

NSW Marine Estate  
Community Wellbeing Survey

# Coastal Youth of NSW Summary Report (*Wave 1*)



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# Introduction

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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 aged 14-17 years 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 Youths relating to the benefits, threats, impacts and management of the NSW marine estate.

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# What is the marine estate?

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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: Anna Bay.



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# How is the marine estate used?

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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.

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# Why is the marine estate important?

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International research on coastal environments has consistently confirmed the importance of coastal environments to the social and economic wellbeing of communities and visitors to the coast. 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.



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# Survey of NSW Coastal Youths

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## 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 the 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.

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## Survey approach

The survey conducted by Ipsos used social media recruitment and sampling design to ensure the integrity and reliability of the data and maximise response rates. This included regional quotas and demographic baseline questions to ensure the results of the survey are representative of the NSW Coastal Resident Youth population (those aged 14-17 years).

All respondents were aged 14-17 at the time of the survey.

The survey provides information to track Youth 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.



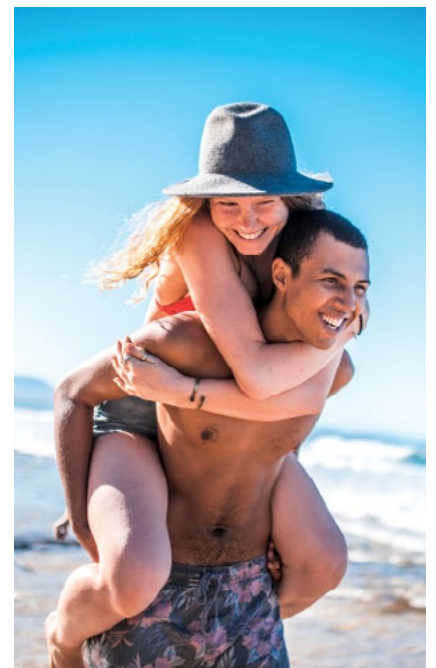
A total of 854 responses were recorded for Coastal Youth across NSW.

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## Key questions

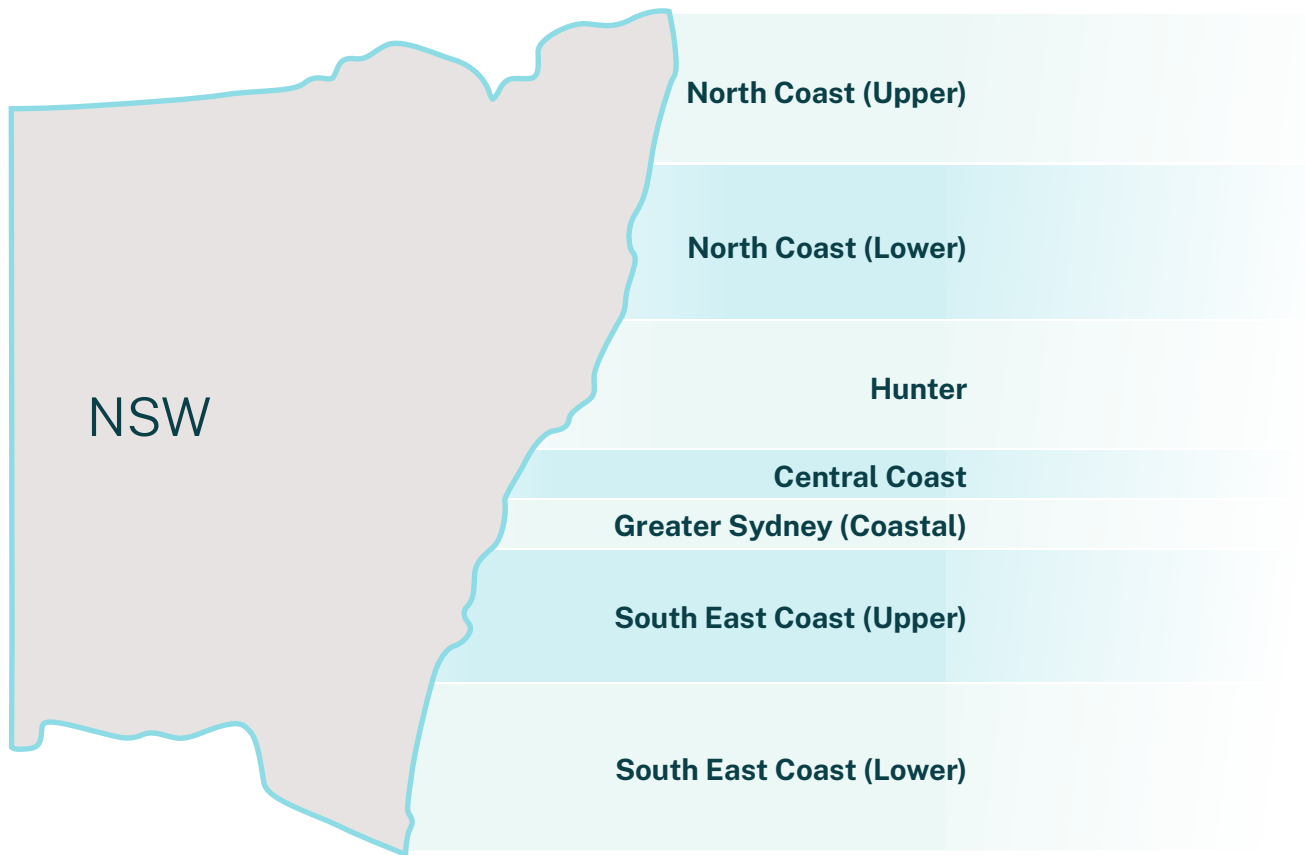
The survey questionnaire captured a range of indicators and data sets on a diverse variety of topics and themes relating to the marine estate. These included:

- Age and demographics
- Locations and regions
- Youth use of the NSW marine estate
- Contribution of the NSW marine estate to quality of life
- Youth connections to the NSW marine estate
- Youth awareness of benefits and threats to the marine estate
- Youth perceptions of environmental health
- Youth 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



# NSW coastal regions

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



*“It’s a place where I feel connected, it makes me feel a sense of belonging. The beach and coast have always been a part of my life since I was born. I always go for bush walks and watch the sunsets, I swim and surf and it’s always been a relaxing and fun time for me. It’s home.”*



Location: Nerah Head, Central Coast.



