

Appendix 5: Stakeholder interviews

This Appendix (i) summarises findings of the second rounds of stakeholder interviews and (ii) provides copies of presentations given through the life of the NCCP focused on recommendations for communication and engagement with stakeholders.

The first and third rounds of stakeholder discussions are not included in this Appendix:

- the first round of stakeholder interviews were reported in detail in Appendix 1, and the report in Appendix 1 should be referred to for results of these interviews
- the findings of the third round of stakeholder discussions are reported in detail in the report of the June stakeholder workshop provided as an Appendix to the Final Report of project 1, with additional findings summarised in the main body of this report.

FINDINGS OF SECOND ROUND OF STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS

The second round of stakeholder interviews focused on identifying stakeholder views about engagement and communication, which were drawn on to inform the National Carp Control Plan Communication and Engagement Strategy & Operational Plan 2019 (a document this project helped shape, which is available separately to this final report).

The second round of interviews were conducted from June to November of 2018, with 45 Round 2 interviews completed overall. During Round 2, 10 of the original 23 key stakeholders interviewed in Round 1 were re-interviewed, to identify how their views about carp control were changing. A further 7 of the original 23 were interviewed as part of ongoing socio-economic impact assessment, and as part of these interviews were asked to describe their overall views about the National Carp Control Plan, particularly communication, engagement and whether and how their views about carp control had changed since the National Carp Control Plan was announced and began its research. In addition, interviews with 28 new stakeholders were conducted as part of the socio-economic impact assessment, who provided their views on these topics as well as discussing potential for specific impacts on the group they were part of or represented (e.g. recreational fishing, koi, native fish aquaculture, commercial fishing or tourism).

In this Appendix, direct quotes are included from the 10 key stakeholders re-interviewed for the second round, but not from interviews conducted with members of specific groups such as koi hobbyists, native fish aquaculture businesses etc. This is because the views of commercial carp fishers, koi sector, native fish aquaculture sector, recreational fishers and the tourism sector about communication and engagement are reported in the individual reports for those sectors. The aggregate view of stakeholders discussed in this Appendix does, however, incorporate those perspectives, to ensure that views of as wide a range of stakeholders as possible are reported (we have simply elected not to repeat quotes multiple times across different Appendices, and hence include quotes only from those stakeholders not quoted in other Appendices).

Community perceptions of carp control

Round 2 stakeholder interviews found similar levels of conditional support for carp control to the levels identified in the first round of interviews. Overwhelmingly participants identified carp control as a priority issue to be addressed and either fully or partially supported the use of the carp virus. However, several stakeholders had identified additional questions or concerns that would need to be addressed to their satisfaction before they would provide support for implementing actions to control carp. Many interview participants felt that more work needed to be completed prior to the release, particularly regarding the ongoing uncertainty of the science, implementation plans, risks of releasing a virus, and the need for further engagement:

“I feel like you can see the light at the end of the tunnel, but I just don't think we're quite there yet. So, I'd like to see an implementation program and that sort of thing before I said, "Yes. It's definitely a go." [Round 2 Participant 1]

“No [I don't support the release of the virus]. Not at the moment. But nor do I say they should never release the virus. I just say we don't know enough to make a good decision yet. But a good decision might be to release. And it doesn't mean it doesn't have a negative effect. It just

means we know what the negative effect's going to be and we're prepared to manage it or prepared to accept it." [Round 2 Participant 4]

"There's a great deal of concern and certainly strong reservations from people that I've spoke to about [releasing a virus]. The example of past releases of exotic pets or diseases in certain ecosystems is often raised as a case in point. ... I can't provide an organizational response to that at the moment until we've done some more consultation." [Round 2 Participant 10]

Those stakeholders who had not supported virus release in the first round of interviews had not changed their views: these were principally stakeholders engaged with the koi, native fish aquaculture, and commercial carp fishing sectors. Almost all koi and native fish aquaculture stakeholders interviewed, together with a majority of commercial carp fishers, opposed virus release or were conditionally opposed to it. There were more mixed views amongst those in the tourism and recreational fishing sectors, many of whom wanted much more information and to see key concerns addressed before they could provide support.

