

NSW Marine Estate
Community Wellbeing Survey

Coastal Residents of NSW
Summary Report (*Wave 1*)



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Cover location: Bar Beach, Newcastle.

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Introduction

The New South Wales coastal and marine environment (the marine estate) are collectively one of our greatest natural assets and is central to our social, ecological, cultural and economic identity and wellbeing.

Our marine estate is a single continuous ecosystem that includes oceans, estuaries, coastal wetlands and the coastline itself that requires active and engaged management.

In 2018, the NSW Government established a vision for the NSW coast. This vision is for:

“a healthy coast and sea, managed for the greatest wellbeing of the community, now and into the future.”

To realise this vision, we are striving for better outcomes for the community, industry and the environment through improved planning and coordination.

This includes a new evidence-based approach to management allowing us to respond to threats and risks in a timely and transparent way.

It also recognises that the views of the community are critical to improving the way we all work collaboratively to manage, protect and enhance the NSW marine estate for residents, visitors and for future generations.

The Marine Estate Management Strategy outlines the vision and priorities for management of the marine estate. Progress towards implementing the Marine Estate Management Strategy and delivering the vision is being measured and reported on through the Marine Integrated Monitoring Program.

The primary purposes of the Marine Integrated Monitoring Program are to:

- a) monitor the condition and trend of environmental assets and community benefits.
- b) evaluate the effectiveness of management initiatives and actions that aim to reduce priority threats and risks.
- c) fill knowledge gaps that were identified as part of the statewide Threat and Risk Assessment process.

This report is a critical step in achieving these purposes and is a key deliverable for initiative 8 under the Marine Estate Management Strategy – to improve the social, cultural and economic benefits that the community derives from the marine estate.

The key objectives of this research were as follows:

- Develop a methodology to collect long-term data for NSW Coastal Residents that allows for robust analysis of spatial and temporal trends in community wellbeing
- Collect baseline data for Coastal Residents on benefits and threats to these benefits to compare with future survey waves
- Collect baseline data against a suite of relevant outcome indicators identified in the NSW Marine Estate Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
- Fill key social knowledge gaps identified in the statewide Threat and Risk Assessment

The report summarises survey results aligned with priority indicators and measures of the values of Coastal Residents relating to the benefits, threats, impacts and management of the marine estate.

What is the marine estate?

The marine estate is one of the most significant natural resources in NSW. It includes around one million hectares of estuary and ocean, with:



more than
1,750

kilometres of
ocean coastline



6,500

kilometres of
estuarine and coastal
lakes foreshores



44

offshore
islands



826

beaches



185

estuaries and
coastal lakes

It offers countless opportunities for the community to socialise with friends and family as well as a chance to engage with the natural world. Experiences in, and associations with, the marine estate through the generations has established a contemporary coastal and marine culture that crosses many sectors. For example, a surfing culture in NSW is well recognised and is an iconic activity important to a broad range of communities and visitors. Similarly, commercial and recreational fishing have a long history in NSW, with associated social and community values (tangible and intangible) established through shared experiences, knowledge generation and a connection to nature.



Location: Hams Beach, Swansea Heads.

How is the marine estate used?

The coast is a central part of Australia's heritage and culture and is afforded significant value, even by those who don't visit it often.

The NSW marine estate is central to the daily lives of many of NSW residents, who live in communities adjacent to the coast. Uses of the marine estate vary considerably, reflecting the diversity of environmental assets and locations across NSW. Common uses include (but are not limited to):

- ocean swimming/bathing
- surfing and water sports
- passive beach and foreshore-based recreation
- recreational fishing
- visiting cafes and shops
- sightseeing
- engaging and interacting with the natural environment
- as a place for cultural engagement and participation
- as a meeting place for social interactions.

Why is the marine estate important?

International research on coastal environments has consistently confirmed the importance of coastal environments to the social and economic wellbeing of communities. Such benefits include:

- improved mental health including reduced stress, increased mindfulness
- reduced rates of social isolation and increased community participation
- improved levels of physical activity through recreation
- reinforced sense of personal identity.

The extent and significance of these benefits is, however, dependent on maintaining the quality of the marine estate environment in the long-term.



Location: Newcastle.

Survey of NSW Coastal Residents

The need for a community wellbeing survey

Historically, there has been no systematic monitoring of the social, cultural and economic (or human) attributes of the NSW marine estate. Such monitoring is essential to realising the vision of the Marine Estate Management Strategy (and associated Marine Integrated Monitoring Program) and ensuring the priority threats and risks facing the NSW coast are addressed.

This report summarises findings of the full survey report (*Wave 1 2021*) prepared by NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and Ipsos. The full report includes further details on the results on regional and sub-group (including age and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) analysis.

Survey approach

The survey conducted by Ipsos used online panelling and sampling design to ensure the integrity and reliability of the data. This included regional quotas and demographic baseline questions to ensure the results of the survey are representative of the NSW Coastal Residents population.

All respondents were over the age of 18 at the time of the survey.

The survey provides information to track community perceptions and values as to benefits and impacts of the NSW marine estate. The design of survey allows for long-term monitoring by repeating the survey periodically. The questions and responses have been specifically designed to accurately reflect community experiences over the past 12 months and allow for priority indicators to be tracked over time in a user-friendly and consistent manner.



A total of 2,180 responses were recorded for Coastal Residents across NSW.

Key questions

The survey questionnaire captured a range of indicators and data sets on a diverse variety of topics and themes relating to the marine estate. These included:

- Age and demographics
- Locations and regions
- Community use of the NSW marine estate
- Contribution of the NSW marine estate to quality of life
- Community connections to the NSW marine estate
- Community awareness of benefits and threats to the marine estate
- Community perceptions of environmental health
- Community stewardship of the marine estate
- Impacts of key threats on community experience of the NSW marine estate
- Importance of managing different aspects of the NSW marine estate
- Awareness and perception of marine estate management.



