

Recovery Into Resilience Project (RRP)

An Appetite for Action -
Community Survey Findings

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An Appetite for Action



A report of the findings from a community survey of Shoalhaven residents into their experiences with, and desired future responses to, extreme weather events.

Contents

Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Survey Objectives	6
Survey Findings	7
Demographics	8
Individuals' Experiences with Extreme Weather Events	10
SWOT Analysis Result	12
Visioning the Shoalhaven 20 Years from Now...	16
Appetite for Action	18
Sense of Efficacy	19
Conclusion	20
Appendix 1	21

Introduction

The Recovery into Resilience Project (RRP), initiated following the Currowan Bushfire (2019-2020) and the COVID-19 pandemic, focuses on enhancing community-led resilience to plan, prepare, respond, and recover from emergency and disaster situations. The project consists of three working streams, namely:

- 1. Long Term Community-led Resilience;**
- 2. Short Term Community Readiness; and**
- 3. Highest Risk/ Most Urgent Needs.**

This report relates to the work undertaken by Stream 1.

The primary goal of Stream 1 is to enhance the Shoalhaven communities' long-term resilience to withstanding and recovering from extreme weather events, emergencies and other disasters. Principally, Stream 1 work focuses on the development of a long-term community-led Adaptation and Resilience Strategy that will help improve the community's ability to respond to and recover from future disasters. The strategy will be developed by a working group, consisting of community members and Council staff, through a series of workshops facilitated by a research team of experts from Griffith University.

Community engagement with the research team began in June 2021, but due to COVID-19 lock-downs and travel restrictions, face-to face workshops were postponed and will resume once restrictions have been eased. In the meantime, two online community surveys were developed and released to the community to collect preliminary data about individuals' experiences with extreme weather events and their initial thoughts about improving their response to and recovery from future disasters. The first survey, referred to as the "adult survey", was released on July 19th 2021, and targeted individuals aged 18 years old and above. The survey was opened for 2 months and closed on the 17th of September. A second complementary survey, referred to as the "youth survey", was designed to be completed by secondary school aged participants, aged 11-18, was released a month later and will remain open until the end of the current academic school year.

This report relates to results from the "adult survey" only.

The purpose of this report is to highlight the survey objective, present the survey results, and discuss their implications for the future work of this project.

Methodology

The survey was designed and tested by the research team from Griffith University with assistance from Shoalhaven City Council's staff. It was approved by the Griffith University Human Ethics Research Committee and was conducted in accordance with Griffith University Ethics protocols.

The "adult survey" was released online on July 19th 2021, using Survey Monkey.

The survey was advertised on the Project's webpage within the Shoalhaven City Council website, as well as through social media, newsletters, and emails to different community groups and networks and to the Shoalhaven community members who have volunteered to participate in the project's Working Group.

The survey closed on the 17th of September 2021 to enable sufficient time for analysis by the research team from Griffith University. Preliminary findings have been reported to the Recovery into Resilience Project team, as well as to Shoalhaven Mayor and Council's CEO on 28th September 2021.

