Building social license through effective stakeholder engagement

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Acknowledgement

I'd like to acknowledge the Ngandowal and Minyungbal speaking people of the Bundjalung Country, in particular the Goodjinburra, Tul-gi-gin and Moorung - Moobah clans.

I pay my respect to the ancestors, elders both current and emerging as being the traditional owners and custodians of the land and waters of the Tweed Shire.

There is general acceptance among the Tweed Aboriginal community for the presence of 3 main groups in the Tweed Valley.

These were the Goodjinburra people for the Tweed Coastal area, the Tul-gi-gin people for the North Arm, and the Moorang-Moobar people for the Southern and Central Arms around Wollumbin (Mt Warning).

However, European settlers used other names and described them as Chubboburri, Gandowal, Duthurinbar, Wirangiroh, Wollumbin, Murwillumbah, Ngarrumbul, Kitabul, and Ngarartbul. These names largely reflected a lack of understanding of the culture, language and connection to each other.
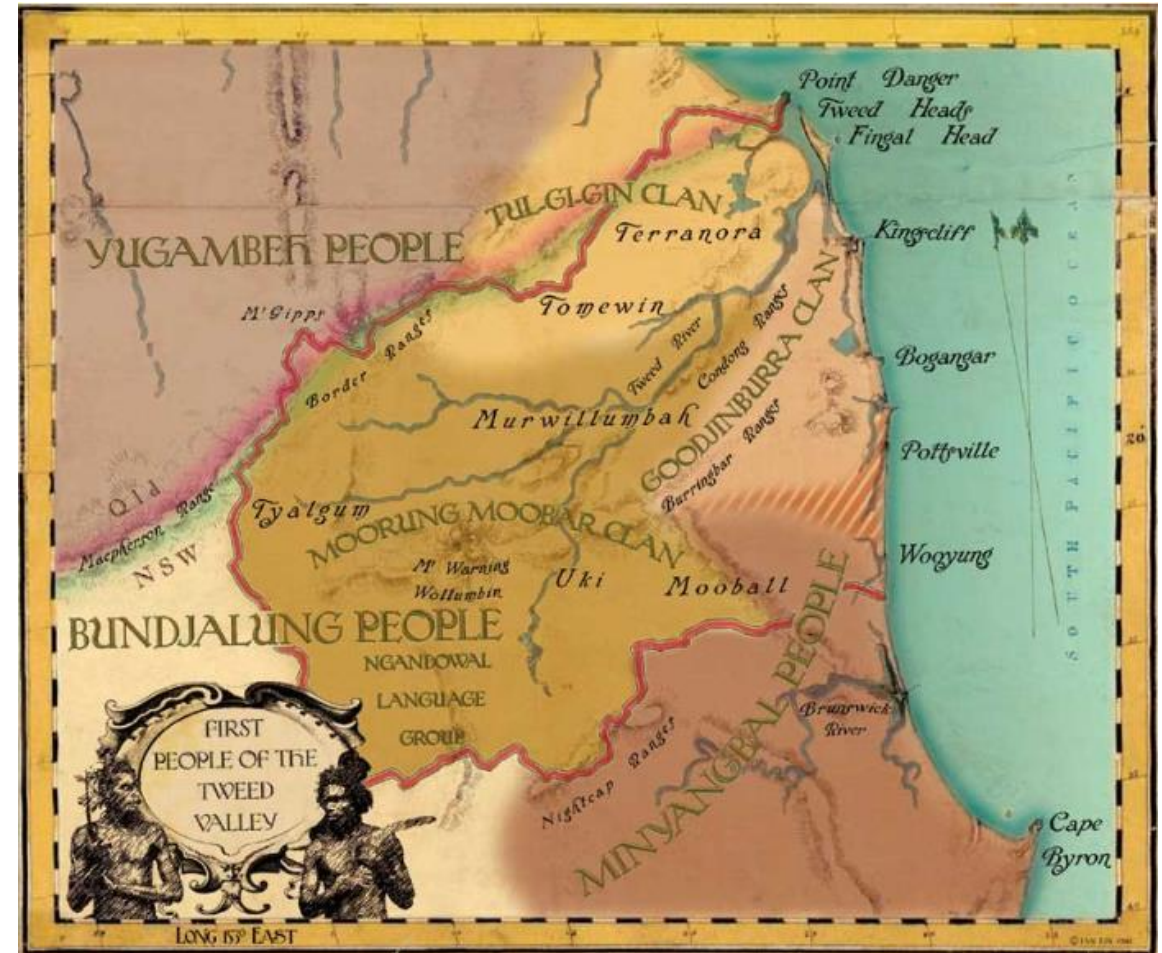
Some questions...?