Location: Lake Macquarie.

NSW coastal regions

For the purpose of the survey, the NSW Coast is broken into 7 discrete coastal regions:



“We have a beautiful coastline and it would be devastating if this is destroyed over the years. I would hope that our children’s children and their children would get to enjoy it the way we do now.”



Location: NSW South Coast.

Scorecard - results

This snapshot summarises the indicators and statewide average scores given by survey respondents to the key questions in the Coastal Residents¹ Survey 2021.

Question/Indicator	Percentage or Average Score
Community use of the NSW marine estate	
How often do you visit your local coastal area?	64% at least once per week
Top 5 activities undertaken when visiting your local coastal area:	
• Beach going	61% of people
• Picnicking, sightseeing, visiting coastal cafes	58% of people
• Land-based exercise	58% of people
• Water sports	42% of people
• Wildlife or nature watching	36% of people
Community perceptions of environmental health	
How would you rate the current health of the natural coastal environment in your local area?	Very good 27% Good 55% Poor 5% Very poor 1%
Top reasons for positive rating of health of the natural coastal environment:	
• Local council / government bodies very proactive / regulations in place	25% of people
• Clear / clean environment	17% of people
• Water is clean / water is clear / water is pristine / good water quality	15% of people
Top reasons for negative rating of health of the natural coastal environment:	
• Rubbish / littering still happens / some leave rubbish behind	29% of people
• Some tourists or visitors ignore regulations	22% of people
• Erosion / erosion taking its toll / a concern / a problem	16% of people
Contribution of the NSW marine estate to quality of life	
Top benefits of the NSW Coast of which Coastal Residents have detailed awareness:	
• Spending time in the natural environments has been linked to better health and overall wellbeing	55% of people
• Recreational fishing provides wellbeing benefits	44% of people
• Estuaries in NSW are important nursery areas for many species	44% of people
How important is the NSW coast in contributing to your quality of life? ²	8.3/10
Top 3 contributors to Coastal Residents' quality of life:	
• Environment ('beach', 'nature', 'fresh air')	55% of people
• Recreation ('exercise', 'walking')	35% of people
• Emotion ('relaxing', 'joy', 'sense of freedom')	29% of people

¹ Coastal residents defined as at least 18 years old, reside in local region and live within 5 kms of the coast

² 0 = Not important at all --> 5 = Neutral --> 10 = Very important

Question/Indicator	Percentage or Average Score
How important is the NSW coast in contributing to the following aspects of your life? ³	
• Emotional and mental health	8.1/10
• Physical health	7.9/10
• Spending time/socialising with family and friends	7.7/10
• Nutritional needs	6.6/10
How much do you agree with the following statements? ⁴	
• I take pride in living on the NSW coast	8.3/10
• I feel a personal connection to the NSW coast	7.9/10
• The NSW coast is part of my identity	7.5/10
Threats and impacts to the NSW coast	
How safe do you feel when using the NSW Coast? ⁵	8.1/10
Top threats associated with the NSW coast of which Coastal Residents have detailed awareness:	
• Marine litter can injure and kill wildlife	69% of people
• Most marine litter comes from land sources	57% of people
• Human presence can impact wildlife causing them to move away	56% of people
How much of an impact do you think the following aspects currently have on your experience of your local coastal areas in the past 12 months? ⁶	
• Litter on shorelines or in the water	6.7/10
• Illegal behaviours or activities	6.3/10
• Overcrowding	6.3/10
• Climate change	5.9/10
• Loss of natural habitats and decline in wildlife to appreciate	5.9/10
Community stewardship of the NSW marine estate	
Top reasons why it is important to manage different aspects of the coast? ⁷	
• Pass on a healthy NSW coast to future generations	8.8/10
• Provide a place where people can connect with nature	8.5/10
• Preserve nature –even though it may never be used or seen by humans	8.5/10
Do you feel responsible for helping maintain a healthy NSW Coast? ⁸	7.8/10
Participation by Coastal Residents in responsible behaviours that benefits the NSW marine estate	74% at least one responsible behaviour
How well do you feel you understand the following rules and regulations related to the NSW coast?	between 44% and 84% 'At least fairly well'
Participation in environmental best practices	between 45 -80% 'Always' participates
Awareness of the Marine Estate Management Authority	20%
Trust in the NSW Government to achieve the vision for the NSW marine estate	88% of people 'Fairly' or 'Very confident'

³ 0 = Not important at all --> 5 = Neutral --> 10 = Very important

⁴ 0 = Strongly disagree --> 5 = Neutral --> 10 = Strongly agree

⁵ 0 = Strongly disagree --> 5 = Neutral --> 10 = Strongly agree

⁶ 0 = No impact, 1-3 = Minor, 4-6 = Moderate, 7-9 = Major, 10 = Severe impact

⁷ 0 = Not important at all --> 5 = Neutral --> 10 = Very important

⁸ 0 = Strongly disagree --> 5 = Neutral --> 10 = Strongly agree

Community use of the NSW marine estate

Frequency of visit

Coastal residents are frequent users to the NSW coast. Over the past 12 months approximately two thirds (64%) of Coastal Residents visited the coast at least once a week, while 43% visit on a daily basis.

