

# The third sector, Big Society and catchment governance - questions from the riverbank

- A joint personal view

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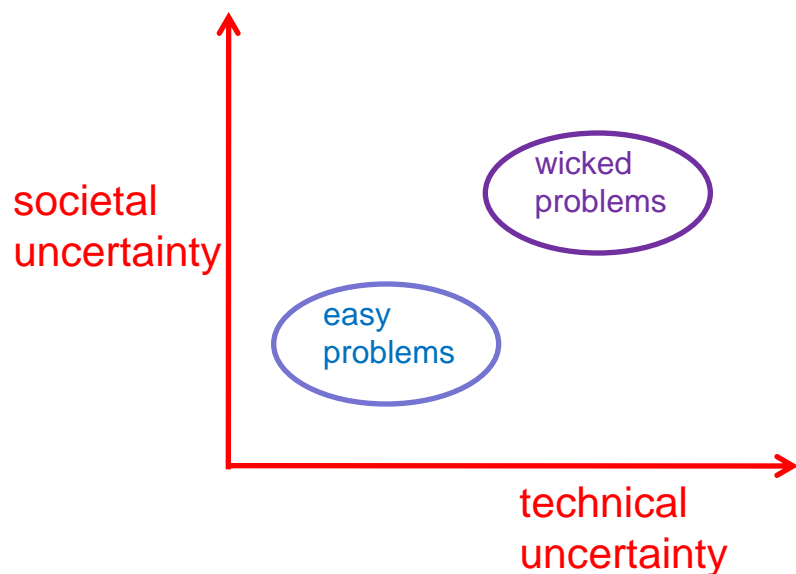
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Hello, I am from the English River Agency - and I am here to help



# How to allocate, manage and protect water resources in catchments in which people live, work and play? A 'wicked' problem!



- complex and location specific
- dynamic, uncertain
- diverse legitimate values and interests
- no definitive problem formulation
- many externalities
- multiple trade-offs
- intractable for a single organisation

(Rittel & Webber, 1973) (Ludwig, 2001)





# Wicked problems need

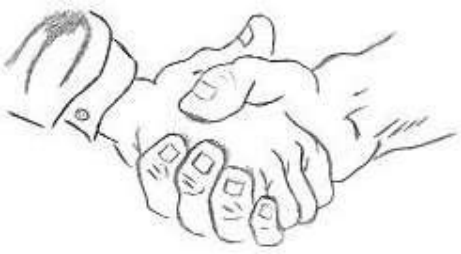
- Governance arrangements that are capable of generating collective understanding of problems
- To sustain behaviour change amongst societal and sectoral groups, including capability for “social learning” that sponsors collective action
- A “twin-track” adaptive approach of iterative scientific research and public participation and negotiation
- Essential joint planning and decision-making

