



Why engage?

Because we want our research to make a difference

Achieving results for threatened species often seems daunting. It involves complex interactions of management capacity, policy and regulatory frameworks, community opinion, business activities, cultural understandings, economic developments, financial priorities... and scientific knowledge. Dealing with this complexity means more than simply delivering scientific knowledge fully formed to end-users. What does that mean in practice for researchers wanting to make a real difference? TSR Hub's Knowledge Broker **Rachel Morgain** sets out the basics – the AEIOU of stakeholder relationships.

Studies consistently show that strong and enduring partnerships are the key to affecting change. Co-created research and research that is responsive to public values gives us our best chance of turning research insight into effective action. But good engagement takes time and effort. It demands skills quite different to those needed for good science. It is as much about relationships as it is about research.

So what are the elements that drive effective partnerships? And what are the benefits? Here are a few basics:

Acknowledgment. TSR Hub research fundamentally depends upon collaborative networks: with other researchers, landholders, parks, land managers, non-government agencies (NGOs), government experts, Indigenous owners, zoos, citizen science groups, industry partners, funding bodies and many more. Acknowledging and celebrating these partners – and the generous resources, time and support they provide – helps build trust and lay a strong foundation for future collaboration.

Exchange. Research is built on the exchange of ideas. Studies of science engagement highlight its value in fostering brilliant research. Knowledge exchange with Indigenous partners and land managers vitally enriches research and can generate benefits for all. Research collaborations that work across domains – eg, between policy and research agencies – can

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produce more robust and better-targeted findings. Engagement between researchers, business, political leaders, NGOs and the public can provide insights into socially pressing issues, the values that impact environmental action, and where research can inform real solutions.

Influence. A diversity of engagement strategies amplifies the impact of the knowledge being shared. For researchers, this often means investing time and effort in building networks, delivering effective results for partners, building collaborative programs to generate robust science, learning skills in communications and media, and reaching out beyond their comfort zone to potentially interested parties. Balancing these activities against the demands of advancing a career in science can be extremely challenging. But bringing researchers together with business and political leaders, land managers, NGOs and other stakeholders also offers the greatest chance for informed decision-making and the greatest potential for transformative action.

Opportunities. Investing time and effort in research partnerships and engagement can open up new opportunities. Small collaborations lead to large programs. Discussions generate new avenues for mutually beneficial research. For researchers, investing in partnerships can be career enhancing, leading to grants, consultancies, or invitations to give advice or to sit on boards. Engagement with stakeholders or with the public can sharpen a research program and inspire new questions. For practitioners, policy and business leaders, engaging with researchers – including young and emerging researchers – can identify emerging research of key value and brings skills, insights, technologies and vital knowledge to support actions and decisions.

Uptake. When environmental research is co-designed (for example between researchers and land managers or policy end-users), it is more effective in leading to changes in practice. Many studies have shown this. Co-designed research generates solutions which are quickly applicable, and allows for adaptive management or experimental approaches as new findings are produced. Even where it doesn't lead to immediate change (policy cycles can take years, even decades) research that has been built from the start with end-users is more likely to survive the long-haul.

I'm not saying that any of this is easy; indeed, there are many challenges to overcome. More institutional investment is needed in supporting researchers to move between government, NGOs, industry and academia. Researchers need to be given time and training necessary for effective engagement. And practitioners in partner agencies – government, non-government and private – need the resources and time to invest in research partnerships. However, this has to be the way we go if our science is to make an enduring difference.

Australia's threatened species are everyone's concern. Traditional owners, business leaders, city planners, farmers, land managers, policy advisers, community leaders, politicians and school kids: we all have a stake in protecting our rich natural heritage. In a complex and ever-shifting world, the only way to achieve results is to have as many key players as possible moving generally in the same direction. By placing partnerships at the centre of our research, we have the best chance of putting the best research at the heart of decision-making and action.

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Science for saving species

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**Why a
bettong in
the bush is
worth two in
the hand**

**Recovering the far
eastern curlew**

**Emergency care: which
species need it?**

**We need to talk about
feral cats**

