



UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

EVALUATION OF WHO CARES ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT (1994-2012)

SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared for NSW Office of Environment and Heritage



ACELG
Australian Centre of Excellence
for **Local Government**

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NSW Office of Environment and Heritage

Prepared by

University of Technology, Sydney: Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government

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1 Background

Who Cares about the Environment? (*Who Cares?*) is social research that examines the environmental knowledge, views, attitudes and behaviour of people in NSW and tracks how these have changed over time. It has been conducted every three years since 1994 by the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) and its predecessor organisations.

See www.environment.nsw.gov.au/community/whocares2012.htm for more information.

The Centre for Local Government at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS:CLG) was appointed by OEH to conduct an evaluation of the *Who Cares?* research program (1994 to 2012). The evaluation, delivered in June 2014, is both summative and formative in nature. It provides an evaluation of the overall value and impact of the program since its inception in 1994 as well as recommendations to inform future *Who Cares?* research.

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Understand the value and impact of *Who Cares?* and effectiveness in meeting its objectives
- Identify the role of *Who Cares?* in meeting OEH's strategic social research needs
- Provide guidance on research design and delivery for future *Who Cares?* to maximize its value, relevance, accessibility, rigour and reliability for users.

The second objective has been considered in detail as part of a supplementary project conducted during the evaluation to develop a strategic social research strategy for OEH.

2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was conducted over a five month period from February to June 2014, using an agreed evaluation framework. It involved a variety of data sources including:

- A study of individuals and organisations using *Who Cares?* including:
 - 58 telephone interviews with a range of stakeholders across NSW
 - An online survey (1,007 people completed or partially completed the survey and of these 433 had used *Who Cares?*)
- Three case studies with a range of organisations across NSW to examine the impact of *Who Cares?* more closely
- A technical review of the *Who Cares?* methodology
- A literature review on the role of social research in evidence-based policy making.

3 Key evaluation findings

This document is a summary of the key findings and conclusions from the full evaluation report. Findings from all data sources have been combined and are presented thematically.

Section 1 reports on the value of *Who Cares?*. It is very widely used and is strongly valued as robust social research.

Section 2 describes the variety of ways that *Who Cares?* is being used. This section describes its use across industry sectors, the areas of work in which it is being used, and its use in programs and activities.

Section 3 considers the impact of *Who Cares?*. *Who Cares?* impacts on the sustainability and environment sectors and in local government policy and strategy. *Who Cares?* data influences program design and implementation in stakeholder and community engagement programs, community and sustainability education programs, and the uptake and quality of other social research. This section also outlines some key findings relating to increasing impact through changes to reporting and dissemination.

3.1 Value of *Who Cares?*

Overall, the feedback about *Who Cares?* is extremely positive. The evaluation found an exceptional level of support for the research, with a large number of users engaging with its findings over many years. *Who Cares?* forms a vital part of the evidence base for research on social attitudes to the environment in NSW and in other parts of Australia, and where it is used, *Who Cares?* provides high value and impact.

3.1.1 *Who Cares?* is highly valued by its users

Who Cares? is broadly used by a wide range of people across a range of sectors and for a variety of purposes, as will be discussed in more detail in Section 2 below. It is valued as a robust source of research which provides an evidence base over time.

[It's] consistent over time showing trends, clear and concise, easy to interpret and use for explanatory purposes, and accessible at no cost. Educator, TAFE in sustainability

It's great that it provides a snapshot across relatively consistent areas over the last 20 years - a fantastic body of work. Really great to see fluctuations in importance of environmental issues, and reported frequency of waste behaviours. Community organisation, waste

It is a fabulous picture of what is important to the population tracked over time and against the backdrop of current events. You only really get to understand the drivers behind attitudinal changes when you see them change over time. The fact that this research has been running so consistently for such a long time means it presents a fascinating social history. We are very lucky to have the data that we already have from it. These reports from the ground are so useful when combined with other research and studies. Education program design, sustainability

The sustainability and environmental sector use *Who Cares?* because it gives valuable information about trends around environmental issues; it is a valued input into decision-making for advocacy, policies, programs, education and evaluation; and the presentation of the research is easily accessible.

