

Findings of the Community Survey for the Mary River Threatened Species Recovery Plan

The survey

The survey consisted of nine questions and was conducted mostly online, though some paper versions of the survey were also completed. The survey was open between March and June 2011.

The questions address the following themes:

- Involvement in the development of the plan
- Your part of the catchment
- Communicating with you and your networks
- Creating a shared vision for the recovery plan
- Final questions regarding survey itself and contact details.

A total of fifty nine surveys were started and fifty were completed. The findings from the survey have been used to help design the ongoing stakeholder and community engagement associated with the Recovery Plan. Two phases of stakeholder engagement remain. The Medium Term phase is between now and endorsement of the recovery plan by the Federal Environment Minister. The Long Term phase refers to implementation of the plan after endorsement. Throughout this report recommendations regarding ongoing engagement are listed.

Please contact the Tanzi Smith, the Project Officer for the Mary River Threatened Species Recovery Plan if you have any suggestions or observations regarding the ongoing engagement. Tanzi's contacts are:

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This summary covers the following aspects of the survey:

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MARY RIVER



CATCHMENT

COORDINATING COMMITTEE



The Mary River Turtle

- One of Australia's largest freshwater turtles
- In the top 25 most endangered turtles in the world
- Lives to be about 60 years old
- Can breathe both through its lung and its bum!



The Mary River Cod

- One of Australia's largest freshwater fish
- Lives to be about 40 years old
- Ambush predator
- Males protect the eggs



The Lungfish

- Watched dinosaurs walking the banks of the Mary
- Lives to be about 60 years old
- Grows to about 1.5m long and around 40 kg
- Can breathe both through its lung and gills



The Giant Barred Frog

- One of Australia's largest frogs
- Produces giant tadpoles that take at least 9-10mths to turn into a frog!

Breadth of participation in the survey

Please refer to Figure 1 to assist in interpreting the findings discussed in this section.

Figures 2 and 3 on the following pages show that among the fifty nine (fifty completed) surveys, responses were received from throughout the catchment and from a range of different sectors.

In each case, respondents to the survey were able to tick more than one sector and more than one part of the catchment. On average respondents ticked 3 sectors and 2.3 parts of the catchment.

Geographical representation

In terms of the geographical coverage of the catchment, Figure 2 shows that there was a shortage of responses from the north and western part of the catchment (Munna Creek, Wide Bay creek and the estuary) and from Tinana Creek catchment.

Recommendation: That the medium term engagement phase target engagement of people in these under represented areas (for example through existing networks such as Waterwatch).

Sector representation

In terms of sectors, the responses are dominated by people who are riparian landholders, involved in landcare, land for wildlife and related conservation activities (see Figure 3). This is not surprising given that the engagement strategy was based on prioritisation of groups with a history of involvement in catchment management or biodiversity conservation. Figure 3 also shows that the responses from agricultural enterprises reflect the make-up of the sector in the catchment, i.e. beef/grazing is the greatest landuse in the catchment and the highest number of responses from an agricultural sector where from this sector.

