

HOW SCIENTIST LEARNT ABOUT THEIR ROLE IN GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF GREAT BRAK

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Angry citizens drew scientists into the negotiations on environmental flows of an estuary located in a rural region of the southern Cape coast of South Africa. A major dam development was threatening their lifestyle and safety. Although environmental impact assessments were not a legal requirement at the time, scientists were commissioned to conduct such an assessment and come up with a management plan for the estuary. This study, which was the first of its kind in South Africa, moved the government authorities from a stance of technocratic decision making on water planning to a cooperative coalition, including local citizens and scientists. Scientists brought evidence-based knowledge of biophysical processes to the negotiations, informing the decision making. And so a fourteen year period of learning from monitoring and through negotiation and interaction followed, culminating in a revision of the original management plan in 2004. The Great Brak case study played a critical role in revising South Africa's water law, acting as an exemplar of the process of incorporating ecological water requirements in strategic water planning and in so doing preserving local social and economic values. In 2009 an ecological flow requirements study as required under the revised water law was conducted, the outcomes of which are still (politically) disputed.

The paper provides an analysis of how scientists participated in this process and explores options for their future contributions to water governance.