

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARDS STOKES INLET



A collation of responses to questionnaires circulated in
December 2006

A report to the Stokes Inlet Steering Group

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Executive Summary

A management plan is being prepared for Stokes Inlet in order to ensure that its high environmental and recreational values are maintained into the future.

An important part of the planning process is to obtain the communities views on the Inlets values, perceived threats to these values and suggestions for management.

In December 2006 a questionnaire was sent out to the community within the Shires of Esperance and Ravensthorpe. The 97 responses received have provided important information which together with technical reports will form the basis of the Stokes Inlet Management Plan.

The results of the survey indicate that the Inlet is very important to the respondents with fishing as the main activity undertaken, along with camping, walking, relaxing and sightseeing. They are also the main values people associate with the Inlet, along with its beauty and natural environment. The ease of access and historical family association with the area are also mentioned several times in the survey results.

The majority of respondents were very concerned with the future of the Inlet, with the main concern being the impacts of commercial fishing and the use of nets. Catchment impacts on water quality and increased population pressures were important secondary concerns.

When asked how they would like the Inlet to look in 20 years time, the overwhelming response was "like it is now" with little change and in a natural condition. The main change people want to see is a reduction or ban on net and commercial fishing. Minor improvements to recreation facilities and access to the beach and coast were other changes respondents sought for the Inlet, while for the catchment revegetation, education and monitoring as well as more funding were sought.

Questionnaires were also sent to key organisations; the 8 responses received provide a diverse view on the values and threats of the Inlet but the majority support an integrated and cooperative approach to future management.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the individuals and organisations that took the time to respond to the questionnaire. The 105 responses received have provided us with a better understanding of what the users of Stokes Inlet value about it and their hopes for the future. Thank you also to those who distributed the questionnaire and encouraged others to complete it.

1. Methodology

Stokes Inlet, located approximately 80km west of Esperance is unique in that it is one of the few protected, large waterbodies in the area. It is deep and accessible and as such the users of Stokes Inlet come from a large geographical area with people travelling long distances to visit the Inlet.

In order to reach as many of these users as possible the questionnaire was distributed through two local papers. 3750 copies were sent out as inserts in the Esperance Express and 900 copies through the Ravensthorpe Community Spirit. Another 100 copies were distributed via the west of Esperance mail run. Copies were left at the Munglinup roadhouse and were available at the Department of Water in Esperance.

While it was expected that most of the 4750 questionnaires would be received by people who had not visited or did not have an opinion on Stokes Inlet, it was felt that this was the only way to ensure all users had been reached. Additionally, it provided an avenue to advertise the preparation of the management plan. A media releases was distributed at the same time as the questionnaire in order to raise awareness of its existence and encourage a greater response from the community.

It was intended that the Ranger at Stokes National Park would hand out questionnaires to visitors that were not from the area; unfortunately the Park experienced a wildfire and was subsequently closed at the time the questionnaire was being distributed. As a result, the views of visitors during December 2006 were not captured within this report. The Department of Environment and Conservation (previously CALM) conduct their own survey of visitors to the park and results from these can be used to provide some information on visitor views.

It was requested that the questionnaires be returned by 15 December 2006. 94 questionnaires were completed and returned by the end of December with another 3 received in early January 2007, all 97 completed questionnaires have been incorporated into this report.

All responses have been collated in such a way that for each question similar responses are grouped into categories, where appropriate, and listed in tables. The outcomes were then interpreted with individual quotes included within the text. Questionnaires that were completed by a couple have been considered as one response rather than as two separate responses within this report.

For a number of questions respondents provided multiple comments which were grouped into more than one category. Therefore, the total number of responses listed in the tables is often greater than the total number of questionnaires received. The organisational questionnaire was sent to 32 organisations at the end of November 2006. 9 responses had been received at the time of writing this report. The responses from this questionnaire were more varied than from the community questionnaire and as such are described individually and can be found in the appendix of this report.

2. Characteristics of respondents

97 completed questionnaires were received as of January 2007. Of these 64 respondents were male, 16 were female, 14 were completed by a couple and 3 respondents did not provide a gender. Almost half of the respondents were aged 51-70 with only 3 aged 16-30, see Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Age of Respondents

Age Group	0-15	16-30	31-50	51-70	70+	Total
Number of respondents	0	3	31	45	12	91

Over 60% of respondents gave Esperance as their place of residence with a couple of responses coming from as far away as Perth and Albany, see Table 2.2. Respondents were listed as residing where they live at present rather than where they used to live, or where their farm is located.

Table 2.2 Place of Residence of Respondents

Place of residence	Number of respondents
Esperance	58
Cascade	6
Ravensthorpe	5
Hopetoun	5
Munglinup	3
Gibson	3
Coomalbidgup	3
Condingup	2
Monjimup	2
Dalyup	1
Jerdacuttup	1
Albany	1
Neridup	1
Scaddan	1
Grass Patch	1
Perth	1
Total	94

Of the 97 questionnaires received, only 7 considered themselves visitors to the area (Stokes Inlet), 11 respondents not providing an answer to this question.