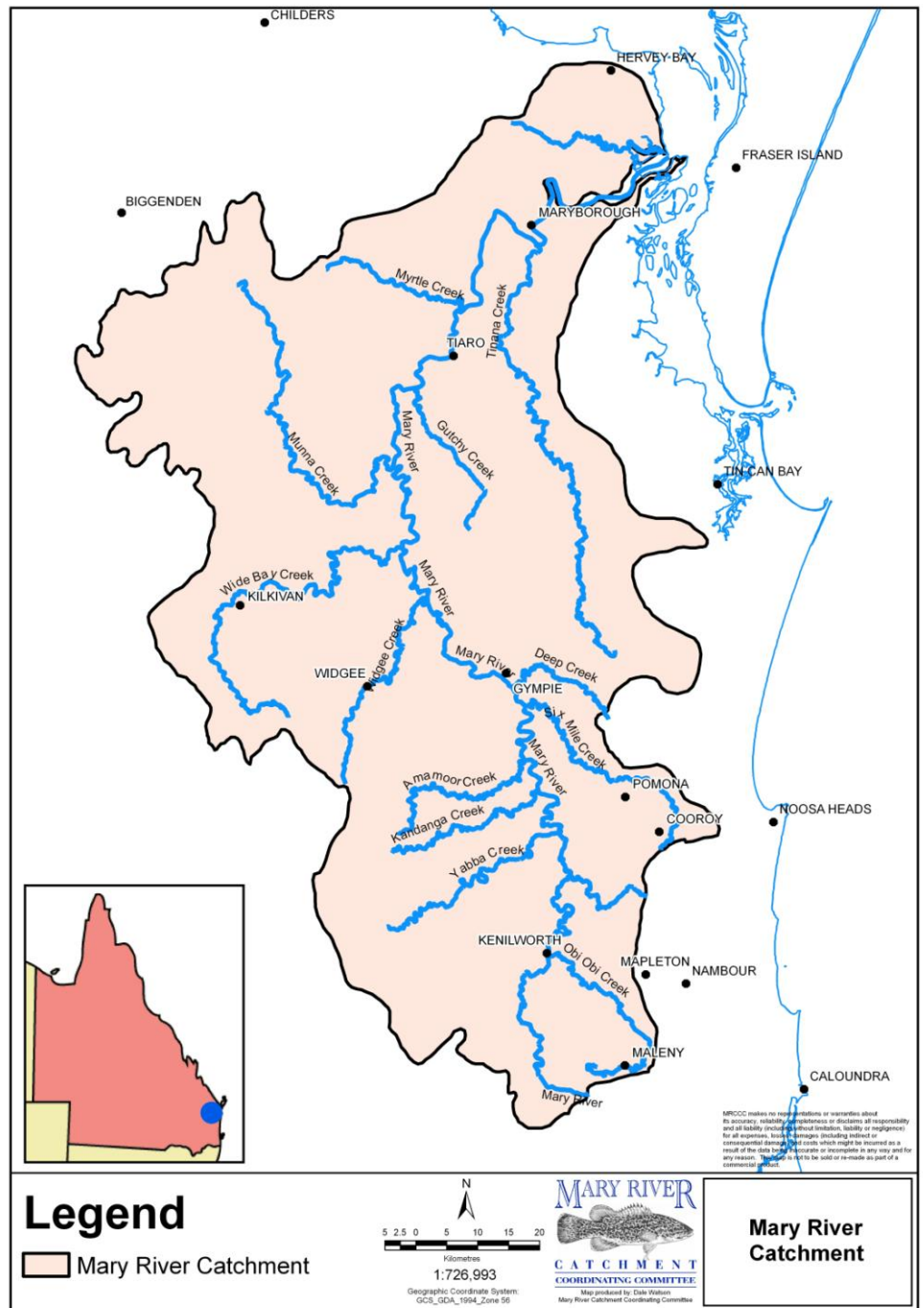


Figure 1 Map of the Mary catchment showing main tributaries only

**Responses to Survey Question 3:
 What part or parts of the catchment do you have a direct involvement in through
 organisations or activities you are part of?
 (on average each respondent ticked 2.3 parts of the catchment)**

