

‘HEALTHY WATERWAYS – BETTER BOATING, MORE FISH’ AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR RECREATIONAL BOATERS AND FISHERS

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Abstract

An environmental education strategy with a twist – it’s not just about delivering a message, it’s also about receiving a message.

This project has been developed by consulting extensively with the target audience to understand how the messages could most effectively be delivered. Information has been gathered through an online survey, a Key Boaters and Fishers Consultative Forum, consultation with peak boating and fishing groups and through a Steering Committee of the partners.

Boating and fishing activity can have negative impacts on the aquatic environment – often it is because information isn’t available to show how to avoid the impacts. The five NSW Coastal Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) have partnered with the NSW Boat Owners’ Association (BOA), the Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW (RFA), the Boating Industry Association of NSW (BIA), NSW Department of Primary Industries and NSW Maritime to develop and deliver a positive environmental education strategy for boaters and fishers. ‘Healthy Waterways – better boating, more fish’.

The major aims of the project are to:

- raise the awareness and enhance skills and knowledge of boaters and fishers of aquatic environmental issues and encourage them to speak up about problems;
- encourage changes in behaviour to minimise disturbance to and implement best practice sustainable resource use;
- identify aquatic champions to be trained and deliver peer education messages to provide longevity to the program; and
- encourage individuals and groups to participate in coastal and marine protection and rehabilitation projects.

Key environmental messages developed in consultation include:

- Watch your habitat – protect it, don’t neglect it.
- Spread the word – not the pests.
- Volunteering – your waterway needs you!
- Be the eyes, ears and voice of the aquatic environment.

Delivery mechanisms include: face to face presentations, brochures, web pages, DVD, marine debris clean up days and training for aquatic champions.

Introduction

Recreational boaters and fishers are a very mixed group of people from all walks of life with a variety of values, different levels of education and different ethnic backgrounds. One thing they all have in common is a love of going boating on and/or fishing in our spectacular waterways. And that's the hook that gets their attention. Many of them already know or can see the value in protecting our waterways now and for future generations but just need some ideas on the best way to do that. However, some of them don't currently see the value in protecting our waterways so they need prompting and reminding.

A previous education strategy for recreational boaters and fishers, undertaken by Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority (SMCMA), focused on marine pests. On the successful completion of that project, the Steering Committee recommended that a more holistic environmental education strategy be implemented. The Program Managers for the other four Coastal CMAs requested that the new strategy include their CMA areas (Northern Rivers, Hunter Central Rivers, Hawkesbury Nepean and Southern Rivers).

This project is partially funded by the five Coastal Catchment Management Authorities and the Australian Government's Caring for our Country. A further grant was obtained from the NSW Environmental Trust.

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The key environmental message areas to be included were:

1. Minimising impacts to aquatic habitat (eg seagrasses, mangroves, saltmarsh, native freshwater vegetation).
2. Don't litter. Clean up aquatic/marine debris.
3. The correct way to dispose of sewage.
4. How to stop the spread of aquatic pests.
5. Minimising erosion caused by boat wake.

Consultation

The premise to the education strategy was to seek boaters and fishers advice. Find out what they already know, what they wanted to learn about, how they wanted to receive information and what form that information should take. They were consulted via:

1. A Steering Committee including representatives from the Boat Owners Association of NSW, the Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW and the Boating Industry Association of New South Wales, as well as state government partners NSW Department of Primary Industries and NSW Maritime.
2. An online survey
3. A boaters and fishers forum
4. Delivery of the draft presentation and therefore key messages to five peak boating and fishing groups.

Face to face communication with credible people is the most effective way to convey a message that results in behaviour change. In addition it makes the written material more useful and meaningful to the audience (Robinson and Glanznig 2003). Presentations at clubs or community group meetings were intended to be a component of the project as they were well received as part of the marine pests education strategy.

A critical element of the project is the Steering Committee. Partners from all organisations involved in the project had representation on the Committee. If they could not attend meetings they provided advice via email or telephone. The Committee members are very experienced individuals with excellent networks and the information they have provided has been invaluable to the project.

Online survey

The online survey was sent via Maritime's e-newsletter *Maritimes* to 7000 recipients and Fisheries e-newsletter *Newscast* to 1000 recipients. Questions were asked about demographics, current knowledge and behaviour in relation to the aquatic environment and what influenced the respondents to protect the waterways, particularly what education methods had helped them change what they do. A question, specifically written in the third person was included to determine what sort of behaviours other boaters and fishers might be doing to harm the environment and what was stopping them from protecting our waterways. They were also asked if they were interested in participating in voluntary coastal and marine related activities.