Who Cares? helps find out key things that the community do and don't understand. Local government, Hunter Region

It is not all that usual for something to have longevity through various different governments and the ability to track over time what's happening with sentiment around the things that we are concerned about. This is one of the most valuable aspects of this. Metropolitan Water Directorate, Sydney and Hunter Regions

It is also valued as an input to support funding applications.

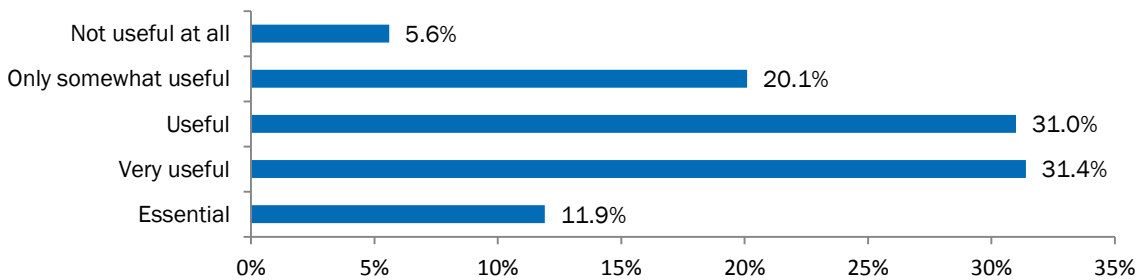
Without Who Cares?...how can we argue our program design needs and requirements? It is an essential part of program planning, implementation and evaluation. Education program design, waste

Who Cares? is valued for being a survey dedicated exclusively to environmental social research.

It is a dedicated environmental survey and there are no others. Local government, Sydney Region

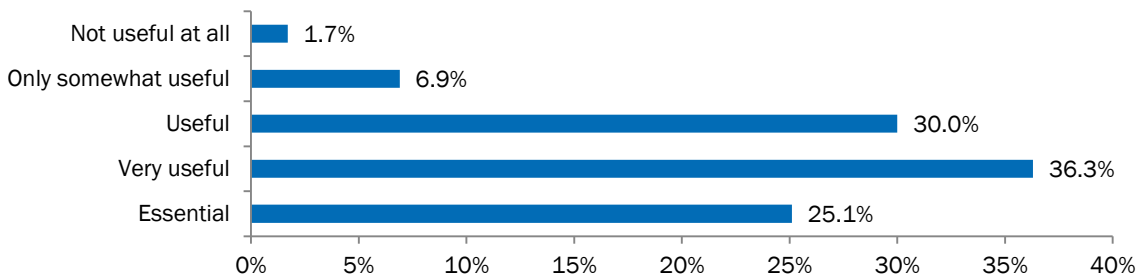
74% of online survey respondents said that *Who Cares?* was essential, very useful or useful.

FIGURE 1 : HOW VALUABLE IS *WHO CARES?* TO YOU? (N=303)



The value of *Who Cares?* is extremely high within the sustainability and environment sector with 91% of respondents rating *Who Cares?* as essential, very useful or useful. 25% rate it as essential within the sector.

FIGURE 2: THINKING ABOUT THE SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR MORE BROADLY, HOW VALUABLE IS *WHO CARES?* (N=303)



3.1.2 *Who Cares?* is valued as robust social research

Who Cares? is a trusted source of independent research, providing an important snapshot of community sentiments, attitudes and concerns about the environment as well as trending information over time since 1994. *Who Cares?* is seen as robust and rigorous and provides a valuable touchstone for social research within the sustainability and environment sectors.

This is the only well researched, consistent data to base education on that will make a difference to our community's understanding, attitude and behaviour towards the environment. Local government, Community engagement about biodiversity and sustainability

There is rigour around questions. Regional Organisation of Councils, Sydney Region

It has been around a long time which gives value and credibility. OEHL, State-wide

It's the longest running environmental attitude survey in the world and... it's tracked attitudes and changes over a long period. There's a consistency about it that is really useful for policy makers and cultural researchers... I like that it's so professionally and competently done as well. You can trust it and rely on it. State government or agency, communication and engagement

The more credible research we put out the more credibility it has in the community and you get more evidence based decision making. OEH, State-wide

[It is] statistically valid and reliable. Local government, Hunter Region

Many local government and non-government organisations users indicated they value the availability of free and rigorous research as they are unable to pay for research of a similar quality themselves.