# Scorecard - results

This snapshot summarises the indicators and statewide average scores given by survey respondents to the key questions in the Coastal Youth<sup>1</sup> Survey 2021.

Question/Indicator	Percentage or Average Score
<b>Youth use of the NSW marine estate</b>	
How often do you visit the coast near where you live?	67% at least once per week
Top 5 activities undertaken when visiting your local coastal area:	
• Beach going	90% of youth
• Land-based exercise	81% of youth
• Water sports	74% of youth
• Picnicking, sightseeing, visiting coastal cafes	72% of youth
• Wildlife or nature watching	47% of youth
<b>Youth perceptions of environmental health</b>	
How would you rate the current health of the natural coastal environment in your local area?	Very good 6% Good 47% Poor 14% Very Poor 3%
Top reasons for positive rating of health of the natural coastal environment:	
• Clean coastal environment / not much litter or pollution	77% of youth
• People look after it / people care / community helps maintain it	25% of youth
• I see wildlife / healthy wildlife / wildlife not disturbed	19% of youth
Top reasons for negative rating of health of the natural coastal environment:	
• Dirty coastal environment / too much litter and pollution	88% of youth
• People don't look after it / people don't care	23% of youth
• Animal disturbance / wildlife is becoming scarce	19% of youth
• Bushland damaged or removed / erosion of river banks	19% of youth
How concerned are you about environmental problems that impact the way you use the NSW coast?	87% at least moderately concerned
<b>Contribution of the NSW marine estate to quality of life</b>	
Top benefits of the NSW Coast of which Coastal Youth have awareness:	
• Spending time in the natural environments has been linked to better health and overall wellbeing	90% of youth
• Many types of marine animals and plants in NSW are unique to the area	85% of youth
• For Aboriginal people, culture, nature, land and water are connected to each other	82% of youth
• Coastal lakes and harbours are important areas for many species to give birth or raise their young	81% of youth
How important is the NSW coast in contributing to your quality of life? <sup>2</sup>	8.5/10

<sup>1</sup> Coastal Youth defined as between 14-17 years of age, reside in local region and live within 5 kms of the coast

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



Question/Indicator	Percentage or Average Score
<b>Top 3 contributors to Coastal Youth' quality of life:</b>	
• Relaxing / brings peace / serenity / improves mental wellbeing	29% of youth
• A place to swim / ocean to swim or surf in	25% of youth
• Brings joy / happiness / fun	24% of youth
<b>How important is the NSW coast in contributing to the following aspects of your life?<sup>3</sup></b>	
• Spending time in nature	8.5/10
• Spending time with family and friends	8.3/10
• Emotional and mental health	8.2/10
• Physical health	7.9/10
How much do you agree with the statement: "I feel a personal connection to the NSW Coast" <sup>4</sup>	7.8/10
<b>Threats and impacts to the NSW marine estate</b>	
<b>Top threats associated with the NSW coast of which Coastal Youth have awareness:</b>	
• Marine litter can injure and kill wildlife	93% of youth
• Most marine litter comes from the land	90% of youth
• Human activities cause most damage to the health of coastal rivers, lakes, lagoons and harbours	84% of youth
• Human presence can impact wildlife by causing them to move away	84% of youth
• Climate change is rated as a major threat to the NSW Coast	81% of youth
<b>How much of an impact do you think the following aspects currently have on your personal experience of your local coastal area in the past 12 months?</b>	
• Overcrowding	82% of youth
• Litter on shorelines or in the water	78% of youth
• Climate change	73% of youth
• Less wildlife to enjoy	72% of youth
<b>Youth stewardship of the NSW marine estate</b>	
<b>Importance of managing the NSW marine estate<sup>5</sup></b>	
• Pass on a healthy NSW coast for the benefits of future generations	9.1/10
• Protect nature –even though it may never be used or seen by humans	9.1/10
Do you feel responsible for helping maintain a healthy NSW Coast? <sup>6</sup>	8.1/10
Participation by Youth in responsible behaviours that would benefit the NSW Coast	93% at least one activity
Participation in environmental best practices	Between 73 and 95% 'Always' participate
Opportunities to provide feedback about how the NSW marine estate is managed	68% of youth

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

<sup>4</sup> 0 = Strongly disagree --> 5 = Neutral --> 10 = Strongly agree

<sup>5</sup> 0 = Not important at all --> 5 = Neutral --> 10 = Very important

<sup>6</sup> 0 = Strongly disagree --> 5 = Neutral --> 10 = Strongly agree

# Youth use of the NSW marine estate

## Frequency of visit

Coastal Youth are frequent users to the NSW coast. Over the past 12 months approximately two-thirds (67%) of Coastal Youth visited the coast at least once a week, while 31% visited on a daily basis.