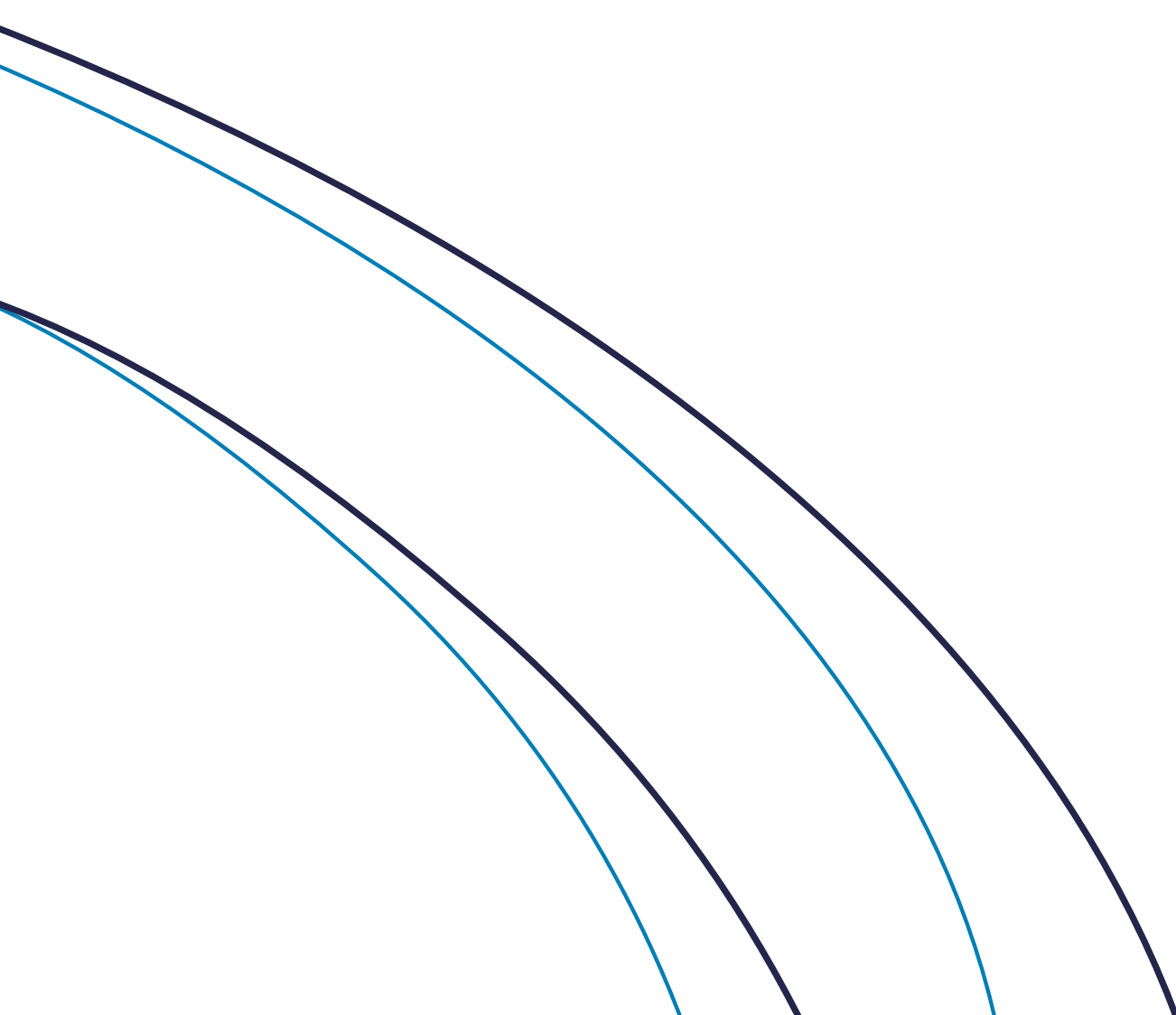


Image:
Bawley Point

Survey Objectives

Several objectives guided the development of the survey, including to:

1. Collect data about peoples' experiences with extreme weather events;
2. Undertake a strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis about the Shoalhaven region's capacity to withstand and respond to extreme weather events;
3. Identify individual's hopes and aspirations for the future of the Shoalhaven;
4. Ascertain the community's stance on the need for a long-term community-led adaptation and resilience strategy for the region;
5. Gauge the community's interest in being involved in the development of the strategy;
6. Gauge individual and collective sense of efficacy to influence the development of the strategy; and, collect demographic data about the survey respondents.
7. Overall, the information collected through the survey will inform the development of the long-term strategy and provide important context and input for the subsequent workshops.



Survey findings

The survey was attempted by 390 people. However, only 260 people completed the survey in its entirety. Therefore, the results presented in this report are based on the responses from 260 people.

Survey Findings in a Nutshell:

- 390 people have attempted the survey.
- 260 people completed the survey in its entirety.
- Responses came from different age groups, but the dominant group was people aged 60 and above.
- Responses were received from 57 location within the Shoalhaven.
- Almost 60 percent of the survey respondents were female and 40 percent male.
- Eight of the responses were from people identified as Indigenous.
- Vast majority (96 percent) of respondents had experienced an extreme weather event, mostly in the Shoalhaven.
- Climate change was identified as the main factor that influences the frequency and severity of extreme weather events.
- Vast majority (97.3 percent) of participants believed that human activity influences the frequency and severity of extreme weather events to some extent.
- 76 percent of respondents felt threatened by extreme weather events.
- Concerns about environmental damage, damage to infrastructure, and damage to private property from extreme weather events were rated the highest by most people.
- Most participants identified the community, Council and emergency services as the Shoalhaven's greatest strengths in withstanding and recovering from extreme weather events.
- Shoalhaven's weaknesses in withstanding and recovering from extreme weather events were diverse and included issues related to lack of forward planning, inadequate infrastructure, geographical location, policy issues, etc.
- Many participants saw an urgent need to adopt policies around climate change mitigation and adaptation & environmental protection as a way of improving the Shoalhaven's resilience to future disasters.
- A broad range of obstacles were perceived as preventing the Shoalhaven from becoming a better place to live and visit, including environmental, social, economic, and political factors.
- The main attributes that make the Shoalhaven a unique and special region are its natural environment and local communities.
- Most participants believe that the Shoalhaven region should have an adaptation and resilience strategy.
- Most people believe that working together as a community on the development of the strategy is more effective than trying to influence it as individuals.
- Support from government and adequate resources are critical for successful development and implementation of an adaptation and resilience strategy.

