

Case Study: Moreton Bay's Living Coast Plan

By Elle Price, Moreton Bay Regional Council



Highlights at a glance

- Moreton Bay Regional Council (MBRC) successfully involved a disengaged, sometimes hostile community in developing a long-term response to coastal hazards and climate change threats.
 - Coastal communities are at risk from coastal hazards, including erosion, tidal inundation and cyclones, which are all expected to worsen with climate change. Rising sea levels may see some low-lying coastal areas inundated by seawater.
 - In 2020, MBRC set out to develop a Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategy called the Living Coast Plan, which would identify coastal hazards and predicted changes out to 2100 and develop adaptation pathways to reduce or avoid the risks associated with coastal hazards and climate change.
 - At the time, MBRC had poor relationships with its coastal communities as a result of past planning approaches and a decade of poor engagement. The initial community response to this project was one of apprehension and mistrust.
 - MBRC worked with the community over a two-and-a-half-year period to build trust and involve the community directly in the planning process.
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- MBRC's engagement goal was to create informed and engaged communities whose understanding of coastal hazards brings an ability to *respond with resilience*. This goal recognises the need for a collaborative approach to responding to coastal change and building resilience.
 - The collaborative engagement process aimed to:
 1. Ensure data capture and knowledge sharing across Council departments and state government agencies
 2. Develop partnerships and knowledge sharing arrangements across the whole of the community to build understanding and resilience
 3. Understand and incorporate local knowledge, experience and insights in the Living Coast Plan.
 - Early engagement included a community values survey completed by more than 1,000 residents, 12 drop in events attended by more than 350 people, and meetings with community groups and local leaders. The outcomes reported back to the community identified values, and specific concerns about the management of coastal hazards in environmental areas and to cultural heritage sites. This reinforced the need for a holistic strategy.
 - These outcomes supported direct input to plan development from a Community Reference Group, which resulted in a Living Coast Plan that addresses community concerns and provides opportunities for at-risk communities to adapt over time.
 - Feedback on the draft plan from the broader community confirmed the approach to long-term coastal management met community expectations and provided direction to MBRC on priority actions.
 - Key outcomes of engagement include:
 1. Improved community understanding of current and future risks, and of the role of adaptation measures in reducing or managing risks.
 2. The development of a new approach to community resilience planning using an all hazards, all stakeholders, full disaster management cycle approach in response to feedback from at-risk community members.
 3. Improved data sharing arrangements and relationships with state government agencies leading to coordinated implementation of current and planned future adaptation responses.
 - Key takeaways from engagement include:
 1. Complex or 'wicked' problems are best solved by involving all stakeholders in developing a shared response.
 2. Community trust is essential to such projects and can be rebuilt through consistent and ongoing engagement.
 3. Upskilling a small group of people to allow them to provide meaningful input to the Plan was both very successful and highly appreciated by CRG members.
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Key search words: Public, Government - Local / Municipal, coastal hazards, climate change adaptation, extended consultation, survey, community reference group, collaborate

Map of the Moreton Bay Region showing major coastal communities



1.0 Objectives

Moreton Bay Regional Council (MBRC) is the local government body responsible for communities in the northern part of Moreton Bay in South East Queensland.

Coastal hazards such as erosion, tidal inundation and cyclones have always posed a risk to coastal areas and communities. Some communities in the region are already impacted by erosion and tidal inundation threatening homes and public infrastructure. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of existing hazards, with the addition of rising sea levels inundating low-lying coastal areas.

MBRC is one of 30 Queensland coastal councils participating in the state government-funded QCoast2100 program. This program aims to develop a strategic long-term approach to managing coastal hazards, adapting to coastal change and building resilient communities. Delivery is managed by the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ).

The minimum standards under the QCoast2100 funding arrangement include targeted consultation with key stakeholders, a 28-day formal public display of the draft plan with an opportunity to make formal submissions, and a public document setting out Council's response to submissions received. The LGAQ encourages a consultative and transparent approach to communication with the community but does not mandate it.

