

Partnerships with the media: Central Queensland's coastal waterways awareness campaign

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Abstract

'Environmental problems in river management cannot be solved by good science and technology alone. They are predominantly social problems requiring political solutions.'

Conservation goals to protect river habitat, improve water quality, reduce pollution, maintain healthy ecosystems, save endangered species, sustain fisheries or manage industrial impacts depend on community driven solutions. Often our scientific and conservation efforts focus on biological problems, but solutions always lie with people.

Effective communication with stakeholders is essential if we are serious about influencing conservation policy or changing people's behaviour. Researchers have shown that good communication programs can shift public support, improve pro-environmental behaviour, reduce pollution, increase effective carrying capacity, and influence policies and decisions that affect natural resources.

Media campaigns can be an effective management tool to communicate messages simply, clearly and with impact. The media have become a potent force in shaping our culture. They influence our world view, our environmental values, our beliefs, myths and stories that define who we are. Some media campaigns target a broad audience with a public awareness campaign, such as the *'Clean Up Australia'* campaign to reduce littering. Other programs target specific behaviours (eg *'Every Drop Counts'*), geographic regions or conservation issues (eg *'Landcare'*). This case study looks at the effectiveness of a regional *'Healthy Waterways'* media campaign in central Queensland. The three-year television campaign was designed to communicate how science and community action are addressing local catchment and waterway issues.

Within eight months of commencement, 90 percent of local residents knew about the *'Healthy Waterways'* campaign, with many people able to recall a number of specific messages. This resulted in greater support for marine and coastal conservation programs in the region, such as *Landcare*, *Coastcare*, *Waterwatch* and *Neighbourhood Catchments*. A second survey of key stakeholders indicated the campaign was successful in raising community awareness and helped to support the conservation objectives of their organisation.

The paper explains how the campaign was planned, what market research was used, how messages were designed, how sponsorship was gained, and ways the project was evaluated.

Keywords: community service advertising, media campaign, public awareness, science communication.

Introduction: Central Queensland's Healthy Waterways campaign

Following a communication planning workshop in 2001, the Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA), Cooperative Research Centre for Coastal Zone, Estuary and Waterway Management (Coastal CRC), Sunfish Queensland and Rockhampton City Council jointly representing 40 government agencies, industry groups and NGOs, agreed to develop a public awareness campaign to show how science, management and community action are addressing catchment and waterway issues in central Queensland. The aims of the campaign were to:

- communicate the nature and extent environmental issues facing the Central Queensland region and effective action for catchment sustainability.
- transfer to the local community the benefits of collaborative environmental research.
- inform policy makers, leaders and residents about natural resource management in Central Queensland that can advance the interests of the community.
- prepare the public for changes resulting from regional planning processes, such as Central Queensland Strategy for Sustainability.
- encourage organisations and community members to become involved in coastal management activities occurring in Central Queensland.
- promote a positive image of Coastal CRC research, management agencies and sponsoring organisations

The campaign comprised of a series of 30 and 60 second information segments on WIN Television, the main local commercial broadcaster in the region, general news coverage and publicity of natural resource issues.

Method

A local planning team was formed with representatives from Sunfish, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Rockhampton City Council, Central Queensland University, Fitzroy Basin Elders Committee, Department of Primary Industries, CRC for Catchment Hydrology, Fitzroy Basin Association and WIN Television. The Coastal CRC brokered the proposal with local organisations, secured sponsorship funding, facilitated planning meetings, designed messages and scripts, integrated campaign objectives with local organisations, and contributed funds to the campaign's development. The campaign was planned as a three-year program targeting local residents, community leaders, schools, conservation groups, fishers, and natural resource managers. Approximately 188,000 people live within this vast catchment – Australia's second largest – which includes the townships of Rockhampton, Emerald, Yeppoon and Gladstone.