Some stakeholders wanted to see the virus released sooner rather than later, particularly those engaged in farming, water management, and some involved in natural resource management work and recreational fishing (although not all). Those stakeholders who held this view felt that the release of the virus would cause some problems, but were confident they could be dealt with during the implementation process and felt there would be significant environmental benefits that outweighed the risks. Typically this view was based on the assumption that the virus would be one of a range of actions intended to reduce carp populations and support environmental health in areas affected by carp invasion:

"I just maintain that I've been positive about this right the way through. But the sooner it rolls out the better and I wish it all the best of luck and all those sorts of things. There will be challenges along the way, I'm sure, but I know a lot of work's gone into preparing for it and I just think there's opportunities there at many levels, as we've discussed, the educational, the spiritual. At every level there are real benefits there that are going to accrue and the sooner that we can see that happen the better." [Round 2 Participant 8]

"It really is time to do something. Yeah. Like, it's a generational thing. Like, when I think that they're not really making enough of that. To me, it's like, "This is amazing. You know, this could potentially change our rivers from being brown to running much clearer again. You know, what a vision for that, you know. It could make our other fish bounce back. I guess the message that we give people is, "Look. You know, the virus is one of many things. It's gonna have to be followed up with a whole range of other strategies." [Round 2 Participant 7]

Some wanted the virus released quickly and were concerned about waiting too long to do so:

"It's just a long drawn-out process. Most of us make a decision and just do it and move on. If it works, it works. If it's bad, you get slapped on the backside. ... Well, it depends how brave people want to be. So you want to sign every I and dot every T, we'll still be talking about it in 20 years time and somebody wants to make a difference, they'll do something sooner." [Round 2 Participant 2]

Other stakeholders however were concerned about moving too quickly to releasing the virus, wanting additional evidence and considerable time invested in reducing risks:

"No, you could generate a catastrophic outcome. .. The other [concern] I call the cane toad effect. You'll never get permission in a generation to release another virus. And so all the viral

controls and viruses are massively important for controlling pests of agricultural crops so it's something we do anyway. And so that if you get it wrong, it's not just the consequence, the ecological consequence, it's the social and global consequences. And so impatience is not a good thing.” [Round 2 Participant 4]

Overall, more stakeholders expressed concern about moving too quickly to implement the virus, and fewer wanted a rapid process of virus release. On balance, a majority of stakeholders interviewed wanted time pressure to be reduced through increasing the time available for the NCCP.

The carp control plan, past, present and future

Stakeholders interviewed generally supported the process being used for the plan, particularly the focus on ensuring key questions about risk were invested in:

“Look I haven't been closely involved with it, but from what I can see it seems to be fairly comprehensive in terms of the research and everything that's gone into the efficacy and workability of the virus, and the management of it. But it also seems to have ticked the boxes in terms of security and in terms of risk to impact on native species. But I think that's obviously the first box that has to be ticked. If it can't pass that test then it doesn't go any further. I think that the fact that they have that level of confidence that it is a workable solution, I think is commendable.” [Round 2 Participant 8]

“I think, from what I said earlier, it's tracking how I would expect something with such big implications and such emotion around it should track. I don't think you want to rush these things. We've got a history of really bad biological control options in Australia, and I don't think any one wants to move down that path again without fully signing off, and I think, hopefully, if we've learned anything from that, it's to really tick all the boxes first, and I think that's what the program's trying to do. ... I'm not surprised at how long it's taking to be honest....” [Round 2 Participant 4]

Some felt that the research initially invested in by the NCCP was insufficient to address their concerns, particularly those in the native fish aquaculture and commercial carp fishing sectors, and some scientists.

