



EPA response to the stakeholder survey

1. Overview

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) commissioned the Ipsos Social Research Institute in early 2013 to conduct an independent survey of the EPA's key stakeholders and members of the general community to gain an in-depth understanding of their views, priorities and expectations.

The intent of the EPA Stakeholder Survey was to encourage stakeholders to provide honest and frank feedback about the environmental regulator and its management of environmental issues in a confidential setting.

Understanding how the EPA's work is perceived by its stakeholders is an important first step to improving and prioritising environmental management practices and establishing better stakeholder engagement activities that foster trust and confidence in the EPA's work.

The survey findings indicate that while stakeholders consider the EPA has many positive attributes and manages many environmental issues well, an improvement is needed in its stakeholder engagement processes, particularly around communicating the EPA's roles, responsibilities and limitations to community and environment groups in a timely manner.

The EPA welcomes all the findings outlined in the survey and thanks the participants for their valuable time and contributions. The EPA will use these findings and recommendations to prioritise its environmental management policies and practices and inform its ongoing stakeholder engagement activities.

The EPA has committed to undertaking a second stakeholder survey in 2015 to measure its ongoing efforts.

2. Summary of findings

The survey consisted of three components:

- Component A was an online survey of 386 NSW residents over the age of 18 chosen at random.
- Component B was an online survey of key stakeholders from community, environment groups, government and industry who had been in contact with the EPA in the previous 12 months. The EPA invited 445 stakeholders to take part in the survey and 130 responded.
- Component C involved 45 interviews and four mini-group discussions, again with those stakeholders who regularly engage with the EPA.

The overall survey findings suggest that while most stakeholders and members of the general population believe the EPA has many positive attributes, such as being professional, trustworthy and independent, it needs to do more to communicate its roles, responsibilities and decision-making processes and thus foster understanding and confidence in its work.

The survey also reports criticism from stakeholders around how quickly they feel the EPA responds to requests and the limited opportunities they believe the EPA offers for stakeholders to engage.

2.1 General population survey findings – Component A

The primary message from the feedback from the general population (Component A) is that the EPA needs to better communicate what it does and how it does it to a wider audience in order to build further knowledge, confidence and trust in its work.

Key findings from the general population survey

- While most people have heard of the EPA, most don't know much about it (p. 27).
- Of those who know something of the EPA, many feel the EPA is professional, trustworthy, independent and an effective regulator. However, fewer believe the EPA is innovative (p. 28).
- Most identify the EPA as the agency to contact about hazardous materials and industrial chemicals, water pollution, air quality and odours and contaminated lands issues (p. 42).
- Most are more likely to contact local councils or other government organisations about native forest logging, illegal dumping, waste management and recycling, excessive noise and littering issues (pp. 35–41).

Meanwhile, the general public see water pollution, the environmental impacts of coal seam gas, the use of radiation and radioactive substances, hazardous materials and industrial chemicals, and contaminated land sites as environmental priorities (p. 43).

Opinions about the management of these and others issues varies, with many respondents rating the management of waste and recycling, water pollution and air quality and odours as good, but illegal dumping and littering as poor (p. 44).

2.2 Key stakeholder survey findings – components B & C

The primary messages from the stakeholder survey and interviews (components B and C) is that the EPA needs to improve systems and practices to ensure stakeholders feel they are being heard and better articulate how it manages the role of both an independent regulator and an advisor to industry to instil greater confidence in its work.

Overall, the feedback from key stakeholders indicates there is a diverse range of both positive and constructive opinions about the EPA's performance, which is to be expected given that the EPA's stakeholders often have competing priorities and views.

Key findings from the stakeholder survey and interviews

- When the perceptions of all the stakeholder groups are combined, most feel the EPA is professional, trustworthy, approachable, technically proficient, independent and objective in its decision-making (p. 54). However, fewer feel the EPA is transparent, timely, responsive, efficient and innovative.
- Most are happy with the EPA's communication methods, which typically include phone, email and face-to-face channels (p. 49), but some would like the EPA to communicate more proactively.

- Stakeholders who regularly engage with the EPA were asked to rate the EPA's management of a number of issues. The findings show that generally stakeholders are satisfied with the management of radiation and radioactive substance use, contaminated lands, noise and water pollution, and waste management and recycling (p. 59). However, fewer stakeholders are satisfied with the management of littering and forestry issues.

