

The Wicked Problem of Australian Threatened Species Recovery Program Management.

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Abstract

Threatened species recovery programs are planned and implemented to prevent the extinction of species. Despite significant scientific research into species recovery, and the investment of considerable amounts of public funding, four species have gone extinct in the last decade in Australia and as a country continues to have one of the highest species extinction rates.

To prevent further loss of species, it is critical that Australia finds a way to improve the effectiveness of the management of species recovery programs. This research investigates the effectiveness of the planning and implementation of recovery programs. It uses the Glaserian Grounded Theory Methodology (GGTM) to build a theory into the problems of recovery program management which presents the root causes of the problems.

The institutional and research driven approach to the management of recovery programs is not able to bridge the knowing-doing gap. The perpetual loop of doing more research, does not provide the knowledge necessary to respond and manage the wicked problem of recovery programs. The lack of a strategic and integrated national approach to recovery programs results in a lack of understanding of project cost, success and whether outcomes are achieved effectively. Furthermore, the knowledge delivered by academics, e.g. the recovery program prioritization schemes and frameworks based on mathematical models and quantifiable criteria, are often not well translated to practice as they are developed without the inclusion of relevant actors.

This research finds, that if we want to resolve the challenges of recovery program management to prevent species extinctions, a transformation of the institution of recovery program management is required. This transformation involves a shift towards an integrated or transdisciplinary approach, which involves all actors to identify and analyse the problem, and co-create knowledge, to develop and implement solutions.

This research presents a conceptual framework of a project organization that integrates such a transdisciplinary approach of knowledge production, facilitated by project management principles and competences, for the improved management of recovery programs. This conceptual framework will resolve the challenges of strategic planning and prioritization of limited funding for conservation. This paper aims to encourage discussion for the implementation and testing of this framework. Urgent project management expertise and transdisciplinary action is required to enable a strategic approach to recovery programs and reduce Australian species extinction.