



Manaaki Whenua
Landcare Research

Examining public participation in New Zealand and the implications for resource management decisions and outcomes

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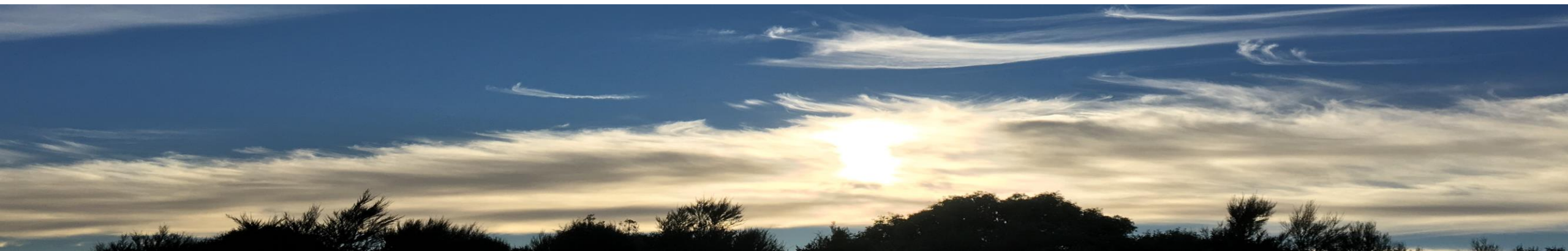
Institute of Australian Geographers Conference
9-13 July, 2019. Wrest Point, Hobart

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Background

- Since 2009, some of New Zealand's regional councils have been experimenting with collaboration to manage water resources
- Concerns that regional councils have not brought the public along with collaborative groups
- Concerns reflect a broader public disengagement malaise
- **Solution: we need better public engagement models!**
... or do we?



Is public engagement the problem?



Sally Eden's *Environmental Publics* (2016)

- The public is a misnomer
- We need to talk about publics and their environmental practices

Jason Chilvers and Matthew Kearnes' *Remaking Participation* (2016)

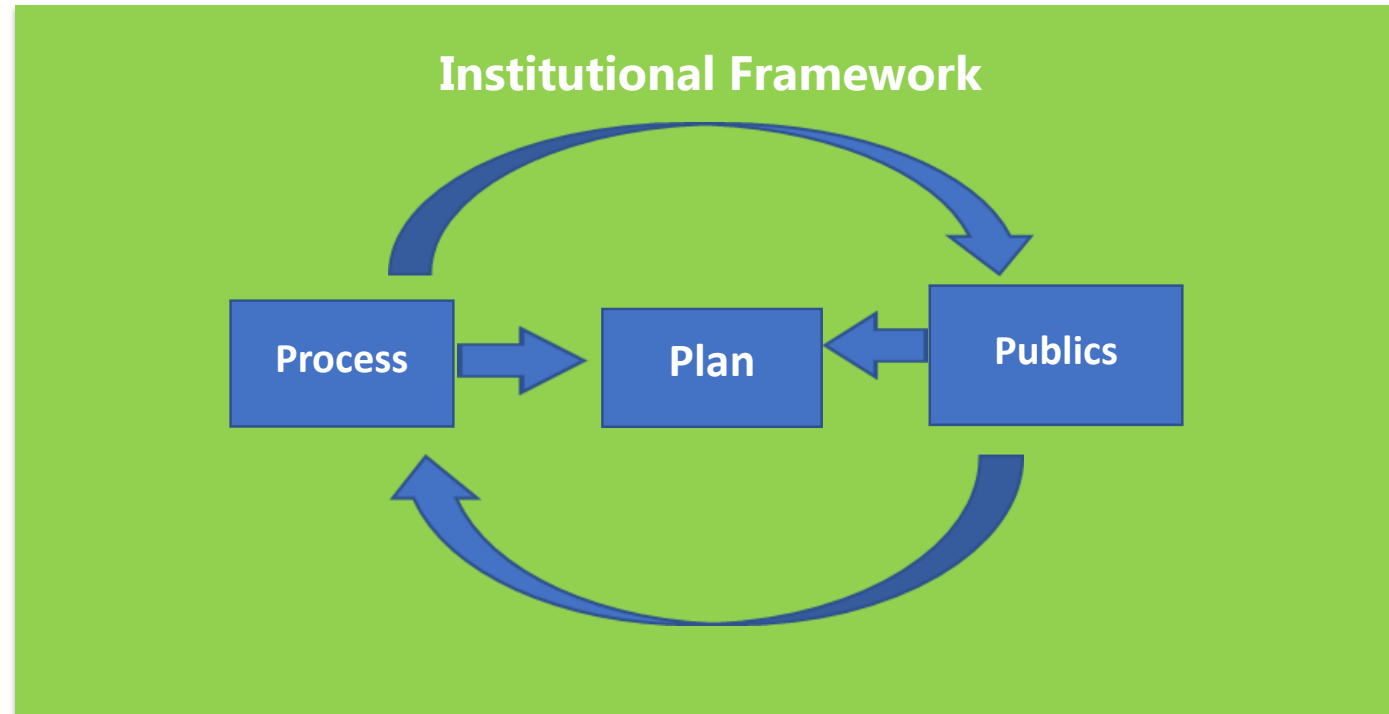
- Publics are “emergent and in the making”
- Publics are “brought into being through matters of concern and the various instruments, tools and forms of mediation deployed to know and move them” (2016, p. 4).
- Publics are outcomes of processes not inputs