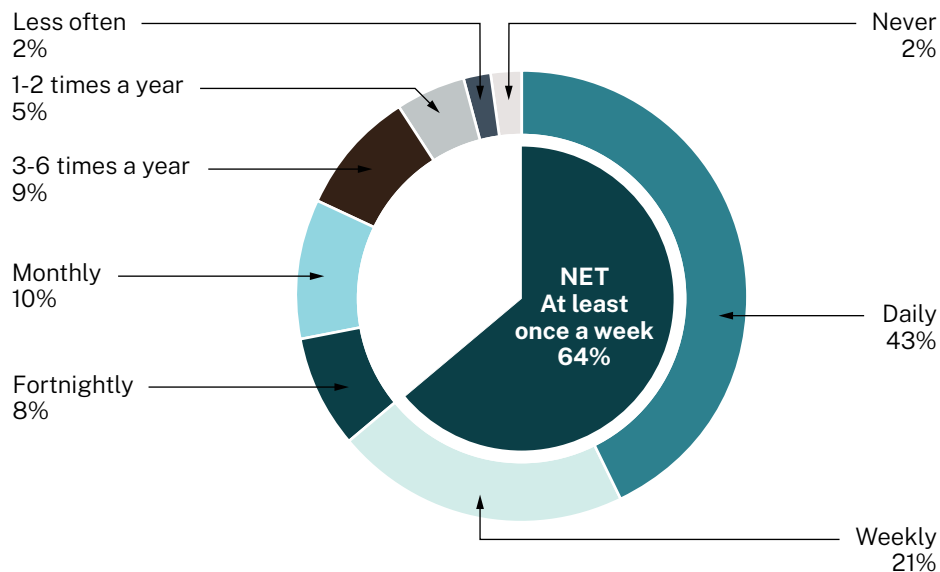


Figure 1: Frequency of visitation to the local coastal area, Coastal Residents, 2021.

Types of activities and uses

A diverse range of coastal activities are undertaken and participated in by Coastal Residents each year. This diversity reflects the varied nature and attributes of the NSW marine estate, including the ocean, beach, foreshore, estuary and adjoining tourism and economic activity (such as cultural sights and cafes/restaurants).

The most common activities undertaken by Coastal Residents over the past 12 months include:

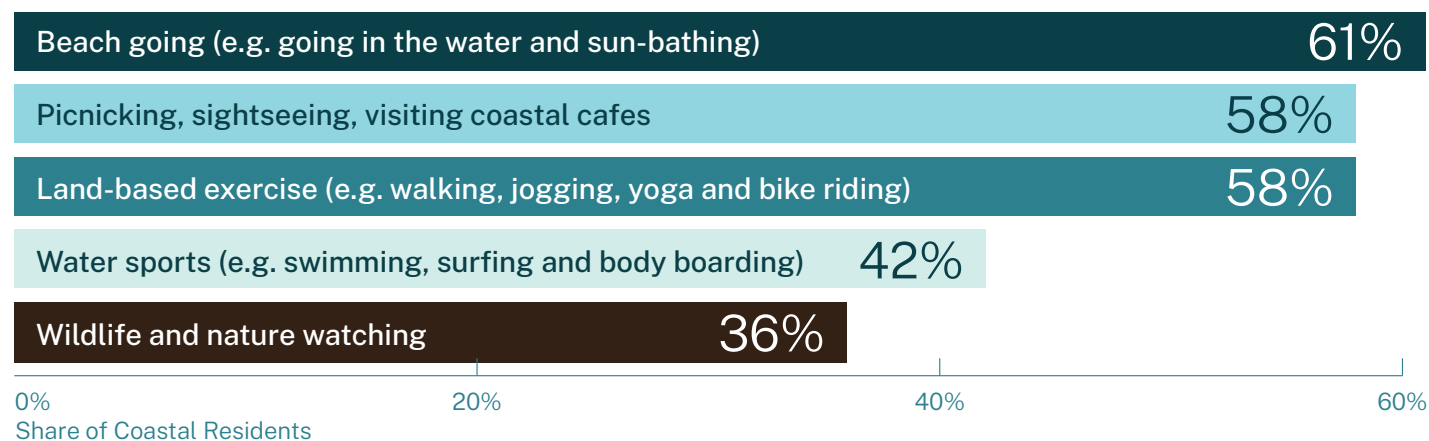


Figure 2: Activities undertaken during visits to the NSW coast, Coastal Residents, 2021.

Other less frequent activities include:

- Recreational fishing (19%) and boating (16%)
- Paddle craft sports (15%)
- Snorkelling or SCUBA diving (11%)
- Environmental work (9%)
- Employment (6%).

Community perceptions of environmental health

Health of the natural environment

The health of the natural environment of the NSW marine estate is critical to realising the benefits of the coast and maximising its contribution to the quality of life of Coastal Residents.

Overall, 82% of Coastal Residents view the current health of the NSW marine estate natural environment as positive, with 27% perceiving it as “Very Good” and 55% viewing it as “Good”. In contrast, only a small minority (5%) of people view the current health of the NSW coastal environment as “Poor”.



Figure 3: Perceptions of the current health of the natural coastal environment of the NSW marine estate, Coastal Residents, 2021.

The most common reasons for positive rating of the health of the natural coastal environment were:

- Proactive local council / government body regulations (25% of people)
- The clean appearance of the environment generally (17%)
- The clean state of the water and marine environment specifically (15%)
- The lack of litter, rubbish and pollution and the general tidiness of the local coastal areas (14%).

The most common reasons for negative rating of the health of the natural coastal environment were:

- Rubbish / littering still happens / some leave rubbish behind (29% of people)
- Some tourists or visitors ignore regulations (22%)
- Erosion/ erosion taking its toll / a concern / a problem (16%)
- Polluted water / pollution is an issue (14%) and
- Lack of ongoing maintenance in some parts / poorly maintained (10%).

“Local people and authorities have worked hard to clean up the local natural coastal environment and continue to work hard to improve it and maintain it.”



Location: Newcastle.

Contribution of the NSW marine estate to quality of life

Awareness of benefits

Coastal Residents exhibited a high degree of awareness of the benefits associated with a healthy natural coastal environment.

