

# Rural Social Research Group

## Tasmanian Institute of Agricultural Research

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### Vision

*The Rural Social Research Group is a strong and effective research group that is valued within TIAR and by external stakeholders.*

### Mission

*The Rural Social Research Group undertakes applied social research that contributes to developing sustainable agriculture, promoting natural resource management, and enhancing the quality of life in rural and regional areas, as consistent with the TIAR Strategic Plan.*

**Research Group Leader:** Prof Frank Vanclay

**Research Group Core Staff:** at present there are no other staff in the Group itself.

**Research Group Core Students:** Rowan Armitage, Genevieve Carruthers, Lain Dare, Aysha Fleming, Melissa Gordon, Sophie Henry, Warren Hunt, Julie Kimber, and Lisa Watson.

**Research Group Affiliate Students:** Greg Leach (Wageningen University, The Netherlands); Svetla Petrova (Curtin University); Peter Stronach (TIAR at Cradle Coast Campus).

**Research Associates in TIAR and UTAS:** Dr Marion Titterton (TIAR), Dr Shaun Lisson (TIAR/CSIRO), Dr Robyn Eversole (Institute for Regional Development), Dr Peat Leith (UTAS/NCCARF), Dr Michael Lockwood (Geography & Environmental Studies), Prof Peter Marshall (Computing & Information Systems), A/Prof Elaine Stratford (Geography & Environmental Studies).

**Research Affiliates:** Dr Heather Aslin (Bureau of Rural Sciences/Charles Darwin University), Dr Gareth Enticott (Cardiff University, UK), Dr Ana Maria Esteves (Community Insights Pty Ltd), Dr Stephen Giugni (CSIRO Tasmanian ICT Centre), Dr Claire Hiller, Dr Peter Nichols (CSIRO), Prof David Pannell (Federation Fellow, University of Western Australia), Dr Katrin Prager (Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany), Dr Wendy Russell (Wollongong University), Dr Jacki Schirmer (ANU), Dr Jo Wills (Qld Environmental Protection Agency).

**Comment [FV1]:** Those TIAR staff and postdocs etc other than the GRL who identify closely with the Research Group, and who report to the Group Leader.

**Comment [FV2]:** Those PhD students closely associated with the Research Group and supervised primarily by staff in the group.

**Comment [FV3]:** PhD students who are enrolled elsewhere but for whom Prof Vanclay is a co-supervisor in at least a limited sense.

**Comment [FV4]:** Those TIAR and UTAS staff who work with the Research Group on joint projects.

**Comment [FV5]:** Those people outside of UTAS who work in collaboration with the Research Group.

### Annual performance goals

- Increase the national and international reputation of the Rural Social Research Group for excellence in rural social research through publications in peer reviewed journals, books, and presentations at scientific meetings, invitations to participate in expert consultations, by continuing to attract new PhD students, and by attracting research funding.
- Increase the application of the research of the Rural Social Research Group to the priorities outlined in the TIAR Strategic Plan.

### Annual Performance Targets for the Group

PhD Completions (at UTAS):	1
New PhD commencements:	2
Journal articles and book chapters submitted:	5

