



Department of Planning and Environment

Prospectus 2021

Stakeholder Survey Summary
NSW Environmental Trust



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Contents

Summary	1
Background and methodology	1
Respondents	1
Key findings	1

Summary

Background and methodology

This report provides the results of the NSW Environmental Trust's (Trust) prospectus survey, designed to reach as wide a range of environmental stakeholders as possible from all regions of New South Wales (NSW). The online survey is stage 1 of the Trust's biennial prospectus process to identify and prioritise environmental issues and projects for funding consideration through the major projects funding stream.

The 15-minute survey was piloted with resulting modifications before release. Survey invitations were sent to 3,402 contacts identified by the Trust as having relevant interests. Snowballing was used, and direct survey recipients were encouraged to pass on details and links to their own networks.

The survey ran for 3 weeks, from 17 August 2020 to 7 September 2020, resulting in a total of n=1,275 responses.

Respondents

The survey aimed to represent the broad array of environmental stakeholders in New South Wales and to reach all parts of the state. The respondent profile focuses on characteristics that demonstrate this representation.

Regional representation: was based on Local Land Services regions with all regions represented in the survey. The smallest number was from the North West region (11 participants) and the largest from Greater Sydney (538 participants). These 2 regions were the only 2 considered to be under-represented in terms of the proportion of respondents in the survey compared to the region's proportion of the NSW population. The most over-represented region was the Northern Tablelands.

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) representation: Those identifying as being of ATSI origin were reasonably represented with 4% (49 respondents) compared to 3.5% of the NSW population identifying as ATSI in the 2016 census.

Stakeholders: were identified from their current environmental work and the average of 1.7 responses per respondent indicates that they are involved in both environmental paid work and voluntary work.

31% are currently working in universities or science research centres, and 24% in state government, together over half the sample. Of other predominantly paid work categories, 17% were in local government, 17% the private sector and 6% the federal government. All levels of government together accounted for 47%.

Of the predominantly unpaid/voluntary settings, 21% nominated community-based organisations, 19% other voluntary work in the environmental sector, 15% professional associations and 5% indigenous organisations. Peak environmental NGOs, which have a mix of paid and voluntary workers, were nominated by 10%.

Depth of experience: 84% have worked in the environmental setting, whether paid or in a voluntary capacity, for more than 5 years, 40% for more than 20 years.

Key findings

All 1,275 respondents nominated their most important environmental issue, and 756 nominated a second most important issue. Two areas were nominated by double (or more) the respondents compared to the next most important issues.

The top issue was 'decline in abundance, diversity and/or range of native species, including threatened species', nominated by 34% as the most important and 48% of the survey sample as either the most important or second most important issue. The second most nominated issue was 'degradation of the climate system/increase in extreme weather events', nominated by a total of 39%, with 25% as the most important.

The next ranked issues were decline in health of land-based ecosystems (chosen by 20% as most or second most important) and decline in health of rivers and wetlands (19% as most or second most important).

Causes/threats: The most nominated causes across multiple issues are land clearing/degradation and climate change. From a list of 20 possible causes or threats, respondents were asked to identify up to 3 that applied to their specific issue. Most respondents chose 3 causes, and responses were spread across the array of possibilities. As with the identification of issues, the leading causes identified by respondents are clearly well ahead of other causes or threats. The cause nominated by most respondents for both first (46%) and second (36%) issues is 'land clearing, degradation, modification and/or fragmentation'. This is followed by climate change (39% and 33%).

The third and fourth most nominated causes overall were 'inadequate government policy and planning frameworks' (30% first issue and 36% second issue), along with 'lack of regulation, monitoring and compliance' (23% for both issues). 'Poor land management practices' was fifth with 18% and 19%.

Ecosystems affected: A majority of respondents think the problems they identify are occurring across all ecosystems. Respondents could select as many responses from a list of ecosystems for this question as applied for their issue. They could also say their issue affected all the ecosystems listed. More than half (57%) of the respondents believe their most important issue is affecting all ecosystems listed, and 54% of those with a second issue. For both most and second most important issue this was more than double those who nominated a top single ecosystem affected. Of the single ecosystems affected, about a quarter nominated freshwater ecosystems (25% for first issue, 28% for second issue) and forests/woodlands (24% for first issue, 22% for second issue) as impacted by their most important issue.

Scale and severity: An overwhelming majority of respondents think problems are widespread (through New South Wales and beyond), severe and urgent. 86% of the combined first and second issues were considered widespread within and outside New South Wales, and a further 11% widespread in New South Wales in specific ecosystems. 80% of the combined first and second issues were considered 'severe with irreversible impacts occurring if action is not taken immediately'. 11% were considered to have 'moderate but increasing impacts'.

Significant differences: There are some differences by regions, stakeholders, respondent experience and interest/work areas, but there is also considerable consistency in the results across the groupings analyses. In general, those 'closer to the ground', for example, in regional areas or involved in areas such as ecosystem management, threatened species management, wildlife care and environmental restoration, more often nominate specific ecosystems and the specific ecosystem type issues, while those in research and education focus more on climate change, possibly as a more overarching issue.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) background participants: ATSI participants focussed more on 'damage to Aboriginal cultural heritage and/or landscapes' both as issues and in causes such as loss of connection to country and lack of opportunities for Aboriginal involvement in management. Fewer ATSI participants than respondents as a whole, nominated 'degradation of the climate system' as an issue or climate change as a cause. They were also less likely to nominate inadequate government policy and planning frameworks as a cause/threat. In ecosystems they were more likely than the whole sample to nominate all ecosystems and less likely to nominate specific ecosystems.