The benefits with the highest share of Coastal Residents “fully aware” included:

Spending time in natural environment has been linked to better health and overall wellbeing

55% are “Fully Aware”

Recreational fishing provides wellbeing benefits

44%

Estuaries in NSW are important nursery areas for many species

44%

Nature-based tourism is important for the economy of regional areas of NSW

42%

Contribution to quality of life

Given the high degree of use by Coastal Residents, it is unsurprising that they also rated the NSW coast as a highly important factor in contributing to their quality of life. The overall importance of the NSW coast to quality of life was rated 8.3 out of 10, with 39% of Coastal Residents indicating that it is very important (i.e. a score of 10).

The average level of importance of the NSW coast in contributing to quality of life increased with age, from a mean score of 7.9 among those aged 18-29 increasing to a mean score of 8.4 among those aged over 50 years.

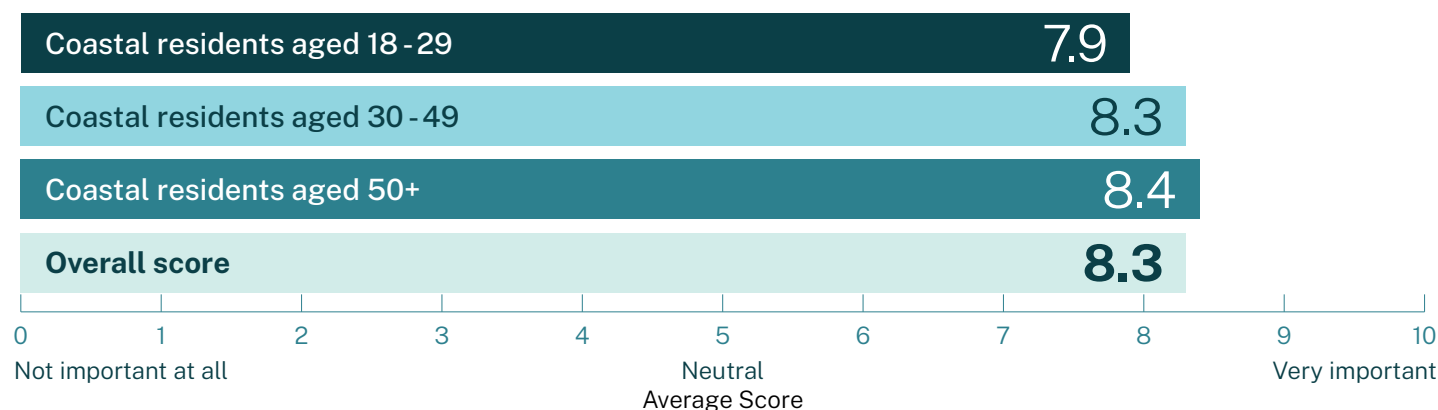


Figure 4: How important is the NSW Coast to the quality of life of Coastal Residents, average score (out of 10), 2021.

The three most common contributing factors to positive view of the quality of life contribution of the NSW coast were:



Environment - 'beach', 'nature', 'fresh air'

55%



Recreation - 'exercise', 'walking'

35%



Emotion - 'relaxing', 'joy', 'sense of freedom'

29%

Contributions to personal health

Coastal Residents recognised the importance of the NSW Coast to different aspects of their health. Of the four major health contributors examined, all scored 6.6 or more out of 10. Two thirds of people viewing the NSW Coast as either an “Important” or “Very Important” contributor to their health, with emotional/mental health and physical health both scoring highly.