## **General research interests of the Rural Social Research Group/Prof Frank Vanclay**

- Enhancing the effectiveness of extension through increasing understanding of the social  
*“Extension is the process of enabling change in individuals, communities and industries involved in the primary industry sector and with natural resource management” (SELN 2006). Activities in this research area include research to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of extension and understanding the socio-institutional context of extension.*
- Social aspects in the adoption of new practices in agriculture  
*The adoption of innovations in agriculture is a complex social process. Research leading to a better understanding of the adoption process will contribute to improving the uptake of new practices when they are appropriate to farmers.*
- Social aspects of farming life, and the nature of family farm businesses  
*This research considers a range of issues associated with the social dimensions of agriculture, farming and rural communities. It considers the ‘styles of farming’ and the ‘cultural scripts’ that influence the worldviews of farmers and the impact of this on their farm management strategies. It seeks to establish how this can be utilised for the better targeting of extension messages. It also looks at the social meaning of family farm businesses and the implications of this business structure for agricultural policy and extension practice.*
- Social aspects of natural resource management and sustainability  
*This research explores the social issues associated with natural resource management (NRM) including considerations of how to increase the uptake of NRM practices by farmers. It includes research into the role and functioning of Landcare groups, as well as the effectiveness of overarching policy frameworks and instruments that promote NRM.*
- Social aspects of climate change  
*This explores the social issues associated with climate change, including examining resistance to climate change as a process and to the specific adaptation measures being proposed. It looks at the effectiveness of information about climate change in changing community perspectives.*
- Social dimensions to regional development and rurality  
*Contrary to political economy arguments pertaining to industrial agriculture (i.e. the uncoupling thesis), agricultural production in Tasmania is embedded within rural communities and is co-dependent on other processes occurring in rural areas. Thus, the future of agriculture in Tasmania (and similar places) is connected to wider issues of regional development and the satisfaction people have with living in rural areas. With the number of non-farming rural residents increasing, especially in amenity landscapes, conflicts over land use can arise. Researching and understanding these issues will contribute to improving the wellbeing of people in rural areas. This includes issues of sense of place, endogenous rural development, social capital as well as understanding the nature of postproductive landscapes and multifunctionality.*
- Social Impact Assessment (SIA)  
*SIA is the process of analysing and managing the social consequences of development. The intention is not only to provide improved information by which to make better decisions, but also to reduce harm and to maximise benefit from projects and other planned interventions, including policies and plans. The social equivalent of Environmental Impact Assessment, in an agricultural context SIA is relevant to issues such as decisions relating to land use change (e.g. to allow plantation forestry or intensive dairying), changes in regulations relating to land management practices, or the development of large infrastructure projects in rural areas, including irrigation schemes.*
- Technology Assessment (TA)  
*TA is an applied process of systematically assessing the environmental, social and economic impacts of technological developments, in order to use this information to influence policy at all levels and to assist in the management and governance of technology. It is highly relevant to the issue of genetically-modified crops, as well as to many other advanced technologies used in agriculture and food. This research seeks to increase awareness of TA in Australia and to improve the practice of TA nationally and internationally.*
- Community engagement and participation  
*Research under this topic considers how the processes of mutual interaction between resource managers and community stakeholders can be improved. It considers the diverse range of publics that exist, and how people have different interests, priorities and expectations.*

### Designated Projects underway in 2009-2010

- Technology Assessment in Social Context (TASC) (Vanclay, Russell, Aslin, with PhD student Julie Kimber). [ARC Discovery Grant]

*This project is developing a framework to assess the social consequences of new technologies. It seeks to improve the governance of science and technology in Australia by increasing awareness of Technology Assessment. The framework being developed highlights the social considerations which may affect both acceptability as well as the rate of adoption of emergent technologies. The TASC framework is being tested using the CSIRO Omega-3 project as a case study.*

- Improving community engagement processes in forestry (Vanclay, Schirmer, with PhD students Lain Dare and Melissa Gordon). [CRC Forestry, Project 4.3.3]

*This social research project seeks to assist communities and forest industries by improving the processes of community engagement practiced in forestry. By examining a wide range of forestry encounters with communities and by drawing on the experience of other industries as well as the field of public participation, the project will develop recommendations for improving community engagement processes and practice. It will consider how forestry industries can engage constructively with a range of stakeholders, including landowners, immediate neighbours, other local landholders, planning authorities and the wider community.*

- New Directions in SIA (edited book) (Vanclay, Esteves)

*This project involves the development and editing of a book, **New Directions in Social Impact Assessment: Conceptual and Methodological Advances**, to be published by Edward Elgar in 2010. We have commissioned the leading writers in the field from around the world.*

- Adoption book (Pannell, Vanclay)

*This project involves the editing of a book, **Changing Land Management: Adoption of New Practices by Rural Landholders**, to be published by CSIRO books. The book is an extended version of the highly cited paper: "Understanding and promoting adoption of new practices by rural landholders", written by David Pannell, Graham Marshall, Neil Barr, Allan Curtis, Frank Vanclay and Roger Wilkinson, published by the Australian Journal of Experimental Agriculture.*

- Social factors affecting adoption of environmental management systems in agriculture (Vanclay, Carruthers) [funded by NSW DPI]

*Environmental management systems (EMS) are widely used in industry, often certified against the ISO14001 standard. They are advocated for Australian agriculture. But how useful are they in farming operations? This research seeks to assist the uptake of EMS in agriculture by considering the issue at three levels: policy, farm and the EMS process itself. The research will consider the motivations and inhibitors to adoption for individual farmers. It will consider what policy instruments are needed to promote increased take-up, and it will consider whether the EMS process needs modification to be applied in farming businesses.*

- Community resistance to climate change: A case study of Tasmanian farmers (Vanclay, Fleming, Lisson) [CSIRO Climate Change Adaptation Flagship]

