

Background

A [Marine Estate Community Survey](#) was conducted to evaluate the values and attitudes of the NSW community and interest/user groups towards the entire NSW [marine estate](#). Rigorous social research methodologies were implemented to understand the:

- values and benefits the NSW community derives from the marine estate,
- threats that need to be managed now and in the future, and
- opportunities it provides for future use and enjoyment, to address key threats and for improved community engagement,

The survey included a qualitative component to understand the views of marine estate interest/user groups, and a small representative sample of the community via a focus group; and a quantitative component to determine the proportion of the broader NSW community that holds those views. See the [Marine Estate Community Survey Final Report](#) for further details on the survey design and results for the entire marine estate.

Sydney Harbour within the Greater Sydney region represents an iconic and valuable asset within the marine estate. Understanding the NSW community's views of this asset is essential to its successful management. This document provides a summary of the results for the Greater Sydney Region from the marine estate Community Survey findings to inform future decision-making for this asset.

Key Qualitative Findings

- Sydney is considered synonymous with the coast, its beaches and the Harbour in particular.
- High prices attached to waterfront properties in Sydney are perceived to provide proof that living by the water is considered a privilege.
- **Those in the western suburbs view the coast as an escape.** Those who live further away from the coast still regularly interact with the marine estate and, given the distance they travel, it is often viewed as an all day trip and somewhat of a mini break.
- **The Harbour is frequently showcased.** Most assume that those who have never visited Sydney would mention the Harbour as a key identifying feature of the city, as it is depicted in advertising, films and television so frequently.

- **Value as a gateway to Australia**
 - **Movement of people.** The beauty of the Harbour is considered to be of great tourism value as a way of creating the best possible first impression of NSW among visitors who arrive by ship or boat or fly into Sydney. Sydneysiders expect a range of economic and social benefits to flow from this first introduction to visitors of NSW.
 - **Movement of goods.** The Harbour and other ports are considered critical for movements of imports and exports into and out of NSW.

- **Feeling part of a community.** Sydneysiders feel a sense of belonging to the marine estate which is an important benefit to the community as a whole, as well as the individuals within it.

“It can bring the community together, we’re sharing space.” (Community, Sydney)

- **Feeling a part of nature.** Sydneysiders feel a part of the marine estate and nature more generally. Recreational fishers and divers in particular see this as an important benefit they derive from the marine estate.

“It feels good to be part of it, to be a part of nature, away from the noise of the city. You’re connecting to something bigger than yourself.” (Community, Sydney)

Perceived threats

Crowding issues, traffic and the rising cost of parking and public transport can detract from the NSW community’s enjoyment of the marine estate in Greater Sydney.

- **Crowding issues.** Many report that crowds at beaches in particular can detract from enjoyment, as people can find it difficult to find a place to sit and to avoid crowds in the water. *“I never swim between the flags because they put them so close together, you can’t get any space and it really annoys me.” (Community, Sydney)*

- **Associated costs can limit the time spent at the beach.** Increasing costs related to being at the beach (e.g. transport, parking, food and drinks) can detract from enjoyment and can actually be prohibitive for some, who don’t visit as often as they would like.

- **Traffic can present a major frustration.** Trying to get to the beach (particularly city beaches) can be frustrating when stuck in traffic for too long.
- **Increases in litter and pollution.** Community members note an increase in rubbish in the marine estate and pollution of the water (compared with their own childhood memories).
- **Fishing.** While most community members who express a concern around the depletion of fish populations are mainly referring to the impact of commercial fishing, others include the threat from unmanaged recreational fishing. Many community members report they do not catch the number of fish they use to expect (especially in the Greater Sydney region) and this is blamed in part on elements such as pollution but also to a perception of overfishing.
- **Skew to commercial interests.** It is considered critical that commercial and environmental priorities are balanced so that development does not negatively impact and compromise the health of the marine estate. *“It’s too much – it’s become a concrete jungle.” (Community, Sydney)*