Several stakeholders were concerned about what they felt was either overly simplistic communication, or was a gap in communication that had allowed what they felt was misinformation or inaccurate reports to occur in the media. Several were reassured by communication in the second half of 2018 emphasising the lengthy approval process required for a virus release if it occurred:

“I feel it had a wobbly start, but I feel more comfortable that it's heading in the right direction and it's my perception so I hear things from community around. I think people have appreciated the communication that's stopped a lot of the Chinese whispers. It hasn't stopped all of them but it's not as alarming as it has been. I think there's, everyone's going 'there's a long way to go yet and there's lots of gates and hurdles to go through'...” [Round 2 Participant 3]

Most interviewees were trusting of the science supporting the process and decisions, the commitment of the people, but were still concerned about the implementation:

“... I trust the process, and I trust peer review and science, and I think that I have trust within that program that they are trying to do the best they can, in terms of getting the research and ticking the boxes beforehand. So, I trust the program as it stands” [Round 2 Participant 1]

“The organisation [RDA] has a high degree of trust for as long as input is included along the way. Currently there is no reason to not trust them as elements of co-creation has happened, they have listened to feedback.” [Round 2 Participant 3]

“Well I think, yeah ... it would have to be you know, I trust them very greatly, very highly, yeah. I've noticed in speaking to some people, that they're extremely passionate about the cause, or about trying to help fix the problems that carp have created in our waterways. I believe it, for sure.” [Round 2 Participant 6]

“I guess to some extent it's based on reasonably robust science, although I have seen some material recently that certainly is trying to ... what's the word ... pick holes in it, but no, basically I think it's ... I think it's well founded on science and I guess the discussion really isn't about the science of it, it's really about the implementation, isn't it?” [Round 2 Participant 2]

However other stakeholders were less trusting due to concerns about communication they felt oversimplified key issues and downplayed the challenges of virus release:

“No. Because I think they've been guilty of simplifying the issue and ignoring data. And I think politically that's okay because that's what we do all the time. You have to create a really simple message. But I think socially and ethically it's not okay at some point and you have to actually daylight those issues. And so I have concerns that there's been sins of omission.” [Round 2 Participant 4]

Meanwhile others trusted the process and the people, but did not trust the politics and the potential impact of politics on this critical decision:

“...yes, you might be able to tick the research boxes, but will governments implement it... So, I think that's where the distrust, from my point of view, anyway, probably comes in more in the implementation and signing off on it and people, politicians, different agendas, and that sort of thing may or may not get on board. So, I have more trust in the scientific research than I do in the latter stages of release, the actual signing off and saying, "Yes, let's go for it." So, I think that'll be less driven by results and research and peer review and more by popularity and that sort of thing as per politics.” [Round 2 Participant 1]

Some concerns were expressed about the quality and consistency of engagement and communications. While most felt the information/consultation sessions delivered in their region early in the life of the NCCP were positive, subsequent lack of communication created a vacuum of information which left them wondering what has happened, and enabled others to fill the space:

“I guess probably the communication of it. I know there have been a couple of rounds of information tours through the regions. I know that we've had a couple up our way, which had been good, but I think particularly of late things seem to have gone a bit quiet. I've had a number of conversations with people who are asking if it's even still happening. There has been a bit of negative media about it in some quarters and that I think has spooked a few people There was a steady stream of stories there for quite a while, which was quite encouraging. But the fact that there appears to be a bit of a lull, I think has some people asking question.” [Round 2 Participant 8]

“I just think that the time is now. Even if they're not looking at rolling it out straight away. The time is now to get a new story. I really feel that quite strongly, because the longer they lay there ... the voices of, "Oh, they don't know what they're doing. Oh, you know, it's not going

to work." They're going to get louder, because there's nothing that we can say in response."
[Round 2 Participant 7]