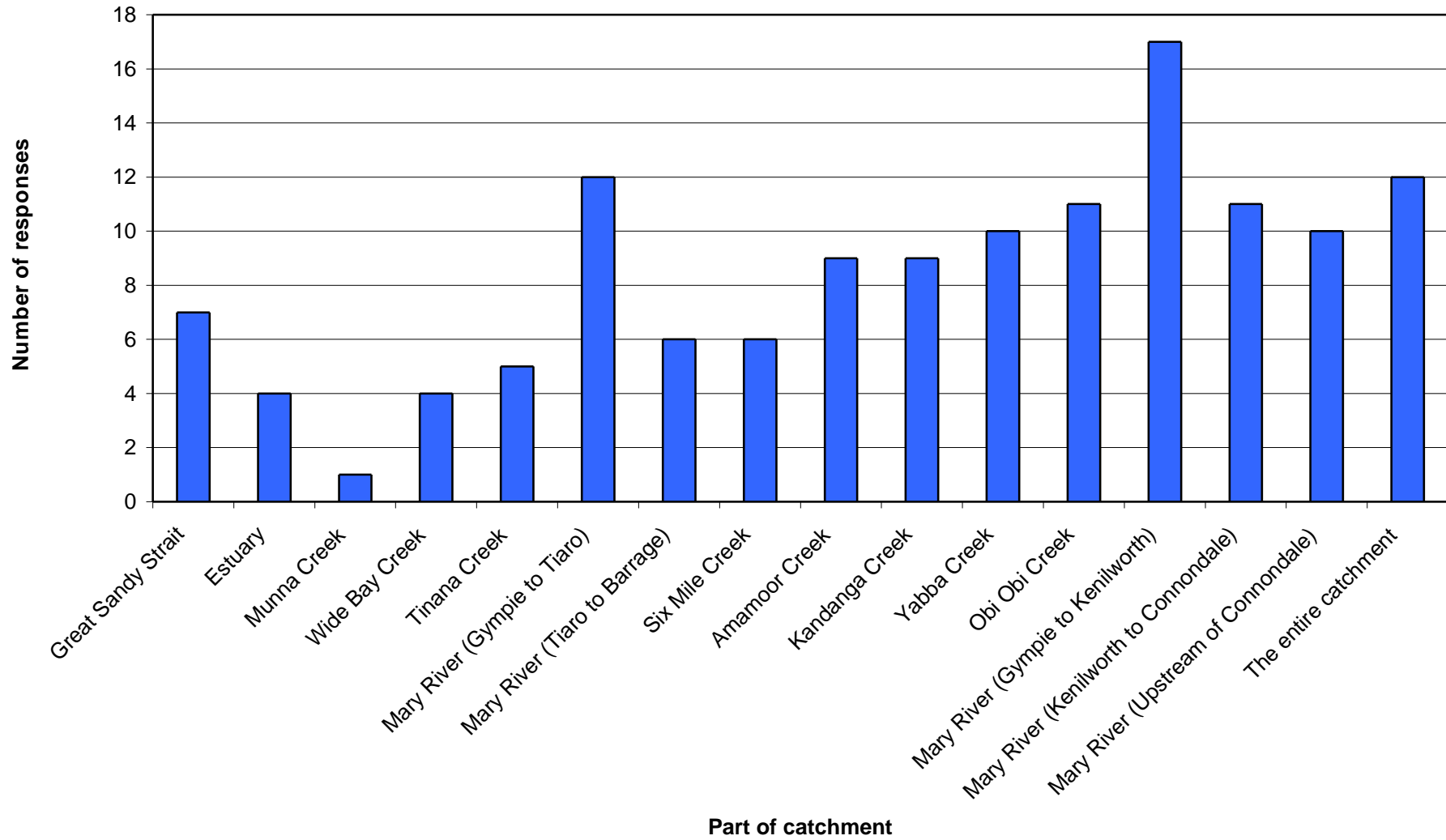


Figure 2 Representation of different parts of the catchment in the survey responses

Response to Survey Question 4:
What sector/activities do you participate in on a regular basis?
 (on average each respondent ticked 3 sectors)