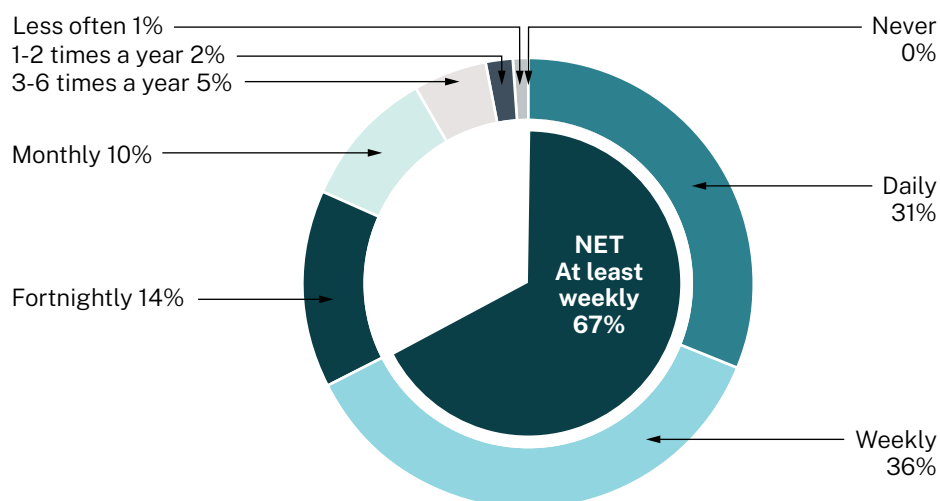


Figure 1: Frequency of visitation to the NSW coast, Coastal Youth, 2021.

## Types of activities and uses

A diverse range of coastal activities are undertaken and participated in by Coastal Youth 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 Youth over the past 12 months include:

- Beach going (e.g. going in the water and sun-bathing) (90%)
- Land-based exercise (e.g. walking, jogging, yoga and bike riding) (81%)
- Water sports (e.g. swimming, surfing and body boarding) (74%)
- Picnicking, sightseeing, visiting coastal cafes (72%)
- Wildlife and nature watching (47%).

These are the same top 5 activities as those participated in by the wider Resident population (aged 18+), though the rate of participation is much higher. For example, while 90% of Coastal Youth participated in beach going, only 61% of Residents participated in this activity. Similarly, while 42% of Residents participated in water sports in 2021, 74% of Coastal Youth participated in the activity. This above average participation rate highlights both a higher rate of overall activity participation as well as a high rate of participation in multiple activities.

Beach going (e.g. going in the water and sun-bathing)

90%

61%

Land-based exercise (e.g. walking, jogging, yoga and bike riding)

81%

58%

Water sports (e.g. swimming, surfing and body boarding)

74%

42%

Picnicking, sightseeing, visiting coastal cafes

72%

58%

Wildlife and nature watching

47%

36%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%  
Share of Coastal Population

■ Youth  
■ Residents

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





# Youth perceptions of environmental health

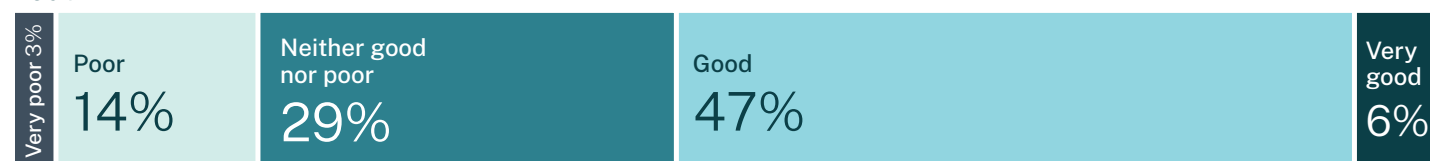
## Health of the natural environment

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 Youth.

Overall, 54% of Coastal Youth view the current health of the NSW marine estate natural environment as positive, with 47% perceiving it as “Good” while only 6% viewing it as “Very Good”. In contrast, a notable minority (17%) of Youth view the current health of the NSW coastal environment as “Poor” or “Very Poor”.

As a result, the perceptions of Coastal Youth of the current health of the NSW marine estate are generally more negative than that of the wider Resident population.

### Youth



### Residents



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

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

- Clean coastal environment / not much litter or pollution (77% of youth)
- People look after it / people care / community helps maintain it (25% of youth)
- I see wildlife / healthy wildlife / wildlife not disturbed (19% of youth)

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

- Dirty coastal environment/ too much litter and pollution (88% of youth)
- People don't look after it / people don't care (23% of youth)
- Animal disturbance / wildlife is becoming scarce (19% of youth)
- Bushland damaged or removed / erosion of river banks (19% of youth)

At a statewide level, the majority of Youth were ‘at least moderately concerned’ (87%) about the environmental problems that impact the way they use the NSW coast, and nearly half (49%) were ‘extremely concerned’ about these problems.

### Statewide

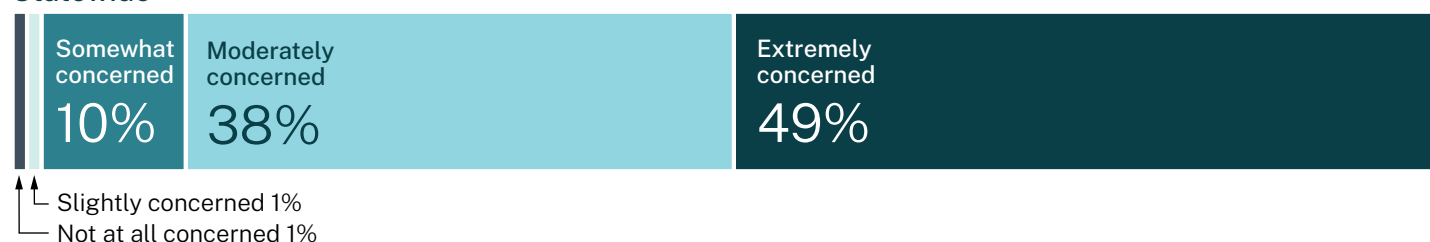


Figure 4: Level of concern about environmental problems at a Statewide level, Coastal Youth, 2021.