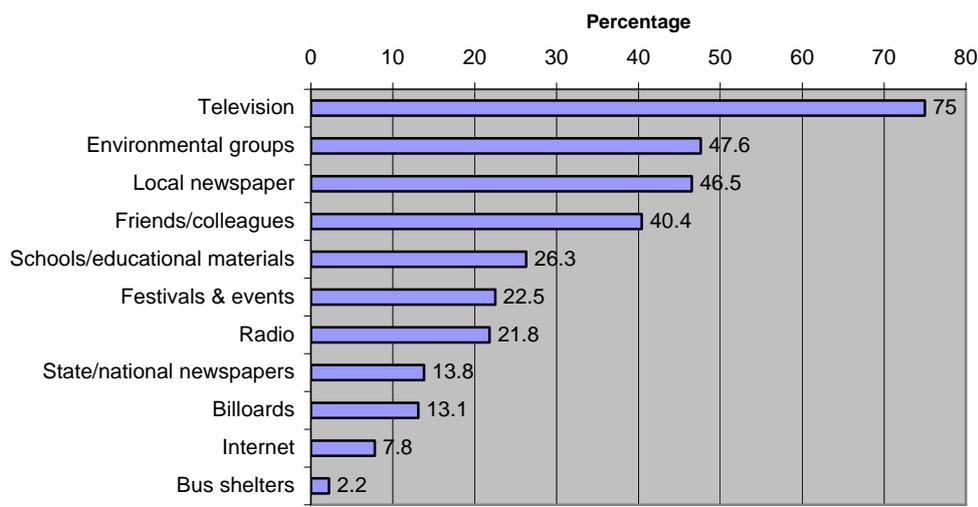
The Fitzroy catchment in central Queensland is a large, agriculturally based region with the Fitzroy River discharging into the southern lagoon of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Approximately 188,000 people live within this vast catchment – Australia's second largest – which includes the townships of Rockhampton, Emerald, Yeppoon and Gladstone.

A telephone survey found most residents (75%) could recall *Healthy Waterways* information on television after three months of the campaign launch in March 2002.

Previous research¹ has shown that good communication programs can shift public support, improve pro-environmental behaviour, reduce pollution, manage visitor numbers, and influence policies that affect natural resources. Market research, undertaken by social researchers at Central Queensland University², indicated that the most widely accessed source of information on waterways by residents living in the region is television (75%), environmental groups (47%) and local newspapers (46%). The survey of 818 residents revealed how residents sourced environmental information. This result was an important factor in selecting television as the primary medium to reach a wide, geographically dispersed audience.

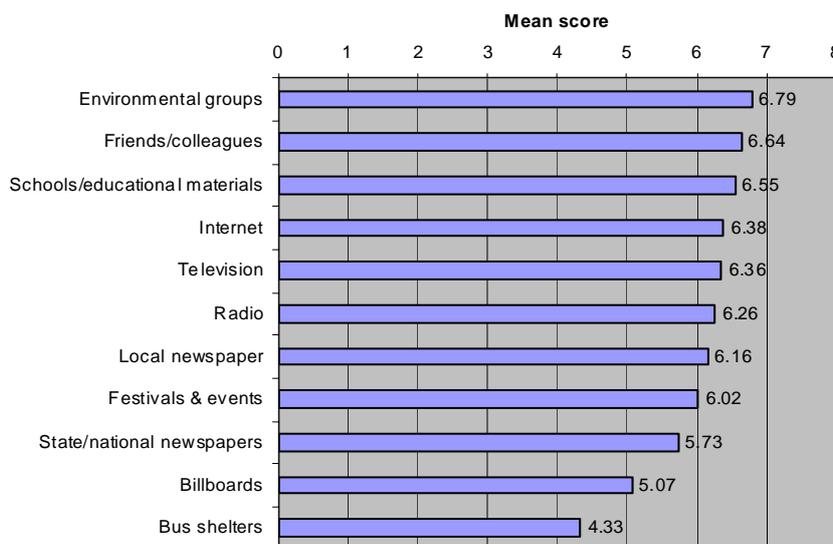
Figure 1 shows television to be by far the most visible source of information on waterways. Other widely used sources of information were environmental groups, local newspapers and friends and colleagues. Schools and educational materials, festivals, events and radio were also used by significant numbers of people.