The results from question 2 which asked, 'How many times have you visited Stokes Inlet in the past year?' are listed below in Table 2.3 and indicate that over 50% of respondents visited the Inlet between 1 and 5 times in the past year.

Table 2.3 Number of visits by Respondents to Stokes Inlet in the past year

Number of visits	0	1-5	5-10	10-20	20+	Total
Number of respondents	21	55	12	2	4	91

Question 3 asked, ‘If you have visited the Inlet in the last year, what did you do while there?’ 75 respondents provided an answer to this question. The results are shown below in Table 2.4 and indicate that fishing was the most popular activity at Stokes Inlet with 47 respondents commenting on it. Fishing was mentioned as occurring in the Inlet as well as within the river and ocean. Camping, walking, relaxing and resting as well as sightseeing were all popular activities. People participated in a variety of other activities while visiting Stokes Inlet as listed in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4 What Respondents did while at Stokes Inlet last

Fishing	47
Camping	16
Walking, bush walking	14
Relaxing/resting	12
Surveyed the view/sightseeing/took visitors	12
Picnicked	9
Boating	6
BBQ	6
Bird watching	5
Took photos/Filmed	4
Fire fighting/suppression	3
Exploring	3
Observing flora and fauna	2
Visiting the Moir Homestead	2
Four wheel driving	2
Surfing	2
Diving	2
Swimming	2
Recreation - unspecified	1
Water-skiing	1
Canoeing	1
Looked at an unhealthy ecosystem	1
Turned around and left	1
Checked compliance of commercial vessels and recreational vessels	1
Explored beaches	1
Total	156

3. Community Response to Questions

Question 1, Is Stokes Inlet important to you? Why?

In reply to this question over 50% of the 95 respondents considered Stokes Inlet to be very important to them, as shown in Table 3.1. Only 2 respondents considered the Inlet to be not important at all.

Table 3.1 Respondents rating of how important Stokes Inlet is to them

Rating	1 very important	2	3	4	5 not important at all	Total
Number of respondents	48	25	18	2	2	95

The second part of question 1 asked ‘Why?’ the Inlet was important to them; the results are listed below in Table 3.2. Of the 95 respondents who rated the Inlets importance 12 did not give a reason why.

Table 3.2 Why respondents considered Stokes Inlet important

Natural Environment	43
Important natural ecosystem/unspoilt/environmental significance	17
Natural beauty/scenery	10
Unique	8
Flora and fauna/wildlife/ bird life	6
Interesting place/educational	2
Amenity	62
Fishing	24
Canoeing/water skiing/swimming/sailing/surfing/general recreation	15
Camping/picnicking	9
Boating	5
Place for relaxation/restful	5
A place to take visitors/good social site for tourists	3
Bird watching	1
Location	10
Easy access	4
Few areas like it that are accessible from Esperance	3
It’s there	2
Remote	1
Historical/cultural	9
Have history at the place/personal history	5
Historic area	3
Related to our culture	1

Interpretation of responses

Amenity reasons such as fishing and recreation and the natural environment were the two categories considered important by the majority of respondents.

Fishing was listed by 25% of the respondents, as why the Inlet was important to them. This included “fishing in Inlet, river and ocean”. Water sports and general recreation as well as camping and picnicking were also considered important amenity values with comments such as “it has been an important recreational destination for our families and neighbours for many years.” Family and safety were often mentioned in association with recreation, for example, “it is the main recreation area for me and my family, very safe for families.”

The natural environment was considered important by 45% of respondents with comments such as “because this is a very beautiful wonderful place”, “because it is unique in that it is the only large estuary in the area” and “I like the environment at Stokes. It is still relatively natural and remote and undeveloped.”

The fact that the Inlet is there and accessible was mentioned many times with comments such as, “very few areas are available to Esperance residents similar to Stokes Inlet.”

Cultural and heritage values were also highlighted as important with many respondents having links to the Inlet from childhood “have been going there since a child (50 years). A unique, natural wonder of nature” and “I used to camp there as a child” as typical examples. Also the general historical value, relating to Moir’s Homestead and the importance of the area culturally was mentioned.

Twice it was mentioned that the fact it was “not a national park” was important.

Question 4, What are the things you value about the Inlet?

Table 3.3 Response to Question 4

Listed in order of priority with 1 being the most important	Priority				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Natural environment	35	18	18	12	83
Wildlife/habitat/flora and fauna/birdlife/ecosystem	9	6	10	7	32
Beauty/scenery/views	11	5	4	4	24
Unique environment/pristine/untouched/the estuary	13	5	4		22
Water quality	2	2		1	5
Amenity	50	51	37	15	153
Fish/fishing	28	19	10	4	61
Camping/picnics/facilities	12	17	10	6	45
Recreation in general/watersports/surfing/swimming	4	5	3	2	14
Walking/hiking	1	3	5		9
Safe for recreation/sheltered water	2	2	3	1	8
Boating		4	3		7
Relaxation and rest	3	1	2	1	7
Bird watching			1	1	2
Location	7	5	7	6	25
Easy access	3	1	5	3	12
Beach/access to beach	3	3	1	2	9
It’s there/location	1	1	1	1	4

History/culture	3	2	1	1	7
Historical significance	3	2	1		6
Cultural significance				1	1
Other					
Other	13	14	5	5	37
Peace/ambiance/not crowded/isolation/serenity	10	12	4	4	30
Fire protection	1	1			2
Open to the public/open space	1			1	2
Access to mulberries and figs			1		1
It doesn't belong to the National Park	1				1
Commercial use of waterway		1			1
Number of respondents	95	83	66	40	305

Interpretation of responses

The response to this question suggests that many people have a strong and longstanding connection to the Inlet and consider it very important with comments like “as I am a very early settler I have wonderful memories of the 1960's. It is a very important part of ecosystem. It is unique in this part of Australia”.

