

MyCoast NSW Study

Fact Sheet 4: Engaging the NSW community about coastal hazards

Why is this important?

Community engagement can be defined as a two-way process of dialogue regarding the concerns, needs and values of the community, which can be incorporated into policy development, planning, decision-making, service delivery and assessment. It is a vital component of successful coastal management practice and is dependent upon mutual understanding of key terminology and topics by all stakeholders. Results of the MyCoast Study found a distinct contrast between what coastal management professionals think the NSW coastal community understands about coastal erosion, inundation, sea level rise and severe coastal storms, and what the NSW coastal community actually understands about these hazards.

What's been done in the past?

The MyCoast NSW study asked NSW Coastal Management Professionals (CMPs) what communication mediums they had previously used to inform their community about coastal erosion, coastal inundation, sea level rise and severe coastal storms, and which mediums they considered to be the 'best' forms of communication (Figure 1). While most had previously used community forums and considered these to be the best communication medium, there also appears to be recognition of social media and television news/documentary, rather than print media (e.g. brochures), and dedicated websites as effective ways to engage the community. The latter presumably have the potential to reach a greater target audience.

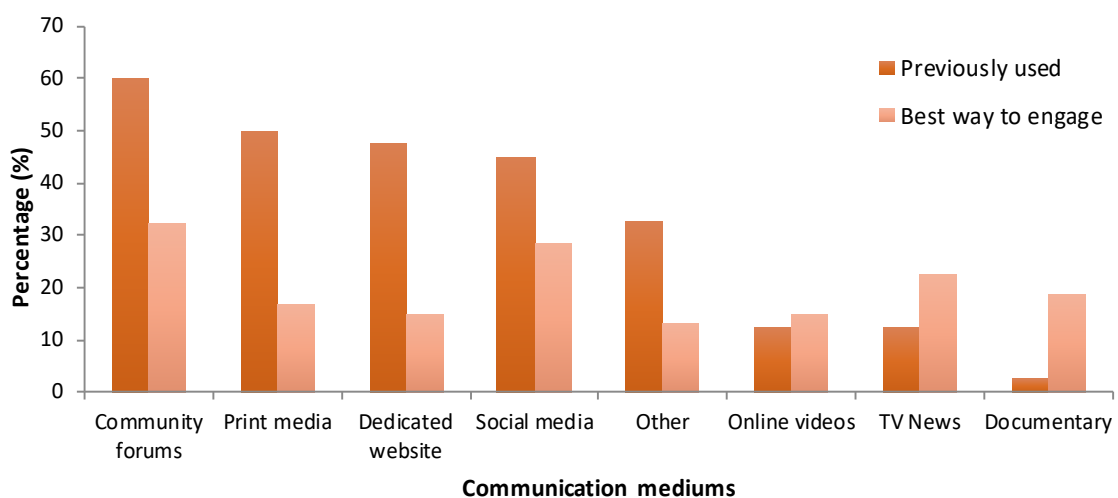


Figure 1. Communication mediums previously utilised by NSW Coastal Management Professionals (n=62) and their perceived best mediums for future communication.



Information sources

Where do people get their information from?

Our study asked NSW coastal users where they had previously received information about coastal erosion and inundation and how they would prefer to receive information about these hazards in the future. While 29% of surveyed General Coastal Users (GCUs) had received information about coastal erosion from their local council, only 3% had received information about coastal inundation (Figure 2). This indicates there is a need for more information provided to coastal communities about the risks and effects

of coastal inundation. Inundation has the potential to affect a greater number of people in comparison to coastal erosion, particularly with rising sea levels. Most respondents had previously received information via news media and documentaries (Figure 2). Personal experience was also identified as a source of learned information by approximately 25% of surveyed GCUs. Of note, print media and community forums were less favoured by GCUs, but surprisingly had been commonly used by coastal management professionals in the past.