There were over 800 respondents. The respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness of the importance of environmental issues, were generally aware of environmental problems and generally behaved responsibly in caring for the environment (T Issues Consultancy 2011). This is probably partly a reflection of the type of person who would respond to a survey on the environment. Respondents had well formed views about what other boaters and fishers were doing that harmed the environment.

There were a range of education tools that were noted as being influential but no one method stood out. However, respondents wanted positive, informative messages and a call to action. There was a range of reasons why boaters and fishers want to protect

the waterways, such as enhancing sustainability, ensuring ongoing opportunity to recreate, leaving a legacy for their children (T Issues Consultancy 2011).

Boaters and fishers forum

The boaters and fishers forum was held in March 2011 to workshop the views of the invited guests. Thirty participants were informed of the background to the project, the results of the online survey and the key messages to be delivered. They were asked to workshop their views on:

1. How the key messages should be tailored to encourage adoption by a variety of boaters and fishers.
2. Multiple and effective approaches to influencing and educating boaters and fishers across NSW about this strategy. The diversity of boaters and fishers (eg age, gender, ethnicity and literacy) needed to be considered. What are the barriers, drivers and top 5 recommended approaches?
3. Aquatic environment volunteering. What are the barriers, drivers and key recommendations for action to encourage boaters and fishers to become involved in aquatic volunteering?
4. Aquatic champions – someone who is credible, informed and available in local communities to educate their peers on key elements of the strategy. What are the barriers, drivers and key recommendations for action to encourage boaters and fishers to become aquatic champions?

Much enthusiasm and discussion ensued throughout the workshop and the boaters and fishers came up with very informative ideas including the important point that boaters and fishers can be the eyes and ears for what is going on in the aquatic environment. They also very strongly noted that they wanted positive, simple and informative messages that focussed on the solution and not the problem. This is similar to the findings for the online survey. Some of the key messages were fairly well known such as litter, boat discharge and boat wash but the group pointed out that people needed reminding. Therefore the main focus for the education strategy should be on habitat and aquatic pests.

Participants workshoped some catchy slogans that were actions and easy to remember, such as “grow it, don’t mow it”, “clean it, don’t translocate it”, “watch your wash” and other slogans that were later adopted. The workshop also indicated that a variety of delivery mechanisms was required to reach such a varied audience, including the need for information in other languages. The top five were:

1. All delivery mediums
2. Internet
3. Champion/peer pressure
4. Fact sheet
5. Link/deliver with existing networks/groups

The summary of evaluation forms from the forum indicated that the participants rated the forum, the quality of information and ideas generated and the usefulness of the forum for developing the education strategy as good. However, only half of the

participants thought the CMAs were approaching the project appropriately. Part of this hesitation may have been due to the lack of previous interaction with the CMAs.

Table 1: Forum evaluation

	Spot on	Good	Ordinary	Ho-hum
Your overall rating of the Forum?	2	20	2	1
The quality of information and ideas generated?	1	21	3	
Confidence that the CMAs are approaching this project appropriately	1	12	11	1
The usefulness of this Forum to developing the Education Strategy	1	21	3	

Slogans, presentation and brochures

A final brainstorm of the slogans was undertaken by a workshop of the partners. Collectively the following slogans were produced and adopted.

The project’s slogan: ***Healthy Waterways – better boating, more fish***

The calls to action:

1. Watch your habitat – protect it, don’t neglect it
2. Spread the word – not the pests
3. Volunteering – your waterway needs you!
4. Be the eyes, ears and voice of the aquatic environment.

Further important information gathered from boaters and fishers and also from the previous marine pests education strategy was that boaters and fishers needed to know what other sectors are doing towards protecting the aquatic environment. Why were recreational boaters and fishers apparently being singled out? They are very aware that they are not the primary impact on the aquatic environment. Therefore an important component of the presentation was to outline what other projects are being done by other sectors so that the audience understands where this project fits into the bigger picture of the protection of our waterways. For example councils undertaking works to improve stormwater quality, volunteer groups rehabilitating riparian vegetation, commercial shipping regulations for ballast water.

These slogans and an explanation of the activities/options required to achieve these actions were incorporated into a draft powerpoint presentation and a draft brochure. The presentation and the brochure were presented to 5 peak boating and fishing groups for comment/advice: NSW Waterski Association, Paddle NSW, Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW, Boating Industry Association of New South Wales Ltd, Boat Owners Association of NSW.

The information from these groups was invaluable in fine-tuning the presentation and providing further ideas and networks to incorporate into the project.

An additional reason for consulting directly with the peak boating and fishing groups was so that they could recommend the project and the presentation directly to their affiliated clubs. This was to try and avoid one of the issues encountered during the previous marine pests education strategy, which was while the clubs enjoyed and appreciated the presentation when it was delivered at one of their meetings, it was very difficult to encourage clubs to agree to hold the presentation in the first place.