This question received 95 responses, one of the highest response rates for the questionnaire. Fewer respondents listed their lower priority values than listed their higher priorities with only 40 respondents providing four prioritised values. There was no distinctive trend between values and their prioritisation. Suggesting that while common values were important to respondents these values were not prioritised similarly.

The highest values were those related to amenity with “fish” and “fishing” making up 40% of this category and as such the overall highest value of Stokes Inlet as listed by respondents. The Inlet is also valued as a “breeding ground for fish and birds” not just for catching fish. Camping, picnicking and general use of the facilities was the second highest reported value making up 30% of the amenity category. It is considered an “ideal camping spot” with “clean camping areas” and “good basic cooking facilities”.

The natural environment was also highly valued, second only to amenity. The wildlife, “natural flora and fauna and birdlife habitat” and ecosystem values of the Inlet were overall listed as the third highest value. The fact that Stokes Inlet is “unique in the area” which is a “pristine environment” and “largely untouched” was an important value for 22 respondents. The scenic value of the Inlet is important with comments such as “the beauty of the place” “its wild beauty” and “pleasant surroundings” common responses to this question. Water quality was also a priority environmental value with comments such as “good quality water and bushland” and “the unpolluted water/aquatic life”.

The peace and serenity was the fourth highest important value, with comments such as “peaceful environment”, “peace and quiet” and “it is not a crowded camp”.

The Inlets location and easy access along with its historical significance were important values to a number of respondents as was recreation with many comments such as “a lovely expanse of water to play general water activities” with “recreation for families and tourists”.

Question 5, What changes have you seen at the Inlet over the past 10 years?

Table 3.4 Response to Question 5

Amenities and access	48
Better/more facilities/camp sites/information areas/parking/walkways/BBQ areas/seating/picnic areas/toilets/steps to beach	32
Improved road access	10
Decreased access to river	3
Upgraded work on Moir Homestead	1
Access has become too easy	1
Introduction of fees to enter the park	1
Use	8
More visitors	7
Increase traffic	1
Fish	21
Decrease in available fish because of professional fishers	9
Decrease in fish numbers/size	8
Pressure from net fishing (decrease in sized fish because of net fishers)	3
Decrease in number of professional fishers	1
Impacts to natural environment	14
Estuary deeper/water level risen/changed	4
Algae build up when bar not open/algae	3
Water quality suffered/nutrients	2
Catchment pollution/decrease in catchment quality	2
Highly silted inlet	1
Periodic natural fires	1
Track erosion	1
No change	7

Interpretation of responses

20 respondents did not provide an answer to this question and a number of responses did not give any information with answers such as 'don't know haven't been there' or 'wouldn't have been there more than twice'.

When asked about the changes seen at the Inlet over the past 10 years, most people responded by commenting on the improvements in the access and facilities of Stokes National Park rather than changes to the Inlet itself. Common comments were that there were "more and better facilities" and "good road in". There were a number of comments about different aspects of access throughout the park "access has become too easy, not 4WD anymore" "good move putting better track to Fanny Cover i.e. traffic off Inlet", "decreased access".

Fish were again identified as an important issue with 30% of the respondents mentioning that the numbers and size had decreased "a lot less fish and the ones left are small". Net fishing was identified as the cause of this reduction by many submissions with comments such as "pressures from net fishing both amateur and professional." 43% of fish related responses to this question linked the reduction to professional fishers within their response "since professional fishing has been allowed the quantity and size of the fish available to local anglers has diminished" is one such illustration of this point.

Change in the natural environment was a category mentioned in almost 20% of the submissions. Changes in water quality with level and algae build up being the main issues mentioned, with comments such as; "increase amount of water", "algae build up when bar not open" and "water doesn't seem as clean, smells a bit rank at times. The Lort River now leaves a slime on the skin after swimming from November onwards. It didn't 10 years ago."

A number of respondents noted that there had been an increase in the number of visitors and traffic "a huge influx of tourists", "more visitors" and "more wear and tear from increased use" were some examples.

A number of respondents (7) felt there had been little to no change over the past 10 years with many commenting that they saw that as a positive thing "it hasn't changed a great deal which is great".

Question 6, Are you concerned about the future of the Inlet? Why?

Of the 93 people who responded to this question, the majority expressed concern about the future of the Inlet, with more than half being very concerned, Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Respondents concern about the future of the Inlet

Rating	1 very concerned	2	3	4	5 not concerned at all	Total
Number of respondents	53	19	15	3	3	93

When asked ‘Why?’ the two dominant concerns expressed were in relation to catchment impacts and over-fishing, particularly by commercial fishers, Table 3.6.