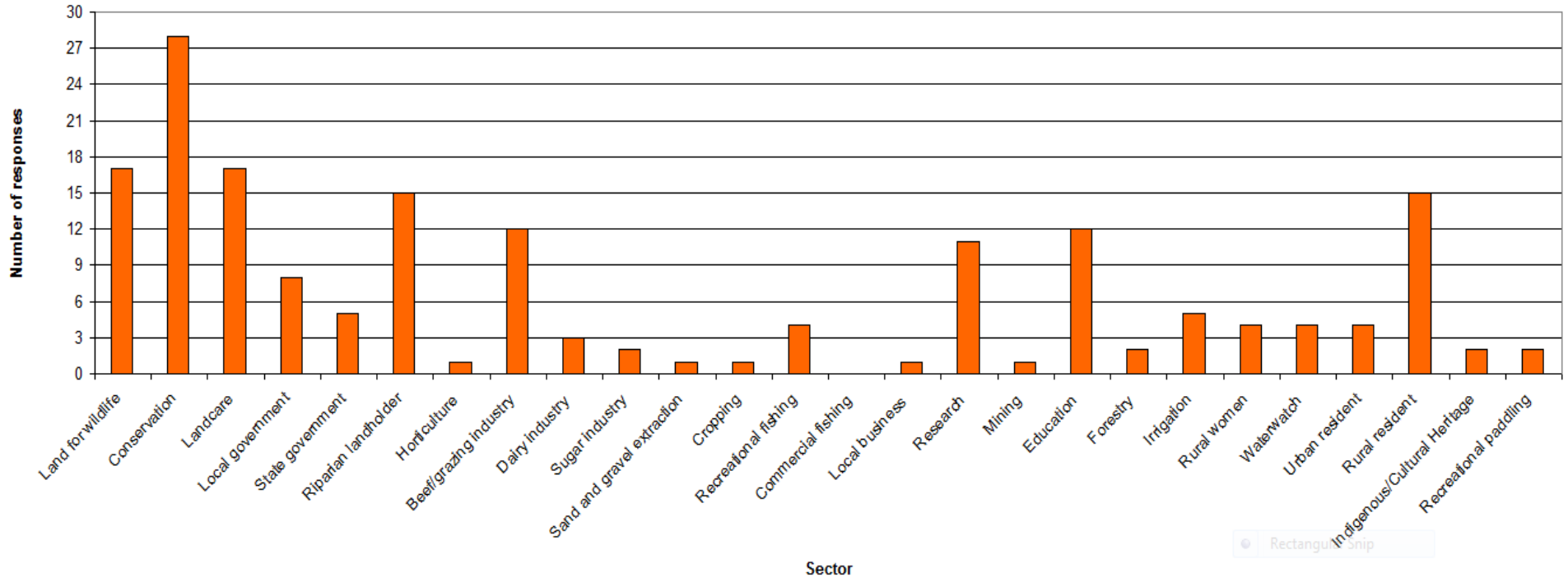


Figure 3 Representation of sectors in the survey

The small number of responses from people who participate in *Waterwatch* (only 3) shows that the engagement strategy has not reached these groups (there are approximately 70 people involved in *Waterwatch*).

Recommendation

It is suggested that in the medium term engagement phase *Waterwatch* groups are targeted.

People involved in *research and education* were also relatively well represented in the survey.

Overall the sector representation confirms that the survey did not include views from people not already involved in some kind of Rivercare activity. This is something to be mindful of in the medium and long term engagement strategy. While the success of catchment management relies greatly on people who are already engaged in these activities, there is a need to reach out to new groups. Future engagement strategies associated with the recovery plan should seek to identify and follow up on opportunities to involve new groups in cost effective and meaningful ways. The appropriate strategy will become clearer once the Technical Advisory Group and Recovery team have completed the prioritization of threats and identified recovery actions.

Recommendation

Strategic communication about recovery actions and prioritised threats should form the basis of future attempts to involve groups of people who are not already involved in Rivercare activities.

Future communication about the plan

The long term nature of recovery plan development and implementation creates a need and an opportunity to seek input regarding future communication and engagement with the plan. This part of the survey focused on these issues.

One of the questions on the survey asked “What do you think are the best ways for me to involve you and your networks in the development of the plan?”. Respondents were given a range of options and asked to rate each one on a five point scale, ranging from “not at all useful” (worth zero points) to “very useful” (worth five points).

Figure 4 shows the results of this question, based on the average score of each option (the average of an option would be 5 if all respondents said it would be “very useful” and zero if all respondents said it would be “not at all useful”).

“*Emails distributed through your networks*” received the highest average rating from respondents, followed closely by “*site visits/field trips*” and then “*attending a meeting of your group*”. The responses shown here influenced the way the short-term engagement period was undertaken. For example, if an interactive website had been at the top of the list, more effort would have been put into this. Importantly, the results indicate that site visits/field trips would be better way to involve people than public meetings. This finding is also consistent with experience of experienced extension officer Graeme Elphinstone. The lower preference for public meetings is the main reason why I have not organized any public meetings about the recovery plan. I am also working toward some site visits/field trips later in the year.

These results also provide insights regarding the medium and long term engagement and suggest that using existing avenues of communication such as email lists and group meetings are useful ways to engage with the respondents. It is important to recognize that these results are influenced by the sectors and parts of the catchment represented and different forms of communication may be preferred by these other groups.

What do you think are the best ways for me to involve you and your networks in the development of the plan?

