

VICE CHANCELLOR'S DISTINGUISHED AWARD  
*FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT*

**2018**

**Prof Carolyn (Tally) Palmer**  
*Institute for Water Research*

Tally Palmer trained as an ecologist and completed her Honours, Masters and PhD at Rhodes University. Professor Palmer has been involved in the Institute for Water Research (IWR) since 1992 moving from senior lecturer to full professor. In November 2016, Tally was appointed as the Director of the IWR. Tally's aspiration as a leader within the IWR and Rhodes University has been to undertake, supervise and collaborate in research that is used effectively, and as rapidly as possible, to advance equity and sustainability in South Africa. Over the past decade her way of working has been transformed guided by an increased understanding of general complexity theory and transdisciplinarity. She is a pioneer of what has become known as engaged research: research that is practice-based, draws on knowledge across usual academic domains and from practitioners and communities, and is used to effect behavioural change towards achieving social and ecological justice.

Tally knows that it is increasingly necessary to embrace the need for a diverse set of skills and expertise to tackle the mounting challenges of sustainable management of South Africa's water resources. Critically, this means listening to and engaging with communities. She insists that since access to safe drinking water as well as water for economic and human wellbeing presents huge challenges: learning to share and care for water cooperatively, protecting water ecosystems, ensuring that ecosystems are catalysts for livelihoods in deep rural areas, and managing failing wastewater treatment plants across the country, are critical for the sustainability of water and natural resources in South Africa. Tally believes that by imagining a common vision for the future in partnership *with* communities, and breaking that into achievable smaller steps, a principled pragmatic water practice may emerge as a positive way forward. By focussing on ensuring that water catchment research is used as directly as possibly to solve problems in water scarce regions, Tally's research has taken her out of the laboratory and into communities.

Since 2013 Tally's main engaged research activities have been undertaken in the area of Integrated Water Resource Management, where she has worked extensively in the Upper Kowie and Crocodile River catchments. Several integrating systemic approaches were adopted in this work, including strategic adaptive management, systems thinking, soft system modelling, and system dynamics modelling. Strategic Adaptive Management (SAM) is a systemic, inclusive process that is particularly attentive to developing a rich understanding of, a shared articulation of values and the co-development of a vision of a shared future. The use of SAM was taken further by paying specific attention to ensuring stakeholders participating in any of the research processes (planning, data collection and analysis, and knowledge sharing) were able to participate fairly. This required attention to the context of knowledge sharing, making use of translation where appropriate, as well as demonstrating an inclusive and invitational attitude in explicitly inclusive processes. All of this was part of Tally's intentional focus on paying attention to epistemic justice - the fairness and equity of participation in water resource management.

Her work in the Upper Kowie catchment was engaged at the local government (Makana), sub catchment scale, and has accelerated local water institutional development with the establishment of the first South African Water, Sanitation and Catchment Management Forum. The combined forum is actively co-hosted by the Makana Municipality and the Department of Water and Sanitation. The forum, called the "Makana Water Forum" by participants, is actively developing a local catchment management strategy (CMS) for the Upper Kowie River Catchment to contribute to household water security. To date more than 85 stakeholders, widely and deeply representative of local interests have actively participated in the Makana Water Forum. Tally is already extending this ground-breaking and exemplary research to the Tsitsa River Catchment.

Working in the Crocodile River Catchment, Tally addressed the Adaptive Integrated Water Resource Management challenge of building a co-operative integrated water quality monitoring process, to forge solutions to deteriorating water quality as a threat to water resource protection. The research built stakeholder capacity to co-operatively change behaviour and collectively improve water quality, and as improvements in the ecological Reserve indicators were monitored, community driven resource protection in action was seen. This ground-breaking work brought many large industries together (including sugar, pulp and paper, and mining industries), with local government, water service providers, water managers,

and regulators. Stakeholders met three times a year for two years, and then handed stakeholder engagement to the Crocodile Water Management Forum which had been established.

A natural teacher and with a keen interest in understanding people's concerns about water issues and sustainable livelihoods, Tally has travelled across the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga engaging with different sectors. Her ability to engage with ministers, directors general and ordinary citizens has enabled a connection to research on the ground as well as into government structures. At a policy and strategic level her research has had massive impact. In July 2016, the Nation Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), Natural Resource Management (NRM) Chief Directorate, formally adopted participatory and collaborative approaches from Tally's work as the basis of their conservation implementation practice. More locally and practically, the footprint of her work is seen in the effectiveness of Water Catchment Management Agencies and Water Catchment Management Forums, which promote social and epistemic justice in water management in South Africa. Her far-reaching contributions to the water sector saw her nominated for the SASAQS Gold medal award in 2016 by the late Professor Jay O'Keeffe who wrote in his nomination:

*"I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that Tally has been the most effective and influential 'game-changer' of her generation of aquatic scientists. Respected and listened to by her peers, by water managers and by policy makers up to national ministerial level, Tally has been instrumental in mainstreaming environmental water science into practice in a number of areas".*



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