Communication strategy

National Environmental Science Program Marine and Coastal Hub

Cataloguing data

This publication (and any material sourced from it) should be attributed as: Communication strategy, National Environmental Science Program Marine Biodiversity Hub (2021)

This publication is available at www.nespmarinecoastal.edu.au.

The NESP Marine and Coastal Hub advises that the information contained in this publication comprises general statements based on scientific research. The reader is advised and needs to be aware that such information may be incomplete or unable to be used in any specific situation. No reliance or actions must therefore be made on that information without seeking prior expert professional, scientific and technical advice. To the extent permitted by law, the NESP Marine and Coastal Hub (including its host organisation, employees, partners and consultants) excludes all liability to any person for any consequences, including but not limited to all losses, damages, costs, expenses and any other compensation, arising directly or indirectly from using this publication (in part or in whole) and any information or material contained in it.

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to their elders past, present and emerging. Our Indigenous research partnerships are a valued and respected component of National Environmental Science Program (NESP) research.

Background

The National Environmental Science Program (NESP) is a long-term commitment by the Australian Government to environment and climate research. Targeted research conducted under the NESP provides an evidence base for environmental decision-makers and climate policymakers. Informed decision-making using the best research greatly improves our chances of protecting our environment, conserving our biodiversity and developing climate policies and services.

The Australian Government invested more than $145 million in NESP from 2014–15 to 2020–21. This funded six research hubs, with marine and coastal research principally led through the Marine Biodiversity Hub and Tropical Water Quality Hub. In early 2020 a further $149 million was invested for the program over the next 7 years (2021 to 2027). This funds targeted research through four new hubs: Climate Systems Hub, Marine and Coastal Hub, Resilient Landscapes Hub and Sustainable Communities and Waste Hub. The hubs have national capability, but deliver through regional nodes, where appropriate.

A key focus for the second phase of the program is closer engagement with research end-users early in the program design, capturing and responding to research needs. Hubs will work with end-users to embed NESP research into policy-making through consistent branding, messaging and engagement.

Marine and Coastal Hub

Australia is responsible for managing and protecting the third largest marine estate in the world. Our oceans provide tremendous environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits. These are subject to cumulative pressures including coastal development, unsustainable natural resource extraction, climate variability and change, and marine plastics and pollution.

The Marine and Coastal Hub will deliver high quality research that improves environmental, cultural, social, and economic outcomes for marine and coastal Australia. We deliver applied scientific knowledge and methods to support decision-making and practical management relating to Australia's national and international laws and obligations. Our approach is stakeholder-driven, co-designed, and highly collaborative, building on 15 years of achievement in previous national funding programs.

Vision

The Marine and Coastal Hub will build on the experience of its partners to deliver a national marine research program to ensure:

- Australia's coastal and marine assets are managed and conserved such that Australians derive maximum social, cultural and economic benefit; leading coastal communities and industries to view effective marine and coastal management, and the relationship with their catchments, as a positive pathway to sustained economic growth and recovery.

- The environmental information/solutions requested by the Australian Government and the community are delivered by a responsive, flexible and highly skilled national coastal and marine research capability that is transdisciplinary, solution-focused, respectful of tradition and local knowledge and capable of equipping the nation to better respond to challenge and change.

Research themes

Informing Policy and Decision Making

This overarching research will develop methods for assessing the cumulative impacts of activities in the marine environment, enabling decision-makers to balance development and protection in the context of climate change. It will draw together information generated by the other five hub themes, on environmental values and processes and cultural sensitivities. Complementary research may develop

tools for deriving benefit from environmental offsets, and methodologies for evaluating the economic, social and cultural value of ecosystems.

Protected Places
Working with other NESP hubs, this research will build and enhance the science that underlies the socio-ecological management of Australia's protected places (such as Australian Marine Parks, Ramsar sites, World Heritage Areas, the National Reserve System and Indigenous Protected Areas). It will synthesise existing knowledge, establish baseline understanding of biodiversity, ecosystems and ocean processes, and identify best-practice management approaches that bridge land and sea. We aim to support Indigenous leadership and participation in science and management, and embrace the importance and value of traditional knowledge and cultural values. The Hub is also the cross-Hub Initiative leader for protected places under the NESP.

Threatened and migratory species and ecological communities
This research, in association with the Resilient Landscapes Hub, will provide knowledge on the status, trends and pressures on threatened and migratory species and ecological communities, in response to management needs. This includes exploring threats to threatened and migratory species, such as interactions with fishing and shipping, port developments and oil and gas operations/infrastructure. Many of these species are of concern for Indigenous peoples, and we support their engagement in protection activities through research engagement, training and employment.