It made a significant impact as my own organisation could not afford that type of research.
Non-government organisation

Regional users reported wanting an increased sample size in the regions to improve the statistical confidence with which data could be analysed and reported. 31% of online survey respondents suggested that the sample size in the regions should be increased.

Understanding the regional differences and picking up where sentiment might change, vary across populations within those regions would be something that we probably could get more information on. Metropolitan Water Directorate, Sydney and Hunter Regions

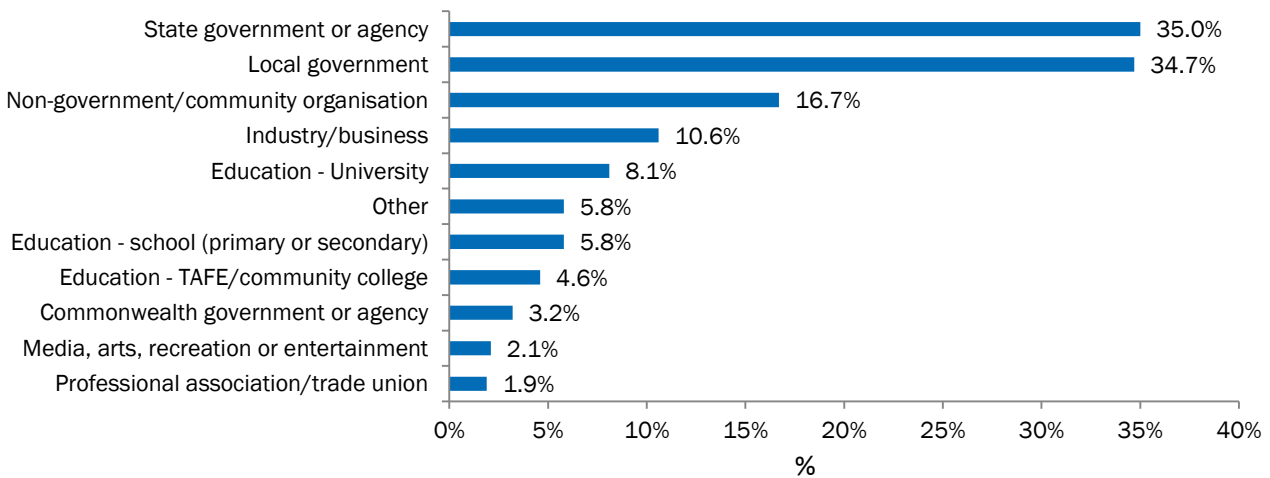
It would be great if there was more detail about regional areas. Some assumptions made may not be relevant to regional areas about behaviours and expectations. Small towns are different to urban areas, for example with attitudes about recycling. And farmers have different attitudes about a lot of things. Regional waste network, Far West, North Western and Central West Regions

3.2 Use of Who Cares?

3.2.1 *Who Cares?* is used across a range of industry sectors and areas of work

Who Cares? is used by people in state government and agencies (35%, as a percentage of users responding to the online survey), local government (35%), education (18%, combining university, primary/secondary and TAFE/community college) and the non-government and community organisation (17%) sectors. There were fewer users from industry/business (11%) and commonwealth government and agencies (3%) as can be seen in the figure that follows.

FIGURE 3: IN WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SECTORS DO YOU CARRY OUT YOUR WORK? (N=433)



Respondents work across a range of areas with over 50% of users involved with sustainability, 44% with natural resource management, 38% with biodiversity and 33% with climate change. They are also working in waste, energy, land use, water quality, and to a lesser extent, agriculture, food security, and mining. Users are working at different levels of seniority within their organisations, with over a third describing themselves as at program officer or program coordinator level.