Shiela Jasanoff et al. (2004) work on *Co-production*

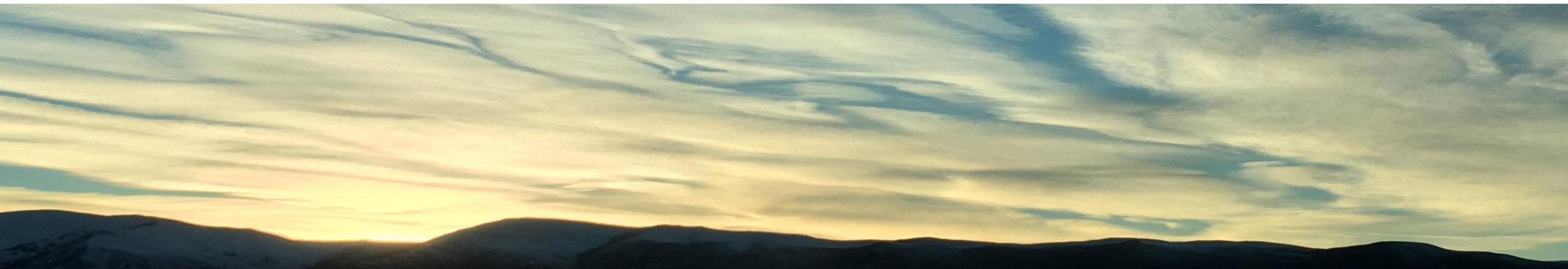
- An institutional focus
- Processes shape publics and publics shape processes





Research questions:

- How does New Zealand's resource management institutional framework shape the public and participatory processes?
- What are the implications of these configurations for the sustainable management of natural and physical resources as required under New Zealand's Resource Management Act, 1991?





The research:

17 semi-structured interviews. 15 with planners in regional and district councils and two former council staff across IAP2 spectrum for public participation.

IAP2 spectrum of public participation - deleted

Institutional framework for resource management



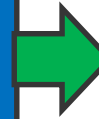
**Local Government
Act, 2002**

Resource Management Act, 1991

**Pre-statutory
process**



**Statutory
process**



**Regional
Plan**



**Environment
Court**

Council drivers for conducting participatory processes



- bringing the community along with council
- having productive conversations, building relationships
- providing comfort for councillors, e.g. heading in the right direction, no surprises, limit political backlash
- minimising the Environment Court risks and costs





Who are the public?

It's everyone ...

They're like friends and family. They're the people in the street. They're everyone outside of the council. It's a big bunch of people (RC 4).

There's no question that the public is absolutely everybody. I mean, you can submit from Czechoslovakia if you so choose (RC 15).





