

Technical Paper 2

Surveying the Community's Views on the NSW Marine Estate

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The NSW Marine Estate Management Authority (MEMA) is advised by the Marine Estate Expert Knowledge Panel (MEEKP). It was established by the NSW Government in 2013 to advise it about policies, priorities and directions for the NSW marine estate.

The NSW marine estate includes marine waters, estuaries and the coast. It extends seaward out to three nautical miles and from the Queensland border in the north to the Victorian border in the south. The full definition and map can be found at www.marine.nsw.gov.au.

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Disclaimer

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1. Background

1.1 Context

To implement the underlying principles that have been developed for the management of the NSW marine estate outlined in [Managing the Marine Estate: Purpose, Underpinning Principles and Priority Setting](#) (MEMA, 2013), a robust threat and risk based approach has been developed. This involves undertaking a logical sequence of steps, which aim to maximise the benefits that the community as a whole derives from the marine estate. This technical paper outlines the methods the Marine Estate Expert Knowledge Panel consider appropriate for the partial completion of step 1. The full set of steps and activities that will need to be undertaken to implement this approach for managing the marine estate is at Appendix 1.

1.2 The need for social science to inform management

The [Report of the Independent Scientific Audit of Marine Parks in NSW](#) found that there was generally a poor approach to social assessment for marine **estate** planning, if undertaken at all (Beeton et al. 2012, p.57). It recommended a more strategic and rigorous approach to social benefit and cost assessment that looks beyond the simple 'support versus opposition' approach of public participation. Such an approach would allow for a deeper understanding of the importance of access and use of the marine environment for all user groups and provide more meaningful discussion around potential trade-offs to achieve optimal environmental protection and community support for marine parks where a benefit is identified. It also noted that given the dynamic nature of our social environment, the process must include ongoing assessment of the social impacts and benefits of these assessments and these should be reported as part of the overall reporting of marine estate effectiveness and impacts.

The Audit also noted that there was a view expressed in workshops with some stakeholder groups that previous community engagement in **marine park** planning in NSW had been inadequate and often undertaken with predetermined outcomes in mind. Some submissions to the Audit claimed that stakeholders had largely been alienated from the Marine Parks Authority planning processes. This alienation had been due to problems with the processes: 'over-consulting' without clear outcomes; public participation processes being used as a proxy for social research; lack of quality input from the science to enable educated and informed engagement; and a lack of transparency around why and how decisions have been made by not closing the feedback loop.

The Audit requested that NSW **marine estate** planning processes 'be improved immediately to allow for a more strategic and cross-disciplinary approach to considering social impacts' (Voyer et al. 2012, p. 437), which should include 'specific and targeted consideration of social impacts... (incorporating qualitative research techniques), with particular attention given to vulnerable groups within the community' (Voyer et al. 2012, p. 437), and 'incorporation of social science expertise into planning [and management] processes... [to] ensure social data are gathered and analysed in a meaningful and scientifically robust manner' (Voyer et al. 2012, p. 437).

In relation to vulnerable groups, the Audit noted that the Indigenous people of NSW have a continuing custodial relationship with 'Country', the land, sea and resources. This extends to maintaining spiritual links to, and caring for, Country. It also noted that Indigenous communities stated that their values and concerns have rarely been appropriately factored into **marine estate** management in general, and not into **marine park** design and management in particular.

1.3 The NSW Government's response

In response to the Audit findings the NSW Government announced a program of reforms which aim to deliver an integrated and coordinated approach to management of the marine estate. The reforms note that decisions will be based on research across environmental, economic and social science (NSW Government, 2013).

Improved processes for community engagement are outlined in the NSW Government's response including:

- support for increased Aboriginal engagement and participation in management and the need to take into account culture and traditional knowledge,
- support for improved community engagement and education strategies in marine estate and marine park planning and management,
- developing planning tools to improve consideration of economic and social information in planning and decision making,
- revitalising local marine park advisory committees to give local communities a better say in decision making, and,
- replacing the former Marine Parks Advisory Council with a focus on targeted stakeholder and expert consultation and engagement on strategic matters.

2. Introduction

As part of the NSW Government's response, the Marine Estate Management Authority (the Authority) outlined its new approach to marine estate management via the release of [Managing the NSW Marine Estate: Purpose, Principles and Priority Setting](#) (MEMA, 2013). The paper outlines the principles and processes that will be followed in providing advice to the NSW Government on the [NSW marine estate](#)¹.

Principle 1 of the paper outlines the process for 'effective community engagement to identify and prioritise benefits and threats'. It notes the need for a thorough understanding of the key community benefits derived from the NSW marine estate at the local, regional and state level, as well as threats to those benefits. Information on these benefits and threats can then be achieved through ongoing and effective community engagement and expert input. The principle notes that a critical component of this first step will be to fully understand the community benefits that the marine estate provides, environmentally, economically and socially, with specific reference also to Indigenous communities. An essential element of this was also to attempt to identify the best engagement strategies.