There is a relatively low level of awareness of *Who Cares?* in the business sector

Who Cares? use is limited in consulting and in the business sector there is not a great knowledge of it. Consultant, State-wide

3.2.2 *Who Cares?* is used in a variety of ways

Who Cares? is considered important across a wide range of uses, particularly for social and behavioural change programs education programs; community and stakeholder engagement processes; communications; and program, project and policy development.

It helped me to target my grant application projects, the councils education program overall, the sustainability directions and also to target communications. Local government, catchment management

We've been using the results as a baseline of designing, implementing and evaluation education for sustainability programs. Furthermore, I have used it to argue the need for more targeted programs, and how to target the education programs effectively. Scoping areas of need. Community organisation, waste

In grant application writing I have used it to justify program development. In behaviour change program development I have used it to justify approaches taken. Local government, education program design

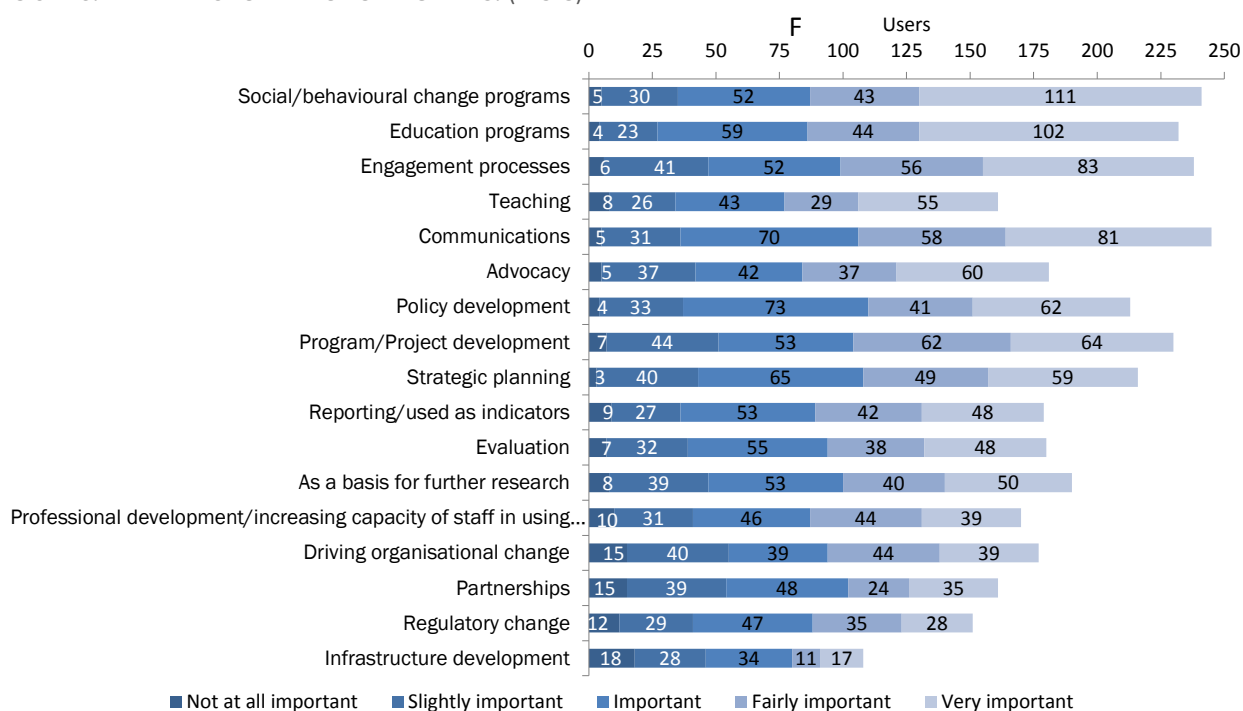
The results of Who Cares are invaluable to me as a sustainability educator. They provide insight into the current priorities and behaviours of our community and enable us to plan relevant and timely educational programs. Who Cares has also helped us with the language of the communications we use. When we discovered that our area didn't particularly believe in climate change (a few years ago at least), we stopped using that term and used other terminology instead. Local Government, education program development

It is also used for advocacy; program and policy evaluation; teaching; driving organisational change; as a basis for further - research, partnerships and regulatory change; and infrastructure development.