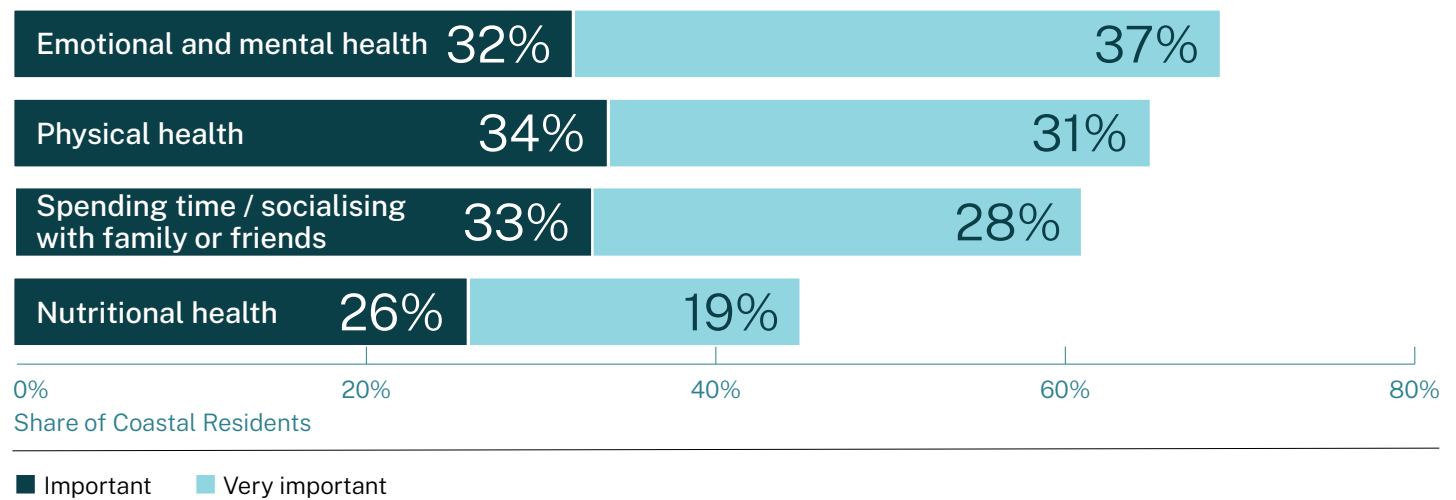
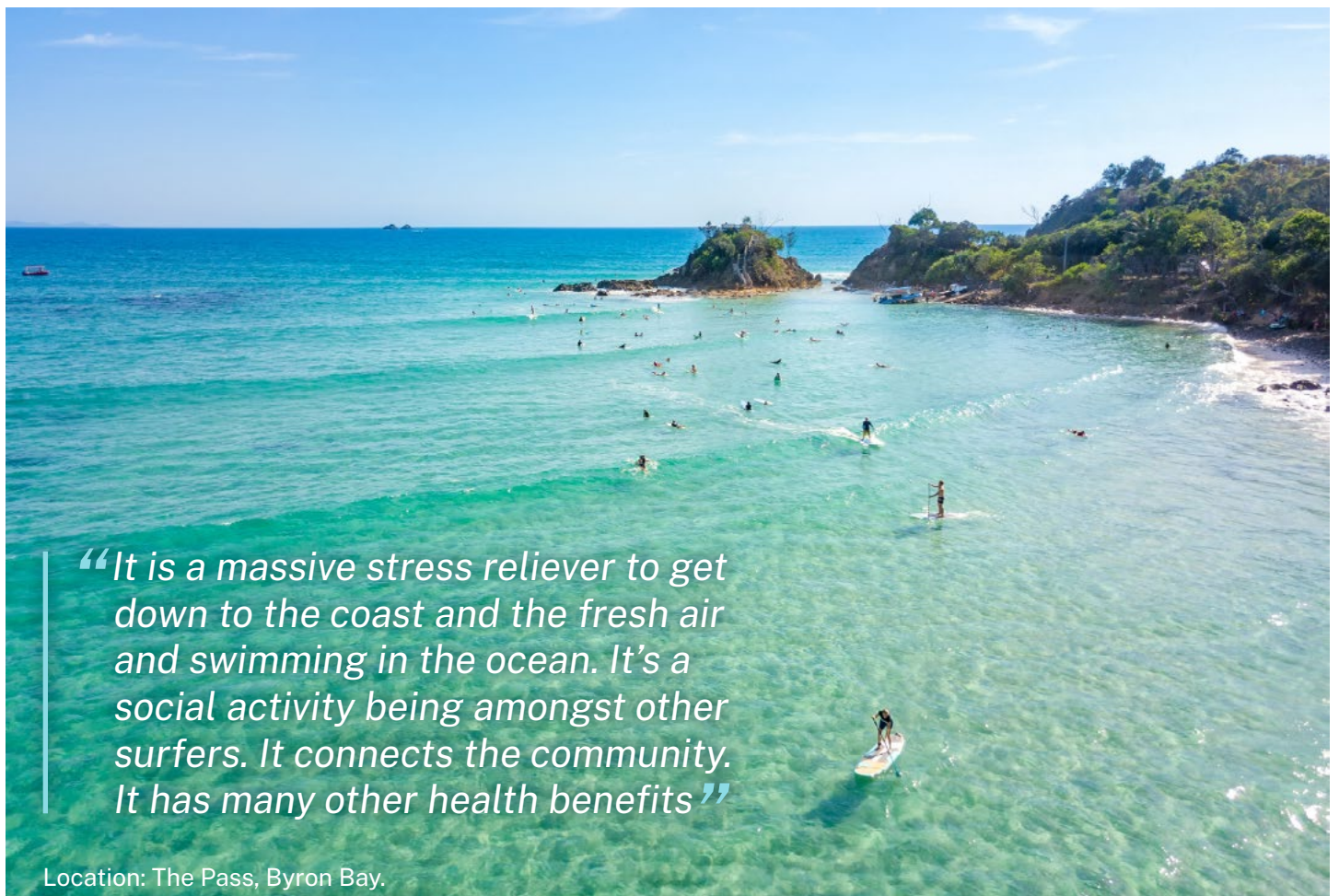


Figure 5: Share of Coast Residents viewing the NSW Coast as “Important” or “Very Important” contributors to their personal health, by health type, 2021.



Community connections to the NSW marine estate

These benefits and contributions to quality of life and personal health appear to underpin a strong community connection by Coastal Residents with the NSW coast. More than 8 in 10 Coastal Residents either “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” with the statement that “I take pride in living on the NSW Coast”, while 66% exhibited a positive or strong personal connection with the NSW Coast.

I take pride in living on the NSW coast



I feel a personal connection to the NSW coast



The NSW coast is part of my identity



■ 0 = Strongly Disagree ■ 1-2 ■ 3-4 ■ 5 = Neither agree nor disagree ■ 6-7 ■ 8-9 ■ 10 = Strongly agree

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Figure 6: Community connections to the NSW coast.

Threats and impacts to the NSW marine estate

Personal safety

Coastal Residents expressed positive feelings of safety when visiting the NSW coast, scoring safety 8.1 out of 10. Over seven in 10 Coastal Residents either “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” with the statement “I feel safe when using the NSW Coast”.

Awareness of threats to the NSW coastal environment

There are a diverse range of threats facing the NSW coast. These range from threats to marine life and the environment from littering and pollution, as well as the downstream effects from, agriculture, land clearing, sediment runoff and other types of human activity.

A large proportion of Coastal Residents of NSW were “fully aware” of a diverse range of threats, including:

Marine litter can injure and kill wildlife through ingestion or entanglement

69%
are “Fully Aware”

Most marine litter comes from land sources

57%

Human presence can impact wildlife by causing them to move away from feeding, resting and breeding areas

56%

Climate change is rated as a major threat to the benefits we receive from the NSW coast

45%

Impact of key threats on community experiences

Coastal Residents rated a number of key threats to their personal use of the NSW coast. Considering the contribution of the NSW coast to the quality of life and personal health of Coastal Residents, threats that significantly impact personal use are of particular concern.

