

**TRANSFORMING THINK TANKS INTO ‘POLICY HUBS’:  
THE CREATION OF RESEARCH–POLICY NETWORKS**

by

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## Statement of Originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or used for other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and the sources used have been acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher B. Vas", with a horizontal line underneath.

Christopher B. Vas  
(September 2012)



## Abstract

The development of public policy has been dogged for many decades by two main issues: the use of evidence and knowledge generated through research, and the engagement of external policy actors or non-state actors in the policy process. The collaborative role of universities and think tanks has seldom been considered in this context. This research thus poses the following three research questions: i) Does a policy network currently exist between government policy makers and university researchers? ii) Is there value in having an institutional structure that mediates and brings together government policy makers and university researchers by operating at the interface of research and policy? iii) What role can a think tank play within this context? How may this vary from the traditional role of a think tank?

In order to address these questions, this research systematically investigates the role of university research centres, and think tanks as mediators in policy interactions with the Australian government. Using an interdisciplinary perspective, this research also explores these issues using the heuristics of policy networks and governance. The Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales, a university research centre, and the HC Coombs Policy Forum, a policy think tank at the Australian National University, were used as case studies in this research. As the Australian government founded both these institutions three decades apart, insights were provided into the ways government thinking has evolved.

The findings from this research are unique. While addressing the research questions, this thesis also outlines how think tanks must transform themselves into system-integrating institutional structures or ‘policy hubs’ that can be responsible for the creation of policy communities. Such policy hubs can also pursue activity at the interface of research and policy, helping bridge the divide between university researchers and public policy makers. In addition, this research also develops a three-tiered framework, *Research-Inform-Interact-Integrate-Policy* or ‘*researchINpolicy*’ (rINp), providing a mechanism to better understand how research can have an influence on public policy.



## **Preface**

This research was born from sheer curiosity about how public policy could be better influenced through university research. My time as a policy adviser in 2006, in the Australian Federal Police within the Australian Government, ignited this interest. In providing policy advice I noted the lack of use of research in the process, despite the significant and relevant research being pursued within universities. This was not because it was not favoured or welcomed; rather, it was related to the problem of academic and government silos. This issue was identified and discussed by the senior echelons of the organisation. The opportunity I was offered by the Chief of Staff, Andrew Colvin, in establishing the organisation's partnership with the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security gave me to believe that this might have been the answer to bridging the research policy divide. However, this was not really so. The challenges multiplied, and ranged from reaching consensus on policy problems that would form the core of the Centre's programs on one hand, to the other extreme where issues were related to data and information access, timelines and outputs. Over a period of time, researchers and practitioners reached consensus and the Centre took off. Not for me, however. These issues still lingered in my mind. I took this up as a personal challenge that had to be continuously moulded and shaped. This doctoral thesis is the result.

In the early years of my research effort, Professor David Marsh helped me conceptualise some of the literature around public policy. The work of think tanks also piqued my interest; it is no secret that many synergies and overlaps exist between university research work and the work of think tanks. It was in this context that my interest took me down a path where I started to spend much more time

studying and researching networks. Given the sparsely populated think tank arena in Australia (in comparison to the United States), I explored the idea of including a comparative element within my research work. Having spent a little less than a year in India between 2009 and 2010, working on capacity-building efforts for the Indian Government, I soon realised that the research–policy problem was not unique to Australia.

The year 2010 was a turning point in my research journey for many reasons. Having commenced working with the Australian Government’s Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) on my return to Australia, I also met with Professor Adam Graycar—well known for transcending the boundaries of academia and government—to discuss the research–policy divide and to outline my research effort. Professor Graycar held roles as Foundation Director of the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales (which is also one of the case studies in this research effort), Head of Premier and Cabinet in South Australia and Head of the Australian Institute of Criminology. After gladly accepting to act as adviser on my research panel, he said, and I quote: ‘you’re a man ahead of your time.’ While I was pleased to think that my work was cutting-edge, I also became aware of the review report *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration* that made recommendations related to some of the issues with which I was grappling. Around the same time, the Australian Government announced the establishment, in partnership with the Australian National University (ANU), of the Australian National Institute of Public Policy, which would house a policy think tank, HC Coombs Policy Forum, which would function at the interface of research and policy. Professor Graycar was announced as



Dean and Dr. Mark Matthews took up the role of Executive Director for the think tank.

In the context of this research, my interactions with Dr. Matthews began while I was at the AFP and he was head of the Centre for Policy Innovation at the ANU. In 2010, we reconnected, and he gladly agreed that I could use Coombs as a case study in my research. From late 2010 to early 2011, I interacted with many of the Coombs stakeholders from within both the University and Government to better understand how Coombs' functioning at the interface was being viewed. I closely followed the Natural Resource Management (NRM) initiative, which I discuss in detail in this thesis. After having spent time, in early 2011, as a visiting scholar to Harvard University, Stanford University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison researching the similar issue of research-policy networks, I returned to Australia and commenced the analysis of the data gathered from the SPRC and Coombs case studies. It was at this time that I decided, based on good advice from Professor Marsh, to drop the international 'compare and contrast' element from the case owing to the complexity involved and the limited time available. Because the data I had collected was rich, there would be too many variables to contend with if I developed an international comparison. By August-September 2011, I had completed the analysis of the case studies. In October 2011, I commenced a secondment with Coombs working with Dr. Matthews. While this provided me with privileged access to information, allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the working of Coombs and offered a much better appreciation of the issues associated with functioning at the interface of research and policy, this did not materially alter any content within the Coombs case study.

Finally, it is time to acknowledge individuals who have been integral to my research journey. I owe a great deal of gratitude and thanks to Professor David Marsh for helping me stay on track and in getting me through the ‘tunnel.’ Thanks to my advisory panel, Professor Graycar, Professor John Wanna and Professor John Ravenhill. It is also important for me to thank my public service colleagues, who have put up with my many ‘research and policy’ discussions: Natalie Bates, Chris Black, Katherine Van Gorp, Fiona Henderson and David Prince from the AFP; my DEEWR colleagues: Astrida Upitis, for her strong ongoing support, encouragement and reassurance, Anthony Fernando, Linda White, Ray Dingli, Nina Campbell, Gaye Kennedy, Erika Heywood, Liam Dee and the rest of the Workforce Innovation Team. To my once-case study subjects and now colleagues, Dr. Mark Matthews and Paul Harris, a big thanks for your ongoing support and inspiration.

I can also reassure my friends who have had to put up with my many research and writing excuses over the years, the journey is finally over... or is it? Finally, my family and most importantly, my better half, Divya, who has been patient, anxious and excited over the last four years about me completing the doctorate, this achievement is dedicated to you.



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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Governments today are increasingly seeking to incorporate non-state actors in the development and implementation of public policy. In the past, stakeholder involvement within the public policy arena has been limited and, for the most part, we can say that governments continue to function in silos in the course of developing policy. It is only recently that governments have started to pay attention to stakeholders' views and opinions in deciding how policies are developed. In a sense, governments are making a transition from actively governing the people and society to a phase where they govern along with the policy actors, institutions and organisations which represent broader society.

Stephen Bell and Andrew Hindmoor (2010) refer to this as *metagovernance*. This also stems from the active role stakeholders, interest groups, community organisations and others have begun to play in the governance of policy issues. For instance, the province of New Brunswick in Canada used a *Public Engagement* (PE) (Public Policy Forum 2011) model to engage non-state actors in developing a poverty reduction plan for the province. The United Kingdom refers to this societal engagement as the Big Society. In the context of policy implementation, Lenihan and Briggs (2011) talk about Australia's effort to formulate a similar concept called *Co-Design*, to develop and improve its citizen-centric services. These moves suggest that public policy is incrementally moving away from serving the political interests of partisan politics to proactively exploring ways to engage with, and address, community and sectoral issues.

Behm (2007) identifies, in the Australian national security context, the limits government faces when devising new ways of developing policy, even when the parameters of national strategy have undergone radical changes. The findings from national and international crisis situations, such as the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US, and other parliamentary inquiries and reviews indicate that there is lack of inter-agency cooperation and utilisation of external networks in working together. Electorates are no longer passive players and bystanders in deciding how a country is governed. Communities demand a voice, openness and transparency from governments, and hold their representatives accountable for their policy actions. It is in this complex space that government bureaucracies are forced to operate. The author's professional experience working within the bureaucracies of federal law enforcement, tertiary education and the employment sector confirms these claims. The Australian Public Service (APS) review report, *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for Reform* identifies the need to enhance strategic policy direction. Recommendation 3.2 of the review indicates that the APS policy capability needs to be strengthened by engaging with academia, research institutions, community and the private sector. This clearly reflects two important components of effective public policy development: the relationship between governments and external stakeholders, and the need for effective knowledge transfer mechanisms from the periphery to the core of policy development.

Lasswell (1951; cited in Bridgman and Davis, 2004) conceptualised public policy development as a sequence involving intelligence, recommendation, prescription, invocation, application, appraisal and termination. This heuristic is easily transposed into the Australian policy cycle identified by Bridgman and Davis, which also incorporates a sequence of steps, i.e., identifying issues, policy analysis, policy instruments, consultation, coordination, decision, implementation and evaluation. They

also refer to public policy making as a process which, when effectively followed, leads to good policy outcome. Policy development and implementation then becomes a series of steps taken to create a dialogue between process and content, procedures and substance. However, with an increasing number of external actors becoming part of the policy process, it is important to understand how these multiple policy actors work in consort with government policy makers.

Policy actors such as university researchers, think tank policy advocates, and lobby groups such as NGOs, unions, the media, industry, society and the community, have all, at some stage or other, played a role in the public policy process. This has resulted in various types of networks being formed between non-state actors in the policy space. Industry and media are connected in order to lobby governments on specific policy matters. The society and community at large have also begun to engage with policy debates through polling surveys, media, focus groups, etc. It is important for us, as political scientists, to be able to explore the policy processes more deeply and to ascertain under what conditions and situations governments choose to engage with stakeholders. Lobby groups or non-governmental organisations, such as Amnesty International and Oxfam, avidly speak out on issues that are of relevance to their organisational mandate, hoping to influence government policy and community action. University research centres, such as the Centre for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford University in the US, have as part of their missions the aim to produce policy relevant research and influence international security policy. Think tanks such as the Brookings Institution and the Hoover Institution in the US claim to have a close association with government policy making. All this reflects one thing: the policy landscape, as well as the process of public policy development, is changing and now requires effective knowledge transfer mechanisms between society



and government built on strong policy network relationships. Thus, in citing Bridgman and Davis (2004), Reige and Lindsay (2006:25) acknowledge that:

Good public policy emerges when knowledge possessed by the society is transferred effectively to governments and when public policy options in turn are tested via ongoing knowledge transfer between governments and stakeholders, leading up to the release of policy and followed by ongoing policy review.

Butterworth and Horne (2003) outline critical components of the policy process to include systematic structuring of a difficult and sometimes poorly understood issue, gathering the requisite information and analytical tools to assess the problem, devising suitable options with implementation plans, and finally, communicating the outcome in a timely manner. This suggests that any policy outcome will only be as good as the information and analysis that is fed into this process. Such information and analysis includes facts, values and ideas, which, when put together, provide guidance for a plan of action (Adams, 2004). Thus, good policy must be founded on a strong useful knowledge base, which in terms of public policy can be defined as well-researched and analysed information leading to the complete understanding of a particular issue. This is why evidence-based policy and stakeholder engagement is becoming increasingly important for governments. Public policy is thus no longer a linear sequence of actions that can be invoked to address policy problems. Government's need for evidence in developing policy alternatives calls for a closer look at how academic researchers can play a role in the policy process. It is in this context that this study will explore how a

policy network can be structured and facilitated between government, universities and think tanks.

Government departments and agencies have for a long time tended to work in silos, and have become territorial. This has, in turn, affected public accountability and sometimes resulted in government agencies operating in the front line without bureaucrats having adequate knowledge of issues. Abelson (2006) highlights the issue that government departments lack the opportunity to think about the long-term impact of policy advice. It is in such situations that governments must work with universities and think tanks, who can contribute their expertise in researching policy problems. They are best placed to do so, and can systematically investigate policy problems issues. This effort needs to develop under joint responsibility, given the complex policymaking process and participation of multiple actors in the policy process. Universities and think tanks are two policy stakeholders which have found a place in the domain of public policy; Think tanks, as policy institutions, more evidently so and this is evident in the work of scholars such as Diane Stone (1996, 2000, 2007), Ian Marsh (1994), David Abelson (2004, 2007), James McGann (2000, 2007, 2009) and others. As applied policy research institutions, think tanks have been long engaged with public policy processes and, hence, have staked a claim to influencing policy. It is no surprise, then, that there are over 5,000 think tanks globally with a high concentration in the US. As we will see later in this research, over 20% of the think tanks in the US are located in the capital, Washington D.C., and over 50% of think tanks have some level of university affiliation, similar to CISAC, as mentioned earlier.

Given their growth and penetration, not only in the US, but elsewhere around the globe, think tanks have continuously morphed from undertaking *traditional think tank* roles associated with applied research, to *think-and-do-tank* activities which include advocacy and outreach (McGann 2007). Think tanks have most often been classified as either being independent or affiliated, and are further sub-classified depending on the nature of work they pursue, e.g., academic, contract research, advocacy-based, or party or government affiliated. We will discuss this in much more detail below.

Aside from think tanks, the manner in which social science research undertaken within universities is linked to public policy processes still requires systematic research and investigation. This arena is still permeated by the decades-old problem that Nathan Caplan (1979) called the ‘Two-Community Theory,’ highlighting the segregation and disconnect between researchers and policy makers. Following Caplan, Carol Weiss, Evert Lindquist and Meredith Edwards have also made an effort to understand *what* exacerbates this divide. In exploring the work of these scholars, this study will identify gaps and make it clear that no studies have been undertaken to determine *how* governments can engage and jointly collaborate with universities and think tanks within a network construct to inform and shape policy.

The days of ‘government knows best’ and of government being the main authority responsible for solving problems are more or less over. Policy complexity and increasing interdependencies of policy issues have governments seeking to proactively engage with non-state actors. The importance of evidence-based policy making has been validated in the fields of science and technology, where inventions and discoveries directly influence the way in which policy is shaped. This is common in fields where a tangible product is the end result of a process that can then take shape as a policy outcome, e.g., mainstreaming a newly-discovered vaccine.

What is unclear and under-researched is how evidence, or the experience of non-state actors, can be utilised in determining policy directions in the social sciences area. Researchers continue to deliberate and explore the link between social science research and policy. Sectors such as education, foreign affairs, immigration, security or human services may not be as straight forward in determining correlations for easy policy solutions to be constructed. This requires research into the underlying problem, as well as an understanding of how the outcomes might affect communities, policy actors and the country at large, given that an increased regulation of the international education sector and tightening of migration rules can have an impact on jobs, trade, labour market supply and growth in the economy. Such impacts must be identified early, long before new policies are introduced, ensuring risk mitigation strategies are put in place. For this to take place, governments and non-state actors have to work together, most often within policy networks (see David Marsh [1992, 2000, 2010] and Rod Rhodes [1992, 1997]).

As this research will show, what is also missing from the literature and scholarly discussion is the use of a policy network and governance approach to study such research–policy network relationships. The policy network heuristics developed by David Marsh, Rod Rhodes and others, combined with the State and Society governance approaches most recently discussed by Andrew Bell and Stephen Hindmoor, have never featured in scholarly efforts to narrow the research–policy gap. Policy networks, as many scholars have suggested, is an alternative to conventional, pluralist, policy making. Marsh and Rhodes (1992) discuss two types of policy networks, issue networks and policy communities. In the case of issue networks, the network relationship tends to be weak, owing to a lack of interaction, limited exchange of resources between network members and multiple policy issues. Here, consultation, rather than negotiation, is

central to the policy outcome. In contrast, in a policy community, the strength and stability of the relationship between interacting stakeholders is high. Self-serving agendas tend to be minimal, as the interest in the policy issue takes priority. There is more goodwill amongst the network participants in terms of resource sharing, higher levels of trust and a commonality in the values shared. In such a network, government takes on a facilitative, rather than a controlling role.

Within such networks, Colebatch (2006) discusses two interaction models. The structural interaction model focuses upon the collective purposeful action between various stakeholders, actors and organisations engaged in the policy process. Here, the necessity to manage stakeholders outside government and develop a shared understanding of the issue is taken to be paramount. On the other hand, the social construction model considers the importance of ideas, knowledge and discourse in the policy making process. David Hazlehurst (2004), building on the efforts of scholars such as Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan (1997), has also discussed the manner in which government selects and interacts with non-state actors. Hazlehurst discusses various policy network models within which government tends to be the key player and controller of the network, and within which it utilises different interaction mechanisms. He describes them as follows: *Competitive Pluralism*, where government selects a stakeholder(s) for interaction, based on an open competition process between interest groups; *State Corporatism*, where government selects a stakeholder from a closed process of competition, incorporating actors from a pool of privileged participants, so that control is centrally managed and imposed on the stakeholder; *Societal Corporatism*, achieved through societal representational monopoly as a result of which a stakeholder is selected (government also retains control in this mode); *Group Sub Government*, wherein clusters of individuals (bureaucrats, academics, interest group members) come

together to make policy decisions that assist government in taking further action; and finally, *Iron Triangles*, which involve a closed and stable relationship between an interest group, government agency/department and a governmental committee.

The models proposed by Marsh et al. and Colebatch and Hazlehurst are important within this study as the relationship between universities, think tanks and governments cannot be considered in isolation, i.e., without taking into account the institutional structures and the individuals associated within them. There have been models introduced by scholars which bring together multiple stakeholders. Henry Etzkowitz and Loet Leydesdorff formulated the Triple Helix System of Innovation (THSoI) model that operates between university-industry-government. This model has proven to have immense value and potential that is most often utilised within sectors that are product-oriented. The relationship between university-industry-government has been well established in the technology sector, where this model has been put to use, specifically in the area of technology transfer. As we will discuss below, universities have seen a shift from pursuing traditional roles of teaching and research (modes 1 and 2) to becoming responsible for civic engagement and ensuring societal impact (mode 3). This has forced universities to build networks and partnerships with industry in order to secure resources to pursue more applied, as opposed to pure, research.

Dzisah (2005) discusses the case of the University of Saskatchewan and its relationship with industry and government within a Triple Helix system aimed at addressing the critical issues facing Saskatchewan. One example he cites is the disease of wheat rust, which costs the Canadian government approximately \$25m each year. The University took on the role of re-energising the economic development of Saskatchewan,

addressing the drought and other problems by enhancing its research activity through developing North America's second largest research park, 'Innovation Place.' This research park houses a significant number of industry firms that focus on tackling important issues facing Saskatchewan, such as agriculture, information technology, the environment and so on. This park has also created in excess of 1000 jobs, and brought in revenue of a few hundred million Canadian dollars, significantly adding to the development of Saskatchewan as a regional hub. The utility of such a tripartite model may be useful to test within the public policy domain, and aspects such as the creation of networks will be explored in this research.

There are two schools of thought regarding the governance of policy networks. One places the state at the centre of policy network governance, i.e., a state-centric approach. The other suggests that the state has lost its ability to govern without the involvement of non-state actors and, hence, argues that societal actors or non-state actors are central in any policy network. The approach adopted by this research study is the former, although this research acknowledges that the state needs to interact and engage with non-state actors in the policy process in order to enhance its ability to govern and develop better public policy.

Stephen Bell and Andrew Hindmoor's (2009) work is the best recent exposition of the state-centric view of governance. According to their work, this form of governance utilises one of the following five forms of governance: *hierarchy*, wherein the state maintains its authoritative position to achieve policy outcomes; *persuasion*, wherein the state persuades society to change its behaviour through self-discipline and compliance; *markets*, through which the state delivers government services; *community engagement*,

wherein decision-making powers are devolved to citizens and communities; and finally, *associations*, in which the state selectively offers non-state actors the opportunity to influence policy in exchange for public support, access to information and assistance with the implementation of policy outcomes. These heuristics will be discussed further in this research to understand how research–policy networks between universities, think tanks and governments can be structured and governed, while adding value to the policy process.

Having established some of the challenges faced by government in policy processes, particularly in terms of incorporating non-state actors and using evidence for policy purposes, let us outline the key focus of this research. Following on from the Two-Community Theory, the discussion of policy networks and governance and the call to bridge research and policy gaps, who is best placed to alleviate this divide? Where universities have the responsibility for knowledge creation and policy makers the responsibility to engage with policy issues, who can bridge the gap between them? What structures need to be put in place to bridge the divide between social scientists, concerned with traditional research, and policy makers, who are action-oriented, practical minded, and concerned with immediate issues? Can think tanks play a role in advocating research outcomes to policy makers in a form that is more easily understood by policy makers? This study will attempt to fill the gap by using the heuristics of policy networks and governance to understand how network relationships between government, universities and think tanks can add value to the policy process.



## 1.1 Research Questions and Case Studies

Bearing these discussion issues in mind, the research questions posed in this study are as follows:

1. Does a policy network currently exist between government policy makers and researchers? How has government utilised and engaged university-based policy research centres to inform policy development? How have researchers within these centres responded?
2. Is there value in having an institutional structure that mediates stakeholder relationships by operating at the interface of research and policy? Can a think tank effectively carry out this role (Marsh 1994; Edwards 2008)?
3. What role can a think tank play in bringing other stakeholders to this network? What are the strengths and challenges which may be encountered within this model? What conditions can encompass such network functioning (Abelson 2007:26)?

In order to pursue this line of exploration, this research has undertaken a detailed study of two institutional structures set up by the Australian Government. The study explores the establishment of these institutions and attempts to understand how they function via identifying the various modes of engagement with policy makers in the government. In order to address the questions posed, it was important to study the institutional structures and interactions, decision-making processes, political context, bureaucracies, political processes and governance issues. A qualitative research design incorporating fieldwork, interviews, observations and document analysis was put to use within this research (Furlong and Marsh, 2010:193).

The first case study focuses on the Australian Government's establishment of the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in the 1970s. The chapter discussing SPRC's engagement with policy makers outlines the government's role, the political context within which the Centre was set up and how government played a key part in its functioning by participation in its governance structure. The chapter outlines how the Centre was established through government processes and a significant resource contribution. It analyses the Centre's past and current activity, highlighting changes in the Centre's governance, operating and research activities. In documenting the changes that took place from its establishment to date, the chapter analyses the SPRC's role in discussing the interaction and engagement channels between researchers and policy makers.

Reflecting on the information gathered from interviews with members of the Centre, the study identifies different models that are used by the SPRC in order to play a role in the policy process. Four models were developed to better understand the Centre's work, which was then analysed to understand if and how SPRC has played a role in various stages of the policy process. This case study helps us to better understand the often-vexed relationship between government policy makers and social science researchers. The analysis in this study offers us an opportunity to understand the nature of research-policy networks. It also provides evidence to understand why research alone does not inform or influence policy-making and that there is a need for greater levels of interaction to share knowledge and information amongst researchers and policy makers, while also bringing in other relevant non-state actors. The SPRC's relationship with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is one such link and a channel that is used from time to time to inform public debate and discussion on social policy issues. This channel has been used by NGOs in utilising research evidence to engage government on

issues of policy relevance. Thus, the use of non-state actors is becoming increasingly important in bridging the research–policy divide. The chapter concludes with discussion on the need for a systems and knowledge integrator that can bring researchers and policy makers closer.

The second case study focuses on the H.C. Coombs Policy Forum (Coombs) at the Australian National University (ANU). Coombs, as we will see later in the study, was set up under the Australian National Institute of Public Policy (ANIPP), an initiative established in 2010 between the Australian Government and the Australian National University. Coombs was set up as a think tank to build better networks and linkages between the government’s policy makers and ANU’s policy researchers. What underpins Coombs functioning is a network framework that aims to bring together researchers and policy makers to enhance public policy.

Chapter 6 examines important distinctive elements of Coombs’ operation: policy exploration; translational research activity for policy purposes; its role as a system and knowledge integrator; and its horizon-scanning activity. Within each of these elements, we will identify and discuss how networks are created and managed. The chapter begins with a discussion of the establishment of Coombs, which reflects the change in thinking in government since the establishment of institutions such as the SPRC. This change reflects the creation and funding of institutional set ups that function at the interface of research and policy making, as opposed to performing pure research. The role of Coombs, its governance structure and activities are then outlined, before introducing some of the models that will underpin interactions and engagement between researchers and policy makers.

The chapter also analyses how policy issues and research areas can overlap via recognising policy interdependencies and how Coombs fosters a long term horizon-scanning approach to address some policy issues. As the establishment of Coombs is recent, this case then attempts to study in depth its first research–policy engagement with the Australian Government. This is the natural resource management (NRM) initiative which Coombs facilitated between the Australian Government’s Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) and the Fenner School of Environment and Society (Fenner) at the ANU. As we will see later, the NRM initiative brought together policy makers, researchers and stakeholders from the NRM community to identify avenues to serve two purposes: informing the *Caring for our Country* (CfoC) policy review that was being undertaken by DAFF and SEWPaC; and, through stakeholder interactions, identify longer-term NRM policy issues. The aim of the chapter is to discuss the extent to which Coombs’ approach has been underpinned by the policy network approach.

Following the discussion and analysis of the case studies, some of the key empirical findings that emerge from the case studies will be outlined. The discussion chapter, which is the essence of this research effort, makes an attempt to re-build the theory from the two case studies, and to contribute to the literature of policy networks, governance and the utilisation of research in policymaking. The chapter constructs an innovative conceptual framework or model, which is called Research-Inform-Interact-Integrate-Policy or ‘researchINpolicy’ (rINp). The rINp model establishes a better understanding of how research can be used within policy processes at three different levels: provision of information, interactions between researchers and policy makers, and the integration

of research and/or researchers into policy making processes. This model also encompasses the need for a network integrating ‘policy hub’ such as a think tank. As Abelson (2007:578) suggests, policy influence is achieved through an interactive process that allows individuals and organisations to exchange ideas and provide information on research evidence between academics and government policy makers. This forms the basis of the rINp model. Underpinning the rINp model is the need for a policy community, that is, a preferred policy network that is supported by a state-centric governance approach. From the case studies and the discussion, this research makes clear that the state can enhance its ability to interact and govern external stakeholders in the policy process, refuting the claims of a ‘hollowed-out’ government. The chapter concludes by outlining new research directions as a result of this study.

## **1.2 Research Value**

As is evident, one of the key elements researched and discussed in this study is the value and positioning of universities within a policy network and their links with think tanks and governments. The role of universities in the public policy process has received little attention when compared to the importance given to other interest groups as stakeholders in the policy process. This is the value-added from this research. In addition, the originality of this research lies in the evidence uncovered and the discussion generated about the incorporation of university research centres as important policy actors in the policy process. The discussion of the rINp model also allows for a better understanding of how a tripartite relationship can be extended to include multiple stakeholders and policy actors, such as the community, media and non-governmental organisations, in the policy process. Finally, this study also adds to the body of knowledge in discussing a reformed role for think tanks in the policy process.

One of the limitations of this research was the need to initially study bilateral relations between universities and government, think tanks and government, before extending the findings to the tripartite relationship. As tripartite relationships between three institutions are few and far between, the case studies of the SPRC and Coombs helped explore and conceptualise how such tripartite relationships can be structured. A further caveat or disclaimer about this research is that it focuses on the policy process and not on the content of the policy or the politics associated with the issue. While the case studies reflect and use the content descriptors to unpack and discuss the underlying policy process, the research avoids making any comment on specific policy issues. In addition, the research takes the position that policy development is seldom a linear process, which is why understanding the interactions and structures built upon a convoluted, iterative and constantly changing course of action has been the key focus.

The author's professional experience working within the Australian Government's Public Service has also informed many of the perspectives within this research. While the case studies inform the research outcomes, the study of only two institutions undoubtedly had a limiting effect on generalising the findings. Further studies will need to be undertaken to generalise any findings. Hence, the outcomes will only hold good for the institutions that have been studied within this research. An additional in-depth study with policy makers and political leaders can help inform the new research directions outlined in this thesis.

## **Chapter 2: Think Tanks and Universities as Policy Actors**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will discuss a putative re-shaping of the relationship between think tanks and universities as important policy actors within the policy process. We will explore how think tanks and university research can play a vital role in the public policy process through pursuing applied research. As we will see, the research and discussion about think tanks over the past decade has focused principally on the issue of policy influence, using proxies to determine such influence. As some research has indicated - a new direction is essential and think tanks must begin to work more closely at the intersection of research and policy. Think tanks should explore the means by which they can take on the role of an extended policy analysis arm of government, working at the interface with research, thus acting as 'intermediary agencies to connect (knowledge) producers to users' (Edwards 2010:61). Think-tanks need to consider facilitating a two-way communication stream between government and researchers, and government and the community. Edwards further emphasises this idea: 'a linear relationship between these (producers and users) might not be sufficient...interactive processes seem to be a key ingredient'.

Such views are supported by Campbell and Pedersen (2006), who identified that further research was necessary in two areas: (i) understanding the extent to which, and the way in which, newly created knowledge influences policy development; and (ii) examining the roles of actors, organisations and institutions affecting the creation of this knowledge and its dissemination in a policy development sphere. Given the increasingly

resource-constrained environment, it has become important to design a collaborative approach between policy makers, analysts and researchers. In establishing this premise and the subsequent research questions for this study, this chapter discusses the role of university social science research in evidence-based policy-making, and considers how tripartite engagement between universities, think tanks and governments can flourish. This is the area in which this research will make a vital contribution.

## **2.2 Think Tanks and Universities: What do We Know About Them?**

The roles of policy networks, stakeholder relationships, non-state actors and interest groups in policy-making need to be carefully researched in order to better understand public policy development, and how external stakeholder engagement can make it more effective. For instance, there are 1,954 interest groups registered in the European Union which by virtue of the nature of their organisations or lobbying perspectives represent policy sectoral interest. Thus, much of the literature concerning interest groups sees policy developments as involving a shift from government to governance (Marsh 2008:254; Kluvert 2009:1–4). Dur and De Bievre (2008:34) see interest groups as a channel for citizen communication by which the community can voice their views to decision makers. This helps in the development of policies that are amenable to citizen preferences as opposed to creating policies that are influenced by the elite. They further (p. 45) suggest four ways in which interest groups influence the policy process acknowledging the intense pressures sometime exerted by such groups:

Societal actors may try to influence policy outcomes by (i) seeking direct access to decision-makers, (ii) influencing the selection of decision-makers, (iii) using voice strategies to shape public opinion, and (iv) employing



structural coercion power... access refers to interest groups' direct expression of demands to decision-makers. Influence may also be wielded before the policy process has really started, at the moment of selecting public actors. Another pathway to influence is interest groups' use of "voice" to try to influence public opinion through manifestations, rallies, petitions, press statements, and campaigning... economic actors may employ structural power by making their decisions on when and where to allocate their funds dependent on the implementation of specific policies.

### *Think Tanks in the Policy World*

In this context, think tanks have received considerable attention. This attention has focused on their role in, and influence upon, the policy process (see, for example, Gyngell 2008; Abelson 2006; Stone 2001 and 2002; Marsh 1994; McGann, 2007 and 2009; and 't Hart, 2008). Think tanks, as not-for-profit institutions, carry out applied research in a diverse range of policy sectors. In an attempt to facilitate better-informed policy-making, they engage policy makers on policy issues and contribute to public debate and policy advocacy through introducing new ideas (Gyngell 2008; McGann 2007, 2009; 't Hart and Vromen 2008). To Moore (1998:75, 78), ideas from interest groups such as think tanks establish:

... the assumptions, justifications, purposes, and means of public action. In doing so, they simultaneously authorise and instruct different sections of the society to take actions on behalf of public purposes... ideas matter because they establish the contexts within which policy debates are conducted, organisational activities are rendered coherent and meaningful, and people's actions are animated and directed.

However, as we will see later in this chapter, the discussion about the policy influence of think tanks remains underdeveloped at best. Measuring influence is difficult, which is why a wide array of proxies has been used. Let us now consider the emergence of think tanks in the policy context and how they have been treated in the literature.

### *The Growth of Think Tanks*

Think tanks first emerged in the early twentieth century in the US. In 1916, Robert S. Brookings formed the Institute for Government Research, an institute devoted to the scientific analysis of public policy issues. In 1927, this became the Brookings Institution, the father of think tanks (Gyngell 2008). McGann (2009) has identified approximately 5,465 think tanks worldwide. The bulk of these are based in the North American region (34%), with Western Europe (22%) and Asia (12%) closely following. Of the 1872 think tanks in North America, 95% are based in the United States of America, with the highest concentration (20%) being in Washington D.C. Fifty per cent of the think tanks in the US have some level of university affiliation. This global distribution suggests strong opportunities for growth in Australia, which in 2009 had only 28 think tanks. Countries such as Ghana (33), Bangladesh (34), Romania (53), Bolivia (36), Italy (87) and Israel (48) have a higher number of think tanks than Australia does.

The global think tank database within the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (McGann 2009), managed at the University of Pennsylvania, shows that over 100 think tanks were established between the 1980s and the late 1990s. There were several reasons for such growth: the increasing complexity of policy problems; the end of the government's monopoly on information; the expansion of government, together with decreasing confidence in public service officials; and the growth of state and non-state actors. However, this growth trend has significantly lessened; less than 20 new think tanks were established in the 2000s. This downturn has been attributed to factors such as: changes in the political and regulatory environment of think tanks; shifts towards a

more short-term policy focus, affecting funding priorities and institutional capacity, together with the relatively easy access to information online. On the other hand, these factors have also brought about some efficiency. For instance, the changes in funding have compelled existing think tanks to become more efficient and effective in their work.

The explosion in the number of NGOs and think tanks has forced think tanks to compete with each other, collaborate and cooperate on issues of interest and shared expertise. This has increased output and sharpened focus. The advances in technology have meant that reports and policy briefs are easily and quickly accessible by individuals and institutions around the world. This has created ongoing dialogue and networks between think tanks, refining and enhancing views and perspectives. Such trends will impact the way think tanks shape themselves for the future (McGann 2009).

#### *Think Tanks: Characteristics and Classification*

A typology of think tanks is important to understand how their role varies in the policy space. McGann (2007) suggests think tanks take one of the following forms: the *traditional think tank*, which undertakes scholarly policy research; the *think-and-do-tank*, which undertakes policy research and conducts outreach activities, or the *do tank*, which repacks and disseminates the work of other think tanks. Other scholars have further developed McGann's typology (see Campbell and Pedersen 2006; McGann 2007, 2009; 't Hart and Vromen 2008), which is consolidated in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 A Typology of Think Tanks**

Type	Category	Description
<b>Independent</b>	Academic diversified and academic specialised	These organisations undertake research in either a diverse range of policy areas or in a specialised field. They are characterised by an academic culture and the research horizons are usually longer term in duration. The standard outputs of such institutions are book-length studies, journal articles and monographs, rather than policy briefs or reports. The Brookings Institution is an example.
	Contract research organisations	These institutions are generally non-governmental organisations, which undertake contract research (most often multidisciplinary) for government agencies. The focus of such institutes is policy-relevant outcomes, rather than long-term research. The institutional culture is that of a consulting environment, characterised by reward systems, schedules and products that are determined by the contract. An example is the RAND Corporation.
	Advocacy	These institutions, as the name suggests, are often seen as entities, which advocate a particular policy position, based on ideology, views and opinions, rather than upon open research. Research undertaken is mostly position and ideology-focused. Hence, the success of such institutions alternate between extremes, i.e., either having tremendous success or absolute failure. The Cato Institute is an example.
	Policy enterprise	These are groups that have a market-based approach to policy-making, i.e., attending to a group of consumers who are in need of a particular product or service. These institutions are distinct from advocacy-based entities, since there is no particular ideology that is harnessed. These institutions simply function according to the needs, based on sales and the marketing of ideas and proposals, which they are willing to service. An example is The Heritage Foundation.
<b>Affiliated</b>	Party affiliated	These institutes have close associations with political parties and are most often established to

		generate new ideas and policy options to address problems in a party's agenda. The research agendas within such institutes are usually directed by the ideologies and views of the party.
	Government sponsored	These are entities that form part of the government structure, most often internal think tank units which have been established to research, analyse and provide advice on current policy issues.
	Private-for-profit	These entities are similar to contract research think tanks, except in that they aim to achieve a profit from the consulting arrangement. The structures of such institutes are similar to those of independent think tanks, where the focus is on policy-relevant research and output rather than on long-term research.
	University-based	These are institutions that are formally associated with a university faculty / department / college / school. The focus of these think tanks is principally on generation of knowledge from researching policy issues that are applied in nature.

After a survey of 23 US think tanks, McGann (2007) concluded that most see their key role as to provide an independent, innovative and analytical voice for the use of policy makers, the community, the media and other relevant stakeholders. Nineteen of the 23 think tanks considered their main activity to be 'policy-oriented research,' in contrast to the remaining four, who believed it was 'scholarly-oriented research.'

Against this backdrop, the role of individuals or 'policy intellectuals' (Weiss 1992:vii-ix) working within think tanks has been identified as being particularly important. These policy intellectuals have specialised expertise about research methodologies, including quantitative and qualitative research, social accounting, economics and budgeting, program evaluation, policy analysis, decision analysis and

forecasting. They also possess knowledge of policy domains. Recently, some of these individuals have attempted to take on the role of policy advocates, working closely with government policy makers on issues of policy relevance. However the value of such institutional transformation is unknown. That is to say, should think tanks be aligned with academics and scholars maintaining objectivity, or should they solely focus on heightening their engagement with politics and policy?

A major limitation in the study of a think tank discussed by Marsh (1994) concerns the assessment of their influence, which has predominantly been based upon analysis of their annual reports. The problem, of course, is that such indicators do not tell us whether any one particular institution has influenced policy makers, or, more broadly, the policy agenda. In addition, even if the government enacts a policy advocated by an institution, correlation is not a cause; other groups or interests advocating the same policy may also have had influence. As such, self-evaluation of 'impact' almost always vastly overemphasises it. Hence, such an approach to measuring impact will be limited, if not misleading. As just one example, collaborative activities undertaken with stakeholders to establish research agendas or to advocate policy preferences are rarely outlined. Of course, there is no easy way to quantify actual influence on the policy process, let alone on the policy outcome.

### *Government and Think Tanks*

So why have governments sought to engage in dialogue with think tanks? There are numerous reasons, including the need for independent advice and information in the context of the move towards evidence-based policy-making; a particular need for international information, given increased international policy interdependence; rapid

technological development; globalisation; and the need for debate in order to influence government decision-making (McGann 2007). Policy interdependencies around the world have been growing, due to reduced information barriers, technological developments and increasing globalisation. The policy choices of one government may have effects on other governments. For instance, a move by the Indian Government to increase trade dealings with its long-standing friend Iran would inevitably cause security concerns in the US and Australia, who also have friendly ties with India, but not with Iran. This would influence policy choices in the US and Australia. Such issues require considerable research in order to identify the impacts such relationships could have on foreign policy and international relations.

A role for think tanks in undertaking such analysis is vital. In this context, policy makers, more so in the US than in Australia, seek information and advice from think tank personnel in shaping new policy ideas. Given the large footprint of think tanks in the US, its government is aware of the potential of think tanks in shaping new ideas, providing advice and enhancing the critical thinking process to the development of new policy: examples are Ronald Reagan's involvement with the conservative Heritage Foundation, Bill Clinton's with the Brookings Institution and George W. Bush's with the American Enterprise Institute. More recently, Barack Obama has been calling on the expertise of John Podesta of the Centre for American Progress. Thus, as Kingdon (1984:21) suggests:

Many [policy] ideas are possible in principle and float around in a 'policy soup' in which specialists try out their ideas in a variety of ways... proposals are floated, come into contact with one another, are revised and combined with one another, and floated again... the proposals that survive to the status of serious consideration meet several criteria, including their technical feasibility, their fit with dominant values and the current national mood, their budgetary workability, and the political support or opposition they might experience. Thus the selection system

narrows the set of conceivable proposals and selects from that large set a short list of proposals that is actually available for serious consideration.

It is precisely in this context of a ‘policy soup’ that there is a need for think tanks, particularly in Australia, to play a more engaged role in the policy domain. Let us now focus on examining the role of universities, and more precisely, of social science research, in the policy making process.

### *Universities: Research and Engagement in Policy Processes*

Universities, in contrast to think tanks, have become key players in the economic development and wealth generation process of various countries. In knowledge-driven economies, universities primarily strive to develop human capital through education and research activity. However, governments have been encouraging the development of the entrepreneurial university (Etzkowitz 1997) through policies designed to promote and sustain university-industry interaction. In order to understand and better position social science research within the policy making process, it is critical to understand how the core business of a university has transformed over time. The traditional role of the university covers teaching and basic research (called ‘Mode 1’) and pursuing applied research (called ‘Mode 2’). However, increasingly, the focus of universities has moved towards a heightened applied research and external engagement model, and particularly towards a triple helix model of university-industry-government collaboration, called ‘Mode 3,’ and also referred to as societal impact (Dooley and David 2007).

In Mode 1, the university is seen as possessing a dual mission of education and discovery research, where the output is developed for public consumption or public good. The key driving force here is the need to create an independent space for



researchers beyond the control of economic interests. Government is usually the main funding source for academic research, and outputs are mostly delivered as academic publications. In this mode, the autonomy of academics and their research interests is paramount. The reputation of academics, the quality of their research and research excellence are key factors in securing ongoing research funding from government.

Unidirectional knowledge transfer to stakeholders is a key aspect of the Mode 1 model of universities. The success of Mode 1 research is essential in attracting partners, as it creates the knowledge reservoir and capability that partners wish to exploit. In this model, academics have increased levels of research control, and academic freedom and interaction between the university and external stakeholders is through knowledge spill-over and unidirectional transfer from the university to the stakeholders.