To inform Principle 1, the Marine Estate Expert Knowledge Panel (the Panel) recommended that the Authority commission a range of qualitative and quantitative social science research (collectively termed the '[Marine Estate Community Survey](#)') to identify and analyse the views of the NSW community about the benefits, threats and opportunities presented by the marine estate. The Panel identified the need for this **critical first step** to allow the Authority to better understand the range of views amongst NSW communities on the values and benefits provided by the marine estate, the threats to those values and benefits, and opportunities to improve its management both now and in the future. No such research had been conducted to date at a state-wide scale in NSW to inform decision-making on marine estate management. This technical paper describes how this survey was undertaken, lessons learnt and how these results should feed into marine estate management over time.

¹ The NSW marine estate includes marine waters, estuaries and the coast. It extends seaward out to three nautical miles and from the Queensland border in the north to the Victorian border in the south. The full definition and map of the marine estate can be found at www.marine.nsw.gov.au

The survey is one component of effective early engagement to inform Principle 1 and the other steps outlined in Appendix 1. It also attempts to deliver on the following principles of community and stakeholder engagement outlined in the Authority's [Community and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy](#) (MEMA, 2014):

Participation	The community and stakeholders will have the opportunity to be engaged in decisions about the marine estate that will affect their lives
Early involvement	The community and stakeholders will be involved early in the decision-making process

3. Survey Design

The Panel aimed to ensure that the design of the Marine Estate Community Survey (the survey) was able to capture the range of views amongst the NSW public who value the marine estate from social, economic and/or environmental points of view, including those who may be direct or indirect users of the estate as a resource.

The Panel noted the importance of ensuring that the design of this (and any future) survey:

- is representative of the views of the broader NSW community spatially (i.e. not only along the coast but also including the views of inland residents); across key marine estate interest/user groups; and socially (i.e. includes Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse community representatives);
- includes qualitative research methods to inform the quantitative research;
- uses randomised sampling methods to avoid biased results;
- includes a variety of media and methods to reach a representative cross-section of NSW community members;
- includes marine estate interest/user group mapping to identify the direct and indirect relationships between these groups;
- allows findings to be reported at both the estate-wide and regional scale (note for the purposes of the first survey that Local Land Services regional boundaries were used to allow the results to inform these key regional natural resource management authorities);
- captures community members' contact details, where agreed, for use in future engagement activities;
- implements an evaluation framework;
- incorporates scientific rigour into the qualitative and quantitative survey components; and
- incorporates privacy standards for data management and reporting that meet legislative requirements.

A Request for Quote for the survey project was developed and approved by the Panel. Nine social research bodies were invited to tender for the project and these tenders went through a rigorous evaluation process to ensure:

- their project team had demonstrated experience in undertaking similar projects with the community;
- their project team had human resource capacity including qualifications, skills, experience and involvement of their key personnel;
- had limited reliance on sub-contractors to complete the research;
- had the ability to deliver the project within agreed timeframes;
- the proposed research methodology incorporated the design elements outlined above;

- control systems were in place (e.g. quality assurance, ethical standards), including professional membership and accreditation;
- the methodologies proposed showed innovation or value adding components; and
- good value for money.

An Australian market research company was selected and tasked with designing and implementing the survey to achieve the aim and objectives outlined below.

3.1 Aim

To conduct a representative community survey of the NSW community to understand the environmental, social and economic values of, and benefits derived from, the marine estate.

3.2 Objectives

Perceptions of the marine estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define what marine estate interest/user groups and the community view the marine estate to be • Ascertain how marine estate interest/user groups and the NSW community want the marine estate to look like in 20 years (and how they envisage marine estate management strategies should evolve to meet this ideal)
Values of the marine estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the perceived short and long term economic, social and environmental values of the marine estate • Determine the benefits they derive from the marine estate • Record perceived changes in the Marine Estate over the short term and the long term and establish perceptions as to why these have occurred
Threats to the marine estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the perceived threats (both current and future) to the marine estate • Prioritise these threats and identify areas that the public and the marine estate interest/user groups consider to need the most urgent attention
Opportunities for the marine estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify potential directions for vision development for the marine estate as suggested by key marine estate interest/user groups • Understand the perceived opportunities for the marine estate among the public and marine estate interest/user groups • Prioritise values, benefits and vision according to key marine estate interest/user groups and the NSW community

3.3 Methods

The following methods were deployed to implement the survey:

Stage	Target Audience	Methods
Inception	The Authority, Panel members & staff	Workshop to finalise the scope and methods for the survey. Aims and objectives of the survey clarified.
	NSW residents*	Media release and website information provided via www.marine.nsw.gov.au to advise the community that the survey had commenced (13 Jan 2014).
Qualitative Research	Marine estate interest/user groups including Indigenous community representatives	Detailed in-depth interviews (45 minute duration) with 36 key marine estate interest/user groups. Five of these interviews were conducted with Indigenous community representatives (two from the South Coast, two from the North Coast and one from the NSW Aboriginal Land Council).
	Cross-section of the NSW community	Seven regional focus groups conducted with 8-12 members randomly recruited to represent a cross-section of the local community (1.5-2 hours). Focus groups were held in Lismore, Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Sydney, Batemans Bay, Eden and Orange. Focus groups in Coffs Harbour and Batemans Bay were asked to consider values, benefits, threats and opportunities in the context of the marine estate and their local marine park.
	NSW residents*	A summary of the qualitative research findings from the in-depth interviews and focus groups was placed on the www.marine.nsw.gov.au website and an online survey provided to allow the general public to add any new ideas/views to the findings. A media release was also released to advise of the launch of the online survey. A separate report was prepared summarising these findings.
Quantitative Research	NSW residents	A 19 minute quantitative online questionnaire was developed based on the qualitative findings from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. A panel provider was used to randomly source a minimum of 1,000 respondents representing an unbiased cross-section of the NSW community (based on age (>18 years of age), gender, income and regional location).
	NSW coastal residents & visitors	A 10 minute quantitative tablet-based field questionnaire was developed based on the qualitative findings from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The questions were sourced from the online questionnaire. Coastal residents and coastal visitors (minimum of 350 each) to the marine estate were randomly sampled (weekdays and weekends) and interviewed using the tablet questionnaire. To meet these totals a minimum of 50 residents and 50 visitors were sampled at each of the following 7 locations: Ballina, Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Pittwater, Circular Quay, Batemans Bay and Eden.
Reporting	NSW residents	Final reports summarising the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research and community consultation are available at the Marine Estate Community Survey webpage. The reports include a list of marine estate interest/user groups interviewed, the discussion guides and questionnaires used during the survey.

Note: * This relates to elements of the survey project conducted by the Authority. All other elements of the survey research were conducted by the Australian market research company.

The qualitative research methods ensured that the range of views of marine estate interest/user groups were captured via in-depth interview and compared and contrasted with the views of the broader NSW community derived from the regional focus group discussions. Regional variations in responses could also be determined from this approach.

The two methods used for the quantitative research (i.e. an online survey and tablet-based field intercept surveys) allowed the results for the NSW general community sampled online to be compared with the findings from the field intercept surveys of coastal residents and visitors at locations adjoining the marine estate. The methods could determine areas of consensus and variation between the three respondent groups (i.e. NSW general community, coastal residents and coastal visitors) and at estate-wide and regional scales.

In recognition of the uniqueness of the Indigenous community's views, a specialist consultant with expertise in Indigenous community engagement was commissioned, and conducted four of the five in-depth interviews with regional Indigenous representatives. The results were incorporated into the Qualitative Research Final Report and these specific findings are included in an Appendix to this report at the [Marine Estate Community Survey](#) webpage.

Overall, it is recognised that many other social research methods are available. However, the Panel found that the above mix of qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for the triangulation and cross-checking of results, provided a scientifically robust survey design and was cost-effective in achieving the aims and objectives of the survey.

4. Results

The results of the survey, including estate-wide and regional analysis, can be viewed at the [Marine Estate Community Survey](#) webpage.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Lessons learnt from the survey

Some key lessons have been learnt during the implementation of the survey which should be considered for any similar survey or social research undertaken in future.

Awareness raising

Despite the Authority's best efforts to inform marine estate interest/user groups about the survey via media releases and email notifications to key contacts, several groups felt that they were marginalised by not being directly involved in either the qualitative or quantitative components of the research. There was also some confusion about the intent of the survey, with several interest/user groups frustrated that the socio-economic impacts of marine parks on communities was not being taken into account in the survey design.

Targeted messaging to key marine estate interest/user groups on the intent, design and likely outputs from any similar social research, including what is not in the scope of the research, may help to alleviate similar concerns.

Similarly, defining processes and timelines for engagement with the community in marine estate management planning upfront and clearly indicating how and when different projects will be implemented could assist in addressing such concerns.

Survey design

There is significant value in conducting qualitative research to inform quantitative survey design and findings when undertaking a community survey. The qualitative research findings provided valuable insights into the views of marine estate/interest groups, the Indigenous community, and the broader community at both a marine estate, regional and local scale. They also provide insight into the language the community can relate to and therefore the wording to incorporate in the quantitative surveys to ensure unambiguous results. The quantitative results are more robust as a result of linkages to the qualitative findings.