People and Sustainable Use
This theme is focused on the human dimensions of sustainable people-environment interactions. Research will examine how regional, remote and Indigenous communities and industries interact with their environment – including specific adaptations to climate change – and ways to minimise environmental impact. It supports ecosystem services or restoration programs that support the economic and social revival of coastal communities. Partnerships will be forged with industry sectors including fisheries, aquaculture, ports, energy, tourism and coastal development, through deriving economic benefit from conservation and protection. We will explore innovative risk reduction actions such as protection and reinstatement of coastal defences (shellfish reefs, wetlands, salt marshes) to prevent harm and reduce major economic loss. With the Sustainable Communities and Waste Hub we will research practical approaches to reduce plastic waste impacts.

Ecosystem Restoration and Protection
This research aims to improve the coordination, scalability and evaluation of wetland rehabilitation, shellfish reef restoration, beach restoration, mangrove and seagrass recovery, kelp and coral restoration and marine pest control. It will explore novel approaches to infrastructure design in partnership with industry, for example habitat engineering to achieve 'living-shorelines', and maximising blue-carbon sequestration. We will also apply research to control species, and protect habitats, including in association with Indigenous communities.

Knowledge Systems
This research will lead and support the marine science community as it augments and improves national marine monitoring to support environmental and cross-sectoral reporting and decision making at regional and national scale. A cost-effective marine and coastal monitoring system will incorporate existing methods and technologies in a national toolbox of standard monitoring approaches. This includes smart monitoring technologies and novel indicators; aligning existing monitoring programs; mining existing data and data aggregation, industry information, citizen science and traditional ecological knowledge, and modelling. By working with industries, indigenous communities, and marine organisations, we will foster a shared understanding of socio-ecological systems.

Strategy aims and communication objectives

This strategy provides the basis for engaging and informing the department, research users and other stakeholders of the planned approach for Marine and Coastal Hub communication.

In implementing this strategy we aim to:

1. Raise awareness among targeted audiences of how applied research and knowledge-transfer by the NESP and the Marine and Coastal Hub helps the Australian Government and other relevant research users achieve environmental priorities through informed decision-making.

2. Enhance collaborative, mutually beneficial communication activities involving researchers, partner agencies, research users and other NESP hubs.

3. Apply the required acknowledgement and accessibility requirements (according to NESP brand standards and Australian Government style manual) in hub communication activities and products.

The Hub approach to communication contributes to the broader approach to knowledge sharing and repatriation for the NESP, as outlined in the NESP Knowledge Brokering Strategy.

Actions to implement the strategy

The hub will implement these five broad actions to achieve the objectives of this strategy:

1. Work with researchers, knowledge brokers and other members of the hub executive team to identify and prioritise communication needs.

2. Develop and use the right mix of content, activities, channels and tools to address communication priorities.

3. Encourage, enable and build the capacity of Marine and Coastal Hub researchers and partner agencies to participate in Hub communication activities.

4. Develop, maintain and implement an annual schedule of communication priorities and activities.

5. Modify this communication strategy where required in response to the monitoring, evaluation and reporting process.

Integration of hub strategies

The Marine and Coastal Hub has developed four strategies to guide development and implementation of its annual research plans. Collectively, these strategies outline the Marine and Coastal Hub's pathway to impact (see diagram below).

- *Communication Strategy*: provides direction communicating the Marine and Coastal Hub's interests, products and outcomes to researchers, research end-users and interested parties.

- *Knowledge Brokering Strategy*: provides direction for facilitating the exchange of information between researchers, policy makers, managers and Indigenous organisations to generate shared understanding and to capture and transfer knowledge.

- *Indigenous Partnerships Strategy:* provides direction for encouraging collaborative input and guidance from indigenous communities, the appropriate communication of Indigenous knowledge and respect for millennia of experience.

- *Data Management Strategy:* provides direction for enabling pathways for how the Hub and its researchers will achieve findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable NESP research products.

Audiences

Government	Research	Industry/Community
Environment Minister' s Office	NESP Hubs	General public (particularly professional networks)
Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment	Natural Resource Management regional managers	Environment non-government organisations (e.g. WWF)
Australian Fisheries Management Authority	Native Title Bodies (e.g. NLC, KLC, SWALSC, YMAC, CYLC, CLC, SANTS, QSNTS, TSRA)	Great Barrier Reef Foundation
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority	Indigenous regional land and sea managers (e.g. NAILSMA, ISWAG, Murujuga Corporation)	APPEA
Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources	CSIRO	Ports Australia
Bureau of Meteorology	Australian Institute of Marine Science	National Energy Resources Australia
National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environment Management Authority	Geoscience Australia	OzFish
Fisheries Research Development Corporation	Integrated Marine Observing System	Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators
Australian Maritime Safety Authority	Australian Universities	Seafood Industry Australia
Torres Strait Regional Authority	Sydney Institute of Marine Science	Industry, including environmental, agricultural and/or financial sectors
National Indigenous Australians Agency	Marine Innovations South Australia	
Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation	Museums Victoria	
State/territory and local governments	Bioplatforms Australia	
NSW Department of Primary Industries		
NSW Environment Energy and Science		

Communication approach

The hub executive team will work together, and with other hubs where appropriate, to engage with researchers, research users, partner agencies and other stakeholders to identify and progress communication opportunities. We will alert and update the NESP through the appropriate channels, and adhere to specified timelines and branding requirements.