Suggested opportunities and solutions

- Sydneysiders are interested in having some **involvement in the management** of the marine estate and feel the NSW Government should ask for their input as they develop future plans.
- **Sense of shared responsibility.** All feel some responsibility for their own interactions with the marine estate (particularly in relation to ensuring they do not leave any rubbish at the beach) and feel that because of this, the community should contribute to the running of the marine estate.
- The **need for education and information sharing** is considered an important element of the management of the marine estate into the future – Sydneysiders believe education from an early age could not only ensure safe behaviours and minimal impact from future interactions with the marine estate but also could help foster an appreciation and respect for the marine estate and organisms within it. *“Education needs to start from a young age. You should have things in primary schools so kids know how it works and what people can do to preserve it.” (Community, Sydney)*
- **Proactive management should be the focus.** Most feel that monitoring and preventative measures are preferable to reactionary policy. *“I don’t want a knee jerk response, I want a pro-active response from the government and the community.” (Community, Sydney)*

- **Encourages engagement and ownership.** If the benefits of the marine estate are effectively communicated to the NSW population (including Marine Park areas), this could engender greater ownership at an individual level. The general community perception is that positive messaging feels more motivating (e.g. 'the positive effect you can have on your marine estate'). *"Tell us the plans and use campaigns like the 'Slip, Slop, Slap' ones to let people know what to do that makes it part of what we do and people might naturally take their rubbish with them."* (Community, Sydney)

Key Quantitative Findings

The Greater Sydney region represents the largest metropolitan area in NSW. Sydneysiders prize the marine estate as a tourist drawcard and as a personal escape. While they acknowledge that it has commercial uses besides tourism, the health and longevity of the marine estate must take priority in the eyes of the Sydney community.

Respondents to the survey were asked to identify the areas of the NSW marine estate that they had visited within the last 12 months. The most visited area of the marine estate was the Greater Sydney region with around 6 in 10 (59%) of the NSW community having visited it in the last 12 months.

Within Greater Sydney, Sydney Harbour was the most visited area with 44% of respondents claiming to have visited this area within the last 12 months. The area of Bondi to Cronulla and the northern beaches to the North Shore were the second and third most visited areas with just under one quarter of the respondents visiting either of these areas (24% and 23% respectively).

Respondents were more inclined to visit areas close to where they live. People who live in the Greater Sydney region are more likely to have visited the Hawkesbury area (17%), Pittwater area (13%), the northern beaches to North Shore area (32%), Sydney Harbour (57%) and the Bondi to Cronulla area (33%).

Similarly, when people visited marine estate areas outside of their local region in NSW, they tend to visit areas close by. For instance, people in the Hunter region are most likely to visit Greater Sydney (62%).

Household income also appears to play a key role, with those earning higher wages being significantly more likely to visit the Greater Sydney region (68%) as opposed to those earning less than \$65,000 (51%).

Within the NSW community, the perception that the marine estate provides a source of income for locals was significantly **lower** in the Greater Sydney region (54% compared with 58% for the entire marine estate). This finding indicates that the Greater Sydney region is not perceived as being as reliant on the marine estate for income compared with other regions in NSW.

In relation to activities undertaken in the marine estate, Sydneysiders were more likely to take a ferry (80% compared with 72% for the entire marine estate) or go on a tour or cruise boat/ship (52% compared with 47% for the entire marine estate) than people living in other regions of NSW. They were **less** likely to have fished from the shore (6%) or a boat (11%) than people living in other regions of NSW.

Amongst the NSW population, people in Sydney were more likely to indicate that they hadn't visited a marine park (32%) or they didn't know (30%) if they had visited a marine park.

Respondents were asked to identify their highest priority values, benefits, threats and opportunities from an economic, social and environmental viewpoint for the marine estate. Views of Sydneysiders are listed in the table below.

Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic: the marine estate is a source of income for locals, however, this finding was significantly lower for Sydney than for other NSW regions; it is home to iconic images of Australia which promotes tourism. • Social: the ability to enjoy the natural beauty of the marine estate; its role as a safe space to spend time with family and socialise with friends. • Environmental: clean waters supporting a variety of habitats and marine life; the abundance of marine life.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic: water pollution affecting local tourism; the loss of natural areas for nature tourism. • Social: loss of appeal due to water pollution; anti-social behaviour affecting the community's safety and enjoyment. • Environmental: litter, rubbish or marine debris within the marine estate; oil and chemical spills.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic: marketing the beauty and biodiversity of the marine estate to promote tourism; developing and implementing management responses to storm surges, coastal erosion and inundation. • Social: more education programs for the community; improving public access. • Environmental: protecting and rehabilitating remaining coastal wetlands; providing more effective litter collection services.