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ABSTRACT SPECIFICATIONS

Title: The Community in Environmental Decision Making: Help or Hindrance?

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Abstract:

Community or 'third party' involvement in environmental assessment, whether strategic or individual project assessment, has long been undertaken in most Australian jurisdictions using different methods and regulatory regimes.

It is often argued by some participants in assessment that community involvement whether through advisory committees, formal and informal consultation or the holding of public inquiries is a hindrance; offering only extended timeframes and increased costs, with little value added to the eventual outcomes for the proponent or broader community.

This paper, through the use of case studies and practical examples explores the issues in more depth and widens the debate to consider other elements such as trust in the regulatory process and governance/Government, the engendering of public participation as an element of civil society, as well as the more traditional consideration of whether third party involvement actually produces better outcomes for the environment and community.

The development through project assessment of the 'citizen expert submitter' will be discussed and the implications of this for proponents and regulatory authorities considered.

How the effectiveness of third party involvement might be improved will also be explored with commentary on the arguments for and against avoiding a 'voting' process where the number of submissions to a project or process risks becoming the deciding factor rather than the merits of the project based on informed argument and debate.