Others were concerned about the narrow inclusion of views in the scientific consultation, with some disciplines perceived to have been excluded from studies despite the need for a holistic understanding of the river ecosystem:

"The scientific consultation has been very narrow and it's been very focused on fisheries people. The risk of that is fisheries people tend to think of separate species systems. And they haven't had enough ecologists. So the preeminent ecologists in Australia have not been engaged. It's been fisheries biologists at a state level. And it's a particular group and they tend to be population biologists not ecosystem ecologists." [Round 2 Participant 4]

Involving stakeholders into the future

While overall views about support for carp control had not changed significantly since the first round of interviews, the interviewees did identify both concerns about and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of engagement and communication about the NCCP.

Most of the participating stakeholders wanted to be involved in development and implementation of the Plan to some extent. Few identified they wanted a significant role in the development or implementation, while all wanted to be either a) consulted and enabled an opportunity to inform plan development, or b) provided information to stay informed and be able share information through their channels, as well as provide feedback from their networks to the NCCP. Sometimes different requirements were identified for different parts of the process:

"I guess just being kept informed. I don't need to sit on a board or I don't need to sit on the panel, we're just limited on time and we're in the regions and we're out and about a lot. But I guess just providing us with enough information that we can then share it with people in regions, and keep them posted ... I see us more as an information conduit if you know what I mean, as opposed to someone who is actively engaged on a committee as such.... The implementation stage is probably where we would want to be more kept in the loop I guess, because if I don't know what the actual result will be of the program... So it's just again, key messaging, is all I would say is probably the extent. But just being kept up to date and informed." [Round 2 Participant 5]

"I guess there's some merit in being involved in the [implementation] decision-making process because then it's ... you know the tight control team are trying to work with the local community, not just sending dates and saying "This is when we do it. You gotta come along." Maybe if we do it, try and work it out with the local community, when it suits the local community, if that makes sense?" [Round 2 Participant 6]

"We will probably want to influence the decisions. ... I think we're going to get to a point where we're going to go, "Okay, it's going along all right. Just keep going. Let us know if anything comes up." It's pretty significant, so we probably need to be on the ground floor. If you want to put it the other way, if stuff starts happening in the river relating to carp, and we don't know about it, we're probably going to get grumpy." [Round 2 Participant 9]

While many stakeholders were happy with the initial communications processes, a tension around communications was identified with others concerned over the political simplification of the messaging to date and the inability of such messaging to enable community members to make informed decisions without sufficient understanding of the associated risks and warned that future

communications need to acknowledge the community's capacity to understand, while others wanted plain English information:

"I think the communication plan needs to assume people are capable of understanding the complexities. So the simple communication, "Carp are bad, this kills carp," is fine and it creates a political sense or political will but it's not sufficient. So even if people bought it and said, "Okay you've got a social mandate to release this," the reality is not an informed social mandate so it's not okay. So I think there just needs to be more of a recognition of the risks, understanding that people have to understand the risks and how those risks are being managed. Otherwise, they'll get big pushback." [Round 2 Participant 4]

"I think it would be useful to have some plain English information about the scientific, and any studies, that have been done to assess the risk of the transference of the virus to other species, all that kind of thing. Some really plain English communication tools around that stuff would be useful." [Round 2 Participant 10]

The importance of including stakeholders who were perceived to be missing from current engagement processes was highlighted by several stakeholders, including local government and Indigenous people:

"I think one area that will probably assist you is actually going through the local councils in the regions that are involved and their affiliates as well because, you know, I guess if you're saying where are the likeliest things that complaints will go to down, you know, to impact negatively on the program? Local councils will be pretty involved in that process." [Round 2 Participant 2]

"I think Indigenous groups are also important. Need to include those guys because they obviously have very close links to the rivers." [Round 2 Participant 8]

The importance of ongoing communications was raised by some stakeholders, who were concerned about the potential for misinformation if there was no continuity of information provided:

"Keep them on the train, the same communications train ... In a vacuum of communications people jump to their own conclusions" [Round 2 Participant 3]

Many stakeholders identified that a key role they could provide was assistance in disseminating information through their often extensive networks. However, doing this successfully required access to consistent and appropriate information:

"Well, I think that the most effective way that they can get information out is to use existing networks. So, it's to look at organizations like mine and say... "What does [person] need?" I need some really good photos. I need a paragraph saying, "This is why we're doing things." And, then i need some short "snippy" quotes that I can really service on social media. And, it would also be really good to have some kind of a regularly updated forum or website so that people can go and look at what's happening, and where." [Round 2 Participant 7]

Indigenous representatives sought a greater role than the sharing of information, and wanted to be embedded within the consultation processes as key experts and given economic development opportunities as part of the Plan implementation:

"We would like to have a strong role in helping to roll out consultation with First Nations in the [Basin]. We'd like to make sure that their perspectives will shape the outcome. That any perspectives that they want to bring to the conversation in term of traditional ecological

knowledge, or other perspectives that might enhance the program, will be accounted for and incorporated. We also want to make sure that, in the rollout of the program, there's opportunities for Aboriginal natural resource management businesses to build capacity, and capitalize on those opportunities, and get contracts.” [Round 2 Participant 10]

Some stakeholders focused on discussing the importance of having appropriate engagement and involvement throughout the process of developing recommendations for the NCCP, and in particular making sure input received clearly influences the recommendations ultimately made:

“Aboriginal communities need to have the opportunity to fully digest all of the information, both the scientific perspectives on the effectiveness of the virus and on the risks associated with the virus. Also, the practicalities of the clean-up and any opportunities that might arise from that. They need to be able to digest all that stuff, and then make an informed decision that is actually going to be listened to when the final decision is made ... If that strong feedback is not going to be factored into the final decision, then communities are going to be disenfranchised again. We don't want that to happen. We talk about free and prior informed consent around any major decisions that are going to impact on our country, our waterways, on cultural values associated with the waterways.” [Round 2 Participant 10]

Some stakeholders focused on discussing the type of communication needed to support implementation, rather than on the type of communication required during the remainder of the life of the NCCP. These discussions focused on the need to adequately resource communications and engagement in on-ground carp control strategies, and to ensure people who had expertise and knowledge in consultation and engagement in areas affected by carp invasion were involved from the start (rather than as an ‘add-on’):

“I would be looking for, you know, in each community that you're working in there isn't always going to be a one size fits all. You're actually going to have to tailor the response depending on who the organizations are, and who the champions are. ... So, it is actually taking the time to work out who are the bodies in each of those regional areas that people look to. And, then getting there to help you tailor your message so it's right for that community. ... you need to be able to enable people to adapt and modify so it resonates in their local community.” [Round 2 Participant 7]

“I remember examples of consultation [where] they actually did the consultation through the bush fire brigades. Because the members of the community were all members of the bush fire brigade. So they targeted those. I think a bit of creative thinking along those lines might go a long way. Most of the people in the community that have an interest in the river, often it's recreational. And then when it comes to industry it's obviously through stakeholder groups like ours. But the recreational users, the fishers, the boaters, all those guys, they are the ones I think you need to target...” [Round 2 Participant 8]

“And I think this is what we tend to do wrong as ecologists in particular. We do that as a group of ecologists and we don't have the science communicators or the social scientists in the room, they're an add on thing.” [Round 2 Participant 4]

“We probably want to have a discussion about how we would design a community engagement process and make sure it captures the right constituency. I'd respectfully suggest that the three key people you need to have in the room to have that discussion are [three names stakeholders] because we've all got similar but different networks. If information's flowing through those networks, or we're helping you design regional events and even batching them as a new program, then that's going to get you better engagement.” [Round 2 Participant 9]