In contrast, the Mode 2 model involves a combination of teaching and research, basic and applied, entrepreneurial and scholastic. Collaborations and interactions with external stakeholders are a key aspect of this approach, and can be classified into: research support; technology transfer; knowledge transfer; and cooperative research. Under this mode, there is a shift from sponsorship to research partnership, and attributes such as trust, openness and understanding are critical for partnership success and the realisation of mutual benefits. Exchange of knowledge, resources development and a close alignment between the university's research output and the needs of industrial partners are crucial. Pursuing the Mode 2 model often results in a university investing in certain enabling capabilities, such as test environments, etc., which allows for a better fit with the needs of external stakeholders. Deeper relationships and trust between partners helps the university achieve a competitive advantage.

The formation of such partnerships and strategic alliances to disseminate knowledge and expertise has now morphed into becoming part of Mode 3 responsibilities for some universities (Dzisah 2005; Hagen 2002). Partnerships are becoming critical in order to effectively capture, disseminate, transfer and apply knowledge to various situations. New knowledge derived through applied research is becoming a significant competitive differentiator, which has been recognised by well-defined knowledge management strategies put in place by government agencies, such as the navy and airforce, in designing new defence capabilities. While this fulfils the needs of collaborating partners, universities must ensure that the research principle of objectivity is not compromised. There are benefits for both parties operating within this mode. From a university perspective, it gives access to sources of research funding; enhanced status when applying for other external research funding; increased capacity to undertake research and develop individual competencies in dealing with external stakeholders, such as government; and faster feedback loops relating to the university's research output, which enhances the verification/validity of outcomes. From a stakeholder perspective, it allows access to base research competence and highly skilled individuals within universities developed through Mode 1 research funding; knowledge (tacit and codified) and competitive advantage by gaining quicker access to commercialisation opportunities; enhanced policy development capacity; and greater cost effectiveness.

Nevertheless, these perspectives also come with significant challenges. The universities and the stakeholder are likely to have different cultures, timescales, objectives and value systems. The academics will want to publish, while government and/or industry may wish to maintain secrecy to secure intellectual property (IP) rights and maintain competitive advantage. As such, there are often issues relating to IP ownership and the division of revenue. There is also the requirement for government and industry to be

reactive and responsive to external environments, sometimes within time pressures, which can result in deteriorating interactions as a result of a changing goalposts or status quo.

Accordingly, a university's function, which has traditionally been to teach and undertake research, has now evolved into something more complex. As well as imparting knowledge and education to students, universities must increasingly focus on the external interactions that result in societal benefit and impact ('t Hart and Vromen 2008:143). Consequently, the gap between basic research and applied research for knowledge production, dissemination and subsequent capitalisation has narrowed. Universities are increasingly required to contribute to the economic regeneration process of countries, reducing their focus on teaching (Mode 1) and research (Mode 2) activities. This brings challenges in finding a balance between curiosity-driven research and the need for market-driven innovations. This challenge will be discussed further in the context of obtaining a balance between 'pure' social science research and the demand for 'applied' research-informed policy. It is within the context of the Mode 2 and 3 models that we see research having an influence on policy making. Thus, while it is important to create and disseminate new knowledge, it is also important to have societal impact and benefit ('t Hart and Vromen 2008).

As we will also see later in this chapter, researchers and policy makers function and operate in different worlds that have different value systems. In effect, they speak different languages. University research centres, in the hope of influencing public policy, have attempted to develop independent networks with government officials and related organisations in order to inform them of research outcomes. For instance, the

Centre for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford University undertakes research on international security and homeland security issues in order to influence public policy debate, and has a well-developed network with government officials.

Such dual mission university research centres have never been studied in order to assess their roles within the research and policy advocacy domains. No research has been undertaken to ascertain whether and how university research centres can co-exist with think tanks, so that research outcomes, while meeting academic criteria in relation to knowledge development, can also inform the work of think tanks in advocating and influencing government policy development. In the next section, the aim is to consolidate these discussions of think tanks and universities.

## **2.3 Addressing the Research–Policy Divide**

To fully understand the research-policy nexus, scholars like Lindquist (1990) have divided the actors operating within this landscape into three communities – policy actors, who are *decision makers* on policy matters, such as ministers and executives within government bureaucracies; *knowledge producers* or generators, such as academic and policy researchers based within or outside government; and, finally, *knowledge brokers* or intermediaries, who are situated between the knowledge producers and the decision makers tasked with performing an interfacing role.

Under the guise of evidence-based policy making (EBPM) many have discussed the need for social research to be founded in real-world policy problems, remain objective in its approach, relevant and timely and, most importantly, for research results to have a

clear link in defining policy implications (Nelson, Roberts, Maederer, Wertheimer and Johnson 1987; Nutley et al 2007; Weiss and Bucuvalas 1980).

Davies and Nutley (2008:7) define social research as: “any systematic process of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, data collection, analysis and codification aimed at understanding the social world, as well as the interactions between this world and public policy, public service”. This suggests that social research and policy, like any other field, moves through a process of problem identification, ascertaining alternatives based on evidence right up to deciding on a suitable manner of action and following it up with evaluation in order to ensure a cycle of continuous improvement.

Lomas (2009) uses the health policy sector as an example to show how evidence-based medicine has grown exponentially, yet there is still a limit in the extent to which public servants use such evidence. In his research on the Canadian health system, Lomas points to the converging views from public servants indicating a functional role for research which should include setting agendas and the development and modification of existing policies.

Despite such views, the availability of systematic studies, discussing research production and use of research evidence – commonly referred to as ‘evidence based policymaking’ - are scarce. As is widely perceived the underpinning principle of evidence-based policymaking is the need to make informed policy decisions based on either the success of current policies or the availability of research evidence that suggests the likelihood of success. So, the absence of systematic studies at one level could indicate the general absence and problem of discerning what constitutes evidence that is needed to meet policy requirements. In such contexts, scholars like Sanderson (2002) and Nutley, Walter and Davies, (2007) have discussed the need to enhance the use of evaluation as a vital part of the policy process. The limited use of evaluation has caused difficulties in comprehending the determinants of “evidence”. Without

systematic evaluation of existing policies or policy trials, evidence of ‘what works’ (Sanderson 2002:4) cannot be well understood. However, it is also important to acknowledge that an added level of complexity does exist within the realm of evidence-based policy making due to the inherent complex nature of social, economic and political systems. These issues also impede the ability to make optimum policy choices and the ability to achieve ‘progress informed by reason’ (Sanderson 2002: 1) may not always triumph.

To overcome such issues, the concept of ‘knowledge brokering’ for policy purposes has been gaining momentum in some countries. Knowledge brokering is considered to be an effective means to close the ‘know-do’ gap by allowing for a greater use of research in evidence-based policymaking (Kammen, Savigny and Sewankambo, 2006). For instance, knowledge brokering defined by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation suggests it is an:

activity that links decision makers with researchers, facilitating their interaction so that they are able to better understand each other’s goals and professional cultures, influence each other’s work, forge new partnerships and promote the use of research-based evidence in decision making (Lomas, 2007: 129)

One of the strategies pursued by such knowledge brokers to enhance influence and achieve results is the use of seminars and workshops with practitioners. These practitioners generally tend to be users of research evidence and hence discussions forums are particularly valuable as a way of promoting interactions and collaboration. The use of practitioners is also important as a vital source of expertise for policy makers. (Nutley et al, 2007). Despite the value of knowledge brokering there needs to be a balance in using the ‘push’ (evidence from researchers to policy makers) and ‘pull’ levers of knowledge use in the policy process. Appropriate support mechanisms must

also be created to further ongoing interactions and exchanges between researchers and policy makers (Lomas 2007, 2009). Knowledge brokers must thus possess superior entrepreneurial and negotiations skills and be able to command higher levels of trust, communicate clearly and understand and appreciate the differences in cultures between research and public policy (Lomas 2007:129). In this context, the aim of this research thesis is to better understand how think tanks can become knowledge brokers.

My earlier discussion of think tanks concluded noting that there was a need for policy makers in Australia to engage with think tanks in order to seek advice and shape new policy ideas. Similarly, we have discussed the changing role of universities and how research has increasingly focused on the needs of policy makers in order to meet Mode 3 obligations of societal influence and impact. Universities themselves have recognised the need to embrace change in line with Mode 2 and Mode 3 responsibilities. In such a context, some university research centres now have dual missions of pursuing research for knowledge development purposes, while at the same time attempting to influence or shape public policy, in the hope that they will be able to demonstrate higher societal value (Stone 2002). The forms these attempts take vary and depend on the sector in which the research centres operate, e.g., technology, sciences, public administration, national security and others.

Nevertheless, the divide between knowledge for research and policy still clearly exists (Edwards 2010:56). So much is evident from Caplan's comment, made in the late 1970s: 'the need for reciprocal relations between knowledge producers and knowledge users in policy making positions is clear, but the problem of achieving effective

interaction of this sort necessarily involves value and ideological dimensions as well as technical ones' (1979:461). More recently, Edwards (2010:55) noted:

the 'fragility of relationships' as it applies to public policy and the social sciences... are of the utmost importance. They are not... in particularly good shape... academic research often deals with issues that are not central to or really relevant to policy debates, and can fail to take the reality of people's lives into account in setting research questions. Conversely, when research tries to be relevant, it can be seen as being driven by ideology dressed up as intellectual inquiry. And a frequent complaint is the lack of timeliness in academic research. Such are the frustrations of many policymakers.

However, let us be clear. It is not only researchers that intensify or widen this research-policy divide. As Edwards (2010:55, 2004:3), quoting Saunders and Walters (2005:13), further notes,

there is a lack of attention by policy practitioners to the subtleties and qualifications of their research findings and a fear that those driving policy are seeking to justify actions already decided by cherry-picking from among the available evidence with little regard for the robustness or validity of the material selected... those involved in policy development often have little idea of how or where existing research can contribute, or what is needed to help resolve outstanding issues. To this could be added an anti-intellectual approach sometimes formed within governments; a risk-averse attitude by public servants to findings that could embarrass the minister; the short time frames under which governments operate; and a lack both of respect for the independence of researchers and of incentives needed for researchers to produce policy-relevant material.

Edwards (2005:69) has developed Caplan's work further by identifying supply, demand and socio-cultural factors, which have exacerbated the research-policy, divide. On the supply side (that of the knowledge producers), the inadequate supply of policy relevant research and analysis, resulting in poor outcomes and ineffective communication by researchers, is a key barrier. On the demand side, crucial factors are a lack of awareness among policy makers; a culture of anti-intellectualism within government; a limited capacity within government to absorb research; and the politicisation of some research.



While the issue of research utilisation in public policy has been long discussed by scholars, scholars acknowledge that research must not be the only element, or indeed a central factor, in policy making. It must be one amongst many other variables. The evidence and knowledge information produced by social science research should be one of the many elements considered by policy makers in the process of policy development. As Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980:1–3) point out, there are good and bad outcomes of research utilisation in policy making. At one end of the spectrum, over-use of research can cause centralisation of power around researchers, while at the other end, key issues within other policy sectors can come to the fore through the work of researchers. There is also the risk that solutions for policy problems devised solely by research could be inadequate and wrong for the communities in which the policy is implemented. Thus, my research is focused on ascertaining how policy networks can be established between social science researchers and policy makers.

This has resulted in a renewed interest in the policy-research nexus in many countries, which appears to be more demand-driven (via governments) than supply-driven (Edwards 2005:68). Caplan (1979) referred to this divide as the *Two-Community Theory*, wherein the abundant knowledge produced by social science researchers finds little place and value in policy making. The non-utilisation and under-utilisation of academic research and the associated divide between the knowledge producers (social scientists) and the knowledge users (policy makers) has resulted in the creation of the two communities operating in silos. This is where the discourse on ‘research utilisation’ has found its place. Weiss (1986) identified three broad ways in which social science research can be used in policy: knowledge, political, and tactical. The knowledge category comprises the *knowledge-driven model*, the *problem-solving model* and the *enlightenment model*. The knowledge-driven model is underpinned by the premise that

basic research leads to applied research, and then to knowledge creation and subsequent application. The *problem-solving model* stems from a policy problem that requires research to identify a solution, and the enlightenment model makes use of research to shape policy problems and the questions associated with it. The political category comprises the *interactive model* and the *political model*. The interactive model takes into account policy actor and researcher ideals, values and interests, and revolves around the interactions and networks between researchers and policy makers in producing and interpreting research. The political model uses research and subsequent political interpretations to support political policy positions. For the most part, it makes an effort to keep researchers out of the process. The tactical category comprises the *intellectual enterprise model* and the *tactical model*. The intellectual enterprise model uses research alongside other policy inputs in the policy process, and interactions among policy actors in this space can cause tension and conflict about how the research is being interpreted. The tactical model uses research to manipulate policy processes by delaying policy deliberation and implementation, which is needed to enact policy. We will use the underpinnings of these models in the conceptualisation and discussion part of this research.

Limitations emerging from some of these models have been identified, even though Weiss has made an effort to test empirically and confirm validity. One limitation in regards to the models in the knowledge category is that policy problems are not always linear, and can have links that are intertwined within other disciplines or sectors, in addition to new policy-influencing variables being constantly introduced. If the research questions are narrowly focussed, this can make the research evidence look underdeveloped and too ambiguous for use in the policy process. In addition, there is an implicit underlying assumption that the policy maker would be easily able to

comprehend all that the research produces from the data and information collected. Similarly, in the political and tactical categories, research interaction is only one of the channels that policy makers may utilise. There are other influences on the policy process, including other interest groups, personal experiences, ideologies, etc., which are not addressed in these models. The challenge thus lies in utilising the benefits of these models in helping research influence policy.

Caplan (1978), Weiss (1986), Edwards (2004, 2005 and 2010) and Stone (2002) all agree that one of the key factors preventing the linkage of research and policy is the societal disconnect between researchers and policy makers. Edwards (2010:56) notes that

... the relationship is quite complex... a tailored approach, sensitive to the context for each problem, is likely to be required if research is to be effectively harnessed; and each issue might require different types of research output or engagement, depending on the stage in the development of the policy.

In trying to simplify this relationship, and creating a more customised approach between research and policy, the role of think tanks appears crucial.

#### *Think Tanks as Mediating Actors in Policy Network Engagement*

As we have noted, scholars have argued that there is a need to build a bridge between social science research and policy development. But, given that universities are more concerned with the development of knowledge, and policy makers with the responsibility for developing policy, who can effectively bridge this divide? What arrangements need to be put into place to bridge the gap between social scientists,

concerned with explaining social phenomena, and policy makers, who are action-oriented, practical-minded and focused on immediate issues? Edwards (2010:58) notes

... some form of intermediary structure or organisation could be needed to act as a broker or a clearing house. Such a knowledge-brokering organisation might assist public servants locate the research or access researchers when needed and could more actively assist in organising round tables involving public servants and academics, if not others on key policy issues.

Can think tanks, as Marsh (1994) suggests, play a role in translating and advocating research outcomes to policy makers in a form that is more policy-friendly and bureaucratically easy to comprehend? Will this enhance the level of policy influence exerted on governments? And does greater influence always result in good policy? In the public policy process, think tanks can undertake two critical research roles, as suggested by Marsh: strategic policy development, through translating theoretical developments into the practical context; and review and analysis of policy or program implementations. This helps the institutionalisation of a cycle of improvement in policy development, implementation and evaluation processes. As such, think tanks can act as a bridge between academia and the policy development community, translating research outcomes (applied or basic) into practical options for policy makers to easily access and rely upon, and for the community as a whole to understand. Think tanks can also undertake to introduce new policy issues, an outcome which is likely to result from sustained and quality research activity. This would help government to remain at the forefront of emerging issues and plan longer term strategies to address policy issues. Marsh highlights that in fact, think tanks have over time crossed into the public policy space, primarily because of their proactive advocacy nature, combined with other influences stemming from factors such as political pressures, situational issues, and the need to enhance awareness of policy issues.

For think tank and university collaborations to be successful, key measures of development must drive knowledge exchange. These measures include the rate at which new knowledge is created and the speed of knowledge transfer from university to think tanks in order for it to be disseminated and capitalised upon. The rate of knowledge development will depend on factors such as the strength of the relationship between university and think tank, the focus and alignment of the research with policy requirements, academic motivation to participate and a correlation between research issues and the expertise of the research centre. The policy issue needs to be given sufficient research priority to ensure an optimum allocation of resources and sufficient and continuing interest from policy makers and researchers to ensure the ongoing focus. The speed of transferring new knowledge to think tanks will predominantly depend on the strength of the relationship and the individuals associated with the transfer at the university and the think tank. In addition, the trust, openness and understanding existing between the researchers involved are also important, along with the presence of organisational champions to institutionalise the research taking place and deal with any barriers which may arise.

Dooley and David (2007) identify some practical measures that are necessary for university-industry collaboration to be successful, which can be applied to the university-think tank relationships:

- placement of university researchers within think tanks for specific durations,
- regular meetings between academic researchers and think tank policy advocates,
- maintenance of ongoing contact and multiple levels of contact between researchers and policy advocates,
- social relationships at higher levels in order to foster strategic alliances, produce tangible outcomes and realise benefits, and
- continuity in the research staff representing universities and think tanks.

There also needs to be a suitable organisational structure to accept and disseminate new knowledge, which may include a series of R&D activities, workshops, etc., to ensure flow of information. There must be an appropriate channel utilised in the interface between university and think tanks. Gatta and McCabe (2008) also highlight the need, significance and importance of policy partnerships between academia and external stakeholders (government, corporate, community, etc.). Universities, as part of their Mode 3 responsibility, are finding that they need to form and maintain external relationships with outside bodies. Collaborative and quality relationship-building is critical to the success of the academic endeavour, if the intention is to positively create policy impact. With the evolving economy and an increasingly complex public policy making process, academia can serve as a vital partner to governments by providing sophisticated research and best practice.

Gatta et al. (2008) and Hagen (2002) identify the following critical factors to create successful policy-academic partnerships:

- commitment, trust and respect
- compatibility which includes clear and continuous feedback between the researchers and policy officials
- capability and shared control, which includes effective governance and appropriate resource distribution
- understanding of each other's institutional frameworks to better comprehend the work and foster effective interaction and sharing of findings throughout the process.

Thus, if we agree that think tanks can play an important role in mediating the research-policy relationship, it is critical to understand the measure of influence exerted through such interactions.

## 2.4 Policy Influence

Influence is not only about the ability of a stakeholder to convince a policy maker to enact legislation that suits a particular interest. Nor is it just about discouraging a policy maker from implementing a policy that could have detrimental impact (Abelson 2002: 555). Rather, Rich (2004:153) defines the policy influence of experts as ‘success (...) in making their work known among a set of policy makers so that it informs their thinking on or public articulation of policy relevant information.’ This is in accord with Weiss (1992:ix), who suggests that assessment of influence must focus on the understanding and interpretation of issues by policy actors. Assessing an individual or group’s influence on the final policy outcome is difficult, given the diverse range of variables in the policy mix, which is why Rich argues that interaction with an individual policy maker can be classified as one level of influence.

Elliott and Popay (2000:463), Nutley et al. (2007) and Edwards (2010:61) suggest that the influence of research on policy emerges through an extended process of

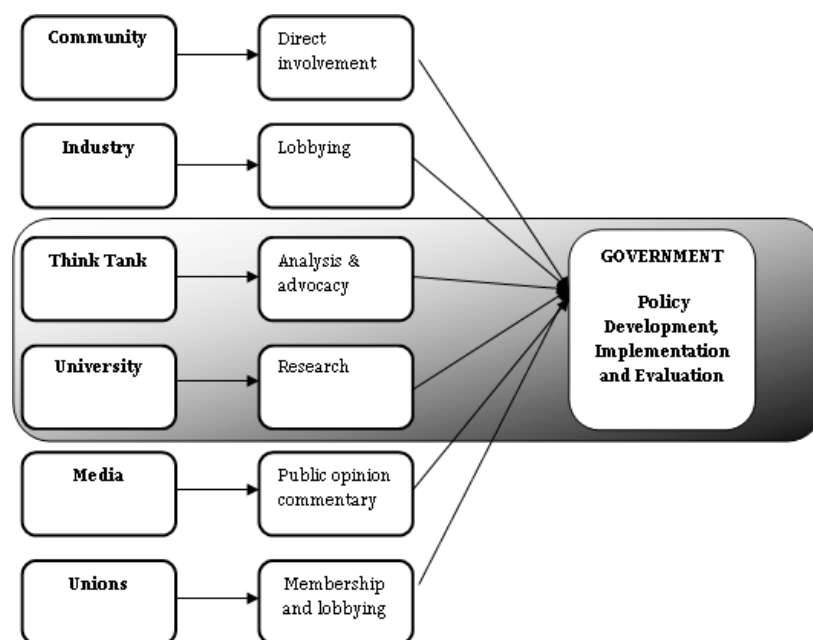


Figure 2-1: Actors in the Policy Process

communication between researchers, policy makers and other actors. It is important to consider the relationship between policy makers and researchers, but not to the extent that it excludes a consideration of other voices in the policy process. Community and business groups, citizens, media and unions are also important actors and their roles must be deliberated over in the policy process. Thus, given the aim of this chapter, it is prudent to suggest that, in the absence of a robust policy influence or impact-defining framework, scholars should turn their mind towards ‘policy network engagement’ as one of the elements that can classify influence.

Policy network engagement can be characterised as the ability of external stakeholders to interact with policy makers, to create awareness of their work in the policy arena and to collaborate with policy makers (e.g., to define and refine policy problems, explore avenues and bring new ideas for policy consideration). As Nutley, Walter and Davies (2007:74) point out, a good predictor of research use and policy network engagement is

... the extent and strength of linkages between researchers and policy makers or practitioners... personal contact is crucial, which may be informal... and formal... policy makers often rely on a personal network of researchers to identify key findings and act as a sounding board for ideas... interpersonal routes for getting research into policy seem particularly effective... face-to-face interactions are most likely to encourage policy and practice use of research.

Although the concentration of think tanks and universities in policy arenas is proportional to the demand for policy research and the availability of funding, not much has been said about universities in this space (Stone 2002:287, Rich 2004:140). The concept of ‘research utilisation’ has found a place in the research and policy discourse, but there has been little empirical work done to fill this gap. Rich (2004:112–120) acknowledges that the use of research in policy-making has its own challenges. He points to the case of health reform in the US in the 1990s, where presidential candidates



Bill Clinton, Bob Kerrey, Paul Tsongas and George Bush leveraged university expertise to develop health reform plans. Bob Kerrey developed the Health USA Act with the help of researchers from the University of California Los Angeles, Paul Tsongas leveraged expertise from Stanford University's Business School, and so on. One challenge Rich notes in this case was that the public debate among researchers, think tanks, interest groups and others dipped into the same pool of research, but arrived at different conclusions. There was little or no consensus. Nevertheless, the research did help identify gaps and problems in the health sector, which provided a strong foundation for debate. The lack of consensus amongst scholars, and critical public and politicised reports, such as the one from the Manhattan Institute, resulted in the watering-down of the Clinton health reform plan. This demonstrates the immense influence researchers have in bringing issues to the fore, and also in taking them off the policy agenda. In discussing the policy network engagement and its influence further, let us consider some of the means used by policy actors to wield influence over the policy process.

### *Political System and Resource-Based Influence*

Levels of policy influence can depend on the political system and how permeable it is to external influence. This line of discussion, i.e., aligning political systems with policy-level influence wielded by external stakeholders, has been discussed by Campbell and Pedersen (2006) in conjunction with what they call *knowledge regimes*. Their distinctions between liberal (e.g., the US) and coordinated (e.g., France) market economies (referring to the level of centralisation), and between low and high capacity states (referring to the depth of resource availability), offer some insight into how stakeholders may be able to leverage their positions in influencing policy development. For instance, in the US, where political power is shared between senior bureaucrats and

Congressional committees, and the policy community and the political parties are relatively weak, there is a greater opportunity for think tanks to be influential. This is not the case in countries such as Australia and Canada (Abelson 2002:551–553), where there is little separation between the executive and legislature.

On the other hand, the influence exerted by a network incorporating think tanks, universities and government policy makers can vary according to the policy issue, the importance and complexity of the policy issue and the number of interest groups on different sides of politics. Levels of influence depend on the resources interest groups have to trade or exchange with the state/government, e.g., information, expertise, electoral support, money, etc. (Kluvert 2009).

A similar view has been advanced by Dur and De Bievre (2007:5). They suggest that institutions with access to higher levels of resources - and to those resources that are valued by policy makers – are able to influence policy development. The possibility of influence is also greater if an interest group is aligned with the same side of governing politics, and also if there are more interest groups participating in the policy debate. However, if a policy output reflects the policy preferences of an interest group, this may not necessarily be a result of that group's influence, as the preferences of the policy makers could coincide with those of the interest group. In such a case, 'influence' could be due merely to luck and timing, given the state's central role in policy development, a complex task requiring high-level stakeholder involvement and technical expertise. This can require the state to engage with interest groups to leverage such external expertise, especially if state resources are scarce. In these situations interest groups can trade expertise in return for influence (Kluvert 2009:9).

### *Output-Based Influence*

The influence wielded by think tanks (see Abelson, 2004; McGann, 2000; Stone, 2002) in the policy process has in the past been measured through the outputs produced, including research output (publications and their relevance); events (number of events and participation level); media coverage (column inches in newspapers, number of times researchers have been cited); research usage (people visiting websites and blogs); and finance (size of budgets). Many other variables are also used as subjective proxies for policy influence: reputation with policy developers; the overall output of an institute relevant to policy processes; the number of recommendations adopted by policy developers; the institute's ability to develop new knowledge and evidence related to policy development; and the ability to challenge the thinking of policy makers by introducing new ideas.

There has been an attempt to differentiate these influence indicators into output and impact factors. Output factors include number and quality of publications, policy briefs, media interviews and conferences, and number of staff nominated to participate in government panels, commissions or inquiries. Impact factors include recommendations considered or adopted by policy makers, advisory roles to political parties, publications in academic journals, public testimonies and success in challenging the traditional wisdom and procedures of policy makers (McGann 2007, 2009). In the Australian context, Marsh (1994) has provided indicators emerging from a survey of 90 Australian organisations in the academic, government and private sectors. Government was the major contributor in terms of policy publication-related expenditure (70%), followed by the university (17%) and the private sector (15%). However, in terms of publications and reports, universities produced the majority (53%), followed by government (35%) and the private sector (12%).

## *Policy Learning*

There have been efforts to measure influence more qualitatively through focusing on policy learning. In their work on the Advocacy Coalition Framework, Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1993:42) have argued that research is not only a resource used by policy makers, but that it may also influence and change policy makers' values and beliefs, resulting in policy change. Due to the competitive nature of advocacy coalitions, they are forced to remain in step with research evidence, and any change in the behaviour or attitudes of policy makers results in what Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier call 'policy-oriented learning.' This can be classified as one level of policy influence.

Policy learning thus incorporates an organisational and impact evaluation at two levels: the *macro* level, where an impact is seen at the strategic level of the policy issue and across the policy system; and the *micro* level, where the work has an influence on the education and understanding process, allowing the stakeholders to participate in the policy process (Marsh 1994). Marsh suggests that there are three key aspects within these two levels: key positions for ideas and analysis in the process of policy development; the ability of the system to mobilise interest in the relevant issues with various stakeholders; and, finally, the competitiveness and consensus about policy issues incorporating collaboration between stakeholders. At the micro level, influence can be measured via identifying whether the research into the policy issue is timely, the extent to which the policy community is involved in establishing the research agenda, and its evaluation and endorsement of research findings. Rich (2004:153-156) goes a step further and suggests four dependent variables against which influence may be measured: political credibility, access to policy makers, timeliness of efforts and intensity of marketing effort. Thus, policy learning can be seen as the process by which society is able to identify critical strategic policy concerns. Society then acts to address

such issues in the policy cycle phase of issues identification, refinement, implementation and review.

Similarly, in Canada in the early 2000s, Lindquist (2001, 23–25) developed a *Strategic Evaluation* model to assess policy influence, working with International Development Research Centre (IDRC) projects. He classified policy influence into three categories:

- expanding policy capacities (improving knowledge and capabilities)
- broadening policy horizons (networking opportunities, stimulating debate, putting ideas on the agenda, enhancing understanding of policy issues)
- affecting policy regimes (introduction, modification or re-design of policies and programs).

This model takes into account issues such as the roles of actors, stakeholders, organisations and interaction mechanisms in determining policy influence. The model focuses on the three aspects critical in determining policy influence:

- the policy problem and the nature/evolution of the associated policy network (actors within the network classified as policy entrepreneurs)
- the intention and scope of the network in determining policy alternatives
- the outputs and events encountered during the network functioning, which subsequently lead to policy influence.

In order to ascertain where in the policy process such policy influence factors can play a role, McGann (2007) and Rich (2004:138–139, 153–156) suggest that think tanks are most influential in the early stages of the policy cycle, particularly in the problem-definition, agenda-setting and policy deliberation stages. Rich (2004:108) thus suggests a role for researchers and policy advocates in the early stages of the policy cycle. For

instance, he suggests that at the policy agenda-setting and deliberation stages, experts could help define boundaries and act as warning or guidance sources to governments, advising on gaps and problems. At the policy enactment and implementation stages, experts could provide support and ammunition to government to get policies through and also assist in the assessment and evaluation of the policies implemented. The level of influence is greater when there is consensus of advice, at least within the policy research community, minimising avenues for conflicting advice to be received by policy makers. In the latter stages of policy development, if and when policy solutions are intensely debated, the use of expert advice is most often restricted to creating or enhancing policy perceptions, which Rich calls ‘window-dressing.’ In the context of this research, various aspects of these models can be customised to ascertain policy influence emerging from a policy network of researchers, think tanks and government policy makers. The model developed below will also help us understand whether government utilises the expertise of external stakeholders to genuinely shape policy, or as a mechanism to implement policy positions and sell decisions decided elsewhere or made previously by government departments (Wanna 2008:9).

**Table 2.2: Policy Engagement Framework for Ascertaining Influence**

Policy network engagement at various stages of the policy process	<b>Policy influencing element</b>	<b>Associated factors</b>	<b>Measure of influence</b>
	<b>Outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministers, elected officials</li> <li>• Bureaucracy</li> <li>• Policy makers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access and interactions with the associated elements</li> <li>• Strength of relationship, construct of policy network and governance frameworks</li> </ul>
	<b>Actors</b>		

	<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• Information</li> <li>• Research-based evidence</li> <li>• Expertise</li> <li>• Physical resources, e.g., technology, infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generation of outputs, e.g., publications, reports, etc.</li> <li>• Level of control over the resource element</li> <li>• Demand from actors for resource elements and the ability to trade them in exchange for policy influence</li> </ul>
	<b>Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutionalisation of stakeholder engagement</li> <li>• Research, analysis and debate through forums, workshops, policy discussions, research projects, etc.</li> <li>• Governmental committees, task forces, working groups, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength of institutionalisation and the level of stakeholder engagement</li> <li>• Participation in associated process elements</li> <li>• Rate and efficiency of knowledge development and transfer, information exchange</li> </ul>

Thus, in the most simplistic manner, influence can be assessed based on a modified version of Dur and De Bievre's four levels: control over policy outcome (position taken by authorities or the implementation of the policy); control over the actors/policy makers; control over resources; and control over the policy process (agenda-setting, problem definition, formulation/consultation, implementation and evaluation) (Dur 2005; Dur and De Bievre 2007:3–5). There is a need for scholars to study the process of interactions and exchange of ideas between universities, think tanks and policy makers in determining policy influence more comprehensively, as we know there are multiple pathways and variables influencing the process of policy development (Abelson 2006; Weiss 1992). Hence, the focus of this research is to consider interactions between universities, think tanks and government which influence any of the policy levels.

## 2.5 Conclusion

We have examined many issues here; in particular, we have looked at think tanks, universities and policy influence. Think tanks can play a critical mediating role, one that is broader than just research and analysis, leading to the provision of informed advice to government on public policy issues. Think tanks can mediate between government and the public and researchers and government, evaluate policies and programs, facilitate a forum for the exchange of ideas and information between policy-concerned stakeholders, and provide informed personnel to legislative and executive functions of the government. At one level, this can help significantly enhance the work of governments. In addition, this can improve the quality of public debate on policy issues by providing an alternate source of views which are anchored in evidence, while ensuring the parameters of policy development are taken into account. Finally, think tanks piloting new ideas and taking on policy exploratory activity that may be perceived as risky for governments can be very useful and valuable to the process (Gyngell 2008; McGann 2007). Think tanks must undertake a vital mediation role between ideas and policy. Academic researchers should work towards generating ideas through the creation and dissemination of new knowledge. Think tanks need to translate any policy issue-based technicalities identified within the research into policy relevant language that can be comprehended by government policy makers. This is not to suggest that academia should refrain from dialogue or interaction with government officials for policy development or implementation. Academia should focus on applied research about policy issues, which, once complete, can be further enhanced by think tanks into policy relevant material that reflects rigour, reliability and robustness. Think tanks also have to play a role in brokering policy problems back to academic researchers. This will



foster a two-way communication flow. In such a context, relationship management and negotiation are key attributes for think tank individuals.

Successful think tank researchers embody a combination of attributes that are often different from those necessary in the public service or academia. They need to be experts in their own fields, committed to research, have a pragmatic mindset, understand how governments operate and have the ability to link knowledge and policy. They need to be open to new ideas, work cooperatively with others and productively contribute to public debate. An issue commonly experienced in some think tanks is a short-term focus on policy issues, which hinders the ability to innovate and to remain flexible and independent. In addition, the notion of having a mind free to absorb necessary information and knowledge is often negated by the narrow focus required from think tanks necessitated by resource and funding limitations. Such narrow focus kills the nature of objective research and think tanks' ability to focus and analyse emerging long-term issues. It also adversely impacts the ability of think tanks to remain abreast of the changing nature of the policy landscape. This is an area where academic researchers from a university can play an important role by pursuing research to include a long-term focus, which can then be used and built upon by think tanks.

However, there are challenges at the university end that also require consideration. Universities are usually plagued by the tensions of serving both the policy world and the values of academia. There is little recognition provided by universities to researchers who are engaged with government policy makers. There is much more incentive attached to the publishing of work by researchers, which results in the obvious silos between policy makers and researchers. Although a neat continuum from basic research

to applied research resulting in new knowledge creation, analysis and advice for policy development can be posited, the realities of achieving this are not without challenges (Weiss 1992:xii). This is where the translation function of think tanks comes in to play, i.e., in being able to broker or bridge the continuum from knowledge creation into analysis and advice.

In parallel, government must also adapt itself to embracing knowledge and research evidence for creating effective public policy. Government needs to move away from paying too much attention to rhetoric and invest effort in evidence-based action. This will subsequently assist in driving efficiencies, improving overall public administration, capitalisation of broader integration of the knowledge base, improving accountability, mitigation of risks by making informed decisions, improving ability to resolve issues, and the delivery of better and more cost-effective services. Such knowledge management initiatives must be part of government activity and must not be separated from planning, strategy, consultation and implementation.

Citing Bridgman and Davis, Riege and Lindsay (2006) note that good public policies are built on good knowledge bases. I.e., good public policies emerge when the knowledge possessed by society is effectively transferred to governments, when policy alternatives are tested via ongoing knowledge transfer between governments and stakeholders in the process leading to the release of policy, and are followed by ongoing policy review. Thus, effective public policy development and implementation undoubtedly requires input from relevant stakeholders built on sound and robust interaction frameworks ('t Hart and Vromen, 2008:144). This sort of interaction and/or partnership between governments and stakeholders should involve analysis, evaluation

and reconsideration. Such processes also provide a cost-effective means of achieving good policy and legitimise public policy development through information and knowledge exchange.

Consequently, a core challenge for governments is the development of an effective network which involves stakeholder groups in policy processes. Governments must identify potential barriers to effective knowledge transfer, such as lack of a common language, educational disparities and cultural differences, as well as resource and time constraints within stakeholder groups. Riege et al. note that one of the reasons governments fail to implement policy is the lack of attention paid to management processes which emphasise people, the lack of a participative (formal and informal) culture at all levels and the lack of appropriate human resource practices, including organisational structures and staff skills (communication, negotiation).

Governments also need to approach stakeholders in a systemic manner, with a view to learning, rather than obtaining quick-fix solutions. While policy-making is political, outcomes should not be predetermined. Feedback should be provided to stakeholders about how their contributions have been used. Processes require procedural integrity and incorporated evaluation. Nevertheless, it must be noted that good quality partnerships with all stakeholders may not be achievable, due to opposing values making collaboration impossible. Governments can form different types of knowledge-based partnerships with stakeholders, which can range from a simple exchange of information to full collaboration involving sharing of resources. It must be noted that monopoly of power and resources can exert great influence on outcomes. Governments need to bear in mind political risk, i.e., alienating stakeholders from policy processes

may have an adverse impact on future election outcomes. This is why governments need to place more importance on the need for policy communication, which is not just a matter of advertising, but of employing diverse marketing mechanisms which target citizen groups: promoting voice, as well as choice. Ideally, governments should possess expertise and knowledge, while simultaneously collaborating with experts outside of government, including leaders from the business and academic community. This helps the development of more effective public policy partnerships.

Thus, in conclusion, what we have discussed here needs to be empirically tested and validated. We need to understand the current situation within which research centres at universities endeavour to influence the policy process. In addition, we need to test the propositions of research scholars who suggest the need for intermediaries such as think tanks to broker a research policy relationship. Underpinning this is the need to better understand how governments can play a role through fostering research–policy networks, and what effect this has on the policy process. In order to pursue this, we need to explore how scholars have viewed the development of the policy network construct over the decades. It is important to understand how governments use networks to interact and engage with non-state actors that subsequently inform and influence the policy process. The selection, interaction and governance of non-state actors such as universities and think tanks within a policy network form a vital part of this research study. This is where the focus will lie in the next chapter.

# Chapter 3: All That is Policy: Networks and Governance

## 3.1 Introduction

The development of public policy is better informed when a policy network, incorporating interactions between government and various policy actors, underpins it. In order to validate this proposition, this chapter will focus upon three key issues in the literature. These are as follows: the evolution of policy networks over the decades; the structuring of policy networks, particularly the *issue network* and *policy community* distinction; and the state-centred and society-centred governance frameworks applied to policy networks, seen as tools, strategies and relationships that help enhance governments govern (Bell and Hindmoor (2009:191). The position adopted in this study is Bell and Hindmoor's state-centred governance approach, which helps us understand how policy networks are leveraged by governments. This is in contrast to the society-centred approach advocated by some scholars. This approach suggests that governments have lost their power, authority and control, which is why they choose to engage with non-state actors.

This research adopts the view that the management and governance of policy networks not only requires the involvement of institutions, but also of individuals who are resilient, open, trusting and willing to collaborate. As we will see, it is important to consider the relations between policy actors in addition to understanding how these relationships are governed and the role the state plays in fostering such relationships. It

is remiss to consider these frameworks independent of each other. Finally, the discussion comes together in posing central questions about how policy networks can be structured, managed and governed in the process of policy development.

### ***3.2 Policy Networks for Complex Policy Issues***

Policy development, as Gerston (2004) suggests, is subject to an open environment with no boundaries, and is analysed through the lens of a process. This process includes the search, debate about, development of, application and evaluation of a given policy solution, arising from a continuum of events with a beginning that is difficult to identify, and an end which is never permanent. Althaus, Bridgman and Davis (2007) use a framework developed by Lasswell (1951) to identify a number of stages in the policy process: identifying the policy problem; its analysis; identifying suitable policy instruments; consultation with stakeholders through various channels (submission papers, meetings, public hearings, etc.); coordination of responses and reactions; decision-making; policy implementation; and, finally, evaluation. As a subfield within political science, public policy assists in understanding the relationships between governments and various stakeholders (the community, interest groups and others) and in analysing and assessing what governments do, how they put their decisions into practice and why they pursue certain policy alternatives over others —basically a networked approach.

Before we delve into the policy networks literature, one similar theory worth acknowledging is the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). The ANT, which evolved from the work of Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, provides one framework that can guide a better understanding of actors within network settings. As this theory emerged from the

fields of science, technology and social science—or technoscience, as Bowker and Star (1994) suggest—it takes into account human and non-human, technical and non-technical interactions within a network comprising multiple influencing variables that are all linked (Hanseth and Monteiro 1998). As Nancy Van House (1998) notes,

Actor-network theory (ANT) is concerned with the processes by which scientific disputes become closed, ideas accepted, tools and methods adopted—that is, with how decisions are made about what is known. These decisions are often—usually —temporary, but closing the black box, in Latour's terms, of disputes allows people to take the work of others as a resource and move on, rather than continually reproducing and questioning it.

While this may suggest that the ANT has a high utility value, similar to the Triple Helix System of Innovation discussed earlier, it is restricted to understanding network relations amongst actors and decision-making specifically in the science and technology arena. Coupled with a key underpinning of an existing network to carry out interactions and the generation of new ideas and methods, this theory requires the presence of actors who play an equal role, and concepts or relations that connect them. The power dynamic can also be viewed as a minimalist element within such a network. For these reasons, this research does not make use of the ANT theory in any great detail.

Policy processes are becoming as important as the policy context itself. In complex policy environments, where governments are increasingly held accountable and transparency is demanded, adhering to good policy processes is paramount. Public policy processes have thus evolved to control and delineate the exercise of power and authority. Policy makers often merge conflicting objectives into acceptable outcomes, and hence have significant impacts on communities, individuals and other groups with an interest in the policy problem. Linear and systematic approaches are rare in relation to policies, which are strongly contested in the political space, and/or in need of a quick

response. In some instances, it is not uncommon to have a policy solution identified and have the analysis conducted in the process of implementing that solution (Howard, 2005). Such issues have to be addressed taking into account the constantly changing policy environment while suggesting policy options that are palatable to the government.

