Governing through representatives of the community: A case study on farmer organizations in rural Australia

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ABSTRACT

The concept 'governing through the community' has been used frequently to interpret the neoliberal policy embraced by Australian governments since the 1990s. Yet explanation is still inadequate of how 'governing through the community' is conducted in practice, particularly the specific mechanisms that regulate interaction among government agencies, groups seeking to represent the community and individuals in the community. In this study, we find that 'governing through the community' is actually 'governing through representatives of the community' because it is the representatives that make the community visible and governable. This observation is based on a case study of three kinds of farmer organizations, in two states of Australia, who see their role as serving the community and are regarded by outsiders as representatives of the community at least on certain issues. An understanding of the interaction among different stakeholders within and outside of the community is developed through three themes of 'paperwork', 'data' and 'price' that were used by locals from Landcare groups, grower groups and farmer cooperatives, respectively, to articulate how they experience the mechanisms through which their interactions are regulated. This paper concludes that these groups can claim to represent some residents within a defined geographical area, rather than any exact definition of 'the community' and that this is a sufficient claim to enable these groups to participate in the process of 'governing through the community'. The tensions between government agencies, community representatives and community members threaten the legitimacy of the community representatives as intermediaries. Government agencies do try to contribute to reduce these tensions by strengthening the legitimacy of community representatives through various policy and project mechanisms. However, while the stated aim of 'governing through the community' is often focused on producing a 'flourishing rural community' through improving democratic modes of representation, this study demonstrates that it is only part of the community, namely the 'targeted customers' of the farmer organizations, that is potentially reachable to 'the state'.

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1. Introduction: farmer organizations as representatives of the 'community'

In recent decades, rural Australia has experienced a neoliberal governance regime, which, amongst other strategies, seeks to deal with economic and social issues in rural areas by devolving responsibilities for service provision and rural development, formerly provided by governments, to local communities, and, through private and non-government actors (O'Toole and Burdess, 2004; Cheshire and Lawrence, 2005; Lockwood and Davidson, 2010). This strategy has led to both a pluralization of agricultural and rural development related-funding; a rapidly changing institutional landscape; and a dramatic reduction of public funding for

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agricultural organizations and programs. Against this neoliberal background, different kinds of farmer organizations, who claim to act on behalf of farming communities, embody the idea of 'community' in this context in different ways and play a key role in the implementation of neoliberal policy. Since the late 1990s social researchers (e.g. Lockie, 1999; Herbert-Cheshire, 2000) have focused on interpreting this regime from a Foucauldian perspective, using the concept of 'governing through the community', also referred to as 'governing at a distance', and 'advanced governance' (Rose 1996a, 1996b).

Scholars have described the consequences of this form of governance on some types of local farmer groups, and rural community development settings more broadly. In this study we observe how three types of local farmer organizations formed by grain producers, namely, Landcare groups, grower groups and farmer cooperatives, are enrolled by, and utilize different mechanisms of neoliberal governance to 'represent' their communities and maintain legitimacy with funders and stakeholders. In doing so we build and expand on the existing empirical base by considering the effect on both previously studied and other types of local rural collectives. The first of these three groups, Landcare groups, emerged as part of the Landcare movement, first started in Victoria and then expanded to a national program by the Australian Government in 1989, principally to address environmental problems, and following the principle of ecologically sustainable development (Toyne, 2000). Many Landcare groups targeting specific local environmental issues were initiated at that time echoing the financial support from government. The second type, grower groups, emerged in the early 1990s from farmers seeking productivity improvements by conducting trials on their own farms. These groups were quickly supported by the state government agricultural agencies and Research and Development Corporation of Newfoundland and Labrador through project-based funding, in turn increasing the number of grower groups. Third, we farmer cooperatives in Australia were first formed in the late nineteenth century by dairy farmers in New South Wales (Lewis, 2006). In our study we focus on the bulk handling cooperatives initiated by grain growers to reduce the cost and improve the service of grain storage and marketing.

We begin the paper with a brief review of studies of neoliberal policy in advanced liberal democracies from a governmentality perspective, focusing particularly on rural Australia. Next, we overview the three types of farmer groups that serve as case studies for our analysis and describe our methods. In the analysis of in-depth qualitative interviews with members and stakeholders of the organizations, we then identify (i) how different definitions of 'community' are deployed in the operations of these groups; and (ii) the diverse mechanisms or technologies of governance used by the state, and the groups themselves, to 'govern through the community'. We focus on how these mechanisms shape groups understanding of their local community, their relationships with their own members, and with their funders and stakeholders. We also examine how the mechanisms related specifically to accessing and maintenance of income or funding for the groups' activities shape these relations. To help make sense of our findings we draw on concepts of different governing 'mentalities' and techniques of governance, used by Lockwood and Davidson (2010) and described below, to explore and explain differences in the representational and funding dynamics within and between the groups in our study. Finally, we conclude by arguing that farmer organizations, who reinterpret both the demand of their communities and the supply of policy, make the neoliberal regime 'governing through the community' both possible, and at the same time problematic for local forms of rural community representation.

2. 'Governing through the community': top-down, bottom-up or hybrid governance?

Derived from Foucault's work on governmentality, the concept 'governing through community' refers to:

"a way of demarcating a sector for government, a sector whose vectors and forces could be mobilized, enrolled, deployed in novel programmes and techniques which operated through the instrumentalization of personal allegiances and active responsibilities" (Rose, 1996b, p. 332).

