Let's do this! Engaging Invercargill locals with climate change action

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The Paris Agreement on climate change entered into force in November 2016 after NZ, along with many other countries, had ratified (become a full participant to the agreement) (Ministry for the Environment, 2018). The preamble of the Paris Agreement explains that ratified nations (or Parties) should "respect, promote and consider" the rights of indigenous people, local communities and human rights obligations when acting to address climate change (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2016). Article 7 of the agreement says action to adapt to climate change should follow a "participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems". This paper provides initial feedback on a current project, which is exploring how Invercargill local people are involved in climate change action. Planned data collection includes a survey of local understandings about climate change and climate change action, observations of two workshops on climate change action in Invercargill and a series of interviews with government agency representatives, iwi and relevant NGOs. An important focus of these interviews is how locals are engaged with initiatives for climate change action, where climate change action covers both adaptation and mitigation to climate change. This paper will discuss the data gathered prior to the date of the symposium. Processes of stakeholder engagement are viewed through the lens of environmental communication scholarship. This argues the importance of early engagement with stakeholders (Glasbergen, 2002), building trust between stakeholders and authority holders (Senecah, 2004) and making opportunities for stakeholders to question and challenge knowledge being presented to them (Daniels & Walker, 2012). Engaging locals in dialogue rather than transmitting information to them is of key importance in environmental communication (Lindenfeld et al, 2012). In fact, if information is merely transmitted to locals, this appears to undermine the citizen engagement and mobilisation that engenders social change and problem solving (Brulle, 2010). Consequently, this study focuses on the methods and approaches used in Invercargill to communicate with locals and involve them in climate change action.

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