



CRC for
Water Sensitive Cities



Australian Government
Department of Industry and Science

Business
Cooperative Research
Centres Programme

2nd water sensitive cities conference

2015

watersensitivecities.org.au



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Engaging communities in stormwater management

Project A2.3

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The University of Queensland

2015

watersensitivecities.org.au



A2.3 Engaging communities in Water Sensitive Cities

Engagement is ‘a personal state of connection with an issue’



Socio-cultural Context

**WATER
SENSITIVE
CITIZENS**

Behavioural engagement
I act, I participate

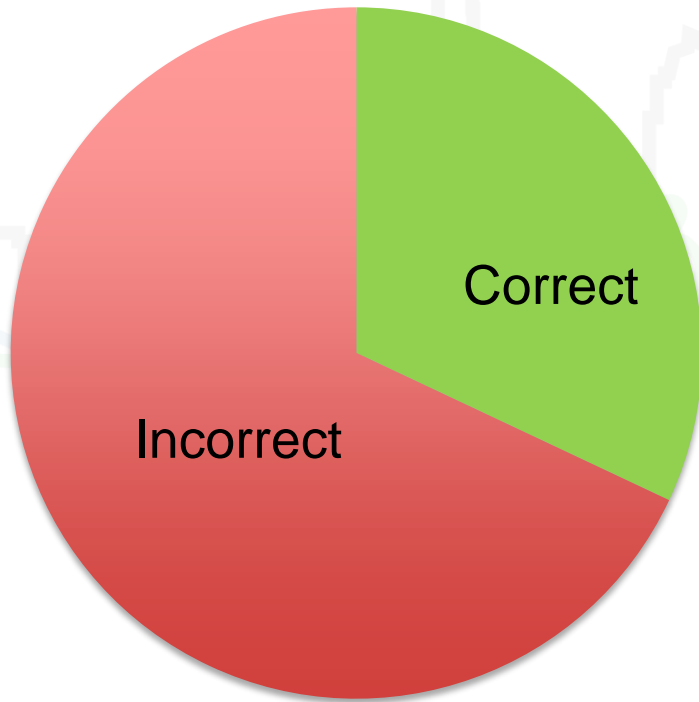
Emotional engagement
I care, I value

Cognitive engagement
I know, I agree



Knowledge about stormwater is poor

Knowledge about stormwater



National survey: less than one third knew:

- Urban stormwater isn't treated before entering waterways
- Separate pipes carry domestic wastewater & stormwater



We wanted to explore this further...

- What do people think about stormwater?
- What factors promote or limit their engagement with stormwater issues?
 - Personal actions
 - Government actions



Focus groups

Explored perceptions of stormwater management

- Representative mix of ages, gender & income
- 40 participants in total





Responding to information

We then
provided
information
about
stormwater

Discussion about
definition and
management
options

Concepts not difficult – people
response well to information

Poor community understanding
*“I didn’t realise that stormwater
washed all the rubbish out to
sea, I thought it just cleaned
everything up, you know, not
that it did any harm”*

Despite prompting,
the conversation kept
returning to ‘visible’
issues like litter

Poor issue visibility
*“We don’t see, to a large extent,
where our stormwater goes”*



Discussing personal actions

Unprompted

Limited capacity to
identify behaviours

Most responses ~
physical litter or
water saving

Prompted

“Oh, that’s common sense”
“good advice”

Barriers?

Not thinking soil is a pollutant

*“I wouldn’t think of planting trees...
that wouldn’t spring to mind”*

Personal relevance

*“For me, that’s a bit tricky to relate to
because I live in a small apartment”*



Discussing water sensitive

Unprompted

Very limited capacity to identify any management practices

Assumed local govts would be investing in expensive filtration technology

Prompted

Curiosity: effectiveness

Relevance: will it affect my property or rates?

Positive: aesthetics



Raingardens in park
water and filter
pollutants

Barriers?

Poor Awareness

“It sounds great, but we don’t know what it is”

*“Does it really have a benefit? **It seems too simple**”*

Poor Visibility

*“you can see the things we want councils to do, ... **this has got nothing, no function you can see**”*



Need to *show* impact

Nature of the problem

“show people how much rubbish builds up...”

“I would be interested to see the stats, what chemicals are going into the environment ... to explain what’s happening...”

“Show us the difference we can make”

*“explain why you’re asking me to do this... **we want to know the impact**”*

“I don’t think it would hurt to have some signage, saying this is what we’re doing and this is what it does”

What type of impacts are more motivating?