How planners view 'the public' and why so few get involved in plan processes

- very hard to communicate with
- no time to engage
- apathetic about planning





The public is everyone but ...



institutional barriers and factors shape publics



Barriers: planners' perspectives on the Resource Management Act, 1991

- Opaque
- Daunting
- Intimidating
- Inaccessible
- Exhausting
- Confusing
- Litigious
- Impenetrable



Institutional factors

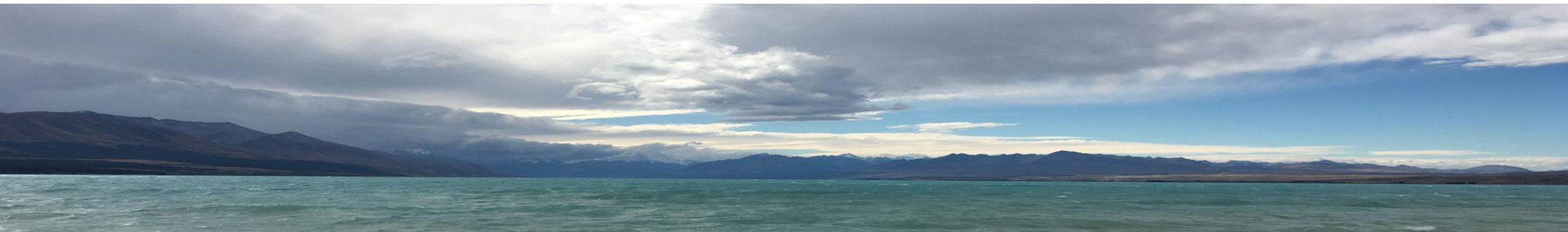


Efficiency and cost effectiveness requirements shapes publics

It should be everybody. ... the RMA allows everybody to have a say [but] you've got to be efficient in time and cost effective. That means you've got to make a few choices (RC 8).

Interests and potential to be affected shapes publics

You never actually know who has the interest, who is going to be affected. In water, you've got such a wide variety of users, it could be anybody (RC 4).





Implications for resource management?