Gerston (2004) identifies two types of policy issue: *substantive* and *symbolic*. Substantive issues are complex, require extensive consultation and are often time-consuming. The introduction of new policies and legislation to deal with the issue of climate change is one example. Symbolic issues, on the other hand, reflect an immediate change that is needed to address a pressing policy problem. Increasing the number of law enforcement officers in crime-prone areas while a long-term solution is identified is an example of a symbolic policy issue. In such contexts, it is wise to consider policy frameworks as a guide to working within the complex sphere of policy development that not only comprises intersecting and interdependency policy issues, but also involves multiple actors, political agendas and power plays. It must be understood that without government activities, commitments and politics, there is no room for public policy. It is therefore important for policy makers to take into account the various perspectives on the issues, as the resulting policy can only be as good as the value of the inputs. The attitude of government must be to look for new ideas from outside the system and to engage with ideas which may be controversial. In order for such a system to function and progress smoothly, governments require an organised system for investigating solutions to long-term policy issues. Establishing a balance between what is proper and what is needed in the policy process, when looking to incorporate a diverse range of non-state actors and stakeholders, is the preserve of government. It is



for this reason that a state-centred approach is adopted by this research. We will discuss this in detail later in this chapter.

In government's effort to seek new policy ideas from non-state actors, opportunities can be created for outside influence on government thinking and policymaking. Kingdon (1984) has termed these opportunities 'policy windows.' It is during such periods that the attention of policy makers and the political leadership can be captured to gain traction on a policy issue. These policy windows do not have a stipulated timeframe against which non-state actors can work or have access. They can fade away from the limelight for the very same reasons they appeared in the first place, i.e., an issue is no longer pressing, there is a change in political actors, a suitable policy alternative has been identified, or the crisis that bought about the creation of the policy window is averted.

For example, in the case of the US, Kingdon argues that policy windows were created in Congress, resulting in the enactment of Medicare, Medicaid, poverty programs and aid to education (Kingdon 1995:167–168). In the Australian context, a similar situation was created at the 2010 federal election, when the major political parties were unable to secure a majority to form government. The Australian Labor Party's eventual dependence on regional independents enabled the creation of a 'policy window' for a sizeable number of regional policy initiatives. This eventually led the Australia Labor Party to commit to a multi-billion dollar program for regional Australia, which has since formed a central part of most policy debates. Similarly, in the context of national security, a policy window emerged following the Bali bombings of 2005. Identifying the threat of terrorism close to Australian borders prompted the Government to consider

a string of policy solutions which included the capacity building of Indonesian law enforcement through a regional law enforcement centre, and enhanced engagement with the Muslim community through community liaison groups, network officers and the like. In addition, Australia also saw the establishment of a dedicated university research centre of excellence to examine and research issues relating national security.

As such, it is evident is that policy windows can open up due to a change in circumstances, such as a new administration, a change in political actors, or ideological shifts, or they can come about suddenly, with the emergence of pressing issues. These windows of opportunity can also emerge if there is an increase in the appetite for new policy alternatives. For state and non-state actors to come together and operate within a network that can help inform policy development, a common set of dynamics, which determine collective wellbeing, is needed. This has also heightened the need for innovation in policy making to enhance the development of our civil society, as actions taken by governments, and the processes they use, have an impact on individuals and communities. Such innovation can be achieved through a network approach, via government engagement with interest groups, such as the community, industry, universities, the media, think tanks and unions—i.e. within a policy network. A policy network relationship can be different from the traditional hierarchical organisational models evident in public institutions.

Policy makers and policy receivers can create a space for interaction which should be combined with the ability of interest groups bringing in strategic perspectives for collaboration with government (McClintock 2003). Marsh and Rhodes (1992:2–3) point out that policy networks can also reflect the status and position of various interest

groups in the policy arena, whilst wielding influence on policy issues. Policy networks have an influence on the policy process in terms of setting the agenda; policy formulation; the choice of policy instruments; and decision-making. The more controversial a policy turns out to be, the more likely one group can benefit at the expense of another. Thus, it can be said that there are vital components of any public policy ecosystem - the policy issue; the policy actors, stakeholders and institutions who present, interpret and respond to these issues and resources affected by the deliberation over these issues; and governments who are responsible for proposing a policy direction towards it. It is not the intent of this research to explore or investigate the predictability of the creation of policy windows, but discussion of this aspect is warranted to ascertain the stage at which a policy network approach may be considered useful.

### *Policy Networks*

The policy network approach provides a useful conceptual framework within which we can consider the role of state and non-state actors in policy development and implementation. Networks at the macro-level are fluid structures that combine the competitiveness and autonomy of markets with the rules and authority of hierarchies (Damgaard 2006:674). The policy network concept has been used by scholars as a way in which to examine the role non-state actors (especially, but not exclusively, interest groups) play in the policy making process (see, for example, Borsel 1998; Colebatch 2006; Hazlehurst 2004; Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Marsh 2008; Rhodes 1997; Sabatier 1999). Rhodes (1992:13–14) defines a policy network as ‘a cluster or complex of organisations connected to each other by resource dependencies and distinguished from others by breaks in structure of those resource dependencies.’ Further, policy networks have been described by Rhodes as a meso-level concept and as a political structure (1997:9–12, 29) focused on interest group intermediation in order to facilitate and

constrain policy actors and outcomes. Marsh (1997) and Rhodes (1998) consider policy networks to be an additional arm of an organisational structure that is formed to influence the development of policy. As Marsh and Smith (2000:4) point out, policy networks are structures that define the roles of state and non-state actors and stipulate the policy issues for deliberation. Deliberation over policy problems cannot take place in isolation from organisational and bureaucratic structures. It can be argued that in the case of power distribution between members of a policy network, the inherent characteristic or ability to wield power stems from a policy actor's own organisation. For example, a bureaucrat can wield power over members of the network to the extent that the bureaucracy provides him or her with that authority. Without such authority, the ability to wield power over other members of the network is limited at best. Thus, policy networks function as structures that require effective management and governance (Hay 1998:40; Rhodes 2007:1251).

### *Resources Interdependency*

Resource exchange occurs within policy networks. Government brings certain resources, such as funds, authority and legitimacy, to trade with members of the network, who provide information and expertise. This forms the basis of exchange relationships between members of the network. Members of such policy networks enjoy privileged access to policy makers, which is why membership can sometimes be restricted. Policy networks have also been viewed through the lens of power complexities to include tangible and intangible elements. E.g., possessing the power to veto a policy decision is a type of resource which policy actors can trade with other negotiating stakeholders in return for a particular policy preference. Membership of a policy network can require the participation of stakeholders who possess tradeable resources and who display a distinct policy preference by virtue of perceiving problems

and solutions differently, thus bringing different strategies and resources to bear (Compston 2009).

Similarly to Compston, Sørensen et al. (2007:98-102) suggest that the formation of policy networks can be premised on interdependence and the need to exchange policy resources, such as knowledge, innovative ideas, organisational capacities, funding, formal authority and legal rights. Such formations usually emerge because one policy actor lacks the capacity and resources to design or implement policy without the help of the other. This requires collaboration with other policy actors to address the policy problem. In such a setting, the need for consensus and consistent understanding of the policy problem is paramount, as resources will only be traded once policy actors clearly understand the issue and their roles within the network. Due to the nature of resource interdependencies, conflict and tension is common, as are high levels of negotiation and bargaining. Inclusiveness (for example, including the right policy actors within the network) thus becomes critical in order to ensure identified policy solutions take into account the scope of the policy problem from various perspectives.

#### *Interactions and Power Dynamics*

Policy networks are positioned between the macro-level of policy analysis, which is concerned with broader policy questions and the distribution of power, and the micro-level, which is focused on the roles of interest groups and government. The privilege and access to policy makers enjoyed by members of policy networks is a common element of various policy network models. Policy networks are also concerned with institutional linkages and the relationships between individuals operating within these institutions. Power dependence can also become a feature of policy networks premised

on resource trading and exchange between actors. This power dependence consequently shapes the behaviour of the policy actors. Such aggregation and intermediation is important in the political arena for defining the roles and behaviours of policy actors, limiting participation in the policy process, setting policy agendas and privileging certain interests (Marsh 2008:263).

There are, therefore, two schools of thought in policy network analysis. One school views networks as a mode of *interest intermediation*, where policy networks are based on power dependency and exchange relations between governments and interest groups. In contrast, the *governance school* views them as a specific form of public/private interaction, based on non-hierarchical coordination. These schools of thought have caused, in the view of Blanco et al. (2009), the discussion and terminology surrounding policy networks to morph into discussions of network governance and governance networks (Borsel 1998; Blanco et al. 2009:3; Damgaard 2006:676–678; Sørensen and Torfing 2007). The distinction between these two adaptations of what is still predominantly a policy network is the extent to which the state interacts with the societal or non-state actors in shaping policy. This is confirmed by Blanco et al. (2009:4), who note that this kind of morphing and related arguments reflect two important factors: that policy making is no longer the exclusive preserve of governments; and that policy making requires the involvement of non-state actors who have an interdependent relationship with government.

### 3.3 Policy Network Frameworks

Rhodes (1997:32–34), citing the work of Jordan (1990), identifies the genesis of policy network models in the pluralist and corporatist approaches of the 1950s and 1960s, which focused on micro-level relationships between policy actors in the US. These micro-level relationships developed and took the shape of *subsystem* networks (Freeman 1965), which included bureaucrats, Congressmen and other interest groups in the development of policy and in decision-making. These relationships then expanded and developed into *sub-governments*, as discussed by Cater in 1974, which included clusters of individuals, including members of the House or Senate, Congressional staff, bureaucrats, and representatives of private groups and other organisations. These individuals made most of the routine decisions in particular policy areas.

The scholarly literature from this period also discussed the formation of *iron triangles*, where network representation and participation was much more selective. The resource dependency between members of such networks was high, and the success of the network was reliant on each stakeholder's effective participation. The defining feature of this network model was in the dependency of two of the stakeholders within the triangle on the third member to achieve policy success.

Building on this, Heclo (1978), Marsh and Rhodes (1992:2–3, 198–199) and Rhodes (1997) conceptualised two types of policy network, ranging from the loosely connected 'issue network' to 'policy communities,' with more restricted and selective membership. In between these two extremes, Rhodes introduced three other network types as models of interest group intermediation, mostly differentiated by membership and stability: professional networks; intergovernmental networks; and producer

networks. As we have seen, interest group intermediation is evident in the subsystem, sub-government, iron triangle, pluralism and corporatism models. Each of these models vary in terms of their hierarchical set ups, the level of competitiveness amongst policy actors and leadership representation. This research focuses on two models that have been used more widely and which are central to this research study: issue networks and policy communities.

### *Issue Networks*

As discussed above, policy networks are seen as relationships and interactions between stakeholders who share an interest in policy issues. The critical element holding such networks together is the view that cooperation is needed to achieve common end goals (Borsel 1998; Hazlehurst 2001; Blanco, Lowndes and Pratchett 2009:6). Moving away from elitist network models, Hecló (1978) brought back pluralism and talked of *issue networks*, consisting of policy actors who were interested in specific policy issues, rather than other aspects of the network. This was seen by some to be more of a policy communications network than a network that deliberated over policy matters (Rhodes 1997:34). The stakeholders constantly comment on policy matters, developing, criticising and commending new policy ideas. This network typically includes government authorities, legislators, businessmen, lobbyists, academics and journalists. In the case of an issue network, wielding influence on policy is not restricted to a privileged few. The strength of the relationship between interacting participants is considered to be weak, owing to the low frequency of contact and lack of resource exchange between the interacting organisations. The membership of this network is consequently large. The intensity of collaboration is minimal and conflict is rife because the link holding the network together is an interest in multiple policy issues. Direct



access to policy makers is limited. Here, the issue network is mostly involved in consultation, not negotiation.

### *Policy Communities*

There have been multiple definitions of a policy community. Coleman and Skogstad (1990) used the term 'policy community' to refer to the set of state and non-state actors that coalesce around an issue and share a common interest in shaping its development. A tighter-knit network of stakeholders, who possess shared policy interests, but also common values, is what Richardson and Jordan (see Rhodes 1997:35–36) referred to as a policy community. Judge (1993:122), quoting Rhodes (1985:15, 1988:78, 1990:204) and Rhodes and Marsh (1992a: 182; 1992b:13), defined policy communities as:

Networks characterised by stability of relationships, continuity of a highly restrictive membership, vertical independence based upon shared delivery responsibilities and insulation from other networks and invariably from the general public.

Here, the formation of the network is based on interpersonal and inter-organisational relations and shared values. In policy communities, relationships between the network members are strong and stable. While the policy issue is central to participation within this type of network, there is a higher level of goodwill amongst the participants. Vertical and horizontal interdependence is evident and resource sharing and exchange are common. Regular interactions, restrictive membership, with the conscious exclusion of some groups, the possession of shared values and high levels of trust are also common characteristics. Government has a facilitative, rather than a controlling, role. Consensus about policy goals is easy to achieve through negotiation, and self-serving agendas are rare. A policy community is thus characterised by a limited number of

participants, regular interaction, stability, resource dependency, equal and shared power distribution and regulation of members.

The greater the number of policy communities, the higher the number of epistemic and advocacy coalitions that emerge within the policy system. As Skogstad (2005) points out:

policy sectors are dominated by a winning advocacy coalition whose members share core beliefs about desirable policy objectives. The existence of other coalitions in the policy sub-system, advocating for other sets of ideas, creates an environment for learning within and across contending advocacy coalitions. The epistemic community approach also assumes that there are multiple and competing communities attempting to affect policy through their ideas.

Hence, any policy system can have multiple policy communities.

#### *Differences between Issue Networks and Policy Communities*

Marsh and Rhodes (1992:249–53) identify key differences between issue networks and policy communities, which are outlined in Table 2.1. For instance, while membership of policy communities is selective and closed, network participation in issue networks is high. The interests shared by members of a policy community tend to be specific, as compared to the varied interests of members of issue networks. Stability, frequency, quality of interactions and acceptance of outcomes are much stronger within policy communities in comparison to issue networks, where conflict is usually evident. The formation of a policy community also brings with it the element of resource exchange (physical, financial, intellectual, technical, member support, etc.) required for effective functioning.

**Table 3.1: Differences between Issue Networks and Policy Communities**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Issue network</b>	<b>Policy community</b>
<b>Membership</b>	Open and loosely structured	Closed and selective
<b>Functioning protocol</b>	Negotiation and bargaining	Consensus
<b>Power dynamics and interactions</b>	Distributed or uneven, given the irregular pattern of interaction and consultation	Negotiated power dynamic as the mode of interaction is much more regular
<b>Resource interdependency</b>	Limited, with low levels of collaboration and relatively high levels of conflict	High, given the modus operandi of the network is to establish consensus and develop a shared interest and approach in addressing the policy problem
<b>Strength of network</b>	Limited, as there are a large number of members in the network who have a diverse range of policy interests	Strong, given the network members are held together by a sole focus on the policy problem and there is a higher level of collaboration

The power distribution between members of the policy community is fairly even. In issue networks, however, power is distributed unevenly between members. Such uneven power distribution and conflict within the issue network can be seen as a result of low

levels of collaboration and cooperation between network members. As we have seen, these two policy network models have characteristics that are distinct from each other. Hence, it is prudent to now consider how these two types of network are governed.

### **3.4 Governance of Policy Networks**

#### *State-Centred versus Society-Centred*

The work of Bell and Hindmoor (2009) is most relevant in this context. Bell et al. (2009:14) have argued that although governments ‘are constrained by constitutions, parliaments, elections and the media, they remain authoritative actors who can change the rules of the political game.’ They reject the claims of scholars (e.g., Salamon 2002; Bevir and Rhodes 2003; Bevir, 2007) who support a society-centred governance model.

Bell and Hindmoor take issue with scholars who claim that the state has lost its centrality and power to govern, and has been ‘hollowed out’ (Bell et al. 2009:xiii), given that it has embraced a decentralised mode of policy making, where there is a preference for ‘less state, more market’ (Sørensen et al. 2007:1). The governance model, reflected in this latter approach, denotes a move away from hierarchical governance to governance which is market- or society-driven. The society-centred governance model portrays a weakened government, which has minimal power or control over non-state actors in devising solutions to policy issues. This inevitably promotes the need for partnerships and networks that diminish the authority of government. As Klijn and Skelcher (2007:601–02) suggest,

the analysis of power is seldom at the forefront of the analysis of governance network because of the powerful underlying assumptions of cooperation, mutuality and consensus between the actors in the network.

The boundaries between state and non-state actors are blurred, and so are the networks, which tend to be informal, egalitarian and non-hierarchical. Policy decisions within such networks take place via self-organising networks which involve lengthy negotiations, and hence, often lack clear direction. Instead, Bell et al. (2009) argue that the state's ability to govern is enhanced as it builds and manages relationships with multiple external stakeholders, and that it continues to exert a hierarchical approach in decision-making, which can be blended with participative policy-making at the grass-roots level. They acknowledge that policy goals are being increasingly pursued by non-state actors and define governance (2) as: 'shaping, regulating or attempting to control human behaviours in order to achieve collective ends.' This requires the state to build strategic relationships and partnerships with non-state actors.

The state-centred approach sees government as engaged with society, utilising any one of the five forms of governance. These are as follows: hierarchy, where government maintains its authoritative position to achieve policy outcomes; persuasion, where the government persuades society to change its behaviour through self-discipline and compliance; markets, which deliver government services using public/private partnerships, service contracts etc.; community engagement, wherein decision-making power is devolved to citizens and communities, e.g., citizen juries; and, finally, associations, which are used by states selectively in offering non-state actors, e.g., unions, the opportunity to influence policy in exchange for public support, access to information and assistance with implementation of policy outcomes. Utilising these modes, government engages with societal or non-state actors to address policy issues, but continues to retain central responsibility for these problems, organising frameworks and systems to ensure accountability, fairness and transparency. For governments, this type of engagement brings multiple benefits, including resource sharing, greater

credibility, and a level of trust and legitimacy with stakeholders. The choice of governance mode used depends on the issue and the envisaged policy end goal.

### *Metagovernance*

Bell et al. (2009:46–47) identify the central role of the state within a networked structure of policy-making. This governance of societal stakeholders or policy actors as opposed to the society directly is what they referred to as *metagovernance* - the government of governance. Sørensen et al. (2007:15) refer to this as ‘regulation of self-regulation’ or ‘network management.’ Metagovernance is defined by Bevir (2009:131) as:

an umbrella concept that describes the role of the state and its characteristic policy instruments in the new governance... the role of the state is said to have shifted from the direct governance of society to the metagovernance of the actors involved in governing society.

Bell et al. posit that, irrespective of the governance approach, the state plays a key role in coordinating and overseeing governance arrangements. The selection of participants, resource mobilisation and responsibility for the effective operation, accountability and transparency of the system are all aspects which remain within the domain of the state. This view is supported by Bevir and Rhodes (2010:86), who outline three frameworks within which the state can metagovern: by setting the rules of the game and letting non-state actors choose how they operate within it; by influencing non-state actors to persuade other policy relevant actors; or by influencing non-state actors through the distribution of resources. Through these frameworks, the state remains at the centre of the process by developing new tools and strategies and institutionalising relationships with non-state actors. Through these modes, government engages in societal (non-state) stakeholder interaction to address policy issues, but continues to retain central

responsibility for these problems. At the same time, it organises frameworks and systems to ensure accountability, fairness and transparency.

According to Sørensen (2006:103), ‘metagovernance can potentially be exercised by any resourceful actor—public or private. All it takes is resources and a desire to influence activities performed by self-governing actors.’ The relationships, interactions and negotiations between actors may indeed be pluricentric, but, where the end outcome is deciding on a policy alternative, the central decision-making element always resides with government. This indicates that the relationship between state and non-state actors can be interdependent, with autonomous actors, interactions and negotiations, and the presence of regulatory, normative, cognitive and imaginary frameworks (Sørensen et al. 2007:9).

The advantages of a governance network, as highlighted by Sørensen (2008:12–14) and other scholars (see Klijn & Koppenjan 2000, Kooiman 2000, Scharpf 1999 and Sørensen and Torfing 2003) relate to early identification of policy problems; making knowledgeable and informed policy decisions; possessing a framework for consensus building to reduce risk of implementation issues through gaining higher levels of credibility with stakeholders; creating a sense of joint responsibility; and ownership of policy issues. Conversely, changing network membership, unresolved conflicts, weak and ineffective leadership and external events altering the network balance are challenges seen within a policy network.

The work on governance networks focuses upon the interdependence (resources-focused), governability (response and participation), integration (shared values among

actors) and governmentality (structuring society) of networks. Of course, these issues are also prominent in the policy network literature, as Sørensen et al. point out. However, the difference between the two models revolves around the changing power balance. So, the policy network literature views the state as dominant in most policy networks, whereas the network governance literature focuses much more on the role of societal actors, and sees state and societal actors as unable to function effectively without one other. In the network governance model, policy networks are still crucial in government policy development, but the relationship between the members of those networks is different.

Sørensen et al. (2008:10–12) argue that as governments continue to operate under hierarchical frameworks (mostly top-down structures), governance networks do not submit to the laws of the market, but instead operate within political and institutional confines, which constrain their capacity for self-regulation. Damgaard (2006:674–677) also contends that policy networks are not necessarily self-organising, citing the example of the establishment of a policy network by the Danish parliament to pursue local employment policies.

Similarly, the study *Working Nation: Policy and Programs* of 1994, undertaken by Edwards (2001) and analysed by McClelland and Edwards (2009), provides insight into how the Australian government was responsible for the structuring of a policy network. In the mid-1990s, the burgeoning issue of long-term unemployment was strongly canvassed in the public domain via a Reserve Bank governor's speech, research by labour market economists, work undertaken by the bureaucracy and the advocacy positions of some organisations. The issue gained traction and interested the ministers in



taking action. The establishment of a special governmental task force and a committee involving academics, bureaucrats and senior advisers from the Prime Minister's Office was one part of the plan to develop a policy solution. The Green Paper prepared by the committee proposed various options for discussion, but the political position of the Government resulted in some of them being discarded and in others being canvassed.

This demonstrates two things. First, government displayed a hierarchical model and superiority in determining which policy options were supported for further action and which were discarded. Second, the mechanism of working through a taskforce approach involving non-state actors denotes a level of governance through which government engaged with other stakeholders to be part of the deliberation process—a metagovernance approach. Informal networks, combined with the entrepreneurial nature of some ministers, academics, advisers and bureaucrats, led to the formulation of a whole-of-government policy response to the unemployment problem. The presence of a greater number of external players in the policy making process, the move from consultation to collaboration and the role of bureaucrats and advisers working across boundaries were all evident in the Working Nation case. There is a call for this type of metagovernance approach to be enhanced and significantly expanded in order to better interact with, and service the community. This subsequently demonstrates the willingness of a more responsive government (Shergold 2005).

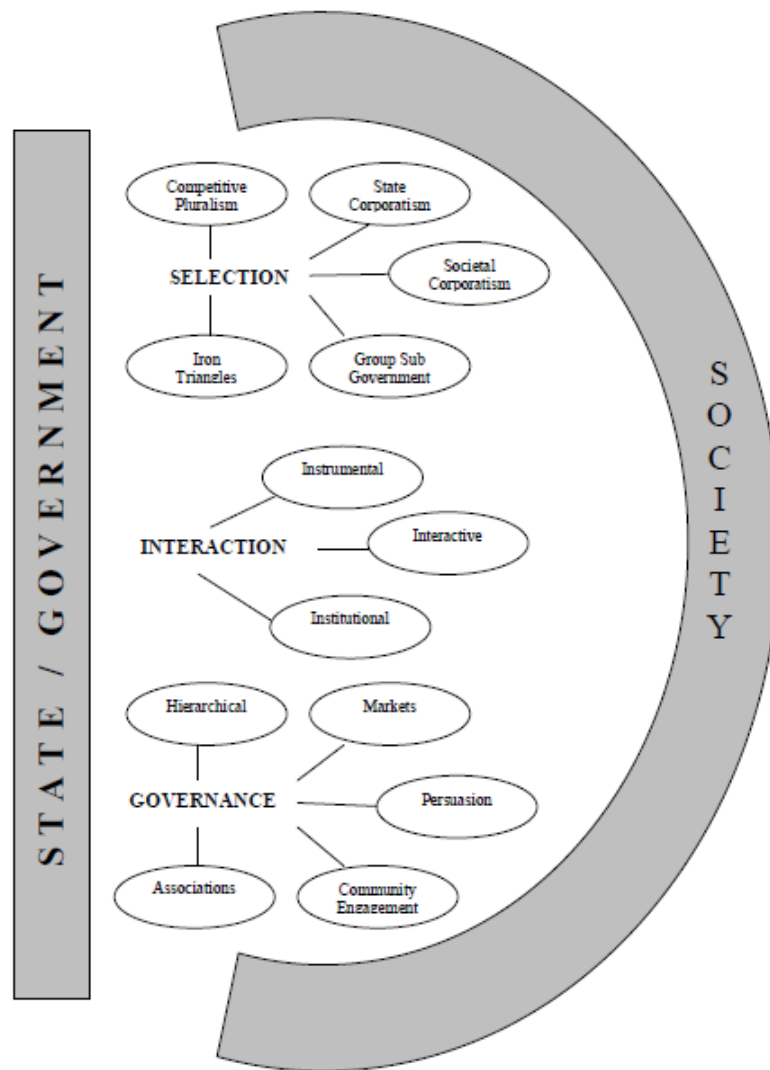
#### *Selection, Interaction and Power in Policy Networks*

To reiterate, Hazlehurst (2001), building on Schmitter (1979) and Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan (1997), identified other governance models utilised by governments:

**Table 3.2: Governance models utilised by Governments**

<b>Hierarchical network</b>	Government is key and controls the network
<b>Competitive pluralism</b>	Government selects a stakeholder based on an open competitive process
<b>State corporatism</b>	Government controls and selects a stakeholder from a closer process of competition
<b>Societal corporatism</b>	Stakeholder interactions are based upon societal representational monopoly

Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan (1997:46) identify three frameworks for network interaction, and is built upon by Hazlehurst (2001). These are as follows: the *instrumental* approach, in which government chooses how network relationships are constructed (hence they are high cost); the *interactive* approach, which is a negotiated and collaborative approach between network members; and the *institutional* approach, which is focused on hierarchies, structures and rules within which network members interact. In instrumental interaction, government imposes central power and control on the network to achieve pre-set goals. The balance of participation and control is skewed in the government's direction. Interactive interaction involves the state facilitating and participating in the exchange of ideas, and possibly resources, but without a pre-existing commitment to a particular policy position. In institutional interaction, the state does not participate directly in the network activity, but has an interest in the policy issue and provides overarching guidance or a framework. The interactive and institutional interaction mechanism involves minimal control exerted by government, and hence permits greater creativity.



**Figure 3-1: Structuring of a State-Society Network**

The choice of interaction model may depend on the policy issue and how government chooses to address the issue. Such approaches demonstrate how a top-down hierarchical approach can be blended with participatory policy-making. Marsh, Richards and Smith (2003) and Colebatch (2006) take into account structures, institutions and ideas in discussing the need to manage non-state actors to develop a shared understanding of policy issues. They look at the collective, purposeful action of various stakeholders, actors and organisations engaged in the policy process. They highlight the role of policy

networks, institutional structures, inequalities and stakeholder interactions, based on asymmetric exchanges that entail mixed modes of governance. The challenge that still remains is to ascertain whether policy knowledge and technicalities are best managed within hierarchical networks, participative networks or self-organising networks. In such situations, how does government get involved and steer these networks? There needs to be discussion and evidence that proves stakeholder engagement is considered valuable for government policy making and critical to policy design.

The asymmetric power distribution between state and non-state actors has been endorsed by Peter Shergold (2008:198), Australia's former Head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. He notes that the collaborative relationship between a government and any external stakeholder can never be a relationship of equals, owing to the asymmetrical power relationship, which reflects the government's authority. The asymmetric power model has, on the other hand, been criticised for an over-emphasis on the role of the state and an under-valuing of the role played by non-state actors within a policy network. These criticisms, however, downplay the importance of institutional hierarchies and inequalities within society. From the position of an institutionalist, the primacy of institutional structures within which agents operate can be argued, noting that hierarchy can take precedence over networks.

Bell and Hindmoor (2009:71, 187–189), in a similar vein, suggest that states enhance their governing capacity by interacting with non-state actors on policy problems that require collaboration with external stakeholders. This involves acknowledging asymmetries between state and non-state actors which the state needs to address in an

effort to move beyond traditional hierarchical methods of interacting with non-state actors (see Moran 2006; Bartle and Vass 2007).

Returning to the issue of policy networks, as we have seen, there has been very little empirical focus in the literature on the ways in which policy network relationships are formed, or on how they function and survive. These are the questions that Sørensen et al. (2008:14) attempt to answer in their efforts to suggest that governance networks are the next generation of policy networks. As already argued, the basic elements of a governance network are the same as those of a policy network. The only element that has had undergone some change is the perceived distribution of power-sharing between state and society. I.e., societal interaction with the state on policy issues has grown over time, and this has been recognised through research efforts.

Network governance must be concerned with the management and governance of policy networks. This entails consideration of issues relating to the structuring of the networks; the network's membership and the stability of the relationships within it; how resources are exchanged within the network; the conditions under which such exchanges take place; the power distribution within the network: and the performance of such networks. In arguing the predominance of a state-centred approach, we have discussed policy networks and governance issues in detail. We must now look at the role of individuals involved in these policy networks.

### **3.5 Policy Advisers and Other Actors Within Networks**

There has been little analysis of issues relating to the individual capabilities required to participate within a network; most discussion has been on institutional roles. The success of any network will depend on the individuals within it, and as such, their role is very important. The key skills and capabilities required by individuals within such networks are the ability to operate strategically, establish trust amongst the network members and effectively negotiate with other stakeholders. Little has been said in the literature on these issues, though Rhodes speaks of trust and diplomacy as being the glue that holds bureaucrats and markets together (cited by Blanco et al. 2009:12–14). As Damgaard (2006:679–680) suggests:

Narratives of individual participants are therefore needed since interests and beliefs of policy networks cannot be ascertained simply from objective facts about them. Analysing narratives allow us to gain knowledge about the motives actors give for participating in a policy network and the conditions that constrain their opportunities to fully engage themselves.

McClintock (2003) points out that for the government to identify, plan for and strategically address long-term policy issues, the resilience of government leaders, combined with that of senior political leadership, needs to be strengthened. This strategic ability directly depends on the quality of policy advice and the role of advisers, individuals who support political leaders in the policy process. Effective policy alternatives must be identified, along with mechanisms to implement, monitor, evaluate and effectively communicate the results to political leaders. The process of policy development must also be critical and analytical. Poor policy often results from a lack of process efficiency, which can, in turn, result from deficient foundation, inadequacy or complexity of policy advice, poor stakeholder management or poor consultation. This does not necessarily mean that good policy will eventuate if good process is adhered to,

but it is certainly difficult to achieve good policy from bad process. It is prudent, therefore, to consider the role of the policy adviser, who will be a critical element in any policy network. A clear understanding of the role of the policy adviser will help non-state actors to reshape and transform themselves in order to be considered of value in the policy process.

Butterworth and Nicholas (2003) discuss the role of the policy adviser in detail. They indicate that, for an adviser, finding the right balance between providing neutral (but well-informed) advice and displaying enthusiasm for the political agenda, while remaining politically aware, is critical. A degree of detachment from the political agenda allows the policy maker to understand different perspectives on the same issue and how different points of view emerge. To establish a pattern of effective delivery, policy advisers must ensure that they understand what is required, and, most importantly, when it is needed. Failure to put a policy product in the minister's hand at the appropriate time can negatively affect confidence.

A common failing in this area is delaying the provision of policy advice so that more information can be collected. This can either be because the outstanding information may be extremely compelling to the policy options under consideration, or from fear of providing the wrong advice that could impede or negatively impact the policy process and subsequently the outcome. A key role of the policy adviser is thus to sift through and summarise large amounts of information in preparation for effective policy advising. Outlining all options considered in the recommendation of specific options may not be required. Information overload can make the minister's job harder in terms of supporting a specific policy path. Developing effective techniques to avoid

information overload and strategically interrogating the information available are important in guiding policy development.

It is also important to test policy advice against the government's philosophical agenda and express it in terms that can be understood and accepted. Policy advisers also need to have a good working relationship with the minister. Confidence, trust and respect are critical. Political leaders and ministers should be confident that the advice provided by their policy advisers will be timely and of high quality. Trust relies upon openness, honesty and avoiding conduct that might work against a minister's objectives. Respect is more complex, embodying notions such as technical expertise, sustained effort, honesty, diligence and strength of character. Respect can also be developed when a policy adviser consistently delivers more than a minister expects.

Displaying creativity, diplomacy, patience and commitment towards the government's political agenda are all important factors in developing a good working relationship. Commitment to the political agenda does not necessarily involve publicly subscribing to political goals or taking part in the debate, but a combination of dedication and objectivity to the policy process. Timeliness of advice involves provision of advice when needed, rather than merely within a reasonable timeframe. For a policy adviser, the best feedback is to have the policy advice accepted. The advice must be based on critical analysis, rather than judgement of what a minister wanted to do. However, if advice is rejected and the policy adviser firmly believes in it, then he/she should work towards getting it accepted.



Successful policy advisers can anticipate what will be required in the future and plan for future challenges. Such foresight can only be enhanced by experience, and even failed attempts will help develop aptitudes that will be of benefit in the future. Policy advisers must also develop entrepreneurial skills, and evolve into policy entrepreneurs. In order for policy entrepreneurs to gain traction, they must be prepared and geared up with policy options. They need to expend considerable time, effort and resources engaging with policy issues before they come to the fore. Such entrepreneurial characteristics, combined with political clout, strong innovation, negotiating skills and a persistent nature is vital. Displaying strong analytical capabilities, being research or evidence driven to back up policy options and pursuing negotiations in the policy process are also important for policy advisers.

Thus, it is important to pay attention to the development of such policy entrepreneurs (not only those who operate within government, but also those who are on the outside) who strive to play an important role in influencing and informing the development of public policy through evidence and stakeholder engagement. These elements become very important not only for policy makers but also for non-state actors operating within policy networks.

Within the network of state and non-state actors, a network manager has responsibility for mustering the resources and stakeholders required for the task at hand. However, it is seldom the case that one network member is able to command authority over all, or even most, network participants. This is because each individual within the network retains their own authority as delegated to them by their parent body. Participation within a network structure is mainly to resolve issues or problems. As individuals begin

to operate together, the ever-increasing need for immediate access to information and the need to enhance trust between individuals within the network who belong to different organisational settings add to the burgeoning value of networks within a public policy context. As identified by Agranoff and McGuire (2001), a critical element of network management is *groupware*—a dynamic attained by a network when it achieves consensus amongst members as a result of overcoming issues of coordination and communication through hierarchy, and creates interagency task groups for jointly developing solutions.

Power-sharing between stakeholders is a common issue arising from the dual loyalties of network actors to the parent organisation and to the network. The challenges within such networks are numerous, and are not limited to potential loss of time and effort if the network malfunctions. Government can lose control of such networks, as the ability to build consensus on policy issues emerging from various perspectives can be severely limiting. In bringing their own self-interests to the network, stakeholders can change direction, consequently resulting in a loss of momentum in addressing the policy problem at hand. This can also result in additional resources being put into the network to resolve conflict and tension. This brings with it undesirable problems of power supremacy and deterioration of trust between members of the network.

The issue of power and trust relationships between network members suggests that collaboration requires a high level of institutional linkage in terms of resource commitment, task sharing, individual networking and common goals. In collaborations that have shared goals, the commitment is long-term, and participation is stable. Formal processes and structures exist, along with significant resource commitments. The ability

of individuals to represent the interests of parent organisations within networks, and to represent the interests of networks within parent organisations, is paramount. Thus, the governance of such networks or ‘network governance’ must be considered to be an integral element of policy networks, one that provides an insight into how such networks function, how they are managed and under what conditions stakeholder relationships flourish or deteriorate.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this literature review poses two important questions for this research. First, how are policy networks structured, governed and managed in the context of a tripartite relationship between university, think tank and government? Second, what network and governance approach is best suited to such a relationship and what role does the state play in the creation and management of these networks? As we have seen, policy networks differ on the basis of interests, membership, interdependence and resource exchange, while specialisation and interaction are additional distinguishing elements of the different types of policy networks. Changes within networks can occur, and are often linked to changes within economic/market situations, ideology, access to information and institutional structures.

These changes can also influence the policy process. It is evident that the level of influence may vary depending on the presence of a policy community or issue network in the relevant policy sector. Given the strength and stability of membership in a policy community, and the interdependencies among its members, it can be said that higher levels of policy influence can be wielded through this network approach than through an issue network. Such networks not only have the opportunity to shape particular policy

solutions, but also have an influence on governmental agendas. Market position and access to information or knowledge are critical elements that can be leveraged by policy actors within policy networks in order to gain privileged access to policy makers and decision-making bodies. Such positioning and privileged access reflect existing structural and societal inequalities. Unequal access to resources, unequal power distribution and decision-making abilities add to the asymmetries within policy areas.

The policy network models and governance approaches discussed above are the central focus of this study, in the context of the relationship between universities, think tanks and governments. However, this cannot be considered in isolation, i.e., without taking into account institutional structures, the environment within which they operate, governance structures and the kind of individuals who are associated with them. When we extend the policy network model into the context of a university-think tank-government network for policy development, government will take an organising role, or what has been defined as a state-centred approach incorporating societal interaction. This is because the responsibility for designing and implementing policy rests with government, in consultation with external stakeholders. Thus, a state-centred governance model is what needs to be considered within this research context, rather than a society-centred governance approach. As stakeholders learn to operate together, and develop mutual understanding, overcoming issues of coordination and communication within the network, the culture of trust between individuals from different organisational settings increases.

It is important for government to be able to develop this groupware dynamic when dealing with universities and think tanks. The research and analysis responsibility which

comes naturally to a university research body, combined with the translational and horizon-scanning abilities of think tanks, can present an ideal combination for productively exploiting problems that can help inform the development of policy issues and also help develop new ideas. In order to establish this, we must then consider the roles of university research and think tanks in the context of policy development.

## **Chapter 4: Establishing the Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I shall discuss the research design, establishing the linkage between the research questions and the methodology and data collection strategy. In chapters 2 and 3, it was argued that the capability of government to operate effectively in the policy context is enhanced through interacting with society and non-state actors. Interest groups, researchers, non-governmental organisations, industry groups, communities, unions and the private sector all have a stake and a role to play in the policy process. For governments to interact and engage with such non-state actors does not constitute a diminution of power, control or authority. On the contrary, it enhances a government's ability to govern effectively. It also helps spread the risk of implementing what may be construed as an underdeveloped policy, as a government's choice to not engage with its stakeholders in the policy process can lead to bad or underdeveloped policy solutions. However, while suggesting that government should engage with stakeholders in the policy process may be theoretically and conceptually sound, it is not without practical and real challenges. Such challenges can arise from conflicting stakeholder views and opinions, resource constraints for governments, the timing and sensitivity of the policy issue and, sometimes, a conflict with a government's own political ideology and electoral mandates.

## 4.2 Deriving the Research Questions

Acknowledging such issues, this research is concerned with understanding how a policy network model can be used to incorporate interactions and engagement with university researchers in a way that takes into account research-generated evidence to inform the development of public policy. Understanding the adoption of a policy network approach between researchers and policy makers for policy process is of prime importance in this study. It is crucial to ascertain the value and utility for governments in engaging with academic researchers and think tanks to provide an informed, but independent, view. The mandate for applied policy researchers is clear: producing research evidence to inform the policy development process. This fits well with government's commitment towards the use of evidence-based policy. While there is no argument about such linkages at the conceptual level, there are real challenges for researchers and policy makers that need to be addressed before such processes can become mainstream practice.

If we look back at the literature, as Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980:16–17) argue, there are three loosely coupled systems that exist between policy makers and researchers. These relate to the production of research; the potential use of the research in policy making; and the structures (institutions and individuals) responsible for linking the producers and users. Owing to the institutional differences and societal disconnects associated with the governance and mandates of these institutions (government and research institutions), barriers to the effective linkage of policy and research have always existed.

For university researchers, the fact that incentives and reward structures are not linked to applied policy research is also real. It is common knowledge that academic research

scholars are incentivised or rewarded for pursuing research that ultimately finds itself published in top- ranked academic journals. Research that is geared towards applied research issues does not carry much weight and, while it may have a societal impact, the rewards and motivations for researchers within institutions are yet to be structured in this direction.

Even where researchers align their study with policy issues, there can be a misalignment in the way that the research question is framed in comparison to the subject upon which the policy maker wants to focus. In addition, most often, there is a level of tension between the realities and complexities faced by policy makers and the conceptual theoretical frameworks utilised by the social science researcher. Researchers can tend to focus on issues that are discipline-specific, which can be in conflict with policy makers who have the arduous task of ascertaining the impacts on the problem from various perspectives that are often not the domain of any single discipline.

One specific problem here is that researchers turn to discipline-specific methodological frameworks to address problems which are multifaceted. Thus, identifying policy interdependencies is also a real issue for policy makers. To complicate this already complex landscape, research is time-consuming, and is not easily amenable to the rather rigid timelines of policy makers. Other barriers to linkages between research and policy relate to the difficulties in communication between researchers and policy makers, inconsistent research findings, and a research focus on historical issues, which provides little guidance to policy makers concerning what should be done differently in the present day situation or even in the future (Weiss et al. 1980:16–18).



There are many other questions, which scholars have posed in the context of research and policy making which are yet to be answered. For instance, what are the aspects of politics with which research can get involved? How can research influence politics and its custodians in achieving greater legitimacy for their decisions? Is it always about politicians having the control and power? If we subscribe to the view of Bang (2005), who discusses the roles of ‘expert citizens’ and ‘everyday makers’ in politics and policy making, can we associate one of these two roles with researchers?