What do we mean by Social License?

What does effective engagement entail, and how can we be sure it is effective?

What are the certification requirements for consultation and engagement?

Who are the stakeholders, when it comes to social licence?

And, in what are they interested?

How, when, and with whom should a forest manager engage?

What's the difference between strategic and operational engagement?

How should a forest manager deal with disparate or opposing views?

Let's not confuse engagement with processes for dealing with complaints and disputes.

What do we actually mean by social licence, and why does it matter?

From StollzNow research report

- 'Social licence to operate recognises the importance of stakeholders in <mark>allowing continued operation</mark> of a business. Stakeholders will include 'key opinion leaders', local communities and the general public.'

From ChatGPT

- 'In conclusion, the importance of forest managers gaining social license through effective stakeholder engagement cannot be overstated.

- <mark>It is essential for building trust, ensuring balanced decision-making, mitigating conflicts, accessing markets and funding, complying with regulations, and upholding ethical standards.</mark>

- Moreover, it reflects a commitment to responsible forest management that respects the diverse values and interests associated with forests.

- As society becomes increasingly conscious of environmental and social issues, social license becomes not just a desirable outcome but <mark>a necessity for the sustainable management of our forests</mark>.'

How are community attitudes developed?

Social licence and community attitudes

- Social licence is essentially an expression of collective community attitudes.

- A social licence exists where there is a generally shared community attitude towards, and acceptance of, a business or activity.

- Without such acceptance, there is no social licence.

Role of leadership in shaping community attitudes

- Sparking interest – the importance of making an emotional connection
- Creating awareness – what's the problem we're trying to fix?
- Providing information
- Building understanding
- Gaining acceptance

Building social licence - how can a change in attitude be engineered?

Messaging on repeat

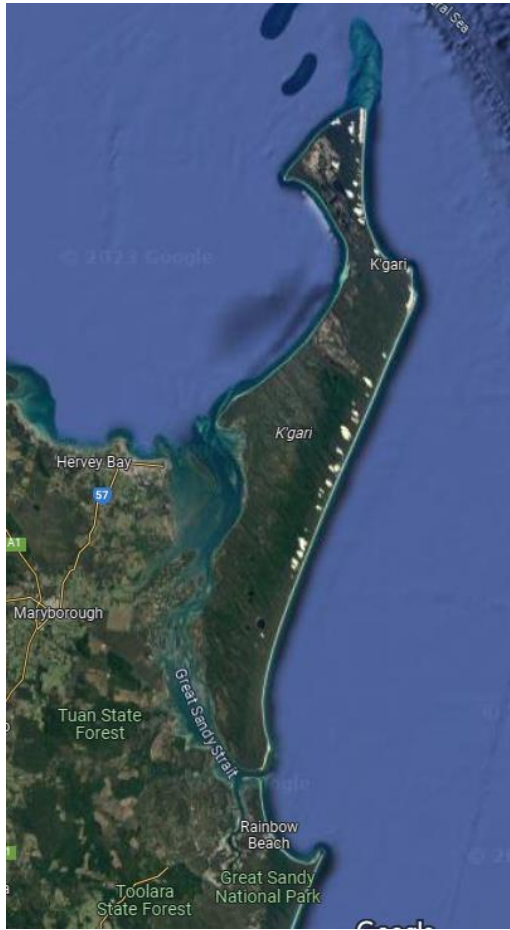To gain acceptance, the message must be:

- Clear
- Succinct
- Credible
- Unambiguous
- Understandable
- |: ... :|

Challenges

- Social media
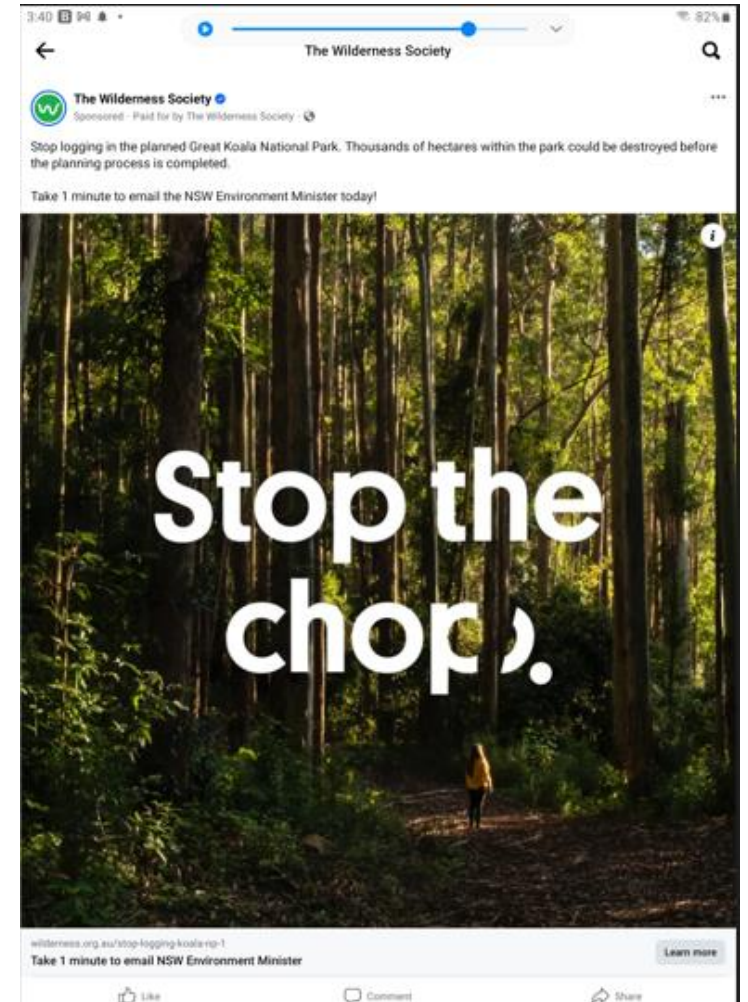- Artificial intelligence
- Influencers

When the message is repeated often enough...

What messages are getting through?

Let me introduce my dog, Badger…

What do certification schemes require?

Under FSC

Engaging/engagement: The process by which an organisation communicates, consults and/or provides for the participation of interested and/or affected stakeholders ensuring that their concerns, desires, expectations, needs, rights and opportunities are considered in the establishment, implementation and updating of the Management Plan. (Source: FSC-STD01-001 V5-0)

Multiple requirements throughout the Standard to:

a. Consult relevant expertise to obtain the Best Available Information, and

b. Consult stakeholders on assessment, management and monitoring processes.

The Standard notes that **targeted and meaningful engagement** with Australia's Indigenous stakeholders is a priority for FSC Australia.

Stakeholders include:

- Relevant agencies
- Affected stakeholders
- Workers
- Indigenous Peoples (culturally appropriate)
- Local communities

Certification and stakeholder engagement

Under PEFC (AS/NZS 4708:2021 - Responsible Wood)

Stakeholder: person or organisation that can affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision or activity.

> EXAMPLE: Customers, neighbours, communities, suppliers, regulators, non-governmental organisations, investors and employees.

> Note: To 'perceive itself to be affected' means the perception has been made known to the organisation.

Stakeholder engagement: interactions with communities and interest groups in deliberation around issues that affect them.

> EXAMPLE: Making plans and descriptions of management publicly available, written communication, face-to-face and public meetings, field visits, information signs, media advertisements, and stakeholder or community advisory committees.

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Certification and stakeholder engagement

Under PEFC (AS/NZS 4708:2021 - Responsible Wood)

Stakeholder-affected: groups and individuals who might experience a direct change in living and/or working conditions caused by the actions or inactions of the forest manager.

> Note: Affected stakeholders include neighbouring communities, Indigenous peoples and workers.

Stakeholder-interested: groups and individuals who have interests in the management of the defined forest area but are not directly impacted.

Certification and stakeholder engagement

Under PEFC (AS/NZS 4708:2021 - Responsible Wood)

Stakeholder engagement: interactions with communities and interest groups in deliberation around issues that affect them.

Policy commitment: includes acknowledgement of the positive contribution of stakeholders and a commitment to proactive engagement with stakeholders.

4.2 Understanding the needs and expectations of stakeholders

The forest manager shall:

(a) identify stakeholders;

(b) evaluate which activities are likely to directly impact stakeholders;

(c) determine how they are affected by its operations;

(d) identify the relevant needs and expectations (i.e. requirements) of stakeholders;

(e) identify and justify which of these needs and expectations become its compliance obligations.

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Certification and stakeholder engagement

Under PEFC (AS/NZS 4708:2021 - Responsible Wood)

Other requirements:

- The forest manager shall <mark>strive to build constructive relationships</mark> with stakeholders.

- The forest manager shall establish, implement and maintain the process(es) needed for <mark>facilitating effective, culturally appropriate, meaningful and timely</mark> stakeholder engagement.

- The forest manager shall retain documented information as evidence of its stakeholder engagement.

- Public summary of the forest management plan must include an outline of stakeholder engagement processes, including procedures for obtaining further information.