Co-producing present and absent publics

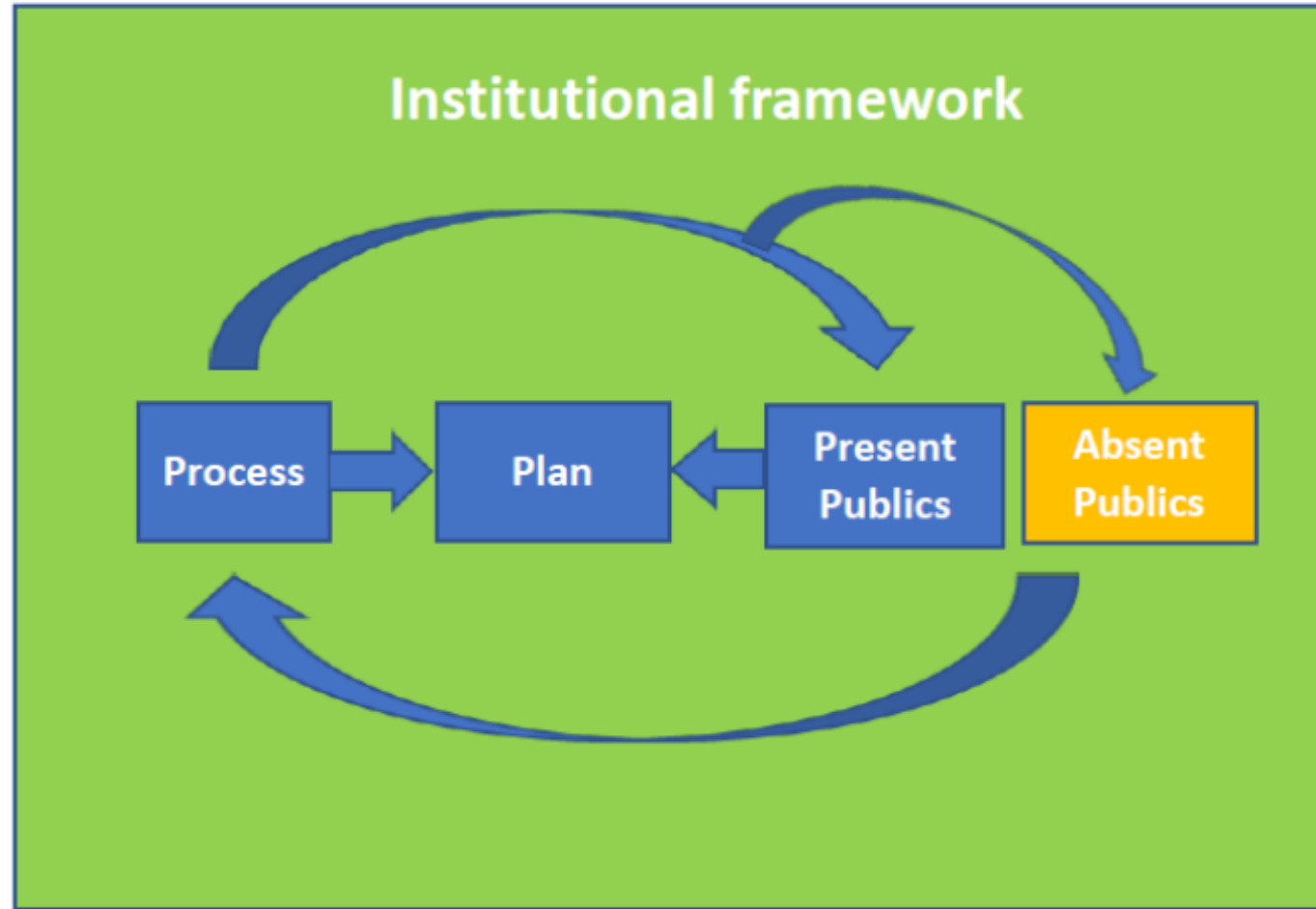


Figure 5. A co-production model of how New Zealand's resource management institutional framework produces present and absent publics. Yellow highlights what the co-production model brings into view.