# Contribution of the NSW marine estate to quality of life

## Awareness of benefits

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

### The benefits with the highest share of Coastal Youth “aware” included:

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

**90%** are “Aware”

Many types of marine animals and plants in NSW are unique to the area

**85%**

For Aboriginal people, culture, nature, land and water are connected to each other

**82%**

Coastal lakes and harbours are important areas for many species to give birth or raise their young

**81%**

## Contribution to the quality of life

Over three in four (76%) of Coastal Youth consider the NSW coast as either an “Important” or “Very Important” contributor to their quality of life (compared to only 2% that consider it of “Low importance” or “Not important at all”). This results in an overall score by Coastal Youth of 8.5 out of 10, which is higher than the score for all Residents (aged 18+ of 8.3) as well as other age groups.

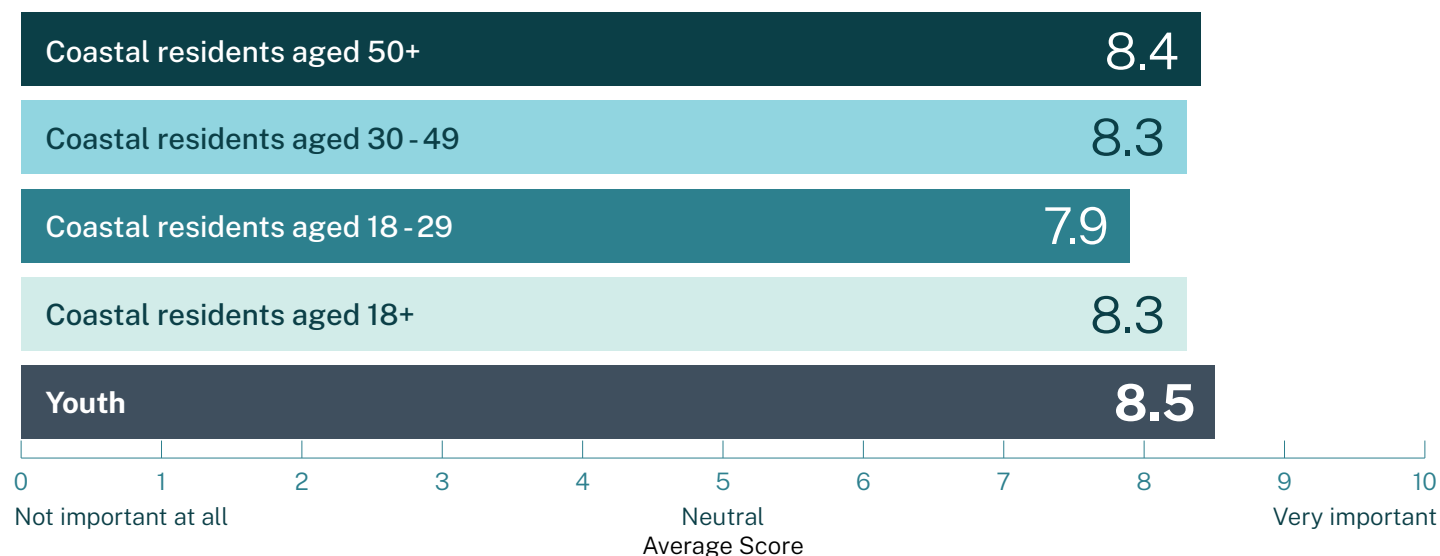


Figure 5: How important is the NSW coast to the quality of life of Coastal Youth and Residents, average score (out of 10), 2021.

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



Relaxing / brings peace / serenity / improves mental wellbeing

29%



A place to swim / ocean to swim or surf in

25%



Brings joy / happiness / fun

24%

Overall, contributions relating to recreation qualities collectively accounted for 73% of responses, compared to health with 65%, emotions (48%) and environmental qualities (36%).

## Contributions to personal health

Coastal Youth recognised the importance of the NSW Coast to different aspects of their health.

Of the four major health contributors examined, all scored 7.9 or more out of 10. Two-thirds of people viewing the NSW Coast as either an “Important” or “Very Important” contributor to their socialisation, environmental immersion, and their emotional/mental and physical health.

