

# 2009 Community, Environment and Sustainability Study

## Feedback to Respondents

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## Thank you!

Last year you completed a questionnaire on natural resource management (NRM) for the Northern Agricultural Catchment Council (NACC). The enclosed cards featuring images of plants found throughout the Northern Agricultural Region are a token of our appreciation.

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## Why we conducted the survey

Part of NACC's role has been to communicate and promote State and Federal government programs aimed at improving land management practices, and in some cases restore degraded landscapes. We observed there was a poor understanding of many key concepts used in our work. These terms included "biodiversity" and "sustainability" as well as confusion about just what it is that NACC's does. To make matters worse we found that different groups of people often understood these terms differently.

It became one of our objectives to improve community understanding these terms and to make clear NACC's role in improving land management in the region. We did this as scientifically as possible. First we conducted a preliminary study in which measured community knowledge and attitudes in much the same way as the survey in which you participated. This was followed by an advertising campaign on the topics previously identified as being poorly understood by the community and land managers. To determine whether the campaign was a success we ran a follow up survey - this is the one you completed. This brief report summarises the follow-up study.

Both this and the previous survey (included here) measured knowledge, attitudes, practices and aspirations (KAPA) of people living in the Northern Agricultural Region - an area of about 8 million hectares - and both surveys noted different groups held often widely differing views on such things as land use, land clearing, genetically modified crops, and concerns about environmental, economic and climate change.

NACC ran four commercials on the topics of sustainability, biodiversity, the role of NACC and good farming practices. These commercials ran on GWN and WIN in June and August 2009. The survey you completed was designed to test if these commercials made a difference in people's knowledge and attitudes.

## Who participated in the survey?

Names and addresses were drawn randomly from many lists. The three main groups we surveyed were: NACC members, farmers, and residents of shires within the Northern Agricultural Region including the City of Geraldton-Greenough. We sent surveys to 822 addresses; about 1% were returned unopened because the people were no longer living there.

In total 353 people returned a questionnaire. This is a good result for a survey. Here is some information about the people who completed the questionnaire:



- 61% were male
- Ages ranged from 19 to over 75 years old with the average age between 50 and 54 years
- 33 were NACC members
- 111 were farmers
- 209 lived in the region but were not farmers

74% completed high school and 20% had studied at university

## Were the commercials effective?

Yes! Your responses tell us this campaign was successful in raising community knowledge on topics related to improved resource use in the region.

For example, the survey conducted before the commercials were aired found that 60% of respondents defined sustainability as only about profitability or the environment. The follow-up survey found between 35-55% of people who saw commercials thought differently about the concept.

When we tested for correct knowledge we found that viewers were more likely than non-viewers to know the right definition:

- Viewers were 12% more likely than non-viewers to know the correct definition of sustainability.
- Viewers were 8% more likely than non-viewers to know the correction definition of biodiversity.
- Viewers were 6% more likely than non-viewers to correctly describe NACC's role.

## What is NACC?

The Northern Agricultural Catchments Council was established in 2003 and is supported by the Australian and Western Australian governments. NACC works with communities and all levels of government to ensure the region remains prosperous, the environment is kept in good health and its communities remain vibrant. NACC's principle focus is to create a healthy and sustainable future for the region.

## What have we done with the information?

Already your responses have made a difference. NACC used the information to improve its messages to the Northern Agricultural Region. It did this through the *Greener Life* supplement in the *Geraldton Guardian* insert and through work with farming and coastal community groups.

Presentations based on this research were made to local and interstate audiences. Policy papers are being prepared which emphasise the effectiveness of such campaigns. These will be delivered to state and federal governments and their agencies. We are optimistic that based on this pilot research further programs will be developed and run throughout Australia.

No social research is possible without the time, patience and effort of its participants, again, thank you.

## Snapshot of attitudes and values

We asked all of you to indicate your views on 32 different statements related to natural resource use. We found some statements were widely supported by almost the entire community. On other statements indicated community opinion was divided and for some statements there was little or no support at all.

### ***Widely supported (70% or more agreed)***

The statements which were most strongly supported were about the importance of protecting the environment. Some of the most strongly supported statements were:

- The continued loss (extinction) of

## What is Sustainability?

*Sustainability* means that natural resources (land, water, air, animals and plants) are used by the present generation in a way that it will not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

NACC promotes sustainability by reconciling often competing environmental, social and economic demands on land use.

## What is Biodiversity?

Australia is one of the most diverse countries on the planet. It is home to more than one million species of plants and animals, many of which are found nowhere else in the world.

Biodiversity is the variety of life: the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, their genes and the ecosystems of which they are a part.

animals concerns me.

- I would like to see more trees and native vegetation in the region.
- My community will suffer if the environment is not looked after.

There was wide support for governments and businesses doing more to look after the environment and respondents believed climate change will be serious for the region and took actions personally they believed would protect the environment.

### ***Somewhat supported (50 -69% agreed)***

Although respondents strongly support looking after the environment, more than half also agreed to statements that support economic

activities which impact on the environment. For example,

- Conservationists and 'greenies' don't realise how important the economy is to our survival.
- Farmers should be allowed to clear the land that belongs to them.

Many also believed farmers should be allowed to use genetically modified crops if it enabled them to continue farming.

More than half believed climate change is the result of human activities but they also agreed 'conflicting information about climate change makes it hard to know whether it is actually happening'. Most

respondents did not understand how carbon emission trading schemes work.

***Not supported (less than 50% agreed)***

Many of the statements not supported by the majority of respondents are controversial. Less than half supported protecting the environment if it meant not having a strong economy. Also not supported was a complete halt to land clearing, developing nuclear power and immigration programs which brought people to regional Australia.

Those statements suggesting climate change was not serious were also not supported.



Respondents fall into three distinct groups based on their attitudes to land management.

The first group (30% of respondents) holds strong environmental values. They consistently give high ratings to statements about protecting the environment. The second group (32%) highly value economic development, often above the needs of the environment. The third group (38%) was more moderate: they tended towards less extreme opinions on statements about the environment and economic development.

For more information about this study or any of NACC's activities call 1 800 821 774 or (08) 9964 9774.