The threats identified as having the greatest current impact on community experience include:

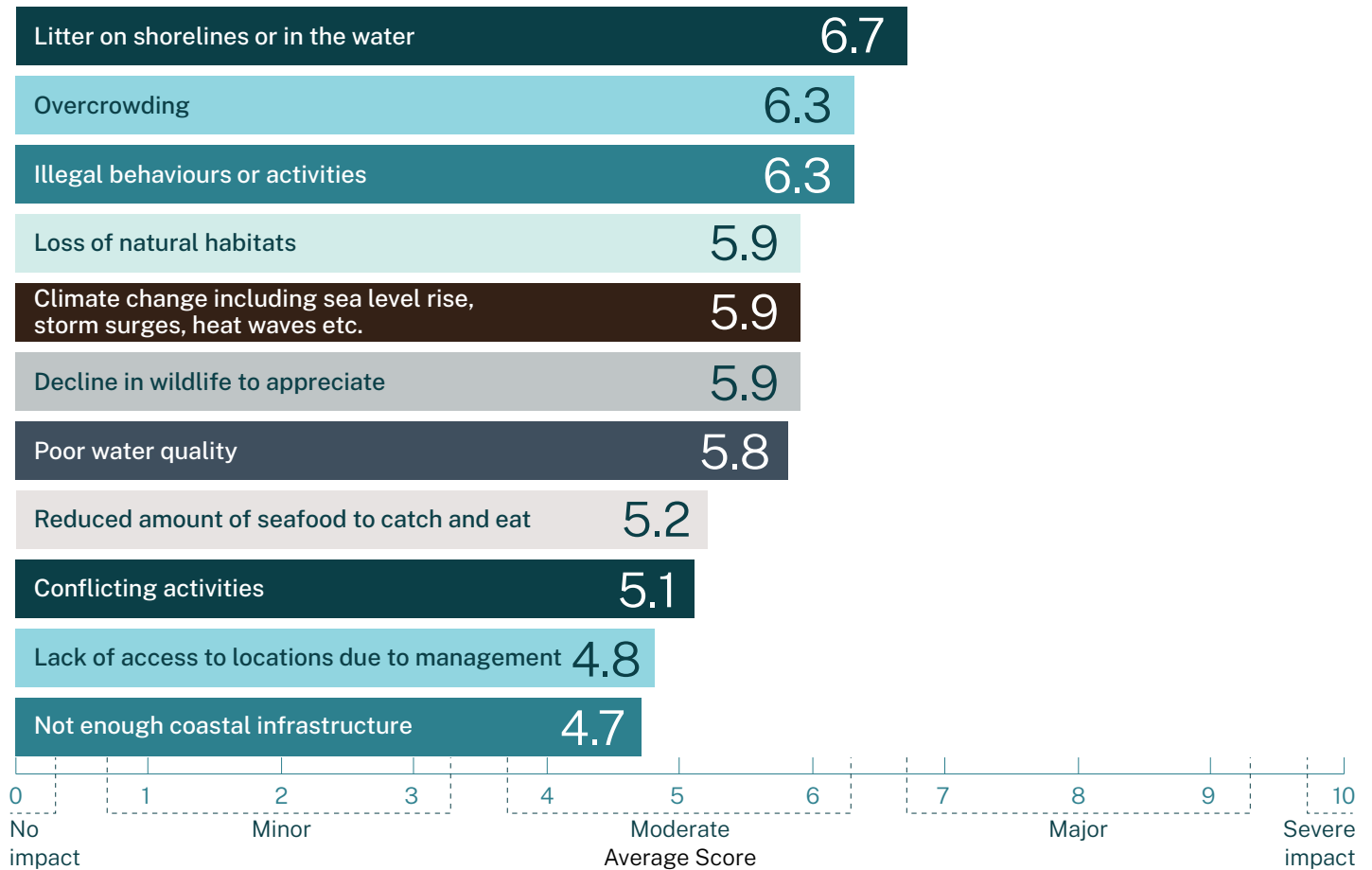


Figure 7: Impact of key threats to community experience on the NSW Coast, 2021.



Community stewardship of the marine estate

Importance of managing the NSW marine estate

Managing the NSW marine estate is critical to maximising the benefits and contributions of the NSW Coast to the personal health and quality of life of residents. It's also essential to ensure the prevailing threats to the natural environment and community experience are identified, mitigated and addressed.

Coastal residents consider all identified reasons for managing the NSW Coast relatively important with an average score of at least 7.7 out of 10. However, three reasons were viewed as particularly important for managing the NSW marine estate, including to:

- Pass on a healthy NSW coast to future generations (8.8)
- Provide a place where people can connect with nature (8.5)
- Preserve nature – even though it may never be used or seen by humans (8.5).