The feedback on the slogans, actions and the brochure was very positive and very few changes were needed to the brochure before it was finalised. The brochure has been translated into 10 different languages and is being distributed, in consultation with NSW DPI, to the relevant community groups.

The presentation was further workshopped by staff from the other CMA regions and needed to be simplified and made locally relevant where possible. CMA staff were trained in the specifics of the presentation via a training day that included presentations from the relevant experts within the NSW DPI and NSW Maritime. This was supplemented with a training manual that included fact sheets and frequently asked questions so that the CMA staff could deliver the presentation in their CMA area. The presentation and brochures have since been rolled out along the NSW coast.

The presentation has also been translated into 5 other languages (Vietnamese, Korean, Arabic, Chinese simplified and Chinese traditional) and is being delivered in association with an interpreter to the relevant communities in partnership with NSW DPI. Brochures in the relevant language are available for these presentations.

Feedback sheets have been distributed at every presentation, including the bilingual presentations, and these results are being collated. Attendees are encouraged to fill out the feedback sheet and provide their contact details by making them eligible to go in a draw for a \$500 gift voucher for a boating and/or fishing store in their CMA area. This has been a very successful tactic. The sheet allows the attendees to express their interest in being involved in the marine debris cleanups and/or the aquatic champions' program. To date 46 presentations have been given to English speaking audiences, and 5 bilingual presentations have been delivered.

Total Attendance: 1,816

Attendance range: 6 to 210

Average per presentation: 37

Total number of feedback forms completed: 638

Number of feedback forms with contact details: 563

The feedback on the suitability of the presentation etc and improvement of knowledge is yet to be collated. Attendees are also given a list of information on other types of volunteer programs that they might like to join.

Website and DVD and other

Another important communication method is the website, housed currently on the SMCMA website with links for further information to partners' websites. It will be translated into 5 other languages which match the bilingual presentations.

While face to face delivery of presentations is effective it is also labour intensive and dependent on being able to gain an invitation to a club or community group meeting. Therefore a DVD was developed that would be available for distribution at boat chandleries and similar outlets, and which could also be uploaded to websites such as Youtube. The DVD has recently been completed with valuable advice from our partner organisations and it will have captions in three other languages.

A common comment throughout the different consultation avenues was the need for signage at boat ramps with positive points to encourage boaters and fishers to undertake best practice. This project did not include funding for signage but is perhaps something for the relevant agencies to keep in mind.

Participation

To encourage boaters and fishers to get involved in aquatic environmental volunteering, two programs have been financially supported through this project: NSW DPI's Fish Habitat Forums, and; Marine Debris Cleanup days.

DPI's Fish Habitat Forums aim to enhance the knowledge and profile of fish habitat issues amongst recreational fishers and have been held yearly since 2009. In 2012 co-funded strategic information sessions were held at 7 venues up and down the NSW coast to build capacity within the recreational fishing community to undertake fish habitat enhancement projects. There were a total of 67 attendees to these forums.

Five marine debris cleanup days are being held, one in each coastal CMA area. The aim is to alert boaters and fishers to the marine debris issues in and around their waterways and to become proactive in cleanups and voicing their concerns about the source of marine debris. A marine debris cleanup held in Ballina in association with the local fishing club was well attended with 30 people. However, unfortunately one held in Sydney had poor attendance. Feedback sheets are being collated as part of this project.

Aquatic champions

The aquatic champions' program is about peer education – boaters and fishers passing knowledge to friends and peers on an informal basis, such as having a chat with a mate when they are out boating or at a club meeting. People, including boaters and fishers value information received from their peers and they are more likely to change their behaviour as a result of information received this way (Robinson and Glanznig 2003; Ford and Collier 2006). A training workshop and information pack are currently being developed based on the key messages. The attendees will be trained on how

best to impart this information in an informal way that is not lecturing and is non-adversarial. An aquatic champion is not a volunteer as such but an 'information steward'. The CMA website will be a source of information into the future for these champions. They will also be informed of volunteer programs in case they would like further involvement in protection and rehabilitation of the aquatic environment.

Wrap up

The final component of the project will be to conduct a survey of the success of the project. Has it reached a significant proportion of boaters and fishers, has it encouraged changes in behaviour, what delivery mechanisms were the most effective? What recommendations are there for the way forward? A common comment throughout the different types of consultation was boaters and fishers prefer education rather than regulation. If they know what best practice is – they can put it into practise!

The SMCMA would like to thank all the partners and individuals who have taken part in this project and enthusiastically shared their experience, advice and networks.

References

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