The hub communication and media specialists have established trusted and productive relationships with hub researchers, research users (such as Parks Australia), and communication specialists at partner agencies. These connections have been built through working together on communication planning, events, and production of communication materials. The hub communication and media specialists will maintain these ongoing relationships, and forge links with new research partners and research users.

The hub will work with researchers, and other stakeholders to ensure knowledge generated is targeted to the correct audience to maximise the impact of the knowledge via core activities outlined below:

Core activities

Prioritisation	• Work with researchers and colleagues in the executive team to identify and prioritise communication needs and develop appropriate responses, using the right mix of activities and channels.
Planning	• Develop and maintain an annual communication schedule that outlines communication priorities. • Develop and manage plans for communication activities to ensure a shared understanding among researchers, the executive team and stakeholders. • Work with researchers to ensure the department is given sufficient notice of communication activities. • Work with researchers to manage communication risk associated with project publications and communication activities.
Networking	• Engage with communication representatives from partner agencies, research users and other hubs to identify opportunities for unified messaging and shared initiatives.
Communication products	• Prepare, or manage design and creation of communication content and products including: fact sheets, web content, newsletter, media releases, graphics, videos, articles, social media posts, templates, presentations, posters, banners. • Manage review and approval of communication products. • Disseminate products using channels appropriate to target audiences. • Facilitate and manage correct branding and acknowledgement in hub products. • Manage relationships with communication service providers.
Research products	• Provide advice and assistance on application of branding to research products including presentations.
Website, campaign manager and social media	• Develop, manage, maintain and provide guidance on use of the hub website. • Develop and maintain hub social media accounts. • Maintain subscriber list using campaign manager software.
Conferences, events and webinars	• Provide communication support for webinars, conferences and other priority events identified in the communication schedule.
Imagery database	• Manage images provided from projects for use in communication products.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting	• Track and evaluate communication metrics. • Report to executive team. • Update communication strategy.

Primary communication channels

A range of communication channels will be used to facilitate communication, with specific channels used according to the communication goals, products and target audiences. The primary channels include:

- Marine and Coastal Hub Website;
- Marine and Coastal Hub Newsletter;
- NESP News (if continued);
- Marine and Coastal Hub social media accounts (Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram);
- media release distribution (via partner agencies);
- hub and cross-hub committee meetings;
- external publications;
- workshops, conferences, events and webinars; and
- meetings and emails.

Key messages

- The Marine and Coastal Hub is one of four research hubs funded under the National Environmental Science Program (NESP), the Australian Government's enduring commitment to environment and climate research.
- The Marine and Coastal Hub research supports the sustainable use, conservation and recovery of Australia's coastal and marine environment for the maximum social, cultural and economic benefit.
- Marine and Coastal Hub scientists work with research users and communities to plan and conduct research that is relevant, accessible and effectively communicated.
- Targeted research conducted under the Marine and Coastal Hub provides an evidence base and practical solutions for industries, environmental decision-makers and climate policymakers.
- The Marine and Coastal Hub values Indigenous research partnerships and respects traditional knowledge. It works with Traditional Owners and communities to deliver culturally fit-for-purpose research and increase cultural capacity in the environmental research sector.
- Informed decision-making using the best research greatly improves our chances of protecting our environment, conserving our biodiversity and developing climate policies and services.

Key dates

Effective communication is promoted when researchers, the executive team and key research users have a shared understanding of communication priorities and the scheduling of major communication activities. NESP research planning sets a predictable annual cycle, for research planning, progress reporting and engagement with research-users and researchers. Priorities for the provision of communication support will flow from this process.

Other key dates influencing the communication schedule will be the publication of major research reports and journal papers, and external events such as science conferences and public science events. The hub communication and media specialists, in association with colleagues in the executive team, will develop and maintain an annual schedule of communication priorities and activities that identifies these key dates. The schedule will also outline regular communication activities including website and social media updates, and newsletter distribution.

The table below provides an indicative list of key dates for 2021–22 for identifying communication opportunities.