In NGO-world Who Cares? has great currency. You can see its fingerprints in their education programs. Metropolitan Water Directorate, Sydney and Hunter Regions

Across a broad range of work in which the findings have been employed, users consistently rate *Who Cares?* as important, fairly important and very important, as can be seen in the figure below.

FIGURE 4: THINKING ABOUT *WHO CARES?* AND THE RANGE OF WORK IN WHICH YOU HAVE USED ITS FINDINGS, HOW IMPORTANT HAS *WHO CARES?* BEEN IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS? (N=345)



It was also reported that *Who Cares?* is used to support funding applications and to benchmark their own research. *Who Cares?* has been used to great effect in regional collaborations where resources for social research are constrained.

I work in a regional area and there are far fewer resources available to commit to environmental issues generally, and also those working in the industry are required to be generalist in their approach. This helps to focus our energy and resources into areas which will be useful to us and to our intended audience. Local government, natural resource management

Within local government, *Who Cares?* is used to support organisational strategy, policies and priorities. It is particularly used in strategic planning. It is increasingly used to benchmark local values, attitudes and behaviours through replication of *Who Cares?* questions within local mini-*Who Cares?* or resident satisfaction surveys.

We link our 20 year city plan and Who Cares?. Our plan has a corresponding response for each of the main issue groups. Local government, Sydney Region

We do a mini Who Cares? every three years within a broader survey on natural resource management issues – actively trying to track attitudes and behaviours. The results help to inform programs on the ground. Catchment Management Authority, Northern Region

Within OEH, *Who Cares?* is used for general information about trends in NSW, as a source of evidence for programs and policy, and as an input to NSW State of the Environment reporting. However, it seems

underutilised at a strategic level to set corporate priorities and both external and OEH interviewees expressed disappointment that there was little evidence for its use in this way, especially in more recent times..

How much of Who Cares? is communicated up the chain of government is unclear. Whether environment is mainstream through government departments. It shouldn't just be OEH dealing with environment but [it should be] mainstream throughout all government. Who Cares? can be a tool to start the conversation. University, Sydney Region

3.3 Impact of *Who Cares?*

3.3.1 *Who Cares?* has a high impact in the sustainability and environment sector

The majority of people who use *Who Cares?* report that the research has had significant impact on the sustainability and environment sector as it provides a strong evidence base for policies and programs and shows how community attitudes to the environment have changed over time.

It's a source of insight and data that we can use to better frame sustainability program design [by] helping to understand our audiences... those that are engaged and those that are partly engaged. Local government

Who Cares? is really important. The sector sometimes gets sidelined. It gives it arsenal, provides strong indicators. Regional Organisation of Councils, Sydney Region

We call it killer facts. OEH, State-wide

It has also had an impact in shaping environmental education, and building awareness, understanding and knowledge about environmental issues within the community. The issue specific data in *Who Cares?* has been used to provide a rationale for the respective adoption or continuation of a new or existing policy, program or strategy.

The results do influence strategy and messaging. Community organisation, land use and natural resource management

[We use] results to highlight within government or with stakeholders that there is a need for new/changed policy/program to meet a need evident through Who Cares?. State government or agency, biodiversity

We have made reference to the results to support justification for existing education/engagement programs; used results as a basis for developing new programs and setting policy development; [and] used it as an evaluation tool to see if we are concentrating on the correct areas. Local government, sustainability policy making and community engagement

The impacts in program design, education and communications across sustainability, natural resource management, biodiversity, climate change, waste and energy related issues are widely reported.

The trends on water, natural resource management and biodiversity [community] actions and attitudes provide the basis for shaping strategic work and advocacy. Non-government organisation, climate change and land use planning

I am a consultant so I use it as part of strategy development projects with agencies, especially with local government. I use it to support content of professional development/training I am delivering. I use it to support project bids and reports. I use it to inform me about the changes in people's knowledge, skills and behaviours. I use it to argue the point, as a lobbying tool. Environmental sector private consultant

Who Cares? has been used drive policy and program development, especially in regional collaborations where resources for social research are constrained. It has increased the use of social research within the sustainability and environment sectors as a key evidence base in decision making and had a significant impact on training and development by supporting training in evaluation.