Reasons for Managing the NSW marine estate:

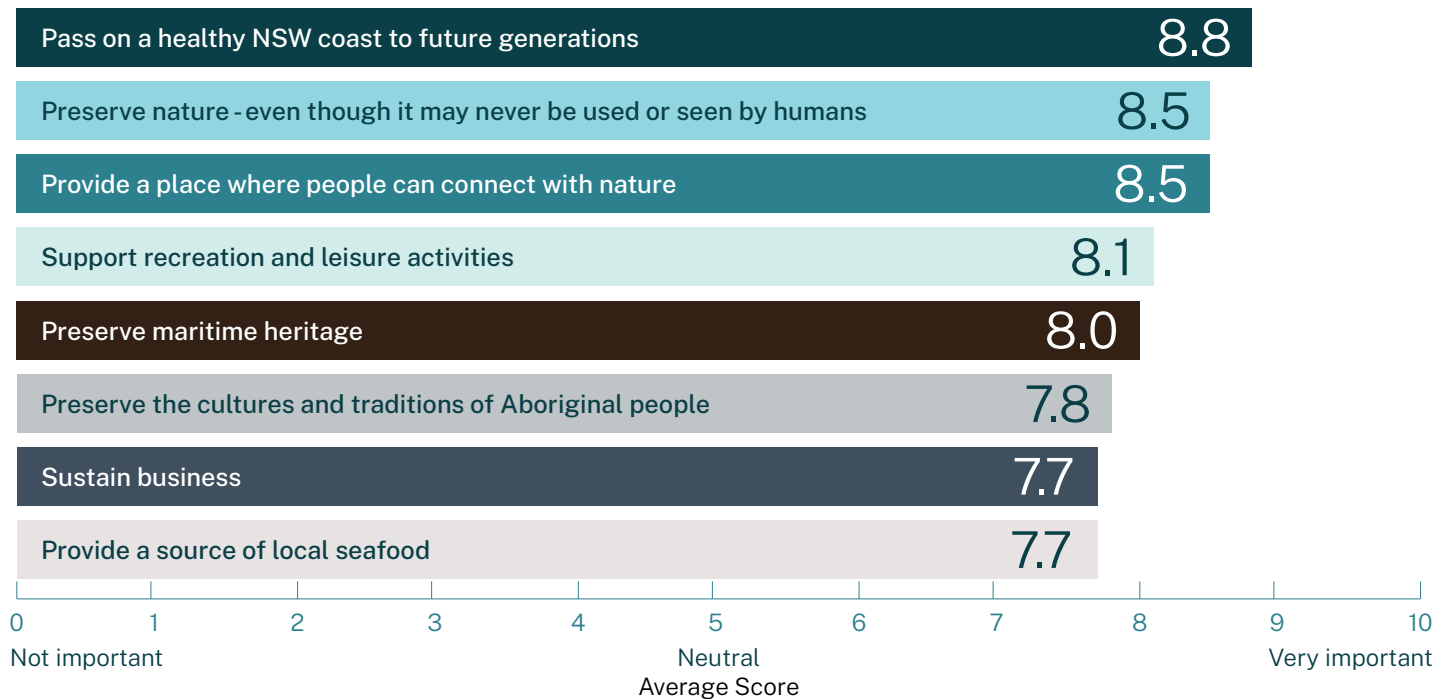


Figure 8: Perceived importance of managing the NSW marine estate, average scores (out of 10), 2021.

These reasons show a strong focus on creating and sustaining long-term intergenerational environments along the NSW coast for connection with nature, recreation or for the sake of protecting the environment itself.

“The beach and sea are my connection to the natural environment, clean beaches and water are very important.”

Personal and community responsibility

Coastal Residents have a strong sense of personal and community responsibility for maintaining a healthy NSW coast. When asked whether they had a sense of personal responsibility towards maintaining a healthy NSW coast, 34% “Agreed” and 29% “Strongly Agreed” (with an overall score of 7.8 out of 10).

This personal responsibility is reflected in high rates of participation by Coastal Residents in responsible behaviours that benefits the NSW marine estate and in environmental best practices.

The majority of Coastal Residents (74%) reported undertaking at least one of the prompted responsible behaviours. Major responsible behaviours included limiting energy use for environmental reasons (48% of coastal residents) and cleaning up litter in a public space (44%).

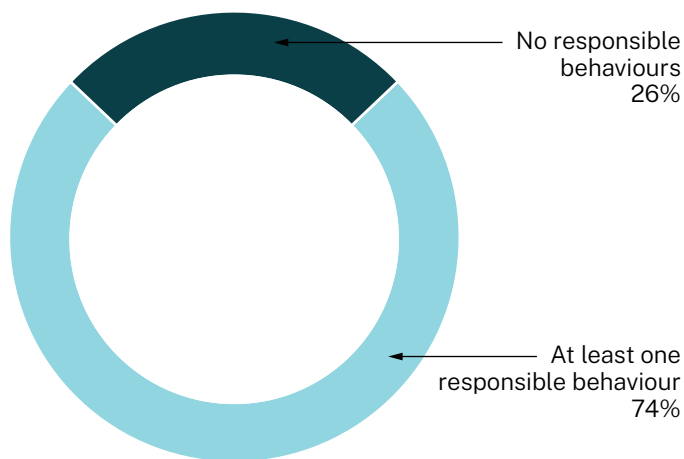


Figure 9: Share of Coastal Residents that undertook at least one responsible behaviour benefiting the NSW Coast, 2021.

This is also reflected in a comparatively strong understanding of the rules and regulations related to the NSW Coast including:

- Recreational fishing (84% understand the rules and regulations “at least fairly well”)
- Recreational boating, including use of paddle crafts (71%)
- Disposal of different types of rubbish (69%)
- Approaching marine wildlife on foot, boat or in the water (59%)
- Stormwater best management (44%).



Location: 7 Mile Beach, Gerringong.

This is also reflected in participation in environmental best practice, with Coastal Residents reporting high levels of participation (89-96% “at least sometimes”) across a range of practices. This was particularly the case for three major practices where more than two thirds of Coastal Residents claiming to “Always” participate in these best practices.