Overwhelmingly stakeholders agreed that face to face forms of communication were essential for implementation in particular given the that carp is an emotional issue due to the combination of water, environment and science. Face to face is particularly important when it came to implementation stages where it was important for those affected to be able to speak directly with experts rather than relying on more passive forms of communication:

“You actually do need to be probably out across the communities where there's going to be an impact. So how you do that at that stage is probably up to you but I think it's just, you get towards release points and you say, well this is what we're going to do and this is how it's going to happen. I think that's more on information sessions. I think that's what you actually do need to be in the communities. [Round 2 Participant 2]

“You can have as much email and Facebook and twitter as you want but it is the shared communication that makes the difference.” [Round 2 Participant 3]

“I think you can't beat face-to-face. And I think in the first instance particularly, you can't beat the face-to-face and be able to answer the questions and those sorts of things. And then once people have a base level of knowledge, then they can go to the website or to different publications and so forth to get more information if they want to.” [Round 2 Participant 8]

Recognising that face to face communications is highly resource intensive, stakeholders also identified that facilitated webinars which are becoming well attended in regional areas, and the production of online video content (and DVDs) which provide readily accessible information. Stakeholders identified websites as an important communication approach, but felt that they should not be the first port of call when communicating about implementation in particular: website information was viewed as good for those with expertise or high interests, but of less utility for the average member of the public. This was accompanied by some stakeholders calling for investment of sufficient resources to ensure the right communication and consultation could occur during any implementation of virus release, if a decision is made in future to release the virus.

Conclusion

All stakeholders felt reducing carp populations was important for the future of Australian waterways. However, almost all stakeholders wanted more information before they could support the release of the carp virus, and several wanted active engagement and the opportunity not only to hear results of research, but to engage in processes of discussion and decision making. Many stakeholders interviewed wanted to be part of the communications process, whether that be through direct consultation that influenced decision making, or by supporting information dissemination and providing a conduit for providing feedback from members of their networks to the NCCP.

Recognising the desire for more involvement and the need for more engagement and communication as the implementation plan is developed and rolled out, stakeholders wanted:

- **Detailed engagement with the science** - dialogue with the scientists so as they could move beyond high level findings to discuss the content and details (eg. online or face to face forums & workshops, field trips)
- **To help shape recommendations** for consideration - particularly important for some aspects of the Plan including biosecurity strategy, clean-up, and strategies to address impacts on specific groups (tourism, koi, commercial fishers, native fish breeders)

- **Input into Plan development** - active and ongoing consultation and engagement on Plan itself, don't restrict engagement to formal consultation at the end of the process.
- **To help communicate information** about development of the Plan - an active role in helping to share communications going forward. Stakeholders would like to receive materials they can use to communicate with their networks (particularly some NRM-focused NGOs, farming and rec fishing organisations)

PRESENTATIONS GIVEN TO NCCP MEETINGS RELATED TO STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

The three embedded presentations below provide the updates given to NCCP meetings that reported on ongoing findings produced from stakeholder engagement as part of this project.



Embedded Presentation 1 Update given to NCCP May 24 2018, focused on stakeholder engagement needs

Stakeholder and community engagement strategy

Proposals for best practice engagement

Jacki Schirmer, Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra

jacki.Schirmer@Canberra.edu.au

EmEmbedded Presentation 2: Recommendations for best practice engagement, produced based on second round stakeholder interviews, 2018 (click to open presentation and scroll through)



National Carp Control Plan

Building community support for carp control: understanding community and stakeholder attitudes and assessing socio-economic effects

Jacki Schirmer, Helena Clayton
University of Canberra

Health Research Institute & Institute for Applied Ecology

Jacki.Schirmer@Canberra.edu.au
helena.clayton@Canberra.edu.au



NATIONAL CARP CONTROL PLAN
RESTORING NATIVE BIODIVERSITY

Embedded Presentation 3 Presentation given December 2018 summarising key findings and recommendations, including key recommendations related to stakeholder engagement