Table 3.6 Why respondents are concerned about the future of the Inlet

Catchment Impacts	24
Contamination/chemicals/pollution/agricultural impacts	9
Salinity	5
Eutrophication/nutrients/algal blooms	5
Sedimentation	3
Water run-off/changed hydrology	2
Fishing	28
Commercial fishing – adverse impacts	18
Over-fishing	5
Over-fishing with nets	4
Commercial fishing – need for it to continue	1
People Pressure	12
Population/people pressure/above of facilities	8
Restrictions on public access	2
4 wheel drive impacts	1
Development	1
Other	6
Too much regulation	2
Fire management	2
May become National Park	1
Water levels	1

Interpretation of responses

When asked ‘Why are you concerned about the future of the Inlet’ many people responded by reiterating the values they had mentioned before, such as the Inlet’s natural beauty, uniqueness or recreational value. Respondents did not always respond with a threat or concern.

Catchment impacts were a major concern, and respondents understood that there is a relationship between the Inlet and its catchment. “Upstream agricultural pressure, sedimentation, erosion of creeklines, salinity, nutrient input,” and “the present and possible threat of contamination to rivers and Inlet from agriculture and pesticides washed into Inlet from catchment areas” were typical responses.

Commercial fishing was the single largest area of concern raised in submissions. There was a general view that commercial fishing was undertaken by outsiders, that commercial fishing threatened fish stocks and recreational fishing, and that it provided

only a low economic return on the fish caught. One respondent felt the fish caught were to be used for cat food. Examples of submissions made include the following; “commercial fishermen from outside can net huge amounts of fish and return to their place of living without supporting local businesses”, “the fact that professional fishermen can net huge amounts out of the Inlet”, “commercial netting of Inlet will delete fish stocks”.

Only one respondent felt that commercial fishing was an important asset that should be maintained. All other submissions relating to commercial fishing felt that commercial fishing should be stopped.

Some respondents provided suggestions on how values could be maintained or enhanced. One submission suggested controlled burns should be undertaken in winter months to make sure burns were not destructive. Another submission suggested monitoring of fish and birdlife, while another suggested increased access.

In terms of people impacts, there was a concern people pressure would adversely impact the Inlet, and potentially lead to restrictions being placed on future access.

Question 7, How would you like the Inlet to look in 20 years time?

Table 3.7 Response to Question 7

Level of Naturalness	51
Same as present/still pristine	49
More natural than today	1
Healthy, scenic	1
Access	12
With access road to beach/sandbar	6
Trail to beach	2
No access road to beach	1
Clearly define walk-trails	1
More access for public	1
All weather track to east side of Inlet	1
Fishing	10
No commercial fishing	4
Good fishing	4
No netting	2
Amenity	22
Recreational facilities/camping grounds/more sites	12
Better amenity facilities for day trippers/picnics	2
Better boat ramp	2

Toilets	2
Showers	1
Lawn area around campsites	1
Cabins on ridge overlooking Inlet	1
Good interpretation	1
Other	12
Like it did 20 years ago/like it did 6 months ago	2
Better fire protection	2
Restoration work on Homestead	2
No national park	1
Shared understanding of values	1
Natural bar openings	1
Sandbar opened to allow greater fish recruitment	1
Eradicate foxes and cats	1
Need to ask next generation	1

Interpretation of responses

This question received 91 submissions, the dominant message being “as it is now”, “much the same as now”, “better than now”, “very few changes” or “same as it was 20 years ago”. The overwhelming response was to keep the Inlet as it looks today, with 49 submissions to that effect.

Improved recreational facilities, with modifications to the existing sites or an increase in the number of camping bays, was also sought. Examples of submissions included “as it is today but with eco-friendly toilets and camping areas”, “some more camping areas to cater for more population”. No big infrastructure was sought in the submissions, but toilets and showers were suggested. There seemed recognition that facilities needed to be improved to cater for visitor increase, but that the character of the area should not be altered by these new facilities.

Access to the sand bar and coast was sought by a smaller but still significant number of people, with almost an equal amount mentioning the desire for road access as for a walking trail. Ease of access to the beach for fishing and recreation seemed the reason for this request.

The only other area of multiple submissions related to fishing, with a number of people wanting good fishing to continue, and for no commercial fishing to take place.

Question 8, What do you think should be done to achieve the future you want for the Inlet?