Based on Rose's work, the term 'governing through the community' has been used broadly to analyse the neoliberalist mode of regulation relied upon in some 'advanced' Western countries (Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins, 2004) in different fields. These fields include the study of school systems and migrant women programmes in Germany (Schreiber et al., 2015; Marquardt, 2014), research on urban governance policy in Canada (Rosol, 2014) and discussion of urban citizenship and rural governance policy in the UK (Flint, 2002; Ward and McNicholas, 1998; Shucksmith, 2010). These studies from the UK and Europe show similarities in the policy directions and programs of rural development to those experienced in Australia in recent decades (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000). In Australia, this concept has been relied upon to study the implementation of national agri-environmental programmes established since the late 1990s. Lockie (1999) shows that in the neoliberalist context, state agencies actually developed a method of governance to mobilise farm businesses to participate in community Landcare groups under the Landcare Program, rather than 'abandon family farmers as transnational agribusiness comes to dominate the organization of production'. Although widely used in Australian economic development policy, this regime of 'governing through community' has encountered problems in dealing effectively with the negative effects of globalization. For example Cheshire and Lawrence (2005) point out that this kind of neoliberal policy cannot prevent the marginalization of rural and regional Australia as it does nothing to challenge the mechanisms of contemporary globalized capitalism.

The concept of 'hybrid governance' developed from the term 'governing through the community'. This terminology helps to illustrate the complexity of the implementation of neoliberal policy, although defined differently to some extent by different scholars. In their discussion with the Foucauldian governmentality school about the 'death of the social', Watt 's (1999) study in southeast England points out that the neoliberal governance regime is employed by state agencies together with the universalist principles of service provision. This mixed assemblage of governance logics is termed 'hybrid governance' (Lockwood and Davidson, 2010) and is used by some Australian scholars to analyse the mentalities directing the community-based programmes, or in other words, 'governing through the community' practices in Australia. Higgins and Lockie (2002) argue that hybrid governance is evident in Australian natural resource management programmes. Their research shows that, within this hybrid governance, 'statistics of performance' are employed as technologies, which shape both the farmers' view on their practices and the policy decisions. Although embraced as a powerful tool by state agencies, hybrid governance actually contributes to the failure of agri-environmental programmes due to its inner conflicts between economic rationalities and social targets (Lockie and Higgins, 2007). Lockwood and Davidson (2010) in their detailed study of Australian natural resource management policy analyse the mentalities of hybrid governance. They hold that, within that particular policy context, neoliberalism, localism and ecocentrism are the

three mentalities competing to direct natural resource management. For them, hybrid governance is 'an assemblage of subjects, ethics, ends and techniques' that is directed by these different mentalities of governance.

While providing a powerful explanation of neoliberal policy in advanced countries, the governmentality approach has been questioned by some researchers (e.g. Barnett, 2005; Lockwood and Davidson, 2010) for its predominant focus on top-down forms of state power and its regulation of conduct in everyday life. However, other studies, which devote their attention to the failure of centralized governance, have emerged in recent years. These studies expand the former research on governmentality by analyzing grassroots engagement with and reactions to government intervention. For example, Shortall (2008), in his discussion of the differences between social inclusion, civic engagement, participation and social capital, demonstrates that some groups fail to participate in certain rural development programmes. This analysis indicates that those groups are not necessarily socially inclusive, rather prospective members automatically chose non-participation for 'ideological and theological reasons'. Similarly, Dinnie et al. (2015) explain why some government policies have not been successfully implemented in Scotland by analysing the 'counter-discourses' held by land managers that holds that they are the only owners of the exclusive knowledge needed to manage land. Eversole (2011) argues that it is difficult to strengthen community engagement in government programmes because governments and communities have different institutional forms and organizing principles. Other authors analyse the complexity of communities via a variety of research topics to demonstrate obstacles to involving communities and their members in government programmes (Harrington et al., 2008; Scott and Hogg, 2015; Prager et al., 2015).

The literature outlined above demonstrates the different analytical perspectives taken in governmentality research in rural contexts, namely top-down perspectives of state intervention; bottom-up perspectives of local response to those interventions; and the complex character of competing mentalities and techniques that contribute to hybridity in the practice in governing through the community. In this study we engage with these different dynamics through the lens of local community representation in different rural collectives. We examine how representation is performed to mediate between state-based objectives; the maintenance of group funding and legitimacy; and the interests of place-based rural communities. We seek to extend the empirical understanding of the diversity of contexts and mechanisms that shape these multi-level and multi-party relationships within contemporary rural governance. By focusing on three types of groups within the grain production industry, the study also highlights the diverse, and pervasive ways in which neoliberalism shapes representational dynamics even with a single agricultural commodity sector. In doing so we attempt to communicate a more comprehensive account of how 'governing through the community' is attempted and what tensions are inherent in those attempts.