One missed opportunity of the survey design was the inability to directly compare the results of the online survey with the field intercept surveys as several questions had to be streamlined or removed to meet the timelines required for an effective field intercept (i.e. 10 minutes). Future survey designs should ensure direct comparability of results from differing methods used to improve the triangulation of quantitative results.

A final lesson is having fewer or more streamlined objectives for the survey in order to reduce the number of questions being asked to meet the stated objectives. This allows the survey design to include similar questions that are asked in several ways to cross-check results.

5.2 Incorporation of the results into marine estate decision-making and management

The results of the survey are already informing current programs undertaken by the Authority as well as several priority projects in the NSW marine estate [Schedule of Works](#), to ensure the community's views and ideas are valued, understood and considered in decision-making, including:

- the proposed Marine Estate Management Act and Regulations – community views have informed the drafting of the legislation, in particular the objects for the new Act.
- the threat and risk assessments being undertaken for the marine estate – as noted in Principle 2 in [Managing the NSW Marine Estate: Purpose, Principles and Priority Setting](#) – the values, benefits and threats identified in the survey will be incorporated into these assessments.
- the new Marine Estate Management Strategy – the survey results and the outcomes for the threat, opportunity and risk assessments will inform the priorities for management of the marine estate and have identified where more work is needed to better engage the community in decision-making and management outcomes.
- informing the objectives of new management plans for marine parks, including the pilot management plans to be developed for Batemans and Solitary Islands Marine Parks.

The Authority will also use the findings of the survey to inform future community engagement processes for the delivery of the above steps and activities outlined in Appendix 1. It will also use the survey results over time to gauge the success or otherwise of the engagement processes being implemented.

The Panel will play a key role in advising the Authority on how the survey findings are used effectively and interpreted within these steps and activities. Both the Panel and the Authority are committed to listening and responding to the community's views expressed in the survey findings.

The Authority has ensured the survey findings are publicly available and have been provided to other key authorities.

5.3 Assessing the community's views over time

The survey provides an opportunity for the Panel and the Authority to:

- continue to monitor the community's views on the marine estate over time and adapt management responses to changing community values, benefits, threats and opportunities.
- monitor changes in community views and attitudes towards marine estate management responses implemented via the Marine Estate Management Strategy and marine park management plans.
- identify long-term trends in community views by repeating the survey and including a core set of questions.
- monitor the success of community education and engagement processes to determine if community attitudes towards key issues, threats and management responses change over time.
- improve the survey design and questions incorporated as social research methods evolve and management of the marine estate matures with time.

5.4 The next steps

The Panel acknowledges this is **the first step** in meaningful community engagement on the marine estate. The survey methods will need to evolve over time. Many more steps are needed to ensure the Panel and the Authority understand the NSW community's requirements for the management of the marine estate (see Appendix 1). The Panel and Authority look forward to continuing to work closely with the NSW community to build on the conversation started, to deliver on the vision for the marine estate as a 'healthy coast and sea, managed for the greatest well-being, now and into the future' (MEMA, 2013 p.3).

References

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Appendix 1

Putting the principles for managing the NSW marine estate into practice – A logical sequence of steps to maximise community benefits (adapted from MEMA, 2013 p9).

Step 1	HOW THE COMMUNITY BENEFITS FROM THE ESTATE 	Identify key economic, social and environmental benefits, and perceived threats and opportunities derived from the estate	Develop ongoing engagement strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ community consultation ▪ expert input ▪ stakeholder surveys Refine scope of key MEMA benefits	<i>Principle 1</i>
Step 2	ASSESS THREATS AND RISKS TO BENEFITS 	Expert assessment of threats and opportunities to the key economic, social and environmental benefits	Prioritise threats based on their likelihood and consequence and consider relevant scale: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ local ▪ regional ▪ state-wide 	<i>Principle 2</i>
Step 3	ASSESS MANAGEMENT OPTIONS TO MAXIMISE BENEFITS 	Identify and assess current and potential management settings in delivering community benefits	Apply values to economic, social and environmental benefits of alternative uses Assess which options deliver maximum community benefit	<i>Principles 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7</i>
Step 4	IMPLEMENT PREFERRED MANAGEMENT OPTIONS 	Implement options which maximise overall benefits to the NSW community as a whole	Identify the most efficient and cost-effective management options Design measurable performance indicators. Develop strategic monitoring program to measure outcomes relative to the vision	<i>Principles 1, & 8</i>
Step 5	BE ACCOUNTABLE	Monitor, measure and report on performance Review progress	Report transparently to the community Promote strategic research to inform management and enhance future outcomes Examine performance, including benefit, threat and risk status periodically Review management arrangements for those not achieving adequate performance	<i>Principles 1, 9 & 10</i>