Indicative key dates for 2021–22	Communication opportunities
September 2021	Interim Marine and Coastal Hub Website established
February to March 2022	NESP progress report compilation
28 June – 2 July 2022	AMSA Annual Conference (Queensland)
29–30 June 2022	AMSA Indigenous Workshop (Queensland)
13–21 August 2021	Science Week
7th -11th August 2022	Australian Coral Reef Society annual conference

Budget and risks

Table 1 shows the estimated % budget allocation at the time of writing this document. This budget may need to be adjusted through the life of the program to meet evolving needs of the Hub, the Department and other stakeholders.

Budget items	Hub contribution	Partner contribution (in-kind)
Communication and media specialist (UTAS) Communication and media specialist (RRRC) Knowledge team: Hub leaders, Initiative leaders, Executive Officer Operating (e.g. running workshops and events) Workshop/ conference/ travel etc Website Indigenous engagement/elders costs/ remote area travel	The Hub contribution will represent ~8.2% of the total Hub budget over the life of the program. Some additional investment may occur within specific projects that deliver on aspects of the Strategy.	Matching in-kind contribution will be provided to support the Hub budget allocation.

Key risks	Controlling measures	Additional mitigation measures
1. Research-users are not meaningfully involved in designing research projects	Communication representatives work with project leaders to identify and consider primary research users in the development of communication deliverables.	
2. Research-users are not meaningfully engaged in co-designing communication outputs to meet the needs of research-users	Communication representatives engage with researchers and research-users to ensure there is a shared understanding about research user context, including understanding of communication timing, media platforms and packaging of outputs.	Communication representatives check-in with research-users and researchers on high priority projects
3. Insufficient resources (time and budget) to deliver the Strategy	Communication representatives engaged in development and review of hub priority setting and budget.	
4. Research findings have the potential to be controversial for research users	Communication representatives will work with project leaders to ensure relevant research users are informed of potential controversial findings and	

	communication products are closely managed to manage risks.	
5. Lack of coordination between communication representatives, Hub leaders and Initiative Leader(s)	Communication representatives to use hub leadership team meetings to ensure coordination with Hub leaders and Initiative leaders.	Ensure there is shared understanding about high-priority projects requiring coordination of communication and consistent messaging.
6. Lack of coordination between communication representatives, Knowledge Brokers Indigenous facilitators and Data Wranglers	Communication representatives to engage with Knowledge Brokers Indigenous facilitators and Data Wranglers to ensure effective coordination	Ensure there is shared understanding about high-priority projects requiring coordination and consistent messaging.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring, evaluation, review and improvement of the Marine and Coastal Hub's strategies is critical to achieving success. There are many factors that will contribute to the success of the Marine and Coastal Hub. It can be challenging to isolate and evaluate the effectiveness of communication in this context. Nonetheless, the hub will monitor, evaluate and review the effectiveness of the Strategy in achieving its objectives. The strategy will be reviewed annually using measures and metrics that align with the objectives.

The hub will also seek feedback from research-users and researchers about the overall effectiveness of the approach to communication. The table below identifies the proposed measures and metrics for monitoring the effectiveness of the Strategy.

The communication and media specialists will prepare a concise evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy and present it to the Hub leadership team before it is tabled at any meeting of the Steering Committee. The evaluation will summarise the performance measures and metrics and, where required, provide advice and recommendations to improve the strategy.

Objectives

1. Raise awareness among targeted audiences of how applied research and knowledge-transfer by the NESP and the Marine and Coastal Hub helps the Australian Government achieve environmental priorities through informed decision-making.

2. Enhance collaborative, mutually beneficial communication activities involving researchers, partner agencies, research users and other NESP hubs.

3. Apply the required acknowledgement and accessibility requirements (according to NESP brand standards and Australian Government style manual) in hub communication activities and products.

Measure	Primary alignment with objectives	Metric
Design of research projects	2	• Percent of projects in which research-users clearly identified their communication products
Engagement in project implementation	2	• Percentage of projects (active or completed in the reporting period) that engaged research users in discussing the communications needs during project development
Delivery of project outputs	2	• Percentage of projects with milestones delivering communication products to specific research users
Website and social media involvement	2,1	• Percentage of projects with engaging website profile • Percentage of projects engaged in social media

Measure	Primary alignment with objectives	Metric
Overall effectiveness of communication	2	• Sentiment of research-users (about approach to communications, (eg newsletter and website) • Sentiment of researchers (about approach to communications)
Reach and engagement	1	MaC Newsletter • Number of newsletter subscriptions (about reach of communication) • Newsletter readership among subscribers (about level of engagement with Hub information) MaC Website • Number of website visits (to determine website usage) • Number of website pages viewed and time spent on pages(to determine website engagement) MaC Social Media • Number of followers on facebook, twitter, Instagram (to determine engagement levels) • Selected usage metrics