3. Case studies and research methods

Informal scoping discussions with agricultural researchers and government agency representatives were undertaken at the outset of the study to identify a range of diverse grain producer-based groups across two states of southern Australian, namely Victoria and Western Australia to approach for participation in the study. Regions within these states are key grain production regions and provide grain to both domestic and export markets. Initial, orienting field visits were made to the Victorian groups in early November, 2014. Three types of farmer organizations formed by

grain growers, agreed to participate in the study. All of these farmer organizations (i.e. Landcare groups, grower groups and farmer co-operatives) see their aim as serving the 'community' but deal with different kinds of issues in rural communities. Landcare groups mainly focus on environmental issues, grower groups primarily deal with grain productivity, while farmer cooperatives deal with the business of grain storage and marketing. Support from government agencies, both directly and indirectly, also forms different proportions of the groups' income sources. For Landcare groups, nearly all of their income is derived from national and state governments. This funding originally came from national funding programs (NLP) directly to these local groups. However, since program was redesigned in the early 2000s, much of these funds are now mediated through regional or catchment level-natural resource management organizations. In grower groups, over half of their income is derived from project grants from the Federal and state governments.[1] Although there is some government support for farmer cooperatives, such as certain kinds of project grants and tax deductions, this support is viewed as a very small proportion of income by interviewees. Crucially, the different proportion of government money in their income source indicates a different relationship or distance between the 'state' and the 'community'.

Each type of farmer organization was investigated in both states: that is six groups within two states.[2] In this paper, they are named Landcare in Victoria (LV), Landcare in Western Australia (LW), Grower Group in Victoria (GV), Gower Group in Western Australia (GW), Farmer Cooperative in Victoria (CV) and Farmer Cooperative in Western Australia (CW) respectively to preserve the confidentiality of interviewees. Board members, staff members and general farmer members[3] were interviewed in each group. We also interviewed government agency aligned stakeholders who interact with but are not members of farmer organizations, including staff in the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC), Catchment Management Authority (CMA), Northern Agricultural Catchment Council (NACC), Grower Group Alliance (GGA), Council of Grain Grower Organizations (COGGO) and Australian Landcare International (ALI).

In total, 41 participants were interviewed (see Table 1). All of the interviews were conducted and audio recorded with the consent of participants.

The main field component of the investigation was conducted through semi structured qualitative interviews, each of which took around 40 min to an hour. These interviews were conducted in the field between late 2014 and early 2015. In addition to the interviews participant observation was undertaken at several group events, staff meetings and project meetings that were held by or associated with these farmer organizations. Observations and reflections were recorded in writing during and after these events and assisted with contextualizing and interpreting the interview data.

Interviews were conducted with officials or individuals with leadership roles in each of the groups, and, with regular group

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[1] The direct funding source for grower groups is Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) and other rural industry funding agencies. For the Research and Development Corporation (RDC) model in Australia, the Australian Government matches industry expenditure dollar to dollar, with industry funds derived from a compulsory levy on grain growers. RDCs are generally regarded as Federal Government agencies by interviewees.

[2] The Landcare group we visited in Western Australia is actually the same group as the grower group investigated there. However, this grower group was initiated as a Landcare group and maintains a branch to work especially on Landcare projects. Participants from these two branches were interviewed separately.

[3] 'General farmer members' refers to farmers who are members of the organization, yet do not work in it as staff or serve as board members.

Table 1
Participants from three types of farmer organizations.

Type	State	Organization	No. and Role of Interviewees
Landcare group	Victoria	ALI	1 Secretary
		CMA	1 Facilitator
		LV	1 Facilitator
			1 Board member
	Western Australia	NACC	3 Facilitator
		LW	1 Facilitator
			1 Board member
			3 Farmer member
Grower group	Victoria	GV	1 Former Chair
			1 Acting Chair
			1 CEO
			1 Communication staff
			1 Financial staff
			3 Farmer member
	Western Australia	GGA	1 Chair
			1 Staff
		GRDC	1 Board member
		COGGO	1 Board member
		GW	1 Former Chair
			1 Current Chair
			1 Board member
			1 CEO
			3 Farmer member
Farmer cooperative	Victoria	CV	1 Board member
			1 Manager
			3 Farmer member
	Western Australia	CW	1 Chair
			1 Staff
			3 Farmer member

members in five of the six groups studied (see Table 1). The majority of interviews were conducted with officials and leaders in the groups as these individuals were better positioned to understand how internal group operation articulated with external stakeholders and funders. Individuals in these leadership roles are central to influencing group strategy and operational norms and are more likely to be aware of the funding related relationships that maintain the group.

Drawing on elements of Davidson and Lockwood's schema for understanding governmentality in hybrid policy contexts, described above, Table 2 below presents the generalized interview topics.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Transcriptions of interviews were firstly coded according to respondent types in different farmer organizations. This initial coding strategy highlighted the character of representational and funding relationships between organizations. However, in the course of analysis three organizing themes became evident that related to how farmer group members articulated their experience of the techniques and mechanisms that served to

structure and legitimate those funding and representational relationships both internally, and externally. These mechanisms also, clearly, took both material and discursive forms and were referred to variously as 'paperwork', 'data' and 'price' by group leaders and members alike.

The following section reports on the results of the analysis, focusing on how groups define and seek to serve the interests of their communities, and how these three mechanisms above regulate both their relationship with those communities and their external funders and stakeholders. It also describes how these mechanisms serve as technologies of governance, and the tensions and opportunities created through their application.

4. Results

Table 3 below summarizes the farmer organizations' various claims to represent grain farmers within a defined geographical area: that is, the basis on which they constitute their 'community'.