In my view, this is possible. Researchers can play a role as ‘expert citizens’ in policy situations where they possess a deep understanding of the policy issue, and can comprehend the evidence base and its linkages with other intersecting or interdependent policy issues. This is in contrast to other ‘expert citizens’ who may only choose a unidirectional mode of communication with government, e.g., participating in dialogues with policy makers. In this manner, researchers can lend politics a level of credibility by participating in interactions that can allow new policy ideas to be explored. However, this has to be weighed up against competing and self-perpetuating interests from other ‘expert citizens,’ such as industry groups, lobbyists or union movements. It can be challenging for researchers to participate in this context, but, at the same time, it could be satisfying being able to provide advice on policy matters that influence the policy process.

On the other hand, if researchers were to participate as ‘everyday makers,’ how different would their approach need to be? It is unlikely to have to be significantly different, but what would differ is the level of attention they could command from policy makers. Because their interest in participating in the process would vary, they

could venture in and out of political participation, and hence be construed as actors who do not value the importance of policy issues. This would subsequently lessen their ability to lend credibility to government on policy matters. Bang's description of expert citizens and everyday makers within a context of political participation, resonates with some of the discussion of policy networks - issue network and policy community, such as the strength amongst network members and regularity of interactions within such policy networks.

While there are clear limitations at the researchers' end, there are equally challenging difficulties for the policy maker. Firstly, public servants who are tasked with the analysis of policy problems operate within complex bureaucratic structures that are most often geared towards impressing their political masters. This brings with it organisational, procedural, structural and political challenges that are not easy to wade through. Resource conditions and policy alignments are most often political decisions made by the legislature, and hence outside the direct control of policy makers.

These are one level of issues faced by policy makers that do not involve the use of research within policy processes. Policy makers have the arduous task of convincing decision-makers who generally operate within a complex, multi-actor and fragmented bureaucratic system. Where social science research is concerned, decision-makers have also to weigh up the application of research evidence to a policy problem that involves a diverse range of stakeholders who may or may not be recipients of new policy initiatives.

The constant rotation of policy makers within and across bureaucracies can have a negative impact on the type and strength of relationships that can be developed with researchers. Policy makers are generally time-poor and often require quick results to address policy issues and to respond to pressures from various stakeholders within and outside bureaucracies. The changing nature of politics also has an impact on how long policy issues remain the central focus or a 'hot' topic.

Hence, the challenge of frequently changing goalposts is real. In addition, the interdependencies amongst nation states and emerging globalisation trends has brought policy dependencies that are not restricted to national borders. Policy makers operating within this space for long periods of time are consequently exposed to a number of policy process iterations, gaining rich experience working within complex policy environments. This could inadvertently create an attitude that resists investing time and effort in systematic research, the thinking being that the policymakers 'know and have experienced everything' in the policy area.

In situations in which policy makers are responsive to researchers and their scholarly work, there is the reverse issue of policy makers being able to outline the policy problem succinctly, in language that is familiar to researchers. There may also be an issue with policy makers' ability to comprehend research evidence and technical issues which emerge as outcomes from the research. So, there could be limitations in the ability of the policy maker to effectively use research material for policy use.

At the same time, there is also the issue of individual bias in relation to the use of research in policy making. For instance, a policy maker's unpleasant experience with research or a researcher in the past can negatively impact his or her appetite for the

future use of research in the policy process. The flip side of such an occurrence can result in a heightened appetite being created by policy makers, requiring extensive research to feed as inputs into the process.

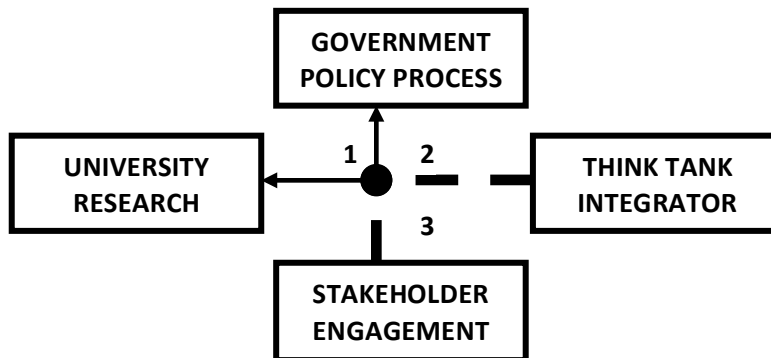
These experiences can boil down to how well the use of research for policy purposes is institutionalised within government departments (Weiss et al. 1980:19–21, 36). In addition, government agencies can tend to be ‘pluralistic, divided, under-informed, short-sighted, only partly in control of their own processes, and unable to guarantee the outcomes which they promise’ (Weiss 1992:VII). Weiss et al. note (1992:248) that the situation within which research enters the policy domain is complex, ambiguous and elaborate. Their findings about how research is utilised (or not) in the mental health sector are useful in understanding the pressure points faced by policy makers. It is noted (p.250) that there is often a conflict between individual policy maker values and those of the bureaucracies within which they operate.

Formal acceptance or non-acceptance of research is more a political decision than one that is defined by logic and rationale. This aspect has been referred to as the ‘theory of utilisation’ and the ‘sociology of knowledge application’ by scholars such as Holzner and Fisher (1979) and Lazarsfeld, Sewell and Wilensky (1967). We also find these issues being discussed in governmental reviews and reports. Testament to this is the popularly known Moran Review report on the Australian Public Service (*‘Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of the Australian Government Administration’*) (Australian Government 2010) which recommended that government departments should enhance their strategic policy development capability through engagement with academics, researchers and institutions of similar standing.

This recommendation suggests that the challenge faced by researchers and policymakers thirty years ago is still real. However, where the report falls short is in suggesting ways of bridging this divide. There is a need to focus on the issue of research utilisation, which must be directed to understanding and identifying the ‘how to’ of alleviating the research–policy divide. Bringing these elements together, the research questions posed in this study are as follows:

1. Does a policy network currently exist between government policy makers and researchers? How has government utilised and engaged university-based policy research centres to inform policy development? How have researchers within these centres responded?
2. Is there value in having an institutional structure that mediates stakeholder relationships by operating at the interface of research and policy? Can a think tank effectively carry out this role (Marsh 1994; Edwards 2008)?
3. What role can a think tank play in bringing other stakeholders to this network? What are the strengths and challenges which may be encountered within this model? What conditions can encompass such network functioning (Abelson 2007:26)?

A visual representation of the research questions is depicted below:



**Figure 4-1: Research Questions**

Aside from the three main research questions, a series of research sub-questions will be investigated within the case studies to further enrich this research:

- How are networks formed between university and government and between think tanks and government?
- Can a tripartite network be formed between university-think tank-government for policy purposes? Who is best placed to initiate the formation of such networks? What environmental conditions surround the formation of these networks?
- What singular or multiple functions can such networks undertake? Do these networks self-manage themselves, or are they interdependent for resources, power and authority? How can such networks operate, manage and coordinate activity, incorporating the multiple agendas of the different institutions?
- How can such networks secure legitimacy? How are they governed? What are the risks, issues and challenges faced by these networks and how are they addressed?

Over what time frame do such networks begin to deliver value or influence on policy makers and policy itself?

- How can these networks sustain and function in turbulent times? What happens when such networks cease to exist? What role does each stakeholder play within the network? What are the innovative features that each stakeholder brings to the network?

#### **4.4 Research Methodology**

In order to address the research questions, it is important to study the elements relating to institutional structures and interactions, decision-making processes, political context, bureaucracies, political processes and governance issues. To understand how policy processes can be influenced and informed by engaging with universities and think tanks is to ascertain how institutional structural arrangements help facilitate or impede exchanges that inform policy. Network formation and governance modes are critical aspects of this research. At the same time, it is important to analyse the role of individual actors, their actions within specific contexts and how these emerge in political exchanges between institutions. This research is thus empirically based and built on strong normative concepts of political science which relate to policy networks, governance and its management (Marsh and Stoker 2010:3–5).

In order to pursue such analysis relating to institutions, political and non-state actors and their subsequent exchanges, the use of a quantitative research design methodology would be futile. Hence, a qualitative research design incorporating interviews, participant observation and document analysis in building the case studies was required (Furlong and Marsh 2010:193). The position I adopted here is aligned with

understanding and ascertaining the actions of institutions and the individuals associated with them in specific contexts. The findings are offered as one interpretation of the relationship. This argument can be supported using Vromen's (2010:249) explanation of the interpretivist focus on 'why,' in contrast to the positivist focus on 'how many.' She also notes (p.253–254) that qualitative research design is increasingly finding its place in political science research which is responsive to real world problems and empirically based, in contrast to the popular and dominant positivist preference for quantitative research methods.

As the central objective of this research was to answer the 'how' and 'why' better linkages are needed between research and policy, a case study approach prevalent in public policy research was utilised (Yin 1994; Parsons 1995). The case studies include 'first-hand' primary research and 'secondary analysis,' incorporating in-depth qualitative studies of human interactions and experiences observed by means of on-site fieldwork, and combinations of interviews and/or document analysis. The case studies may generate multiple qualitative interpretations and perspectives through observation, reflecting 'patterns of interaction, organisational practices, social relations, routines, actions' (Vromen 2010:256–257). In-depth interviews incorporate the core attributes of a robust qualitative approach, i.e., inductive analysis, which includes exploratory questions that are theoretically derived, and holistic analysis, which endeavours to fully understand context and interdependence of variables (actors, institutions etc.). The research process incorporates an element of flexibility by asking open-ended questions that help establish the context, providing detailed descriptions and direct quotations that clearly reflect perspectives and experiences. Complete objectivity is impossible for qualitative researchers, which is why an attempt is made to demonstrate 'empathetic neutrality,' in order to be non-judgmental (p.257). Finally, in line with Vromen (p.258),



the interviews provide information on understanding, opinions, what people remember doing, attitudes, feelings and the like. This methodology is often adopted by political scientists to study political behaviours inside and outside institutions, and is used within most political science approaches.

#### **4.5 Case studies: Why and How were They Selected?**

The case studies in this research explore the extent to which research has been informing the development of public policy and the role government has played in this context. To develop a thorough understanding, two case study subjects were selected: the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales, and the HC Coombs Policy Forum (Coombs), operating under the recently established Australian National Institute of Public Policy at the Australian National University. SPRC is a university research centre that focuses on social policy issues. It was initially set up in the late 1970s to assist government with social policy issues. Since then, the Centre has undergone several changes with regards to its governance and funding model. It was initially heavily dependent on government resources, but has had to evolve, becoming a research institute focused on applied policy issues. It is also tasked with promoting itself at the national and international levels. The case study of SPRC provides a historical focus on its operations over the last three decades, which assists in developing an understanding of how political interactions have shaped the Centre's work.

Coombs, on the other hand, operates as a think tank at the cusp of research and policy. Coombs is working to carve out a niche for itself by bringing together academic researchers, policy makers from the federal government and other relevant stakeholders

in a networked manner to address policy issues being faced within Australia. By positioning itself at the intersection of research and policy, it provides a framework for interaction, governance and subsequent policy influence. Like SPRC, Coombs was also established and funded by the federal government. What is interesting, and this will be discussed later, is that the government has moved away from funding research centres to now creating structures that sit between government and research centres. As Coombs' establishment is only recent, this case study offers some detailed insights by way of looking at a particular research–policy engagement in the natural resource management (NRM) policy space between Coombs and the Australian Government.

Following the study of these cases, we will readdress the question of how research has been used and continues to be utilised by policy makers, and the processes which accompany such linkages. The discussion will conceptualise a model and identify the conditions under which the model could function effectively, bearing in mind the political and policy contexts. In addition, the case studies endeavour to shine some light on issues which are wider than the remit of political science, i.e., the roles of ideas, power and structures in policy making, and also the interplay of these issues with sociological issues relating to societal actors.

### *Interviews*

The case studies involved in-depth interviews with selected individuals (see Appendix I) from these institutions, desktop analysis and attendance at institutional activity such as a roundtable in the case of Coombs to observe the underlying processes involved in the formation, management, coordination and functioning of policy networks required to influence public policy. The face-to-face interviews varied in length from 30 to 75

minutes, and were semi-structured to allow and stimulate discussion around a set of themes. The interview questions (see Appendix II) were structured to elicit information relevant to the theoretical underpinnings of policy networks and governance. The interviews commenced with broader questions that were then followed up by questions, which delved deeper into the participant responses. For instance, the interview commenced by asking participants to outline their role within the institution setting. This provided the researcher with a sense of how the interviewee in a particular role viewed issues relating to networks, policy process, governance and the like. Participants were provided with an overview of the research and the manner in which the methodology was being used to address the research questions. They were asked about their role in research, policy or in both processes. The interview participants were allowed to talk extensively about their experience as related to research. In situations where the responses deviated from the research focus, participants were prompted with follow-up, open-ended questions that helped bring the emphasis back to the research in question. Some of the themes that guided the interview questions related to the following:

- Institutional structure
- Research/policy/political process
- Network engagement and interactions across organisations
- Resource exchange between organisations
- Research translation into policy
- Role of intermediaries
- Leadership, performance/impact measurement, skills and knowledge requirements

For instance, the interview questions (see Appendix II) included the following:

- What level of interaction does the organisation have with government departments/academic researchers? Is this limited to formal meetings and engagements?
- Can you describe the research undertaken by yourself that aligns with policy agendas of the government (local/ State/ Federal)?

Such questions allow the interviewee to provide a descriptive narration that shed light on the institutional context, and which can be contrasted with responses received from the other interviewees. They allowed the interviewee to attempt a form of ‘story telling’ needed to gain a full understanding of the context, situation, intent, action and the subsequent policy outcome.

### *Confidentiality*

At the outset, the research methodology and data-gathering process was subject to and approved by the University’s human research ethics clearance processes. The individuals who participated in the study shared their experiences of working in a university, government department or think tank. In order to maintain confidentiality, particular attention was paid to key qualitative research elements as discussed by scholars such as Patton (2002) and Marshall and Rossman (1999). Prior to commencing each interview, I outlined to participants the format of the interview, the central issue of the research pursued and the relevant research questions. In the light of this, all participants were happy to be interviewed and have their responses recorded. Some participants wanted to be notified if they were to be quoted, so they would have an opportunity to ensure their comments were adequately represented. In many instances,

discussing the aims of the research with participants helped them reflect on their experiences in a way they had seldom had the opportunity to do so previously. This helped build a relationship of trust and dialogue with participants. Of course, if participants requested confidentiality, this was honoured.

### *Participant Selection and Data*

Participants were selected for the interview in consultation with the directors of the two centres. Participants from government departments were also selected based on their engagement with the Centre. The number of participant interviews was decided on the basis of a redundancy framework, i.e., when new interviews were adding minimal new information to the process and the study, interviewing ceased. All participants agreed to be recorded for the research following which summary notes were drafted.

### *Analysis*

The data collected was analysed in alignment with accepted principles of qualitative research methodology, in that the research used inductive frameworks to help categorise the data (Charmanz 2000). Given the aim of the research was to explore the manner in which participants and their institutions were rooted in the research and policy process, there was no need to assess the validity of the interviewee responses. This approach was an attempt to use the perspective of the participant to understand how their role and involvement shaped the research–policy linkages. This approach helped identify the experiences that participants viewed as critical in bridging the research/policy gap. Where possible, an effort was made to triangulate the interview findings with the available documentary data concerning the organisations, individuals and projects.

In the analysis of interviews, resonating themes were identified to allow comparison of contexts and other relevant factors. For instance, interviews with government officials resulted in a theme around complexity and the structures that help shape government interaction with non-state actors. This theme also emerged from interviews with researchers as a factor affecting interaction with political actors within government. Documentation produced by both SPRC and Coombs was analysed. This included publicly available policy briefings, research material, meeting notes and other archival material. The analysis helped in understanding the political and policy contexts, in addition to the institutional and individual policy actor's preferences.

The secondary research material analysed included reports and articles that were less descriptive or analytical. Such material was used if it met four criteria: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. The internal consistency in presentation and style, accuracy, clarity and the comprehensibility of the document were vital factors also taken into account. These two levels of analysis provided an avenue for what Vromen (2010:262–263) calls 'interpretivist discourse analysis.' The triangulation of information collected through interviews, observation, fieldwork and document analysis enriches the interpretation offered in case studies. In this way, findings were strengthened, and a better understanding of how policy networks between governments, think tanks and universities can provide better-informed policy development was enabled. Part of the analysis also incorporated the inductive and iterative analysis of the interview data and literature material. The aim was to explore relationships between the different sources of evidence obtained. In examining the case studies, the iterative process (i.e., moving back and forth between outlining and presentation of the data to interpreting and theorising) will be evident.

This iterative process helped develop a better understanding of the data and was subsequently used to categorise evidence into research findings. The challenge here was to balance the empirical research findings with those of the interpretations used for the purposes of theory construction. There was a need to respect the depth of experience that participants expressed in the interviews and balance this with the interpretation of the data to understand how the policy network and research policy nexus could be better understood within a political context. In order to balance this, the case studies and the findings will be detailed before making an effort to conceptualise and build a new theoretical framework based on these findings. These lessons and theoretical frameworks are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

## **4.6 Limitations**

Given that this research encompasses the study of two institutes and their interactions and engagement with government policy makers and bureaucrats, the ability to generalise findings across research institutions and government departments is clearly limited. The experience of different research institutes with government departments, policy makers and bureaucrats will inevitably be different, and this fact is acknowledged. The findings from this research cannot be easily extended to other institutional settings, or internationally, unless a significant number of commonalities can be identified. The research focus does not aim to ascertain ‘how much’ influence was exerted through the interactions between governments, think tanks and universities, but rather focuses on the processes of interaction and engagement that may have had an influence. The processes and conditions under which these interactions can be further enhanced is where this research makes a significant contribution. The study of only two Australian institutions limits the applicability of findings to a wider national or international domain. Further research would be needed in order to validate the findings

from this research. Finally, this study does not systematically consider the influence of politics on the relationships between researchers and policy makers, although some commentary and analysis has been provided where this influence was evident.



## **Chapter 5: The Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC): Guiding Research into Policy**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Australia. As we will see in this chapter, the SPRC was established by the Australian Government in the late 1970s. The government has continued to maintain a close relationship with the Centre in the context of social policy development. The study outlines the government's role, the political context within which the Centre was set up, and how government played a key part in its functioning by participation in its governance structure. This chapter analyses SPRC's role as concerns government since establishment and how this has helped construct an interaction and engagement framework between researchers and policy makers. Through this process, the chapter documents the changes that have taken place over time. Through interviews with various members of the Centre, the study identifies the different models that the SPRC implicitly uses in order to inform government policy makers.

In the context of this research, this case study helps to understand the relationship between government policy makers and social science researchers within university research centres. This analysis will allow us to identify how extensive the research-policy network can be between government and research. We will see how research alone may not inform or influence policy making, and that there is a need for greater levels of interaction to share knowledge and information amongst policy actors

(both researchers and policy makers, but also bringing in other relevant non-state actors). As we will also see later in this chapter, SPRC's relationship with non-governmental organisations is one such channel that has been leveraged to inform public debate and discussion on social policy issues. At the same time, this channel has been used by NGOs to leverage and utilise research evidence to engage government on policy issues. Thus, the use of non-state actors is becoming increasingly important in bridging the research–policy divide.

This chapter commences by outlining how the Centre was established through government processes and significant resource contributions. As the chapter progresses, the Centre's past and current activity will be analysed, and changes in the Centre's governance, operating and research activities outlined. Four models are developed better to understand the Centre's work, which is then analysed to understand if, and how, SPRC has a role in various stages of the policy process. The chapter concludes with discussion of the role of a systems and knowledge integrator as a vehicle in narrowing the divide between researchers and policy makers.

## **5.2 The Journey of SPRC: 1970–2011**

Social policy and administration is understood to involve an interdisciplinary and applied study of the delivery and distribution of welfare and well-being within societies in response to social need. This incorporates issues involving the provision of adequate food and shelter; the establishment of a safe environment; health; financial support to the needy; and education and training of individuals which allows them to participate in society (Lawrence 2006:292–300). Against this backdrop, the Australian Government established the Social Welfare Research Centre (SWRC) at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in August 1978. This was in response to a recommendation from

the Henderson Commission of Inquiry into Poverty in 1975. The Inquiry recommended the establishment of a research institute under the control of a Special Minister of State, which would transcend various governmental departments.

The purpose of this institute was to bring about an improvement in social policy at all levels of government and to work closely with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Due to the change in government in 1975, the Commission was abolished, but the intention to establish a social welfare research centre remained. In the late 1970s it was decided that the Centre would be placed under the control of the Minister for Social Security, with a remit to ensure that adequate data was made available for policy and planning purposes and that the best use was made of available resources. This set the scene for the SWRC to be established with funding from the Commonwealth Government. The Centre was independent of government control in its effort to develop social work and social policy as a discipline, mainly through research activities that created new knowledge and its subsequent dissemination, which enriched public discussion and debate (Lawrence 2006:25–7). The challenge for SPRC was to contribute and create a general body of social policy knowledge (Lawrence 2006:230, 253). The intention was clearly to gain academic input into social policy, rather than the Centre functioning as a stand-alone unit within the University.

It was decided that the Centre's director would be responsible for its performance and report to the Vice-Chancellor of the University. The Centre would have an Advisory Committee of ten members, chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University, comprised of two Ministerial nominees, three university academics, with the other members being knowledgeable in the social welfare field (Lawrence 2006:24–7, 35).

This Committee would advise on the key research priorities for the Centre, which the faculty would pursue. Governance seemed hierarchical, allowing little or minimal input from the Centre's researchers. Given the core funding provided by the Federal Government, the Centre and its researchers were precluded from applying for other research grants and from pursuing consulting opportunities.

A five-year agreement between the Australian Government and the University was signed in 1978. In 1980, Adam Graycar (founding director of the SWRC) engaged with welfare administrators and the Institute of Family Studies (IFS, launched in 1980), with the intention of aligning research agendas with policy needs of the government. Through a life-cycle approach, four distinct, but linked, teams were set up to explore social welfare issues. For instance, 'Policies and programs for Australia's children: implicit and explicit policies – an analysis of policy formulation and implementation' was one such project, focused on the welfare of young children. In addition to the life-cycle approach, public policy analysis, quantitative servicing and evaluation were also picked up as themes for exploration. Thus, as Lawrence (2006:38–39) suggests,

The research agenda was said to concentrate on the study of policies and programmes, which had an impact on social equity... [and to aim to] understand the broad policies which affect the functioning of services and institutions, and which also affect the target population.

By 1982, three years after the Centre's formation, ten external research projects were 'contracted' or 'sponsored' by the Centre in areas in which it did not possess expertise. Fifty-four public events were held by the Centre, which included seven conferences of varying duration, including one jointly run by UNESCO (Lawrence 2006:41–5). In 1983, the first review of the Centre was undertaken, chaired by Dr. Sidney Sax, the nominee of the Minister for Social Security. The University's Vice-Chancellor recommended two other professorial nominees. While the work of the Centre was found

to be useful and valuable to scholars, researchers, community and policy makers, the Review Committee, as Lawrence (2006:55) indicates, more broadly stated that the ‘Commonwealth officials had not found much of the material useful for their particular policy functions.’ Lawrence further notes that:

There was disappointment about the lack of emphasis on work dedicated to tackling what are seen to be practical problems and workable solutions with more regard to priorities.

In order to overcome this challenge, the report recommended the establishment of a five- member Research Policy Panel, which would include two government representatives. Among its functions would be to ‘select the questions to be studied by the Centre’ and also to ascertain if the research priorities for contract research were aligned with the priorities advocated by government representatives on the advisory committee (Lawrence 2006:56). Professor John Lawrence, at Graycar’s request, wrote to the SWRC Chairman, Professor Athol Carrington, making the following comments on the issue of the proposed panel and the research priorities:

The proposal seems to me to go from the present position of possibly too much autonomy and independence on the part of the research staff to the other extreme where they are likely to feel very circumscribed—and by a small group with very much a spasmodic part-time involvement... Again, the committee seems to have swung from observing a situation where some government interests have apparently not been adequately pushed, to a view that it would be prudent if research contracts are consistent with the priorities advocated by Government representatives on the Advisory Committee... (Lawrence 2006:59–61).

Despite this reluctance, the next five-year agreement for the Centre saw the establishment of a four-member Research Management Committee, which included Lawrence, a member of the advisory committee and one representative each from the

Department of Social Security and the Office of the Minister of Social Security. The committee's function was to consider and approve the medium-term research strategy for the Centre; consider and approve research programs brought to the committee by the Director; and to approve other programs as recommended by the Director (Lawrence 2006:66).

This is testimony that too much power was vested in this committee. In prioritising research, the committee agreed on twelve criteria against which proposals would be judged. As Lawrence (2006:81) points out, national significance (ranked 1) and community concern for the issue (ranked 3) were rated higher than making a contribution to knowledge (ranked 5). Staff interests (ranked 7) and contribution to the overall SWRC research program (ranked 11) were also ranked much lower. This indicates the priority and importance that was placed on the need for the research to inform national policy issues and community concerns. This level of detail is critical for our analysis. As we will see, this feature of SWRC's functioning remains even today, and has formed a major mode of interaction for the Centre's researchers with government policy makers.

The second review of the Centre's operations was initiated in 1987 (two years prior to the expiration of the five-year agreement and as stated in the contract), this time by the Research Management Committee, and subsequently approved by the Advisory Committee and the Minister for Social Security. The membership of the review committee was independent and one of its terms of reference was to 'review the scope of the research agenda and priorities given to particular areas of social welfare and particular policy issues' (Lawrence 2006:86). While the review did not suggest any

significant changes to the mission, or to the role, of the Centre, a few notable changes emerged. First, the Minister for Social Security recommended the Centre be renamed the ‘Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC)’ to denote a broader focus than just social welfare. Second, the Centre was required to build research capacity in the areas of income security, taxation, labour market issues and the provision of community services, and a proportion of the Centre’s research program was to originate from the Department of Social Security. Third, the Centre had to raise at least 20% of its funds (in proportion to the Commonwealth’s base grant of \$700,000) through contract research undertaken for other bodies. Finally, and this was the most important change, there was the replacement of the Advisory Committee and the Research Management Committee with a single Management Board.

The Management Board would have seven members, the Chair being nominated by the Vice- Chancellor of the University, three members appointed by the Minister for Social Security, two members from the University, and the Director. This, as Lawrence (2006:90–93) points out, was in keeping with the new emphasis on efficiency and managerialism that was spreading through government and academic institutions. The role of the Board was to approve the three-year research strategy, the annual program of research and the management plan. In addition, the Vice-Chancellor was tasked to report to the Minister of Social Security with an annual report on the Centre’s activities and financial performance. It is worth noting that, by this time, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (another Australian Government-established institute) was brought under the Social Security portfolio and a new Social Policy Division was also established under the Department of Social Security (Lawrence 2006:109). In addition, by now the Centre was successful in producing a significant number of outputs in terms of publications, seminars, conferences and the like. The Centre’s 20% target for

research contract funds was also surpassed, reaching 28%. This added significantly to the profile of the Centre and to its effort in developing the social welfare discipline within Australia.

A three-member external and independent committee undertook the third review of the Centre. Rather than seeking public submissions, as in the second review, the committee chose to interview the individuals directly involved with the Centre. The committee reported in 1992, and was positive in recommending the renewal of the five-year agreement. A key conclusion was (Lawrence 2006:169):

...the Centre's research had made a major contribution to improved information about social welfare needs, the social processes that affected the welfare of particular groups and the impact of policy measures in meeting those needs...

It also recommended the reconsideration of the name change to SPRC:

...the present name may lead some stakeholders to assume that the Centre does and should play an active role in policy development, analysis and implementation as well as policy research... the impact of the research program should be judged on the basis of its broad effect on social welfare and its determinants rather than solely on the basis of its effects on the development of specific social policies...

In addition, the committee concluded that the Centre should not continue to commission research or undertake commissioned research, and that the membership of the Management Board be expanded to include more social welfare experts. The Department of Social Security did not accept this recommendation. In contrast, it raised the proportion of research that the Centre had to undertake for the Department from 12.5% to 20%. The target of 20% for other commissioned research remained the same.



The Vice-Chancellor and the Minister for Social Security signed the new agreement in 1994 (2006:171). As Lawrence (2006:172) points out,

While ‘institutionalised research’ had grown, many individual scholars had found it increasingly difficult to pursue their research... associated with a more managerialist culture... the drive to undertake policy relevant research funded by interested parties could endanger basic research which asked new questions, developed new theoretical frameworks and constructs, and addressed different issues.

The fourth and final review (Lawrence 2006:230–234) of the Centre was undertaken in 1997. By this time there had been a change in government at the federal level in Canberra. The Minister for Social Security appointed a three-member Review Committee in consultation with the University. Ian Castles, Executive Director of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and previously Secretary to the Department of Finance, was appointed Chair of the committee. This time, the committee sought external submissions, including international representatives, and interviewed individuals from the Centre and the Department of Social Services. While the Committee saw no issues in recommending the renewal of the five-year agreement until 2004, there were other issues that were brought to the fore, predominantly as a result of the submission made by the Department of Social Security. They referred to the ‘targeted approach’ that was required by the Centre in servicing the needs of the Department and questioned the need for other community-related activities that were being pursued by the Centre. In addition, the submission also questioned the low level of funding support being provided by the University to supplement the core funding provided by the Commonwealth. The Committee was also of the view that other Departments, such as the Education, Employment and Families portfolios, should contribute to the core funding of the Centre. As is evident, the change in government brought along with it a need to propagate the culture of ‘competitiveness’ and ‘value for

money.’ This is clearly reflected in the words of the new Minister for Health and Family:

...given the Government’s commitments to competition for the provision of services to government it was not appropriate to continue this arrangement... beyond its core funding the Centre should compete with other organisations for work, including work for my portfolio, in areas where it has expertise (Lawrence 2006:235).

The Committee provided its report in 1998. It was the same year in which the federal election outcomes brought with it a reorganisation of portfolios, resulting in the creation of the Department of Families and Community Services (FaCS), which replaced the Department of Social Security. Despite the positive findings of the Review Committee, in June 1999, the Minister for FaCS wrote to the University Vice-Chancellor advising that the Centre would be funded following a competitive tender process, which would be undertaken by the Department of FaCS. In early 2000, SPRC, along with the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne and the Economics Program in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University (ANU) were announced as the successful bidders. Under the new arrangement, SPRC received \$462,000 per annum (a drop from the previous core funding of \$1.105m) for four years.

As we have seen, the change in government at the federal level brought about a level of culture change within the Department of Families and Community Services (FaCS) (Whiteford, 2011). The aim was to bring a commercial mindset to the functioning of the Department, which included assessing ‘value for money’ on any government projects that involved external partnerships. In this context, the competitive funding model was subsequently adopted, distributing the core funding which had been provided to the

Centre more broadly to a range of other research centres across the country. This resulted in the SPRC increasingly focusing on securing the additional research dollars from other non-government stakeholders to ensure it remained operational and sustainable. This in a sense diluted the Centre's policy-level engagement through a reduced presence of government bureaucrats and policy makers in the Centre's governance structure. Until then, the research focus was aligned directly with policy needs through the Centre's governance arrangement.

There is little doubt that the drop in Commonwealth funding forced the SPRC to become more commercially driven, shifting some of the much-needed research time and effort to business development activities relating to sourcing new funds for research. Nevertheless, this had its benefits. Researchers now had more freedom and autonomy in terms of researching issues that had a longer-term focus and in identifying self-driven research interests. As a result, the Centre's revenue after the reduction in Commonwealth funding increased rather than decreased. By 2002, the Centre's funding base had passed \$2.35m, which was the maximum it had ever achieved, even while it was funded by the Commonwealth Government (Lawrence 2006:263). This allowed the Centre to develop expertise in areas that were much broader than the government policy focus and, in a way, helped increase SPRC's marketability in the wider social policy arena. This included working in the following areas:

... poverty, social inequality and standards of living; the role of households and families in meeting social need; work, employment and welfare reform; the organisation and delivery of human services; locality and geography in social needs, support services and community well-being; the politics of social policy and its institutions; and theory and methodology in social policy research (Lawrence 2006:263).

As Lawrence (2006:254), citing Saunders, who reflected on the Centre's work between 1998–2000, points out:

Many of the issues it [the Centre] addresses are not popular under the current policy regime and it is doubtful whether the research would have been funded under the new arrangements. A way must be found of combining research that addresses specific issues of immediate policy interest with basic curiosity-motivated research that raises longer-term fundamental questions not currently at the forefront of the reform agenda.

By late 2004, Professor Ilan Katz had come from the United Kingdom to take over as Deputy Director of the Centre. In his first newsletter at the Centre, he shared his view that research was required to provide a mediating and different perspective to the highly contested marketplace of policies and programs (Lawrence 2006:256). Katz had the arduous task of reinvigorating the Centre to ensure its viability, growing its national and international research profile and integrating it into the Arts Faculty within the University. However, the need to engage with policy makers was not lost despite the numerous changes. Katz (Lawrence 2006:258) argued:

Although we are now constituted more or less like a business, our *raison d'être* will continue to be to provide robust research, which will give policy makers the information they require to address the needs of the most vulnerable members of our society.

While this was the underlying intent, the manner in which the Centre continued to enhance its profile with government departments at the state (Department of Community Services) and federal level (Department of FaCS, ABS and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW]), with non-governmental organisations, various social science bodies and research organisations is worth noting. Two of the major funding sources for the Centre were the Social Policy Research Services (SPRS) agreement with the Department of FaCS and the Australian Research Council (ARC),

which provided funding to undertake academic research. The Centre was beginning to move in a direction that was primarily ‘market driven’ and ‘where the research money was available’ (Lawrence 2006:264). This resulted in debate about the overall direction of the Centre, given the diversity of projects and the limited links between them (109 projects between 2001–2004).

As for the governance structure, the Management Board was disbanded with the discontinuation of the Commonwealth agreement in 2000. A six-member Management Committee was established in its place, which dropped to five members in 2003, following the establishment of a ten-member Advisory Committee. None of the members of the management committees were from government. It was predominantly an academic structure, set up to advise and support the work of the Centre (Lawrence 2006:288–9). On the other hand, the Advisory Committee, which undertook the role of advising the Centre’s Director and Management Committee, had two representatives from government at the federal and the state level and a representative from the independent social sciences sector.

The governance structure shifted from being hierarchical and top-down to a more collaborative approach, where research priorities for the Centre were established through consultation and discussion. The Committee took on an advisory role, rather than directing the Centre’s functions. While this allowed free rein for researchers, it diluted the involvement of policy makers in the research activity of the Centre. Subsequently, one of the key challenges faced by the Centre was engagement with government. Until 2000, this had been embedded in the Centre’s governance and operations, but was now an activity that had to be specifically planned. The uneasy

relationship between research and policy is emphasised by Lawrence (2006:254–65, 292), who cites Saunders as follows:

... one of the main tasks of social policy analysis was to identify the values involved in policy making, and in the analysis and research... research could be utilised in many different ways... it was difficult to establish its influence on policy. The quality of the research and its dissemination to those engaged in formulating policy was an important factor.

Katz (Lawrence 2006:258) also noted that the Centre had to maintain a focus in order to ensure that policy makers, in addressing societal issues, utilised social policy research undertaken by the Centre. In this context, Lawrence (2006:292) lists three types of empirical social policy research: descriptive research; formative and hypothesis-testing research; and evaluative research. Australia is noted for being particularly strong in descriptive research, but over the last few years it has moved towards strengthening evaluative research, given the rise of the mantra of ‘evidence-based policy.’

Now that we have developed an appreciation of the Centre’s historical background, which is vital to this study, let us explore its role today and its interactions with government. We will see that the Centre has more recently changed its focus to ‘formative’ and ‘evaluative’ research as a means of developing a strong reputation in social policy.

### **5.3 Research and Policy: Networks and Governance**

This section of the study focuses on the findings derived from the interviews conducted with various senior members of the Centre’s staff, including the Director of the Centre. In addition to the interviews, a desktop study was conducted of the Centre’s website, of archived material on the Centre and of all publicly available material that discusses the

Centre's operations. This section is structured in a manner that focuses on the findings, looking through the lens of policy networks and governance, attempting to understand how the Centre's work has been playing a role in policy processes of development, implementation and evaluation.

### *Organisational Governance*

The Centre's governance structure today comprises a Management Board and an Advisory Committee. The Management Board has seven members, who include the Director and Deputy Director of the Centre (as the Executive) and five other members from the relevant faculty and school in the University. The role of this board is to mentor the Centre's executive and oversee the Centre's performance, in line with its objectives. The Advisory Committee has 13 members, of whom six are external to the University. It comprises individuals from the non-governmental, governmental and industry sectors. The other seven members are internal to the University, including the Director of the Centre. The role of this committee is to advise and guide the Director and Management Board on matters of strategy and policy. The limited representation from government in the governance structure indicates a limited interaction and involvement from a policy perspective. However, this cannot be construed as being a cause of the decreasing research focus on public policy matters. This is why it is important to understand how the researchers see their role within the Centre and how this role aligns with studying policy issues. The interviews with researchers revealed two categories of research staff operating within the Centre: *fundamental* or *pure researchers*, whose focus is on the development of new knowledge; and *applied researchers*, whose role is to bring new research evidence to bear and to engage with social policy issues by interacting with government, non-governmental organisations, industry, communities and other channels.

## *SPRC Research Network Models*

The Centre has extensive engagement and interaction with government at federal, state and local levels. This was clearly evident in the interviews. It is rare that the Centre creates new partnerships at the institutional level which pave the way for new research networks between individuals. In fact, most of the Centre's interactions with government are based on individual relationships, rather than on an institutional relationship. Individual researcher initiative is what is used to create new, or enhance existing, relationships. This is evident in the categorisation of the Centre's interactions with government, discussed through the first three models below. These models vary, based on the partners involved and the type of government funding received by the Centre. Given the focus of this study, we are concerned with the Centre's interactions with government more than those with any other stakeholder.

### *I. Core Funding Model*

In the pre-2000 era, the federal government provided core funding to SPRC. This core funding brought along with it a hierarchical governance model, within which new research had to be approved by the Advisory Committee. In addition, the organisation of research priorities was seldom a collaborative effort, and the power to approve remained in the hands of a few decision-making individuals. While this mode of governance has changed in the post-2000 years, the Centre continues to pursue a proportion of its research work under the core funding model. The five-year SPRS agreement between the Centre and the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) provides a level of core funding to undertake research against priorities that are jointly decided between the Centre and FaHCSIA.



Both organisations suggest themes, issues and ideas for research. The Centre surveys the wider social policy context at the local, national and international levels, bearing in mind the challenges of pursuing research (i.e., data access, information sources, the plausibility of the research itself, etc.) in suggesting new projects. On the other hand, the government department considers policy issues and matters of immediate importance in the national policy context in suggesting these as areas for research. Through a structured process of communication and negotiation, the key priorities are agreed upon, and research is subsequently initiated. As one interviewee from the Centre commented:

One of the key tensions I observed is the tension with government department wanting research undertaken on particular questions of policy relevance while researchers wanting to undertake research on questions they can actually answer.

It is unclear how much pressure was exerted by the federal government departments in order for the researchers to pursue research questions of government interest. This is not to say that the differences in what is being proposed by either side are so vast that there are limited areas for consensus and agreement. This approach has its challenges in understanding how research can be organised as a negotiated process between what is a current problem and what is a novel research idea.

While this model indicates that there could be tension and negotiation in how research priorities are addressed, it in effect reflects a collaborative approach to pursuing research that contrasts with a hierarchical model, where research priorities are driven from the top. What is evident here is a policy community network approach in which policy issues for research are decided based on consensus and negotiation. The strength

of the network in this approach is strong, and commitment is evident through the contribution of resources and membership by both institutions.

## *II. Service Model*

The second model that underpins the Centre's functioning is a service model. This model is underpinned by a 'contract or a fee-for-service' arrangement with government but at the same time allows for research-policy capability building. In this model, the government pays a contract fee to the Centre to provide a particular research-related service. These contracts are generally targeted at government program evaluation research, and hence have a link to the public policy process in that the evaluation outcomes of government programs feed into the policy decisions of government. One of the Centre's significant revenue streams stems from such contracts.

As can be expected, this model incorporates interactions and engagement with policy makers, but they are of a different nature. Here, government has a clear idea of what it requires from a research engagement. As most of these contracts are focussed upon program evaluation and this is undertaken to ensure that the policy, through program implementation, is meeting the intended objectives and that public monies are being appropriately used.

One such evaluation undertaken by the Centre for the NSW State Department of Health concerned the Mental Health Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative. The government department at the time, in the early 2000s, had limited experience of working with social science researchers. It suggested that a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) on a small number of recipients be undertaken as part of the evaluation,

with results to be reported in a few years. Rather than taking just a ‘contract management’ approach—under the guise of a fee-for-service model, which would have alienated the researchers from working and engaging with the government department’s representatives—the lead researcher at the Centre encouraged and brought in department officials to be part of the project team in order ensure continuing involvement from the Department in the project. This helped address any ongoing issues, while at the same time up-skilling the department officials in the nuances of pursuing such research. The outcome from the evaluations indicated a successful program and which subsequently resulted in the evaluation being expanded to include a larger number of program recipients for evaluation. Subsequently, the government unit that was responsible for administering this policy also received the State Premier’s award for the management of the program. The Centre’s use of mixed research methodologies and formative research techniques were also identified as reasons why the evaluation research was successful. Over the years, the Centre has built a strong relationship, predicated on trust, partnership and credibility, with the stakeholders associated with this program.

What can be identified in this model is the manner in which researchers chose to bring policy makers within the confines of the project, not only to secure their involvement, but also to up-skill them in understanding the research process. It is also important to note the willingness on the part of the government policy makers. Rather than adopting a contract management approach to program evaluation and policy-making, they deemed it important to become part of the evaluation process allowing them to better understand the nuances of research evaluation. This is a good example that demonstrates how a research–policy network between researchers and government policy makers can play an important role in policy evaluation.