Table 3.8 Response to Question 8

Fishing	41
Ban or greatly reduce commercial fishing	26
Ban net fishing	13
Breed fish for release	1
Monitor fish stocks	1
Public Amenities	19
Few more campsites/slow and managed expansion	6
Leave as is/do nothing	5
Install composting toilets/upgrade existing toilets	3
Provide BBQ facilities	2
Provide 24 hr tourist stopover	1
No more facilities	1
Provide information on Inlet values/interpretation	1
Management	22
Have ranger presence/enforcement	4
Increased funding/State and Federal funding	4
Have long-term management plan/action plan	4
More controlled burns	3
Make it national park	2
Have 2 full-time rangers	1
Include in marine reserve	1
Sensible regulation	1
Have regular clean-ups	1
Just rebuild it to what it was	1
Access	15
Provide walk trail to ocean	5
Provide road to beach	5
Increase walk trails	2
Improve vehicle access to Moir's Homestead	1
Ban 4 wheel drive vehicles	1
Maintain roads	1
Catchment	18
Reduce sediment/nutrients from catchment	8
Increase monitoring of catchment rivers	3
Stop vegetation clearing in catchment/near rivers	2
Promote perennials/tree coverage in catchment	2

Study flora/fauna in area	1
Reduce feral animals – deer, foxes, rabbits	1
Research Inlet and catchment	1
Sandbar	3
Increase sandbar openings at high water levels	3

Interpretation of responses

Responses to this question were varied, perhaps prompted by the fact respondents were not asked to prioritise their suggestions. By far the most significant response in terms of number of submissions related to the desire to ban or greatly reduce commercial fishing, with 26 responses (from a total of 90 responses for this question). “Stop all professionals netting for cat food/cray bait, leave the area for all recreational fisher people”, is one such submission. Net fishing generally was the target of many submissions, with a general belief net fishing was destroying the fish stocks for recreational anglers. “Get rid of net fishers and I will return to Stokes again”. Several submissions made mention of the need to stop netting in the river system particularly.

Away from commercial fishing and netting, there is no strong focus for suggested improvements. This might suggest that generally people were satisfied with their experience and facilities provided, as suggested in the earlier responses to Question 7.

There is a recognition the camping areas may need to be enhanced and extended, but in a manner that harmonises with the surroundings and in an incremental way. There is a desire for improved access to the coast on the western side of the Inlet, but some people are seeking vehicle access while others a walk trail to achieve this. There is also recognition that catchment impacts are important, with a number of people mentioning the need to reduce nutrient and sediment transportation from the catchments.

Maintained or increased ranger presence was valued, to enforce regulations and to ensure the site is kept tidy and not vandalised.

Question 9, How do you envisage the catchment looking in 20 years time?

Table 3.9 Response to Question 9

Comparison with Today	44
Similar to today/same as today	26
Worse than today	7
Improved from today/sustainable agriculture	5
Depends on rainfall	3
Productive	2
In pristine condition	1

Catchment Vegetation	19
Revegetated/more trees/riparian buffers	17
Full of blue gums	1
More clearing	1
Water Quality	11
Increased salinity	7
Algal problems	2
Sedimentation	1
Reduced flows	1
Others	2
Converted to Crown land	1
More education	1

Interpretation of responses

There were 80 responses to this question, and a number of these responses did not relate to the catchment or showed a limited knowledge of the catchment. “Don’t know, haven’t been there”, “not qualified to have an opinion, depends on the surrounding farming practices”, “the same minus nets”, were examples of responses.

Of those that did respond with catchment initiatives, the main message was an expectation that the catchment would continue largely as is, with a continuation of farming practices, but with increased revegetation of the catchment and particularly adjacent to waterways.

26 responses felt the catchment would be similar to today. “Much the same as now or better because everyone is making a living in the catchment and will protect that”, “Hopefully much the same as now. Hopefully we can continue tree planting and other landcare measures to sustain the catchment”, were examples. An almost equal number of people felt the catchment may get worse or better with a continuation of farming practices. The role of climate was mentioned in 3 submissions.

In terms of specific catchment changes, there was an expectation that salinity would increase, and sediment loss was mentioned by three people. Several submissions made reference to mining activity being a potential source of pollutant as well as agriculture, an example being “agriculturally very similar, however, there could be an increase in mining activity which could produce more sediment in the rivers”.

Catchment revegetation was mentioned 17 times, and there was a desire to see greater revegetation of the creeklines. “More trees and bush, 100+ on main catchment areas”, “tree lined 200m each side to source of river”, “500m either side of any watercourse reclaimed to natural vegetation”.

Not everybody felt they understood the Inlet’s problems sufficiently to make comment on catchment changes. “I would like to understand what challenges/problems are for the Inlet currently”, was one response.

Question 10, What do you think should be done to get the future you want for the catchment?

Table 3.10 Response to Question 10

Catchment	51
Greater revegetation/revegetated creeklines/promote perennials	22
No further vegetation clearing	7
No chemical use/greater controls on chemicals	4
Promote sustainable agriculture	3
Stop pollution	3
Controls on farming	3
Reduce farming areas/purchase land	3
Increase drainage/open sandbar	3
Reduce drainage/increase on-farm storage	3
Education/Community Involvement	8
Greater involvement of farmers/work with farmers/common goals	5
Community education/farmer education	3
Management	11
Greater funding/funding of plan	6
Preparation of management plan	5
Monitoring	5
Increased monitoring of river flows/water quality	5
Comparison with Existing Management	6
Leave it alone	5
Look after it same as now	1

Interpretation of responses

Of the 76 responses to this question, 11 were focused on the Inlet rather than the catchment, and are excluded from the above results as they are better covered in the responses to other questions. This left only 65 responses and these were widely spread over many varied suggestions.