Demographics

The vast majority of survey participants (90) were permanent residents of the Shoalhaven. The remaining 10 percent were predominately people who have a second home/holiday home in the Shoalhaven, or were in the Shoalhaven for work, tourism, or visiting family at the time they completed the survey.

Respondents who live permanently in the Shoalhaven came from 57 locations; providing a good representative coverage of the whole region. However, there was no uniformity in the number of participants from each location and certain locations were better represented than other (e.g. Nowra, Mannjanna, Shoalhaven Heads, Culburra Beach) (see Figure 1). A detailed breakdown of respondents' location can be found in Appendix 1.

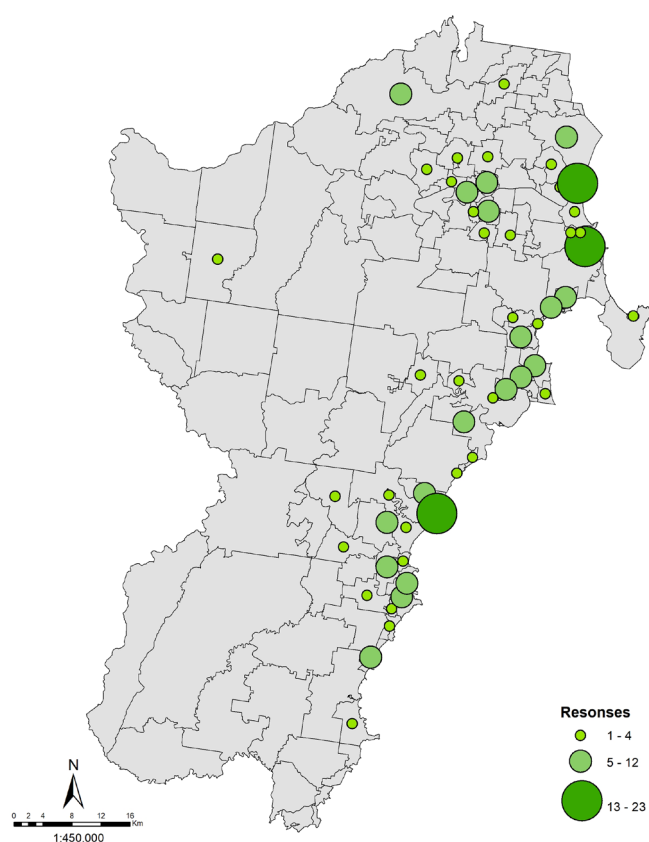


Figure 1. Respondents' location distribution across the Shoalhaven

Q1: "Are you a permanent resident of the Shoalhaven?"

Q2: "What is your main reason for being in the Shoalhaven?"

Q3: "Where in the Shoalhaven do you currently live?"

Q4: "How long have you been living in this location?"

Q5: "Have you lived anywhere else in the Shoalhaven region?"

Q23: "What is your age?"

Q24: "Which gender do you identify with?"

Q25: "Which of the following best describes your current employment status?"

Q26: "Are you a member of any community organisation?"

Q28: "Do you identify as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?"

More than 50 percent of respondents lived in the Shoalhaven for 10 or more years and almost 30 percent lived in the Shoalhaven between 4 and 10 years. The remainder 20 percent of participants were people who lived in the Shoalhaven for less than 4 years.

There was strong participation from people aged 60 plus in the survey (58%), followed by 23 percent of people aged 50-59 years old and 17 percent 35-49 years old (Figure 2). No responses were received from people aged 18-24, and there were very few responses (only 3.07%) from people aged 24-34. About half of the participants were retired (48%), and the remainder half were either working full or part-time, or are self-employed (22%, 13%, and 13%, respectively).

The survey was completed by 156 female participants and 99 male participants. Six participants chose not to list their gender.

More than 60 percent of respondents were active in the community as members of some organisation. There were many types of community organisations, ranging from those with a social focus to environmental, sporting, economic, political and other focus areas.

The survey was completed by 8 people who identified as Aboriginal; all whom provided a very detailed responses to the survey.

