



SEMAPHORE

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Urban River Governance in Focus

In an article recently published in the *Australasian Accounting, Business and Finance Journal*, MLAANZ immediate past president Dr David Goodwin (pictured) reviewed failed attempts at reform of the governance of Melbourne's Lower Yarra River over the five-year period from 2015 to 2019.

The article is titled "Melbourne's Birrarung: the Missed Opportunity for Collaborative Urban River Governance". It pinpoints the complex and fragmented regulatory arrangements that continue to apply to the Lower Yarra – the section of river that runs alongside and through Melbourne's Central Business District, from the Hoddle Street bridge to the mouth of the river at Williamstown. There are at least a dozen distinct clusters of regulation or oversight.

The importance of surfacing institutional, interpersonal and other risk factors which affect the dynamics and performance of collaboration is emphasised. The article illuminates the drivers, engagement processes, motivational attributes and joint capacities that can enable shared decision-making and implementation across multiple organisations and jurisdictions.



"Drivers" of change such as interdependence and uncertainty can play key roles in driving collaboration dynamics in the context of an urban river corridor. In the particular instance of the Lower Yarra, it is likely the necessary impetus to catalyse changes to relationship dynamics will need to be spurred by leadership direction or consequential incentives. It is argued that past reform attempts have failed due to an inability to effectively manage political, legal, socioeconomic and environmental influences, and the absence of collaboration dynamics (principled engagement, shared motivation and capacity for joint action).

The article advocates a transition to more effective forms of governance, adopting a multi-regulator partnership-oriented approach based on principles of collaborative governance. This way forward would require key players to pool their resources, power and skills, and to negotiate compromises on points of difference.

There is a need for further, structured work to operationalise the components of a "collaborative governance regime" and assess the state of readiness of the various regulators involved for a partnership approach, the article argues.

The article can be viewed at <https://ro.uow.edu.au/aabfj/vol16/iss2/5/>.

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