### *III. Linkage Model*

The third model that emerged from the research indicates the Centre's use of a partnership model with government, which also incorporates other non-state or partner organisations. This can be identified as the Linkage Model. Under the auspices of the federal research funding body, the Australian Research Council (ARC), the Centre brings in institutional partners who are like-minded and share an interest in a specific social policy issue. The issue can be a government policy issue, a stakeholder-driven social or community problem, or can be a long-term social issue. This is the first sign of researchers establishing a policy community-type network model. The Centre brings in specific government departments at the state and/or federal level to partner in such projects where the interest exists. Depending on the issue, the Centre also brings in industry partners from the social sector, including non-governmental organisations. This partnership model helps in considering policy issues that are multi-faceted (i.e., issues that are targeted at the macro-level and generally long-term in nature), and issues that are of researcher interest and community relevance. The Centre takes a lead role in ensuring that regular interactions are organised with all the partners and that research plans are provided to the partners for their consideration, while at the same time acknowledging the government's policy level interests. Through such interactions, the key themes are agreed upon. As one interviewee commented,

It's a really good opportunity to work in research where you get policy inputs from all levels of government and also the NGO input that gives you an idea of what's happening on the ground.

The Centre, under the imprimatur of the University, remains the main administering body of projects that receive funding support from the ARC. The governance of such projects is much tighter, as the ARC specifies how these projects must be governed. As part of its best practice methodology, such research projects have a project advisory

committee, comprised of all partners, who then set out the reporting mechanisms, deliverables expected from the research, meeting frequency and other such matters. The linkage model has been leveraged by the Centre to secure almost a third of its annual funding.

This model demonstrates a clearer picture of how a network and a partnership model can underpin the creation of a research–policy framework. As we have seen in this model, the network is initiated by the academic partner to develop research initiatives that address questions which can be important to government, industry, community groups, non-governmental organisations and the like. This model indicates that it is important for researchers not only to pose questions, but also to bring external stakeholders who can help address the problem into the network. Partners in such initiatives contribute resources, information and personnel to progress and pursue research questions. While this model is targeted at the creation of knowledge and its dissemination, what is its policy relevance? This model has clear application in the world of public policy. As Katz (2011) suggests,

... it is naïve to think that research influences policy only through policy makers. A lot of the research we undertake influences policy actually via by being taken up by non-governmental organisations, organisations like the ACOSS or the Brotherhood of St. Laurence or other individuals who then use the research evidence to influence public discourse and policy. So it goes via a number of different channels. Sometimes the media also picks up the research.

This model creates a network within which government representatives can interact with researchers and action-oriented individuals or institutions. This helps provide a space for government policy makers to raise issues and bring policy problems to the network that are of concern to the government of the day. It can also provide members of the network with some understanding of the political context that influences such

policy problems. So, at one level, the research direction can be influenced by the policy context. At the same time, the ongoing involvement of bureaucrats in the research process can help shape some of their thinking. These connections, interactions and linkages are not easy to quantify or explicitly identifiable, but they are existent.

#### *IV. Interactive Outreach Model*

This model is less structured, loosely organised within the Centre. In this model, the Centre interacts with government and its policy makers through various forums, networking events, conferences and other similar channels. This provides a level of engagement with government and can result in new relationships being formed, which may or may not result in a research–policy network relationship. Although it is difficult to ascertain how many of these relationships are formed, and how frequently, it must be noted that the Centre hosts many such interactions, including an annual conference. Given the Centre’s long-standing history in the social policy field, it endeavours to reach out to policy makers, not only at the national, but also at the international level. It has, for example, been able to establish a strong program on Chinese social policy. The Centre also has a well-developed dissemination mechanism that is part of this model. For instance, the SPRC Annual Report for 2009 lists a range of material disseminated and made available in the public space. This ranges from newsletters, research report series, journal article, books and seminar series, to conferences and other such activities. In this manner, a mode of interaction, channel of information and policy influence has been created. As Hill (2011) noted in her interview:

What is helpful in developing these relationships is to have forums where policy makers and researchers get together and can talk as frankly as they are able to, about what the policy agenda is, what are the concerns, what evidence base is needed to inform the policy discourse. From a researcher’s perspective it would be useful to understand the constraints on public

servants and policy makers in terms of what they are able to discuss and provide feedback on.

As we have seen, each of these models brings a variety of governance structures to the research–policy relationship. These structures dictate, to a certain extent, how much, and how well, interactions between researchers and policy makers take shape. What is clear, however, is that the Centre uses such governance frameworks as a way to influence policy makers. For instance, in the Service Model, the project governance is set up in such a way that it brings the government sponsor in as a partner in the process. This allows researchers to identify and understand, to the extent possible, where the pressure points may lie within the government department. It provides them with an understanding of the government department hierarchy, which helps them bring to bear the driving elements behind any research engagement that is constructed to inform policy, e.g., a better understanding of the reporting needs and the decision makers are.

In many program evaluations, the Centre has recommended that the Treasury Department be brought into the governance framework, as most program evaluations have a Treasury interest in ascertaining policy successes or failures, and the likelihood of the program continuing. This mechanism helps to ensure research and researchers form part of the broader policy process and vice versa. In this manner, a genuine effort is also made to make the public policy landscape a part of the Centre’s research efforts. In this way, risk and hostility, which can emerge from non-engagement, is also managed by ensuring individuals possess a superior level of interpersonal and management capability. These four models provide an understanding of how well the Centre is geared towards engaging with government. While the research–policy challenges are alleviated, the challenges of institutionalising this and narrowing the research–policy gap still exist.

## *Resource Distribution*

### Individuals

Researchers at the Centre have found bureaucrat turnover to be an issue, especially in situations where researchers have long been working alongside government on specific policy issues. The research into the policy issue become compromised and distorted when bureaucrats and policy makers move in and out of roles within government. This in itself is also an issue for policy makers, as their focus may tend to be short-term in nature and their knowledge initially limited while they work towards building their understanding of the policy issue. As one interviewee noted:

Relationships between researchers and public servants can be highly personal. Individuals can have different working relationships that will not necessarily be on the same wavelength. There is a strong individual relationship to how networks are formed but this is built on an institutional base.

Because individual relationships dictate the strength of a research–policy initiative, and given the high attrition rate within the government, there was overwhelming support from the researchers for institutionalising this researcher-policy maker relationship. A short-term fellowship model, where individual staff exchanges could take place between government and the Centre, was suggested. This could help strengthen relationships, and consequently make such interactions sustainable and institutionalised. Individuals within the Centre have varying responsibilities when it comes to engaging with government. Most of these are research-based, but there is also a growing level of proactive initiation that is being developed by researchers in creating new relationships with government departments. This helps identify new initiatives with government, create new projects and seek out new funding sources. This entrepreneurial activity has been a result of the individual backgrounds of some of the Centre’s faculty, with a few



coming from consulting backgrounds, and some previously holding positions in government.

### Funding

The exchange of funds between government and researchers is evident in the models discussed above. This exchange of funds is mostly unidirectional from government to the Centre, either through core funding of the Centre's operations, contributions as part of a partnership project or as part of a contractual agreement. Nevertheless, what is useful to note here is that the Centre's researchers put significant time and effort into establishing new initiatives and relationships with government, most of which cost the government nothing, but incur costs for the Centre.

### Data and Information Sharing

The exchange of data between government and researchers is limited and only occurs in situations where a contractual arrangement is present. In the models discussed above, with the exception of the interactive outreach model, the exchange of data is evident. This is seen mostly in the case of researchers needing access to government data sets. Governments, from time to time, have requested information from the Centre's researchers, which ranged from ascertaining the validity of research, depth and extent to which research has been undertaken in specific policy areas. Information-sharing between the Centre and government departments is also evident when researchers provide a diverse range of information to government, e.g., international case studies, advice and guidance on best practices, literature searches and the like. The Centre also conducts information-sharing sessions on issues that have policy relevance.

## 5.4 Influence

### *Translational Research*

The general experience of interviewees indicated that interpretation of research by policy makers was not a significant issue. One of the reasons for this is that the Centre presents research findings to policy makers in a non-technical manner through reports and face-to-face presentations. This approach is often separate and in addition to the academic output produced by the Centre's researchers. In situations where the interactions between the researcher and officials within a government department are well-established, there is a mechanism of continuous feedback and interaction through ongoing communication that also helps smooth out any translational issues.

While the issue of research translation is minimal, this research reveals a lack of understanding of the research process on the part of policy makers. As one interviewee suggests:

The problem is not between research and policy makers. It is between research bureaucrats and policy bureaucrats within a department. Research bureaucrats, more often tend to be lower down the hierarchy and who are not very senior have the difficult job of selling the research within the department. There are challenges associated with it as policy bureaucrats higher in the chain of command see research very differently. They have a concrete view—*I have this problem and I need an answer in two weeks*. Sometimes we get research requests that are not research. It's more intelligence-gathering to take stock of what's happening at different levels of government and in the community.

In addition, the view expressed by the Centre was that policy makers are seldom able to keep up or get access to the academic research work that is most often published in academic journals. It is easier for them to get access to publications related to business and other magazine-type material, which provides a diverse range of views and opinions, but not much hard evidence. Researchers acknowledge that, over the recent

decade, with technological developments and increasing levels of policy complexity, policy makers have become even more time-constrained, reducing their ability to keep up with literature. Policy makers can misinterpret technical information, such as statistical evidence, even where they do have access to research-intensive publications. This emerged as one avenue where researchers could do more and fill the gap for policy makers. This could take the form of shorter briefings or literature reviews. At present, the incentive for researchers to undertake such responsibility is absent within the system. Researchers are charged with the task of undertaking research and publishing their findings and not with ensuring the uptake of such findings within government.

In addition, new ways of thinking and innovative ideas are beginning to take shape at the Centre. One idea that emerged was to undertake and update literature reviews on the completion of research projects and re-present this to the policy makers. This is useful because the researcher works through the specific problem, understands the intricacies better and is exposed to new literature. This helps the researcher develop a much better appreciation of the literature from multiple perspectives, thus making sure that, at the conclusion of a particular project, researchers and policy makers have a clear understanding of the scope of research that was undertaken. This subsequently helps develop better understanding among policy makers about the strengths and limitations of research.

### *Public Discourse and Awareness*

The issue of research influencing policy emerged as a strong theme from the interviews. Not all researchers saw their role as being critical or influential in the policy process. Some identified their role as influencing public debate on specific issues. As one

interviewee commented, the absence of a government policy can be considered a policy in itself (e.g., a government's decision not to place major constraints on smoking or the consumption of alcohol because these are seen as involving individual choice). But it is not the same for research. Stakeholders from business, government and other sectors expect research on policy issues to be pursued, despite the importance government may or may not place on them (e.g., smoking). Thus, it is important for researchers to continue their efforts to influence public debate by bringing research evidence to bear and influencing the wider community's understanding of specific issues.

Moving into the future, researchers consider this an important aspect. Over time, scholars have tried to establish a nexus between research and policy, but very little attention has been paid to research influencing public debate and opinion. In today's policy landscape, it is believed that public opinion occupies a very critical space, one that has the power to influence not only politics through public opinion polls, but also, from time to time, policy processes. Just as public opinion can put pressure on party politics, it can force governments to undertake certain courses of action as a response to policy problems. For instance, the introduction of a carbon pricing mechanism and minerals rent resource tax in Australia brought with it a public backlash, underpinned by well-designed advertising campaigns from big businesses, significantly slowing down the introduction and implementation of the policy. Governments cannot afford to ignore public opinion. Subsequently, research will find its way to policy makers. While this is not the focus of this research, it is important to recognise that such channels will be a crucial new mode of policy influence in the future. Acknowledging that research is only one factor that influences the policy cycle, albeit a critical one, one interviewee commented on the experience of the US, where some of the world's best research in

social policy is undertaken, but some of the poorest policy alternatives have been put into action.

### *Citing and Public Statements*

Researchers expressed concern about having a limited understanding of the policy process, not because they did not have an interest in having such an understanding, but because of the lack of transparency on the government's part. As one interviewee commented,

It is difficult to know how exactly a piece of research is used towards informing policy. As researchers we don't have a full picture of the policy agenda because this is often discussed within government departments... we don't know how influential a piece of work is unless there's a public statement about it. There are always trade-offs between policy and other factors in policy making. We don't have any indication of what these trade-offs may be.

Thus, good research does not necessarily lead to good policy outcomes in all instances, even when research finds its way to policy makers. As this study shows, there are various factors, such as lobbying, political ideology, etc., that are not research related, but still have an impact on the political process of policy making.

The research also identified evidence to suggest that, in many instances, researchers have avoided incorporating policy level recommendations into reports to government. The inclusion of recommendations in a report to government means that a government response is almost required. Some researchers refrain from making any policy recommendation on programs or policy changes in order to avoid political complexities, hence remaining non-partisan. In a way, this has reduced the ability of researchers to influence policy directly. This suggests that there may be a need for an intermediary or

an entity which could independently offer up such policy level recommendations based on research evidence, to help ensure that research becomes more effective in informing policy makers.

### *Forums to Present Research*

The research has found that there is a need to construct forums that allow researchers to present research findings and interact with policy makers, creating an ongoing dialogue. The value of such interactions was evident in one instance when, on the issue of young carers, some of the Centre's researchers were invited to speak to a large number of state government policy makers, including the Minister. This allowed researchers to create formal and informal networks with policy makers, through which further interaction and engagement was able to take place. Through such representation and network membership, knowledge is shared, information is exchanged, experience is leveraged and trust and rapport is established, all leading to the strengthening of the network, which helps create an environment for robust deliberation on the policy issues. Subsequently, a better understanding of the constraints that exist on the policy makers and researchers is also achieved.

### *Interactions with Policy Makers (Meetings, Committee Representation)*

The research also examined how the researchers at the Centre have been working on government-appointed committees on specific policy matters, so having an influence on policy development. This can be considered a direct avenue for policy influence. This level of involvement and engagement has taken place at both the national and the international level. In one instance, the Centre responded to an international inquiry on the issue of pensions and provided advice to an international fact-finding committee on

their visit to the Centre. The final committee report explicitly referenced some of this activity and the advice provided by the Centre. This clearly indicates a level of policy influence.

### *Using Mediators in a Research–Policy Relationship*

While the Centre has utilised multiple avenues and channels to inform policy makers and become part of the policy process, it is evident that the divide between research and policy still exists. Given this divide, the interviews explored whether the Centre considered there was any value in having a mediating or an integrating entity, such as a think tank, that could facilitate the creation of a tripartite network, bringing together researchers and policy makers. Where a strong relationship between researchers and policy makers exists, the value such an entity could offer would be minimal. There was broad consensus on this general statement. Nevertheless, in situations where resources (human, physical and funding) are constrained, could think tanks organise resources and improve the structure to boost research–policy engagements? Can think tanks take on a new role as an integrator, bringing in relevant non-state actors such as the community or businesses to deliberate over policy issues? Of course, for such tripartite or multipartite network relationships to be successful, individuals who work within integrating entities like think tanks would have to be strong negotiators, relationship managers and enthusiastic communicators, underpinned by a strong ethic of collaboration. The creation of an effective research–policy network within a policy context can only occur where collaborative relations between government and researchers exist.

Institutions such as non-governmental organisations have begun to increase their activities in the field of knowledge and research transfer. Although their interests may

be biased, they use research outputs to influence policy changes through the political process. While being keen to assist external organisations in understanding research and its findings, the Centre is clear about maintaining its objective position and hence remaining a non-partisan participant in the political process. As Katz (2011) suggested in his interview:

The role of the Centre and the researcher is to put information in the public domain which can further policy. The researcher cannot function as a lobbyist to influence policy makers to do certain things... researchers have to maintain integrity... The researcher's responsibility is to see that research is not misused. I would get involved in the political process in so far as making a public comment (that is backed by research) if policy being developed is not evidence-based.

The Centre's view on the viability of a mediating entity is mixed, as a number of issues remain unclear. Who would fund such an entity? On whose behalf would such an entity act—on that of government or of researchers? Some respondents suggested that there was definite value and a space for such entities to operate, but in order to influence policy significantly, such an entity would need to be situated closer to government and work more closely with policy makers than with academia. One interesting view put forward related to the lifespan of such entities; it was suggested that, if the entities functioned independently, and if they were to be funded by government, they would tend to last for very brief periods. This is because, if organisations operate at arm's length from government, enjoying independence, governments over time realise that the independence is at a cost to them. This would consequently raise questions for government about the 'return on investment,' which might result in a withdrawal of support.

There was consensus from the Centre indicating that any mediating entity should not be positioned solely as a broker or just a linkage mechanism of the research-policy



relationship, as this would only add another layer of complexity between researchers and policy makers. The role of such an entity would have to be to facilitate closer network interactions. At the same time, in working with researchers, these entities would be responsible for undertaking translational research activities for policy purposes. For example, extensive literature reviews could be undertaken to help inform public policy issues. One aspect also suggested concerning mediating entities was that if they were to mediate a research policy network relationship effectively, they would have to be able to regularly bring together a cross-section of government, industry and community stakeholders, along with researchers, to deliberate over policy issues. Such an approach needs to incorporate a long-term focus that looks forward, rather than being caught up by questions of the here and now of policy and program constraints.

Thus,, the view on mediating or brokering institutions in clear. Research can inform policy through mediating entities which:

- i) facilitate closer interactions between government policy and researchers;
- ii) undertake translational research for the government and policy translation for researchers to better inform both stakeholders;
- iii) appropriately interpret research findings to address political contexts and the self-interest of interest groups, such as non-governmental organisation; and
- iv) bring together a wider cohort of stakeholders.

These findings will be investigated and tested in the case study detailed in Chapter 6.

## 5.5. Discussion and Analysis

*Ideas + Power = Influence?*

From the above discussion and research evidence, it is clear that at present, there are a limited number of channels for interaction between researchers and policy makers, and that there is a lack of researcher engagement by policy makers in the policy processes. Thus, the opportunities for researchers to influence policy processes directly are minimal, and there are challenges associated with changing the status quo. At the same time, it is clear that policy influence is also linked to how relevant research is made to the context of policy.

In exploring the workings of the SPRC, it is clear that a research–policy-level engagement can take place most effectively under the Service Model, which at present focuses mostly on policy evaluative research-type engagement. Researchers bring in the objectivity required to assess the benefit, value and impact of government programs independently. Researchers undertake genuine program evaluations, not exercises designed to provide a seal of approval for government policy. This ensures a non-partisan approach to policy evaluation. In addition, the findings also indicate that researchers do not play an extensive role in the shaping of new policy ideas.

The appetite of government for engaging with researchers in setting policy agendas is, at least in the social science arena, minimal. While there may be advocates within government who embrace research and attempt to use evidence to inform policy processes and outcomes, this element is far from being fully institutionalised. However, it is evident from the findings that there is interest being generated by non-governmental organisations leveraging the research outcomes from various research initiatives

undertaken at the SPRC. These organisations repackage and use research findings to advocate their own causes. On occasion, researchers from the Centre have assisted such organisations in ensuring appropriate interpretation of technical aspects of the research, helping wider appreciation of the knowledge generated and also of the evidence gathered. SPRC does not play a very important role in lobbying for such self-interest causes, but ensures that it works with the relevant non-governmental organisation to ensure they understand the findings, thus avoiding misinterpretation. In this way, research informs the public debate in specific social policy contexts, which may or may not have an influence on public opinion, and subsequently on the public policy direction.

The issues surrounding research translation and the interpretation of research results into policy language was not a topic of concern for researchers, although there is room for improvement in this area. Researchers are aware of the need to produce non-technical reports for policy makers. Researchers have problems with the opaqueness of the policy process. They are unclear as to how the various hierarchical levels within the government departments use research in policy development. The experience of researchers here can be dependent on individual relationships between researchers and policy makers. Just as researchers have to undergo a peer review process to publish scholarly material, there is a view that governments should adhere to a similar process by which policy choices made are based on evidence that is publicly available and transparent.

What must be factored in here are the political influences on policies, especially when issues are highly contestable. This seems to be an area where researchers have limited

understanding, which is inevitable, given this is not their area of expertise. Thus, ‘political astuteness,’ which would help researchers develop an appreciation of policy development and its processes, would be a valuable skill for researchers to possess. However, this needs to be complemented by policy makers developing an appetite for proactively utilising research in the effort to develop informed public policy. Reviewing research material, synthesising and developing new policy perspectives are critical activities that need to be undertaken by bureaucrats and policy makers. This goes to support comments made above about the need to minimise issues subsequently creating a breed of ‘research bureaucrats’ and ‘policy researchers.’

#### *Network and Governance: Institutional and Individual*

As the research has revealed, the relationship between the Centre and government departments is premised predominantly on individual relationship and networks. The fact that the Centre was established by government ensured that an institutional relationship was initially created and fostered, but this has since morphed into a set of links centred on individual relationships. Being based solely on individual relationships carries a significant risk element. Given staff turnover within government, which was identified as an impeding factor, the need to re-establish relationships between policy makers and researchers on a frequent basis is challenging and onerous. This is a problem for researchers who have constantly to contend with changes in the bureaucracy, either when individuals move on to different roles, or when reorganisation and restructures take place. Hence, there is a need to institutionalise such relationships in order to ensure such research–policy networks are sustained.

#### *Organisational Incentives*

This case-study indicates that the incentives provided to the Centre researchers to ensure research was meeting policy needs, or to governments (state or federal) to make use of the research evidence in policy processes were minimal or non-existent. In the case of the Centre, the University agreed to continue funding the Centre, as it broadly believed it was meeting its stated objectives. Given the Centre's geographical location and the presence of other major universities, non-governmental organisations, businesses and interest groups, the competition to gain access to policy makers at the state level is intense. As policy makers have to contend with competing sources of information, this has limited the ability of the Centre to clearly determine how much influence it has been able to wield over the policy makers, at least at the state level.

The Centre has also become more integrated within the University as compared to when it initially commenced operation in the 1970s. This has caused a tension between the competing goals of the University and the Centre. As in every other university, staff must teach, undertake research and publish regularly in top-tier academic journals. For the Centre, remaining operational and sustainable has meant that staff have had to get involved in sourcing funding for research projects by engaging with external stakeholders. Thus, the Centre operates in a semi-academic role within the University. The challenge of incentivising staff is clear, and in many instances, researchers have questioned the challenge of meeting competing priorities working in such an environment. There is no doubt that the University, heightening its focus on social impact as an outcome, considers the Centre to be meeting its goals and objectives, and this was clear from this research. Some researchers have tested this through their own applications for promotion within the University; they were successful because of the positive societal impact that was created as a result of the Centre's work. This denotes a change in the University's culture, which has become more accepting of the third

mission of academic institutions, which is to make a social impact. This supports the discussion undertaken in the earlier chapters about the Mode 3 responsibilities for universities. Thus, in conclusion and from this study, we identify and distinguish the roles of researchers and policy makers as follows:

**Table 5.1: Distinguishing roles of researcher, policy maker and intermediary**

<p><b>Researchers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frame research questions and undertake literature reviews</li> <li>• Engage with policy makers to understand the policy and political context</li> <li>• Determine research requirements and methodology</li> <li>• Understand the constraints within which policy makers function</li> <li>• Progress research and analysis</li> <li>• Generate findings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Policy makers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the policy and political context to understand the policy problem from a holistic perspective</li> <li>• Ascertain the data and resource requirements to pursue research that generates evidence to inform the policy problem</li> <li>• Ensure that the relationship between researchers and policy makers is institutionalised</li> <li>• Understand the limitations of research and clearly articulate how research will inform the development of various policy options</li> <li>• Provide details of the current policy gaps and policy questions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Intermediary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and facilitate the network interactions between researchers and policy makers, and where needed, incorporate other external stakeholders</li> <li>• In seeking to narrow the silos between governments and universities, ascertain policy and research questions in collaboration with researchers and policy makers</li> <li>• Translate literature reviews into succinct policy briefs</li> <li>• Assist in the translation of research findings for policy makers and offer new policy ideas that emerge from the research process</li> <li>• Muster resources needed for the research</li> <li>• Seek end-user engagement in the research process and possibly explore pilot policy models</li> </ul>	

Through this case study, we have identified some of the strengths of the Centre and challenges that it is exposed to in terms of bridging the research/policy divide. However, there are some clear opportunities that also emerged from the analysis:

1. The Centre could create policy networks with government, industry, community and academics that function beyond project scopes; and endeavour to institutionalise these relationships. This will allow innovative attributes to be brought in to a research-policy network such as social and community engagement; knowledge transfer processes and frameworks to be developed by which policy processes can be influenced.
2. Seek closer engagement with Government Departments through staff exchanges and secondments, such as the Fellowship model.
3. Enhance understanding of the policy process by interacting with policy makers, allowing engagement to also inform policy makers about research and researcher challenges.
4. Identify internal linkages across SPRC projects and facilitate frequent peer interactions.
5. Continue to ensure the research process and outcomes are rigorous and grounded through end-user engagement (where appropriate).
6. Enhance interdisciplinary interaction within the University that fosters a broader appreciation of changing political and policy contexts.
7. Seek to partner with independent intermediaries to achieve policy leverage emerging from research endeavours. Some of the key areas where an intermediary must support the Centre are: bringing together a cross-section of government departments at federal and state levels for interaction and networking; translating extensive literature reviews into succinct policy briefs;

and, finally, ensuring an opportunity for new evidence to be implemented by end-users, ensuring the trialling of new policies.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The effort of the SPRC to continue functioning despite the withdrawal of government funding has meant that it has had to adopt a commercial approach to many of its research ideas to test marketability. This is evident through the Linkage and Service Models. Nevertheless, it is useful to note that the SPRC has continued to operate in the applied policy space by innovatively informing policy through engagement with non-governmental organisations. It has also created an international presence by continuing to engage in the Chinese social policy space and thus subsequently providing an opportunity for research and policy lesson transfer between the two countries.

Nevertheless, there are issues that are beyond the control of the SPRC which have an influence on its operations. There are gaps that continue to exacerbate the research–policy relationship. The incentives of the two sectors, government and university, are structured at cross-purposes. Where researchers are performance-measured against quantitative measures, such as peer-reviewed publications in top journals, success in securing research funds for the university, number of academic publications and conference papers delivered and the like, government policy makers do not share such pressures. This is not to say that policy makers operate in an environment with no pressures. Instead, the pressures on policy makers are different and multifaceted, ranging from addressing public needs through policy engagement to serving political masters who can be demanding. However, there is no requirement for government policy makers to seek peer reviews on their policy positions, or even to



provide a scientific explanation as to why they choose to do what they do. The litmus test for government is the electoral cycle, which it pays much attention to, sometimes a bit too much attention, thus crowding out good policy ideas. The election test which can make or break a government is often the lens through which political leaders view new policy developments and its underlying processes.

It is also evident from this research that researchers and policy makers are driven by considerations that are focused on the here and now of policy. There is a need for network creation and engagement that considers issues that are longer term. Foresight is seldom evidenced in policy debates or discussions of any sort. This needs to be strengthened for sustainable policy solutions to be created. What is also required is the consideration of policy interdependencies and lessons learned from other sectors that can be applied to a policy issue under consideration. This imposes on government policy makers the need to engage widely across government, through joined-up government, and for researchers to engage widely with stakeholders at the national and international level. This will help increase the number of new ideas being generated by researchers and also the ability of government policy makers to provide a strong and informed context for the introduction of new policies. This does not in any sense suggest that the terrain of ideas generation only belongs to researchers, while practical on-the-ground information and data is the domain of government. Either stakeholder can choose to take the role of the other. However, bearing in mind the resource constraints within each institution, these needs to be utilised to the maximum, it is prudent to get researchers and government initially doing what they do best, and then to build on the capability created by the network.

In conclusion, returning to the issue of policy networks, this case clearly depicts how in the establishment of the Centre, government adopted the policy community approach. In the early years of the Centre's operation, the governance arrangement incorporated representation from government and the provision of funding resources to the Centre to undertake research on policy issues aligned with government needs. This indicates the presence of the hierarchical governance approach, power dynamics skewed towards government and the resource dependency evident in a policy community model. Although the resource interdependency between government and the Centre is weak, the strength of interaction between researchers and policy makers seems relatively strong. Currently, the limited interdependency between the two may be a reason for the power dynamic changing to a more collaborative model, where power is equally distributed amongst the network members. This changing dynamic of using a hierarchical governance model for policy making underpinned by collaborative networks is a model that needs further exploration and study. We researched this in the next case study, that of the HC Coombs Policy Forum.

## Chapter 6: HC Coombs Policy Forum: Integrating Research and Engagement into Policy

*The Australian Public Service (APS) is constantly exhorted to sharpen up, trim down, reach out and rein in... The public demands improvements. The press castigates failure... the new HC Coombs Policy Forum [is] designed to provide public servants with input from academics and other subject experts. It will promote public involvement in policy debate. And it will catalyse inter-disciplinary research in areas of critical national need.*

Senator Kim Carr, speaking at the launch of the Australian National Institute of Public Policy (ANIPP) on 17 February 2011 (ANIPP 2011).

### 6.1 Introduction

The HC Coombs Policy Forum (Coombs) was set up under the ANIPP, a new initiative established between the Australian Government and the Australian National University. Coombs is established as a ‘think tank,’ specifically to build better networks and linkages between the government’s policy makers, public servants and ANU’s policy researchers. This chapter outlines the role of Coombs in a public policy context. A key element underpinning Coombs’ mandate is a network approach premised on policy development and enhancement in what has been referred to as a ‘policy network’ by scholars. This chapter examines this and other distinct elements of Coombs’ operation, as compared to other traditional university institutes (research or otherwise): policy exploration; translational research activity for policy purposes; its role as a system and knowledge integrator; and its horizon-scanning activity. Within each of these elements, there are issues of network creation and management, risk management and policy interdependencies that will be explored.

As the establishment of Coombs is relatively new, this case study closely focuses on one of its first research–policy engagements with the Australian Government. This is the natural resource management (NRM) initiative which Coombs facilitated between the Australian Government’s Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) and the Fenner School of Environment and Society (Fenner) at the ANU. The NRM initiative brought together policy makers, researchers and stakeholders from the NRM community to identify avenues that would meet two main purposes: i) inform the *Caring for our Country* (CfoC) policy review that was being undertaken by DAFF and SEWPaC; and ii) through research and stakeholder interaction efforts, identify longer term NRM issues which could emerge as policy concerns. The NRM initiative case study involved interviewing relevant policy makers from DAFF and SEWPaC, researchers and executive-level individuals from Fenner and Coombs. First-hand insights were also gathered by participating in one of the NRM workshops to study the network interactions, in addition to analysis of other documentary material.

Given its recent establishment, there is only a limited amount of information regarding Coombs publicly available. The evidence and analysed information referred to throughout this chapter derive from interviews, attendance at network meetings and other documents. The policy network concepts are put to use and discussed in a structured manner, offering a thorough examination of the theoretical issues with which this study is concerned, i.e., the shape of policy networks in a research–policy context. The aim of this chapter is to understand the extent to which Coombs’ approach can be understood using the policy network concept.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the establishment of Coombs and ANIPP as an Australian Government initiative. The role of Coombs, its governance structure and activities are then outlined, before introducing some of the models that underpin its interactions and engagement between researchers and policy makers. This chapter also analyses how policy issues and research areas can overlap through recognising policy interdependencies, and how Coombs fosters a long-term, horizon-scanning approach to address some policy issues. This chapter then turns to a discussion and analysis of the NRM initiative. Finally, this chapter offers up discussion on the underpinning issue of policy networks and their management.

## **6.2 Coombs' Establishment: Role, Funding and Governance**

ANIPP is a joint strategic partnership between the Australian National University (ANU) and the Australian Government, through which ANU receives funding from the government under the *Enhancing Public Policy Initiative*. As part of this initiative, joint goals have been established (ANIPP, 2011) between the university and the government, primarily relating to:

1. Improving the connection between the public sector and university's public policy researchers
2. Fostering innovative relationships
3. Building an evidence base which public policy practitioners can leverage for future public policy
4. Enhancing the capability of public policy practitioners by adopting best practice thinking and action

In order to accomplish these goals, Coombs, as a think tank, has to ‘integrate, translate and communicate policy relevant knowledge.’ It endeavours to achieve these goals by undertaking a number of critical activities (HC Coombs Policy Forum, 2011):

- A. Providing an interface between academia, public service and the community
- B. Facilitating a two-way flow of information on policy requirements and academic expertise between the APS and ANU, designed to improve the effectiveness of government policy formulation
- C. Enhancing the evidence base to create innovative policy solutions and longer-term policy analysis
- D. Provide a forum for broader public debates of policy issues and targeted advice, via parliament and briefings to the public service
- E. Translate high-quality research work into relevant, innovative and workable public policy

At the time information was being gathered for this case study, Professor Adam Graycar, who was also foundation Director of the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at UNSW, was the Dean of ANIPP, and Dr. Mark Matthews was the Executive Director of Coombs.

ANIPP has an Advisory Board chaired by Derek Volker, former Secretary within the Australian Government and current Chairman of Defence Housing Australia. The Secretary of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), Lisa Paul, and the Secretary of the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR), Dr. Don Russell, are members of the Board, along with

the Australian Public Service Commissioner Stephen Sedgewick. These three members represent the Australian Government. The Vice-Chancellor of the University, the Director of the Crawford School of Economics and Government and the Dean of ANIPP are university members on the Board, along with three other members from the Australian New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). There is thus a ten-member Advisory Board, drawn from a cross-section of government and academia.

Coombs' primary aim is to work closely with university researchers, public servants and policy makers within government departments to help inform policy matters. At the same time, it also aims to influence public debate and subsequently enhance the manner in which researchers work with the government, crafting innovative policy that will shape future thinking and improve government policy. Helping government leverage evidence-based policy is a critical aspect of Coombs' effort, which is predominantly built upon a literature review model that assesses the research evidence, thereby offering up suitable policy alternatives to government. Coombs is also tasked with the horizon-scanning of policy issues (Matthews, 2011).

Against this backdrop of challenges, Coombs has established a plethora of activities, as outlined in Figure 1.

Name of Activity	Description
<i>HC Coombs Lecture and Seminar Series: Stimulate public debate</i>	Organise public lectures and seminars on topical issues in line with the Australian Government's thematic priorities
<i>Information resources: Provide policy support information</i>	Provide timely policy-relevant information to the ANIPP website organised by thematic relevance with hyperlinks to academic and policy source materials
<i>Thematic workshops: Capture APS requirements</i>	Provide an opportunity for government officials and ANU academic researchers to discuss topics of current policy importance and to define priorities for future investigation. Each workshop will result in a brief Scoping Report
<i>Advisory Service: Provide decision-support expertise</i>	Project manage the deployment of ANU expertise to assist the APS. The identification of expertise will be facilitated by the ANIPP web portal's advanced search and classification system
<i>Capacity-building workshops</i>	One specific form of workshop will be <i>Joint mid-career policy workshops</i> . These will allow balanced groups of EL1/2 officers and Level C/D academics to jointly consider specified challenges
<i>Long-term Horizon Scanning: Provide policy support information</i>	Collate, integrate and communicate research findings pertinent to long-term opportunity, threat/risk management by the APS
<i>HC Coombs International Fellowship Program: Access international expertise</i>	Host eminent academic experts and policy practitioners whose work is of interest to the Australian Government
<i>Policy Innovation Actions: Provide policy support information</i>	Customised 'translational research' information modules and longer policy papers that integrate insights from different disciplines
<i>Impact tracking: demonstrate contribution and relevance</i>	Collect, collate and disseminate data that demonstrates the additionality of the <i>HC Coombs Policy Forum</i> ('what difference has the mechanism made to the Australian Government')

**Figure 6.1: HC Coombs Policy Forum: activities**

**Source: HC Coombs Policy Forum, *Thematic Priorities*, 2010.**

Matthews (2011) sees Coombs' vision and mandate as being distinct from that of other think tanks. He notes the partnership model as being central to its functioning with government, but that Coombs remains at arm's length by virtue of being situated within a university environment. Its independent nature allows Coombs to be responsive and innovative in offering policy alternatives to government. A major benefit of this approach is that Coombs can also explore policy ideas and manage the risk for government of recommending new policy alternatives. This, in a way, can alleviate the



threat of implementing underdeveloped policy or suggesting policy options that have limited buy-in from external stakeholders. He says:

It is important to bring to bear policy thinking, particularly in terms of the importance of having an appetite for risk... Coombs will play a role in the early stages of a policy cycle and undertake policy exploratory work to help government in policy and program design process. We are a mechanism that helps government policy units do their work better. Our aim is to set a forward-looking agenda that governments can deliver on.

Why is this important for government policy makers? Ian Thompson (2011) from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), says:

Policy makers are driven by shorter-term time horizons. The focus is to implement and deliver the latest policy, respond to the latest request, meet certain accountability standards, etc. No public servant anymore has the time to review the research literature. Unless there's an academic wandering the floors of government departments with their ten-point plan from time to time, public policy makers will never hear of it.

This is why Coombs has a vested interest in working closely with public servants and policy makers from government to better understand some of its policy priorities, which it can then explore in further depth via working with academic researchers. In order for this to be pursued effectively and successfully, it is important for individuals working within Coombs to be able to traverse the policy and research environments. We will explore this issue later within this chapter.

### **6.3 Policy Level Engagement: Interaction with Researchers**

Considering the joint goals established between ANIPP and the Australian Government, and the activities of Coombs, let us draw some early findings about the alignment of the research–policy engagement.

When we consider the broad partnership objectives, we can see that the Australian Government aims to achieve two things: stronger networks with the research community, and a rigorous evidence base on which public policy can be formed. This suggests that the government is seeking support to enhance the manner in which it develops and implements public policy. Coombs' role and mandate addresses these needs by helping the creation, facilitation and management of network interactions between researchers and policy makers in a neutral space. Coombs' capacity-building workshop activity between academic researchers and policy makers and public servants from government provides evidence here. Coombs also aims to influence public debate using various channels such as longer-term policy analysis, seminar series, debates and policy innovation actions.

A simple mapping exercise of Coombs' activities against the joint goals clearly depicts the alignment between the two. For example, the thematic workshop, long-term horizon-scanning and policy innovation activities clearly contribute to strengthening networks between researchers and policy makers. It also attempts to increase the use of research evidence through 'translational research' activity being undertaken for policy purposes. We can infer from this sort of mapping and triangulation that the Coombs model is sound and the alignment is strong in terms of how it intends to achieve policy level engagement and meet the goals that have been set out.

As we can see, this effort to build links and networks between researchers and policy makers will help to inform, if not influence, aspects of policy development. In order for such policy networks to have maximum impact in terms of influence, there needs to be a level of network engagement with both the political and broader community. Paul

Harris, Deputy Director of Coombs, outlines how Coombs' participates and engages in this space:

We do this in two ways. We work directly with government departments, and, senior ANIPP members directly engage departmental Secretaries and Ministers' offices. We influence debate on policy issues by bringing research expertise to bear on the public discourse... Our aim is to agree with government on a range of priority issues and themes and use a range of tools to address them. We are not trying to jump on to hot issues. Our focus is the longer-term policy challenges.

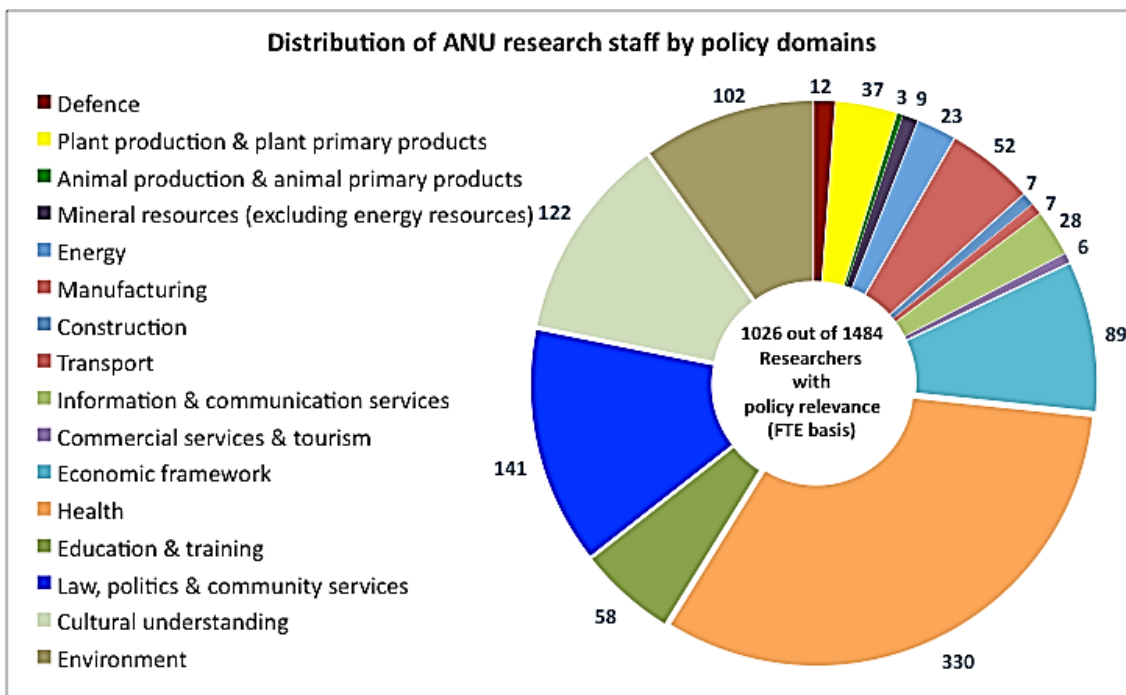
In this manner, influence can be exercised not only on the policy issue itself, but also on the process that encompasses political interactions. Research intertwined with the political context complicates this situation further, as in many instances the process of selecting winners and losers in a policy process is not always transparent. There are political decisions made about trade-offs that are not always understood by many in the wider community. The utility of research in a policy process is huge, as it makes available a vast amount of information that would not have been otherwise obtainable. The challenge here is to move the development of a public policy to a setting as politically neutral as possible, i.e. from a 'politics informing policy' setting to a 'policy informing politics' dynamic. In this context, the governance of policy issues becomes important, and there is a need to understand how governments choose to govern.