Who Cares? changed the shape of the profession. It opened eyes around social dimensions of environmental and the link between knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviours. More people started doing social research in their work within government and externally and it also led to a demand for evaluation and the training of people around evaluation.
 Consultant, Ex OEH, State-wide

It has ensured that those working in the sustainability sector use social research as the first step to design of a behavioural change program. There is an increased awareness that generalising, predicting and assuming we know what will work for communities, and why is simply not enough anymore. Social research is fundamental. Regional waste organisation

3.3.2 *Who Cares?* has an important impact in local government policy and strategy

Who Cares? has had a particular impact within local government where it has been successfully incorporated into integrated strategic planning processes (including for reporting and within indicator frameworks), program development, environmental education, environmental reporting and community engagement.

Who Cares? helps a lot with community strategic planning and other strategic documents.
 Local Government, Central West Region

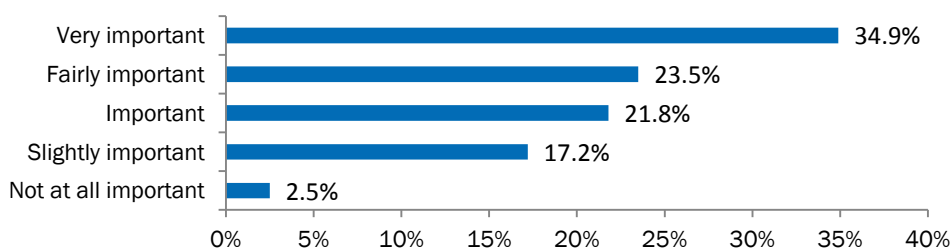
Who Cares? is the main document I go to for policy development to understand trends and shift in values and knowledge and ranking of environmental issues. Local government, Sydney Region

Have used it mostly in preparation of policy and strategy and as justification for policy. And over the years as justification for funding in Council. Local government, Central Coast Region

3.3.3 *Who Cares?* impacts on stakeholder engagement processes

Who Cares? has been particularly influential in informing community and stakeholder engagement processes. For example, 80% of online survey respondents reported that *Who Cares?* was very important, fairly important or important for community and stakeholder engagement processes.

FIGURE 5: THINKING ABOUT *WHO CARES?* AND THE RANGE OF WORK IN WHICH YOU HAVE USED ITS FINDINGS, HOW IMPORTANT HAS *WHO CARES?* BEEN IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS? STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT (N=238)



Who Cares? is used when developing behaviour change initiatives in order to determine how to engage stakeholders and the community. In many instances, the data from *Who Cares?*, in particular the demographic findings and segmentation analysis, have led to changes in the conduct of community engagement, how audiences are targeted and the mode and format of the delivery of consultative processes.

We used Who Cares? when designing attitudinal surveys to environmental issues in organisations. University, teaching, research and educational program design

Have run our own social research, but Who Cares? segmentation helps to narrow the scope. EPA, State-wide

3.3.4 *Who Cares?* impacts on design and implementation of programs

Who Cares? is widely used in program development as a basis for identifying potential priority target areas for programs and then for developing the aspects of the program. It is used for behaviour change programs and education programs across a wide range of environmental issues, including waste, natural resource management, climate change and air quality. It is also used to tailor these programs to particular sectors of the community. There is less evidence that *Who Cares?* is used in implementation stage of programs but it is frequently used to benchmark the outcomes during the review and evaluation stage.

Who Cares? research is used to assist our team to justify some of the environmental issues we are working and investing in. Local councils activities reflect local communities interests and demands and the survey can assist in identifying what these might be. Local government, natural resource management

We targeted a workshop series on sustainable food for a younger demographic and then used this as a lead into other areas eg. growing own food , pesticides, food miles, carbon emissions. Local government, Sydney Region

We have just developed an updated education strategy and Who Cares? was included in the research for that. It is brand new and our bible. Regional waste network Far West, North Western and Central West Regions

3.3.5 *Who Cares?* has impacted on the uptake and quality of social research

Who Cares? has had an impact on social research within the sustainability and environment sector and has made more people aware of the value of social research as part of the evidence base for change.