### Personal health benefits:

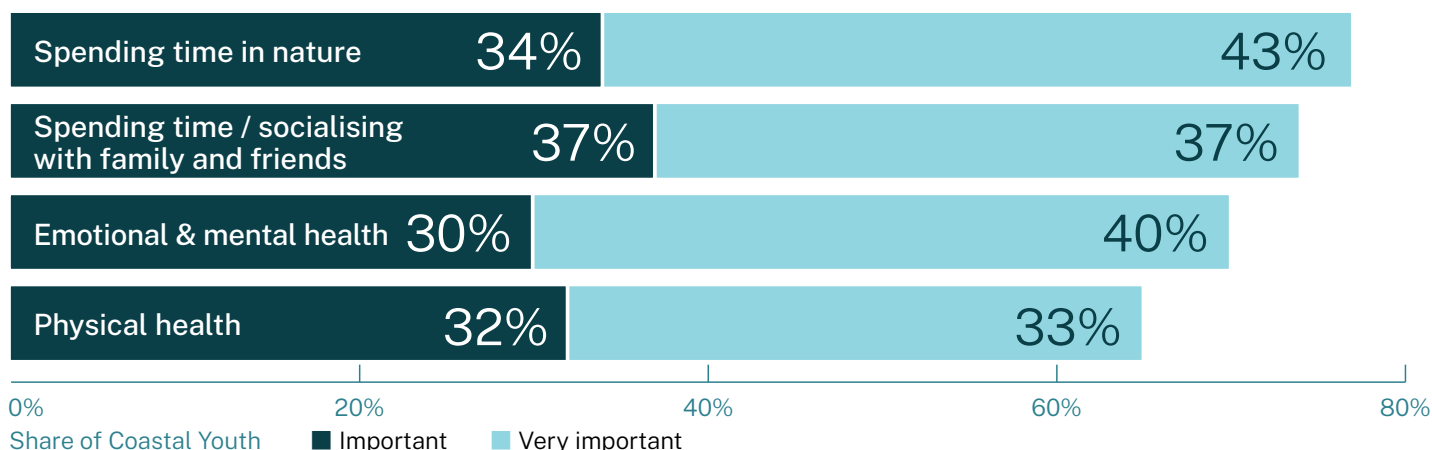


Figure 6: Share of Coast Youth viewing the NSW Coast as a “Important” or “Very Important” contributors to their personal health, by health type, 2021.





## Youth connections to the NSW marine estate

These benefits and contributions to the quality of life and personal health appear to underpin a strong connection by Coastal Youth with the NSW coast. When presented with the statement “I feel a personal connection to the NSW Coast”, 80% agreed to varying degrees (ranging from 18% “Somewhat Agreeing” to 36% Strongly Agreeing”) with a mean score of 7.8.

I feel a personal connection to the NSW coast



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

Figure 7: Youth connections to the NSW coast.

## Threats and impacts to the NSW marine estate

### 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 Youth of NSW were “aware” of a diverse range of threats, including:**

Marine litter can injure and kill wildlife when they eat it or get tangled up in it

**93%**  
are “Aware”

Most marine litter comes from the land

**90%**

Human activities cause most damage to the health of coastal rivers, lakes, lagoons and harbours

**84%**

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

**84%**

Climate change is rated as a major threat to the NSW Coast

**81%**

“With an influx of people visiting the coastal environment, the coast gets more wrecked as more people leave their rubbish behind or tread on the habitats of animals accustomed to living in or near marine environments.”



Location: Crowdy Head

## Impact of key threats on youth experiences

Coastal Youth 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 Youth, threats that significantly impact personal use are of particular concern.

**The threats identified as having “at least a moderate” impact (i.e. a moderate, major or severe impact) on the current experiences of Coastal Youth include:**