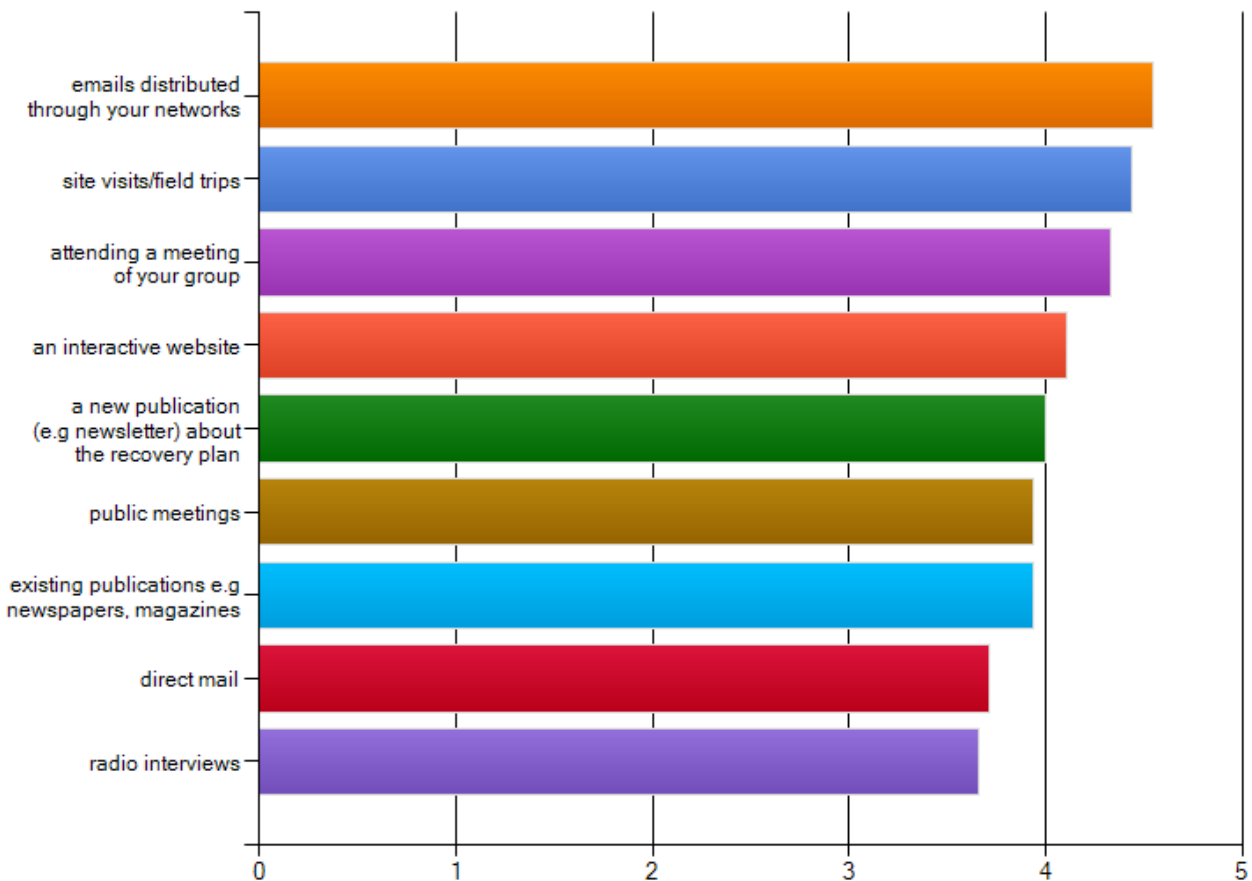


Figure 4 Respondents views on methods of communication regarding the recovery plan

Recommendation

That the medium and long term engagement periods engage people through their existing networks (via email lists and group meetings) and use site visits/field trips to strategically receive feedback and input on the plan. It would also be beneficial to develop an interactive website that is used in conjunction with and support of the three approaches just listed, and less as a stand-alone communication tool. (On this note, a website for the recovery plan has been under develop for months, but as yet I am not convinced the time required to maintain it is worthwhile. I've recently set up a facebook page and going to see whether this page provides a web presence that is an easier to maintain and promote).

Recommendation

To determine the role that communication methods played in the poor response from particular parts of the catchment and particular sectors and to identify alternative methods of communicating with these groups which need to be involved in the recovery plan. e.g. Using the Munna Waterwatch network as a way to contact people in that area.

