

# Surveying the community's views on the marine estate

## *Summary of results from the public online survey*

### 1. Introduction

Given the passion the people of NSW have for their marine estate it's critical that the Marine Estate Management Authority (the Authority) and the NSW Government understand the variety of views and values held by the community. This will help ensure this important community asset can be managed carefully and effectively now and into the future.

Part of the new approach to managing the marine estate includes early and effective community engagement. The Authority has started this engagement with the NSW community and visitors to the marine estate via a community survey.

An Australian market research company was commissioned to implement a range of qualitative and quantitative research activities to capture the variety of community views about the marine estate at local, regional and State scales. The project, known as the Marine Estate Community Survey (the survey), aimed to find out:

- how marine estate interest/user groups and the community view the marine estate;
- how the community would like to see the marine estate in 20 years;
- the personal values and benefits they derive from the marine estate;
- changes they have observed to the marine estate in the short and long-term;
- the views of marine estate interest/user groups and the broader community on the threats to, and opportunities for, the marine estate now and in the future; and
- prioritising those benefits, threats and opportunities.

Details of the survey design and results can be found at [Marine Estate Community Survey](#).

#### 1.1 What is the NSW 'marine estate'?

The marine estate includes the

- ocean
- estuaries
- coastal wetlands (saltmarsh, mangroves, seagrass)
- coastline including beaches, dunes and headlands
- coastal lakes and lagoons connected to the ocean
- islands including Lord Howe Island

It extends seaward out to 3 nautical miles and from the Queensland border to the Victorian border, as shown in [the map](#).

## 1.2 Qualitative findings from the survey

A summary of the qualitative research results from the survey were provided on the [Marine Estate Community Survey](#) webpage to allow the general public to add any new ideas/issues they may have to the findings. An online survey was also provided to allow the general public to add their views.

A media release was issued on 7 May 2014 asking the NSW general public to 'have their say' on the qualitative findings via the online survey. An email announcing the commencement of the online survey was also sent to over 500 recipients, including marine estate and marine park interest/user groups and others who had registered to be provided information on the marine estate reforms.

The online survey was open for one month and closed on 8 June 2014.

## 2. Summary of the results from the online survey

### 2.1 Who participated?

A total of 537 people visited the [Marine Estate Community Survey](#) webpage during the period of the 7 May to 8 June 2014. Of these, 152 (28%) chose to participate in the online survey.

Demographic data from respondents is provided below for those who chose to respond to the demographic questions:

#### Country of origin

118 participants answered the question.

- Australia (including external Territories) – 94%
- United Kingdom (including England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) – 4%
- New Zealand – 2%

#### Age group

128 participants answered the question.

- 18 – 30 years - 7%
- 30 – 60 years - 73%
- 60+ years - 20%

#### Gender

128 participants answered the question.

- Male – 56%
- Female – 44%

#### Identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

127 participants answered the question.

- Yes – 3%
- No – 97%

## Distribution of respondents in NSW

Respondents were asked to provide their post code so the Authority could determine regional locations where feedback was provided. The map below provides a summary of the 128 responses who noted their post code. Those areas highlighted in orange-red recorded the highest response rates.