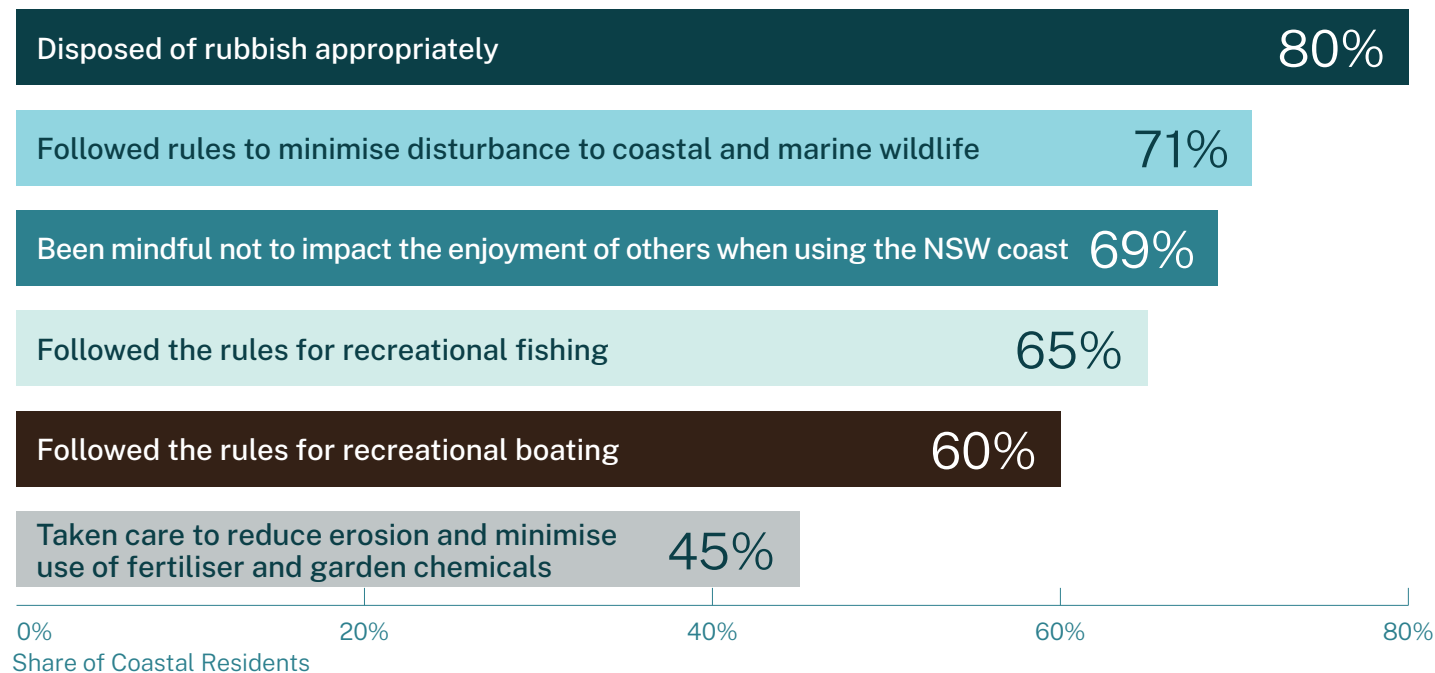


Figure 10: Share of Coastal Residents “Always” participating in environmental best practice activities, 2021.



Trust in government

While general awareness of the Marine Estate Management Authority is comparatively low (with only one-in-five Coastal Residents reporting awareness), overall trust in the NSW Government to achieve the vision for the NSW marine estate is high:

- 55% were very confident in the NSW Government
- 33% were fairly confident.

NSW Coastal Residents appeared to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with components of governance, with around one third giving a neutral response (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied).

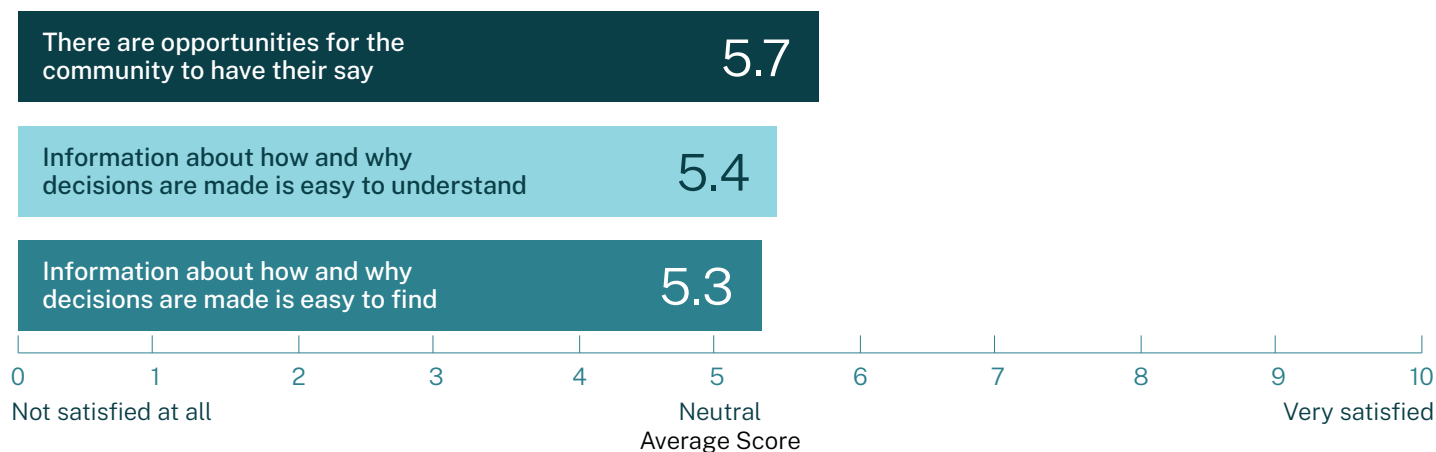


Figure 11: Satisfaction with different components of governance of the NSW Coast, average score (out of 10), 2021.





The complete reports can be found at
marine.nsw.gov.au

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