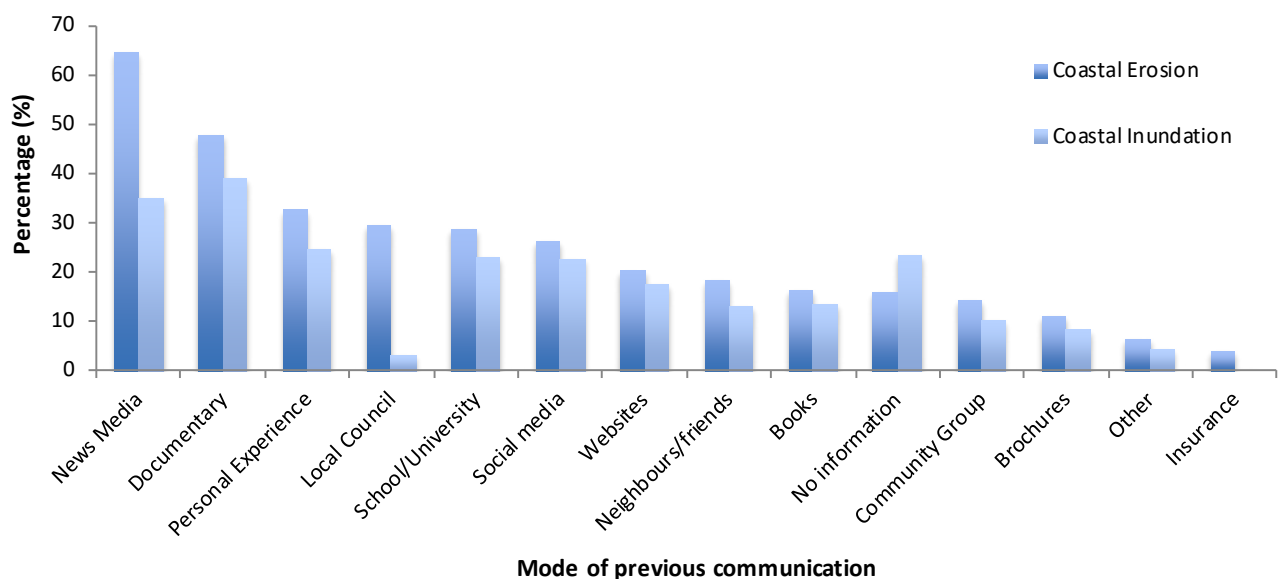
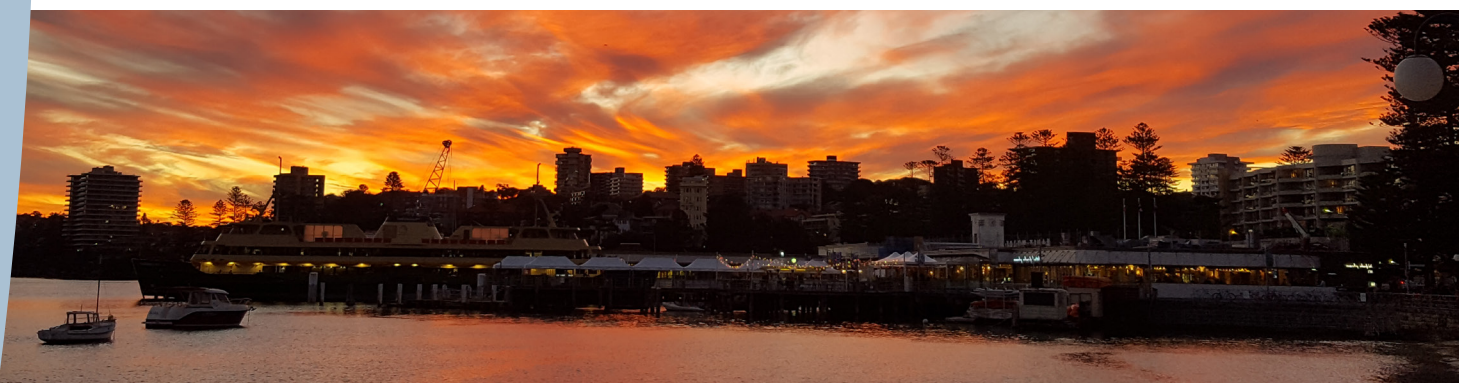


Figure 2. Communication mediums from which surveyed General Coastal Users (n=993) had previously gained information about coastal erosion and inundation.



Information sources

How does the community want to access information?

Surveyed General Coastal Users (GCUs) in NSW were asked how they would prefer to receive information about coastal erosion, inundation, sea level rise and coastal storms in the future. As shown in Figure 3, most wanted to receive information from government sources and preferred learning from documentaries

and dedicated websites. This does not reflect the perceived 'best ways' to engage the community by surveyed Coastal Management Professionals (CMPs; Figure 1), with social media rated as a lower preference by GCUs and community forums not receiving any mentions within the 'other' category.