MBRC was conscious that its coastal communities had low levels of trust in Council. There was a history of poor communication and engagement over the previous 10 years, exacerbated by contentious issues around planning for coastal areas, including planning scheme overlays. A newly elected mayor had committed to improving engagement and transparency and established a new Community Engagement Team within Council, but a significant level of community distrust and dissatisfaction with Council's planning processes remained.

Considering the complexity of the issues to be addressed and the community's low level of trust in the Council to plan for coastal hazard management, MBRC decided community engagement on

Key points

- Coastal hazard and climate change adaptation planning for established communities
- Some communities already regularly impacted by coastal hazards
- Community hostility and lack of trust in Council planning processes
- Broad and deep community engagement to identify and incorporate community values and preferences in plan
- More than 1,000 people involved in early consultation with a high level of confidence in outcomes
- 12-person Community Reference group spent 30 hours in workshops and activities
- Very high community values for marine and terrestrial environments and species
- High level of acceptance of climate change risks and the need for action
- Prioritises adaptation and resilience to hazards to allow property owners to keep their homes and communities to adapt over time to changes
- Shared ownership of actions to adapt to coastal hazards by both Council and property owners.

Coastal erosion at Woorim.



this project needed to be transparent, inclusive, strongly promoted to raise awareness of the planning, responsive to community concerns, and would need to allow time for the community to take the journey with Council. Council also chose to focus on adaptation and resilience to hazards in the new plan.

The goal of engagement was to 'create informed and engaged communities whose understanding of coastal hazards brings an ability to *respond with resilience*'. Project objectives were to:

- Ensure collaboration and governance across Council departments to ensure data capture and knowledge sharing while building on our internal capability to explore the risks and mitigations to Council assets
- Ensure consistent and coordinated messaging is provided to all interested stakeholders with opportunity to provide input and feedback into the project
- Build community understanding and resilience towards potential coastal hazard causes, impacts and mitigations through development of partnerships and knowledge sharing arrangements
- Understand and incorporate valuable local knowledge, experience and insights to inform both understanding of tangible and intangible community assets and potential adaptation measures.

Engagement used a 'T Model', starting with broad and shallow engagement across the whole of the region to understand community values, preferences and priorities. The outcomes of this phase were shared with the community through a report of the findings that would be used in development of the draft plan.

The narrow and deep engagement phase made use of a Community Reference Group (CRG) representing a range of local community priorities, including members of protest groups formed against previous planning decisions. The CRG was supported by technical experts and educational activities, including a wave tank and site visits, to incorporate their local knowledge and understanding into the development of the draft plan. Through a total of 30 hours of workshops and activities, CRG members ensured their local knowledge and understanding was incorporated in the Living Coast Plan.

The final mandatory display period was supported by broad promotion and allowed community members to make submissions formally in writing, via an online interactive map, or verbally at community events.

The result of this engagement approach was a sense of community ownership of the Living Coast Plan and endorsement of the outcomes by some of MBRC's strongest former critics. Local communities are involved and excited to support Council in implementing the Living Coast Plan actions.



Regular king / storm tide inundation in the community of Toorbul.

2.0 Methodology

The iterative and adaptive engagement program was delivered between November 2020 (launch of the community values survey) and January 2023 (final CRG meeting). Each phase of engagement included both online and face-to-face tools, in-person support at Council libraries and customer service centres, and a dedicated project email address for direct contact with the project team. A breakdown of the delivery timing, tools and levels of engagement is provided in the table on the following page.