We aim to point to some vital questions for water governance

# What is 'government'?



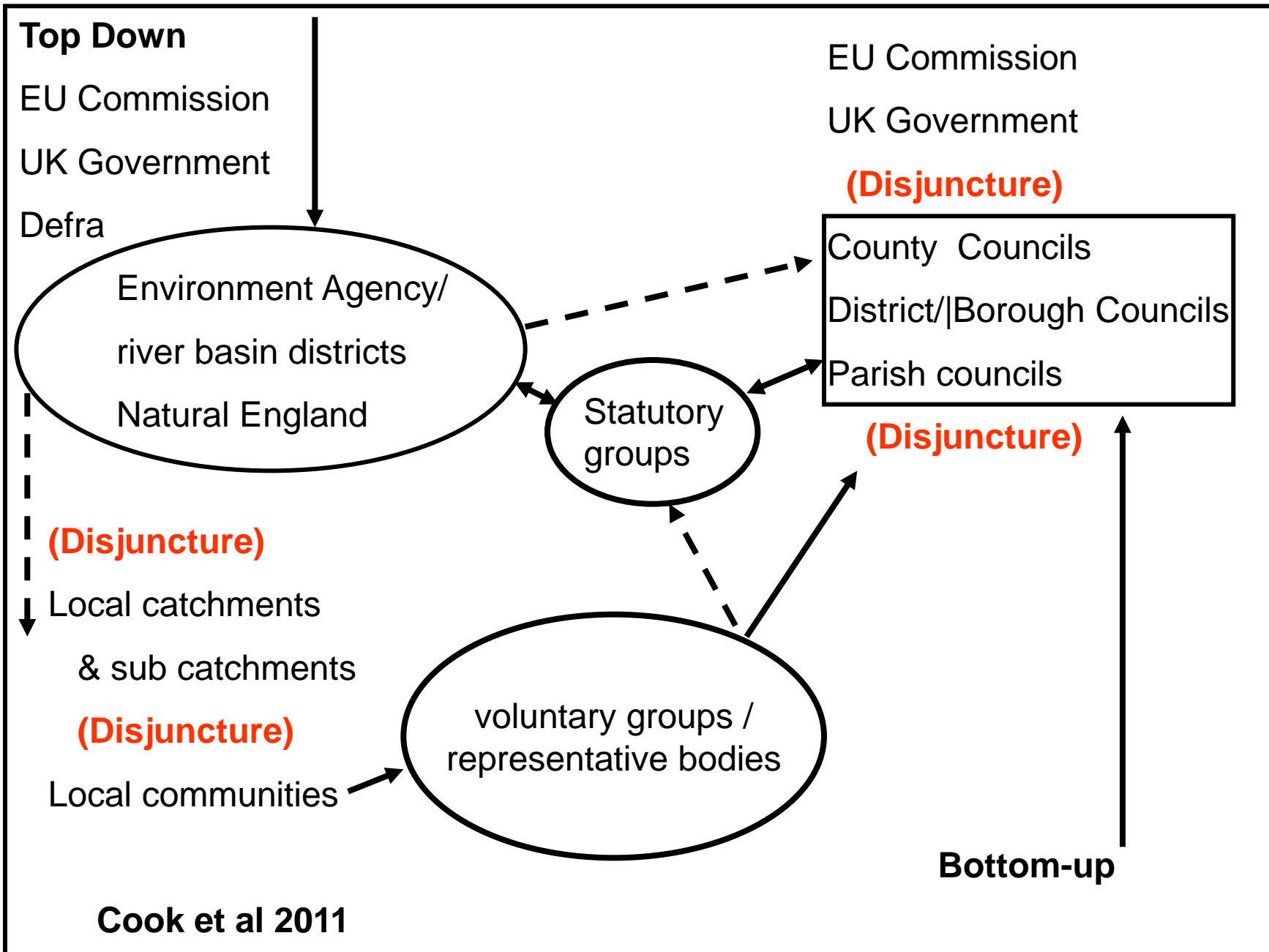
- A common perception of 'government' relies upon it being 'top-down', based in centralised structures and in legal frameworks delivered by the State
- Since the Thatcher era, governments seek to regulate monopolised markets through statutory agencies that also deliver environmental goods
- Separation of power occurs because natural monopolies are charged with delivering utilities while regulation, including that required for environmental quality, are delivered via 'competent authorities'
- For example, water has separate regulators for the industry, for water quality and quantity, for pricing and investment, and for human and animal health issues



# What is 'governance'?

- The term refers to 'steering' rather than command and control
- Can occur at many levels, from local to national to 'supra-national'
- WFD is an example of the latter, but it requires for more concerted action
- Political scientists talk of governance through communities, networks hierarchies and markets (Pierre & Peters, 2001)
- Whole regulatory environments becomes more nebulous than hitherto

# A view of water governance for England and Wales – the status quo?





# Current situation

- **Currently catchment governance arrangements are being scrutinised**
- **WFD targets have generated major challenges for catchment managers**
- **The *status quo* is considered to be expensive in monetary terms**



- Expanding the role of the 'third' - or NGO - sector has been on the UK political agenda under both recent administrations
- Under the 'Big Society', NGOs are seen as a partial replacement for Top-down 'Big Government' action
- The water sector has likewise experienced a development of NGO creation and action
- Such Institutions play roles in conservation, fisheries, and other relevant areas. This has been the case for decades
- The perceived change generates questions for catchment resourcing, governance and regulation
- And we need better working arrangements between public, private and third sectors



# Third sector solutions?

- Value driven, issue focussed and economically efficient due volunteer engagement and low administrative overheads
- Operates free from direct government intervention. An expenditure-conscious administration under neo-liberal influence is likely to see this as desirable in providing environmental goods and services
- Mobilising the public in focussed voluntary action seen as a 'social good' that has resonance in social inclusion
- Is *ad hoc*, that is mission statements arise from perceived need, not a from rigid structure for integrated river basin management
- Has been operating in the environmental sphere for over a century and so is well established in the public mind
- Broker and deliverer on the ground...fits Big Society paradigm

# Key questions

- **How might NGOs be built into the governance structure?**
- **Which tasks are realistic for NGOs?**
- **Which bodies should be ‘tasked’ with delivery?  
Rivers Trusts? Other environmental NGOs?**
- **How might ‘gaps’ in provision be filled, by whom and who decides?**
- **How can funding become sustainable?**



# Questions that may be asked by citizens and professionals alike:

What are the 'sustainability' criteria?

(Are they merely):

- Good management of bulk water supply
- Effective flood management for inland waters
- Effective water quality control at source
- Effective habitat management (including sustaining fisheries)
- Meeting overall WFD objectives
- What else?



# Summary observations

- Task and resource allocation are required between public and NGO sectors.
- How will 'turf wars' between government agencies, and between them and the NGO sector be avoided?
- Gaps and 'disjunctures' (especially for accountable government) will need to be addressed.
- Accountability of NGOs to central government equally needs definition.
- Are there to be criteria for social sustainability as well as those established for 'the environment'?



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- But the opinions expressed remain those of the presenters





Your (wicked) suggestions  
are (more than) welcome  
**THANK YOU**