Thompson (2011) from DAFF makes the following point:

If you ask stakeholders, they will say government imposes on them. The main thing we impose is budgets. Stakeholders also perceive that governments impose priorities. But what we fail to understand is that government priorities emerge from input that predominantly comes from stakeholders. There are lots of stakeholders who have influence on priorities, there are international pressures too. Governments have a mortgage on establishing a level playing field. Thus governance is not hierarchical. Budgets and rules of engagement are the only things governments primarily impose with some focus extended to the issue of timelines.

*Facilitating Network Interactions*

It is timely to consider in some depth how Coombs fosters and mediates research–policy network relationships. Coombs considers it important to ensure a sustained policy dialogue takes place between researchers and policy makers. Firstly, Harris (2011) identifies the need to bridge the incentives gap between researchers and policy makers, so that researchers are able to carry on what they do best—research—while aligning their research efforts with government policy issues. This is primarily achieved through the creation of a policy network that encompasses researchers and policy makers, but



**Figure 6.2: Distribution of ANU research staff by policy domains**

Source: HC Coombs Policy Forum, *Thematic Priorities*, 2010.

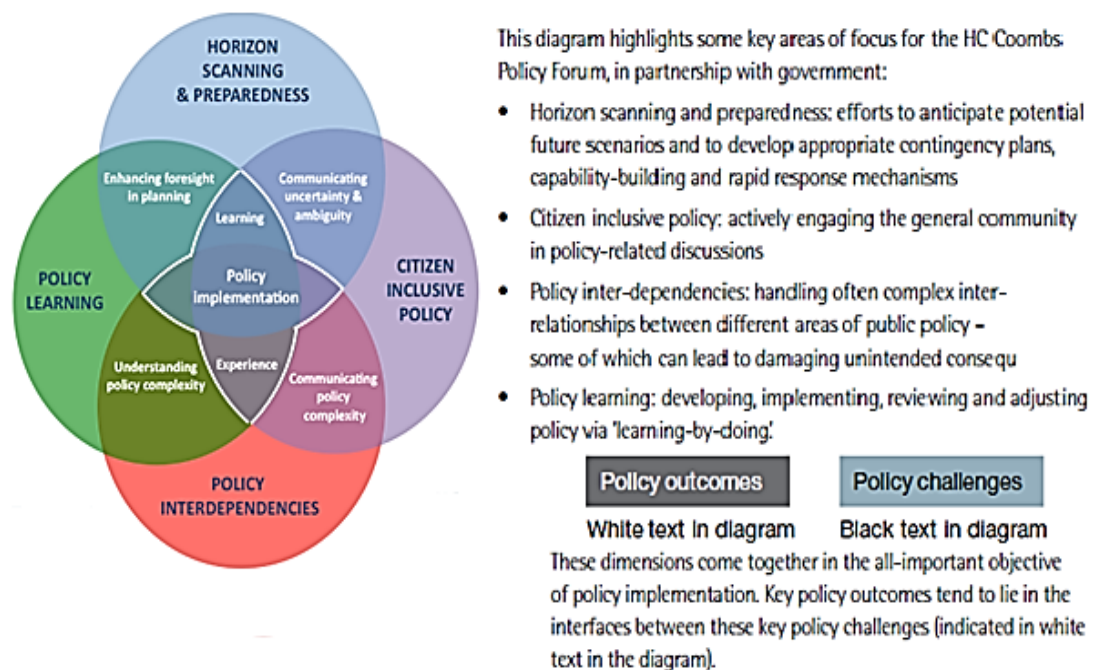
also brings stakeholders, members of the community and other institutional representatives into the network. As we can see in Figure 6.2, Coombs has mapped and linked the research expertise within ANU to the policy areas of the government. It has

also created a framework for policy collaboration that is a central underpinning of Coombs' operation in a policy network context.

Figure 6.3 outlines Coombs' framework for enhancing policy collaboration, which encompasses four distinct policy elements:

- horizon-scanning and preparedness
- citizen inclusive policy
- policy interdependencies
- policy learning

This must not be confused with what is generally denoted as a policy cycle, although the Coombs' framework implicitly suggests that these elements can be taken into account within any policy process.



**Figure 6.3: Framework for Enhancing Policy Collaboration**

Source: HC Coombs Policy Forum, *Thematic Priorities*, 2010.

As is seen in Figure 6.3, a process of continuous improvement is implicitly incorporated within the framework for policy collaboration. Through the horizon-scanning and preparedness element, Coombs leverages research to ascertain past experience and future expectations in the policy space. This helps to influence public discourse, while also bringing in the community and stakeholders to explore policy alternatives. This is important, as it helps validate and test policy ideas. Testing policy alternatives outside of government helps manage the risk of implementing underdeveloped policy and also tests stakeholder support for new policy ideas. What is unique in this framework is the ability to glean experience from other policy sectors that either has relevance or offers lessons for the policy problem at hand. All these four elements come together in the implementation of policy.

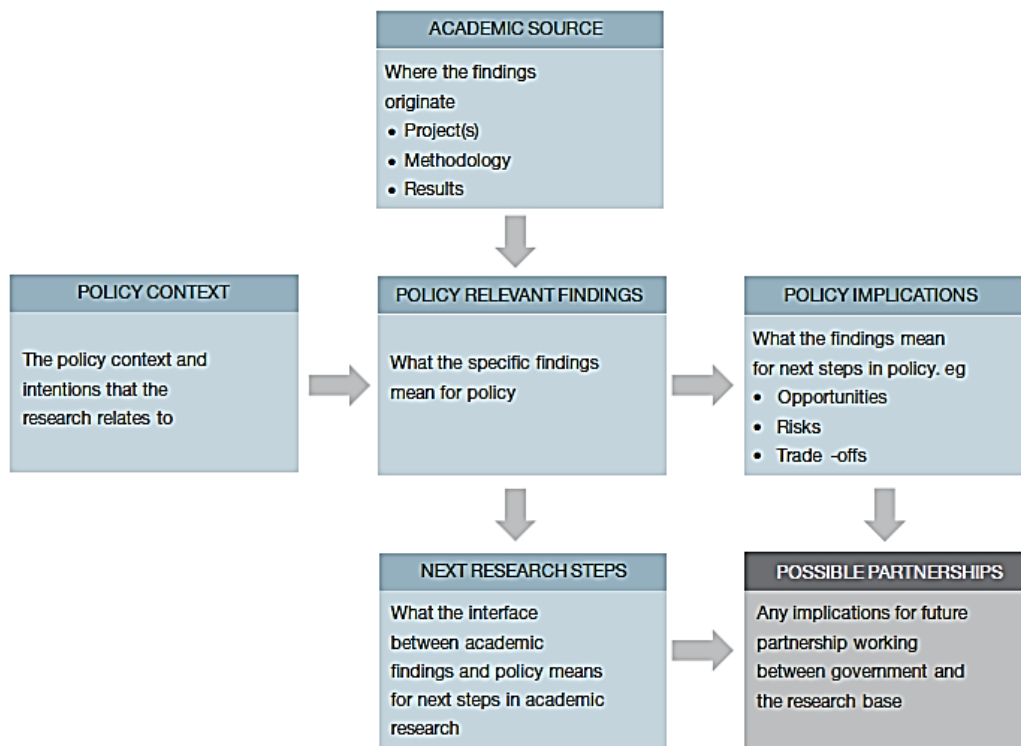
Underlying these policy challenges are the policy outcomes that can emerge from such interactions and engagement with research and researchers, the community and other stakeholders involved in the policy process. Two aspects that become crucial here are policy complexity and communication.

### *Translational Research*

Figure 6.4 depicts how Coombs sees the research and policy processes intersecting. The framework that Coombs has in place to map out the research and policy process is quite linear. It establishes the intersection between the ‘policy context’ and ‘academic source’ to identify ‘policy relevant findings.’ It is seldom the case that all existing academic research converges to make the same point in support of a policy solution. Nevertheless, such divergence creates room for multiple views to be taken into account while

planning policy solutions. What is important in any policy process is consideration being given to the maximum number of sources of evidence, research or otherwise, that either point to the creation of a policy opportunity or help in the identification of policy risks.

Policy has many parents. Having the same problem definition is a challenge for policy makers and researchers who engage in collaborative efforts. Very often, what a researcher considers interesting is not the policy problem governments are concerned about. Timing is another issue. The need for input into a policy process is often very urgent, and this can be problematic for researchers. Achieving sound policy alternatives and making relevant changes in government direction cannot be realised without considering the evidence base. Undoubtedly, more often than not, there are political incentives that play a role in policy processes. In an ideal world, a range of views would be considered and deliberated leading to the development of a number of policy options. In this way, underdeveloped policy alternatives can be rooted out.



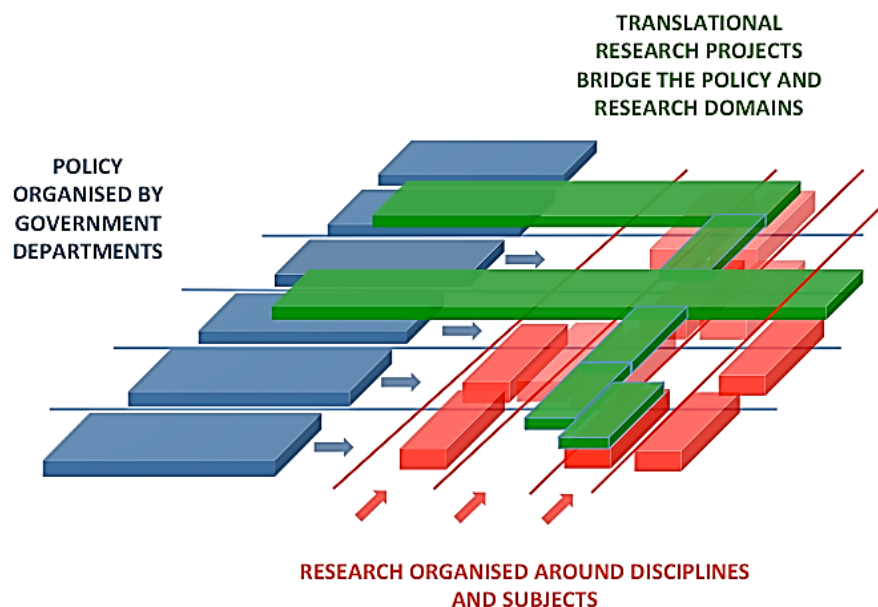
**Figure 6.4: Mapping the policy and research intersections**

**Source: HC Coombs Policy Forum, *Thematic Priorities*, 2010.**

Each of the policy alternatives identified can have a range of stakeholders involved, who may exercise influence on government’s deliberation. Sometimes, the government may finally select a policy alternative that is quite different from the ones proposed. However, the point of the policy process is to ensure that most, if not all, policy alternatives are considered, ensuring rigour in the policy thinking process (Dovers 2011; McConchie 2011). Under the ‘next research steps’ and ‘policy implications’ phases of this model, researchers and policy makers continue to enhance interactions and engagements. Most often, a policy decision will be a political decision, unless there is overwhelming support for a particular policy alternative. If the political decision aligns with the research and policy process, then there are generally few concerns. However, in contentious policy spaces, there is seldom an easy alignment between research–policy interaction processes and the political decision-making process. In such instances, it is critical to understand how political decisions, most often driven by values, may weigh



up a policy process that is evidence-and research-driven. This is where the challenge lies for Coombs. For instance, within the ‘policy implications’ element within the model, the identification of ‘trade-offs’ and the incorporation of a level of research–policy deliberation can potentially help to neutralise politically contentious policy decisions. Now that we have an appreciation of the Coombs translational research model, let us consider how Coombs identifies the policy areas in which such research will be pursued. Figure 6.5 indicates Coombs primarily uses a matrix structure that helps align policy priorities and research interests.



**Figure 6.5: Matrix to bridge research and policy**

**Source: HC Coombs Policy Forum, *Thematic Priorities*, 2010.**

Coombs undertakes to link research expertise within the university with some of the critical policy issues identified by government departments. This results in the identification of priority themes for Coombs in which relevant translational research projects are designed. These priorities are then validated and agreed to by the Advisory Board, which is a high-level research–policy network embedded within the

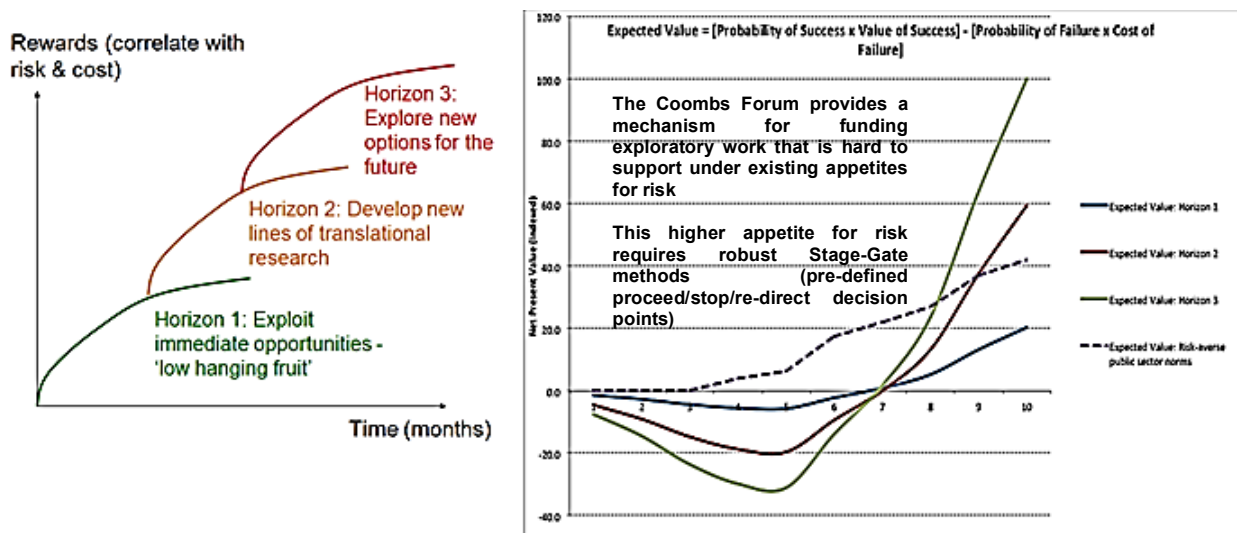
Coombs–ANIPP governance structure. What is unique in this framework is the ability of Coombs to bring together a cross-section of government departments, thus incorporating an interdisciplinary focus on policy issues. This works well in a research–policy setting. The challenge for Coombs is to extend this framework so that it encompasses stakeholders such as interest groups, community groups and non-governmental organisations.

### *Horizon-Scanning*

The next important element of the Coombs model is its horizon-scanning focus. As ANIPP (2011) notes, ‘dealing with current issues and looking over the horizon requires tremendous skill, knowledge and policy capacity.’ In line with this thinking, Coombs has identified three horizon-scanning levels, as shown in Figure 6.6. ‘Horizon 1’ is considered to be the short- or immediate-term focus of policy issues. Here, the policy need is instant and the opportunity to engage with stakeholders and ascertain policy alternatives is immediate. The challenges for Coombs are to create, facilitate and moderate policy actors within a network in a short period of time, and to leverage research evidence and stakeholder interests.

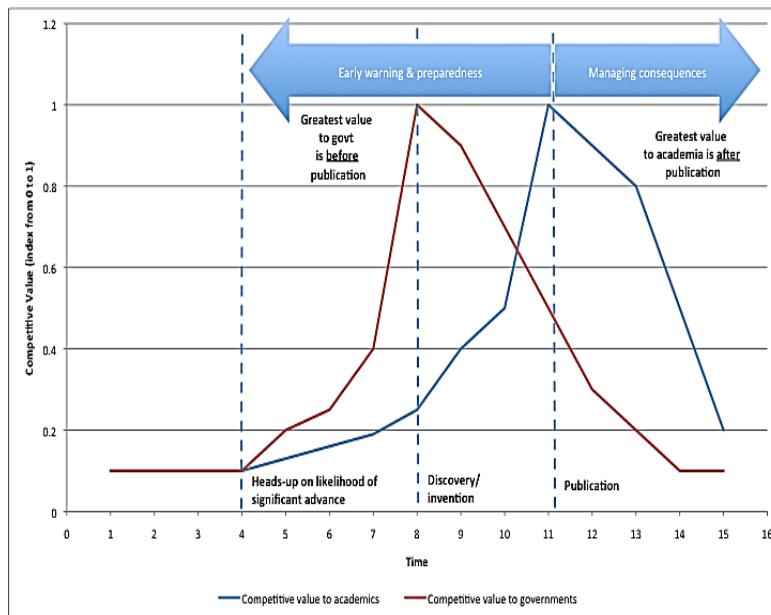
‘Horizon 2’ reflects a medium-term policy focus within which governments must respond to policy issues. In such situations, to identify suitable policy alternatives, Coombs must create, facilitate and moderate policy networks to work on collaborative activities that involve undertaking relevant research, policy exploration exercises and stakeholder engagement. The challenge here is to ensure that this policy community sustains itself in the medium term, while forming new policy relationships between the state and non-state actors.

‘Horizon 3’ denotes the longer-term focus of policy issues. These issues generally have a timeline that extends beyond seven years. Coombs envisions its network value to be the highest working within this horizon. Taking an investment risk approach, Coombs has identified this as displayed in Figure 6.6. Coombs still has to create, facilitate and moderate new policy networks, while undertaking new research, translational research and stakeholder activities to inform the formation of policy alternatives. However, in Horizon 3 activities, Coombs has also to pay close attention to the management of long-term risk, policy interdependencies and sustaining the policy community for the long term. The risk appetite, as identified by Coombs, is an element that needs to be managed by networks. This consequently requires the use of a stage-gate approach, not only to predefine process- and progress-related activity, but also to stop, redefine and redirect research–policy activity.



**Figure 6.6: Horizon scanning levels and expected value**

Source: HC Coombs Policy Forum, *Thematic Priorities*, 2010.

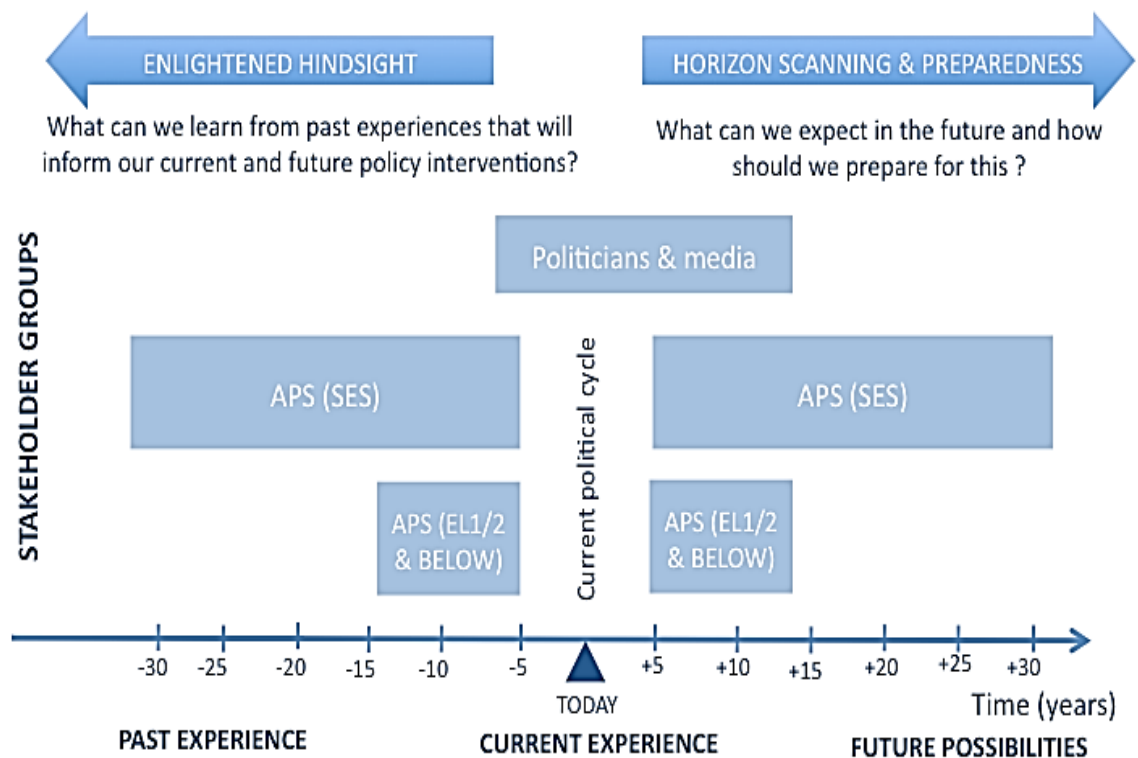


**Figure 6.7: Maximum utility point for government and academia**

**Source: HC Coombs Policy Forum, *Thematic Priorities*, 2010.**

Coombs has taken this framework a step further by plotting the horizon levels against the maximum utility points for government and researchers. If we take the maximum utility point to be the ‘research publication’ stage, then for government, the value of the policy network and its interactions is achieved well before the publication value point is reached. In contrast, for researchers, the maximum utility point is achieved at, or after, the publication stage. This provides us with a sense of where the incentives and motivations may lie for policy makers and researchers. The motivations for network participation by these two groups are different, and hence, there are minimal avenues for convergence. Thus, Coombs aims to attract mid-career researchers to undertake translational research activity for policy purposes. Through this engagement, mid-career researchers can build their research profiles, as well as building networks with policy makers, allowing for longer-term engagement and influence. As Harris (2011) says, ‘policy makers and researchers want to talk to each other, there’s just never an

opportunity for them to interact and engage'. Thus, Coombs plays a key mediating role between researchers and policy makers, while offering incentives for participation.



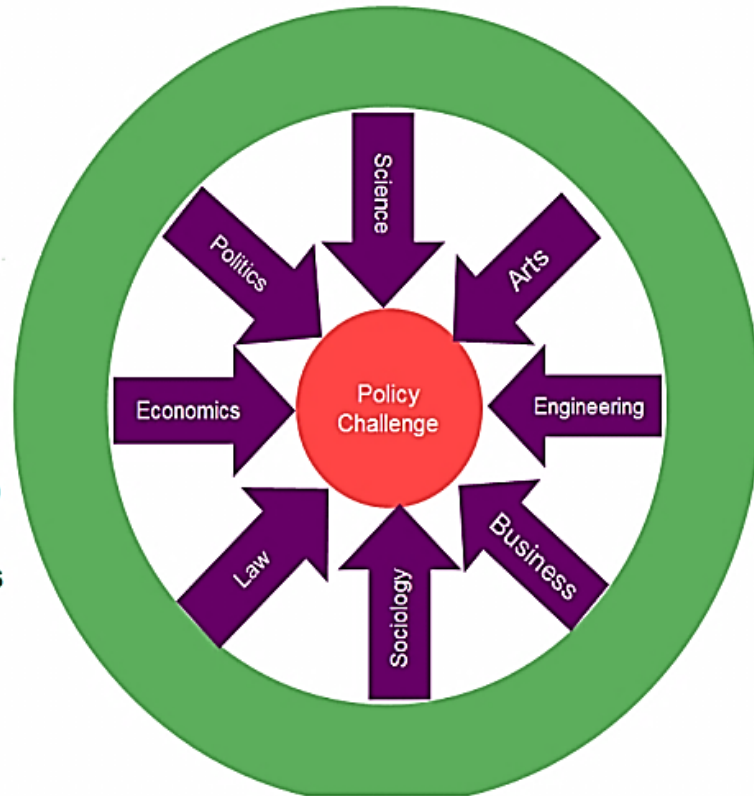
**Figure 6.8: Past experiences, future expectations, today's decisions**

**Source: HC Coombs Policy Forum, *Thematic Priorities*, 2010.**

Figures 6.8 and 6.9 display the foresight and policy interdependency frameworks used by Coombs. As we know, real world policy cycles require rapid responses to events, with little time to plan carefully, experiment and pilot different approaches. This drastically increases the risk of unintended consequences. The accumulation of forensic analyses of past successes and failures in policy, combined with horizon-scanning linked to preparedness planning, can be very useful. It can mitigate the risk of unwanted policy outcomes by enriching the evidence base and skills upon which practitioners can draw at short notice (HC Coombs Policy Forum Prospectus 2011).

**Stage 1:**  
Analyse the issue  
and report from  
different  
disciplinary  
perspectives

**Stage 2:**  
Integrate discrete  
disciplinary  
analyses  
and generate “360  
degree” policy  
options appraisals



**Figure 6.9: Two-stage process for understanding policy interdependencies**

**Source: HC Coombs Policy Forum, *Thematic Priorities*, 2010.**

Figure 6.8 illustrates how Coombs specifically aims to interact with different policy actors in order to learn from past experiences and decide upon a common policy future by making robust policy decisions today. The chart illustrates how policy actors, such as politicians, the Senior Executive Service (SES) of the APS, other levels of policy bureaucrats and media personnel can play a role. In addition, this is about finding opportunities within government policy cycles where research can be utilised to see what has been done in the past, to sum it up and to think about what it suggests for the future. As Harris (2011) says: ‘It’s taking the brains of people who have studied the policy issue with academic rigor, but synthesizing it in such a way that it is useful for policy makers.’ Figure 6.9, on the other hand, illustrates how Coombs endeavours to inform a policy issue by learning from other sectors and ascertaining policy

interdependencies. Why is this important? As per the earlier discussion, it is important for policy makers to draw on lessons from practices in other policy areas, while also being able to realise areas of interdependence. In addition, Coombs' mandate is aligned with bridging the gap between researchers and policy makers. Hence, leveraging from interdependent policy sectors becomes important here. These Coombs methodologies are thus important in framing policy issues, as they bring together researchers, stakeholders and government departments to address the same issues, but with a broader lens.

## **6.4 Think Tank or More: Systems Integrator?**

As has been discussed in earlier chapters, policy networks encompass key principles about the formation of the network, member interactions and trust building, resource sharing or dependency, ideas and interest mediations, power dynamic and governance arrangements. This study focuses on issue networks and policy communities. Coombs plays a key role in the creation of policy networks that include policy makers, researchers, stakeholders, interest groups and community representatives. One way in which it does so is via a thematic priorities framework, designed in collaboration with policy makers and researchers, and with advice from the ANIPP Advisory Board. This provides guidance in ascertaining which policy areas might require research deliberations as opposed to stakeholder interactions or sometimes both.

In this vein, Matthews (2011) outlines a vision for the creation of a new and unique sector that builds on a policy network model, rather than a think tank advocacy model. Think tanks, like non-governmental organisations, compete for government funding and

sponsorship, which is a marketplace in which there is no incentive to collaborate.

Matthews emphasises:

Coombs can play a role... as a systems and knowledge integrator that can link in with think tanks as well. That's the new innovative market niche, a new sector that sits between government and civil society. We manage the interaction and integration process to reduce the risk of non-delivery... it's a supply chain management approach in policy... In this way researchers do not need to develop policy skills; we bring that to the network. We can substitute for the strengths and weaknesses of the actors within the system. That's our value proposition.

Harris (2011) reaffirms this view, acknowledging that Coombs' aim is not to be a subject matter expert, but to operate as generalists, who at the very least, connect the dots by linking relevant academic work with the policy challenges of government. This could entail a one-on-one relationship between the two bodies, or a one-to-many relationship between government, researchers and other stakeholders in the policy context. This novel approach brings to bear policy interdependencies from other sectors that are relevant to the policy challenge at hand. From a government perspective, Thompson (2011) also identifies a role for institutions like Coombs in mediating research-policy relationships. He notes that the relationship between policy makers and researchers can be direct, if the relationship is well established and appropriately organised. These are relationships that are few and far between. Where such networks do not exist, it can become the responsibility of institutions like Coombs to narrow the divide by bringing together these disconnected policy actors. In research-policy relationships specifically, Thompson acknowledges the value in bringing researchers to participate within a policy network, as they are well placed to analyse issues that are not immediate, but long term in nature. He argues:

Researchers are in a much better place to look at horizon scanning issues. Public servants do not have the opportunity to do this in a consistent manner. They have to do this in dot points to a minister over an hour's meeting... Researchers understand how to analyse policy positions and draw



consensus and that's where institutions like Coombs can help... A policy forum can run through a make-believe government policy process. If it comes up with a good policy solution governments can choose to implement it. That's their role—to trial something in a safe place and realise opportunities. If it does not work, you at least have a group of people who understand the complexity of the policy problem.

Thus, mapping the University's research expertise with national policy issues, Coombs has identified many research policy intersections. One policy theme identified by Coombs is the need for new governance and community engagement models to manage complex, long-term sustainability challenges in the environment and climate change context (Thematic Priorities HC Coombs Policy Forum 2011). Let us look at this case in some detail.

## **6.5 Natural Resource Management (NRM) Initiative**

At the request of the Australian Government, Coombs, in partnership with the Fenner School of Environment and Society (Fenner), supported the six-month initiative on integrated NRM and regional policy and planning. The two policy departments collaborating in this initiative were the Departments of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC), and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). The principal aim of this initiative was to provide one source of information to inform the *Caring for our Country* (CfoC) policy review process, which was being jointly undertaken by the departments. The intent of CfoC, a \$2b initiative over five years which commenced in 2008, is to create an 'environment that is healthy, better protected, well-managed, resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.'

In order to achieve this outcome, the government established national priority areas against which it made funding available for activities to be implemented to achieve the shorter-term (five-year) and longer-term (20-year) outcomes. The purpose of this policy review was: to assess the progress, efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of current policy settings and to examine future policy options. This was set against six discussion themes: national priority setting; investing against these priorities; community engagement; engaging indigenous Australians; working effectively with state, territory and local governments; and regional base funding. It was against this backdrop that the NRM initiative between DAFF, SEWPAC, Coombs and Fenner was established.

#### *Establishing the Tripartite Relationship: the Role for Coombs*

Before we delve into the detail of the NRM initiative, it is pertinent to discuss the initial interactions between the departments, Coombs and Fenner in the establishment of this initiative. First and foremost, scholarly research has shown that, in a research–policy relationship, there is often a challenge in aligning the policy problem and research question. In interviews with representatives from the departments and Fenner, it was clear that there was a long-established and mature relationship between the two organisations. This institutional relationship was further strengthened by individual relationships that fostered a closer research–policy relationship. Here, Thompson (2011) argues that the ‘research informing policy’ element is built into the fabric of the institutional relationship. The relationship between Fenner, DAFF and SEWPAC had thus been institutionalised. It is not always amicable, as he says, and the institutions learn most from instances in which they agree to disagree with each other. This existing relationship was the foundation of the establishment of the NRM initiative and helped circumvent the issue of aligning the policy problem and the research question.

On the issue of aligning research with the policy timing, Professor Stephen Dovers (2011) notes:

What is this month's policy priority is not do-able in the time and is often not a research problem. Creating a forward agenda, like the *Caring for our Country* review, has a near-term focus but it also provides a future platform for an ongoing relationship.

McConchie (2011), from SEWPAC, notes that in past researcher engagements no particular challenges were encountered, except in that researchers took their time to explore and study issues in great detail. Sometimes it becomes important, as McConchie says, for researchers to deviate from a linear path and explore other tangential issues that might relate to the problem. This constrains researchers to work within set timeframes that is often not an acceptable position for policy makers. This is one reason why the timeline issue between researchers and policy makers is a cause for concern and debate. In the context of the NRM initiative, one government official said:

The timing is fixed and I cannot deviate from it. I have to meet expectations set around the policy review. The challenge being informed by a research group is that they don't have to work within this limitation. As a group they might want to work within this constraint, but it's not required. I would like for the research to inform the work, but it's not necessary.

It was evident from these interviews that the outcomes of the NRM initiative would form one part of the 'arsenal guiding the recommendations to Minister of the future of the CfoC program and (...) eventually form part of government consideration,' while in addition helping to set a longer-term NRM agenda.

### *Coombs' Role*

The role of Coombs in establishing this relationship was critical. Coombs was a catalyst that leveraged its resources to create a wider research–policy network for engagement in the NRM initiative. Coombs brought critical elements to this relationship. It had a mandate and endorsement from the highest relevant levels of government, i.e., Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) and the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR), which provided the imprimatur to further relationships between research and policy makers. Coombs, having received core funding from the Australian Government to progress such network initiatives, was, as suggested by one interviewee, like a ‘prepaid service on tap’ which was responsive, flexible and innovative. This also meant that government departments wishing to leverage the research–policy network relationship with the ANU did not have to undertake a separate budget allocation or procurement exercise to secure such a service. With Coombs’ establishment, it was easier for government departments to engage researchers in a policy debate and vice versa (Dovers 2011). On the other hand, for researchers, this meant gaining access to applied research funding and engagement with policy makers, both of which would have an immediate impact.

So, why didn’t governments choose to do this themselves? As per Thompson’s comments outlined earlier, McConchie (2011) also identified the constraints on public officials, emphasising the many policy complexities. The manner in which governments function today involves consulting broadly with stakeholders, knowing that the time and resources to invest heavily in literature research, stakeholder engagement and other related activities may not always eventuate. Engaging and interacting with people who have other expertise and experiences, particularly in different markets and sectors, is interesting but time-consuming. Collaborating and bringing evidence to bear from past

research, with structure and information that provides a view on hindsight and expertise that government is not aware of due to its technicality, are highly valued. Nevertheless, one government official involved with the review process identified areas in which government will continue to endeavour in policy deliberations:

Apart from this [Coombs] element, we will endeavour to consult with our stakeholders, including environment groups, state and local government, our own internal people that have corporate knowledge and expertise, NRM organisations which are regional based who deliver programs on ground, indigenous stakeholders and others. We are also undertaking to develop a series of issues papers... on specific issues that have been established through our stakeholder engagement process.

Coombs is also expected to play a role as a neutral stakeholder, providing objectivity and an independent perspective to the network and policy challenge at hand. Because Coombs does not have a predetermined policy and research motive, in choosing to engage with it, government departments or researchers did not perceive it as a threat. Coombs was thus treated as an asset to this relationship. Coombs' engagement with a range of government departments on different policy initiatives helped bring new ways of thinking to the NRM initiative. If such benefits and value-added service were not going to be present, Coombs' facilitation and involvement in such an initiative would have been 'overkill' (Clayton 2011). Thus, Coombs had to play a role as an independent stakeholder and facilitator who brought in representatives from other government departments and stakeholders to participate in the NRM initiative.

## *NRM Initiative Focus*

The primary aim of the NRM initiative was to provide input to the CfoC review. Its secondary aim<sup>1</sup> was to strengthen the linkage between the policy challenges of NRM and national and international research evidence that could inform future policy direction. The initiative was thus tasked with examining issues relating to:

1. The role of the Australian Government in achieving NRM outcomes through a regional delivery model [*policy issue*]
2. Learning from other areas of policy success, the integration of NRM policy and programs across different levels of government (federal/state/local) [*policy interdependency, multi-level governance and policy learning*]
3. Partnerships at the regional level to strengthen overall community capacity [*stakeholder relationships and community engagement*]

As identified earlier, these issues require further consideration. The central policy issue is an obvious starting point for any research–policy reflection, and the NRM initiative is no different. In addition, it is important to note that the issues of policy interdependency, multi-level governance challenges, policy learning and stakeholder and community engagement also emerged as being important for government in its effort to reflect on policy development. This is useful and valuable information that adds a new dimension of understanding about the issues which play a vital role in the way governments think of policy issues.

It is also helpful to note that the Australian Government was keen to understand better its role in the NRM context for a few reasons. At the highest level, the Australian

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<sup>1</sup> Project Overview: Joint initiative on integrated Natural Resource Management and regional policy and planning. [http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/coombs/research/nrm/NRM\\_project\\_overview.pdf](http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/coombs/research/nrm/NRM_project_overview.pdf), viewed on 10 June 2011.

Government sets the priorities for the NRM sector, against which it makes funding available to State Governments and Regional NRM bodies. States have their own policies and programs in place that inform some of the local level strategies. In such a context of multi-level governance, it is important that there is adequate alignment between all these three levels to ensure land owners and relevant stakeholders are not caught at cross purposes working on NRM matters.

Of course, this is not a challenge only in the NRM sector. In Australia, this challenge is seen even in sectors like health, which is why there was a keen interest in this initiative offering some discussion on best practices from other sectors. From this, it is clear that the intention to develop sound policy on NRM was a priority focus. The three objectives set for this project primarily address the policy issue of immediate concern, but an effort is also made to learn from other policy sectors. The effort to consider stakeholder and community engagement aspects is also vital to any policy process, as this is where the success of a policy or program will be determined. In order to achieve the NRM initiative objectives, Coombs brought together a group of stakeholders, internal and external to the sector, including academics, policy makers and other individuals, to discuss policy interdependencies and derive lessons from other policy sectors. Other key mechanisms that Coombs put in place to facilitate this relationship were:

1. Bringing together a project reference group that involved individuals from a range of government departments, regional communities and researchers [*policy community network creation*]
2. Commissioning a literature review that summarised the available national and international literature on NRM and details of government policy and programs [*building evidence through translational research*]

3. Facilitating a workshop with a broad range of stakeholders to discuss elements emerging from the literature review [*network facilitation*]
4. Providing input into the *Caring for our Country* policy review process [*informing policy*]
5. Publication and dissemination of the final report [*informing public discussion*]

It is clear that a model exists with this five-step process. This indicates how Coombs aims to inform the policy process, mainly through:

- Creating a policy community around the policy issue
- Building evidence through research and engagement
- Facilitating network interactions to reflect on the evidence
- Informing policy
- Influencing public discourse

Let us consider each of these elements individually, establishing the underpinnings of the model.

1. Creating a policy community from across sectors. This was important for many reasons. In particular, there was a need to bring SEWPaC, DAFF and Fenner together to understand, rationalise and agree on the scope of the policy issue, and to discuss avenues by which research could inform the policy challenges and also the longer-term policy landscape. Relationships between these specific departments and Fenner have been long established, and for Coombs to merely facilitate this bilateral relationship would not have been of any value. It was hence important to understand the role Coombs could play in bringing together stakeholders from across government to participate in this initiative. Two factors



were vital here. First, it was crucial that Coombs had endorsement from the Australian Government and also the commitment that the NRM initiative would derive lessons from best practices in other policy areas such as health. In order to ensure participation from across government, Coombs also invited representation from the newly-formed Department of Regional Australia. Coombs thus had an important role to play in bringing together this network of stakeholders. It is important to note that this network was not lead by government or Coombs. Fenner, the academic partner in the initiative, chaired the network. This supports the view that network independence was important. Hence, government did not impose a hierarchical governance model on the network. McConchie (2011) stated at the meeting: ‘We like the idea of having some distance. Researchers do not need to be captured by the government’s position.’ This suggests two things. First, objectivity within the network was encouraged, and was not tainted by either a preconceived or predetermined policy position. Second, the governance framework adopted by the network was collaborative and less hierarchical. This also ensured participation, and that the power dynamics were not skewed to any one particular stakeholder group—government, academia or stakeholder.

2. Building evidence through translational research and engagement is a key element of the work of Coombs. Coombs’ objective in undertaking translational research is the creation of ‘relevant, innovative and workable public policy.’ Our earlier discussion on the mapping of the research and policy intersection process details this aspect of Coombs’ work. Literature reviews are a key element of Coombs’ methodology in fostering research–policy relationships. This was evident in Matthews’ opening remarks at the reference group meeting: ‘Evidence-based

policy is taken seriously by government and is built upon a significant literature review assessing what the research evidence suggests.’

Coombs commissioning of the literature review helped the NRM initiative in a number of ways. It provided a structured discussion of the diverse NRM practices identified in the literature. It also discussed NRM policy and program evaluations previously undertaken. This assisted in providing a theoretical underpinning to the initiative that was built upon real-world policy learning. Many themes were suggested by the departments for consideration, and they were further refined to three key themes, identified by members of the network. The value of the literature review is also evident in the discussion paper<sup>2</sup> prepared by Coombs outlining the role it played in each phase of the initiative. The literature review was used to inform discussion amongst the network members which formed one source of input to the CfoC review.

3. Network facilitation. It is not enough to merely bring stakeholders together. If research and stakeholder views are to find a way into policy, one also needs to manage them and facilitate interactions. Coombs played a vital role here, not only in setting up the Reference Group, which provided the imprimatur to its work, but also in bringing together a wider stakeholder group from within and outside the NRM sector to facilitate discussion and interaction. Coombs hosted the first meeting<sup>3</sup> of the network at its premises. The meeting discussed many issues, including the themes that would be pursued within the literature review phase, the broad structure of the initiative, how the network would play a role in informing

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<sup>2</sup> Joint initiative on integrated regional NRM policy and planning: Literature review discussion document for Reference Group. [http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/coombs/research/nrm/NRM\\_discussion\\_paper.pdf](http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/coombs/research/nrm/NRM_discussion_paper.pdf), viewed on 10 June 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Joint initiative on integrated regional NRM policy and planning: First reference group meeting, 25 February 2011. [http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/coombs/research/nrm/NRM\\_minutes.pdf](http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/coombs/research/nrm/NRM_minutes.pdf), viewed on 10 June 2011.

the CfoC review process, and the longer-term objective that was to be achieved through the initiative. It was decided that the literature review phase would serve three purposes: to take into account the CfoC policy review process in order to capture the evolution of the NRM landscape; to take into account changes that could inform future policy challenges; and to learn lessons from other policy sectors that would inform new changes for NRM delivery.

In addition to the high-level reference group, a wide range of stakeholders was brought together for a two-day workshop. Participants involved in this workshop were from different levels of government, academia, industry and environmental and indigenous organisations. It is useful to note that the network also encompassed participation from New Zealand, which provided international context and perspective on best practices in other countries.

