# A Greener Alternative? Deliberative Democracy Meets Local Government in Australia

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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### Declaration

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#### Abstract

In recent decades a search has been conducted among democratic theorists to find a decision making form that is both democratic, and able to produce outcomes that may be seen to favour the life supporting capacity of our natural systems. One form of decision making that has gained considerable interest from green theorists is participatory or deliberative democracy. It is suggested that compared to liberal representative structures, a deliberative conception of politics will allow for a more informed policy process that enables the discovery and support of generalisable rather than particular interests. As a consequence, citizen deliberation will produce outcomes that support the pre-eminence of the natural environment, while providing greater legitimacy and compliance with the agreements reached.

These assumptions about the environmental credentials of deliberative forums are not entirely theoretical. In recent decades there has been a gradual movement within local government in Australia towards the use of participatory or deliberative models to support its existing representative structure. In particular, this has been driven by the emerging role of local government in addressing environmental issues. It is shown that despite questions regarding their reliability, many of the assumptions made within the deliberative democratic literature also exist within local processes to deliver favourable environmental outcomes. The thesis therefore tests the purported benefits of deliberative structures. It finds that citizen deliberation can produce more informed policy processes. However, the notion that deliberative structures will produce both environmentally favourable and universally legitimate outcomes is dependent upon a range of contextual factors.

To support this thesis, existing research on public deliberation and two case studies in Australian local government are presented and examined. The first case study inspects the use of a precinct system at the Glenorchy City Council to address issues including waste management, while the second concerns the use of a citizens jury to address stormwater issues at the Waverley Municipal Council. Although a range of factors prove to have significant impacts upon the environmental outcomes that were achieved, the thesis concludes that the deliberative model can facilitate the greening

of decision making, and enable a collective realisation of the benefits of active citizenship.

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Ivan Zwart

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## Previously Published Material

Earlier sections of some chapters were presented at a conference or published.

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'A Risk Worth Taking: Citizen Participation in Local Government.' Paper presented at *The Cutting Edge of Change* Conference, University of New England, Armidale, 14-17 February, 2002.

Sections of Chapter Two, Six and Eight were used to produce the forthcoming article:

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### Abbreviations

ALGA Australian Local Government Association

ALP Australian Labor Party

BCP Bronte Catchment Project

EPA Environmental Protection Authority

ESD Ecologically Sustainable Development

GPT Gross Pollutant Trap

IGAE Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment

ISMP Integrated Stormwater Management Plan

IUCN International Union for the Conservation of Nature

IULA International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives

KBB Keep Bronte Beautiful

LA21 Local Agenda 21

NRO Natural Resource Officer

NSESD National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development

NSW New South Wales

RFP Residents Feedback Panel

UK United Kingdom

UNSW University of New South Wales

USEP Urban Stormwater Education Program

WCED World Commission on Environment and Development

WCS World Conservation Strategy

WMTF Waste Management Task Force

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