Reaching people who are not already part of an existing network is a challenge. The Dugong Rock competition provides one example of how this can be done. However, careful follow up on the competition is required to capitalize on these benefits. This is an ongoing process but anecdotal evidence suggests that the competition did raise awareness in a variety of ways. It is suggested that a similar competition be run next year which draws on lessons learned from this year's competition.

The vision for the plan

The survey included questions about the vision and actions that the survey respondents thought should be in the recovery plan. The responses to the vision questions were in many cases actions, rather than visions. I think that was a consequence of the way I worded the questions.

The action responses to the vision question have been incorporated in the discussion of actions below. The remaining responses to the question about the vision offer guidance on both the objectives and vision for the plan.

The responses which relate to the vision or objectives of the plan were as follows:

- The long-term conservation of all indigenous plants and animals within the catchment. The restoration of aquatic habitats with resulting high water quality.
- Optimising the health of the natural environment in the Mary River catchment, taking into consideration the needs of all its inhabitants, including people
- Baseline assessment from which success/failure can be measured
- Improving the health of the river environment, bringing back the endangered species to a point where they are not endangered, community supported, information about what changes to practices are needed and how funding can be sourced
- To maximise community awareness of importance of threatened species within catchment, identify avenues to provide increased legislative protection for species and prohibit activities that will impact on the values of EVR species and ecological communities.
- It should mention "coordinate outcomes for management of biodiversity especially unique species". Should mention "encourage increased stewardship of river and increased community understanding of river values and river processes"
- A strategic plan for filling the gaps in information required to make informed and science based decisions on the Mary and catchment
- **Long term plans** for educating younger generation about River health & catchment issues.
- **General River health check.** From this, pick off each ailment, be it erosion or riparian veg, or siltation of the estuary, or whatever is found to be affecting the threatened species and plan for improvements in each area. Involve all levels of government and community.
- A statement of desirable environmental condition. Target conditions at key locations to provide "env flow conditions for the water plan, and as targets for stream rehabilitation
- A vision that recognises the value of primary production equally with environmental values.
- conservation/restoration of catchments through integrated/sustainable land management strategies adopted by landholders throughout the catchment
- Triple bottom line approach
- **Recovery of ecosystems that support threatened and non-threatened fauna, identification of pathways people can take to assist to recovery**
- **Ecosystem approach to threatened species recovery**
- healthy habitats working together concepts - a perspective into the future - responsibility concepts
- Flora, fauna, rural industries, forestry
- As above (ie 2 examples), re environment and communities BUT must include reference to primary production and mining activities in the riparian zone as the Mary has probably 90% of such usage in its length

Important themes to emerge out of this set of suggestions are:

- Use of the term health to refer to the river/catchment and the corresponding focus on the river as a whole rather than specific species.
- Recognising the role of people and the importance of existing activities and industries
- The role of legislation
- The need for baseline data and identification of information gaps.

Outcomes of Indigenous engagement meetings:

Two people who identified with the indigenous sector completed the survey. The primary means of seeking indigenous input has been through meetings with the Butchulla and Kabi Kabi/Gubbi Gubbi people. The kind of influence the participants in the meeting would like to have on the plan and the vision and actions for the plan were the main topic of

discussion (a link to the survey was also provided to participants in these meetings). The dynamics of these two meetings were quite different and the engagement process is ongoing. In addition a meeting with one individual with significant cultural knowledgeable of the Mary River has taken place, and the ways of incorporating an indigenous perspective in the plan were discussed.

Some points of particular significance to the development of the plan emerged. For example the appropriateness of singling out particular species was questioned and emphasis was placed on the importance of looking at the bigger picture and the interconnections between places, species, pathways and people. The Mary River plays an integral role in this bigger picture, but the areas which the different groups describe using historically cross catchment boundaries. Another important point is that relationships to species were in some cases through use of them as food and therefore the cleanliness and availability of these species is an important consideration.

Discussions so far have highlighted that there is great variation amongst indigenous participants regarding their knowledge of the Mary River. The meetings have served as a forum where knowledge could be shared.