4.1. Definitions of 'community' according to farmer organization types

'Community' or 'local' was the key word emphasized by all participants, especially board members and staff, in all three kinds of farmer organizations. This key word was frequently used to underline the value and aim of farmer organizations. Board members from LV and LW believed that Landcare groups helped to deal with environmental issues in the rural community and thus enhanced the profitability of local farmers. Participants from GV and GW hold that grower groups provided reliable data for local farmers as they conducted field trials within the local community. CV and CW were regarded as important organizations to reduce storage costs for local farmers as farmer cooperatives were controlled by and thus run for the interest of local farmers. Interviewees in all three types of farmer organizations thought that their groups brought considerable social benefits to the community, such as job creation and enhancing communication among local farmers. These social benefits were seen as crucial for the survival of farming communities. The following quotation from one manager of CV is a representative summary of these perceived social benefits:

'Our organization has a lot of benefits to this community. It's a farmer community. We buy locally, spend locally. Only if we can't get it, we can't buy it local. But we try to get it local. We employ local. We are owned local. And we do support local sporting clubs and schools.'

Yet, when asked about the exact meaning of 'community' and 'local', they gave answers that differed according to the type of farmer organization. For LV and LW, community referred to the local

Table 2
Examples of interview topics and relationship with key concepts.

Key concepts	Topics with farmer group interviewees	Topics with interviewees from agencies funding the farmer organizations
Subjects	Primary and other income sources; Geographic area the group was oriented to and from which the group members were drawn; Relationship with funding bodies; Understanding of members' interests.	Income source of the funding organization; Key farmer groups and localities where they invest;
Ends	Reasons for joining group or initiated the group; Goals of the group and obstacles to achieving those goals;	The priorities of their program reasons that they started cooperating with the farmer organizations.
Ethics	Rights and responsibilities within the organization to internal and external entities; Risks entailed in relying on certain income sources;	The process of setting priorities and ensuring accountability;
Techniques	Changes in income sources over time and the reasons for change; Main mechanisms for interacting with members and demonstrating value and legitimacy	Criteria used to select and evaluate funding objects; Main mechanisms for implementing strategy and engaging with farmer groups.

Table 3
Simplified overview of farmer group community, representational focus and primary regulating mechanism.

Group Type	Community definition (subjects)	Representation issues (ends)	Regulating mechanism (techniques)
Landcare group	Local shire residents	Agri-environment	Paperwork
Grower group	Geographic coverage of agronomy trials and members (district)	Agri-productivity	Data
Farmer cooperative	Geographic coverage of patrons; proximate supply chain members	Grain storage and marketing	Price

shires they were based in. For GV, community was the area in which the majority of its trials and members were located. Although the participants from GW saw the local shires as their community because GW had originated in a Landcare group, they had actually accepted members from outside the community area and were discussing extending GW to a bigger area, on the basis that their trials provided useful information to farmers in areas with similar rainfall and soil types. Interviewees from CV saw the supply chain area of the cooperative as the community. And, for CW, community also referred to the geographic area where the majority of its grain was delivered from and where all its members resided.

Although on face value their definitions of 'community' differed, one commonality was that they all referred to the area within the service radius of the farmer organizations. From the selected cases, we can see that various factors influence the service radius of farmer organizations. The service radius of Landcare groups was highly influenced by government policy,[4] whereas the radius was mainly decided by typical services provided in grower groups and farmer cooperatives. However, 'community' always referred to the geographic area and the residents within it that the farmer organization could reach.

4.2. Three mechanisms regulating stakeholder interactions: paperwork, data and price

Three distinctive patterns of regulatory mechanisms were evident from the experiences of members and officials from each of the three types of groups: 'paperwork', 'data' and 'price'.

The primary mechanism described by locals in Landcare groups was 'paperwork', as indicated in the following quotation of a LV board member:

'I can make an application and fill it here in the kitchen at the beginning. Very simple, because I'm a simple person, and I can get some funding. But now to get some funding, we have to get someone like Mike (fictitious name, referred to the facilitator) that can fill all the dots and crosses … Paperwork is very difficult for local farmers. And you got sick of filling in these forms. And 90% of the farmers were the same … You have to apply for big lot of money now. I could get $500 or $1000 (at the beginning), but that's impossible now. You got to get $10,000 projects … If we didn't have Mike here, Landcare in this area would die.'

The emergence of Landcare groups on national level in Australia can be attributed to Australian governments at all levels.[5] According to the initiators of LV and LW, they started their local Landcare groups because the State and Federal Government wanted to invest in conservation on farm land through the community and thus

there was money local farmers could easily access. That is why the participant quoted above stated he could do paperwork in the kitchen and obtain funding easily at the beginning of Landcare programme. Yet the participant found that the paperwork burden in applying for funds dramatically increased and became very difficult for the majority of farmers to handle after government changed their policy in favour of big projects.[6] Facilitators, who were not usually local farmers and were employed for their administrative skills, became the key to the survival of local Landcare groups because of the burdens imposed under an increasingly administratively driven process. Accordingly, paperwork became the highest priority issue in Landcare groups in order to keep them running.