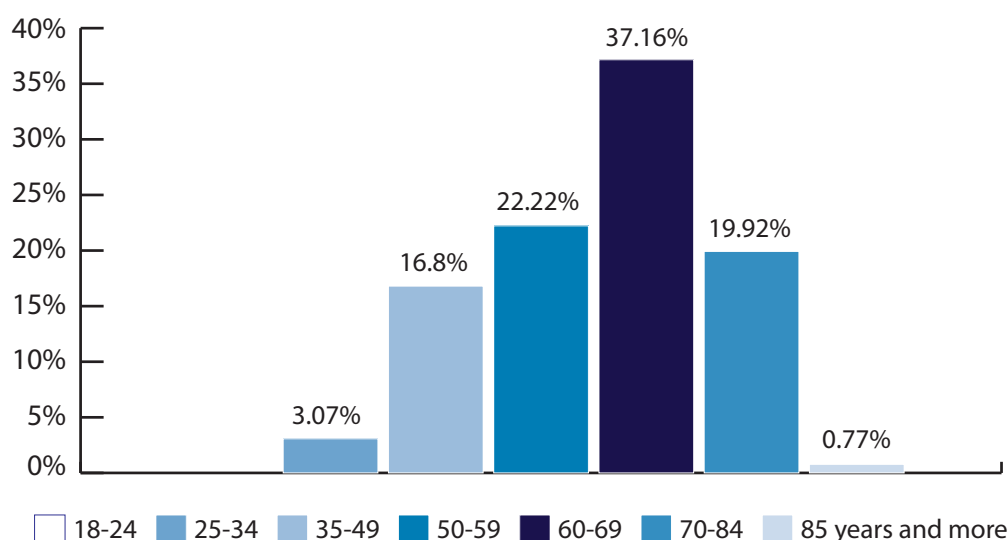


Figure 2. Age of survey participants

Individuals' Experiences with Extreme Weather Events

Survey participants were asked a number of questions about their experience with extreme weather events. Specifically, people were requested to say if they had experienced an extreme weather event in the past five years in the Shoalhaven or elsewhere. A positive response was received from nearly 96 percent of respondents, and of those, 93 percent said they experienced it in the Shoalhaven region. People were also asked to indicate if they felt threatened by extreme weather events, and again, a very large number of participants (76%) responded 'YES'.

When asked to rank what impacts from extreme weather events worried them the most, the largest number of people (77.86%) selected environmental damage (see Table 1). This was followed by impacts on infrastructure (69.47%), damage to private property (68.70%), loss of life (66.41%), social impacts (54.20%), impact on services (47.33%), financial impacts on the Region and State economy (30.53%), and damage to your businesses (9.92%) .

Q6: "In the last 5 years have you experienced an extreme weather event, such as a bushfire or floods?"

Q7: "Do you feel threatened by extreme weather events where you live?"

Q8: "What impacts from extreme weather events worry you the most?"

Q9: "What do you think are the main factors that influence the frequency and severity of extreme weather events?"

Q10: "How much do you think that human activity influences the likelihood and severity of extreme weather events?"

Table 1. Impact Ranking

Impact Type	Responses (n= 262)
Environmental Damage	77.86%
Impacts to Infrastructure (e.g. transport, communication, sewage, water, electricity, etc.)	69.47%
Damage to your car, home or property	68.70%
Loss of life	66.41%
Social impacts (liveability, community cohesion, psychological, etc.)	54.20%
Impact to services (health care, social services, police, ambulance, etc.)	47.33%
Financial impacts to the City and the State economy	30.53%
Damage to your business	9.92%

The survey also gathered information about peoples’ opinion about the factors that influence the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. The Question related to that issue was open ended, and no options were given to participants to select from. A word cloud analysis revealed that the words used most frequently to respond to this question were: “climate change” (60%), “global warming” (24%), [lack of] “planning” and [inadequate] “land management” (32%) (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Word Cloud: Key Factors identified by respondents to influence the frequency and severity of extreme weather events

Another question asked participants to rank how much they thought human activity contributed to the likelihood and severity of extreme weather events. All, but 2.49% of participants felt that human activity contributes to the frequency and severity of extreme weather events to some extent, with the majority of participants believing that human activity contributes a “great deal” (62.24%) or “a lot” (16.60%). A small proportion of people answered “a moderate amount” (9.54%), or “a little” (9.14%), and only 2.49% selected “not at all” (see Figure 4).

