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# Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Rice Production

... of growing importance

## Media Release

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### An End to the 'Us & Them' Approach

An acceptable outcome in the water debate can only be reached with a properly managed negotiation procedure.

A recent Rice CRC research project has outlined a set of guidelines which will help streamline negotiations, while ensuring that the interests of all stakeholders are taken into proper consideration.

The research, outlined in a paper by Charles Sturt University PhD candidate Andy Brown, points to the issue of an 'us and them' attitude which is often a huge obstacle to progress. Until now, there has been no structured system of facilitating constructive negotiation on sensitive issues which properly addresses the concerns of all stakeholders.

Simple factors, like a broad variation in the definition of 'sustainability' held by different stakeholders, can obstruct the final outcome if not correctly addressed. Proper acknowledgment of the knowledge and capabilities of each stakeholder is also very important, as is the participation in the debate of people with useful knowledge and/or experience in the matter at hand.

The first step involves observation. By observing initial contacts between the stakeholders, a facilitator can more accurately determine the real concerns of each party. He or she is then in a position to guide the process towards a successful outcome, which properly addresses all concerns. These observations will also help determine "the actors required for a successful forum". In other words, who needs to be involved in order to cover all the bases.

Once the real issues and the required participants are properly identified, a set of guidelines can be drafted to help bring the issues into sharp focus and to ensure that all participants have their every concern taken into proper consideration in the outcome.

Primarily designed to address the problems encountered in recent negotiations over water issues, the knowledge acquired through this research can conceivably be applied to any forum dealing with sensitive issues.

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The Rice CRC is sponsored by the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program. The Centre coordinates the research activities of teams from Charles Sturt University, NSW Agriculture, CSIRO, Department of Infrastructure, Planning & Natural Resources, University of Sydney, SunRice and the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation.

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