To obtain funding from government agencies, local Landcare groups must find assistance as the farmer members were almost all volunteers and paperwork was time consuming. Different Landcare groups use different methods to find the administratively skilled person according to our interviews with staff in CMA in Victoria and NACC in Western Australia. A few Landcare groups had local farmer facilitators, and these were usually board members in the group, to apply for funding. However, these groups faced the problem of succession as the older people lost enthusiasm after many years of work and the younger generation had not shown interest in Landcare issues. Some Landcare groups formed a Landcare network to employ one facilitator, whereas others turned to facilitators working for the CMA or NACC to get help. In our case study, LV was involved in a network formed by 17 Landcare groups while LW was a combination of two Landcare groups that had managed to employ their own facilitator through the combined Landcare group.

In summary, paperwork was the key activity to obtain funding from the government agencies, and some enthusiastic local farmers sourced an administratively skilled person to help them with it through Landcare groups as it was hard for individual farmers to meet this administrative requirement. As a result, the need to demonstrate administrative competence had materially and politically reshaped the networks and relationships between local Landcare groups.

Although paperwork was also important work for staff members in grower groups, it was not primary mechanism that regulated the interaction of different stakeholder types. Instead, 'data' was emphasized by all stakeholder types in grower groups.

"Without data, you are only just another person with opinion."

The above was the first sentence of a researcher's presentation at the Crop Update of GW. The key word 'data' explained the nature

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[4] According to interviewees who have been involved in Landcare groups since the beginning of the Landcare program in Australia, the Landcare groups were supposed to operate within the physical boundaries of local shires with the help of each shire council.

[5] The Landcare movement originally derived from collaboration between the Victorian Government and Victorian Farmer Federation. The Federal Government subsequently decided to expand it into a national programme.

[6] Over the last decades, Landcare programmes experienced several changes. First, government gave funds directly to Landcare groups through National Landcare Programme and related programmes. Then following the programme changes in around 2002 and then 2008, regional or catchment level projects and activities were emphasized to improve the strategic outcomes of Landcare (see Tennent and Lockie, 2013). In response to concerns from Landcare groups about the administrative burden, government made money available directly to groups again but only for relatively small grants. Despite this, the paperwork burden hasn't really changed and is still high.

of the interactions between stakeholders in grower groups. Grower groups sought GRDC projects as a major source of funds that enabled them to carry out locally relevant research for the benefit of their members while GRDC saw farmer groups as effective in customising and communicating science and technology based innovations, normally exhibited in the form of delivering on-farm trial data to farmer members. According to participants from GV, GW and GRDC, grower groups needed to demonstrate in the applications for projects and project contracts that they would provide objective data to farmers. For farmers, the main aim of involvement in grower groups was getting access to scientific data from on-farm trials conducted by the grower groups. When asked the major benefits as members, their replies were all similar to the quotation below:

'They run trials. You get all the trial result … They had about three or four viewing of the trials throughout the year. So you get to go to them to see what progress has been made or different chemicals. It's just a way to get exposure to new products really, and new ideas and testing different things. '

Researchers employed by research organizations and commercial companies also joined in the process of data production together with farmer groups. Research organizations usually played the role of collaborating with grower groups in funding applications whereas commercial companies were normally sponsors for grower groups. Both these public and private researchers tried to demonstrate the value of their research data via presentations to farmers through grower groups. As one researcher from a research organization stated:

'It's important to show that your research will be put on the ground if you want to apply for money from GRDC … If you do not present your data to farmers, only you yourself know your research.'

It can be seen from the analysis above that data was the mechanism that served to coordinate interactions between the stakeholders in the grower groups. In the process of data production, GRDC was the investor, research organization and grower groups were suppliers, farmers were both investors and consumers, and commercial agri-business companies were a combination of investor, suppliers and consumers. The work conducted in grower groups was primarily about producing and marketing data, through which all stakeholders interacted with each other, received benefit and ensured legitimacy.

Although the incentive to belong to farmer cooperatives also concerned increasing profitability, profitability was realized through the mechanism of 'price', rather than data.

"Their (farmer cooperatives') business is to get the grain as cheaply as they can. My business is to sell it as dear as I can. The seller always wants the higher price and the buyer always want the lower price. "

The quotation above came from a farmer member of CW, who has been involved in CW for more than 20 years. He stated that the only reason he sold his grain through CW was that CW provided the best price on the day he prepared to sell his grain. It was the price rather than membership that was decisive. The same followed in CV although it was a much smaller cooperative than CW. CV was established because of local farmers' dissatisfaction with the inefficiency of a big grain handling company (H), which was the only bulk handler in that area before CV. Nonetheless, almost all growers in the area still stored and sold some of their grain through H because it provided good prices for certain kinds of grain.

When asked about the challenges in the organization, both board members and managers in CV and CW replied that the biggest challenge was the increasing competition in their business. They said that the most important priority was to ensure they offered services at a competitive price to guarantee attracting enough grain to keep the business running. Some project funding was available from government agencies for cooperatives, if they could meet certain criteria, on the basis that the cooperatives were community based and contributed to the profitability of local farmers. In contrast to Landcare and grower groups, the main income of farmer cooperatives was derived from grain storage and marketing. In summary, farmer cooperatives managed to survive because: they offered competitive prices to local growers; government showed their support to farmer cooperatives for this reason although funding was modest and application for it difficult; and local growers became involved in farmer cooperatives due to the good price they provided.

As described above, the three mechanisms of 'paperwork', 'data' and 'price', were the techniques that functioned to coordinate the action of different stakeholders in the three types of farmer organizations. We now turn to examine the reactions to policy change according to stakeholder types united under these mechanisms as part of the process of 'governing through the community'.

