

MyCoast NSW Study

Fact Sheet 2: Understanding and defining the NSW coastal community

Defining the coastal community

A common challenge in coastal management is identifying, understanding, and engaging with the multiple, often contrasting, perspectives of the coastal community. In reality, a homogeneous 'coastal community' simply does not exist. Rather, 'coastal communities' consist of multiple, often overlapping groups of different individuals that are constantly changing spatially and over time. The MyCoast Study identified various communities of place and interest to define the NSW coastal community.

As shown in Table 1 below, communities of place and communities of interest were surveyed as three distinct groups: Coastal Management Professionals (CMPs), General Coastal Users (GCUs), which consisted of six sub-groups, and Coastal Accommodation Businesses (CABs).

Communities of place

Communities of place are groups of people linked through a specific space or place and include coastal tourists, coastal Indigenous communities, frontline coastal erosion residents and volunteer members of Surf Life Saving Clubs.

Communities of Interest

Communities of interest are groups of people linked through a common interest and include coastal management professionals, teachers and coastal council employees.

Table 1. Coastal Communities included in the MyCoast NSW Study.

Coastal Communities	Why chosen?
1. Coastal Management Professionals (CMPs) (n = 62 surveys)	
'Decision makers' working in a coastal related field (e.g. government, consulting, research)	Explore 'expert' opinions of coastal hazards, management options and perceptions of community understandings and preparedness
2. General Coastal Users (GCUs) (n = 993 surveys)	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers (High School and Primary) 2. Volunteer Surf Life Savers 3. Coastal Tourists 4. Coastal Council Employees 5. Coastal Indigenous Communities 6. 'Frontline' coastal residents 	'Coastal communities' of place and interest with; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varying levels of interaction with the coast • High accessibility (for surveys) • Demographic diversity • Various interest levels in NSW coastal management • A broad range of knowledge and understanding
3. Coastal Accommodation Businesses (CABs) (n = 62 surveys)	
Coastal accommodations deriving business largely from their proximity in a coastal location, usually within 1km of coastal waters	Various accommodation types; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caravan parks • Coastal tourist parks • Hotels/motels/resorts To assess understanding, needs and expectations of coastal businesses



The mental model approach

People generally have some kind of existing 'mental model'; a knowledge structure that helps make sense of new information received about a subject. These mental models may be constructed through formal education, personal experience or information received through the media or peers. In the My Coast Study, the mental models we aimed to identify were related to community understandings of coastal erosion, inundation, sea level rise and severe coastal storms.

Mental models have three major functions: i) to serve as a framework to which people 'filter' new information; ii) define how individuals' approach and solve problems

and; iii) help shape actions and behaviours in response to the new information. As any new information received by people will pass through, and be filtered, by existing 'mental models', it is crucial to know what those mental models are before designing a communication campaign. The MyCoast study followed the first two steps of the five-step 'mental model' approach (Figure 1) to define common mental models in regard to coastal hazards and risks, measuring what people might already know about these issues, prior to a formal communication strategy. This lays the ground work for future related studies to fully apply the mental model approach to community understanding of hazards.

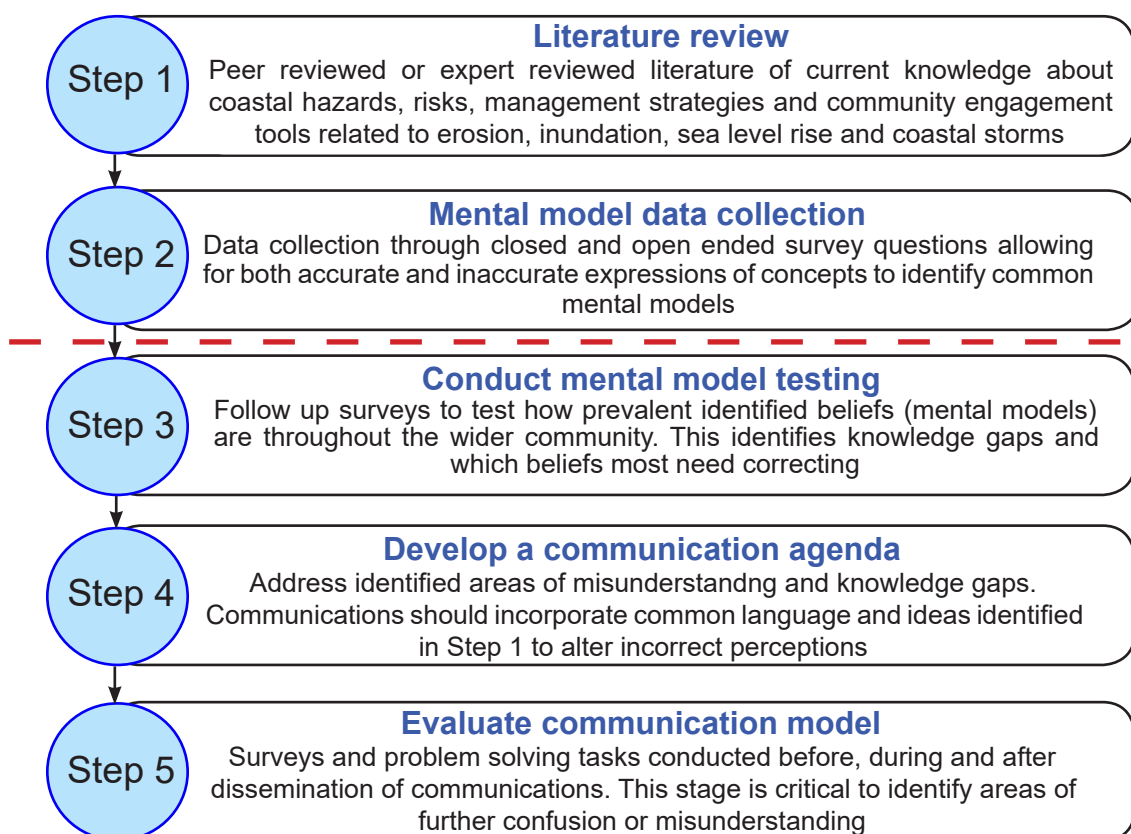


Figure 1. The five step mental model approach. The red line indicates the MyCoast NSW Study's progress; completion of the first two steps, indicating from where future studies may continue.

The full My Coast Report and other Fact Sheets and resources can be found at:
www.bees.unsw.edu.au/nsw-my-coast-study

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