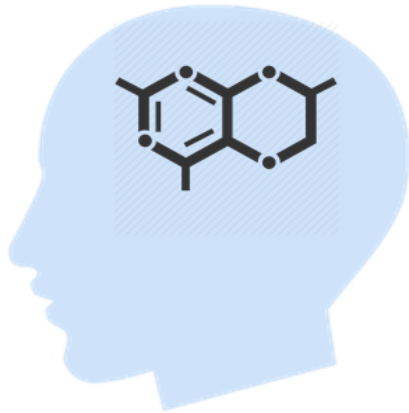
Safety & family recreation

Pleasant **local** places

Turtles & dolphins

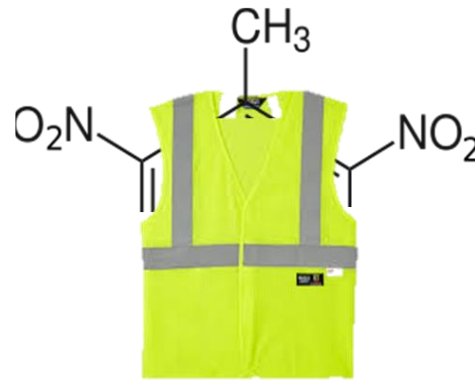


Tips for engaging communities



When people think about stormwater, pollution is not top of mind.

We need to be explicit about discussing pollution



People focus on pollution they can see.

We need to build visibility of the issue *and* effective responses



Stormwater perceived as not relevant.

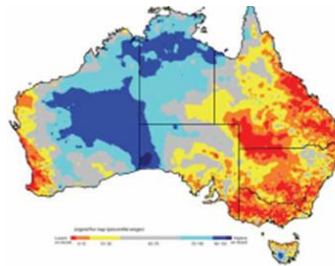
Motivating factors:

- Safety*
- Recreation*
- *Pleasant local spaces*
- *Iconic megafauna*

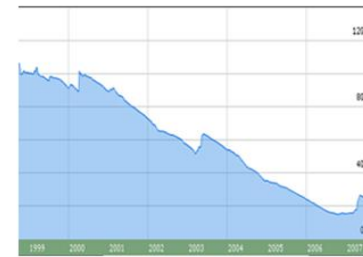


Consider water shortages...

How to build support for stormwater action?



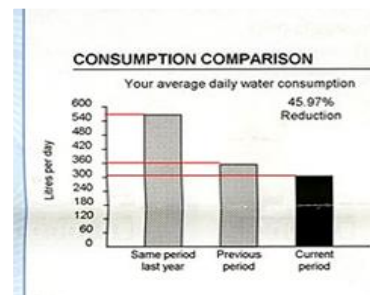
We communicate urgency & need for action



We communicate how this changes over time



We recommend specific actions



We provide feedback



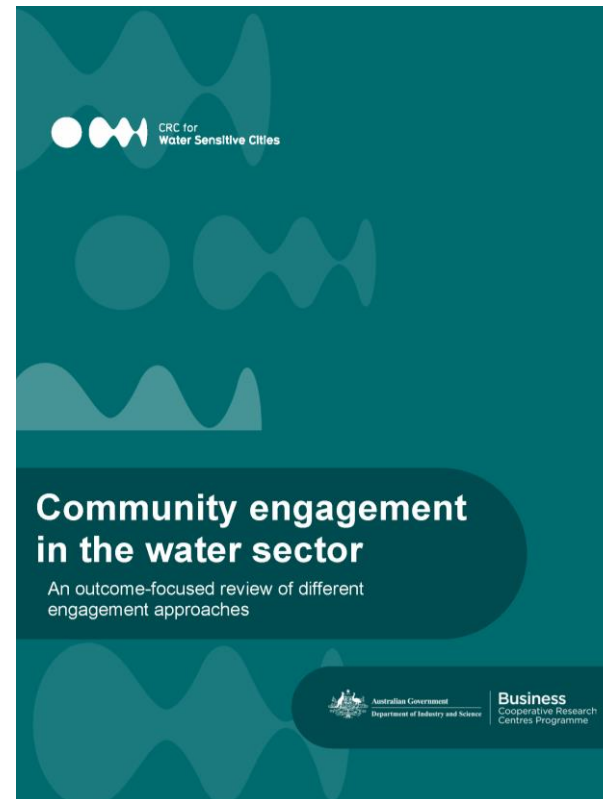
We activate social norms



Where to next?

Methods of engagement

- Review:
 - Effectiveness of different engagement techniques





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What messages are most engaging?

- Role of images
- Experimental studies:
 - Message framing





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Building support for policy

- Role of
 - participation process
 - jargon
 - trust



A2.3 Engaging communities with Water Sensitive Cities



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