Influence follows interests, visibility, accessibility and resources

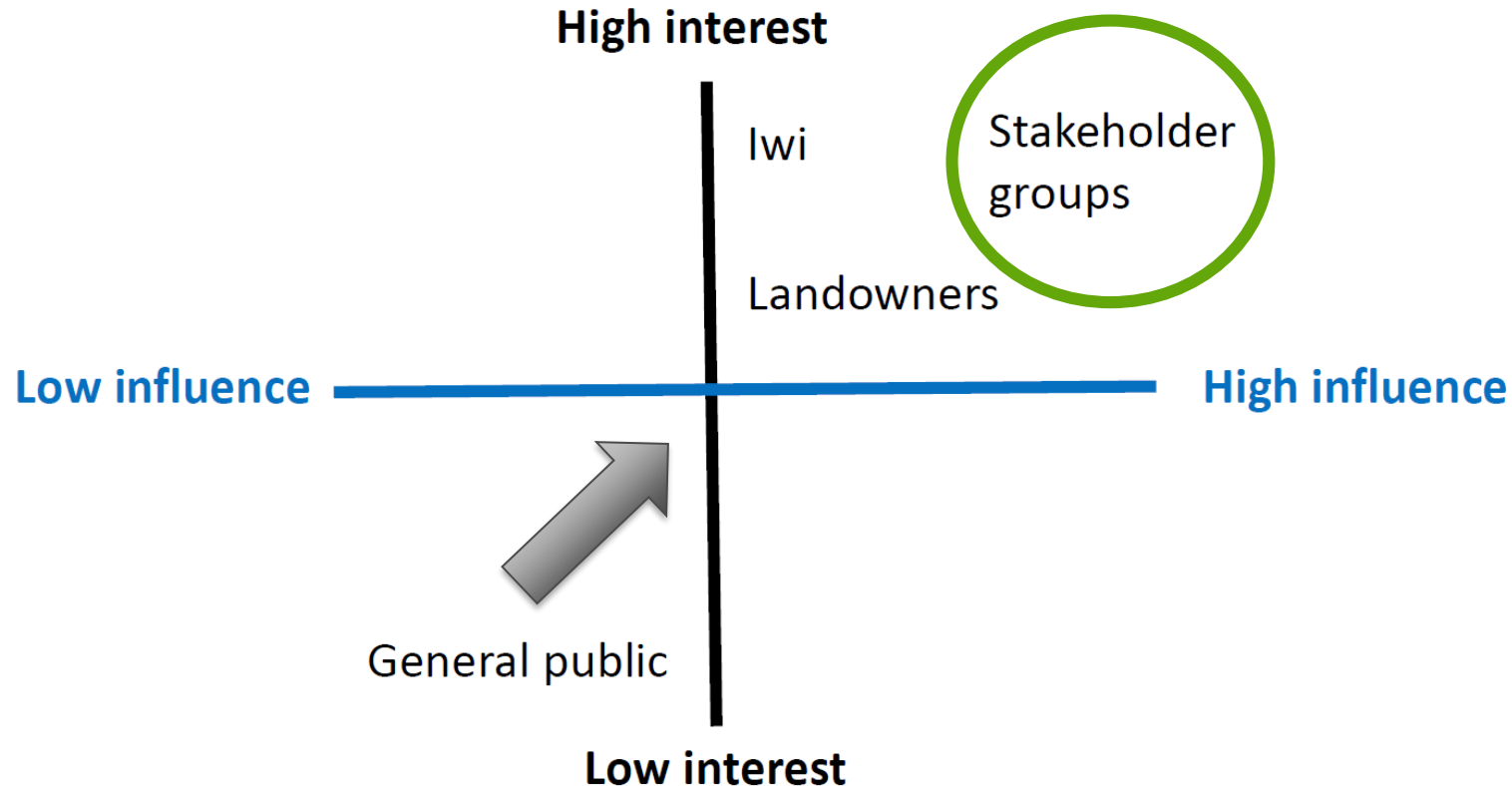


Figure 4. Schematic showing where interests and influence intersect

Co-producing present and absent publics



- Present publics are *planning publics*
- Strongly shaped by visibility, accessibility, resources and clearly identifiable interests and potential to be affected
- RMA-savvy stakeholder groups dominate
- Polarised debates prevail