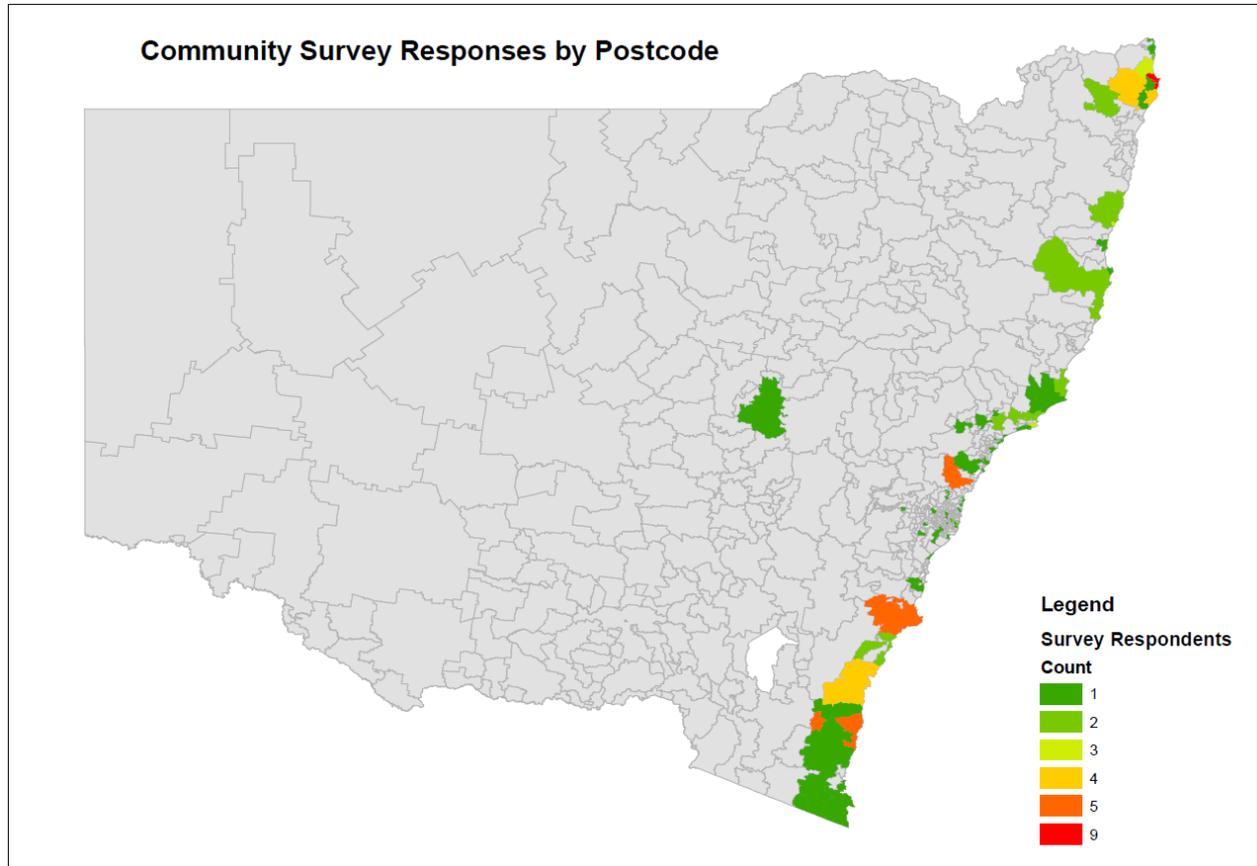


Figure 1: Number of responses per post code from the online survey from a total of 128 respondents who noted their post code.

## 2.2 Values attributed to the marine estate

The online survey provided participants with the list of **values** (see below) identified during the qualitative research phase of the survey.

For the purpose of the survey **value** was defined as “the regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something”. The **value** of the marine estate can include:

- intrinsic value that marine biodiversity has, and gives to my confidence that the ocean is healthy
- the opportunity to access and use a local beach when I want to for recreation
- the security of knowing that my grandchildren will have the same opportunity for quality fishing experiences in our local fishing port that I had as a child
- the impetus that the marine environment provides for people to buy my swimwear/sports goods/fishing gear/tourist products

The most important **environmental values** identified during the qualitative research phase of the survey were:

- its healthy, diverse and abundant marine life
- the uniqueness of its environments and mix of organisms that cannot be found in other locations
- its cleanliness – it is an unpolluted environment
- it's natural beauty
- is a source of oxygen

The **environmental values** were identified as **core values** that underpin many of the social and economic values (listed below). If the core values are diminished, then the social and economic values are also diminished.