The most significant suggestion (with 22 responses) was to encourage revegetation of the catchment, particularly along creeklines, and to promote perennials. "Continue tree planting, research species and varieties for better economic return. Research alternative methods of preventing salinity". Revegetation was linked to the tackling of erosion and nutrient loss, and extensive revegetation of the river foreshores for the Lort and Young was suggested.

Working with farmers, through education, financial assistance, and sharing of goals was considered significant in most responses, with only 3 people advocating a reduction in farmland and an increase in public land. The continuation of agriculture was seen as a given, with some changes or a continuation of sustainable practices. One suggestion was for “funding and education for ‘green’ and Biodynamic or organic farming.”

The need for a management plan for the catchment was acknowledged, and was normally attached to the need for greater funding. “Well funded management plans and rehabilitation”, “management and investment plan”, were examples of such submissions.

Increased monitoring of river flows and quality was another suggestion that received 5 submissions, with a similar number advocating greater involvement and education of farmers.

Question 11, Have you any other comments on the Inlet or Catchment?

Table 3.11 Response to Question 11

Stop net fishing/concern about fish stocks/ professional fishers	21
Leave as is/preserve it	6
Change in catchment/revegetation/education	4
Inlet should be part of the National park/sort out management	4
Improve/as it was	4
Open the Inlet artificially in high rainfall years	3
No unnatural bar openings	1
Don't blame the farmers	3
Maintain access/need a road to ocean	3
Add interpretive centre/ signage	2
Concern about fire safety/dieback	2
Good ranger	2
Inventory of health of flora and fauna of area and rivers/good scientific Monitoring data	2
Ski area	1
Upper reaches should have the algal blooms cleaned out	1
Ensure water is as fresh as possible	1

Interpretation of responses

The 63 responses to this question provided a large variety of comments, many of which have been discussed previously within this report.

As with previous questions concerns about fish stocks, netting and professional fishers were expressed in many of the responses with comments such as “our family (3 generations) have enjoyed the Inlet for over 45 years, fishing, camping, day trips etc and fish numbers and sizes are at an all time low. Concerned about the professional fisherman..... Our family of the 3 generations is over 37 people and we

all feel this way” and “allowing netting in nursery areas for fish = suicide for fish stocks, especially when it’s not commercially logical. Cat food or recreational dollars??”

No other one issue was mentioned in more than 10% of the submissions. 6 respondents felt that the Inlet should be preserved and kept as it is “we hope that the inlet can be preserved for future generations”. Almost as many respondents felt the Inlet needed to be improved or returned to how it was.

Concern was expressed in relation to farmers being blamed for problems; while many thought work was needed in the catchment for cooperative education, revegetation and change in chemical use with comments such as “education of farmers in catchment in a cooperative way and not telling the farmers what they have to do.”

Bar openings were commented on with 3 respondents supporting artificial openings “open the mouth of the inlet in high rainfall years to flush the catchment out” and 1 submission saying “no unnatural openings”.

Management was also mentioned with comments ranging from “sort out management between national park and inlet” to “the Inlet be made part of the National Park”.

Access, the ranger, signage, fire and dieback were all mentioned a couple of times.

Question 12, What role would you like to play in improving the condition of the Inlet?

Table 3.12 Response to Question 12

Anything I can do/open to suggestions/volunteer	13
None	7
Be a pleased/considerate visitor	7
Help out when visiting the inlet/clear rubbish	7
Plant trees/revegetate	5
Not much – too old	5
Be informed/consulted of any programs set up /Opportunity to comment on plan	4
Lobby for no net fishing	3
Support	3
Promote sustainable agriculture	2
What can I do?	2
Restoring heritage sites	1
More than now	1
Member of catchment group	1

Interpretation of responses

Of the 58 respondents to this question over 20% said they would be happy to help through “community volunteering” with some saying that their role would be “anything I could do”. 5 responses were more specifically related to revegetation work with comments such as “plant trees”. A slightly smaller number of respondents said they would be willing to help when visiting the Inlet.

Just over 10% of respondents felt they would like to have no role with statements ranging from “too far away, none” to “None. It is an ecosystem that is self-sustaining. We have seen the Inlet over a 40 year span and the fish and birds are better now than ever” suggesting they felt the management plan was not necessary.

A number of respondents felt that they could not play a role due to their age “am getting to be a bit long in the tooth to be of much help I'm a tourist these days.”

Some respondents felt that being a pleased visitor was their role with comments such as “by being able to visit on a regular basis and be able to explore a beautiful coastline” as a response to what role they could play.

Another role which a number of respondents felt they could play was to be informed and to comment on the plan “I would like to be helped informed of any progress and help in an advisory form if possible”.

3 respondents commented that their role would be to end commercial fishing at the Inlet with comments such as “seeing through the banning of out of town professional netting of the Inlet.”

Appendix 1

Analysis of responses from organisations

Letters were sent to 32 organisations, considered likely to have an interest in Stokes Inlet. A copy of the letter and questionnaire are included (appendices 1 and 2) within this report.

Responses from 8 organisations are summarised below.

Department of Fisheries

- Fisheries are responsible for the management of all fish resources.
- The Fish Resources Management Act 1994 does not assign priority to any value. All values must be given due consideration in fisheries management decisions.
- The main threats from a fisheries perspective are:
 - Environmental influences such as rainfall and salinity,
 - Fishing pressure (recreational and commercial),
 - Pollution and other human environmental stressors.