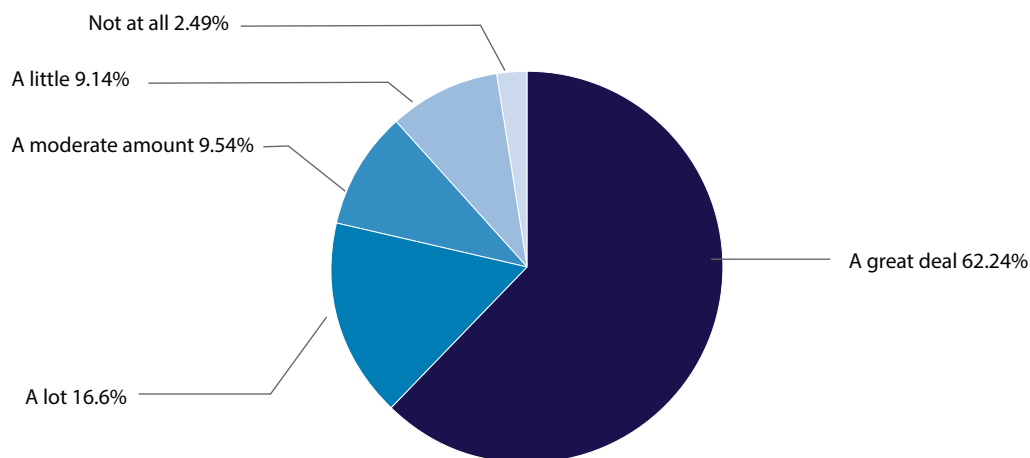


Figure 4. The extent of human activity’s influence on the occurrence of extreme weather events

SWOT Analysis Result

The survey asked a number of questions about the regions capacity to withstand, respond and recover from extreme weather events and other disasters. The first set of questions were focused on identifying what were the main strengths and weaknesses of the Shoalhaven in withstanding and recovering from extreme weather events, and the next set of questions focused on external opportunities and threats that could enable or restrict the Shoalhaven becoming a better place to live and visit.

Strengths

Survey respondents identified the Shoalhaven community as its biggest asset/strengths in withstanding and recovering from extreme weather events. Responses kept emphasising how the community “pulling/standing together”, “spirit”, “volunteers” and “connection to each other”, helped people during and after the events in question. Also highlighted as a strengths were emergency services, council and the collaborative approach adopted by Council and emergency services and the community before, during, and after extreme events. The word cloud below shows the most frequently used words describing the strengths of the Shoalhaven (see Figure 5).

Q12: “What do you think are the Shoalhaven’s greatest strengths in withstanding and recovering from extreme weather events?”



Figure 5. Word Cloud: Shoalhaven greatest strengths in withstanding and recovering from extreme weather events

Weaknesses

Whilst key themes were easily identified in relation to the strengths of the Shoalhaven, identifying the weaknesses revealed a more complex picture. Responses were very diverse and ranged from concerns about physical infrastructure (e.g. road, power and telecommunication) to issues associated with emergency preparedness and land use planning (overdevelopment). Also identified were issues surrounding governance and poor communication, politics and bureaucracy and denialism and inaction on climate change. Some quotes from selected respondents below help demonstrate the diversity of the issues identified:

Q13: "In your opinion, what problems or challenges related to the Shoalhaven region are the biggest obstacles to the region and community withstanding and recovering from extreme weather events?"

"Decisions being made away from the affected villages, without valuable local knowledge and therefore with a mistaken perception that problems and challenges can be dealt with from only a central point, which is therefore removed from individual community special circumstances and requirements"

"Inaction on climate change and hazard reduction activities that are sound scientifically and mimic aboriginal practice"

"That the current Council and the State Government and Commonwealth Government are not addressing the root cause that lead to extreme weather. It increases the likelihood of future extreme weather and many in the community feel that their voices are not heard and not taken seriously. It affects the children and adolescents and young adults, who will have to live in the conditions we create. A more local issue is the increase of threats of bushfires due to logging (which dries out the forests), the approval of residential houses and subdivision in or adjacent forested areas and on 'bush blocks' in fire prone areas (as opposed in urban areas) National Parks don't have sufficient resources to address fuel load".

Opportunities

Participants were asked to list some external opportunities that could support a better, more resilient Shoalhaven. External opportunities were defined in the survey as “favorable factors or conditions external to the Shoalhaven. For example: external trends in international and national tourism, international treaties/ agreements, technological innovations, etc.”

A number of participants found that question challenging or incomprehensible (i.e. out of the 240 responses received, 29 respondents chose to answer “not sure” or “????”). A few commented that the question was too complicated for people with limited knowledge and/or understanding of national and international affairs.

However, 211 responses revealed a broad range of topics. In particular, people identified the urgent need for policies around climate change mitigation and adaptation, plus environmental protection and management. Opportunities were also identified around tourism, and technological innovations and around adopting “indigenous ways of looking after the environment”. Indicative quotes from selected respondents include:

Q14: “List some external opportunities that you think could support a better, more resilient Shoalhaven region”.

“Environmental preservation, sustainable green tourism, promoting, consulting with and listening to indigenous communities and knowledge.”

“Climate policy!!! Stop mining coal, stop logging old growth forests, invest in more renewable energy, green infrastructure planning...”