The most important **social values** of the marine estate were that it:

- has clean and safe waterways to use and enjoy
- has unspoilt coastal areas to access and enjoy
- is generally accessible to all
- is an iconic part of Australia's identity
- is a place to enjoy spending time with family and friends
- is a place where you feel part of a community
- is a connection to country for Aboriginal people
- provides a place to escape, engage with the natural environment and de-stress / relax
- supports a desirable and active way of life
- is a source of therapeutic/healing properties from the sun, saltwater and some marine life
- provides a source of food to share with family and for traditional cultural activities
- is part of our culture and heritage
- offers a range of activities and uses
- is a place for scientific discovery and educational opportunities (including cultural education)

The most important **economic values** of the marine estate were that it:

- contributes to local and state economies (e.g. tourism, fishing, seafood industry)
- facilities and services are in place to encourage use of the marine estate (e.g. marinas, boat ramps, amenities etc. and services such as Surf Life Saving)
- is a gateway to Australia – it provides an important transport link for visitors and to other markets for trade

Online survey participants were asked “Are there any other **values** you would like included?”

Approximately 59% (of 141 respondents) agreed with the list of values provided above.

A number of additional values were also suggested, which were generally similar to those identified above. Additional values that participants provided included:

- resilient ecosystems (e.g. buffering against storm surge, climate change)
- food security
- ecosystem productivity
- carbon sequestration, climate change mitigation
- contributes to the overall health of worldwide oceanic processes
- provides linkages with terrestrial biodiversity and habitats (e.g. shorebirds)
- a place for exploration / adventure / discovery
- protected areas established to protect and enhance marine biodiversity

## 2.3 Benefits derived from the marine estate

The online survey provided participants with a list of **benefits** (see below) identified during the qualitative research phase.

For the purpose of the survey a **benefit** was defined as “anything that is for the good of a person, community or thing”. The **benefit** of the marine estate could be:

- peace of mind knowing it is there
- swimming at the beach on a hot summer day
- exercising while enjoying the coastal views
- family time at the beach or while boating in an estuary

- undertaking a hobby (e.g. fishing, kayaking, surfing, bird watching, etc.)
- deriving income (e.g. whale watching business, charter fishing, commercial fishing, etc.)

Overall, the most important **environmental benefits** identified during the qualitative research phase of the survey were:

- the marine estate continues to be healthy, diverse and unique into the future
- the biological diversity of the marine estate

The most important **social benefits** derived from the marine estate were that it:

- allows people to observe and interact with a variety of marine animals and plants
- provides a variety of seafood to catch and/or eat
- is there to enjoy and feel a part of nature
- is a place for future generations to enjoy
- is a source of scientific discoveries and personal experiences and knowledge
- provides physical and mental health benefits and is part of a healthy lifestyle
- provides a place to socialise and strengthen relationships with family, friends and the community
- offers fun and enjoyment through a range of uses and activities
- provides a sense of peace and tranquillity
- helps teach appreciation and respect – for both the marine estate itself and the views of other marine estate interest/user groups
- a place for cultural activities (e.g. community gatherings, collecting traditional foods)

The most important **economic benefits** derived from the marine estate were that:

- you can derive an income from it (via employment or business) - which provides direct and indirect benefits to NSW communities
- it brings tourism to local areas and beyond the marine estate
- it provides trade routes around Australia and the world
- the associated infrastructure allows access (e.g. roads, boat ramps, amenities, etc.)

Online survey participants were asked “Are there any other **benefits** you would like included?”

Approximately 60% (of 128 respondents) agreed with the list of benefits provided above.

A number of additional benefits were also suggested, which were generally similar to those identified above. Additional benefits that participants on the online survey provided included:

- ecological integrity and resilience, contributing to our sustainability
- intrinsic benefits are derived from its very existence
- productivity of the marine estate
- spiritual nourishment / place of rejuvenation
- offers a range of ecosystem services (e.g. buffer zones for coastal erosion and inundation, water quality improvement, source of oxygen)
- climate change mitigation

## 2.4 Threats to current values and benefits

The online survey provided participants with a list of **threats** (see below) identified during the qualitative research phase.

For the purpose of the survey a **threat** to the marine estate was defined as “any activity or process which prevents environmental, social and economic values and benefits that people derive from the estate from being realised. Some threats are likely to vary in complexity and scale across the estate. This can impact on the ability to manage the threat or to adapt to it over time”.