Co-producing publics and processes

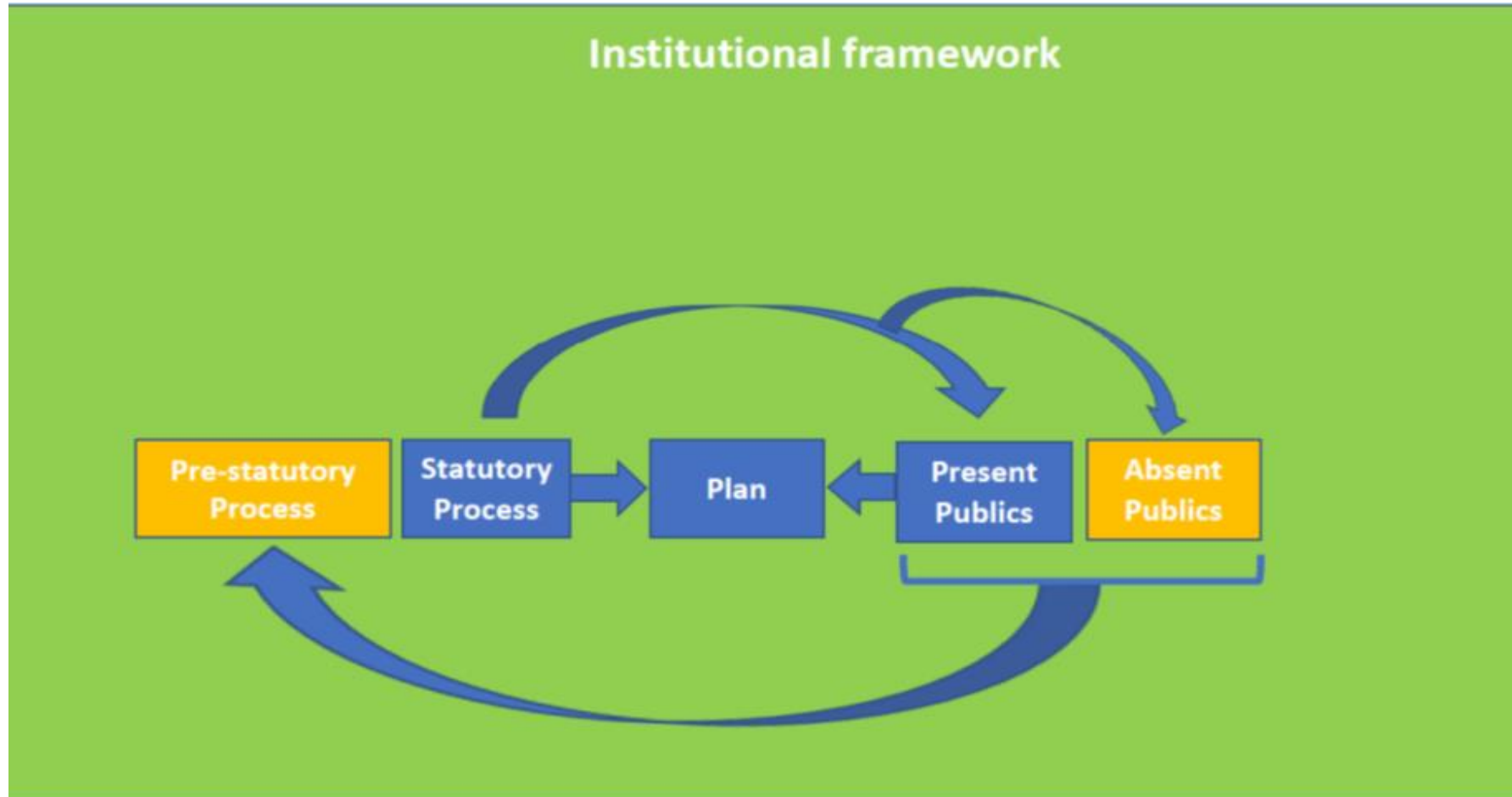
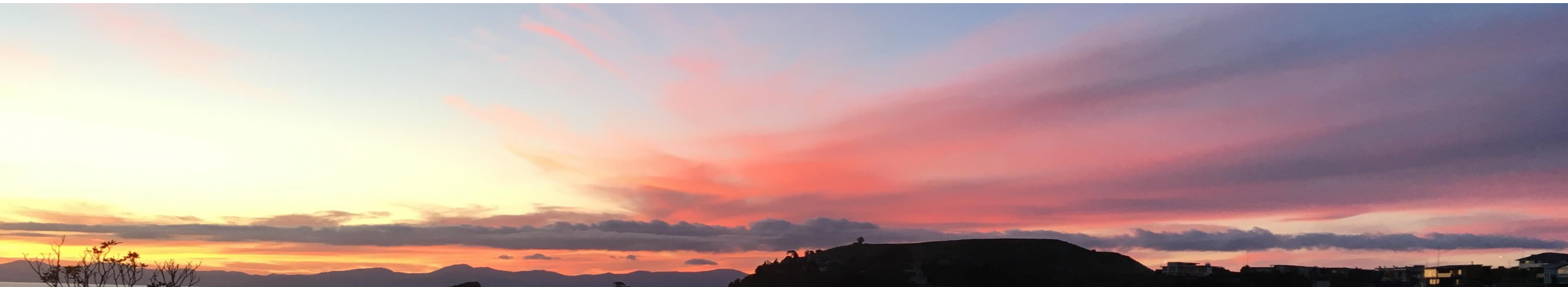


Figure 6. A co-production view of how New Zealand's resource management institutional framework responds to present and absent publics by directing attention and resources to pre-statutory processes. Yellow highlights what the co-production model brings into view.

Co-producing publics and processes



- Councils are concentrating efforts in the pre-statutory stage
- Where they can build relationships, engage, avoid court, road-test ideas, minimise political backlash
- Councils are reaching for absent publics; seeking to 'bring into being' *participating publics*





Co-producing possibilities for new publics?