“We need to adopt policies that empower traditional methods of managing lands, support Aboriginal practices for cultural burning and land management.”

“Regenerative agriculture, regenerative businesses, purpose-led businesses, regional circular economy initiatives to promote more local-market operations and employment, micro-economy activities such as plastic recycle to product entities, education around living systems/regeneration/community adaptability & resilience, expanded community-led development initiatives.”

Threats

Participants were asked to list some external factors or obstacles that could prevent the Shoalhaven from achieving positive progress and becoming a better place to live and visit. External factors were defined as “External factors are those influences, circumstances or situations that cannot be controlled by the Shoalhaven, but could impact on its ability to achieve its desired goals. For example, changing weather patterns, changing government policy, downturn in the economy.”

This question elicited a broad range of responses concerning different issues or obstacles. However, out of the 242 responses, the terms “climate change”, “global warming”, and “sea level rise” were recorded in 115 responses. An additional 24 respondents identified “changing weather patterns” as a threat to the Shoalhaven.

Respondents were also concerned with social issues, especially affordable housing and poverty, as well as overdevelopment in the region and economic homogeneity. Other issues mentioned were slowed decision making/bureaucracy, and political inertia.

Q15: “List some external factors or obstacles that you think could prevent the Shoalhaven from achieving positive progress and becoming a better place to live and visit.”

“Obstacles are the lack of both State and Federal governments to work together to address climate change and make bold policy decisions that may be painful for the economy and individuals in the short term but achieve desirable long term goals. Local action can be thwarted by lack of or restricted funding to implement imaginative/innovative local action”.

“Region is very dependent on tourism, need to diversify. Global warming will continue to have a huge impact as there are many coastal villages at sea level. Large areas of bushland subject to catastrophic fire events and land affected by extreme flooding.”

“Greed and overdevelopment which threatens the very ambience and amenity that makes it such a good place in to live, or to visit, much of the pressure for which appears to be coming from outsiders looking for business and investment opportunities. Lack of a whole of government, whole of community response to climate change. Lack of controls and protections for the environment, both land and sea. The preference given to commercial and economic values rather than community values and imposed on Shoalhaven communities from outside.”

Visioning the Shoalhaven 20 years from now...

Survey respondents identified, almost unanimously, the natural environment and the community as the key attributes that make the Shoalhaven a unique, special and important place to live and visit. The word cloud below (Figure 6) helps demonstrate the frequency in which terms associated with the natural environment and the community were used in the responses.

Q11: “What do you think is unique, special, and important about the Shoalhaven region?”

Q16: “What would your community be like if you had the power to make it any way you wanted?”

Q17: “Please write a few words that clearly describe the Shoalhaven you would like to see 20 years from now.”



Figure 6. Word Cloud: Shoalhaven greatest strengths in withstanding and recovering from extreme weather events

Questions 16 and 17 asked participants to reflect on the areas that can be improved and to briefly describe the Shoalhaven they would like to see 20 years from now. Participants identified a broad number of issues that can be grouped under eight key themes:

- Protection of the natural environment;
- Enhanced community preparedness and response to natural disasters;
- Improved infrastructure & services;
- Promote and support a diversified economy;
- Foster better relationship with First Nations people;
- Improve governance and explore ways to enhance the community's input into planning;
- Maintain current population density; and,
- Develop sustainable and affordable housing for all.

Selected Visioning quotes included:

"A place of smiles"

"Connected, resilient, sustainable, self-sufficient, smart, creative, caring, respectful"

"This community would have a level of connection where people knew their neighbours and participated in local events and organised activities that provided positive interactions for those living here. We build a culture of trust and mutual respect within communities and between government and community. We would be well aware of some of the disaster risks we face and have plans in place should they happen. Communities would have thought about their resilience and worked with emergency and other services to make sure that they are prepared when disasters happen and be in a position to choose between persisting, adapting and transforming. We would be governed by a system of local government that seeks to balance economic development with caring for people and the environment. Our leaders would seek to get behind each other's good ideas rather than always seeking to point score and tear one another down. We would strive for a decarbonised economy and look for opportunities to minimise contributions to global warming and set a benchmark for a sustainable and regenerative economy. We would support local 'doughnut' or at least circular economies that support local production and services..."

Appetite for Action

A vast majority of respondents (84 %) agreed that the Shoalhaven should have an adaptation and resilience strategy and that the community should be involved in the preparation of such a strategy. (Figure 7)

Q19: "In your opinion, should Shoalhaven City Council have an adaptation and resilience strategy?"

Q20: "How do you think the community should be involved in the preparation of an adaptation and resilience strategy?"

