

Communicating Coastal Conservation – Getting the Message Through

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a critical part of coastal and marine conservation. Without effective communication, the ability to achieve conservation outcomes is likely to be limited and short term. On ground works, policy change, enforcement and awareness raising activities all depend on effective communication for successful implementation. This is because ultimately, healthy coastal and marine ecosystems depend on long term best management practice by every single person connected to that system. And best management practice – regardless of on ground works of any description – only comes from understanding and acceptance of that best management practice, which can only come from effective communication and engagement.

The Burdekin Dry Tropics (BDT) coastal region spans from Bowen in the south to Townsville in the north, encompassing Palm Island, Magnetic Island and part of the Great Barrier Reef Natural World Heritage Area. A range of different communication methods from different stakeholders have been used within the region and this paper explores the various effectiveness of these, and what new methods are currently being utilised. Although the information is specific to the BDT region, the general principles are generic.

BACKGROUND

Some of the main threats to the BDT coastline at present are coastal development, vegetation loss, disturbance of habitat and species (such as sand dunes and salt pans), loss of biodiversity, climate change and water quality decline. (Scheltinga and Heydon 2005). All of these threats are anthropogenic, which means behavioural change within the community is essential to managing the problems. Behavioural change is a direct result of effective communication strategies.

Along with NQ Dry Tropics (formally Burdekin Dry Tropics Natural Resource Management), several key NRM stakeholders operate within the region. Other stakeholders include the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F), Townsville City Council (TCC), Burdekin Shire Council, Whitsunday Regional Council, Reef Check Australia, James Cook University (JCU), Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), several not-for-profit organisations, several non-government organisations and several community groups. Some communications and education programmes operate through partnerships.

METHODS

NQ Dry Tropics commissioned a study by TYTO Consulting to undertake a review of all existing interpretive and educational material on coastal and marine key messages. The aims of the 'Coastal and Marine Communications Review' were to develop a product inventory summarising the common forms of communication to identify where duplication and gaps exist, and what key messages our community are receiving. Recommendations for the development of future key messages were suggested based on consultation with stakeholders. Some of these recommendations have been subsequently trialled.

The review was conducted using three main methods:

1. An inventory of existing print materials and related communications products and education programs relevant to the coastal and marine area of the BDT region (236 different print products were reviewed)

2. Interviews were held with relevant communications managers of key organisations. These included NQ Dry Tropics, GBRMPA, DPI&F, AIMS, EPA and Local Governments
3. Regional community groups and representatives were consulted via a survey: Townsville Regional Bird Observers Club, Seagrass-Watch, Reef Check, Sea Turtle Foundation, Landcare, the Regional Aboriginal Land Management Facilitator and the Townsville Local Marine Advisory Committee (LMAC).

RESULTS

From Coastal and Marine Communications Review (Barnett 2008)

The 236 different print products were produced by 54 different organisations, as shown in Figure 1 below. The majority were produced by the GBRMPA, followed by DPI&F, the EPA, Coastcare, CRC Reef and NQ Dry Tropics.

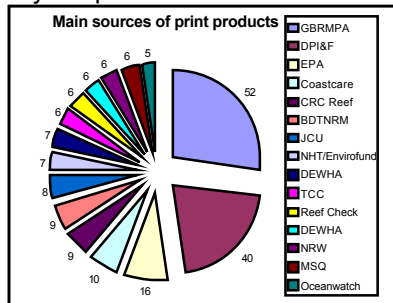


Figure 1: Main sources of print products (Barnett 2008)

Product themes are diverse and fall into a number of categories, outlined in Figure 2 below. The dominant themes were fishing and fisheries, water quality and wetlands and community and environment. Boating and research were surprisingly low in coverage.

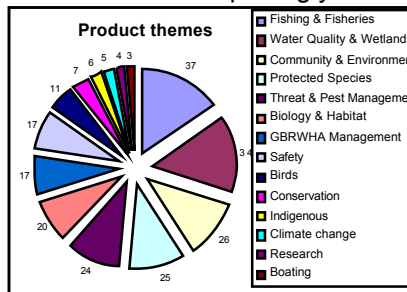


Figure 2: Key product themes (Barnett 2008)

Product format varies greatly; many options for materials are available based on intent and budget. The majority of materials come in the form of a flyer, information sheet or a brochure. Posters, cards, stickers and newsletters are also common, while CDs and DVDs, information kits, field guides and other collateral (such as rulers hats, magnets etc) are in lesser supply due to cost of production. The product formats are outlined in Figure 3 below.