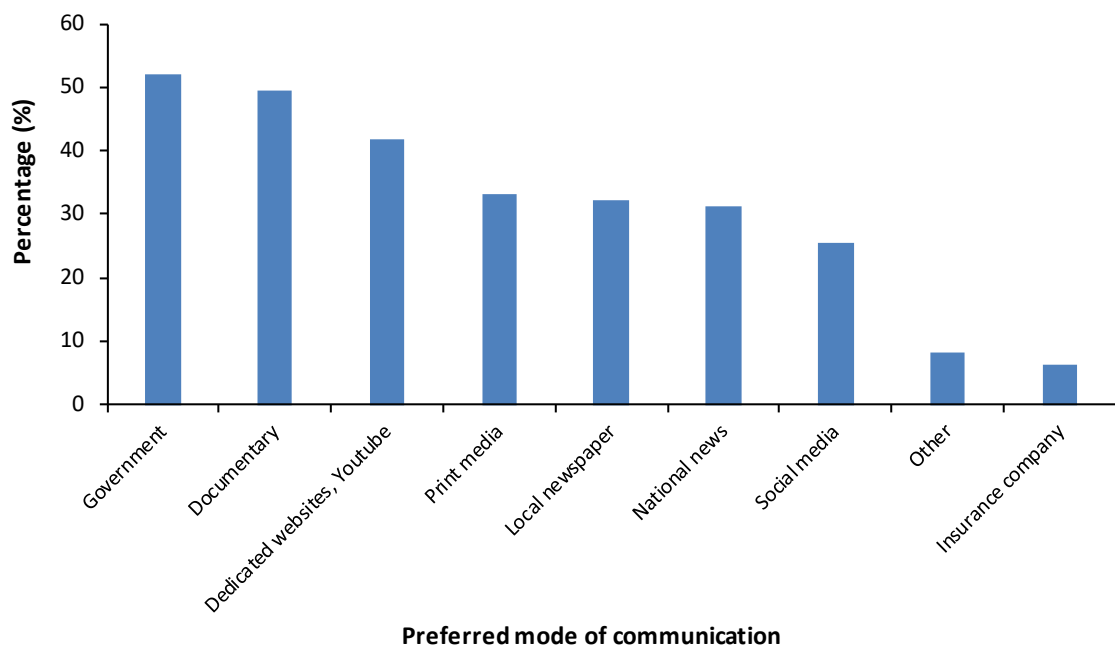


Figure 3. NSW General Coastal Users (n=993) preferred modes of communication for future information on coastal hazards.



Information sources

What do people need to know and what do they want to know?

The MyCoast NSW Study asked NSW Coastal Management Professionals what they think are the most important aspects of coastal erosion and inundation that the NSW coastal community should be educated about (Figure 4). It also asked NSW General Coastal Users

(GCU) what topics they would like to know more about (Figure 5). Results indicate there are distinct differences between what Coastal Management Professionals (CMPs) think the community should know and what General Coastal Users want to know.

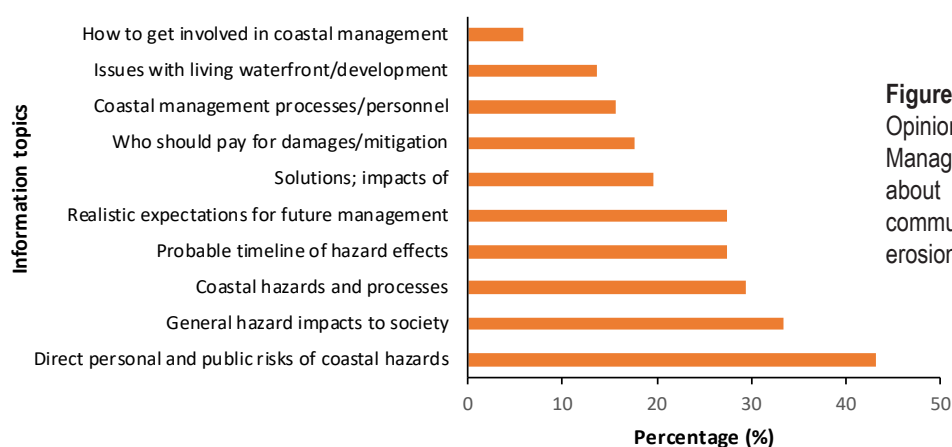
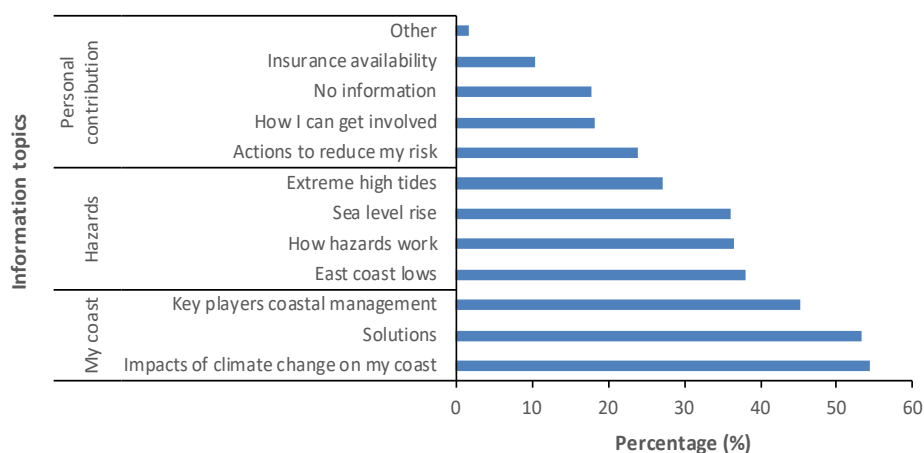


Figure 4. Opinions of surveyed NSW Coastal Management Professionals (n=62) about what information coastal communities need relating to coastal erosion and coastal inundation.

While the CMPs want the general public to know more about personal and public risk, hazard processes and impacts to society, the GCUs wanted to know more about how hazards would affect their coast, possible solutions and who are the key players in coastal management - they want local information about what will happen, how it will impact them and who is doing something about it.

Figure 5. Preferences of surveyed NSW General Coastal Users in relation to what topics they would like to know more about in terms of coastal hazards and coastal management.



The full My Coast Report and other Fact Sheets and resources can be found at:
www.bees.unsw.edu.au/nsw-my-coast-study

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