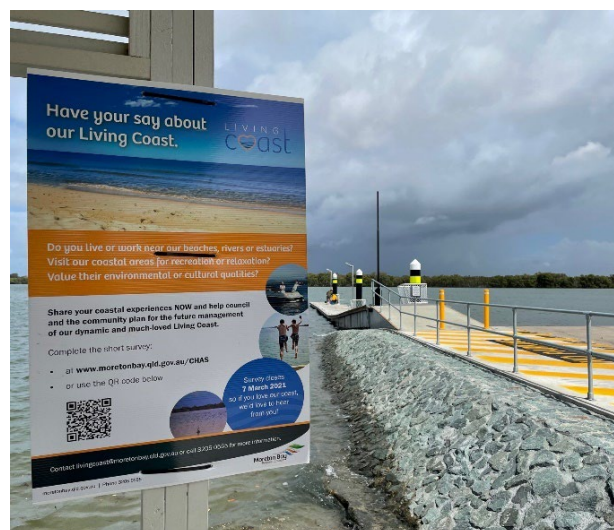
Consultation started with a community values survey designed to capture the priorities and preferences of community members, both at a regional scale and at a sub-regional local scale. The closing date for the survey was extended from December 2020 to March 2021 and the number of drop in sessions was doubled in response to both a negative initial community response and a severe weather incident that impacted coastal communities. This extension and expansion of the Phase 1 engagement period allowed more residents to be involved in the project and contribute to coastal management planning.

The survey was supported by an intensive community education and awareness campaign, which included:

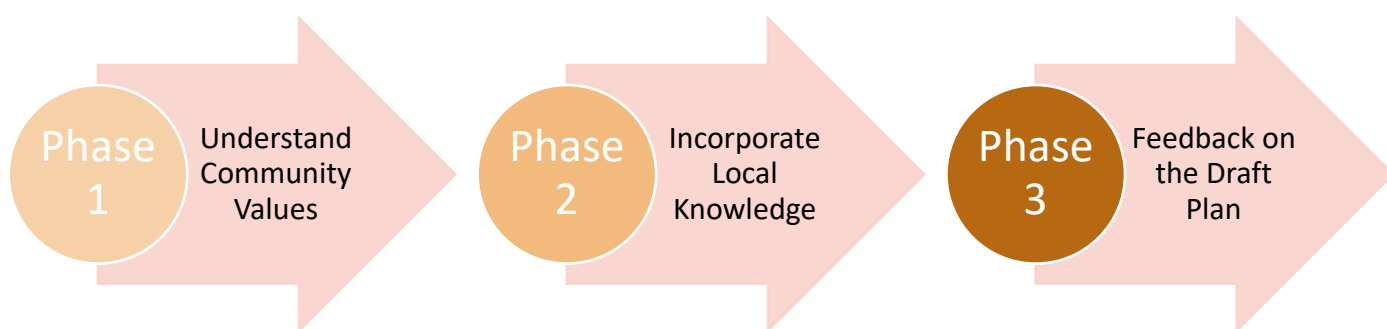
- Distribution of project information to over 100,000 properties in coastal communities
- A suite of educational fact sheets on coastal landscape processes, coastal hazards and existing management practices
- Direct email promotion to community groups and organisations
- Promotional signage, including Variable Message Signs alongside roads into coastal communities
- Project officer attendance at eight community group meetings in coastal communities
- 12 community drop in events, all promoted through social media, newspaper advertising, local signage, emails to community groups and active promotion by local Councillors
- Media statements and social media content
- Promotional displays in Council libraries and customer service centres, including support to complete surveys online or on paper.



A community drop in event at Beachmere, February 2021.



An example of promotional signage at popular coastal locations across the region.



