

Chapter 4

A Guide to Using the River Values Assessment System (RiVAS)

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4.1 Introduction

The River Values Assessment System (RiVAS) has taken three years to develop, and has been applied successfully to a diverse range of values (e.g., irrigation, tangata whenua, native birds, whitewater kayaking). In developing the method we have continued to be reminded of the importance of ‘reality checks’ and of making sure the method is both ‘user friendly’ and defensible. In what follows we briefly describe the key steps¹ for applying RiVAS to ‘new’ values and then for subsequent applications elsewhere (i.e., where the method has already been developed for a value).

4.2 Initial application of RiVAS to a ‘new’ value

Where RiVAS is applied to a ‘new’ value for the first time, an application is derived that is tailored to the specific value, while being consistent with the method as described by Hughey et al. (Chapter 3, herein). It is tested through application in a particular region.

a. Identify a supportive host council

This is a vital component as it provides a home base and support from staff of the host organisation as well as access to relevant data sets, GIS and other resources. Alongside the host council is the need for a key contact within that organisation. This key contact is essential for establishing and maintaining internal council linkages required for the work and for helping to identify and maintain external stakeholder contacts. Typically this person would be a planner or environmental scientist. It is important that the council contact person will also be the person with expertise to sit on the expert panel, since this ensures commitment and continuity for the project.

b. Explain clearly the method to the council

The briefing should involve staff and other interested parties including councillors and stakeholders as appropriate.

A sample briefing presentation is available on the Lincoln University project website – located at <http://hdl.handle.net/10182/3132>.

c. Funding

Funding a ‘new’ value application costs from \$10-20,000. This cost comprises the following inputs:

- A lead consultant: planning, including identifying and consulting with potential expert panel members; attendance at the workshop(s); subsequently writing a draft report, circulating for comment and making corrections, arranging and managing peer review – all in all, time involved at this stage can be in the order of 5-10 days;
- Holding 1-2 one-day workshops: likely costs include transport, meals and occasionally accommodation. Most representatives of professional and voluntary organisations internalise their time input costs; and

¹ See also Tipa (Herein, sections 8.9.7-8.9.14)

- Potentially also some costs around report publishing and also hosting on a central website (currently Lincoln University) – likely, including overheads, to be in the order of around \$1500 per ‘new’ value.

d. Lead consultant

Appointment of a project facilitator is imperative. This person needs:

- A working knowledge of the value;
- Facilitation and other organisational skills;
- Technical ability to write the value report; and
- A good understanding of Multi Criteria Analysis approaches.

e. National expert panel

Applications to ‘new’ values require formation of a panel that can identify and evaluate primary attributes from a national perspective while concurrently being able to apply the method at a specific regional level. Where individuals cannot fulfil both roles, the Panel should comprise national-level experts and experts with strong regional knowledge.

Key attributes of the national expert panel members include:

- Credibility, i.e., they are known and respected ‘experts’ in the value – such experts would include value practitioners (e.g., farmers using irrigation for irrigation, kayakers for whitewater kayaking), relevant scientists/consultants (e.g., a bird ecologist for native birds, a recreation specialist for river swimming, a hydrologist for irrigation), and appropriate policy makers (e.g., planner from a regional or district council with an understanding of the value, policy advisor from key stakeholder organisations (e.g., field officer from Fish and Game);
- An appreciation of the value from a national perspective;
- A demonstrated record of working within the collaborative approach of an expert panel context; and
- An understanding of multi criteria approaches.

f. Peer review

‘New’ applications require peer review. These experts must have:

- Credibility, i.e., they are known and respected experts in the value;
- An appreciation of the value from a national perspective; and
- An understanding of multi criteria approaches.

g. Timelines

Now that the method is developed, it should be possible to complete initial application to a ‘new’ value in around 4-6 months. The key components of this time are:

- Obtaining host organisation and key stakeholder buy-in;
- Identifying and securing expert panel member involvement;
- Organising and running the workshop(s);
- Writing the report, gaining joint author comments, etc; and
- Undertaking the peer review and responding to concerns before finalising.

h. Testing

The method for each new ‘value’ should be tested at least once and a maximum of twice more in other regions depending on how much data are available and how representative the regions are for that value, before the application to that value is finalised. One test must be done as a minimum and results of the test reported back to the national expert panel.

4.3 Subsequent applications of RiVAS to ‘existing’ values in new regions

When the RiVAS method has already been tailored for a specific value and applied in an initial region, subsequent applications for this value elsewhere follow the tailored method. Therefore, the task is more straight-forward.

i. Policy relevance

Second, third and subsequent applications of RiVAS to a defined value are always driven by a policy need or other imperative (e.g., potentially as part of a national-level roll out of the tool). It is important to be clear on this need and if it has implications for how the work is undertaken, who might be involved in the work, and key timelines.

The more transparent the process and the wider the representation and involvement of key stakeholder groups, the potentially greater ‘buy-in’ to the process and outputs.

j. Funding

Subsequent applications of RiVAS appear to cost in the order of \$3-6,000 per value per region, for most values. Given the method has already been applied to the value, there should be greatly reduced costs in running it again. Only one workshop should be necessary and writing up time should be greatly reduced, with no need for peer review. This will depend on the number of rivers to be assessed and whether the value is present for all of them.

k. Lead consultant

Appointment of a project facilitator is imperative. This person needs:

- A working knowledge of the value;
- Facilitation and other organisational skills;
- Technical ability to write the value report; and
- A good understanding of Multi Criteria Analysis approaches, including of the RiVAS approach.

l. Regional expert panel

Subsequent applications of RiVAS to ‘existing’ values require formation of a panel that can apply the method at the specific regional level.

Key attributes of the regional expert panel members include:

- Credibility, i.e., they are known and respected ‘experts’ in the value – such experts would include value practitioners (e.g., farmers using irrigation for irrigation, kayakers for whitewater kayaking), relevant scientists/consultants (e.g., a bird ecologist for native birds, a recreation specialist for river swimming, a hydrologist for irrigation), and appropriate policy makers (e.g., planner from a regional or district council with an understanding of the value, policy advisor from key stakeholder organisations (e.g., field officer from the local Fish and Game New Zealand region);
- An appreciation of the value from a regional/district perspective;
- Ideally one member who is a ‘national’ expert for that value and also familiar with the process;
- A demonstrated record of working within the collaborative approach of an expert panel context; and
- Ideally, the regional expert panel will reflect the types of expertise and perspectives present in the original national expert panel. This will minimise discussion about the appropriateness of the methodology and focus time to assessing the values.

m. Information

Council support at the RiVAS workshop should include someone who can take notes (much useful knowledge is imparted) and someone skilled at spreadsheet data entry and calculation.

Almost all workshops will be based around an interactive spreadsheet populating process – it is vital the spreadsheet is set up before the workshop and includes:

- The list of the region's rivers – with pre-agreed low importance ones deleted (but available to be used if need be); and
- Objective, 'hard' data (e.g., for salmonid angling data for the National Angler Survey), assuming such are available.

Where data are missing or inputs rely on expert panel assessments, ensure the process remains transparent by recording reasoning and rationale for decisions made.

n. Timelines

It should be possible to produce these subsequent reports much more quickly than initial applications, probably in a 2-4 month time period.