

**Place-Based Knowledge and Consensus Building:  
From Access to Impact**

**Boyd Fuller**

Assistant Professor  
LKY School of Public Policy  
National University of Singapore  
Contact: boyd.fuller@nus.edu.sg

**Keywords:** local knowledge, street science, consensus building, environmental policy; public dispute resolution; environmental mediation; collaborative policy making; joint fact-finding

**Abstract**

If the holders of local knowledge have sufficient power so that they have to be heard by decision-makers and expert analysts, is that enough for local knowledge to be effectively integrated into decision making? The literature on local knowledge provides few direct answers to this question, in large part because it is rarely addressed directly. This paper provide more direct insights into the question of what lies beyond the point at which holders of local knowledge find themselves with access to and some standing in the halls of mainstream policy-making. It does so by looking at a conflict over agricultural water use efficiency in California. Despite agriculture's significance political influence and other resources for the conflict, the agricultural community claimed that it had place-based knowledge that was not being sufficiently acknowledged and incorporated into decision making. And yet, in one consensus building process, a group of environmental, agricultural, and agency stakeholders were able to craft an agreement that the agricultural community felt did incorporate what they knew. This paper explores this case to provide analyzes the barriers remain to the incorporation of local knowledge into environmental decision making once sufficient power is obtained and provides some insights into how these barriers might be overcome in consensus building processes.