The objectives<sup>4</sup> of this workshop were: to reflect on the literature review; to enhance engagement between different groups in the NRM sector, while reflecting on existing practices; to consider current and future challenges in the NRM and regional planning sectors; to consider cross-sectoral integration issues; and, most importantly, to inform the action of the Australian Government in this context. It is worth noting that the format of the workshop involved a context-setting presentation by representatives of the government, followed by group-based interactions on themes relating to roles and responsibilities, policy and planning processes, partnerships, collaboration and coordination, and capacity issues and community engagement.

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<sup>4</sup> Workshop: Integrated Natural Resource Management and regional policy and planning. [http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/coombs/research/nrm/NRM\\_workshop\\_overview.pdf](http://publicpolicy.anu.edu.au/coombs/research/nrm/NRM_workshop_overview.pdf), viewed on 10 June 2011.

This larger group of participants can be considered as a second layer of the network, put in place to meet a multitude of purposes. The most important of these was the need to inform the high-level reference group. While the reference group network created the imprimatur for a tiered structure, it also helped ensure that a broader stakeholder network considered the research evidence. This also provided an avenue for the community voice to inform some of the policy direction. Government representation in the second-level interaction was not hierarchical or top-down. However, it did set the context and terms of reference for participation. This suggests two things. First, government was keen to engage and ensure the interactions were valued in setting the direction of any future policy context. Second, in order to achieve this outcome, government was comfortable in ceding control to the group in promoting open debate and discussion.

A number of issues emerged from the network interactions inside and outside the reference group meeting, including: multilevel governance; complexity; adaptive governance; poor transfer of practical information; longer-term planning principles; the Commonwealth's role in NRM partnerships; developing leadership; and the need for a NRM evaluation and monitoring strategy.

The international participation within this network is also worthy of comment. Given this level of engagement, was the network, at least to a limited extent, a catalyst for some level of international policy transfer?<sup>5</sup> Of course, this would depend on how much of the future Australian NRM policy context is

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<sup>5</sup> '[T]he process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and ideas in another political system' (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000:5).

determined by practices across the Tasman, or for that matter by practices from any other country. This is not the focus of this case study, but is worthy of future research.

4. Informing policy. Network creation and facilitation do not serve a purpose in themselves. All these activities do is help break down the silos between government and the outside world of researchers and community and stakeholder groups. The interactions that take place between the network members are important to capture, as they do bring research evidence and real life experiences to bear on policy issues. In this instance, the two-day interactions between network members allowed reflection on elements emerging from the literature review and also consideration of issues that were longer-term in nature. A documented version of the workshop outcomes was provided to the departments for consideration and possible input into policy.

At present, it is too early to assess whether any of these outcomes will have a direct influence on the policy. However, it is clear that the network has had an influence on the policy thinking of policy makers and bureaucrats more generally through the policy makers' participation in the network interactions, their commentary, reports and papers that were developed through the process. Therefore, at the very minimum, such engagement and network interactions have played a role in informing policy makers. The active participation of policy makers at the workshop helped bring to the fore many policy issues which the government considered a priority. This subsequently helped achieve a level of alignment between the policy needs and research direction. It is also important to note that the continuous

involvement of the policy makers in the process helped network members develop a consistent conceptualisation of the policy problem and the complexities associated with it. In acknowledging such complexities, Harris (2011) outlines the value of Coombs:

Coombs provides the link for lessons learned from the NRM and other policy initiatives for government to leverage... Fenner will collate a report that feeds into the policy process, which Coombs will develop further to highlight broader policy outcomes in terms of multi-level governance, the role of different levels of government in regional and local policy and other policy elements. That's the aim—absolutely meet the needs of government for NRM policy and at the same time report on the other policy learnings.

5. Informing public debate. The culmination of this process resulted in the dissemination of the findings and outcomes that emerged from the initiative. The fact that the network was much broader than policy makers and researchers, including stakeholders from the NRM sector, provided a level of credibility, even at the grass-roots level with members of the NRM community. This helped avoid stakeholder criticisms of the initiative as not reflecting real world experiences, and thus viewing it as either a policy or a research exercise with no practical application. When asked about the 'success' of this particular initiative, Dovers (2011) responded:

To know that the network found the engagement useful and if the discussion paper that developed was a cogent piece of work that informs future direction and agenda setting. If it enlightens the debate in future around the key challenges... and help subsequent governments to utilise this material, then it would indicate success.

Coombs exhibited a good understanding of the broader policy context, while appreciating the constraints on bureaucrats in terms of timing and political sensitivities, and also acknowledging the limitations on academic researchers. In

this way, Coombs was able rapidly to develop trust with individuals from government and Fenner. In the interactions, Coombs was able to participate in the conversation where needed and refrain from discussion when NRM technicalities were being raised. This suggests that participants understood their own roles within the network and that they appreciated the value of other members. The government departments expressed interest in showcasing the NRM initiative research–policy engagement effort. This suggests that government considered the researchers and the network of participants to be valuable and credible, thus valuing engagement within, and among, the network members. Ongoing communication was critical between the participants to leverage as much utility and expertise as possible from the network.

As for the issue of resource dependency among the members of the network, Coombs provided the financial and physical resources; Fenner brought the technical and knowledge base; government brought the mandate and authority, and the community representatives brought their experience and information. Fenner’s aim was to influence the policy review process. Of course, its participation also helped secure the goodwill and trust of the Commonwealth Government to help foster future opportunities to pursue new research. Government representation provided the network with authority, legitimacy and the imprimatur for the work to be carried out, focusing on policy relevance. Representatives from the government departments many times explicitly acknowledged the value of academic research in informing policy work undertaken in the sector and in identifying future policy issues. Stakeholders who were invited to participate in the workshop brought expertise from having implemented NRM projects on the ground, thus providing valuable insights to the policy context. Other representatives who participated in the

workshop and were members of the network also brought expertise that was valuable for the functioning of the network. These elements may not have been tangible, but were very important. For example, representation from the Department of Regional Australia provided objectivity and validation to some of the network interactions. This applied a different lens to the NRM initiative, but one that was important from a policy interdependency point of view.

## **6.6 Other initiatives: *Future Forum***

In line with Coombs' mandate to consider longer-term policy issues and to inform public debate, Coombs, in collaboration with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), developed Future Forum,<sup>6</sup> a televised series of panel discussions with an audience drawn from the community. It is envisioned that the Future Forums will discuss Australia's future state and emerging policy issues. The first program aired on 3 August 2011 and focused on the issue of the rise of Asia and the concomitant impact on Australia's future. Some of the topics discussed in this panel session related to education, cultural exchange, security and trade. The panel comprised of eight members: four senior academic researchers from the ANU; a Deputy Vice-Chancellor from Charles Darwin University; and three people drawn from business and media. The ABC anchor Ali Moore facilitated the session. The second program was aired on the topic of 'Who wins and who loses in a global green economy?' Clearly, this activity of Coombs' directly relates to its mission of citizen-inclusive engagement that subsequently informs public debate and discussion on policy matters. Consolidating the viewpoints and comments that emerge from such discussions and from community

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<sup>6</sup> ABC. Future Forum. Available at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/abcnews24/programs/future-forum/>, accessed on 4 September 2011.



involvement can help inform relevant projects, inquiries or initiatives with which the government is involved.

## **6.7 Discussion and Analysis**

What can be gleaned from the Coombs model and the NRM initiative? It is clear that the policy network operated in an innovative manner, allowing consideration of interdisciplinary policy issues, policy lessons from other sectors and international practice. There was a sense of risk acceptance by the policy makers, acknowledging that the network engagement might, or might not, produce outputs that would inform the policy process. Given the nature of the policy issue that was being discussed, i.e., a federal-level policy that also had state, regional and local-level impacts, an appreciation of the policy complexities was evident. Network participants embraced the need to focus on longer-term policy issues, rather than take a short-term and myopic view. There was no culture of secrecy or dismissiveness amongst the network participants. The network operated collaboratively, with network members having a clear understanding of their roles in the process. This resulted in the absence of leadership or power struggles.

In addition, government did not impose a hierarchical governance approach or a predetermined model of how the network should function. What it did provide to the network was guidance as to what was expected from the network participation. This relates to the metagovernance aspect discussed in earlier chapters, i.e., the governance of societal stakeholders as opposed to the society directly. Researchers in the process acknowledged the constraints within which the bureaucracy functioned, and hence understood that these would play an important role in the review process. Researchers were thus keen to work within the requisite timelines and requirements of the policy

makers. This demonstrated the flexible nature of the researchers who were engaged in the process. Interestingly, the bureaucrats were at times critical of the shortcomings stemming from operating within government, particularly the pressure of operating under short timeframes and the challenge of being overly process-driven.

While there was goodwill between the network participants, there were some critical issues that require discussion. Some members of the network mainly focused on the policy review, rather than on helping the network identify emerging and longer-term policy issues resulting from the deficiencies within the current policy setting. The level of commitment to the process, as opposed to the issue, seemed to be relatively low. This could have been because the formation of a new network, tasked with delivering on outputs within a short period of time, did not allow enough time for trust and rapport to be built amongst the network members. In addition, it is unclear as to how network communication was facilitated after the workshop session and to what extent the network members were involved in informing the work of the high-level reference group. These aspects could be revisited and tested in future network interactions that Coombs facilitates.

Despite the success of Coombs in creating, facilitating and managing a network of policy makers and researchers in the NRM initiative, there are some wider issues that pose limitations to its approach. From an institutional-wide perspective, the ability of Coombs to leverage the expertise of many public policy scholars across the University is limited. Given the distinct spread of public policy experts across the University's system and the pressure on Coombs to leverage experts from within its own School can

result in less than optimum results in brokering the most optimum research-policy relationships.

Coombs' positioning within a University brings significant research expertise to bear on policy considerations. However, at the same time, it is also constrained in its engagement beyond the boundaries of the University. Engaging with policy stakeholders outside academia, such as industry, businesses, media and non-governmental organisations, tends to be very limited and frowned upon by various academic units across the University. This hinders Coombs' ability to position itself effectively as a system or network integrating policy unit.

From a human capital perspective, the ability of Coombs to attract, retain and train young, early-mid career researchers in areas of policy interest to government has also been limited. There is a strong academic tradition of teaching and academic research within the University, and the need to adhere to an academic incentive system characterised by tenure based on research output, as opposed to impact outcomes. This can restrict Coombs in its ability to be flexible, responsive and agile if it continues to focus its engagement solely on University single discipline-based researchers. Coombs will thus benefit from attracting early to mid-career applied researchers who can permeate organisational boundaries, developing policy and research skills of value to government and academia. Coombs has to appropriately leverage the 'push and pull' factor to engage with various government departments and policy makers.

This demonstrated weakness in Coombs' human capital approach could negatively impact on its ability to sustain research-policy networks beyond specific partnership

engagements. Furthermore, this could also have a negative impact on Coombs' success in terms of institutionalisation of its research-policy partnership based model. The adoption of a demand-driven approach, i.e. responding to government policy needs, without building its own internal policy capability, especially in the light of a University culture of limited-external engagement, can become a future cause for concern.

Exacerbating these deficiencies, Coombs' resource base is limited. This prevented it from dedicating additional human resources to the initiative in order to develop the issue-relevant expertise. This will prohibit Coombs from taking a more proactive and engaged approach, which could result in a perception that Coombs is no more than a facilitator. Coombs needs to create its 'value proposition' as a systems integrator that will help sustain longer-term relationships between policy makers and researchers. This can be achieved through internal capacity building and creating a robust network of government policy makers and researchers who function beyond specific research-policy initiatives. The benefit of such an approach is that Coombs will avoid being compartmentalised into having expertise in specific policy sectors that could narrow its policy reach with the government. To overcome the culture of non-engagement and the inward-looking nature of some areas of government, Coombs needs to adopt a strategy that fosters interactions with policy makers 'in their own backyard,' and then attract them to engage in external collaborative activities. Confidence, trust and willingness to engage will emerge only over a prolonged period of time. It is important for policy makers and other bureaucrats to engage knowing that interactions will be accepted as a way of doing business in the government, thus reforming the way within which bureaucracies function. This will subsequently enhance the policy effort of government departments and institutionalise research-policy networks.

Coombs also has the equally arduous task of adopting a similar strategy with academics and researchers within the University. In time, this researcher interaction and engagement will need to extend beyond the ANU, to bring in expertise from across the country and internationally where required. Researchers have to recognise the value and benefit which research–policy network engagement brings, and which goes beyond the usual challenge of generating academic publications. This is a tertiary sector-wide issue, with incentives for academics and researchers geared towards producing research output, rather than civic engagement. A culture of external engagement must be created within such institutes of higher learning. Knowledge development has to be followed by knowledge dissemination and capitalisation.

The divide that exists between ‘knowledge producers’ and ‘knowledge users’ has to be broken down, which is where ‘knowledge agents,’ such as Coombs, play a vital role. Such engagements are valuable, especially where resources are scarce, and resource-sharing helps partners achieve more with existing resources. An ongoing mode of interaction and communication must be created for policy makers, researchers and other policy entrepreneurs, that, at the very minimum, includes, but is not limited to, policy meetings, seminars and closed policy workshops. Frank and fearless conversations are needed for new ideas to emerge and take shape. This behaviour needs to be encouraged and modelled across all levels of government.

It can be said that Coombs’ horizon-scanning effort in a research–policy network engagement context is overly dependent on the technical expertise of researchers. For instance, in the NRM initiative, it would have been challenging for Coombs to lead the horizon-scanning effort without Fenner’s participation. Nevertheless, Coombs did play

an important facilitation role, bringing in stakeholders and other government departments who could challenge the status quo, albeit from a different perspective. There is a need to incorporate technical experts from beyond the academic and policy community who can systematically pursue activities that relate to understanding strategic futures and in developing future scenarios against which current policy frameworks can be tested.

Over time, through its growing range of research–policy networks, Coombs must be able to develop a horizon-scanning and foresight framework that will underpin new research–policy relationships. What this also suggests is that Coombs operates at the macro-level of policy development, rather than being limited to the technicalities of any policy sector. This poses some future risks for Coombs in being able to successfully integrate the research–policy ecosystem. As was noted, the Fenner-DAFF-SEWPac network relationship was already institutionalised and mature. There would have been significant challenges for Coombs to create, build and sustain this research–policy network beyond the NRM initiative. This requires Coombs to develop a strategy and establish its value proposition as being more than a systems integrator. This will help ensure the sustainability of some of these networks. Undoubtedly, as concerns the NRM relationship, Coombs helped establish the network, provided the network with resources and enabled participation from stakeholders within and outside the network. Effectively, what Coombs was aiming to do was morph and transform the ‘policy issue network’ into a ‘policy community,’ a policy network that survives and functions beyond a specific engagement. Despite the involvement and participation of policy makers in a research–policy relationship, how can entities such as Coombs ensure and know that its network and system integration effort is making a difference? Coombs will benefit from the establishment of a tiered level of impact and influence indicators

that emerge from such policy network interactions and engagement. Is the creation of a sustained environment for interactions a good enough measure of the effectiveness of the work of Coombs? Is this an appropriate measure for Coombs' system-integration role? How does Coombs identify the institutionalisation of such research-policy networks? These are issues that Coombs will need to further consider.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

This chapter clearly demonstrates the immense value in a think tank being positioned on the cusp of research and policy. Undertaking translational research activity, working in partnership with government policy makers, mediating and integrating interest groups and policy actors in the policy process are all important responsibilities for such a think tank. The NRM initiative provides an empirical basis for this study in terms of ascertaining the role a think tank can play in creating, facilitating and integrating a network of stakeholders that moves beyond just the academic and policy community. For the purposes of this research, this case study clearly showcases the enormous value of adopting a policy community approach between researchers and policy makers, and the transformed role for a think tank as a system integrating and knowledge-brokerage institutional structure that can help bridge the research-policy divide. As outlined in the preface, my involvement with Coombs has been useful in better understanding the remit of the organisations and its interactions with academic researchers and policy makers. While this has added to my research reflections, materially it has made no change to this research project.

# **Chapter 7: Demystifying the Research–Policy Network with a *Policy Hub***

## **7.1 Introduction**

In an attempt to answer the research questions posed in this thesis, this chapter focuses principally on the discussion and analysis of the research findings from the two case studies. In doing so, this chapter first outlines key empirical findings from the case studies, and then makes an attempt to reconstruct aspects of the conceptual frameworks with the intent of adding to the existing literature on research utilisation in policy making, policy networks and governance. A new conceptual framework or model is constructed, called Research-Inform-Interact-Integrate-Policy or ‘researchINpolicy’ (rINp) (see Figure 7.1). The key elements emerging from the case studies that assisted research in becoming part of the policy process relate to the provision of information, to sustained interaction and communication between researchers and policy makers, and to explicit integration of research and researchers in the process.

In addition, this research also finds value in having a network-integrating structure or what can be called a ‘policy hub’ to link researchers and policy makers. In such a context, the role a think tank can play as a policy hub is vital. These elements are discussed in further detail later in the chapter. Finally, what is also valuable and this research makes a contribution in this aspect – is the need for a policy community to underpin both the models.



It is critical to note that the creation of a three-tiered mechanism is what this research constitutes as the ‘influence’ or ‘impact’ measure of research in policy. In addition to discussing this model, what has also emerged from the Coombs study is the need for a system or a network integrating institutional structure. This is required not only to bring researchers and policy makers closer, but also to integrate other policy actors or non-state actors in the policy process. A network integrating ‘policy hub’ or a reformed think tank is what is proposed here. This chapter concludes by outlining the new research directions that emerge from this study.

## **7.2 The Findings: What Does This Research Say?**

As outlined in the case studies, the establishment of both SPRC and Coombs were Australian Government initiatives. This indicates a willingness and commitment on the part of government to include research and researchers within policy processes. In the case of SPRC, government’s aim was to develop social policy as a discipline within which it could seek the help of research experts to develop, implement and evaluate policy. In the case of Coombs, government was clear in its thinking about enhancing its strategic policy capability by engaging researchers from various disciplines, which is why it created an institutional structure that would not only broker such research–policy relationships but also explore new policy horizons. In both cases, the institutional relationship between government and academia, and the strength of collaboration was a direct result of government’s involvement in creating these institutions. Hence, government saw both institutions as key organisations in the policy landscape.

In the case of SPRC, the decision by government to decentralise investment across multiple institutions created an environment of competition for resources, attention,

information and access to policy makers. As a result, conflicting ideas and agendas began to play a role in determining how research priorities would be organised in alignment with policy needs. Such decentralisation, over a period of time, forced institutional relationships with government to morph into relationships that were predicated on individual relationships. This depended on how proactive researchers were in engaging with policy makers and bureaucrats; or if they had any prior engagement with government. This led government into taking centre stage in commanding attention from academic researchers, and it was thus able to put in practice a hierarchical ‘top-down’ mode of governing—not only as regards the policy issues but also the relevant institution.

This ‘divide and rule’ phenomenon resulted in policy making becoming a closely-guarded domain of government and the public service, who chose when to engage with which institution and on which policy matters. This exacerbated the research–policy divide, which resulted in research and researchers continuing to pursue activity that was mostly characterised by self-interest and institutional mission, rather than an interest relating to a specific policy problem. This diluted the amount of policy relevant research being pursued by the SPRC. This silo approach was accentuated even further with breakdowns in what were previously open, regular and ongoing communications between researchers and policy makers. From then on, researchers and policy makers, in collaborating on specific policy matters, adopted a case-by-case model of engagement.

### 7.3 Research-Inform/Interact/Integrate-Policy (rINp) Model

Of course, the research–policy divide is still appreciable. The institutional focus on the SPRC and Coombs in this research establishes this. The focus here has been on how to alleviate the research–policy problem; in essence, on the process. On the basis of what has been discussed within the two case studies, it will be helpful to bring these elements together with a discussion of the type of policy network that best fits such relationships. This will be done within a conceptual framework: what this research calls the Research-Inform/Interact/Integrate-Policy (rINp) model. The rINp model establishes a framework to better understand how research can be used on multiple levels within the policy process. At the outset, this study claims three levels of influence or impact of research on policy:

**Level 1: Inform** This level mainly incorporates the provision of information from researchers to policy makers or public servants in government. Given the underlying intent is for research to influence policy, this level of engagement is mostly unidirectional, incorporating a one-way mode of communication from researchers to policy makers. This can include academic papers provided to policy makers, conference presentations, media appearances and the like.

**Level 2: Interact** This level incorporates a two-way mode of communication between researchers and policy makers. The channels of interaction, through meetings, forums, partnership-based research–policy projects, provision of research services through contracts and other engagement can be considered part of this mode of influence. For a policy hub, which is discussed later in this chapter, such as a think tank, working within this level can also include the incorporation of non-state actors, such as non-

governmental organisations, community groups, business groups and other relevant stakeholders. Reflecting on the literature, the rINp model achieves policy influence through what Abelson (2007:578) sees as an interactive process allowing individuals and organisations to exchange ideas and provide information on research evidence.

What is evident in this level is the chance for researchers to provide information to policy makers and public servants through the process of interaction. Researchers can undertake to pursue translational research activity and in-depth literature reviews to help in the provision of information. Apart from the inclusion of researchers and policy makers interacting, this level can incorporate the membership of other stakeholders as well. It is at this level that a policy community network can be located, based on resource dependency, stronger and regular interactions between members of the community, access to policy makers and a higher level of interaction, leading to consensus. Level 2 has a much greater level of influence on the policy process.

**Level 3: Integrate** This tends to be the highest level at which research or researchers can influence policy. This level incorporates the manner, including explicit references, by which sustained patterns of interaction occur between researchers and policy makers. This level can incorporate Level 1 and 2 modes of engagement as well. In this level, provision of information forms the basic ingredient to achieve optimum levels of integration. This is then combined with interaction mechanisms, by which researchers are actively sought to advise and guide government policy makers on the best course for policy development or implementation. This level of integration can also take place in the policy evaluation stage of the process, wherein researchers are called upon to advise on the suitability of government policy and programs. For instance, this might involve

the nomination of researchers to government taskforces, inquiry committees and the like. In the case of SPRC, this level of policy influence was evident when the Centre was asked to evaluate government programs relating to the mental health issue, after which the Centre's effort was acknowledged through an award.

Thus, in any research–policy engagement process, the focus must be on the ‘inform’, ‘interact’ and ‘integrate’ components of the rINp model. However, this only constitutes one element of the policy process. In addition to research, governments also need to consider stakeholder engagement, e.g., the engagement of business groups, communities, interest groups and others who have a role to play in the policy process. This is covered by the ‘interact’ component of the rINp model. A network approach underpins this element, and this study establishes that both research and stakeholder engagements are important parts of the policy process. The earlier discussion of the literature indicated that policy influence can be achieved through three means: engagement with policy makers; control over resources; and control over outcomes. This conclusion is supported by the findings of the case studies and is also addressed through the different levels of policy influence discussed above.

To delve deeper into understanding the interactions and engagement pursued with policy makers, the rINp model discusses the extent to which a policy network approach can incorporate researchers from universities and individuals from think tanks as part of the policy process. This is directly targeted at the research questions of this study and aligns with Abelson's (2007:577) view that think tanks should play an important role in creating such a network—a ‘policy community.’ In order to create a workable policy network, it is important for the stakeholders in this space, i.e., universities and think

tanks, to establish a level of political credibility. This can be achieved by various means: sustained engagement channels with policy makers, an established level of interaction and collaboration with bureaucracies, providing critical and valued feedback to government on policy alternatives, media commentary and the like.

In addition, this must be built upon by ensuring certain conditions of network participation are met, including network participants being committed to working on the policy issue; the network being open and transparent; network participants remaining objective and receptive to research findings; and finally, the members committing themselves to the interaction process itself. This requires network members to be appreciative of the complexities that exist within the process more generally. Members of the policy community need to be resilient and adapt to change. Regular interactions and open communication need to be encouraged to ensure members achieve a common understanding of the policy problem and the manner in which the problem will be addressed. Members also need to have a clear understanding of their own role working within the policy community. Resources (funding, information access, control and authority) must be shared between network participants.

At the same time, they must ensure that their respective home institutions provide adequate support to the policy network, by, for example, leveraging university infrastructure to enable research to be carried out; leveraging business and other relevant networks to test and validate policy ideas; and gathering public opinion on new policy ideas. These are all important aspects that will require support and commitment. Participants within the policy community must also encourage entrepreneurship and innovation. To gain control over resources, power must be shared, and leadership must

be distributed among members of the network. As the focus of the policy community is on addressing policy problems, governments may have to take the lead in facilitating and organising such policy communities. The role of the university research centre and think tank within such a policy community must be clearly understood as being that of a knowledge producer and knowledge disseminator (broker/advocate) respectively.

To ensure effective functioning of the community, there also needs to be a clear understanding of the governance mechanisms. As Bell and Hindmoor (2009) emphasise, government can govern policy issues and its stakeholders through hierarchies, persuasion, markets, communities and association. This requires governments to have access to information, policy research expertise and advice. Understandably, the effective management of such policy communities cannot be the responsibility of any one institution. It must be a shared responsibility under the stewardship of government. There are challenges that involve the distribution of resources, the changing political landscape, changes in personnel and representation within the policy community, and other such issues.

The skills and attributes required by individuals participating in the policy community are also critical for the success of the network. These include the ability to navigate and permeate organisational boundaries; to establish a high level of credibility and trust with external stakeholders (not being limited to government, think tanks or universities); to deal with bureaucratic structures and large organisational processes; and to understand policy making process and research frameworks. Individuals must also be able to influence organisational champions to institutionalise such policy communities, as they have a long-lasting impression on management, and thus on the operations of

organisations. Individuals must also have the ability to understand and appreciate the challenges associated with knowledge development, its diffusion and subsequent capitalisation. This will assist the translation of research findings into policy relevant findings, and also identify new ideas and policy alternatives that can be advocated with government policy makers. Members of the policy community, through regular interaction, must establish acceptable working principles that help define the policy problem; a clear understanding of how research is to be used within the process; relevant resource requirements; the role of each participant and supporting institution; the outputs to be generated against an agreed timeline; and communication mechanisms.

In addition, there needs to be an awareness of any changes taking place in the political landscape, of changing socio-economic conditions and how these changes may influence the functions of such networks. Thus, the rINp model also requires the creation of an effective and mutually-agreed knowledge transfer mechanism. This has to be based on each member organisation understanding its role within the policy community; i.e., the university has the lead responsibility to undertake the research, while the think tank must play a critical role in creating effective two-way communication flows. Therefore, interpreting the policy problem to university researchers and translating the research findings to policy makers is vital.

The role of a think tank is important in brokering such relationships, and emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring clear communication and interpretation of messages between the university and government. In doing so, think tanks must create a neutral interaction space for university researchers and government policy makers. Government must play a leadership role in encouraging and supporting these interactions to ensure



better-informed policy development. In addition, the distribution of resources amongst participants is also an important issue that government must facilitate.

It is also crucial to recognise that policy makers are cautious about being perceived as having too close a relationship with researchers and advocates of particular policy positions. Such situations can emerge if government is deliberating on policy issues that are particularly politically sensitive, given government usually has to decide on trade-offs, choosing who wins and who loses from the policy process. In these instances, it is important for think tanks to facilitate the creation and management of an independent network that focuses on such policy issues. On occasion, governments can have a predetermined policy option, based on limited, if any, consideration of evidence. This is experienced in highly contentious political debates when competing advice is received on policy issues or when government is forced to make a quick decision on policy problems. Governments commit themselves to such positions, sometimes to court popularity, as a result of significant lobbying by interest groups, or for ideological reasons. This does not necessarily suggest that the policy solution identified by government is a non-workable or bad one. Think tanks and universities still have a role to play here by helping government identify policy and political risks while at the same time informing public debate of policy issues. Think tanks must be able to build a relationship with policy makers to candidly discuss the need to evaluate policy in a systematic manner, with the hope of identifying risk and strategies to manage such risk. The messages from think tanks and universities here must be clear and concise, focusing on ascertaining the policy value and its impact (negative or positive) on relevant communities.

Members of the policy community must draw upon policy scenarios and horizon-scanning activities to identify longer-term issues that may not have been part of

government's considerations. To operate within a networked structure with think tanks and university researchers offers policy makers the opportunity to leverage the expertise of these individuals in longer-term thinking and strategic analysis of policy issues. Governments on their own may not have the resources or the luxury of assessing the long-term impacts of a particular policy. This is where the network engagement with researchers can help establish new objectives. Such opportunities must be valued and individuals must ensure the creation of a long-term relationship extending beyond the focus of short-term policy problems.

There is undoubtedly an issue of resource availability and distribution that requires consideration and some discussion. Think tanks and universities generally lack funding that can be dedicated to extensive research of applied policy issues. However, it must be understood that in the same way universities and think tanks are financially constrained, government is also being increasingly stretched in terms of its human and analytical capacity to identify policy alternatives, implement and evaluate them. This is why governments are increasingly looking towards interacting with non-state actors on policy issues.

The effort required to create effective policy network relationships is significant, and so is the time taken in strengthening and sustaining such networks. Think tanks and universities must avoid focusing on short-term gains in return for a long-term relationship with government policy makers. As such, in the absence of government providing it, this calls for distributed leadership to be displayed by universities and think tanks. In this context, it is worth considering how universities, think tanks and governments leverage other non-state actors such as industry groups, businesses and

community groups to secure additional resources. While this adds to the constrained resource base, it also promotes and proactively engages in bringing in external stakeholders to take responsibility and commitment to the policy process.

In terms of the outputs that will influence a policy maker, lengthy books are not usually helpful. Government policy makers are most often time-poor, and hence tend to benefit from short, but information-rich, policy analyses, briefs and reports. Abelson (2007:569) shows how the Heritage Foundation provides brief reports to policy makers that receive attention from policy makers in a timely manner through feedback, discussions and other interactive mechanisms. In addition, these policy briefs need to be supplemented by other interaction mechanisms. For instance, seminars and forums that bring together government policy makers, academics, researchers and other stakeholders can provide the much-needed impetus for policy advice or new ideas to be discussed.

Depending on the sensitivity of the issue, think tanks must consider bringing academic researchers and policy makers together in a neutral setting to discuss the policy problem, the political landscape, the research findings, any new ideas that emerge, and possible public reaction to each of the new ideas, while also discussing the likely long-term impacts of the implementation of any of the new ideas. While these interactions and network engagement mechanisms are important, government has the final say in deciding on a policy solution to meet a diverse set of requirements, i.e., public opinion, political leaders' appetite for a particular policy solution and the like.

Hence, the rINp model should provide scholars with an understanding of the process. This can be put to use in determining how research and policy links can be effectively

constructed. The model also adds to the discussion of governance and policy networks by highlighting the importance of the process. In this context, the new knowledge added to this field by this study includes the elements of process governance and policy process networks. The manner or the process by which governments select, interact and engage with non-state actors such as universities and think tanks is a vital contribution of this study. At the same time, interactions and processes initiated by non-state actors to inform-interact-integrate with government policy makers is also important. Thus, the rINp model adds a new dimension to better understand the institutionalising of network structures.

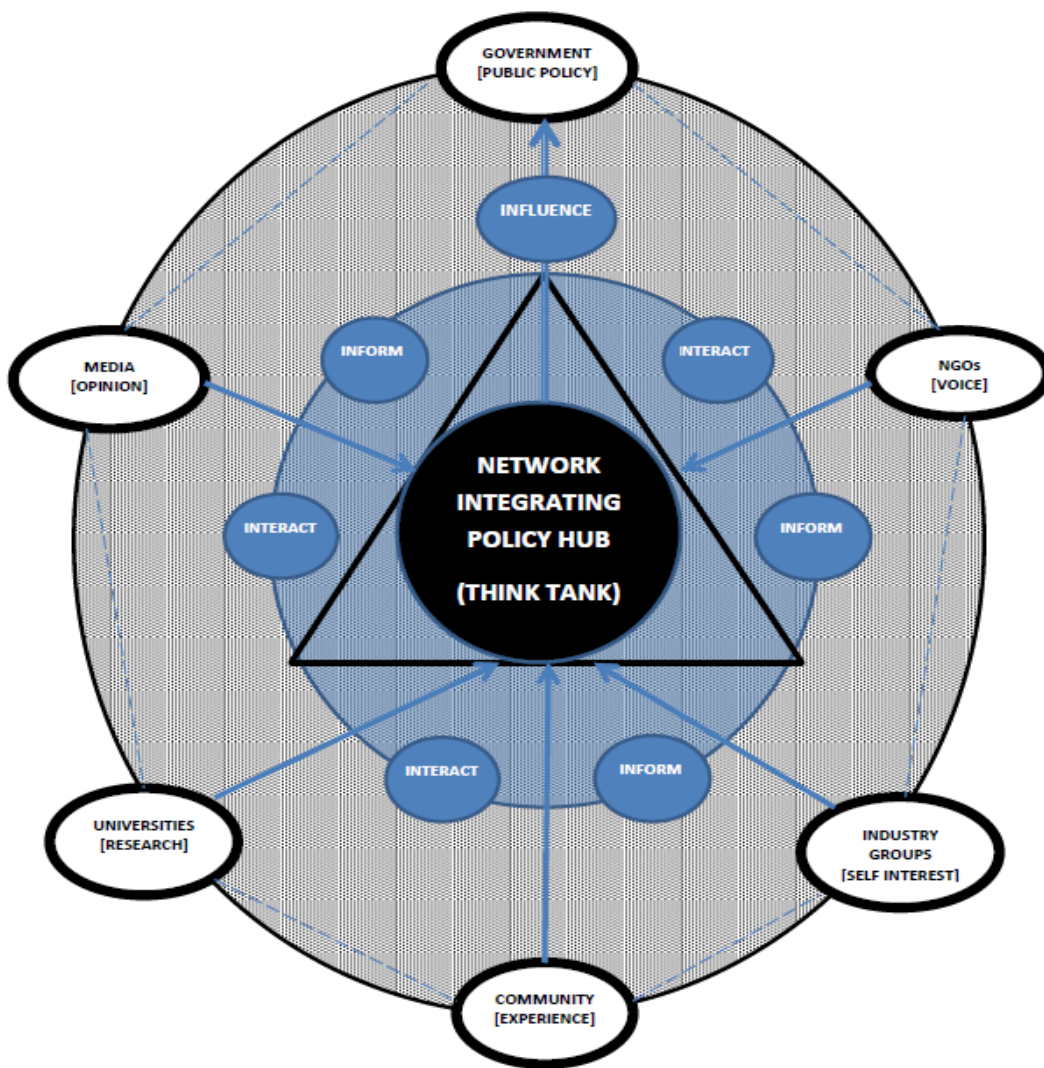
#### **7.4 Integrating rINp Through a ‘Policy Hub’**

Following on from this research, let us examine the creation of a policy community that involves a university and think tank, but also other policy and non-state actors. Evidently, the model encompasses a diverse range of policy actors, such as the community, universities, think tanks, media, non-governmental organisations, industry stakeholders and the government. This is what we can refer to as the policy ecosystem.

This ecosystem creates a space for interaction between various policy actors, and as such, does not hinder any policy actor from interacting with others. This interactive space creates an environment conducive to new ideas being brought to the fore, creativity being enhanced through research, and through interactions between various policy actors, bringing research evidence to inform policy to bear. However, at the same time, operating within this ecosystem can have challenges of its own. For instance, access and competition for resources such as funding, power struggles for leadership

and authority, and access to policy makers can negatively impact the network functioning.

As discussed earlier, a think tank, as a systems integrator and a policy hub, will have to play an important role in facilitating these interactions and also in negotiating working relationships. In the case of a tripartite network arrangement between university-think tank- government, this raises the question of for whom the think tank should be working –academia or government? Should it be independent? How would non-independent think tanks function in such a tripartite network? Who should resource such a think tank? Let us try to address some of these issues using this model.



**Figure 7-1: Policy Hub integrating the rINp model**

The core of the policy ecosystem is where the policy network or the policy community is created and managed by a ‘system integrating policy hub,’ or a reformed version of a think tank. The policy hub plays a key role by working closely with government, to the extent that it can possibly be considered an additional arm of government. If such a policy community is to be successful, the policy hub has to be an independent structure or an organisation that does not report to government, but rather works in partnership with it on policy issues. So then, what value does a policy hub bring to the policy community? Firstly, the policy hub needs to be resourced from a pool of stakeholders,

e.g., individuals seconded from government or business or other such groups. Government can create the initial institutional structure by providing core funding to the policy hub, as in the case of the HC Coombs Policy Forum. The diversification of resources contributing to the policy hub (not just financial contribution, but also physical resources and personnel support) can be derived from industry, universities, community groups and other stakeholders. This helps avoid any one policy actor having, or being perceived to have, too much influence on the policy hub. No one member of the policy community can drive the governance of such a policy community. It needs to be independent of any one stakeholder's influence, non-partisan and objective in its approach.

As is evident from the model, the policy hub is responsible for linking together all the policy actors in a networked manner. This is not to say that actors cannot choose to network directly with other policy actors in such an ecosystem. In an ideal setting, the policy hub would encourage such stakeholder interactions and then play a network facilitation role. This interaction and engagement amongst policy actors will help them deliberate over policy issues from various perspectives. In addition, the policy hub must allow cross-pollination of ideas, thus emerging as a repository of ideas derived from network interactions and also from other policy sources.

To an extent, this model also demonstrates the presence of a 'hub and spokes' approach, in which the system integrator is the central hub and the other policy actors and the network relationship are the spokes. What lies between the wider ecosystem and the policy hub is the policy cycle. As we know, most research has considered the policy cycle to be a sequence of steps that move through defining the policy problem,

ascertaining alternatives to address the issue, identifying a suitable alternative, and implementing and evaluating the policy. In keeping with this thinking, the policy ecosystem supports a policy cycle that is not dissimilar. This policy hub model outlines the inform-interact-integrate phases in helping the development of new public policy. Let us carefully unpack these aspects.

At the outer level, the policy cycle approach is embedded within the policy ecosystem model and encompasses involvement from various policy actors. As indicated earlier, this model does not preclude any policy actor from interacting with others in the policy process. For instance, media organisations can continue to use opinion polls and other avenues to influence government policy direction and decision-making. Communities, through being at the receiving end of government policies and programs, can continue to interact and influence new policy directions.

While such interactions can continue, this model indicates the ability of the policy hub to be a repository of information that can be leveraged further in order to undertake analysis from a holistic or multiple perspectives. To expect governments to engage with each policy actor and to respond to individual needs can become onerous, time-consuming and counter-productive. It is in this context that the policy hub, as an integrating mechanism, can undertake to engage and interact with multiple policy actors to ensure a common understanding of the policy problem is attained. This can be used to shape thinking about the policy problem, which can inform government's policy direction. Government's effort to develop public policy can indicate a phase where various policy alternatives are considered, trade-offs are made and a policy position has been identified. To a certain extent, this model can reduce political influence on policy



making and provide some true meaning to the notion of evidence-based policy making i.e., governments attempting to develop policy alternatives only on the basis of strong research-driven evidence.

The primary role of the policy hub is to integrate, connect and facilitate network interactions between the relevant policy actors. This approach is needed to ensure that the policy that is developed remains evidence-based and objective, rather than being heavily politically influenced. For instance, the hub has to work more closely with government than any policy actor and establish network relationships with the community, industry representatives, media organisations, universities, think tanks, etc. In addition to creating the network that is focused on policy issues, it needs to ensure the sustainability of such policy communities through regular interaction.

This is an important characteristic for a policy community. A number of activities must form key parts of any policy hub. These are: canvassing policy options with policy actors; undertaking translational research with universities; working with the media to gauge the pulse of the community at large; and undertaking policy exploration activity that focuses on the current issues and at the same time fosters consideration of possible longer-term issues. This modelling will ensure a sound approach to policy learning with a view to helping government make effective policy choices for the present and the future.

In addition to these actions, a vital part of a policy hub's activity must be to ascertain policy interdependencies and intersections across various sectors. As government resources become progressively constrained and government agencies are forced to do

more with less, there will be an increasing need for policy hubs to network with policy actors, identify policy options through policy exploration, ascertain policy interdependencies and evaluate policy impact. Let us focus our attention on some of the questions that may have been unaddressed.

*Where Does This Leave Universities and Research Utilisation?*

This research has identified four research–policy models: core funded, linkage, service, and outreach. These models must continue to function, develop further and subsequently create a system by which such engagements can link in with a policy community-creating policy hub. This is not to suggest that the interactions of researchers with government can only be leveraged through a policy hub. Institutional and individual interactions with government policy makers and other policy actors can continue to take place independently of the work of a policy hub. However, the benefits of coordinated engagement and interactions with a policy hub cannot be underestimated. Most of the information and knowledge will not be exchanged on the basis of one-to-one relationships between researchers and policy makers, but through the creation of an ecosystem that allows research knowledge to be brought to bear along with the views of other policy actors participating in the policy network.

It is naïve to suggest that applied policy research can only be utilised by government policy makers. As we saw in the case of the SPRC, research is increasingly being leveraged by non-governmental organisations, which repack and re-present the evidence to government and other policy actors. Similarly, the media can use research evidence to influence public debate. Thus, the policy hub can also play a very important role as a ‘knowledge integrator.’ It can not only create a network of interactions between the

various policy actors in a policy cycle, but also enable the creation of a knowledge network. This is achieved primarily through the policy hub's function as the central node of interactions between stakeholders.

*Creation of a Policy Hub: Does This Command and Wield Excessive Power, Control and Authority over Other Members of the Policy Community?*

What underpins the successful functioning of a policy hub is a network structure in which the mode of governance of such relationships is collaborative, and not entirely hierarchical. No policy actor interacting with the policy hub is required to give up any part of its authority to any other actor within the network or the policy hub. The strength, credibility and superiority of a policy hub are dependent on effective participation and interaction amongst its members. The intent of this network is to share information and resources amongst the network of actors in order to frame the policy problem in a coherent manner, to derive synergies across institutions that will assist the identification of policy options, and to develop viable policy alternatives that are not driven by self-interest, but rather by a common set of values. The nature of this collaborative functioning will enhance the credibility, legitimacy and authority of the network actors.