An indigenous perspective and way of learning about the landscape and species can greatly enhance the recovery plan by not only respecting this knowledge, but by providing engaging stories and a holistic view. Direct involvement in review and drafting of the plan by key indigenous people with detailed knowledge of the Mary River is one way of enabling this perspective to become part of the plan. This is in addition to general consultation and discussion regarding the plan.

Indigenous representation on future recovery team meetings was also supported by both meetings. A place on the recovery team was originally allocated to an indigenous representative, but in the two meetings that have been held no invitation was sent. I have suggested that one representative of each group (Butchulla and Kabi Kabi/Gubbi Gubbi) be invited to the next meeting and this is supported by SEWPAC. Advice needs to be obtained from the indigenous community on whether this is the best approach and who the representatives should be.

Recommendation

That indigenous people with detailed knowledge of the Mary River be supported to contribute to reviewing the draft and providing indigenous perspectives and that a formal consultation period for indigenous input on the reviewed/modified draft takes place.

Recommendation

The vision/objectives and guiding principles for the recovery plan that are developed by the TAG and recovery team should reflect the views expressed by stakeholders including indigenous groups. Feedback should also be provided to survey respondents regarding how their input influenced the recovery plan.

Actions the plan should address

A large number of actions covering a wide range of activities were proposed by respondents to the survey.

To facilitate integration of this feedback with the work of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and Recovery Team, the suggested actions have been grouped according to relevant threat categories developed during the May 2011 TAG meeting (altered geomorphic features, poor riparian integrity, water quality, barriers, altered hydrology, instream habitat (I have made this its own category), alien and translocated species, fishing and recreation and information needs to better manage species.

Additional categories were also added to encompass actions that do not address specific threats but contribute to protection of the species/river. The main additional category is “awareness/education/appreciation” which includes a range of suggestions regarding raising awareness of the uniqueness of the river and how to protect it. It also includes suggestions that aim to increase the sense of connection and value placed on the river by the stakeholder groups. For

example, this category includes actions that would increase public access to the river, because, as one respondent wrote "What people can touch, they can love".

The awareness category is closely related to the "commitment/cohesion/coordination" category. A comment which epitomizes this connection was made by one of the respondents who wrote "We need to respect [the river's] role and ensure that it becomes healthier through a commitment as a community"

The results of tabulating the actions in this way are shown in Figure 5. It is important to note that these results reflect survey respondents' views at the time of the survey. They were not presented with all of the options shown in Figure 5 but asked an open ended question about the actions they think should be part of the recovery plan.

The most common suggestion related to the integrity of the riparian zone (25%), followed by actions regarding raising awareness and appreciation of the river and how to improve her health (18%). The categories of water quality, alien and translocated species and information needed to better manage the species all had the same number of proposed actions (10%). They were followed by actions related to barriers (7%), altered hydrology (6%) and fishing and recreation (4%). With the exception of the one response about sand and gravel extraction (in altered geomorphic features), the remaining 10% of suggested actions included a range of specific ideas or proposals. Examples included seeking environmental outcomes from the government owned land in the Mary Valley and identifying new industries that can have environmental (and social) as well as economic benefits.

This data can be used to direct future activities both by capitalizing on existing knowledge the survey respondents have and helping increase awareness in areas where there appear to be knowledge gaps. For example, there is great awareness among the survey respondents of the need to improve the riparian zone integrity, but only one suggestion was made regarding improving instream habitat, which is very important for many of the endangered species.