It has provided a baseline on which to inform policy and programs across the sector. State government or agency

It is a vital tool. I use it for getting concepts around sustainability across in local government, especially to Councillors who know they need to use quadruple bottom line but don't know what it means. Environmental education consultant, State-wide

Who Cares? has also increased practitioners' knowledge about how to use social research in planning, implementation and evaluation. *Who Cares?* is widely used within the university sector and the environmental education sector as an example of best practice social research.

Who Cares? is an agenda setter for social research within government. It is good for methodology and a model for best practice. University, Sydney Region

As a source of information, social research is used by a greater number of survey respondents than biophysical/scientific research, evaluation reports or economic research, although biophysical/scientific is used more frequently.

3.3.6 *Who Cares?* dissemination could be designed for more impact

Existing users of *Who Cares?* know about the research and are able to easily establish when a new wave of data is being published through the existing communication channels. However, users said that they think it could have greater penetration into mainstream media and into certain sections of business and education where it has potential to be used more.

The days when you just write a report and stick it on the website are gone. The published document is not the end – pushing it out is needed. We need to turn data into information into knowledge into wisdom. OEH, State-wide

Additionally, over half of online survey respondents (55% or 574 people) reported limited awareness of *Who Cares?*, in that they may have heard of it but never looked at any of the reports or been to a seminar. Yet, of these low-awareness respondents, 92.5% thought *Who Cares?* would be of great interest/some interest to them. A high proportion of these potential users are from state government or agency, NGO/community organisations and local government. This suggests that there is potential for greater reach and use of *Who Cares?* within these key sectors.

79% of online survey respondents and most interviewees are happy with the three-year research cycle but feel the ongoing penetration of *Who Cares?* in the three-year timeframe is limited. Most people use *Who Cares?* when it comes out and then forget about it. This is partially because the full report no longer comes out in hard copy as an easy, visible desktop resource, but also because there is little tie-in communication with issues reported in *Who Cares?* as they arise in the intervening period.

But it is only useful if you use it, not leave it in a drawer. Local government, Hunter Region

I would prefer a hard copy. The main report would be more useful if it was a common resource on my bookshelf. Local government, Central Coast Region

There is not a lot of continual sharing of information over three years - get a pulse when first release, hits at one time. Needs communication methods to continue or else is a waste of money. Consultant, State-wide

Local governments and NGOs can be distribution partners as a way of getting the information out and keeping it top of mind. Environmental NGO, State-wide

3.3.7 *Who Cares?* reporting could be designed for more impact

The *Who Cares?* Summary Report is the most often used report format which appears to be an underutilisation of *Who Cares?* when there is such a breadth and depth of information available in the other reports.

Users said they thought more tailored reporting linking the results of *Who Cares?* to specific themes or target audiences and increased use of visual representation of the data would make it more usable.

Not talking about dumbing down, but smart ways of graphically representing the data.
Local government, Central Coast Region

The seminars (and webinars where accessed) are considered valuable, well run and, especially in a regional context, present a great opportunity for attendees to network, discuss the findings and talk about the implications of the findings for their region and their work. However, some key users and peak bodies suggested their organisations would get more value from the findings if they had separate briefings with OEH. Users also suggested a web-based portal allowing tailored searches of the data; increased use of social media; and increased use of 'infographics' and other data visualisation to improve impact.

3.3.8 *Who Cares?* should reflect changed ideas about the 'environment'

Users reported that since the inception of *Who Cares?*, community levels of awareness, knowledge and understanding about sustainability and environmental issues have changed. 'Environment' has moved from a single issue around conservation, protection and management towards a more integrated concept embedded in land use planning, economic development, liveability, quality of life, health and well-being.