As we have seen, researchers have often found policy maker attrition rates to be an issue, especially in situations where long-term research-policy relationships are required. The initiation of research into a specific policy issue becomes compromised and distorted when bureaucrats and policy makers move into and out of policy roles. This is also an issue for policy makers, as their focus can tend to be short-term in nature or imprecise while they increase their understanding of the policy context. Individuals

working within the policy hub can offer researchers a level of stability if they are well-entrenched in the workings of the bureaucracy and can advise incoming bureaucrats and policy makers.

#### *What Role does Government Play Within Such a Network?*

Government must take on the role of a network member within such a system of engagement. It is clear that, in order for sound and workable policy to be developed, governments cannot function without the participation of other groups. At one level, such broad-based participation helps government to spread the risk of implementing bad policy and allows them to quickly recognise and address less-than-favourable policy outcomes. Does government lose its power and control by participating in such a network? It may seem as though this would be the case. However, network participation helps government to legitimise new policies that have been developed. It can continue to play a lead role in the development and implementation of new policy. In this manner, policy risk is managed through the network. Such a policy network approach also helps to root out any underdeveloped policy options that are being considered by the government.

#### *How does the Policy Hub Manage the Self-Interest Aspect That Comes With Interest Groups?*

Managing interest groups within a policy community can be a challenging task and this is no different for a policy hub. However, the presence of a large number of policy actors within the network can to a certain extent neutralise self-interest, as this will be balanced with other competing views, evidence and knowledge emerging within the network. When such an interactive environment exists, self-interest can be minimised,

provided the network members maintain genuine interest in solving the policy problem. The challenge for a policy hub will be to effectively manage such competing views. The presence of a policy network and its effective management can mitigate self-interest by encouraging policy actors to step back and consider the policy context from multiple perspectives. Network members may need to operate at a level that is set apart from institutional or individual preferences, but at the same time bring their knowledge and interests to bear in ascertaining how the policy problem can best be addressed.

*What Institutional Characteristics Especially Within Government Would Foster Such Collaborative Relationships?*

For the successful creation and functioning of policy communities, a number of institutional characteristics must be created. These are as follows:

- Commitment of institutional senior executives towards the policy community, engagement with its network members and other policy relevant stakeholders.
- Identification of a common policy objective, i.e., acknowledgment that policy influence can only be achieved if the stakeholders work collaboratively. This is the crucial principle for the success of any policy community.
- Governance structures. The internal governance structures within institutions should be set up in such a way that stakeholder engagement is easily facilitated, without extensive bureaucratic layers.
- Resource support, including funding. Institutions should set aside adequate funding and resource support for such policy community creation, facilitation and engagement.

- Sharing of responsibility. The responsibility to inform and shape policy must be shared equally among members of the policy community. For instance, universities have to accept their role in undertaking the research and developing knowledge that is at the centre of the policy issue. Think tanks will need to capitalise on this new knowledge and test its validity through public engagement. Government bureaucracies need to take equal responsibility for this by developing appropriate communication mechanisms and techniques that build on the evidence base. In addition, the responsibility of developing strategies that effectively communicate such messages to the senior executive and ministers rests with the bureaucracy.

*How Are Policy Hubs Established and Who Resources Them? What Characteristics Must Individuals Who Operate Within Policy Hubs Possess?*

There is a clear need for entities such as the HC Coombs Policy Forum to be set up. These can be embedded within universities, but must remain closely engaged with government. In order for such relationships to be institutionalised, a range of policy actors need to contribute resources (funds, human capital) to establish organisations that sit on the cusp of research and policy. In this case, joint funding contributions from university and government will help ensure commitment from the highest level. Government commitment and resource provision need to come from across governmental departmental portfolios, not from any one single department. This will ensure policy interdependencies and intersections are leveraged and understood in a more effective manner. The aim in creating such an entity is not to broker research contracts between governments and universities. It is to guarantee existing or new research evidence is brought to bear, along with stakeholder views and opinions, helping policy formation.

In addition, these policy hubs will have the arduous task of influencing public debate and engaging multiple stakeholders in the process. Just as universities have established technology transfer institutes, it is critical that joint collaboration with government sees the creation of a new generation of research bureaucrats and policy researchers who can traverse institutional boundaries. What has been clearly identified in the case studies is the need for a policy institution that sits in between government and society, but works towards bringing these closer: an institution that is able to create an evidence base through research and interaction to inform and influence the development of public policy.

Within these institutions, there is also a need for a specific type of individual, one who can cross policy boundaries and engage with government and academia at the very minimum. This type of individual has to be able to leverage the evidence base, draw upon policy lessons and interact with stakeholders and government. This policy agent must also ‘from outside the formal position of government... introduce, translate and help implement new ideas into public practice,’ ‘facilitate competing interests during policy making’ and have a ‘particular interest in the success of policy’ (Oborn, Barrett and Exworthy 2011: 326–327).

Such policy agents have been referred to as ‘policy architects,’ ‘policy entrepreneurs’ or ‘policy intellectuals,’ indicating that innovation and facilitation are the two crucial elements in this role. Policy entrepreneurs thus have dual roles in the policy process: to act as a *broker* between policy interests and an *advocate* of policy innovation within and outside of government.

In addition, policy entrepreneurs have to exhibit two crucial characteristics to ensure the success of a policy community network: foresightedness and innovation. Policy entrepreneurs must be able to identify current trends and signals when scanning the horizon for policy issues. This can be achieved through engaging with institutions and individuals across the globe and by undertaking scenario-planning exercises on a regular basis. They need to be curious about the status quo, be able to explore new ways of doing things which can improve existing policy or create and implement new effective policy, and heed the process of knowledge transfer.

In addition, identifying policy interdependencies across sectors is also vital for such networks to function successfully. Other individual characteristics that are vital in such policy community interactions are the ability to display professionalism, build trust with the network members and amongst policy actors, operate analytically and effectively negotiate. Most of all, it is vital for policy entrepreneurs to be accepted within the policy community, which requires the individual to be a talented listener, open-minded and an astute negotiator. Policy entrepreneurs thus have a critical role in building institutional capability and inter-organisational networks. This, in turn, helps establish a policy community that can create a good level of alignment on the policy issue, sharing of objectives and interests. Such networks can then also help foster knowledge transfer across organisations and individuals.

#### *How is This Different From 'Traditional' Think Tanks?*

Policy hubs can be quite different to think tanks. Think tanks do not seek to bring stakeholders and interest groups together with government to work collaboratively on



policy issues, or if they do, the practice is not widespread. A major distinguishing factor between policy hubs and ‘traditional’ think tanks is the level of operating distance from government. Policy hubs must work closely with government in creating new opportunities for government to enhance its policy development capability. Think tanks, on the other hand, most often remain at arm’s length from government, in order to hold government to account. Policy hubs must be responsible for organising and facilitating stakeholder forums as closed events that create a tripartite engagement between researchers, interest group and policy makers. The goal has to be the exploration of the particular policy issue and the devising of alternatives for the long term.

The collaboration between interest groups, stakeholders, researchers and policy makers brings together a unique group of individuals interested in a specific issue. The objective is to propel policy forward by leveraging lessons from the past. Researchers bring immense value here through scholarly effort that explores the experience of the past. When this is combined with current stakeholder experience, the policy entrepreneur’s foresight and the policy maker’s political judgement, there is an opportunity to provide rigorous policy alternatives.

#### *What About Incentives for Researchers and Other Stakeholder Groups?*

Incentives are inherent within such a framework. Given the collaborative effort amongst network members, there will be resources available to ensure incentives for most members. For researchers, the ability to undertake research that provides intellectual stimulation, combined with the need to deliver on academic outputs, must be present within a policy community. Interest groups within the network can become part of the policy cycle in a manner that they would not have been previously. For policy makers,

having research input, as well as stakeholder engagement, which can have political benefits for the government, enriches the policy process. For citizens and the community more broadly, their voice is heard and their experience deliberated over, ensuring that it is not only the policy maker being given awareness, but also other network members.

### *Why Doesn't This Happen Now?*

The limitation and resource constraints facing current policy institutional mechanisms in trying to bring together a network of actors is one factor preventing such collaborative engagement and interaction at present. Traditionally, it was the role of government to organise society and bring various voices together. However, working within a resource constrained environment in which the public service is being asked to do more with less, the capacity of governments to organise such stakeholders is being diminished. Interest groups lobby government through their own channels. The incentive mechanism for university-based researchers to engage with government on applied policy issues is unclear. At present, it can be said that academic incentives are mostly geared towards knowledge creation and scholarly undertakings that result in quality academic outputs. None of these factors are at cross-purposes with the needs of policy. Most of these elements operate in parallel and the number of intersecting paths between them is few, which is why the divide between research and policy has only ever increased. Researchers must be rewarded for engaging with policy makers, as this constitutes creation of a societal impact.

In situations where research does find its way to policy makers, and stakeholders do manage to get access to, and exercise influence on, government, policy makers can

often find themselves in situations where there is little or no coherence in the views that emerge. This is because the policy problem has been framed using the perspectives of one particular interest group or policy actor. This gives rise to multiple and conflicting views of the same issue, and politics ends up trumping policy. When there is a clear alignment of views and substantive evidence, governments generally support the policy choice.

*What Happens When Researchers and Stakeholders are at Cross-Purposes Within the Policy Community?*

It is precisely for this reason that a collaborative effort must underpin the functioning of such a policy community. In these circumstances, the network members must trust and commit to open dialogue for deliberative action to take place. The inclusion of government policy makers within the policy community will help provide perspective(s) that will strengthen the manner in which evidence is generated and considered by members of the policy community. Hence, government holds a balance to such a multilateral network relationship. Policy entrepreneurs within the policy hub are also important actors in such a process, as they can help neutralise conflicting or unbalanced situations by providing and introducing multiple perspectives on the issue.

These perspectives can emerge as a result of considering policy intersections from different sectors or from generating long-term perspectives of the policy issues. For network members, it becomes difficult to ignore such views, as they emerge not from a self-interest perspective but an objective viewpoint. This is why policy entrepreneurs in policy hubs need to foster a culture of risk management and scenario planning as two vital working elements. It is not the case that such policy hubs and a policy community

approach will always succeed. However, because the effort is collaborative and involves policy actors who provide different viewpoints, the risk of mishap is minimised, as it is spread across and shared amongst the members of the policy community. This also minimises the negative effect of a fall out and criticism from any one stakeholder group. However, the collaborative governance approach does provide avenues for more successes than failures to eventuate.

### *Research Conclusions*

There are some key conclusions that have emerged from this research:

- i) For policy development purposes, improved structuring and facilitation can better a policy network model between university researchers and policy makers. Currently, the most common adaptation of a policy network that includes researchers and policy makers is seen in the case of SPRCs Core Funding and Linkage Models.
- ii) Systemic incentives and motivational factors for academic researchers to interact and engage with government policy makers across institutional boundaries are non-existent. Academic effort is measured against scholarly publications and the securing of research grants .
- iii) The need to broker and facilitate a research–policy network relationship, through policy hubs such as the HC Coombs Policy Forum, is evident. Institutionalising of policy hubs will help:
  - a. Address the need to translate research findings into policy relevant material, given the interest from government to create policy based on evidence. This can only be achieved through sustained interactions between policy makers and researchers to ensure a common understanding of the policy problem.

- b. Identify policy interdependencies and intersections across different sectors and integrate various policy actors to participate in the interaction process. This can form an effective mechanism by which non-state actors bring in unique perspectives and sometimes even experiences to bear on the process.
  - c. Ensure, to the extent possible, policy processes take into account evidence produced by researchers.
  - d. Ensure resources (funding, infrastructure) expended on research have an applied impact through dissemination and use, in addition to creating and producing knowledge.
  - e. Encourage systemic innovation and forward-looking activities with the network that explore potential long-term policy issues.
- iv) Think tanks can take on the role of policy hubs, brokering or mediating such research–policy relationships. These institutions must be adequately resourced with:
- a. *Tangible resources* (human, funding, physical resources, infrastructure etc.), obtained from a range of sources (including government, academia, businesses, non-governmental organisations and the community) to avoid the undue influence of any one sector on such networked relationships. Individuals, through a secondment arrangement, from government, academia and other network organisations can be co-located within policy hubs in order to form research–policy networks. This will help realise a higher level of creativity, the cross-pollination of new ideas, and a future-looking capacity that fosters an appetite for risk.

- b. *Intangible resources*, such as opportunities for engagement through staff movement across organisational boundaries, the creation of a culture of ‘professors of practice,’ allowing individuals to function confidently while operating in a guest environment, e.g., a research institution or government department, and the facilitation of engagement activities to share and disseminate information through conferences, seminars and workshops.
  
- v) Creation of a tripartite strategic policies network that encompasses representatives from university, think tanks and government. Dependent on the policy issues and the capability of members, this network can develop the agenda and set the context for a particular research–policy engagement that can last for a set period of time. A policy hub such as a think tank can facilitate the development of such a network, with government providing appropriate resource support.
  
- vi) The need for a higher number of interactions and exchanges between researchers and policy makers is clearly evident from this research. In addition, these exchanges need to take place in neutral environments and must be facilitated, nurtured and coordinated by such a policy hub.
  
- vii) There is a need for government and academia to embrace a culture of networking between the two sectors that will help foster an environment for sharing of ideas, risk- taking and foresight by entering into policy exploration activities. This has to be supplemented with a relationship that is built on trust and openness and which allows for data and information sharing.

- viii) Governance of these relationships has to be collaborative and shared. Government and researchers have to take a genuine interest in research and policy issues as they impact on society through policy developments.
  
- ix) A policy hub has to play an important role in leveraging support and input from the community in a research–policy relationship in order to ensure new policy development remains, to the extent possible, politically neutral. This creates a balance of power between politics and evidence, which feeds into the creation of robust, citizen-inclusive policy.
  
- x) Through a renewed commitment and willingness, a revival of political and academic leadership needs to take place to allow institutionalisation and the creation of a reinvigorated culture of engagement across sectoral silos of governments and research environments. Performance measurement and the accountability of these networks are also important and must form the two pillars on which policy networks between universities and government are established.

## **7.5 Implications For the Literature and New Research Directions**

### *Policy Networks and Governance*

This research study examined the different policy network models and how they relate to the policy development process. The discussion identified two key models, issue networks and policy communities. The case studies reflect that a policy community model is what is needed in structuring a policy network relationship between government, universities and think tanks. In particular, this research suggests that the strength of a network and the ability to share resources amongst policy actors within a network have the greatest impact on how well a policy network performs. In the case of the HC Coombs Policy Forum, a policy community was created between academic researchers, government policy makers and individuals from Coombs. Coombs provided resources for engagement and interactions to be undertaken which subsequently helped shape the information and advice available to government policy makers. While this network displayed vital characteristics of a policy community, it is only over time and through sustained interactions that we will be able to define success. When we consider the findings of this research in the light of the network governance literature discussed earlier, some conclusions are clear.

For a start, governments are critical to the policy process and have central responsibility in terms of decision-making and deciding on any new policy directions. As was clear in the case study of the natural resource management project, government played a vital role in setting up the policy community, establishing the scope of the project, clearly outlining some key variables, and most importantly, in providing an imprimatur for the



work that was undertaken. It was also clear that government had the liberty to choose whether it utilised the input and advice provided by the policy community. Government as a participant in this policy community network used its position effectively to govern and steer the network in a direction that would be most useful for its deliberation over future policy direction.

This suggests that government does play a role as a meta-governing body within a policy community. This questions the extent to which the state has been hollowed out. It also adds weight to the argument, made by scholars like Bell and Hindmoor, that governments are now involved in metagovernance, the governance of governing, through various channels. Thus, the theory of state-centred governance has resonance. In the context of the network interaction and management models discussed by scholars like Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan (1997) and Hazlehurst (2001), it is clearly evident in the case studies that government still retains the decision-making authority and power to choose the approach that suits its policy purposes.

Reflecting on the SPRC case study and the core funding model that was discussed, one can note government's adoption of the institutional approach in constructing a policy network. The use of structures and rules in deciding which organisation would receive core-funding was clearly evident. What followed in this case in the late 1990s was government's adoption of a state corporatism model, as discussed in the earlier chapters, where government decided with whom it would engage, and how funding would be diversified to a range of institutions. This was a move away from a hierarchical model of governance involving one institution to a model across a range of institutions. In either case, it is important to note the central role of government in

deciding how it chooses to select, engage and interact with its stakeholders. This metagovernance approach displayed by government reflected the significance of the resources it possessed for distribution to non-state actors, in this case universities. This then also adds weight to Sørensen's (2006) argument that metagovernance is exercised by the policy actor who possesses the greatest amount of resources.

### *Research Utilisation: Using Policy Hubs as Knowledge Integrators*

This principal utility of this research is in establishing the importance of a bridge between social science researchers and policy makers. The emphasis on the need for a network-integrating policy hub is original and innovative. While in the past many have advocated the need for policy brokers and knowledge brokers, there is little or no empirical evidence to substantiate this idea. This research has shown, using the Coombs case study, that there is value in having a body or organisation that mediates research–policy relationships by bringing researchers and policy makers closer. In addition, it has been shown that it is important to integrate, coordinate and facilitate such engagements between policy actors. The discussion around research utilisation needs to acknowledge the key role of policy hubs, as outlined in this study, in pursuing translational research, effectively transferring technical research findings into policy-relevant information and analysis. This research also suggests that a think tank can play the role of a policy hub. Given the nature of work performed by think tanks, they are well positioned to take on such a network-integrating role. This research has investigated and provided evidence concerning a university-based think tank. It is important to test this claim with regard to tanks that function outside the academic environment.

The research findings indicate that a policy hub can effectively address the supply and demand factors which Edwards (2005) identified and which were discussed earlier in the study. For instance, supply side issues, such as the lack of policy relevant research and ineffective communication mechanisms between researchers and policy makers, can be addressed through translational research activity and network interactions. On the demand side, issues such as the lack of research awareness among policy makers and the limited capacity of policy makers to absorb research can also be effectively minimised through capacity building efforts undertaken by policy hubs.

This was clear in the Coombs case study in the context of the natural resource management work. One of the limitations which has been identified elsewhere concerns the non-linear relationship between research and policy, which is a key factor in relation to the lack of research utilisation within policy making. This research study has added to the knowledge base by identifying the need and value of a policy hub, not only in acting as a mediating and integrating body, but also in coordinating engagements and interactions with policy actors, like the media, industry groups and communities. This allows researchers to expose their findings through stakeholder engagement, providing for a more robust policy making approach that government can leverage. This also supports the proposition that policy hubs should work in partnership with government and take on the role of establishing policy communities through engagement with such policy actors. In this manner, policy hubs can support government's ability to metagovern policy actors.

## *Network Creation and Management*

The creation and functioning of networks within the policy space brings increased competition amongst stakeholders for access and resource dependencies. The network can achieve goals concerning knowledge development, capitalisation, dissemination and information sharing, if it can manage multiple actors and their perspectives, issues of ownership and intellectual property, control and conflict. If managed properly, this can help ensure legitimacy and public acceptance of policy positions through better communication and engagement with the community and other stakeholders. This can help the community develop a better understanding of the policy problem, and in some instances, could result in their participation to identify better policy solutions.

In such a context, the role of government is critical. There is always an expectation from society that governments will address policy problems and continue to organise society. The expectation arises from the belief, and the fact, that government is the only entity that has the power and authority to choose its own governance rules, rather than operate under a set of rules created by non-state actors. Governments also have the authority to mediate between competing non-state actors. Mandell (2001) discusses the issues concerning collaboration, networks and network structures that can have an impact on the development of public policy. The organisations that form part of network structures are those who work towards addressing a common issue or problem, seeing themselves as part of an entire system. However, in structure and operation they are diverse, with separate goals and operating within different sectors. This is why Agranoff and McGuire (2001) suggest that managing inter-organisational networks should not be mistaken for managing hierarchies that are typically seen within organisations.

### *Key Conditions for Effective Network Functioning*

As Cigler (2001) argues, a number of preconditions seem necessary for policy networks to be successful:

- early support by government through interaction
- participation and resource support;
- collaborative skills-building to implement plans and strategies;
- presence of policy entrepreneurs who possess commitment
- political and people skills to mobilise support to achieve the goal
- capacity building and capability creation
- strategising towards sustaining network ability in the future
- open and effective communication

Nelson (2001) also discusses types of organisational motivation that exist within a policy network context—external, internal and mutual collaboration. External motivation most often results from external reviews and/or recommendations made by third parties. Internal motivation arises when an organisation itself determines that its mission and objective would be best served through collaboration. Mutual collaboration takes place when synergies exist between the end objectives of two or more organisations, so leveraging off one another will benefit all. Leadership in this collaboration is not the primary focus and is not restricted to one participant. Within these three organisational motivation contexts, further synergistic elements have been identified:

*Organisational and participant preferences.* Where an organisation has made the commitment to collaborate with external stakeholders by participating in a network, representation by a suitably committed individual who believes in the value of networks

and understands their role as extending beyond organisational boundaries is critical. Top-down mandates or directives or hierarchical approaches are less productive in such instances. Adequate resource support (financial, human, etc.) must accompany organisational participation in these networks. Individual participation within the network has to be supported and recognised by organisational management hierarchies as important to the goals of the organisation. The quality of interaction within the network, and the ability of the individual participant to demonstrate leadership traits (in representing their organisation and in devising suitable paths to collaboration success), is also important. The success of the collaboration will depend on the robustness of the interaction that takes place within the network.

*Accountability and changing goals.* Representatives of public service organisations in such networks have dual roles in terms of accountability to the external public and to other members of the network. This works well when the stakeholders are aware of the objectives and goals of the network. However, the goals of the network can change due to collaborative insight and discussions between members. In such situations, it is important to keep the external stakeholders, i.e., the public, abreast of these changes; otherwise the functioning of the network is undermined. Improving processes that support network creation and facilitation, network institutionalisation within respective organisations and appropriate participation in the network are also important accountability measures. Network institutionalisation can enhance the motivation of participants by formalising the relationship, providing better access to resources and demonstrating the commitment of organisational management to the initiative. In terms of defining suitable measures of success, the consideration of outcome goals is important. Success can then be measured by assessing the value of the process, by assessing the final outcome, or both. This is why, in order to monitor feedback,

stimulate learning and improved relationships between members of the network, implementation of network activity must be flexible. Adequate and appropriate communication mechanisms are also needed to ensure members of the network are abreast of issues at all times.

*Coercion and trust.* Trust is critical for the collaborative success of a network. In order to be able to function effectively, it is important to ensure participants within a network share objectives and goals. However, in some instances, coercion, rather than cooperation, may be needed for network participants to adhere to network principles in order to maintain compliance within the network. To enhance trust and minimise the need for coercive action, organisational members of the network need to clearly identify their role, place, expectation and commitment within the network. Coercive powers should only be used when absolutely necessary, because these interactions shape the long-term viability of the network.

*Risks and benefits of expanding participation.* The value of expanding participation needs to be weighed against the objectives and expectations of the founding members of the network. This helps minimise unpleasantness and harsh surprises.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

As the case studies and discussions have indicated, this research has created new knowledge towards understanding:

- the manner in which research can truly influence and impact policy through the Research-Inform/Interact/Integrate- Policy (rINp) framework,
- the value of a network-integrating policy hub acting as a mediator,

- the role of a university-based think tank in a tripartite policy network relationship between government and university research centres, and
- the role of the state in the metagovernance of policy actors.

Thus the findings from this research are critical, useful and valuable. The rINp framework is a useful mechanism to understand and better comprehend the manner in which research can influence policy. This study also demonstrated the value of a policy community approach through the creation of a policy hub responsible for integrating and creating research–policy interactions between a range of policy actors. The governance structure of a policy network that is integrated by a policy hub must be collaborative and state-centred. It should have cross-governmental representation, academic representation, interest group representation and community members. A consensus needs to be achieved by all network members, accepting that research creates knowledge that can help shape effective policy. Institutions need to be aware of their role in the relationship, i.e., universities play the role of the researcher, think tanks can facilitate and test such knowledge through stakeholder engagement, and governments develop the policy and program on the evidence provided. Members of such networks have to drop their institutional overcoats and work towards a common objective. This will help inform policy priorities that can be expected in the future.

Information has to be shared openly amongst the network. There needs to be an explicit acknowledgement of the value each stakeholder brings to the table. Policy makers need to be receptive to the ideas of academics and researchers, and vice versa. When there is tension about the agenda for research and policy development, stakeholders need to step back and reflect on the greater goal of the overarching policy. There needs to be strong trust between members of the policy community. There has to be a realisation that



success can only be achieved through the joint effort of all stakeholders. Regular communication and interaction channels need to be fostered between stakeholders which extend beyond formal collaboration and embrace social interaction. This helps strengthen the ties between individuals in the policy community. At the same time, it is important for the network architecture to be flexible and responsive, to muster resources and existing research expertise to address the policy issue where required. Creating social impact through better-informed policy is critical for such networks, as is influencing public debate. As this study stated at the outset and confirmed through the case studies, research is important for the policy process, but only forms one part of the variables that influence decision-making. Stakeholder engagement is also vital to the process and this can be taken care of through the institutionalisation of a policy hub.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This research study commenced by outlining the research–policy problem, commonly referred to as the divide that exists between the use of research, researchers and policy making. Due to recent global developments, we have seen how public policy processes are beginning to experience a trend wherein non-state actors, such as industry groups, businesses and non-governmental organisations, are playing a role. Canada’s experience with Public Engagement, the UK’s approach with Big Society, and Australia’s Co-Design concepts are evidence of this. Coupled with such engagement with non-state actors, it is also important for policy processes to take into account the use of evidence and knowledge generated through research. Evidence-based or evidence-informed policy making has become as important as stakeholder engagement. With these developments in the backdrop, the question that has persisted over time concerns how this research policy divide can be bridged, and which institutional structures can optimise the gap. The utility of think tanks in alleviating the research–policy problem has seldom been considered or given serious thought. In such a context, it is only prudent that the collaborative role for university research centres and think tanks be explored. From a political science perspective, what has also been missing from research consideration is the use of heuristics relating to policy networks (such as policy communities) and governance in order to better understand the research–policy divide problem. These are areas wherein this research work makes a contribution.

Universities, which have been less studied in the public policy space, have been consumed with issues of modalities– teaching and research–and are now increasingly leaning towards activities that demonstrate civic engagement and societal impact. This

is the reason universities have been focusing their attention on creating and fostering new partnerships. Modes 1, 2 and 3 of university functioning are where most scholarly research has been concentrated. Considering the economics of research (supply and demand, knowledge producers and knowledge users), Nathan Caplan constructed the Two Community theory, acknowledging the societal disconnect between researchers and policy makers. Carol Weiss and Meredith Edwards have discussed the research utilisation problem and highlighted the need for intermediaries to bridge the research policy divide. Institutions such as think tanks have also received some attention, albeit using a policy influence lens, from scholars such as James McGann, Diane Stone, Allan Gyngell and Ian Marsh. The need for effective knowledge brokerage has been only intermittently explored. The limitation of such studies is that they have focused upon identifying the problem, rather than providing any putative solutions, i.e., the ‘what’ problem or research under-utilisation in policy processes as opposed to the ‘how’ problem.

The two case studies used in this research provide readers with a clear sense of where the problem lies and alternatives that will alleviate the research–policy problem. The selection of the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales and the HC Coombs Policy Forum (Coombs) at the Australian National University as case studies was important for this research, as the focus was on understanding the role of university research centres and think tanks in policy processes. The aim was to understand how these two institutions have worked with the Australian Government. In addition, the establishment of these two institutions by the Australian Government, 30 years apart, has given an indication of how government have over time altered their interactions with universities on research issues. By analysing these two institutions that were set up by government, it provides a suitable foundation for further

comparative research between government and privately funded institutions to be pursued.

The Social Policy Research Centre study provides clear insight into the functioning and challenges faced by university research centres today. The four models discussed—core funding, linkage, contract, and interactive outreach—provide an understanding of how researchers are able to interact with policy makers, and more broadly, with governments. Most often this has taken shape under the auspices of a venture type activity. In contrast, the HC Coombs Policy Forum, a policy think tank, has a mandate from government to function at the interface of university research and government policy development. This has been pursued through multiple activities, such as undertaking translational research and facilitating activities to bring university researchers and government policy makers together in order to deliberate over policy challenges facing government.

As we saw in the analysis of the Natural Resource Management (NRM) initiative, Coombs played a fundamental role in bringing together researchers from ANU and policy makers from government. It also provided the vital resources needed to facilitate and sustain the research–policy engagement. This clearly demonstrates the importance of think tanks not only in undertaking translational research activity supporting government policy making processes, but also in providing a critical long-term view of policy issues. The need to ensure an ongoing mode of engagement between researchers, policy makers and other external stakeholders from the community and non-governmental organisations is also vital. Network creation, facilitation and resource provision for the activities of such networks is also an important role for think tanks.

This indicates that a think tank cannot only perform a mediating role by bringing together university researchers and policy makers, but also adopt the role of a systems integrator, bringing to bear knowledge, evidence and stakeholder engagement on policy deliberations. Engaging in long-term horizon-scanning activities and policy exploratory efforts that help support government policy thinking is also necessary, and think tanks can play an important part here.

This study also provides some insights into how government thinking has evolved. In reflecting on the role of the Australian government in establishing the SPRC and Coombs, it is noteworthy that government has moved away from providing core funding to research centres towards setting up mediating entities that operate at the interface of research and policy. SPRC was set up as a research centre to develop a discipline in social welfare–social policy, which would inform policy developments. In contrast, Coombs was established as a think tank to bring research expertise to bear on policy developments. Hence, the two case studies have not been discussed or pursued as a ‘compare and contrast’ exercise. It would not have been possible to do so, as both organisations have different mandates. Where SPRC is driven by research outcomes, Coombs is underpinned by the principle of enhancing public policy through translational research and stakeholder engagement.

The analysis of the case studies also resulted in the development of two important concepts–think tanks as ‘policy hubs’ and the Research-Inform-Interact-Integrate-Policy or the Research-IN-Policy (rINp) framework - both of which can be underpinned by a policy community network. Having deliberated over the literature relating to the development of think tanks over the past decades, it is not radical to suggest that think tanks need to undergo a transformation. The evidence from this research supports this

claim, providing further impetus for think tanks to transform into ‘policy hubs’ which not only bridge the research–policy divide but also pursue related activity such as translational research, horizon- scanning and wider stakeholder engagement. This not only brings researchers and policy makers together but also incorporates wider stakeholder involvement, which can subsequently inform policy thinking.

The rINp framework shows how research and researchers can influence policy at three levels: *information*, which is a one-way mode of communication that mostly flows from researchers to policy makers; *interaction*, which denotes a two-way communication and engagement mechanism between researchers and policy makers; and, finally, *integration*, denoting the level wherein optimum and explicit involvement of researchers can be observed within the policy process. What can be inferred from this rINp framework is that there is no one preferred manner by which policy makers can choose to involve research or researchers in the policy process. This is often a choice that policy makers have to make, depending on the policy issue under consideration. In addition, this also depends on the resources government have to draw from, and, most important of all, on the political willingness to include research evidence as part of the policy process. The distinction between each of the ‘IN’ elements in the rINp framework also indicates the extent to which government policy makers and bureaucrats engage with academics and research more generally. The rINp framework also provides a suitable evaluative tool to assess the level at which research has been influencing or impacting policy. The use of the three ‘IN’ levels provides a starting point for researchers to further deliberate and to ascertain research impact on policy processes.

This study also identified organisational or systemic impediments that require further consideration. Issues such as incentivising academic researchers to work on applied

policy problems, and getting policy makers to proactively consider research and evidence as part of the policy process, are still real. The Australian Government's effort through the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) is a case in point. In assessing research quality at universities the Australian Government, through the Australian Research Council, promotes and supports the notion of academic publications in top ranked journals. There is no room to consider how such research effort has informed policy makers or government thinking in deciding on policy alternatives. Governments need to invest in efforts that help identify the various research impact measures. Until such systemic issues are addressed, the disconnect will continue to widen, unless there are mediating entities that link academic research and policy processes. It is in this context that there is significant value for a policy hub to create and integrate policy network relationships with multiple policy actors including academic researchers. This will ensure systemic impediments are minimised and opportunities to cross-leverage across policy issues is maximised. Therefore, in effect, the challenge is to transform the tripartite network relationship to a multiparty network engagement, which is why these frameworks must be responsive at the institutional level.

At the individual level, this study has paid attention to the characteristics and attributes required by a new generation of 'policy entrepreneurs' to function effectively within such frameworks. The need for enhanced skill levels among a range of '*research bureaucrats*', operating within government, and '*policy researchers*', functioning within universities is clearly evident. In the context of individual attributes, aside from possessing a superior research and policy background, possessing advanced skills in communication, negotiation, stakeholder relationship management, consensus and trust building is very important. Additional attributes needed by policy entrepreneurs are

being able to plan for and manage risk, encourage forward-looking activity and foresight, and being able to resolve conflict.

The rINp framework and ‘policy hub’ structure developed by this research sits well when considered in the context of the policy community approach. Elements of open and regular communication, consensus-driven interaction and engagement and a hierarchical ‘top-down’ governance model underpinned by collaborative working principles are all present. Membership of the network can be restricted and access to policy makers is privileged. The objective, working as part of a network created by a policy hub, ensures that the focus on the policy issue is maintained. In this manner, a policy hub is suitably positioned to create and manage a policy community. As Max Moore-Wilton (2002) has suggested, power resides in government, and influence within its institutional structures. This boils down to the extent to which political leadership is willing and committed to accepting evidence and engaging non-state actors as part of the policy process.

In extending these findings to the policy networks and governance frameworks, this study has argued that, to be effective, collaboration between researchers and policy makers needs to occur within a policy community. The key challenge for the policy community here is continuously to sustain and enhance these interactions. If such a policy community, which incorporates universities and think tanks, to have an influence on government policy making, it needs means to have an influence on one of the four elements: resources; policy process; policy makers; or the end outcome. Such a policy community tends to be stronger and more stable, as the interests of the members are focused on the policy issue. A higher level of resource dependency among the members of the network becomes vital, which is why membership can be restricted. Regular



interaction and communication underpins the effective functioning of such a network, which is targeted at achieving consensus. It was also clear and evident from this research that the government's choice to interact and engage with non-state actors, such as universities and think tanks, only helps in enhancing its policy development capacity. This strengthens government policy processes as opposed to weakening it or even 'hollowing it out' as some scholars have claimed. Thus, the claim that governments continue to adopt a state-centred governance approach holds good.

In bringing this study to a close, it is worth identifying a number of issues that might drive future research. Firstly, it is important to understand how research-policy networks can be institutionalised within organisational boundaries of governments, universities and industry groups. Undoubtedly, this can vary across sectors and the experience from say the social policy sector could be quite different from the health sector. Such differences can have an impact on how individuals respond and the influence on their capability development. What impacts does this have on governance frameworks and does a State-centered or Society-centered approach dominate or does a collaborative State-Society governance approach emerge? If so, what is the role of government in such an environment?

As far as think tanks, which have formed another important aspect of this study, are concerned, there is value in determining how existing traditional think tanks can morph into becoming system and network integrators. There are challenges that exist for policy hubs that promote research-policy networks by taking on the responsibility of engaging with multiple policy actors – community, businesses, media and others. This research has studied the experience of a university-based think tank. How can independent think tanks play a role in bringing together a network of policy actors for policy

development? Who should be responsible for resourcing such activities within think tanks? What role can affiliated think tanks play in this policy hub process and does this impact on its independence and objectivity in providing advice to government? It is also important to explore the work of think tanks in further detail to understand their penetration levels at the Federal, State or Regional levels and what does this suggest about their extent of policy influence.

This research has explored and interrogated research questions from a perspective that was external-to-government in an effort to better understand the nature of research and researchers in informing policy processes. What is required is a range of empirical studies that explore how research and knowledge is utilised by policy makers and bureaucrats at various stages of the policy process, i.e., development, implementation and evaluation. In this context, attention needs to be given to ascertaining conditionality for success and failure.

Just as this study incorporates an inter-disciplinary perspective from politics and social sciences, any new research must build upon knowledge derived from such diverse perspectives. The use of policy networks and governance theories in the research–policy space has the potential to be further utilised. There is also immense value in pursuing an international comparative study to understand how university research and think tanks have been influencing policy development and whether the policy hub construct outlined in this research continues to have relevance. One of the limitations of this research is that it focuses upon the study of two government-funded institutions. As such, further research efforts are needed to understand how the findings from this research would vary in the case of non-government funded institutions.

In addition to learning further about such institutions, work is also needed in understanding how governments utilise other entities, such as consulting organisations in the policy process. Within the context of institutional frameworks, it is also worth exploring how government-created policy structures, such as the Productivity Commission in Australia, inform policy development and how this varies from what has been studied in this research.

These are avenues for further research to be carried out. The claim here is that this study has successfully set the scene and foundation for such future research.

## **Appendix I**

Individuals who interviewed with the author

### **Social Policy Research Centre @ University of New South Wales (UNSW)**

Professor Ilan Katz – Director

Professor Peter Whiteford

Professor Lyn Craig

Professor Karen Fisher

Dr Trish Hill

Dr Bruce Bradbury

### **HC Coombs Policy Forum @ Australian National University (ANU)**

Dr. Mark Matthews – Executive Director, HC Coombs Policy Forum

Paul Harris – Deputy Director, HC Coombs Policy Forum

Professor Stephen Dovers – Director, Fenner School of Environment and Society

Dr Helena Clayton – Fenner School of Environment and Society

Professor Ian Young – Member of the Australian National Institute of Public Policy (ANIPP) Advisory Board and Vice Chancellor, ANU

Derek Volker – Chair, Australian National Institute of Public Policy (ANIPP) Advisory Board

### **Australian Government**

Ian Thompson – Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Dr Matty McConchie – Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

**Natural Resource Management Reference Group – Workshop Attendees:**

- Australian Government represented through:
  - Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
  - Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
  - Department of Regional Australia
- ANU representation:
  - Dr. Mark Matthews
  - Paul Harris
  - Professor Steve Dovers
  - Dr. Helena Clayton
- Other industry and non-governmental organisations

## Appendix II

### Sample of interview questions used in preparation of the case studies

#### *Institution focus*

- ❖ What does the institute do? How is it related to education/national security?
- ❖ What is your role within the institute?
- ❖ What sort of governance mechanism does the institute have in place? What are its funding sources?
- ❖ What sort of relationship does the institute have with the government or its policy makers - departments/agencies? Is this an open / informal/ formal/ social relationship?
- ❖ How often does the institute (formally) engage with government departments /agencies? [committee interactions, lectures, workshops, seminars, meetings etc]
- ❖ Does the institute have a dedicated section/unit that pursues engagement with the government or is this a responsibility devolved to various institutional staff/ executive etc?
- ❖ What sort of view, in your opinion, does the government entity have about your institute or the work of your institute? Is your institute looked upon as a vital knowledge/ policy contributor to the issues of education/ security?

#### *Research – policy level engagement focus (context and issue)*

- ❖ Have you (as part of the Institute's work) or the Institute engaged with government through specific projects?
- ❖ Was the research work commissioned as a joint collaboration, contract, partnership etc? How was the relationship established? What were the research parameters? Who were the stakeholders involved?
- ❖ What was your role in the project? Who were the stakeholders involved? What were your thoughts at the end of the research? (*this will provide a guide to ascertain the viewpoints/perspective taken on the issue*)
- ❖ Why was this project important for government and the partners? What were the issues underlying the initiation of this project? How did it become an issue?
- ❖ What was the government's policy or stance on this issue prior to the research? Was a policy change a key focus of the research project? Did the government

identify the need to change policy or call for further research to be undertaken?  
Was there any urgency to the issue?

- ❖ Did the project encounter any other issues in its development i.e. loss of momentum, changing scope, resource issues, personnel involved etc?
- ❖ Did the project achieve what it set out to do? Was it successful?

*[If specific research –policy projects do not exist]*

- ❖ Can you describe the research undertaken by yourself that aligns with policy agendas of the government (Local/State/Federal)?
  - Background (links to government policy agenda);
  - Nature of project, key research questions;
  - Duration;
  - Researchers involved;
  - Interactions with government during the research;
  - Research outcomes; recommendations;
  - Uptake by the government.

***Policy networks & governance: (network/ governance/relationship/resource dependency)***

- ❖ How did the interaction come about? Who initiated it?
- ❖ What priority was associated to the project by collaborators/ government? Were there any constraints? Were the roles clearly spelt out for the stakeholders involved? Were project sponsors within the collaboration identified?
- ❖ What sort of support mechanisms (in terms of funding, resources, information, staffing etc) were provided by collaborators? Was this forthcoming?
- ❖ What sort of consultation took place between the collaborators? How strong was the relationship between the stakeholders? How much negotiation had to take place to ascertain a suitable project path? Type of outputs? How important were issues like trust, confidence, expertise etc?
- ❖ Were the objectives clearly articulated within the project scope? Did this change during the life of the project? If so, what sort of difficulties did the collaborators face in incorporating new issues? What are the challenges in dealing with government/ think tanks and other collaborators?

- ❖ Was there a governance mechanism involved through which a direction of research was agreed? What governance mechanisms were in place to ensure the project progressed smoothly?

***Outcomes: (research utilisation, advocacy, evidence based policy making)***

- ❖ How did the outcomes (from research or specific engagement) feed into government processes? Policy development? (*explore the knowledge transfer process*)
- ❖ Did/Will the outcomes contribute to knowledge of the sector which could be used for planning and resource allocation by government agencies? Did/will the findings be of benefit to existing and/or devising new strategies / policies / programs/ legislative reform for the government?
- ❖ What were the challenges in translating research to policy language?
- ❖ What would you (the institute) do differently if you had the chance of undertaking the project all over again? (*lessons learned*)
- ❖ How would a (university research centre) and (think tank) have enhanced the knowledge development, capitalisation process and that of disseminating outcomes to the government?

Total: 25 questions



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