

W17 Social Values: Revisiting social values in the Healthy Waterways Strategy - from conceptual framework to evaluation

Objective(s)

This project aims to strengthen the conceptualization of key social values that are identified within the Healthy Waterways Strategy (HWS), and which are assessed through the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Framework. In this first year, the research objective is to develop a more in-depth understanding of community perceptions, experiences and well-being outcomes related to the key social values of Amenity, Recreation and Community Connection.

Why this research is important

Melbourne Water makes significant investments in a variety of programs on the basis that these improve the social values of waterways. These investments range from major works and maintenance along waterways, through to community participation and capacity building. Further understanding of how communities perceive and experience these social values, and the ways in which specific management actions may deliver or compromise these values, would provide a more solid evidence base from which to select, justify and evaluate these investments.

The Mid-term review of the HWS recommended the development of new indicators for social values. In preparation for the next Strategy, there is an opportunity to review, test and refine the conceptual model. The research would then enable the review of the performance objectives related to key social values for the next HWS and provide direction on alternatives for evaluating the progress towards targets.

Contribution to Melbourne Water research priorities

- Regional Performance Objective 43: The social values framework, information and methods used to develop values assessments, targets and performance objectives are further developed and improved during the life of the Healthy Waterways Strategy.
- Addressing numerous research priorities identified at the 2018 HWS research prioritization workshop, including: L1.1 - Developing methods to understand social perceptions of waterway management at a finer-scale to better understand social values and most appropriate management responses; and L1.5 - Testing and refinement of the HWS social value conceptual models, with a focus on critical assumption W17 Social Values: Revisiting social values in the Healthy Waterways Strategy - from conceptual framework to evaluations.

Approach

This is a multi-year project commencing in 2024, to be reviewed each year. The staging of the work is designed to support the preparation of the next Healthy Waterways Strategy. In 2024-2025, the research will proceed in two stages, both of which provide foundation for reviewing the structure of the social values conceptual model. The two stages are:

- 1) conduct a scoping review of social science literature on modelling and assessing social values for blue-green spaces; and
- 2) informed by this scoping review, commence empirical research by designing and conducting 'walk-along' interviews to investigate community experiences and perceptions of waterways.

Key areas of research throughout the lifetime of the project will likely include: the relative importance that members of the community attribute to the key social values and experiences in the conceptual model; the interactions and potential points of tension between different social values and with environmental values; and approaches to developing indicators and methods of assessment for social values.

Key Outputs

- Discussion paper or technical report on modelling and assessing social values.
- Journal article on community experiences and perceptions of waterways.

Expected benefits

- Improved understanding of the diverse ways in which social values have been modelled and validated within current academic research on blue-green spaces.
- Early guidance as to areas of development for the social values conceptual model.

For more information

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