

Community Values for Melbourne Water's Urban Waterway assets

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Land managers are increasingly interested in incorporating the views of the public into decision making. This report describes the outcomes of a project exploring what the residents of metropolitan Melbourne think and feel about Melbourne's urban waterways and their management.

This project uses standard social science methods (e.g. psychometric survey) to measure what the public thinks about Melbourne's waterways including rivers, creeks, lakes and wetlands. In particular, people's values, sense of place and attitudes towards Melbourne's waterway are measured as well as their acceptance of management actions occurring around waterways. Three sampling methods were used to increase the range of views being expressed – a postal questionnaire, an online panel, and a survey of friends groups. Over 1,400 responses to the survey were received.

Six different ways that people valued Melbourne's waterways were identified: Natural (e.g. biodiversity), Experiential (e.g. aesthetics), Social (e.g. meeting other people), Cultural (e.g. historic things), Ecosystem Services (e.g. filtering pollution) and Setting for active recreation (e.g. canoeing). These values were all important to respondents. Three kinds of sense of place for Melbourne's waterways were identified: place attachment (e.g. makes me feel happy), place dependence (e.g. is unique and no other place can compare) and place identity (e.g. allows me to be myself). Overall, respondents had strong sense of place for Melbourne's waterways.

The acceptability of a range of management actions were grouped into three categories: preventative management practices (e.g. preventing erosion), naturalising waterways (e.g. restoring native trees, shrubs and grasses), human centred management (e.g. creating trails and paths). Overall, there was strong public acceptance for all types of management occurring around waterways (other than removing native vegetation). However, there was some conflict in acceptability based on values. People with stronger Natural values found naturalising waterways and preventative management actions more acceptable and were less likely to find human centred management actions acceptable. While people with stronger Social values and valuing waterways for a Setting for active recreation were more likely to find human centred management acceptable.

Attitudes towards Melbourne's waterways were also categorised into three groups: enjoyment of use and knowledge, satisfaction and feeling safe around Melbourne's waterways. There was also some conflict in attitudes based on values. People with stronger Social values and Ecosystem Services values were more satisfied with Melbourne's waterways, while people with stronger Natural value were less satisfied with the waterways. People with strong Experiential values and

having a strong sense of place attachment for Melbourne's waterways were more likely to enjoy using the waterways.

This understanding of the value basis of management acceptability and satisfaction with Melbourne's waterways could be used to help improve the management of Melbourne's waterways, and to better engage the community with waterways and their management. In particular, understanding how to improve levels of satisfaction for people with strong natural values could lead to significant improvement in overall levels of satisfaction given the high levels of natural values in the community. Understanding the breadth of values for waterways in the community may help with interpretation and engagement activities, to ensure that the broader range of values in the community are being incorporated into policy and planning.

This project has demonstrated that the values based questionnaire is useful for measuring the public's values and attitudes for Melbourne's waterways, and why places are important to people. It also shows that values are useful predictors of people's attitudes to waterways and their acceptance of management, which could provide guidance to Melbourne Water on management decisions that may lead to public conflict.