Breakdown of actions proposed by survey respondents

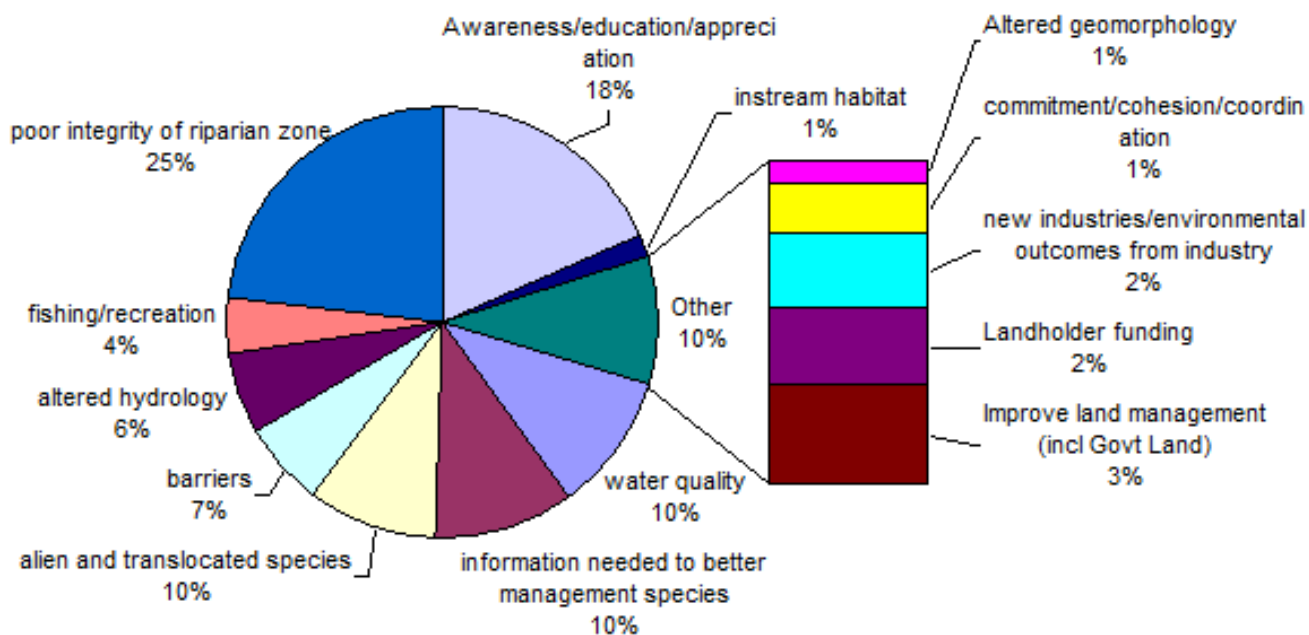


Figure 5 Categories in which actions proposed by the survey respondents fell

The results provided here may reflect the issues the respondents perceive as problems and are therefore in need of action. They may also reflect the particular interests of the respondents, and this fact needs to be taken into account when relating these results to the entire catchment community.

Outcomes of Indigenous engagement meetings:

In addition to any suggestions made by indigenous people on the survey, actions associated with the recovery plan were also discussed in the indigenous engagement meetings.

The actions suggested were:

- Testing for chemical contaminants in the water
- Get kids involved in history and education - take young Butchulla out for water and soil testing, learning about animals.
- Supplying fish stock to waterways
- Undertake own scientific research on issues that are important to Butchulla
- Maintaining culture and creating opportunities – the Cultural Connections approach could be used as a model for this important part of this
- Getting cultural heritage considered in projects such as sand and gravel extraction

These actions raise issues not captured in the survey. These are the human health implications of eating food from the Mary River and estuary and the cultural dimension of species recovery. Culture is related to the awareness/education/appreciation category in Figure 5, because to some extent these activities are about creating and fostering a culture of love and concern for the river. From an indigenous perspective, the meetings so far suggest an additional dimension of maintaining and recovering indigenous culture.

Recommendation

That the TAG consider the current perspective of the stakeholders who completed the survey and outcomes of the indigenous engagement process when prioritizing the actions, and identify opportunities to build on the interests expressed in the development and implementation of the recovery plan.

Proposed Next Steps

Potential Champions of the recovery plan process

The idea behind the champions of the recovery plan process is that successful implementation of the plan will be made easier if people who have the desire and capacity to promote the outcomes of the plan are identified and encouraged. These people may be identified on a sub-catchment basis.

Clarity regarding the parts of the catchment and activities that the plan will prioritise is needed before the strategy of involving champions can be fully developed. Without concrete actions and ideas to discuss it is difficult to get detailed feedback or buy in from people. Also, it is not yet clear where champions are most needed.

Recommendation

Once the plan has progressed further and more specific proposals for action are available, it would be useful to follow up on identifying and supporting recovery plan champions.

On that note, the newsletter which has just been completed asked for expressions of interest from people interested in providing input and advice regarding their local area. It was decided to take this step to get the ball rolling in advance of concrete recommendations from the Technical Advisory Group and Recovery Team.