A threat to the marine estate could be:

- poor water quality entering an estuary affecting a local fishing or swimming spot
- closing areas to particular uses
- a new pest species emerging affecting a local fishing, boating or aquaculture industry.

Overall, the most important **threats** that can affect **environmental, social and economic values** of the marine estate identified during the qualitative research phase of the survey were:

- pollution of the marine estate (e.g. from land-based run off, litter, threat of oil spills, etc.)
- climate change
- lack of use of local knowledge in decision-making
- Illogical or inconsistent decision making

The most important **environmental threats** to the marine estate were:

- habitat destruction – which threatens biodiversity and ecosystems (e.g. loss of nursery grounds for fish (mangroves, seagrass areas) from development, poor management or pollution)
- human extraction via overfishing, mining, dredging
- irresponsible practices (e.g. littering, use of motorcraft near people/habitats)
- water acidification
- concentrating commercial and recreational fishing in certain areas
- coastal development
- political and economic gains at the expense of the ecology
- coastal and riverbank erosion
- no or little knowledge of regulations/restrictions

The most important **social threats** to the benefits people derive from the marine estate were:

- a decline in the health of the marine estate leading to:
  - a decline in use and associated human mental and physical health,
  - a decline in social interaction leading to negative impacts on relationships,
  - disconnection with their community
- too many restrictions, regulations or costs reducing opportunities to enjoy the marine estate and practice cultural traditions
- limits on access to traditional owners of the land to access food sources and practice cultural traditions
- inequitable access to marine resources for some users and not others
- lack of understanding of how people's actions affect the marine estate or each other's use
- poor communication on marine estate management issues and misinformation
- lack of engagement with community and marine estate interest/user groups
- distrust of decision makers
- lack of community ownership of decision making

The most important **economic threats** to the benefits people derive from the marine estate were:

- too many restrictions on fishing (commercial and recreational)
- decline in tourism due to depleted marine life and loss of natural beauty
- coastal development – over and under development
- too many rules restricting access (e.g. for tourism and recreational uses)
- lack of funding to maintain the marine estate – making it less attractive and potentially less safe
- increasing costs for access (e.g. paid parking, use of facilities)
- increasing business costs
- negative views of the public towards some activities (e.g. fishing, powered craft, mining, etc.)
- lack of infrastructure to allow for use of the marine estate (e.g. boat ramps, wharves, amenities, transport)
- smaller catches of fish

Online participants were asked “Are there any other **threats** you would like included?”

Approximately 49% (of 125 respondents) agreed with the list of threats provided above.

The additional threats provided were generally similar to those identified above, although in some cases were more specific. Additional threats that participants provided included:

- lack of community awareness of coastal hazards resulting in injury and death (e.g. surf, storms, floods, marine life)
- marginalisation of marine science expertise
- lack of scientific research
- lack of funding for science and management
- not enough marine parks / sanctuary zones/limits in place to protect ecosystems
- biosecurity issues / invasive pest species (e.g. *Caulerpa taxifolia*)
- fear of shark attacks
- destruction of coastal assets through floods and storms
- overpopulation/overcrowding
- overuse of areas of the marine estate
- current amnesty on recreational line fishing
- failure to think long-term
- lack of practical action
- lack of protection/enforcement of regulations

## 2.5 Opportunities for the marine estate

The online survey provided participants with a list of **opportunities** identified during the qualitative research phase of the survey.

For the purpose of the survey an **opportunity** was defined as “a time or set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something, or achieve an outcome, in the marine estate”. An opportunity for the marine estate could be:

- seeking additional boating infrastructure to improve boating access to an estuary
- conserving a special area of social or ecological importance
- starting a new commercial venture
- promoting a new marine-based water sport

Overall, the most important **opportunities** for the **environmental, social and economic values** of the marine estate identified during the qualitative research phase of the survey were:

- identifying threats and risks and prioritising them
- prioritising based on scientific evidence and community and stakeholder needs
- exploring real versus perceived threats
- building on current management arrangements and what we know
- consistent re-evaluation
- encouraging ecologically sustainable development