Engagement activity breakdown by quarters										
July 2020	October 2020	January 2021	April 2021	July 2021	October 2021	January 2022	April 2022	July 2022	October 2022	January 2023
Establish	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 2	Phase 2	Phase 2	Phase 2		Phase 3
Collaborate	Consult			Involve					Consult	
Set up governance structures	Educational materials, including video			EOI process for establishment of Community Reference Group (CRG)					Statutory public display period	
Engage State Government	Online and face-to-face engagement activities, including 12 community drop in events			Independent facilitator engaged to lead CRG					Online and face-to-face consultation activities, including five community drop in events	
Engage Traditional Owners	Community values survey (online or paper)			Initial familiarisation event for CRG members					Leverage community partnerships	
Engage technical consultants.	Meetings with community organisations and representatives			CRG knowledge sharing activity on history of coastal hazards					CRG workshop on outcomes of consultation and input to final Plan	
	Meetings with Kabi Kabi and Turrbal Elders			Private online hub established for CRG members ongoing knowledge sharing and discussion					Feedback report to community on outcomes.	
	Broad promotional activities			CRG workshops and activities contributing directly to development of draft Living Coast Plan, including educational activities to upskill participants						
	Feedback report to community on outcomes.			Ongoing engagement with Traditional Owners						
				Internal Council Technical Working Group and external state government collaboration.						

The outcomes of the first phase of engagement were reported back to the community and formed the basis of understanding community values and priorities for later stages of the project. Data analysis and reporting considered results across both a regional scale and a more localised community scale, recognising the diversity of communities in the region.

View the interim engagement report at [this link](#).

Sub-regions used for reporting back survey findings at a local level.



MBRC established a Community Reference Group (CRG) made up of 12 community members who collectively represented all of the sub-regional areas, recreational user interests, environmental interest groups, coastal property owners in at-risk areas, and outspoken critics of Council's previous planning projects.

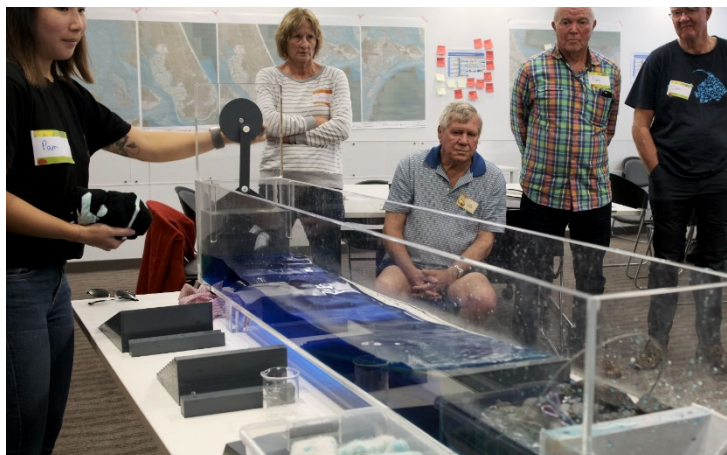
CRG activities included a mix of upskilling activities, knowledge sharing opportunities and workshops to feed directly into development of the draft Living Coast Plan and supporting reports. Education and knowledge sharing were an important part of the CRG process to make sure members could meaningfully influence decision-making.

Activities included:

- An informal 'get to know you' introductory event
- A private online hub, including opportunities to share documents and photos and a discussion forum
- An exploration of historical coastal hazard events and impacts (attended by Elders of both First Nations groups)
- Workshop 1: identifying the impacts of current and projected future coastal hazards on communities
- Workshop 2: demonstration of adaptation options using a wave tank, and identification of preferred adaptation pathways for coastal areas
- Workshop 3: site visit exploration of a community with a mix of cultural, environmental, recreational and residential assets at risk of future inundation as a result of climate change, and discussion of comparative socioeconomic values of different asset types
- Introduction to the draft Living Coast Plan prior to community consultation, using a Big Map to demonstrate adaptation pathways and priority actions for each locality
- Workshop 4 (following public consultation on the draft): consideration of community feedback on draft Living Coast Plan and making recommendations on incorporating feedback into final document.

Consultation on the draft plan was open for 33 days, with promotion of consultation activities beginning one week prior to the consultation period. Consultation activities included:

- Sharing the draft plan and excerpts specific to each coastal community online and in print at libraries and customer service centres



CRG activity demonstrating adaptation options with a wave tank.