The estuary is difficult to monitor and enforce as it is remote.

- To manage these threats:
 - Look at implementing mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change,
 - Use existing fisheries management processes and techniques to control fishing effort/catch and share catch between sectors,
 - DoW and DEC should comment on water quality issues.
- Would like to see future management through various government departments and the community cooperatively managing the Inlet with proper recognition of roles and responsibilities.

Local Politician

Main threat to the Inlet is that it is overfished. Commercial fishing should be banned. It is a closed Black bream fishery and it should be protected.

Esperance Regional Forum (ERF)

- ERF is in the final stages of developing an Implementation Plan for the Young River Catchment 07/08 which will provide incentives for on ground works in an attempt to address sedimentation.
- Main threats to the Inlet are sedimentation, salinity and nutrient enrichment.
- These threats should be managed through continuing to work closely with landholders in both the Young and Lort (in the future) catchments to bring about positive change using on ground works such as fencing and revegetation of stream channels and buffers, planting perennial plants on and near slopes and maintaining a healthy easygoing relationship with landholders/catchment groups and encouraging them to stay united.
- ERF would like to see the Inlet managed in the future through the formation of the Lort plus Young Catchment group (could be call Stokes catchment group) and receive funding to employ a full-time hydrology manager to help deliver on ground works. This position could spend one day per property per year to establish what landholders are trying to do with water, and then provide engineering solutions.

South Coast Licensed Fishermen's Association

- Participates in South Coast estuarine fishery.
- Most important values are environmental and water quality.
- The main threats to the Inlet are nutrient runoff and salinity level.
- These threats should be managed through best practice land management and improved future catchment management.
- Management actions recommended are measures to reduce nutrient runoff and revegetation of river banks.
- Could play a role through advisory capacity, fishing log books, catch data, general water quality monitoring.
- River flow salinity appears to have increased and the Young River flow rates are of concern, they seem to have decreased.

Recherche Advisory Group (RAG)

- RAG has an interest in responsible management of the Esperance marine environment and promotes community driven multi use management of the Recherche Archipelago which extends off Stokes Inlet.
- The environmental assets of Stokes are the most important values followed by community/social values.
 - Main threats to the Inlet are people pressure resulting from park users, salinity and sedimentation from catchment and land users.
 - The threats should be managed by a community driven plan covering all sectors. Focusing on maintaining and improving environmental assets of the estuary and taking into account social and economic factors.
 - Management in the future needs to tackle salinity and sediment threats from the catchment.
- RAG could play a role by supporting community marine interests.

Shire of Esperance

- At this point in time the Shire of Esperance has no direct role in the management of Stokes Inlet. However, the Shire has a joint management agreement with the National Trust for management of the Moir Homestead Reserve. Additionally the Shire regulates development and land use activity in the Shire.
- The values of the Inlet are that it is unique within the Shire of Esperance, appears pristine is highly accessible to all vehicles and supports commercial fisheries.
- Main threats to the Inlet are hydrological changes (altered water flow and quality), increased development activity within region may lead to increase use.
- The threats should be managed through the development and implementation of a management plan with community consultation, involvement and achievable outcomes. Management plan needs to be closely linked to the National Park management plan and identify site specific issues and appropriate management strategies.
- The Shire would like to see the Inlet actively managed in the future by appropriate regulatory authorities to maintain and enhance the identified values of the Inlet as described in the management plan.
- Management actions must be consistent with Inlet and park management plans and should create linkages within the community to promote NRM activities within the Shire, the National Park, biodiversity values, and use of key indicators to identify or demonstrate the health of the Inlet system.

- The Shires role in the management is through membership on the steering committee and through management of reserve 32601 and Moir's Homestead.
- The Shire has additional information on the Moir Homestead which the Stokes Inlet project officer is welcome to view at the Shire offices.

Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA)

- DAFWA is assisting ERF in the development of catchment management plans.
- Values of the Inlet are environmental – landscape amenity, social – accessibility, education, recreation and social – Bream fishery.
- Main threats to the Inlet are sedimentation, salinisation (hypersaline conditions induced by increased salt input from catchment) and eutrophication.
- Threats should be managed by:
 - Sedimentation – planting of buffer strips on 3rd and 4th order streams in catchment.
 - Salinisation – control recharge through planting of perennial species in key areas across the catchment.
- Would like to see the Inlet managed by the incorporation of an environmental repair levy for catchment works based on a choice modelling or travel cost survey of park users, visitor fees as the payment vehicle. Integrated management model including all stakeholders (i.e. agricultural industry and community).
- Recommended management actions are:
 - Appropriate water management systems i.e. harvest, storage and responsible delivery to natural system respecting landscape characteristics,
 - Maintain adequate soil cover to prevent soil loss, abide by the Soil Conservation Act.
 - Efficient use of farming inputs to match land capability and nutrient export through product harvesting (nutrient budgeting). Encourage sustainable agriculture systems.
- DAFWA's role in implementing these actions could be through facilitating extensive activities like workshops to help growers understand the economics and management implications of works to help manage land degradation risks that ultimately influence the health of the estuary.