Figure 1 CQ waterway information sources accessed



Interestingly, Figure 2 shows that all these sources of information achieved similar mean scores for their usefulness. While environmental groups were allocated the highest usefulness score, friends and colleagues, schools and educational materials, the Internet, television, radio, local newspapers and festivals and events were not substantially lower.

Figure 2 Usefulness of information sources in assessing water quality



Another advantage of regional television is its cost effectiveness in reaching large numbers of people frequently - particularly when compared higher production costs and advertising rates in capital cities. Each segment cost \$1000 to professionally produce (including scripting, travel, filming and editing) with broadcast costs ranging anywhere between \$16 for early morning spots to \$340 in prime time evening spots. The series was broadcast frequently during 2002 and 2003, averaging 15 to 20 spots per week over eight months, during a variety of viewing programs. Segments were rotated to expose viewers to a range of issues and conservation messages.

The segments were shown as paid spots (TVAs), bonus spots and as community service spots (placed for free). WIN Television sponsorship was generous. In 2002, cash sponsorship was \$36,400 and free airtime provided by WIN TV was valued at \$40,000³. In 2003, the cash investment was less - \$28,000 and the station provided more than \$30,000 worth of free airtime. In 2004, cash investment was \$24,000 with a similar amount of free airtime. A number of TV news stories were organised separately on TV, radio and in local newspapers about water research, education and management projects in the region. In terms of value for money, it has been a very good deal.

Three year campaign planned

The **first stage** (April to November 2002: 'public awareness' phase) promoted the concept of 'Healthy Waterways' for local central Queensland, and how science, education, community and management programs were addressing water-related issues in the region. The local television weather presenter, Peter Byrne, and chair of the Fitzroy Basin Association, Barbara Wilden, launched the campaign in March 2002 at the *Gumoo Bullaroo Catchment Conference* held in Rockhampton. More than 150 people gathered for the launch, which included interpretive drama performances 'from the source to the sea' by primary school students. Eleven information segments were produced and broadcast (384 slots in total) that year, in conjunction with regular television, radio and newspapers news features, and through e-newsletters and websites directly to stakeholders. Topics in the first series all repeated the theme '*Central Queensland Healthy Waterways: good for the country, good for you!*' were:

1. Campaign aims and sponsors
2. Dawson River fish habitat project
3. Developing neighbourhood catchments
4. Freshwater flows for barramundi fish
5. Scientific water quality monitoring
6. *Waterwatch* community monitoring program
7. Integrated ecosystem monitoring at Port Curtis
8. Fitzroy River riparian revegetation
9. Gladstone *Portwatch* volunteer monitoring
10. Creek revegetation project in Rockhampton
11. Indigenous involvement in resource management

The **second stage** (April to November 2003: 'public action' phase) outlined more practical ways to improve the health and condition of rivers, catchments and waterways. The planning team evaluated and reviewed the campaign's first phase, using indicators such as feedback by sponsors, comments by local *Landcare* and *Coastcare* groups⁴, reviews from colleagues, and results from an e-mail survey of 15 catchment coordinators. Results from the second phase of a Central Queensland Healthy Waterways survey of residents, conducted at the end of 2002, demonstrated an increased level of awareness about the campaign. After one year, 90% of local residents were aware of it and there was an even greater recall of individual topics/messages.

Positive feedback to the campaign continued to grow. New sponsors joined and there was increased anecdotal feedback about how the community was mentioning the campaign's messages in schools, at fishing clubs, by government agency staff, at local council meetings, and during Coastal CRC and FBA stakeholder workshops. The planning team developed a new series of television segments and radio community service advertisements. The campaign was 're-launched' at a function involving the Coastal CRC and FBA in Rockhampton in May 2003 with sponsors.