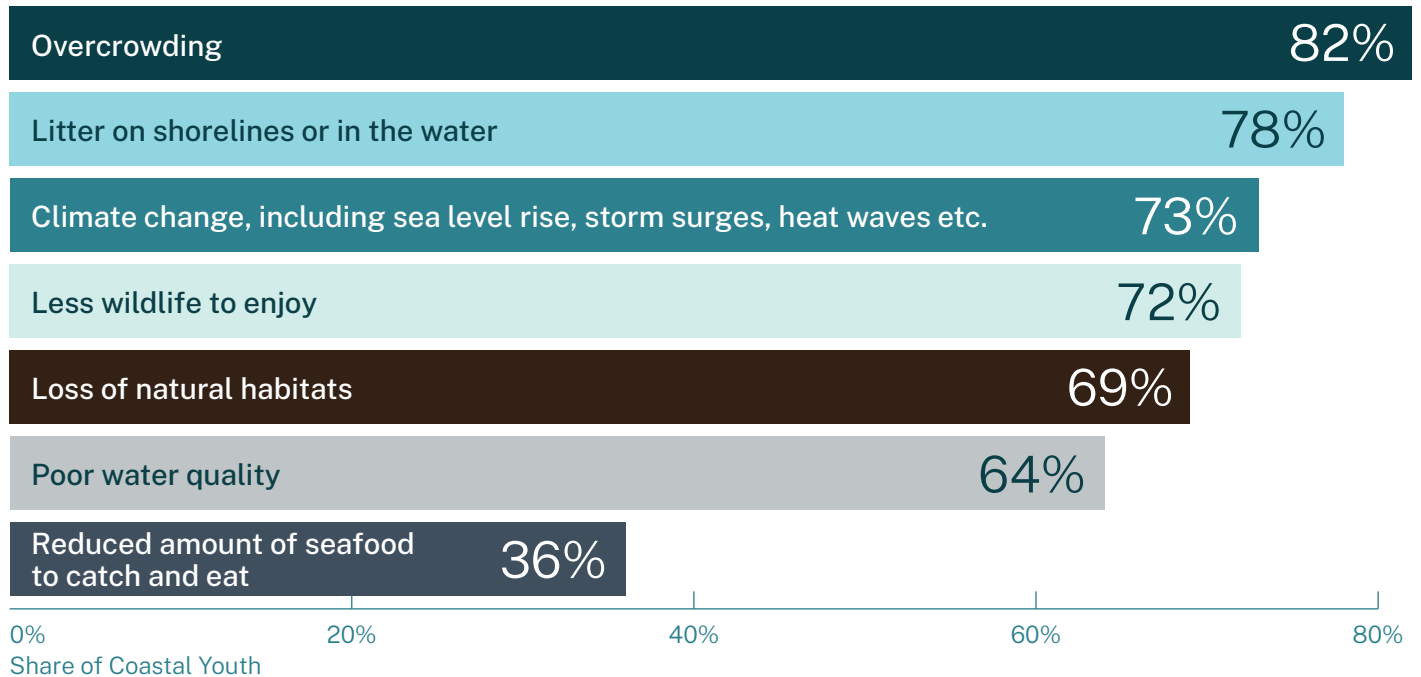
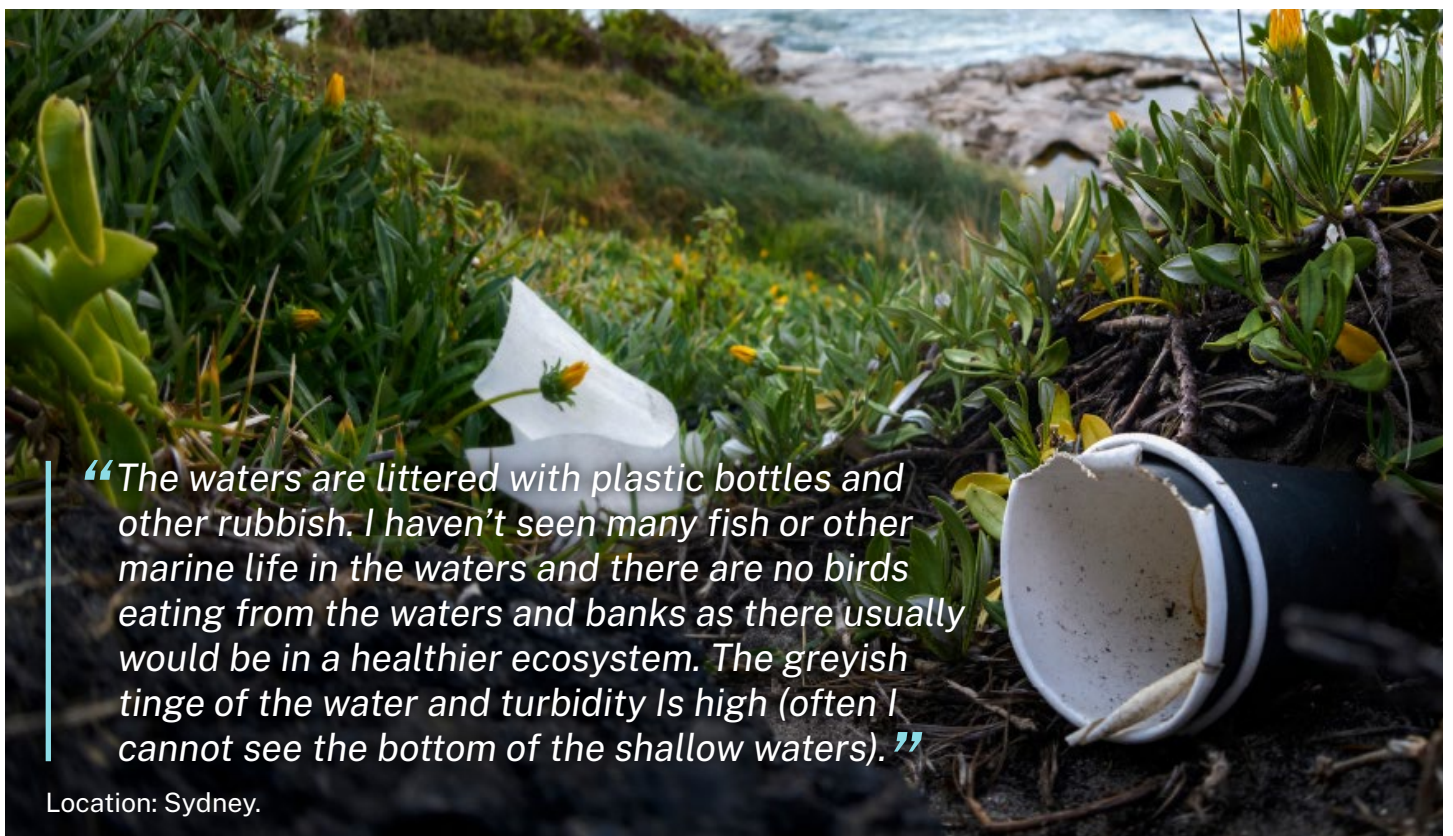


Figure 8: Share of Coastal Youth experiencing at least a moderate impact from key threats to the NSW Coast, 2021.





# Youth 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 young people. It's also essential to ensure the prevailing threats to the natural environment and community experience are identified, mitigated and addressed.

### Coastal Youth scored very highly on two reasons for managing the NSW Coast:

- Pass on a healthy NSW coast for the benefit of future generations (9.1 out of 10)
- Protect nature (for its own sake) –even though it may never be used or seen by humans (9.1).