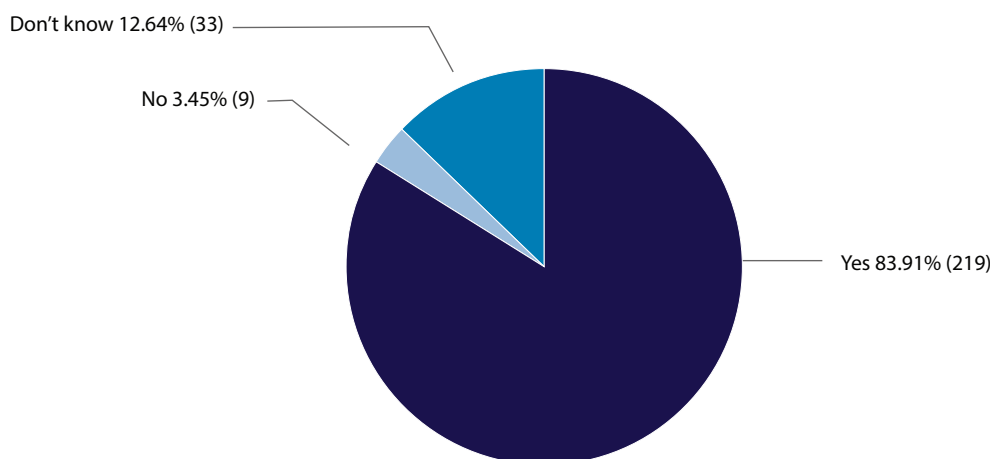


Figure 7. Respondents opinion on the need for a Shoalhaven Adaptation and Resilience Strategy

The methods suggested for community engagement were varied, and included: surveys, use of social media, town hall meetings, workshops, submissions, community forums, etc. It was stressed by participants that all consultation and communication should be handled in a transparent and inclusive manner and should be supported by expert knowledge and endorsed meaningfully by Council. Opportunities for involvement should be well advertised and timing should be carefully considered to enable diversity of participants to attend.

There were a small number of cynical comments about the tokenistic nature of past consultation and about the process being hijacked by specific individuals with personal agendas. Comments were also made about the need to ensure that adequate resources should be allocated for the implementation of such as strategy.

Sense of Efficacy

Most participants (82%) felt that as individuals, they had little or no influence on how the Shoalhaven develops in the future. However, when asked about their ability, as individuals, to influence the development of an adaptation and resilience strategy, 40 percent of respondents felt that they can influence it to some extent (see Figure 8). This number increased to 64 percent, when asked about collective, or community action (see Figure 9).

Q18: "How much influence do you feel that you have over how the Shoalhaven region develops in the future?"

Q21: "How much do you agree with the following statement: as an individual I have the ability to influence the development of an adaptation and resilience strategy."

Q22: "How much do you agree with the following statement: as a community we have the ability to influence the development of an adaptation and resilience strategy."

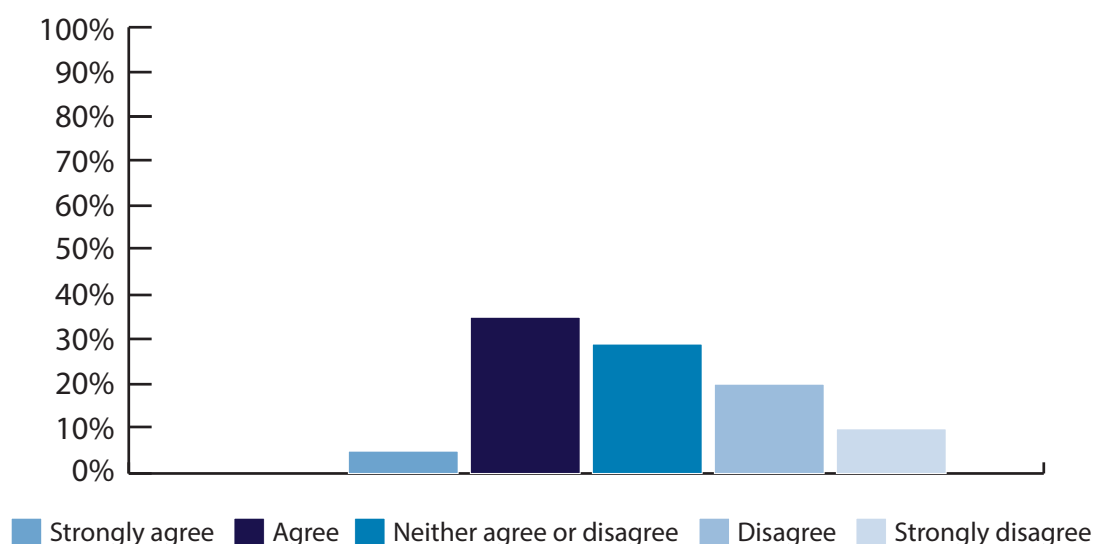


Figure 8. Perceived individual ability to influence the development of an adaptation and resilience strategy