CRG Big Map exploration of proposed adaptation pathways in the draft Living Coast Plan.

- Supporting information about adaptation pathways
- Five drop in sessions in the most at-risk communities
- An online interactive map to provide feedback
- Promotion via social media, signage in coastal areas, Councillor channels, and direct invitation to phase 1 participants and local community groups
- Meetings with community groups and organisations in at-risk communities.

MBRC chose to define ‘submissions’ as any feedback that could be attributed to someone, including verbal feedback at drop in events, emails, pins on the interactive map, and formal written submissions.

The CRG met for the final time after community consultation on the draft plan to review feedback and provide advice to Council on improving the Living Coast Plan. As a result, MBRC is confident the plan reflects the values, priorities and preferences of the Moreton Bay community and will stand the test of time for implementation.



Participants could choose to provide feedback through online tools, in writing or verbally.

The engagement project had a total budget of \$100,000 and was supported throughout delivery by 1x FTE engagement officer, ramping up with additional Council community engagement support to deliver face-to-face activities as required. A consultant was engaged to facilitate the CRG.

The initial establishment of the project included establishing relationships with the Kabi Kabi and Turrbal peoples, the Traditional Custodians of coastal areas of the region, and establishing relationships with key asset owners and authorities that would likely be affected by the project (Marine Parks Authority, Transport and Main Roads, Queensland Rail, Unity Water, etc.). MBRC also established an internal project governance model as outlined in the table below.

Body and role	Membership
Project Steering Group Project oversight and direction	Councillors Council department directors
Project Control Group Consistency across Council planning and policy	Managers and technical officers from affected Council departments (per list for Technical Working Group)
Technical Working Group Regular input to planning	Council department officers from: Community engagement

	<p>Media and communications</p> <p>Parks and recreation</p> <p>Asset maintenance</p> <p>Strategic planning</p> <p>Coastal waterways and drainage</p> <p>Environment</p> <p>Disaster management</p> <p>Natural hazards management</p>
<p>State / Local Government Forums</p> <p>Input and learnings from other jurisdictions</p>	<p>State and local government officers working in the QCoast2100 program</p>

Alignment with IAP2 Core Values for the practice of public participation

IAP2 Core Values	Example of how this was considered in the design of your project methodology
1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process	The project recognised that a holistic approach to managing coastal change through adaptation and resilience measures would require partnerships across the community and a shared responsibility and commitment to action. Participation was heavily promoted in affected communities, resulting in more than 1,000 participants in the initial community values survey. Local knowledge and values were actively sought out and incorporated in planning. Traditional Custodians were directly involved in identifying high-value assets and preferred management approaches.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision	The project methodology was deliberately transparent and reported back the outcomes of the initial community values survey before detailed development of the draft Plan started. MBRC publicly committed to listening to the community and incorporating valuable local knowledge into the plan. CRG members had the final say on how community feedback on the draft would be incorporated into the final Plan to reflect community values and priorities.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision-makers	Supporting materials outlined the scope and purpose of the Living Coast Plan and the importance of sustainable long-term planning that recognises the needs and interests of all stakeholders, including community members, future residents, Council and other asset owners (power, water, roads, etc.). Addressing the challenges of coastal change will require cooperation and a shared commitment to action. CRG members represented diverse interests, including environmental conservationists, coastal property owners, community leaders and recreation users to ensure planning captured all user needs.