New segment topics produced in 2003 were:

1. Responsible fishing
2. Dee River rehabilitation
3. School students monitor creeks
4. Catchment management on farms
5. Reducing litter and pollution
6. Controlling river weeds
7. Water quality monitoring
8. Unique plants and animals
9. Scientific modelling of river sediment
10. Historical change to landscapes

A **third stage** (August to November 2004: 'collaborative links' phase) will feature 60 second long information segments and include short interviews with key people. The Fitzroy Basin Association, and the local planning team, will take over leadership, project management and financing of the campaign. New initiatives, such as an annual community award scheme to recognise outstanding achievements, will be developed. The '*Healthy Waterways*' brand is now a valuable tool for public awareness and information efforts organised by government agencies, FBA member organisations and community conservation programs. New messages in 2004 include:

1. Water sensitive urban designs
2. Protecting riparian areas
3. Protecting shallow estuaries
4. Barramundi fish management
5. Managing salinity
6. River weed management
7. Property management plans
8. School conservation programs
9. Industry codes of practice
10. Treated effluent discharge

Project benefits - summary

- agreement by steering group that media campaign objectives were achieved
- collaboration between project team members, sponsors and supporting organisations
- increased public awareness and education about catchment and waterway issues
- extensive news media coverage of water science and natural resource planning issues in the region
- community support to the concept of 'Healthy Waterways' by decision-makers in local councils and government agencies, and by farmers, urban residents and school children
- increased knowledge of conservation and monitoring programs such as *Landcare* and *Waterwatch* and *Neighbourhood Catchments*.
- increased community awareness of major research and natural resource management organisations, in particular the Coastal CRC and Fitzroy Basin Association.
- increasing numbers of local sponsors becoming involved each year

Tips for planning a successful media campaign

Do your market research. Start your communication planning with some market research. We used various information sources and discussed the proposal extensively with stakeholders and natural resource managers in the region. Ideas include:

- conduct a communication planning workshop with stakeholder
- review lessons from similar environmental awareness campaigns
- survey results of residents' attitudes, values and information sources
- seek written comments from local councils, industry and NGOs
- get advice from colleagues and other communication experts
- discuss ideas with executives of media organisations

Set goals and objectives. Define what you are trying to achieve will help you focus on the who, why, and how of your communication planning. We wanted to show how science and community action were addressing catchment and waterway issues in a specific region. The campaign was primarily an awareness raising communication project, with limited information transfer, but it encouraged positive media coverage of various projects and assisted organisations implement a regional strategy for sustainability.

- garner support from respected community leaders and media personalities
- enhance organisational partnerships through a multi-agency planning team
- promote local conservation, management and science initiatives
- set short term objectives such as sponsorship targets and production deadlines
- use a variety of performance indicators to measure results

Know your target audience. While television messages may affect people superficially (yet emotionally), the project team benefited from existing knowledge about important coastal zone issues, stakeholder interests and even how to use the medium effectively. We had:

- access to stakeholder profiles and social data on community waterway values
- evidence that most people used television as their main source of environmental information
- involved local stakeholders in the design of messages and production of segments
- evidence that locally produced TV advertisements was appealing than slick, expensive ones

Manage your project well. This goes without saying but it's important to remember to:

- involve a committed team of local stakeholders
- develop a timeline and assign tasks to team members
- keep an accurate record of meetings and circulate an agreed action list
- recognise and look after your sponsors and supporters
- keep in touch regularly with project team members, clients and stakeholders
- celebrate various stages of a campaign with special events

Continually evaluate. Measurement and evaluation of communication is a constant process. There are a variety of formal and informal techniques that help measure progress against objectives, such as:

- level of continuing financial support by sponsor organisations
- opinion poll telephone surveys of residents
- email questionnaires to selected stakeholder groups
- feedback to key staff members and an office phone hotline
- anecdotal feedback at regional workshops and meetings
- agreement and level of support by sponsors and supporters
- tracking broadcast schedule and prime time bonus spots
- responding quickly to community concerns

References

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Key point

Media campaigns are a cost effective coastal management tool to communicate the nature and extent of river, catchment and water issues to large audiences. With sponsorship and support, they can effectively raise awareness, convey scientific and conservation messages, and generate support for natural resource management initiatives, and prepare communities for change in regional areas.