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Communicating with government – what's the message?

1. Understand the language

Politicians operate in a political economy,
where the currency is the vote.

The corporate sector operates in a commercial economy,
where the currency is the dollar.

A successful project understands and respects both.

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2. Understand the drivers

- All project decisions will ultimately be "political" decisions

- Politicians are less interested in what the science says and more interested in what their constituents think the science says

- Science can sometimes be the fall guy

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3. Understand the stakeholders

- Every nearby neighbour is a vulnerable species

- Every local politician (local, state and federal) is an endangered species

- At election time, every local politician is a critically endangered species

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4. Understand the "other" process

- Scientific and technical assessments are relatively simple:
  - An impact either <u>can</u> or <u>can not</u> be mitigated in accordance with the rules

- Social impact and community engagement assessments are much greyer:
  - Sentiment, not empirical evidence, can influence an outcome/approval

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Recent examples

- Metgasco, NSW:
  - Licence to drill suspended by Minister because "the company hadn't properly consulted the community"

- Boral, Qld:
  - P&E Court appeal judgement confirmed community and stakeholder engagement process helped mitigate against two, potentially catastrophic technical oversights

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What decision-makers want

- Reliable information

- Facts

- Early warning

- Solutions

- Linkages to government frameworks or priorities

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What decision-makers don't want

- Surprises

- Political advice

- Threats

- Problems with no (proposed) solutions

What should be in the message?

- Society depends on our knowledge and advice

- Our work must always be done in context

- Respect should be the foundation of our work

- It is the best way to influence decision-makers

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