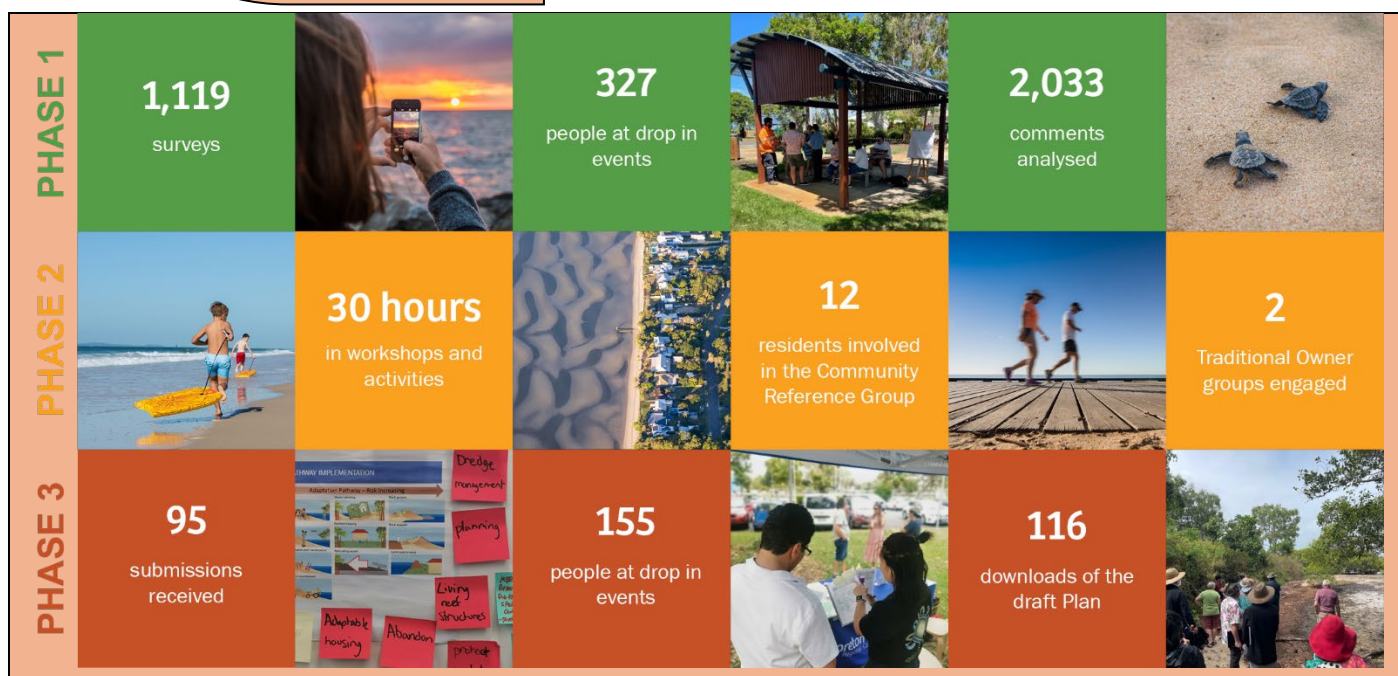
<p>4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision</p>	<p>The project was broadly promoted to coastal communities through letter box drops, newsletter content, newspaper advertising, social media, signage in public spaces and partnerships with community organisations. Community members were encouraged to be involved with educational resources, assistance at libraries and customer service centres, and drop in community sessions. The extended phase 1 consultation period allowed more people to have their say in the process. Traditional Custodians and other key stakeholders were actively sought out for engagement.</p>
<p>5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate</p>	<p>The project methodology allowed participants to engage online, face-to-face or directly with the project team via phone or email. This includes submissions on the draft Plan, which allowed for verbal feedback or pins on an interactive map to be considered formal submissions. CRG members were consulted early in the process to determine whether they preferred to meet on weekday evenings or on weekends during the day.</p>
<p>6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way</p>	<p>Consultation was supported by educational resources in print and video format, and by the opportunity to talk to project team members at drop in events. CRG members were provided confidential internal project reports and hazard maps, and were supported through educational and knowledge sharing tools, including an online hub, wave tank demonstration of adaptation options and a site visit to an at-risk area. The educational aspect was essential to ensuring the community and CRG members were able to provide meaningful feedback that could directly impact project outcomes.</p>
<p>7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision</p>	<p>Outcomes were reported back to the community at two critical points – following the initial consultation period and after consultation on the draft. Workshop outcomes were continuously shared and discussed with CRG members. This reporting back ensured the community and CRG members knew what Council had heard from them and how it would be used in developing the Living Coast Plan.</p>

'I am both hopeful and positive that the priority actions and pathways within this document will work towards ensuring both a healthy environment and a healthy and resilient community well into the future.'