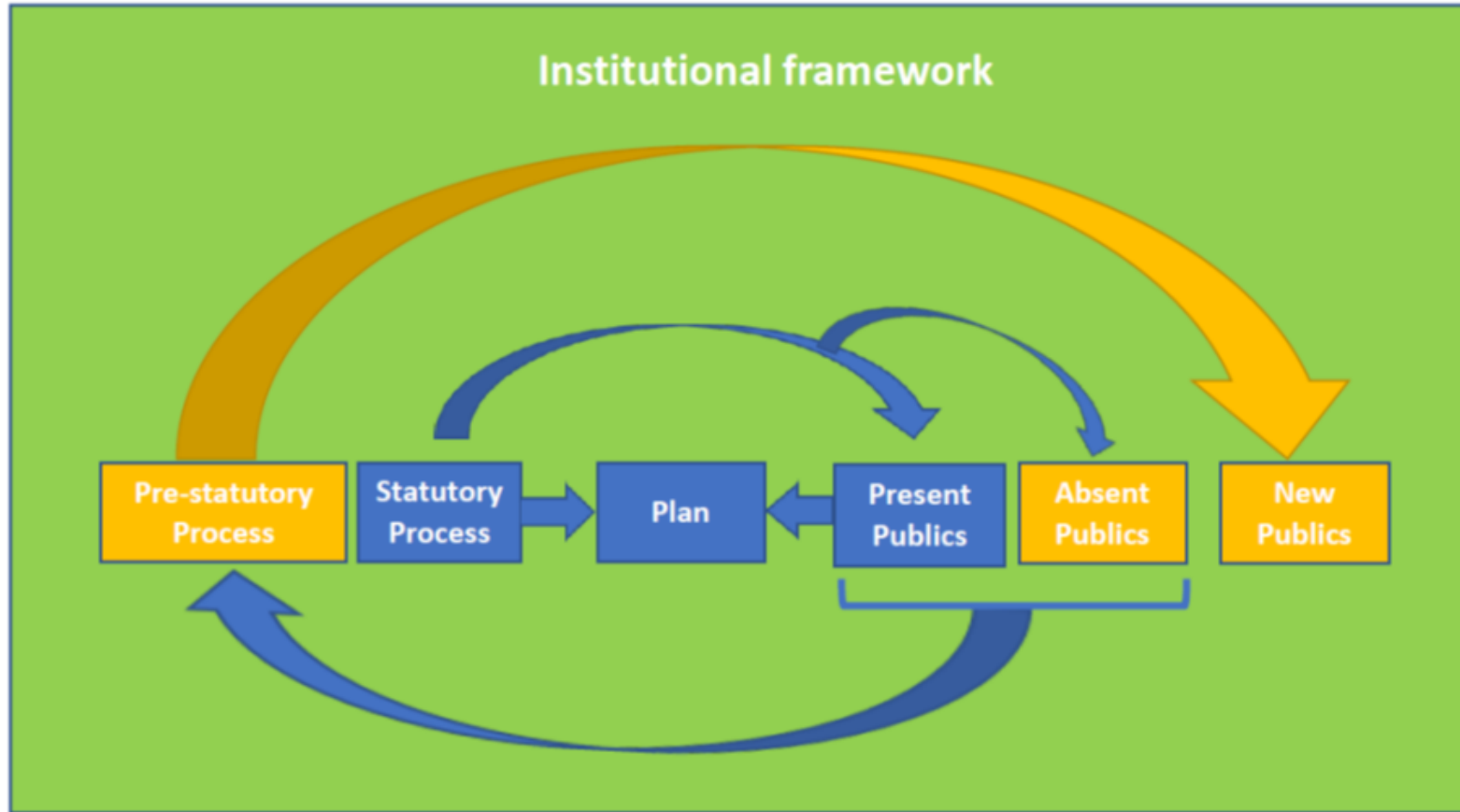


Figure 7. A co-production model of how New Zealand's resource management institutional framework responds to present and absent publics. Directing attention and resources to pre-statutory processes is bringing new publics into being. Yellow highlights what the co-production model brings into view.



New publics, practices [and places]?

Hamilton footpaths - the good, the bad and the ugly

Waikato Times, 23 June, 2018

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/news/104797829/hamilton-footpaths---the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly>

Conclusions



- Yes, we do need new public engagement models!
- Not deficit-based models though
- Drawing inspiration from walking (scootering?) publics, practice-based [and place-based] concepts might allow councils to reimagine new publics and processes and move beyond (or redefine) interests and effects – needs further research





Thank you!

Eden S 2016. *Environmental publics*. New York, Routledge.

Jasanoff S 2004 ed. *States of knowledge: the co-production of science and the social order*. New York, Routledge

Chilvers J, Kearnes M eds. 2016. *Remaking participation: science, environment and emergent publics*. New York, Routledge.