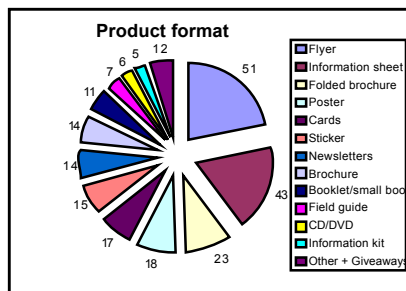


Figure 3: Format of products (Barnett 2008)

Different intended functions for products require different formats. Format is an important consideration for target audience and use. For example, a field guide for native fish species has a different intention to a poster outlining fishing best management practice. The former product would have a long shelf life and is designed as an educational resource for a specific target audience of naturalists; the latter has a shorter shelf life and carries a specific key message aimed at anybody who goes fishing. The following table outlines the function of different product formats.

Product	Use	Examples
Folded brochures	Package alot of information into something sm all and manageable	Visitor guides, zoning information, best management practice
Postcards	'Pocket sized' showing key messages only – useful for remembering short statements or reminders	Pest species identification, emergency response for marine stingers
Stickers	Behavioural reminders of best management practice that can be put somewhere visible for a long time	Fishing bag limits or catch sizes
Newsletters	Resource and management information; more information that flyers or postcards and a longer shelf life; can also be sent electronically. However this is often 'preaching to the converted'	Volunteer activities, funding opportunities, organisation promotion, project promotion
Flyers Posters	Short pieces of information, useful for giveaway. Short shelf life and often discarded after one use only Colourful educational information. Often dramatic and eye catching and can be well depicted using images to make a statement	Organisational promotion, best management practice Fishing line entanglement, pollution issues
Booklets and field guides	Long lasting educational, useful in the field. Seen to have some value so likely to be retained	Bird or plant or fish identification books, cultural heritage information, pest species
Collateral (giveaways)	Promotion of an organisation or attraction to a public event – used this way to encourage people into receiving more information. Usually contains a website for reference. Something durable will mean it is longer lasting than paper products; expensive however and cannot contain alot of valuable information, key messages only	Caps, magnets, water bottles, wrist bands, bags etc
Interactive DVDs or products with practical uses	For practical purposes – long term education or out in the field	Fish measurement rulers, calendars with reminders, games and puzzles

Table 1: Product format functions (adapted from Barnett, 2008)

The community members surveyed showed a strong need for cohesive, easy to understand information that is readily available. Map-based and graphic materials are popular, and any text should be short and written in plain English. 'Boaties' and other people out in the coastal and marine environment prefer materials that are compact and water resistant. 'One stop shop' products are sought after – one product that contains all relevant information. Branded information and giveaways are always popular but not necessarily conveying a key message that is absorbed. Indigenous people respond to photos of familiar places and people (with appropriate permissions).

Stakeholder feedback identified a number of gaps in coastal management information. These included:

- Resource information (what is it? What is special about it that is important to me as an average person?)
- Management roles (who does what? Which organisations are responsible for what? It's confusing to know where to get information and I don't know how to contact them)
- Clear guidelines (what should I do? How should I behave? In simple terms, what do I need to be aware of?)
- Community group information (if I wanted to get involved, who I contact?)
- Regional maps showing clear boundaries and cultural values
- Values of salt pans and mangroves
- Management information produced specifically for Traditional Owners
- Water quality information

Recommendations of the Review

Overarching any coastal program communication should be a communications strategy that is targeted and project specific. It should identify objectives, target audiences, key messages, delivery methods and partners. It should also detail regional stakeholders (including government agencies, community groups, non government agencies and Traditional Owners). Other recommendations include:

- Identify 'hero' projects which can be showcased on the website and develop targeted materials based on that project's outcomes
- Attractive booklets specific to beach front residents and recreational users outlining key threats. These can be 'coffee table' books and used as 'welcome packages' for new residents when produced in a series
- Integrate cultural heritage information in all appropriate resources produced
- Support the preparation of materials for inclusion in education packages for schools
- Develop some materials to celebrate the work of volunteers to show appreciation, encourage further involvement and attract more volunteers
- Strengthen and develop partnerships with other organisations and stakeholders through a regional 'communication network' that will allow the sharing of information and consistent outputs
- Utilise television through community service announcements to reach wider audiences and target community members otherwise not engaged through the written media
- Build on partnerships with local governments to develop common community engagement and communication pathways for catchment management and urban sustainability. Local governments are 'on the ground' and often have community programmes already in place.