*This research seeks to increase farmers' adaptation to climate change by improving extension practice. The research straddles the academic disciplines of adult education and rural social research by looking at the application of adult learning and critical literacy theories in an agricultural context. It examines the reasons for farmers' resistance to extension messages. The research will consider the processes of extension including: who is responsible for providing information to farmers about climate change; the ways this information is provided; and the ways farmers understand and utilise the information. The research will focus on providing both a theoretical understanding of the causes and effects of resistance as well as practical strategies to reduce resistance and thereby improve extension practice.*

- Social factors associated with the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies in the DAIRY industry (Vanclay, Marshall, Watson)

*The project will work with the dairy industry to consider what are the social issues associated with the adoption of innovative Information and Communication Technologies.*

- Social factors associated with the adoption of Information and Communication Technologies in the VEGETABLE industry (Vanclay, Marshall, Armitage)

*The project will work with the vegetable industry to consider what are the social issues associated with the adoption of innovative Information and Communication Technologies.*

- Addressing the barriers to adoption in the dairy industry (Vanclay, Titterton, Eversole)

*Extension is the process of enabling change in individuals, communities and industries involved in the primary industry sector and with natural resource management. Activities in this research area include research to enhance the efficiency of extension, understanding the barriers to adoption, and the socio-political context of extension.*

- Transformational education & NRM (PhD project of Sophie Henry, Supervisors: Vanclay, Hiller) [RIRDC top-up scholarship]

*The research considers the contribution of educational theory to natural resource management. It is based on a branch of pedagogical theory known as transformational education, originating from Paulo Freire. This theory recognizes the inherent political and moral aspects of the education process and identifies collective social justice through the empowerment of the individual as a central concern of educators. It places peace and sustainability at the heart of the curriculum whilst emphasizing the connections between knowledge and transformational action. To know the world is to understand it, to problematise it, and in doing so, to experience a civic imperative for action. The research shall consider the application of this theoretical position to assist in contemporary natural resource management.*

### **Recently completed Projects**

- Comparing approaches to Landcare and natural resource management in Germany and Australia (Prager, Vanclay). [German Academic Exchange Service]

*The research explored the development trends of multi-stakeholder partnerships in natural resource management. Specifically, it compared the Australian Landcare movement, the NRM system in Australia, and the German Landschaftspflegeverbände.*

- Sense of Place (Vanclay). [National Museum of Australia]

*'Sense of Place' here refers to a group of activities associated with the concept of place, including the editing of a book, **Making Sense of Place** (published by the National Museum of Australia in 2008), as an outcome of the April 2006 **Senses of Place conference** (Vanclay convenor).*

- Committing to Place (Vanclay, Lucas, Lane, Coates, Wills, Henry) [ARC Linkage grant with the National Museum of Australia and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission].

*The research project considered the potential of museum outreach and environmental education activities to increase community interest in and awareness of natural resource management (NRM). It also makes recommendations for the improvement of those activities to achieve their potential to engage diverse communities in NRM.*

- Integrating climate knowledge for improved land management decisions in western NSW and Qld (PhD project of Peat Leith, Supervisors: Stratford, Vanclay) [funded by Land, Water, Wool]

*This research examined how local and scientific climate and weather knowledge are communicated and utilised in managing grazing properties in the semi-arid rangelands. Interviews were conducted with researchers involved in the development and extension of seasonal climate forecasts and related information and tools, and with graziers. The research analyses how these groups create what they consider to be salient, credible and legitimate knowledge and how they make sense of knowledge from other domains. The thesis highlights better ways of integrating local and scientific knowledge through reforming institutional R,D&E practices such that they are inclusive, reflexive and move towards developing learning societies that are adaptive and responsive to change.*

- Cottage industries in Tasmanian agriculture (Gralton, Vanclay) [RIRDC]

*This study explored the small-scale food processing industry in Tasmanian agriculture and the use of 'cottage industry' and 'artisanal' labels. Issues surrounding this labelling and the ability of expanded enterprises to maintain an artisanal identity were investigated. The study will facilitate the industry's sustainability and its valued contribution to regional economic development in Tasmania.*

- Water Management Committee decision-making processes (Craig, Vanclay). [ARC SPIRT grant with NSW Agriculture]

*This project explored the grounds on which the legitimacy of water sharing decisions is contested. By exploring these challenges to legitimacy, we facilitate the adoption and implementation of water management decisions.*

- Methodologies for measuring mental models (Vanclay)

*The research considered the concept of mental models and how they are measured. Previously usefully applied in many situations, including organisational learning, health and NRM, our research was undertaken in the forestry industry.*