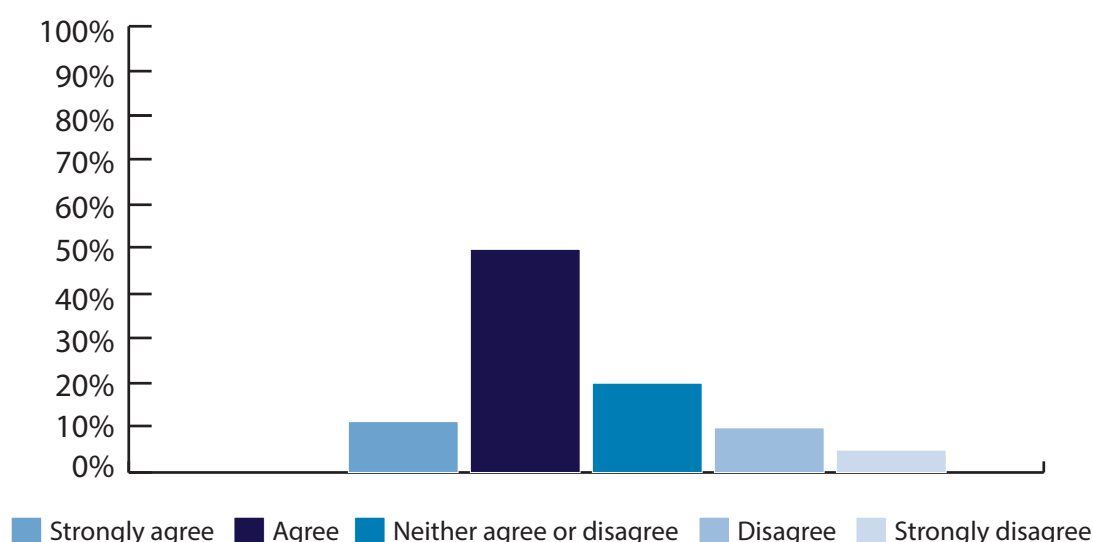


Figure 9. Perceived collective ability to influence the development of an adaptation and resilience strategy

Conclusion

Overall, the survey results are encouraging and are a testimony to a community that is well engaged and enthusiastic about improving their region's capacity to plan, respond and recover from extreme weather events and other disasters. The many detailed responses also revealed an experienced community that has an intrinsic knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of the Shoalhaven and about how the Shoalhaven can become a more adaptive and resilient region.

Despite the relatively high response rate to the survey, it is acknowledged that there are still many voices in the community that haven't yet been heard. The complementary survey, designed to capture the voices of the youth, is still opened and the rate of responses to date is encouraging. Nonetheless, this survey is only the first opportunity for community engagement and it will be followed by a range of activities, including webinars and workshops, facilitated by a team of experts from Griffith University.

The results from this survey will provide an important context to, and input for, the upcoming workshops and will be incorporated into any future community led strategy.

A photograph of kangaroos grazing in a grassy field. In the background, there is a large, leafy tree and a forested hill. The scene is captured in a curved, semi-circular frame that fits into the page layout.

Image:
Pretty Beach

Appendix 1

Location	Number of responses
Bangalee	2
Basin view	3
Bawley Point	2
Bendalong	7
Berrara	1
Berringer lake	1
Berry	7
Bomaderry	8
Burrill Lake	3
Callala Bay	7
Callala Beach	5
Cambewarra	3
Comerong Island	1
Conjola Park	5
Coolangatta	1
Culburra Beach	15
Cunjurong point	3
Curarong	1
Far Meadow	1
Fishermans Paradise	3
Greenwell Point	2
Huskisson	5
Hyams Beach	1
Kangaroo Valley	10
Kings Point	2
Lake Conjola	3
Lake Tabourie	9
Little Forest	1
Mannyana	23

Location	Number of responses
Meroo Meadow	2
Milton	5
Mollymook	6
Myola	1
Narrawallee	2
North Nowra	5
West Nowra	3
South Nowra	1
Nowra	12
Old Erowal Bay	5
Orient Point	2
Pointer Mountain	1
Quiera	1
Sanctuary Point	9
Shoalhaven Heads	22
St Georges Basin	2
Sussex Inlet	10
Swanhaven	2
Tapitallee	2
Ulladulla	9
Vincentia	7
Wandandian	2
Wattamolla	1
Woodstock	1
Woollamia	1
Worrigee	4
Yatta Yatta	1
Yerriyong	1



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