Submission on draft Living Coast Plan

'With the advent of climate change and potential tide rises, there has been an ongoing concern that we might lose access to the way of life we have enjoyed. (The project) caused great worries to us, and rumours and falsehoods set to scare us abounded – in less than two years working with us, you both have made the much needed positive change to this perception.'

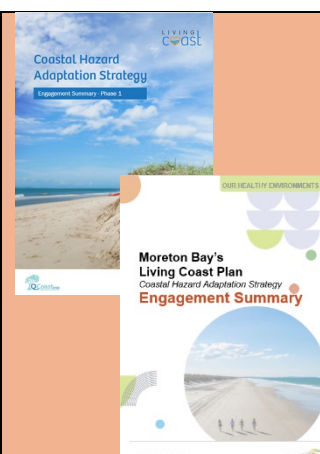
Community group leader



A community drop in event at Deception Bay during phase 1 consultation.



CRG members examining a Kabi Kabi midden and rock carvings at risk from rising sea levels during phase 2 consultation.



3.0 Manage engagement

Managing risks

Key engagement risks identified at the start of the project included:

- Scepticism of climate change risks (including rising sea levels) resulting in rejection of modelling, outcomes and recommendations
- Low levels of trust in Council resulting in poor participation levels, myths and misinformation spreading, and doubt in Council's commitment to implement the plan
- Poor general understanding of coastal hazards, the impacts of coastal hazards, climate change, adaptation and management options, and the role of Council in addressing hazards.

Engagement addressed these risks by including educational materials, links to external supporting information, visual tools, including videos, and historical photos of the impacts of coastal hazards in the local area. Messaging included stories of past and present-day impacts of coastal hazards as well as projected future impacts to reduce the influence of scepticism.

The engagement process was designed to improve trust and build relationships with community members. This included transparent sharing of information, broad awareness-raising strategies, and face-to-face interactions with both individual residents and community organisations. The community's role and opportunities to influence outcomes were clearly defined by Council communications. Project timeframes ensured community members had time to access, understand and respond to consultation activities.



Historical resources included this image of Mrs Harriet Bell and the remains of her Woody Point home following an 1893 cyclone.

Adapting to meet the communities needs

Initial engagement planning had included a six-week timeframe for phase 1 with six community drop in events, but this was extended to four months with six additional drop in events to meet the community's needs. The project was initially met with hostility from some coastal communities, largely related to the historical planning issues and mistrust of Council. This was compounded by anxiety following a severe weather event on 5 December 2020, which caused erosion and inundation in several communities. MBRC acknowledged these concerns and the impact of severe weather on the capacity to participate by extending and increasing engagement activity. This helped to build understanding and trust in both the project and the process. By providing more time to understand and participate, and more opportunities to meet directly with

the project team, MBRC reinforced their commitment to working with the community in developing the Living Coast Plan. This additional investment in the initial engagement phase resulted in a strong base to build later phases on.

Impact to opportunity

In February 2022, the Moreton Bay Region, along with many other parts of eastern Australia, experienced a severe weather event causing major flooding. Coincidentally, this event happened on the same weekend a CRG workshop was scheduled to discuss the impacts of coastal hazards on local communities. MBRC postponed the event by two weeks and restructured the format to document the impacts of the recent flood event on communities, capturing the local knowledge and stories of community members to help identify the socioeconomic impacts of the event. This understanding of flood impacts was easily translated to tidal inundation impacts, including isolation of communities, access to food, medication and services, and how communities came together to manage impacts. This redirection turned a disaster event into an opportunity to capture local knowledge that significantly improved Council's understanding of the social impacts of coastal hazards.



