe space for all participants to contribute and have their contributions meaningfully incorporated and responded to.

Independent evaluation is needed. While a particular organisation such as Regional Council may be relied on to support the collaborative process, it is important that the process be evaluated externally so that other views can be legitimately represented. There is a concern that ‘winners write history’ in their favour and that the faults and inequities of the process can become erased by a self-serving narrative of success. In this sense, having an external evaluation is important to critically reflect on what the process was (and what it succeeded in doing) and also what the process wasn’t (and what it might have done but didn’t). Resourcing an external evaluation provides a way for all participants to weigh in on the process and to allow untold stories and feelings to be documented and provide a basis for meaningful improvement through future actions.

Collaboration should be ‘front ended’ with statutory processes. As noted at numerous points in this report, a number of participants have expressed a desire to front end a statutory process with amore collaborative one. This is not to suggest that the two should be formally linked, or to turn the voluntary soft collaborative into a statutory and regulatory one. Rather, it builds on the shared sense that through the collaborative process participants were able to share their views, values and aspirations in a context that encouraged empathy, understanding and trust. These kinds of relationships provide a stronger confidence that parties involved in planning processes are meaningfully cognizant and understanding of the aspirations and constraints of others. It also provides prospects for thinking about the statutory process in a different way – thinking about different kinds of knowledge as relevant, of different kinds of actions or relationships.

Build a common vision. While an aspirational vision may not be shared by all, having *some* sense of a common aim proved very valuable in terms of getting through the ‘hurdles’ and difficult conversations. Having a shared sense of purpose is important to narrate the group as linked to each other and to build an ethic of solidarity with other participants and with the river, and not just ceding to the separate and often conflicting visions of participants different and formal interests or organisations.

Milestones are important. In order to keep the momentum of the group going, ‘you need a few wins along the way’. These can take the form of specified outputs such as the Accord and Action

Plan, or public events such as riverside festivals. These kinds of milestones provide a point at which to re-narrate the sense of purpose for the group as well as demonstrate that some good can actually result from all the work and time that has been put into it.

Information is needed to facilitate reframing. Developing new, holistic and shared understandings of the river and actions on the river can and should be informed by the best available information. This is important because participants, their organisations and members of the public have different kinds of knowledge about the river, and that there is a sense that we should all be 'brought up to speed' on particular issues in order to make robust decisions about actions and consequences. The role of scientific information is crucial in enabling new ways of thinking to develop, and preventing participants into retrenching into arguments that they entered with or feel comfortable making. Reframing understandings of the river needs to be supported by a sensitive and careful assembling and presentation of scientific information,

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