4.3. Different reactions to policy change within 'the community'

When Landcare groups tended to become more project driven because of policy change in Landcare programmes, administratively skilled facilitators who undertook the essential work of applying for and running government projects performed the key role for the groups' survival or success. Groups like LV and LW who gained the help of facilitators managed to get involved in rural environmental projects. Other Landcare groups who could not deal successfully with the paperwork burden ceased functioning. According to our interviews with participants involved in Landcare groups, the last two decades has seen an obvious decline in the number of Landcare groups.[7] All participants spoke of the difficulties of convincing more farmers, especially young farmers to become involved even in active groups like LV and LW, because the survival of the Landcare groups and the projects they implemented were not regarded as providing farmers with the economic benefits essential for the survival of individual family farm. In short, paperwork was of the highest importance for the survival of Landcare groups, but was not perceived as rewarding work for the majority of farmers. Thus, projects in Landcare groups were mainly a game played by government agencies, facilitators and small number of enthusiastic farmers who usually occupied the role of Landcare group board members.

Turning to grower groups, according to participants from grower groups and GRDC, the latter changed its strategy in favour of big projects that could cover a larger area and benefit more growers. Consequently, it was very important for grower groups applying for projects to demonstrate that they could reduce project costs while expanding their trials' geographic coverage by cooperating with research organizations and commercial sponsors. Meanwhile, public project funding relies highly on the government's policy direction, which is not seen as stable because of changes of government. This fact added to the burden of diversifying their income sources to reduce the risk of relying on project funding in grower

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[7] This trend was also demonstrated by studies on Australia Landcare programmes over the last twenty years (see Tennent and Lockie, 2013).

groups. Although general farmer members were supposed to be the essential component of grower groups, membership fees formed only a small proportion of the total income of the organizations compared with money from projects and sponsors. Furthermore, public project grants were highly controlled by government agencies, whereas funding from sponsors could be used more flexibly to develop the organization from different aspects and thus were more attractive to grower groups. It was difficult for grower groups to balance the various interests of stakeholder types in the data production process given this background. Trials were conducted to retain the main income sources, project grants and funding from sponsors, and were not necessarily related to the need of farmer members. While grower groups sought to diversify their income sources and produce data for different stakeholders, general farmer members lost interest in being involved in the groups to some extent. In one project meeting, participants from government agencies, research organizations and commercial companies all talked about the difficulties of getting farmers to attend the events held by grower groups. As stated:

'It's hard to get farmers to turn up to crop updates. Beer and barbecue does not work anymore.'

The deregulation of the grain industry in recent decades[8] was seen as a big challenge for bulk handling farmer cooperatives, especially those large cooperatives who had enjoyed a monopoly on grain handling in certain geographic areas before deregulation. To survive the increasingly serious competition, some farmer cooperatives were privatized while others kept operating as cooperatives but tried hard to improve their services and to diversify their income sources. Both managers from CV and CW spoke of their struggle in the new environment as cooperatives, and the problems derived from privatizing cooperatives to become commercial companies. However, for general farmer members, deregulation policy was not necessarily something to worry about. Rather, they saw it as an opportunity to chase higher grain prices in the market. Just as one farmer member from CW stated:

'There are also other buyers for noodle wheat (except CW), which is good. You need three or four buyers, then you have competition. If you only get one buyer …, see the price of lupins is really terrible, because there's only one or two buyers. There's no competition in lupins and we get stitched up on price all the time because CW is the only one that buy it.'

For farmers, it was the price rather than the buyer that mattered most. This is totally understandable as historically cooperatives were established by farmers as a way to achieve higher prices. That is, it has always been about price for growers and the ways to achieve this is a means to an end.

Faced with the different interests of farmer organizations and their members, government agencies had or had tried in their policy design to strengthen the connection between these two kinds of stakeholders as is discussed in the following section.

4.4. Reaction of government agencies to the differences within 'the community'

As the work in Landcare groups became more administratively demanding and project driven, growers gradually lost interest because they did not see it as closely related to their on-farm profitability. In response, government agencies tried to (re)connect the environmental projects with productivity issues in their programme design. To obtain government projects funds, Landcare groups are now required to show a close relationship between their proposed project and economic benefits to growers. For example the environmental project from NACC in LW concerned 'Improving productivity on non-wetting soils in the Northern Agricultural Region (NAR) through Pasture Cropping'. And the projects in LV emphasized weed control on farm. We can see this attempt to reconcile environmental with production aims from the following statement of a Landcare facilitator in LW who afforded a clear articulation of this change of emphasis within environmental projects:

' … at the moment there's not much more just for Landcare, so there's no "you just planting trees", that's gone, the funding is gone. So instead of pure Landcare, you try to have sustainable agriculture. And that comes into Landcare as well. One of my new projects is trying a new salt bush species. So we have got funding for that. So we can put it in some marginal land, then you can graze your sheep on it. It restores your soil, so it's Landcare. But at the same time, because you can graze it, it's agriculture … There's no money on purely Landcare anymore.'