Bay of Isles and Esperance Aboriginal Corporation

- Previously worked with CALM (now DEC) restoring heritage areas of Fanny Cove and surrounding areas of tracks destination.
- Most important values of the Inlet are clean water, restrict netting of fish (strictly for general public fishing), open up area to mouth of river and at inlet, find preventative measures.
- Threats to the Inlet are chemical runoff from farms in catchment area north and tributaries, creeks etc.
- Manage these threats through a general consensus of cooperation from all concerned in area as such and education for future users and long term management.
- Would like to see Inlet managed in future by bodies willing to work towards better management probably as a cooperative body.
- Recommended management actions are from all parties a committee working together with finances and the well being of Stokes in mind, subject to funding etc.
- Could play a role as a labour force, contracting, to implement improvements to the area concerned.
- Buffer zones, tree rehabilitation, salt land management in catchment area.

Appendix 2

Your ref:
Our ref: RF296
Enquiries: Mieke Bourne

Dear

RE: DEVELOPMENT OF STOKES INLET ESTUARY MANAGEMENT PLAN

I am writing to invite your contribution to developing an estuary management plan for Stokes Inlet.

Due to the high environmental, social and economic values of Stokes Inlet it has been decided, through consultation with key government agencies, that an estuary management plan for Stokes Inlet should be prepared.

The development of this plan is funded by the South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team (SCRIPT) and is driven by a steering group which presently has representatives from key local and State Government organisations. The group has already met to get things started and the selection of community representatives is now underway.

In order to better understand the present condition of the Inlet an environmental condition report has been prepared and a literature review undertaken. A questionnaire about Stokes Inlet will be sent out to the community at the end of November so that public views on the Inlet can be better understood. The steering group hopes to have the draft estuary management plan for Stokes Inlet available for comment by mid-2007.

In addition to obtaining communities views, the steering group would also like to know your organisations views on the values, threats and management priorities for Stokes Inlet.

It would be appreciated if you could take a few moments to fill out the questionnaire attached to this letter. This needs to be returned to the Department of Water, PO Box 525, Albany, Western Australia 6331 by the 15th of December 2006. If you have any questions please call 98410127 and I will be happy to talk to you further about this project.

Yours sincerely

Mieke Bourne
Project Officer
Developing Estuary Management Plans
Department of Water

28 November 2006

Please find attached the questionnaire and a list of organisations and people to whom this letter has been sent.

Appendix 3

Stokes Inlet Survey for Organisations

Q1. What organisation do you represent in your responses to this questionnaire?

Q2. What role, if any, does your organisation presently play in managing Stokes Inlet and catchment?

Q3. What does your organisation believe are the most important values (environmental, social and economic) of the Inlet? *Please list in order of priority.*

Q4. What does your organisation believe are the main threats to the Inlet?

Q5. How does your organisation believe these threats should be managed?

Q6. How would your organisation like to see the Inlet managed in the future?

Q7. What management actions would your organisation recommend?

Q8. What role could your organisation play in the implementation of these actions?

Q9. Does your organisation have any additional information on the Inlet or catchment that could complement the work being undertaken by this management plan? If yes, please list below.

Appendix 4

MEDIA STATEMENT

Stokes Inlet, have your say!

Community input is being sought for a management plan being prepared for Stokes Inlet.

Stokes Inlet is located approximately 80km west of Esperance. The Inlet and the surrounding Stokes National Park are popular for camping, fishing and many other activities. The Inlet is easily accessible from the South Coast Highway and is the largest and deepest in the Esperance area.

The plan is the first of its type for the Inlet, and will help identify community values and priorities for management. The plan is being prepared by a steering group involving many agencies and community representatives, and is being funded through resources obtained by the South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team (SCRIPT) and the regional natural resource management strategy.

“We are in the early stages of the planning process for the Inlet,” said project officer Mieke Bourne. “At this stage we want to know what the people who use this Inlet value about it and what they want for its future”.

“Community values are a vital part in the management planning process and a questionnaire has been prepared to enable individuals to express their views on how the Inlet should be managed” said Mieke.

“The management plan represents a good example of how SCRIPT funds are being used to better manage natural resources in an integrated way” said Rob Edkins, Chief Executive Officer of SCRIPT.

“The plan will consider all natural resource management themes, across many areas, have extensive community engagement, and lead to an outcome that provides clear direction for the future of the Inlet: In this way a highly valued asset is better protected” Rob said.

The questionnaire is currently being distributed as an inserts in local newspapers, through a mail out west of Esperance and is available at the ranger’s station at Stokes National Park. The questionnaires will need to be returned, postage already paid, by the 15th of December 2006.

“Responses from this questionnaire will guide the plan, a draft of which will be available for community comment and input by mid-2007” said Mieke.

If you have not received a copy of the survey by the end of November and would like to have your say, or you would like more information, please contact Mieke Bourne on 98410 127.

Media contact: Mieke Bourne 98410127
Wendy Cooke 98928537 or 0428928536

Appendix 5

Copy of community questionnaire (attached as a separate document)