We need to look at environment in the context of planning, economic growth, consumption patterns and population growth/change. OEH, State-wide

In our last two (mini-Who Cares?) surveys we have included a well-being question which helps us better link planning and health. Local government, Sydney Region

Who Cares? needs more on bigger issues such as biodiversity protection and climate change and less on those about pouring fat down sink. Environmental NGO, State-wide

3.3.9 *Who Cares?* questions could better reflect current and future issues

There are environmental issues which now appear to be well understood, less relevant or where there is less or slow change in responses in between surveys. User-identified 'known' issues include water supply, water quality, waste and recycling. They would like to see a reduction in questions on these topics which would create more space for more contemporary issues such as climate change, coal seam gas, economic development in national parks, the trade-off between urban expansion and increased density and the need for green space.

*Maybe core values have changed where as a society we don't think littering a good idea but *Who Cares?* keeps asking about littering but not about coal. This is maybe an opportunity lost.* Environmental NGO, State-wide

4 Opportunities to increase the value and impact of *Who Cares?*

4.1 Strategic opportunities

The strategic value of *Who Cares?* could be strengthened by clearly linking the research to the NSW State Plan NSW 2021 and OEH's corporate priorities. OEH interviewees suggested that usage of *Who Cares?* would be improved if the depth and breadth of data in areas such as climate change and heritage was increased; there was more consistent promotion of the research internally between waves; and the research was better integrated with corporate priorities to ensure it helps support and provide direction to the strategic positioning of OEH. There is also support for a more integrated approach that links the environment more clearly into decisions around land use planning, economic development, population growth, health and education.

In addition, using the *Who Cares?* 'brand' could be an effective when commissioning short term social research where new issues arise which would benefit from an evidence-based approach or where public sentiment appears to be changing which may require a different policy/program response. For example, the *Who Cares about Water and Climate Change in 2007*¹ responded to the level of concern noted by respondents in the 2006 *Who Cares?* survey. This is a highly regarded survey and was well received by respondents as it promptly examined in more detail issues identified in *Who Cares?*.

4.2 Opportunities to expand dissemination and make reporting more accessible

Although *Who Cares?* is already widely used and valued, there is capacity to extend the reach of the research. Developing a more comprehensive stakeholder communication plan for the release of the report incorporating clear identification of stakeholder groups (including non-users); tailored information and dissemination for each group; more interactive social media; and strategic partnerships

¹ NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change (2008) *Who Cares about Water and Climate Change in 2007*. Available at: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/community/Whocares2007.htm

with key organisations within the sector to develop stories about the data for the media and their own networks, would assist to increase the reach of the research and its impact. In addition, keeping the research 'front of mind' by maintaining an ongoing discussion about findings between waves, through these same channels, would deliver more value over time.

Access to the research could be increased by changing the reporting to provide improved assistance to users to find a way through the volume of information. Changes in reporting layout in the main report to highlight the more statistically significant and interesting results from a contemporary policy perspective would also help readers navigate through the breadth of information available.

If you're a practitioner then it's fantastic but if you're not it's impenetrable. EPA, State-wide

Although having all the data available is necessary, additional analysis to highlight the most interesting data and contextualise the results within the changing social, political, economic and media landscape would be valuable to improving the accessibility and use of the information. In addition to guiding readers to the most significant results, this type of analysis and reporting will help raise the capacity of readers to interpret data. More use of graphical representation of data would also enhance users' capacity to interpret the data's meaning.

Maybe need to present the facts but then a 'so what' piece so the audience can see the key things but then another piece which puts things into context. OEH, State-wide

As seminars can only reach a small proportion of users who are increasingly time poor, consideration could be given to trialling an increase in the number of webinars and/or static PowerPoint presentations on the *Who Cares?* website to provide different modes of delivery.

4.3 Opportunities to revise aspects of the *Who Cares?* methodology

The already robust methodology of *Who Cares?* could be improved by making some adjustments to the question set to include coverage of emerging issues such as sea level rise, coal seam gas and climate change adaptation. Regional users of *Who Cares?* gave strong feedback about the need to increase the sample size in regional areas to allow for more statistically significant analysis and reporting of data. It was suggested that increases may be able to be financed through funding contributions from the regions themselves. Additionally, some changes to a small number of the core questions, changing the timetable for publication, investigating changes to sample frame design and reducing the survey length would deliver improvements.



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