2.3 Ipsos recommendations

Ipsos Social Research Institute has outlined eight primary recommendations, plus numerous sub-recommendations. The majority of these recommendations are interrelated and aim to address stakeholder concerns about the way the EPA communicates.

Ipsos recommendations

1. Clearly communicate the EPA's role to stakeholders
2. Be as transparent as possible in all transactions and communications with stakeholders
3. Timeliness – ensure that the EPA understands and manages stakeholder expectations around prompt responses to submissions and enquiries
4. Responsiveness – ensure that the EPA understands and manages stakeholder expectations around how it responds to submissions and enquiries
5. Demonstrate how the EPA balances competing stakeholder priorities and evidence in the regulation process
6. Communicate the EPA's approach to compliance
7. Communicate how the EPA ensures appropriate levels of staffing and access to expertise
8. Ensure consultation with stakeholders is meaningful.

The recommendations and sub-recommendations are detailed in Chapter 6 of the Ipsos report.

3. EPA response to the survey findings and recommendations

The EPA has reviewed the eight primary recommendations and 28 sub-recommendations and is committed to making improvements that will directly address its stakeholders' key concerns.

The EPA recognises that many of these concerns focus on the need for the EPA to improve opportunities for communication and stakeholder engagement. It is for this reason that the EPA's Stakeholder Engagement and Governance branch was established – to prioritise communicating with our stakeholders more effectively. This survey is just one example of the EPA's commitment to understanding stakeholder needs and priorities.

The survey findings and recommendations will be used to inform the EPA's Stakeholder Strategy, which focuses on improving communication and consultation with all stakeholders. They will also inform the development of the EPA's Stakeholder Engagement Guidelines, which will be published on the EPA website in early 2014.

The EPA is committed to being an independent, transparent and strong regulator. In 2013, the EPA published its [Compliance Policy](#), which provides additional transparency about how it regulates industry in NSW. The EPA will complement this policy with specific strategies, such as the new compliance strategies for the Crown and Private Native Forestry sectors. The EPA has also revised its [Prosecution Guidelines](#).

The EPA is improving ways in which members of the public can report environmental incidents, either online, via mobile devices or through Environment Line on 131 555.

Members of the community can access information about the performance of their industrial neighbours through publicly available pollution monitoring and annual performance information supplied by licensed businesses. Other information that the EPA makes publicly available includes details of the statutory notices, penalty notices and prosecutions it issues.

In September 2013, the EPA released its draft risk-based licensing framework for public consultation. Risk-based licensing will ensure all environment protection licensees receive an appropriate level of regulation, based on the level of risk they pose to people and the environment. The risk assessment process will identify site-specific risks and environmental issues for each premises. This will help licensees address these issues, guide the EPA to focus regulatory attention, and provide more public information about industry performance. It will also provide stronger incentives for licensees to improve their environmental performance and compliance.

In addition to updating the EPA Stakeholder Strategy and developing the Stakeholder Engagement Guidelines, the EPA is committed to implementing specific initiatives to address the survey recommendations. These include:

- continuing to update and improve the EPA website to provide timely responses and engagement channels
- expanding customer service training for all staff to ensure a higher level of service delivery and engagement
- implementing a subject matter expert program to improve stakeholder access to technical knowledge and expertise
- making the EPA's Compliance Policy, Risk Licensing Tool and regulation processes more visible to community and environment groups to improve understanding of the EPA's current consultation requirements and practices
- strengthening the EPA's communication channels (by introducing a newsletter and subscriptions to alert lists, and increasing opportunities for face-to-face meetings) to better inform and consult with all stakeholders
- undertaking a second stakeholder survey in 2015 to assess what progress has been achieved.

Implementing effective stakeholder engagement activities is a key result area of the [EPA's Strategic Plan 2013–16](#) and recognises the important role stakeholders play in the success of the EPA and its work in improving environmental outcomes.

The EPA is committed to being a world class regulator and an exemplar organisation, and this survey and the EPA's response to the findings, recommendations and stakeholder concerns are important steps to achieving these goals.

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