For grower groups, the membership fee formed only a small proportion of income compared to funds from public projects and commercial sponsors. Yet, it was actually a much more important component than it appeared. When asked what the key factors were for successful funding applications, staff members in GV and GW all stated that the number of farmer members was very important and you would gain advantage in the competition for funding with a larger number of members, or in other words, more growers that the project would potentially benefit compared to other groups. So the importance of membership fees in grower groups should not only be weighed by its proportional contribution to total income. This made grower groups pay more attention to their connection with growers' needs, although balancing the requirements of their stakeholders remained difficult. When asked about challenges facing the grower groups, these interviewees all stated that the most important thing for the group was to maintain relations with growers.

As farmer cooperatives, CV and CW did not receive any project funding from government agencies, but enjoyed a tax exemption and all of these interviewees mentioned that they would lose this tax advantage if they were privatized. Deregulation policy brought more competitors for CV and CW and caused some farmer cooperatives to change into normal commercial companies. However, the tax advantage and maintenance of farmer control were important factors to be taken into account while considering privatization. As one CW board member stated, when he fought against the privatization of CW in the year 2000:

' … I asked them to show me the benefits for farmers (if CW got privatized). And if it was better for farmers, I would totally support it. But they couldn't offset the loss of the tax exemption that we have. They couldn't guarantee that the price (of grain storage) wouldn't go up. There was no guarantee that we would keep control of it. And as times go on and on, companies that privatized, they've totally lost control. There were a few farmers that still got shares in it, but not to the extent they got any control at all.'

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[8] The deregulation policy of wheat marketing started from late the 1980s in Australia. The 1990s started to see the influence of this policy. Yet, various states and grain markets were affected at different time (see Pritchard, 1998; Kingwell and Pannell, 2005).

On the surface, it appears the problem caused by different interests in the community could be solved through policy design. However, the concept of 'targeted customer' raised in the following section points to conflicts that are harder to address in this way.

4.5. Targeted customer versus 'the community'

'Often we don't segment and understand the audience who is in the market for the piece of research we are doing … In our state, we've got this 5000 farmers, only 2000 of those are really sizable scale. How we communicate and engage with those 2000? Often, there's only 500 of them in the market for some of the research we are doing. We should be focusing [on this 500] rather than … mass communication.'

The above quotation was the reply the CEO of a grower group gave when asked about the relationship between growers and the group. He pointed out that the targeted customer, rather than all the growers in the community, should be regarded as the audience for their research. 'Targeted customer' was the concept that divided the community into two parts: one part was growers connected to the farmer organization, the other part was those who were not related to it. Connection between growers and farmer organizations could be decided by economic factors, i.e. growers had to be sufficiently profitable to be a member. For example, growers had to continue investing in certain software to be involved in a project in GV; and had to deliver no less than 600 tonnes over the past three seasons to CW to retain their membership. Other factors could influence growers' participation in farmer organizations as well. For example, one interviewee from LV stated that he initiated a Landcare group mainly because of his own philosophy of the relationship between human society and nature, and some other farmers just had different philosophies and never cared about the environment so they tended not to involve in Landcare.

We now turn to discuss the role of farmer organizations in the process of 'governing through the community', the tensions generated due to different interests during the interactions focused on the three regulating mechanisms, the effects of government policies and the conflicts that are hard to address with policy design.

5. Discussion: a dialectic of distance, tensions and legitimacy

5.1. Governing through representatives of the community

While the concept of community has been well problematized within the literature (eg. Harrington et al., 2008; Scott and Hogg, 2015; Prager et al., 2015) the analysis above articulates how this concept was used flexibly by different farmer organizations to make certain areas, and residents within those areas, representable. Despite the various framings of 'community' offered by the interviewees, the shared commonalities relating to the area of, and residents within, the service radius of the farmer organizations. In other words, for farmer organizations, 'community' always referred to the area and residents they can claim to represent. For Landcare and grower groups whose main income sources are public funding, emphasizing their role as representatives of the community is an important way to strengthen their legitimacy in applying for and running public projects, which are intended to be designed for the interests of the rural community. For farmer cooperatives, one principle that must be obeyed is 'concern for community'.[9] Although 'price' is the main mechanism governing interaction between farmer members and farmer cooperatives, the members do contribute to the establishment of farmer cooperatives especially at the beginning. The ethic of working on behalf of the community makes the cooperatives somewhat more attractive for farmers than normal commercial companies.

In their devolution of responsibility to communities (Rose, 1996b; Lockie, 1999; Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Everingham, 2001; Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins, 2004), government agencies need to find representative intermediaries who can both embody the concept of 'community' and implement government policies by conducting assemblages of projects. Participants from government agencies also discussed the relationship between different government agencies. As they usually possess the power to distribute public funding specifically in certain fields, different government agencies have to find representatives of 'the community', who are adept at the specific functions or knowledgeable of the issues they prioritise within their agencies. For example, funding for Landcare groups usually comes from the Department of Environment and CMAs, and projects for grower groups normally related to GRDC and Departments of Agriculture. For government agencies, it is not the exact meaning of 'the community' that matters; rather, they are more interested in who can act as representatives of the community on certain issues so that they can make their policy workable.

5.2. Tensions in governing through representatives of the community

As mentioned before, the three types of farmer organizations we studied were positioned at different distances from the 'state'. We can see the differences from both the proportions of project funding in their income sources and in the primary mechanisms that regulate their interactions.

