

WAS*IS interest statement from Peat Leith, 25th September, 2006

The Australian WAS*IS workshop would be a wonderful opportunity to engage with other enthused people about an array of subjects that are my primary research focus, and my passion.

Although I have a background in biophysical science, particularly geographical climatology, I have become more and more interested during my adult life in how people make sense of the climatic and related environmental conditions in which they live. This has led me to tackling a doctorate the working title of which is, *Knowing El Niño: integrating knowledges of climate variability in the eastern Australian Rangelands*. The primary research question to which I am attending is: how can local and scientific knowledges be better integrated to improve decision-making about seasonal climate variability in Australia's semi-arid rangelands.

I have used qualitative research methods, informed by the broad literatures of Science and Technology Studies (STS), Risk and Place, to examine the nexus between science and society. I have completed and over one hundred in-depth interviews with graziers as well as researchers in the fields of climate science and climate applications. Drawing primarily from these interviews I am investigating the boundaries among scientific disciplines and organisations and between these sciences and the graziers. I am currently writing up my thesis but have already had opportunities at various forums and via a recent publication (see CV) to share some of my analyses with both the climate applications community and the 70 graziers who participated in the research. I have had encouraging responses from these groups and hope to continue working with publics and climate science and applications researchers in Australia, and perhaps internationally, to foster the ability of this complex but crucial field to do public good and so increase societal adaptation and resilience to climate variability and change.

My research has made me keenly aware of a variety of institutional and social issues that mediate the production and communication of climate knowledges. For instance, my research draws out – through peoples' talk about uncertainty, risk, decision-making, and relationships, among other things – how trust plays out in the co-production of socio-environmental knowledges, identities and structures. Yet, how to do public good climate science and applications research remains an enormously challenging issue, and a question that I hope to keep pursuing, working among the boundaries between sciences and agriculture. I hope that, if accepted to attend the WAS*IS workshop, my reflection on these questions will be both helpful and helped through that opportunity.