Results of implemented Recommendations

The following recommendations have been implemented over the past 12 months:

1. Two booklets – *Coastal Plants of the Burdekin Dry Tropics* and *Coastal Birds of the Burdekin Dry Tropics* – were produced to target coastal residents. The key conservation messages are to drive and walk dogs responsibly on beaches with nesting/migrating birds in mind, and to plant native species in residential backyards to improve coastal ecology. Both books contain cultural heritage information from two local Traditional Owner groups. In around a year, around 3000 copies of each have been distributed, with an estimated 10% of recipients seeking the product out after recommendations through word of mouth. The books are distributed via a targeted strategy and are not promotional item giveaways. A list of recipients has been kept for follow up within the first year to conduct some monitoring and evaluation in behavioural change. The books will form part of the 'coastal welcome packages' for new residents.
2. NQ Dry Tropics has a partnership with the GBRMPA's Reef Guardian Schools Program through a funded Reef Guardian Schools Project Officer. This innovative program develops and delivers education packages to around 60 schools in the BDT region. The two above mentioned plant and bird books are the basis of two teaching programs that will be implemented in terms 1 and 3 this year respectively. Term 2 will focus on marine debris while term 4 will be an indigenous unit on the cultural importance of turtle and dugong. This programs work in partnership with community groups, local government and Traditional Owner representatives.
3. During last year's Coastcare Week, an article on the work of local volunteer and NRM groups was published in three newspapers across the region in conjunction with free community birdwatching events. The information included contact details, activities for involvement and areas of operation. The profile of these groups were raised and there have been at least two reports of increased recognition (informal conversation).
4. Three separate Community Service Announcements (CSAs) formed part of a stormwater campaign. The CSAs were originally developed by Burnett Mary Regional Group and were re-branded. The catchy CSAs feature two characters, Duey Dugong and Drainman, and were shown on two mainstream channels over two x two week periods (August and Coastcare Week in December). The effective reach (number of people who are likely to have seen the CSA) was roughly 100 thousand people per channel per period. The timeslots for viewing targeted mainly families and children. Viewers have described them as 'funny and entertaining' and as something that they have remembered. Currently a Duey Dugong mascot is being made up for public events, the aim being to create an association in the community between Duey Dugong and healthy waterways with further screening of the CSAs.

DISCUSSION

It's well understood that communication is a vital link in the conservation chain and without it, NRM initiatives are not fully effective. The role of communication is to portray the science to the general populace, mindful that the general populace are not made up of scientists. Science communication is a specialist genre and must be delivered as such.

This means not only taking current research and communicating it through laymen's terms but also applying a certain level of psychology to attain behavioural change. 'Preaching to the converted' – or working only with the NRM aware community – is not an effective way of

attaining overall human impact improvement. It is the sector of the community that is not already environmentally aware that needs to be specifically targeted. Some examples may be the urban environment or corporate sector; the older generation or the working single parents; immigrant communities or older primary producers.

People not already environmentally aware are not voluntarily going to read NRM materials. NRM messages must be promoted to them in attractive, mainstream styles that are short, easy to read, eye catching, interesting and relevant to their everyday lives. Messages are most likely to be absorbed if it is of some value to them. For example, mangrove conservation can be promoted as directly affecting fishing catch as they are nursery grounds for many popular game-fish species. Most importantly, communication needs to be appealing and non-intimidating.

Communication projects like any other project, also need to be subject to monitoring and evaluation. This allows for improvement based on effectiveness of a campaign. For example if flyers are simply being put straight in the bin there is absolutely no point in producing more; perhaps using television or radio would be more effective in reaching the target audience.

CONCLUSIONS

- Communication is a critical component of any conservation campaign targeting a behavioural change outcome
- Communication needs to be planned, targeted at specific audiences and coordinated with efforts of other organisations with similar aims
- Key messages need to be clear, easy to understand and appealing, holding some value to the target audience
- There are several different forums for communication and these need to be tailored for a specific message
- Communication projects need to be subject to monitoring and evaluation.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

When communicating a coastal conservation message, approach it like you are selling something that is of value to your target audience. Make the message appealing, easy to understand and easy to remember. Understand your target audience and use appropriate resources to reflect this.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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