Landcare groups are the closest to government agencies out of the three farmer group types because their survival depends almost completely on project funding. Thus Landcare groups are subject to the highest degree of government control, which is exercised in the form of paperwork. Paperwork is not merely a way to implement agri-environmental projects or policies, it is actually "an authoritative tune" (Scott, 1998), to which Landcare groups must dance in order to survive. However, it is not necessarily a tune that general members in the community must dance to, for their survival ultimately relies upon the income from their own farm to which the projects are not seen as closely related. Landcare groups have to reinterpret the community need to make it match the priorities of government agencies to increase the probability of success in winning funding. As the work in Landcare groups becomes more administratively orientated and thus professionalized, Landcare groups risk becoming increasingly distanced from their community.

The mechanism of 'data' in grower groups as one form of 'knowledge' becomes an important instrument of 'governing through self-governance', and the corresponding power of experts, is well recognized (Rose, 1993; Reed, 1996; Lemke, 2002; Carolan, 2006). However, we can see from our study that knowledge (data) is not merely an instrument of governing for government agencies, it is also a marketing method used by commercial companies whose targeted consumers are growers. Grower groups, to reduce their risk of relying on funding from government agencies,

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tend to produce or demonstrate knowledge for commercial companies as well through product trials. Although, knowledge conflicts are not necessarily induced from the production of data for different funding bodies, some of the trials conducted by grower groups look more outsider-driven than farmer-driven from the perspective of general member growers. This sees growers becoming more reluctant to join in the data-sharing events in grower groups. The power of all the 'knowledge' produced in grower groups is actually weakened by the felt loss of ownership of the work carried out by their group. In this way the currency of 'data' can become self-defeating to the groups claims of legitimately representing local framer interests.

Farmer cooperatives are the least directly connected to government agencies out of these three kinds of farmer organizations. They are also the type most directly connected to economic benefits for growers compared to Landcare groups and grower groups. Instead of repeatedly announcing their representativeness of the community to government agencies to apply for funds, they emphasize their close relationship with their community and make themselves more attractive to growers by 'employing locally, spending locally and supporting local schools and clubs'. Yet, the 'cost-price squeeze', in which farmers face worsening terms of trade with their costs going up faster than the price they receive for their produce, makes 'price' the most important thing for growers to think about while making decisions. Deregulation policy, which has increased the competition among grain bulk handling bodies, is seen as a significant challenge by farmer cooperatives. But deregulation is embraced as a good policy for farmers as long as it functions to increase grain prices. The survival of farmer cooperatives relies upon the productivity and loyalty of growers, whereas, the survival of growers does not necessarily rely upon the operating of farmer cooperatives.

5.3. Strengthening legitimacy of representatives

Through processes of policy design and implementation we see in our study government agencies making compensatory arrangements to enhance the connection between representatives of the community and those who are represented. This strategy, termed 'hybrid governance' (Higgins and Lockie, 2002; Lockie and Higgins, 2007), try to attract locals by (re)connecting government projects with farmers' productivity issues. While there are conflicts between different mentalities within this governance regime (Lockie &Higgins, 2007; Lockwood and Davidson, 2010), we can see in our study that this hybrid governance strategy actually strengthen legitimacy of farmer organizations as representatives of the community to some extent and, in doing so this make these groups something that can be governed through, and members of the community reachable to 'the state'.

However, use of the concept 'targeted customer' indicates a more complex relationship between farmer organizations and other growers in the community more broadly. Growers decided to participate in the farmer organization or not according to various factors. Farmer organizations announced their aim as encouraging the social and economic flourishing of 'the community'. Yet, 'the community' that they could claim to represent were only the targeted customers rather than the whole community. Thus the community that could be reached through farmer organizations were only the part formed by the 'targeted customers'.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the manner of 'governing through community' in rural Australia. To understand and explain this phenomenon we focused on three mechanisms of regulation that had both discursive and material forms. These mechanisms of paperwork, data and price are structure and legitimize interaction between governments, rural communities and their representative organizations. This analytic strategy proved useful in bridging different perspectives in the governmentality literature which describe 'governing through the community' from top-down, bottom-up, and hybrid perspectives.

We found that government agencies have to cooperate with representatives of the community in order to embody the concept 'the community' and make a community governable, no matter what the exact definition of community being relied upon, or the distance between the state and farmer organization created by the extent of financial dependence.

Landcare groups are the closest and most tractable to the state. The mechanism of 'paperwork', betrays the administratively demanding nature of their work and status as almost totally influenced by the priorities of government agencies. The behaviour of grower groups is highly influenced by government polices as well, although this influence is not as strong as is upon Landcare groups. The mechanism of 'data' governs interaction between government agencies, grower groups and general farmer members. While grower groups diversify their income sources to survive, the power of data as knowledge is weakened as data production becomes more outsider than farmer driven from growers' perspectives. Farmer cooperatives are the least directly related to the state and are not strongly influenced by government agencies compared with Landcare or grower groups whose main income rely upon public funding of projects. 'Price' is the main interaction mechanism between farmer cooperative and general farmer members. This kind of farmer organization is also supported by government to some extent as they enhance economic benefits to growers and contribute to the development of the community. However, the dominance of 'price' also shows us the tensions between the interests of farmer cooperative as an organization and growers as individual entrepreneurs.

Government agencies have developed strategies in their policies to deal with these tensions in the process of governing through representatives of the community. These arrangements are designed to strengthen the legitimacy of representatives and bring the broader community within reach. Yet, in practice only sections of the community that formed by targeted customers of the farmer organization were potentially reachable.

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