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Short webinars for environmental policy-makers and practitioners

Environmental Perceptions Survey 2022

The following questions were asked during our live webinar with Pike Stahlmann-Brown and Pam Booth but due to time restrictions, we were unable to answer these in the session.

To what extent do you think external factors change public perceptions (social media, news, politics) as opposed to physical changes in the environment?

Answered in webinar. In addition:

There's a lot of scientific evidence to support this concept. At the same time, we think it's important to remember that we have nearly 2100 from across the entire country, and an external factor that affects one person's perceptions may not affect another person's perceptions.

How well informed are respondents? I follow environmental trends closely but wouldn't be well informed on say sewerage impact on coastal waters.

Answered in webinar. In addition:

This is a great question that gets to the heart of the survey's purpose. We ask about the perceptions of ordinary New Zealanders, who may or may not be well informed about specific environmental issues. If people are well informed, it's easier to garner public support for the most critical environmental programmes, whatever they may be. But if there's a disconnect between science and public perception, then it's much harder to achieve a mandate.

So based on these results, what - if anything - should NZ be doing differently? What's the ideal policy or social action impact?

Highlighting the disconnect between the perceived and actual state of the environment (which will be a focus of our research in 2023), we think there's a role for scientists to communicate better.

Is the farming community more engaged because of the greater impact on their business to beef/sheep and dairying? So that group participating in the survey because it impacts on their financial margins?

Kia ora Kahi, This is a great question. The survey really focuses on WHAT the NZ public thinks about the environment rather than WHY they think it. We'll turn our attention to the farming sector specifically during the upcoming 2023 Survey of Rural Decision Makers.

Do you know if a definition was given to respondents for what a wetland is/where they are found?

Kia ora Alison, Similar to previous waves of the survey, respondents were not give any prompting or additional information about any of the environmental domains. This allowed for us to understand

public perceptions without potentially influencing those perceptions through introduction of information.

Speaking of respondents perception on how farmers are doing, how about perception of how city populations are doing?

Answered in webinar. In addition:

We agree! This report has had a bit of a focus on farms and how well they're doing for the environment, but I don't think we've paid enough attention to urban areas, either in terms of how the natural environment in urban areas is faring or in terms of the considerable environmental pressures urban people put on the natural environment. We'll put this in the bucket of things to consider for the next Environmental Perceptions Survey!

It would be interesting to track public media against the results over time.

Kia or Sandra, This is a terrific idea that we may take up for the 2023 Survey of Rural Decision Makers. Stay tuned!

How do we build activity back up to pre-COVID times!

It's a compelling question! The survey asks WHAT the NZ public does in terms of environmental engagement, but not WHY they do it. We hypothesise that COVID and inflationary pressures mean that people have less discretionary time that they once had, but we didn't specifically explore this in the survey.

How well do you think we as the NZ science community actually communicate the real state of our environment?

Answered in webinar. In addition:

Given the disconnect between perceptions and reality for some environmental domains, we think scientists can improve in this area!

Any suggestion on why all those activities dropped?

Kia ora Magnus, Some activities (e.g., 'reducing or limiting use of electricity') were already on a slow decline and others were slowly increasing (e.g., 'been an active member of a club or group that restores/or replants natural environments') since 2010. While the survey only asks what people are doing and not why they are or are not doing certainly activities, a potential hypothesis to understand the large drop across all activities in 2022 points to exogenous pressures that impacted everyone. We hypothesise that COVID and inflationary pressures mean that people have less discretionary time than they once had.

What about urban environments?

Kia ora India, We have a time series for state and response to pressures on 'Natural environments in towns and cities'. Starting in the most recent survey we also asked respondents about the pressures on the natural environments in urban areas.

Do you have a theory for the significant change in perception on sewage/stormwater between 2010 and 2013?

Kia ora Lionel, While we don't ask why respondents think the way they do about the environment in this survey, we are keen to explore this question in our upcoming research.

Were any questions asked specifically to Māori about their perceptions / concerns?

Kia or Pip, We did not ask questions specifically to Māori, but did recruit the survey sample to be representative across ethnicity, age, region, and gender.

Really interesting to see how perceptions relate to 'reality'. I'm curious to hear your thoughts about implications of misalignments?

Kia ora Flo, We think there's a role for scientists to sharper their skills in science communication!

Have you done any work on matching media reports with changes in trends?

Kia ora Ruth, While we don't ask why respondents think the way they do about the environment in this survey, we are keen to explore this topic next year.