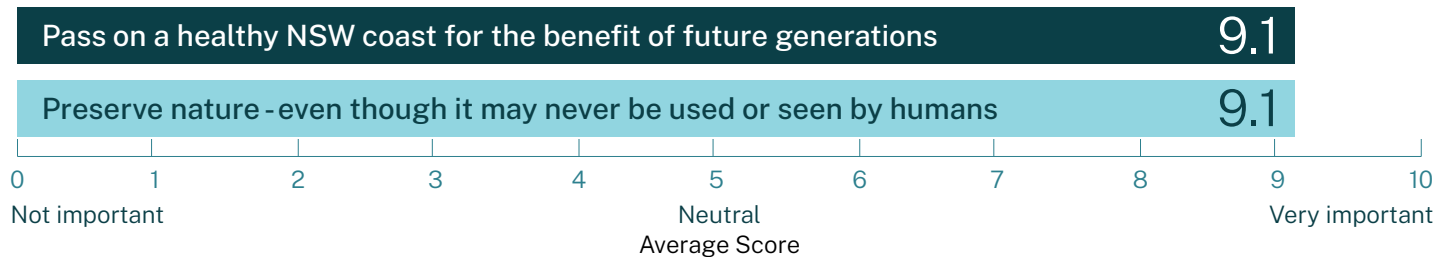
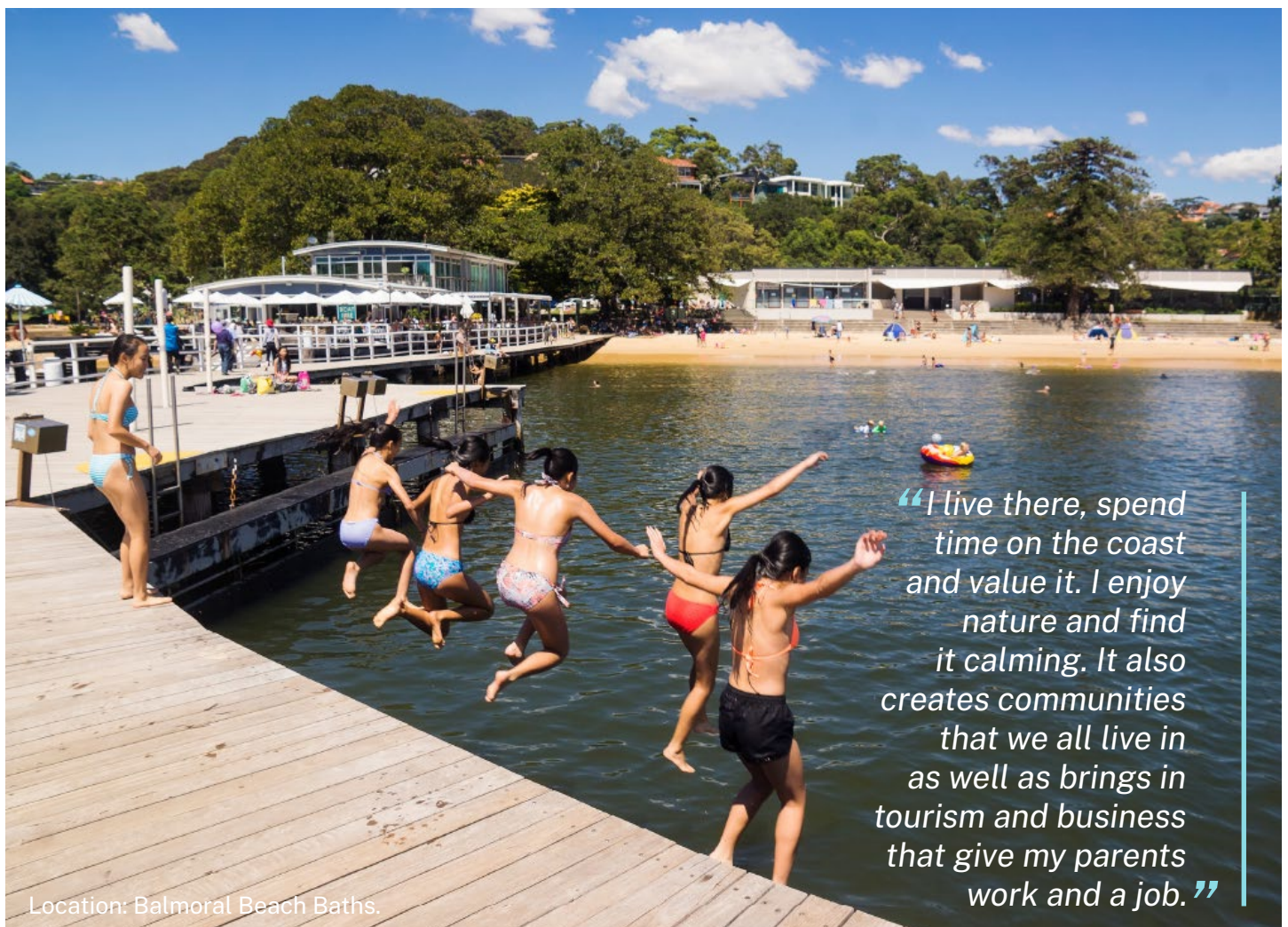


Figure 9: Perceived importance of managing the NSW marine estate, average scores (out of 10), 2021.





## Personal and Youth responsibility

Coastal Youth 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, the average score was 8.1 out of 10, with over a third giving a rating of 10 out of 10.

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

The majority of Coastal Youth (93%) reported undertaking at least one of the prompted responsible behaviours, which resonated with their general concern about environmental problems at a local scale. Major responsible behaviours include cleaning up litter in a public space (74% of youth), and limiting energy use for environmental reasons (69%).