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What happens when there is a perception of no social licence?

Politically opportunistic government decisions

Perceptions based on fear and emotions:

- Unacceptable levels of environmental harm

- Unacceptable threats to biodiversity

- Threats to iconic species – koalas, greater gliders, LBP, swift parrot

- Not science-based policy

Lack of understanding

- Plenty of information out there

- Message is not getting through

- Crowded out by the squeaky wheel

- It's easier to just say 'enough is enough'

Role of forest managers in building social licence

Meaningful and proactive engagement

Aim is to:

- **Make a connection**

- **Gain buy-in**

- **Link to things that have a direct impact**

- **Affirm sustainability, backed up by credible science**

- **Use a medium that will engender interest and engagement**

- **A shared journey**

Social licence to operate
Two opposing beliefs

Native forestry has no social licence

"What I would say, and I am very confident in saying it, is that there is a serious lack of social licence for the timber industry particularly the Public Forest Estate in NSW. I think that's across the whole of NSW. I'm seeing communities, particularly people who neighbour the public forests, live next door and people who live in regional towns. The timber industry is very visible"

Native forestry has social licence

"What I've found is when you do talk to people, forgetting the 20 to 30 percent who are completely ideologically opposed, there is no point talking to them about it. I find everyone else when you talk to them about it actually understands it. I think they're easily convinced and easily persuaded in seeing it's a renewable industry in a sense, you cut down a tree and a new tree grows and good carbon sequestration occurs, it's environmentally sound as long as you do it sustainably"

What did the StollzNow research team discover?

Social licence to operate
'Top 5' attitude statements – strongly agree/agree
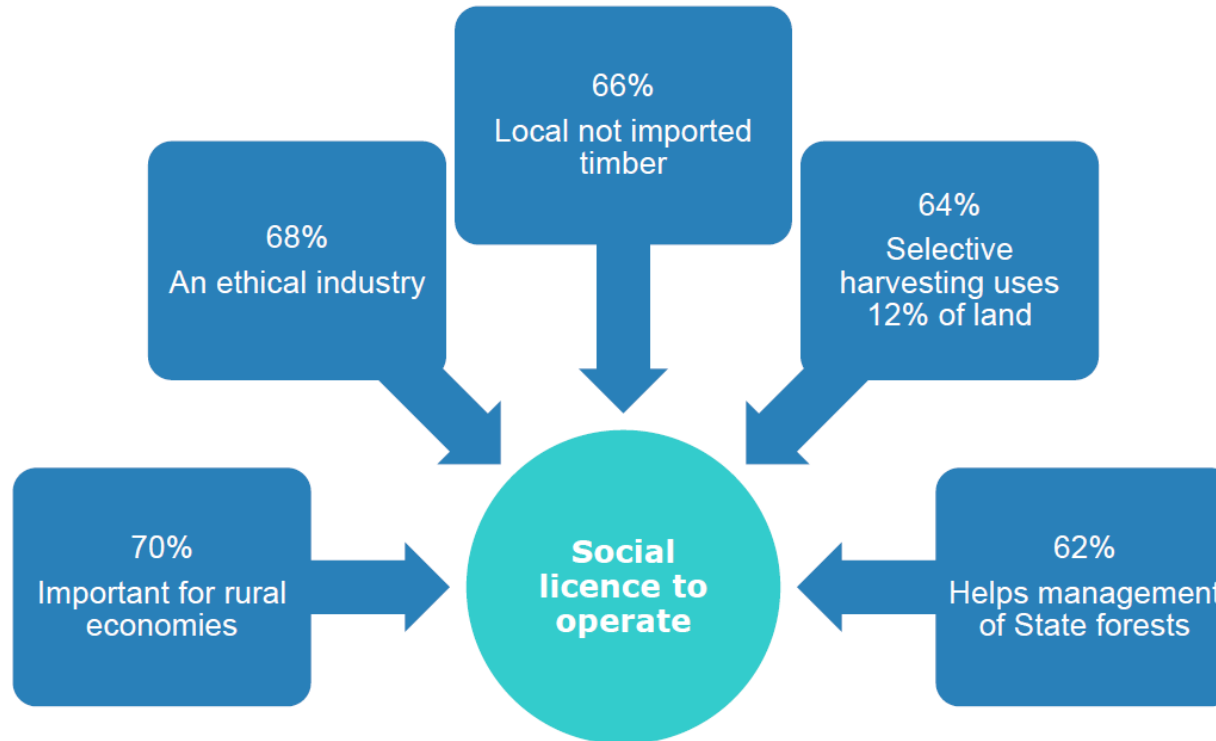
Thank you

Questions and discussion?

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