

CRAWFORD SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND GOVERNMENT

Federal Hydrological Systems: why are they so difficult to manage?



Daniel Connell

Tuesday 7 April 2009

12.30 - 1.30pm

Light lunch will be provided

Seminar Room 4, First Floor, Crawford Building

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The management of large cross-border hydrological systems is almost invariably characterized by high levels of intergovernmental and interagency conflict, opaque decision making, poor accountability, large transaction costs, ad hoc deals between competing governments and declining environmental conditions and resource security. It is perhaps understandable that this should be the situation of international systems shared by more than one nation such as the Mekong, the Indus or the aquifers underlying Algeria, Tunisia and Libya but it is much less clear why this description is also apt for the Murray-Darling, Orange-Vaal, Colorado and the high plains aquifer of the central United States, hydrological systems which are largely contained within a single strong federal political system. Are there features of federal systems that make them particularly ineffective when dealing with large hydrological systems that are bisected by internal state/provincial borders? This presentation will report on a project which is investigating the interaction of a number of major federal political systems with rivers and aquifers looking for common elements and possible responses to the institutional dilemmas that they appear to share.

Daniel Connell holds a joint appointment to the ANU's Water Initiative and the Crawford School of Economics and Government. His book *Water Politics in the Murray-Darling Basin* assessed the management of that region against the National Water Initiative. He is now undertaking a comparative institutional analysis of water management in the Murray-Darling, Orange-Vaal, Colorado, Guadiana, Yangtze and Yellow river systems.

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