

# Human Service Ecosystem and Stewardship

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THINKING BIG ABOUT HUMAN SERVICE SYSTEM REFORM

Presentation by Sector Sustainability Program Community-Based Co -Lead May 2024



# Focus of Presentation

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Concept of a Social Services Ecosystem

Role of Government as Steward of Ecosystem



# Concept of an Ecosystem

Encyclopaedia Britannica definition of an Ecosystem:

An ecosystem is a **complex system** of living **organisms**, their **physical environment**, and their **interrelationships** in a particular **unit of space**.

National Geographic definition of an ecosystem:

An ecosystem is a **geographic area** where **plants, animals, and other organisms**, as well as **weather and landscapes**, work together to form a **bubble of life**.

# Ecosystem Services

Encyclopaedia Britannica definition of Ecosystem Services:

Ecosystem services are **outputs, conditions, or processes** of natural systems that **directly or indirectly benefit** humans or enhance social welfare.

National Geographic definition of ecosystem services:

**Providing resources** such as food and water, **maintaining habitats** that **support biodiversity**, **offering opportunities** for recreation, and **helping to regulate** human-caused impacts like climate change.

# Human Services Ecosystem & Ecosystem Services

## Ecosystem

- Complex system of co-existing and interacting capability, investments, infrastructure and activities
- Shaped by legislation, regulations, policies and procedures
- Operating in physical and online spaces
- Directly and indirectly impacted by political, economic, climactic, social, health and education circumstances and trends

## Ecosystem services

- Creating/regenerating/sustaining social and human capital
- Contributing to economic and environmental capital
- Engaging with, activating and building belonging in communities of place, identity, shared experience and aspiration
- Facilitating representation and influence in political, economic, environmental, climate, social, health and education debates

# Concept of Resilience-Based Ecosystem Stewardship

"resilience—based ecosystem stewardship as a strategy for responding to and shaping change in a rapidly changing world" ([01 Young The Earth System: Sustaining 2009.pdf \(anu.edu.au\)](#))

- **Management** of the co-occurring and intersecting drivers of change, impacts for people/place/communities, impacts for the system/related systems and feedback across systems that influence future drivers of change
- **Objective** is to sustain the functional properties of systems (supply and renewal) that are important to society (as expressed in policy and practice) under conditions where the system itself is constantly changing
- The **challenge** is to anticipate change and shape it for sustainability in a manner that does not lead to loss of future options
- Precise predictions of the future state of the system are impossible and **focuses attention** on understanding the dynamics of change as a basis for stewardship
- Any **sustainable solution** to a resource issue must be compatible with current social and ecological conditions and their likely future changes.
- Because stakeholders differ in their values, perceptions of needs, and capacity to fulfill them, ecosystem stewardship requires a **participatory place-based approach** to improve well-being, plan for change, and cope with inevitable surprises

## Role of System Steward:

**regulate, provision, inter-connect, support, learn**

# Stewardship of Systems

"State actors with responsibilities for a population's health perform as stewards when they **exercise authority and employ resources for the common good** above and beyond narrow efficiency and effectiveness objectives." (WHO, 2000)

"Stewardship is a practice of **caring for something that we have been trusted to look after**. Being a good steward means accepting responsibility for that care, and working to ensure the long-term integrity and sustainability of what has been entrusted to us." ([Stewardship guidance | Australian Public Service Commission](#) 2024)

## The machinery of government needed to enable stewardship that achieves better outcomes and attendant societal benefits

- Legal frameworks that promote rights and quality
- Institutional arrangements that support effective collaboration among government, civil society and private providers
- Mechanisms that strengthen stewardship – financing fit for purpose structures, leading adoption inside government, capability development
- Legitimate Decision-making - free from political or special interest, transparency and accountability to citizens, evidence informed
- Mobilising sufficient and sustainable financing

# Human Services Eco-System Stewardship

Whole of Eco-System View = steward whole of system to understand the eco-system, strengthen performance and accountability

What do we expect the eco-system to deliver – for individuals, families, communities, government?

Is the system being "stewarded " currently? What happens if there is no steward?

Do we have the right Institutional Structures to adopt a more intentional stewardship approach?

Are there competing priorities/imperatives within the eco-system? Are there perverse incentives in the eco-system?

Is there balance in the eco-system – across the service spectrum?

Does the eco-system encourage prevention of, and early intervention in responding to, the need for services?

Are there gaps in the service offerings in the eco-system?

How does the ecosystem learn, renew and evolve? How are we collecting and analysing data from multiple sources to inform eco-system design, evaluation and improvements?

How are we monitoring the impact of economic and environmental factors and trends on service outcomes?

How are we monitoring trends in demand for and access to services?

Is the ecosystem operating in a way that ensures people eligible for services can access these when they are needed, for the length of time and level of intensity required to address their needs?

Who is monitoring and planning responses to threats and challenges in the ecosystem? From what perspective?



# Discussion

"System stewardship is a powerful and increasingly influential way of thinking about the role of government, which focuses on governments as creators, influencers or guardians of systems from which outcomes emerge."

<https://anzsog.edu.au/news/reimagining-governments-as-system-stewards-to-deliver-better-outcomes/>

Is this thinking helpful? Might it:

1. enable a more integrated approach to service system development and commissioning cycles?
2. support a whole of government approach to building diversity, vibrancy and sustainability of community sector?
3. frame resetting the resourcing and relationship model for partnership between ACT Government and NGOs delivering human services?

Should the next Commissioning Roadmap incorporate system stewardship ?

Who needs to be engaged in a conversation about adoption of a system stewardship role by the ACT Government?

# Further reading

Brief Introduction: <https://www.themandarin.com.au/144112-opinion-government-must-shift-focus-from-authority-over-people-to-stewardship-of-complex-systems/>

System stewardship is a holistic approach to governance. It acknowledges the complex and adaptive nature of developing policy and delivering human services in a systems context. At its core, it involves a steward or collection of stewards steering all system participants, including service providers and users, towards high quality, long-term outcomes.

<https://www.thefrontproject.org.au/media/attachments/2022/11/22/05.-what-is-systems-stewardship-2.0.pdf>

Stewardship involves a range of functions that help to ensure service provision is effective at meeting its objectives, and users are protected. Unlocking the potential benefits of competition or contestability relies on careful stewardship by governments. Stewardship arrangements are difficult to get right, and it can be harmful when they fail.

<https://www.pc.gov.au/media-speeches/articles/pc-news/pc-news-august-2017/human-services-reforms>

In colloquial usage, stewardship means that something valuable is cared for responsibly, with a view to retaining value for the longer term, possibly beyond the current generation.

[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2016/September/Stewardship\\_of\\_human\\_services\\_delivery](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2016/September/Stewardship_of_human_services_delivery)

A key weakness in the institutional architecture of many systems engaged in delivering public services to common groups of citizens is the lack of an incentive framework to act outside achieving individual program and organisational key performance indicators. Addressing policy issues like long-term unemployment, social and economic inclusion for people with disabilities, health or environmental issues calls for a coherent funding and performance measurement regime that rewards collective-action solutions and partnerships between services across jurisdictions to participate meaningfully in the community.

<https://apo.org.au/node/303222>