The most important **environmental opportunities** for the marine estate were:

- learning from other management models to inform the best management approach for the marine estate
- collection of baseline information (e.g. habitats)
- regular scientific research/monitoring to understand the estate
- consistent evaluation to identify and track threats
- consulting with the community members who have a great deal of experience interacting with the marine estate

- prioritising threats - build on community consultation and scientific information to determine those threats that should be tackled as a priority
- guidelines for use of scientific information
- specific policies on how to deal with lack of scientific information
- communication of scientific information to the community
- encouraging sustainable practices (e.g. tourism activities)
- consistent and logical decision-making even without scientific information
- use the precautionary principle to help guide management
- more marine parks/less marine parks
- more sanctuary zones/less sanctuary zones
- highlighting the benefits of protected areas
- habitat rehabilitation including water quality improvements

The most important **social opportunities** for the marine estate were:

- support the continuation of cultural practices
- education/communication:
  - on the importance of managing and protecting the marine estate
  - on how to interact safely with the marine estate
  - positive messaging, letting people know what they can do
  - provide a central information source for regulations and restrictions
  - more regular communication with the community
  - different types of communication to fit a variety of audiences (e.g. different methods in different languages)
  - explanation of reasoning behind decisions
  - encouraging interaction with the marine estate to promote healthy lifestyles
- engagement
  - define the role of the community in decision making and management to encourage ownership and responsibility
  - community and marine estate interest/user groups engaging in decision making – local and state
  - collaboration between different stakeholder groups (aim for win-win outcomes)
  - access to decision makers (locally and at Executive/Minister level)
  - local presence of decision makers
- represent the range of views and interests held in NSW

The most important **economic opportunities** for the marine estate were:

- business and government working together to market/promote the marine estate
- expansion of income opportunities without compromising current values of the marine estate
- development of job opportunities
- encourage business and employment opportunities for Indigenous communities
- increased customer service standards to improve visitor experience
- consistency in regulation
- government working with local businesses/Chambers of Commerce to determine new income opportunities
- provision of information to local businesses (e.g. visitation rates, uses)

Online participants were asked “Are there any other **opportunities** you would like included?”

Approximately 70% (of 113 respondents) agreed with the list of opportunities provided above.

The additional opportunities provided were generally similar to those identified from the qualitative research, although in some cases were more specific. Additional opportunities that participants provided included:

- business opportunities that assist with climate change adaptation
- establish learning centres at major marine sites
- prioritise specific knowledge gaps
- support for economically viable food resources
- creating artificial reefs in marine parks
- provision of access infrastructure (e.g. boat storage)
- maintain and promote public access and use
- expanding revenue streams to fund monitoring and management
- developing and implementing Indigenous cultural resource use agreements/ecologically sustainable cultural use
- environmentally sensitive coastal development
- a more balanced and integrated approach to management
- promotion of self-regulation (cleaning up after ourselves)

## 2.6 Communication and engagement

The online survey provided participants with a list of communication options and they were asked “How would you like us to communicate with you about marine estate initiatives?”

Approximately 84% (of 115 respondents) preferred email, 29% preferred the website, 10% preferred newspaper/magazines and 1% Twitter.

The survey collected 80 email addresses of those who would like to receive information on marine estate reforms.

Participants were also asked “Do you have any other ideas on how we can improve our engagement with you?” Suggestions for improving engagement included:

- Focusing not just on those groups with vested interests but the general community too
- Local meetings with particular groups
- Social media (particularly for environmental groups)
- Media strategy (less jargon, free events, more awareness of the Authority, etc.)

## 3. How are the results being used?

The Authority is already using the results from the survey to inform current programs and several priority projects within their [Schedule of Works](#) for the marine estate including:

- the threat and risk assessment process for the marine estate
- future management plans for the marine estate, including marine parks
- development of a new Marine Estate Management Strategy.

For more information see [www.marine.nsw.gov.au](http://www.marine.nsw.gov.au)

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (June 2014). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the Secretariat for the marine estate or the user's independent adviser.

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