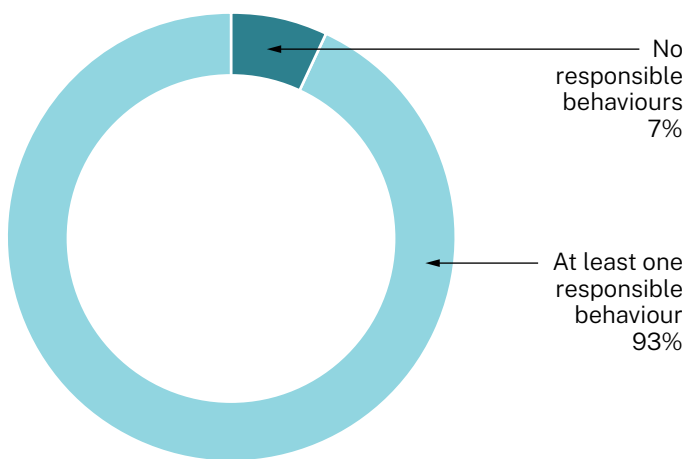
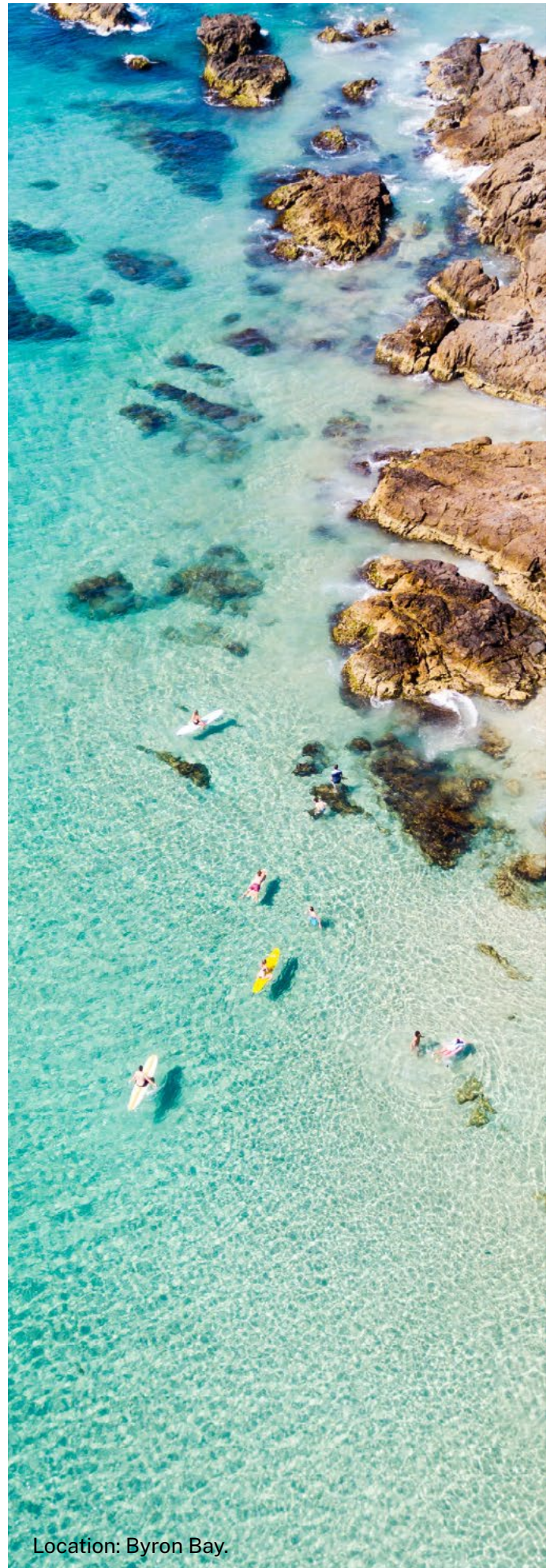


Figure 10: Share of Coastal Youth that undertook at least one responsible behaviour benefiting the NSW Coast, 2021.

### This is also reflected in participation in environmental best practices among those who said each behaviour is relevant to them:

- 95% said they always followed rules for recreational fishing
- 87% reported always being careful not to disturb or hurt coastal and marine wildlife
- 86% always followed rules for recreational boating and
- 73% always put recyclables in the correct bin.



Location: Byron Bay.



## Best practices:

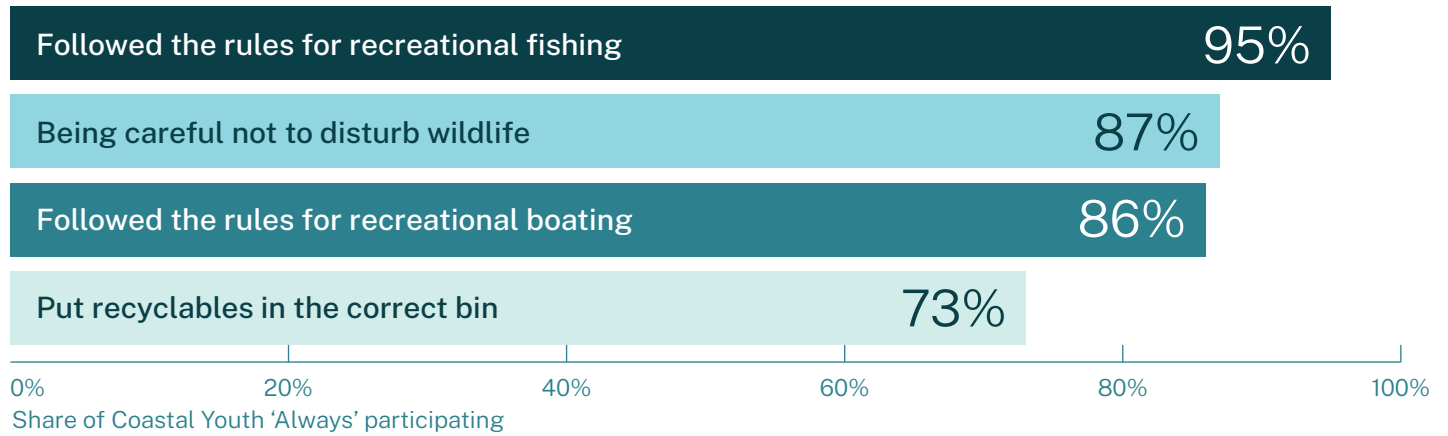


Figure 11: Share of Coastal Youth “Always” participating in responsible behaviours benefiting the NSW coast, 2021.

In addition to regularly participating in best practice activities, Coastal Youth also expressed a strong interest in having opportunities (like this survey) to have a say in how the NSW coast is managed. Over two thirds (68%) of Coastal Youth reported that they would like more opportunities to have a say about how the NSW coast is managed, while one-in-four (24%) were unsure.

## Statewide



Figure 12: Share of Coastal Youth who would like to have more opportunities to have a say about the way the NSW coast is managed, 2021.





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