Many coastal communities were isolated by flooded roads during the February 2022 event.

4.0 Outcomes, impact and insights

Reach and effectiveness

MBRC's investment in broad promotion of the project resulted in very high participation rates, including:

- 1,119 respondents to the community values survey, including 2,033 free text comments
- 327 people attending pop-up events during phase 1, and 155 people at pop ups during phase 3
- 880 visits to the project website and 733 document downloads, including 161 downloads of the draft Living Coast Plan during phase 3
- 95 submissions on the draft Plan, including written, verbal and online feedback.

Analysis of phase 1 survey participant demographics have determined the sample is statistically representative of Moreton Bay Region's coastal communities.

Outcomes and impacts

Engagement outcomes were publicly shared at two key points during the project – at the conclusion of phases 1 and 3. This ensured community feedback was transparently shared and could be seen to directly influence project outcomes. The mayor and councillors were briefed multiple times throughout the process to keep them informed of engagement activities and results, as well as how feedback was being used in developing the plan.

The Living Coast Plan has been formally endorsed by several coastal community groups and organisations, and residents of at-risk communities are actively seeking opportunities to participate in implementation actions. Former critics of Council have recognised the effectiveness of engagement on this project and are now advocating for a similar engagement approach on other projects.

CRG feedback

A survey at the conclusion of the CRG process evaluated participants' perception of the effectiveness of the process and identified opportunities for improvement. Findings of the CRG evaluation included:

- All CRG members felt the Living Coast Plan had effectively incorporated local knowledge through the CRG process
- CRG members particularly valued the practical educational activities and would have liked to see more
- 80% of CRG members wanted to continue to be involved in the implementation of the Plan or in other Council planning projects
- The CRG process was effective at bringing stakeholders who had been hostile towards Council into the planning process and creating community advocates.

A new approach to resilience planning

Residents of some of the most at-risk communities told Council they wanted resilience planning to recognise the interaction of coastal hazards with other hazards, such as overland flooding or isolation by inundated roads.

This feedback led directly to MBRC developing a new approach to community resilience planning using an all hazards, all stakeholders, whole of disaster planning cycle approach. This new model is currently being piloted with some of Moreton Bays most at-risk communities and directly involves local residents in identifying the risks to their community, vulnerable residents that may need additional support, opportunities within their communities, actions Council and other asset owners (state, infrastructure, etc.) can take to support community resilience, and actions property owners can take to improve the resilience of their homes and businesses.

Lessons and innovation

Evaluation of the engagement project highlighted some key takeaways:

- It was more important to allow the community time to feel confident in the project than to meet a predetermined project schedule. Extending and expanding the first phase of engagement improved community trust in the whole process.
- Upskilling a small group of community representatives allowed them to provide far more meaningful input to the project and to understand the trade-offs in options. This improved both the ability of Council to develop a plan that met community needs, and the acceptance of trade-offs by the community.
- Coastal hazards and climate change are wicked problems that are best resolved through multifaceted approaches, including community ownership of actions and responsibilities. A strong engagement program built the partnerships and community trust needed to create a resilience-based approach to coastal management.

Acknowledgements and to find out more:

We would like to thank Moreton Bay Regional Council for agreeing to share this case study and insights to advance engagement practice. This case study was authored by Elle Price.

At the time of publishing, Elle was employed by Moreton Bay Regional Council in the position of Principal Community Engagement Officer. Elle has experience in the public and private sectors and expertise in environmental and sustainability issue engagement. Elle was engaged by IAP2A to support practitioners to share their engagement story as a case study.

For more information about this project see:

yoursay.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/coastal-hazard-adaptation-strategy

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