



Ocean and coastal sustainability outcome paper

Canberra scoping workshop





Executive summary

Future Earth Australia has proposed the creation of an ocean and coastal systems transformation 10-year strategy, which will outline clear, actionable strategies for achieving healthy and resilient oceans and coasts for all of Australia.

This document outlines findings from a multidisciplinary symposium of academics, policy makers, and practitioners who gathered on 11 March 2020 at the Shine Dome in Canberra to provide input on the first stages of the strategy.

First, participants considered the key elements of a national strategy for oceans and coasts. They found:

- Ocean and coastal issues are diverse across the Australian landscape; a national strategy must make space for this diversity while moving towards a common goal.
- The strategy should consider top-down ideas of governance as well as bottom-up elements of community engagement.
- A literature review of ocean and coastal issues will give examples of success stories and define gaps and overlaps in existing structures.

Next, participants were asked to react to the four pillars that underpin FEA's methodologies for

national strategies: vision, stakeholder engagement, institutional design and governance, and knowledge. They found:

- The four pillars are all critical elements of a strategy, but should be visualised as more interconnected.
- Additional elements could include an implementation element, equity and wellbeing, transparency, and adaptability.

Participants were asked to respond to the proposed scope for the strategy: 'To enable systems transformation to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) for Australia's interlinked oceans and coasts.' They decided:

- The scope of the strategy will be refined by an expert reference group in the next stage of the process, focusing on defining oceans and coasts as well as finding plain-English alternatives to 'systems transformation.'

The next steps of the process will be convening an expert reference group to steer the process of consultation and creation of the strategy and creating a literature review of relevant policies and governance structures in the ocean and coastal context.

Symposium context

Australian oceans and coasts are threatened by the fragmented way we manage and govern the ecological and social processes that connect them; we do not have a clear path forward to ensure that these areas are healthy and resilient. Future Earth Australia has proposed the creation of an ocean and coastal systems transformation 10-year strategy, which will outline clear, actionable strategies for achieving healthy and resilient oceans and coasts for all of Australia.

This strategy will outline the steps we need to transform how we think about, govern, and protect oceans and coasts across Australia. Importantly, we will take a systems approach to transforming oceans and coasts, as many sectors will need to work together to achieve our goal: social services, tourism, industry, land use experts, ocean and

coastal researchers, and decision makers from all levels of government. By undertaking a bottom up, country wide consultation process and incorporating ideas and knowledge into a 10-year strategy, we can provide a blueprint for the national transformational change that Australia's oceans and coasts need. This initiative has been generously funded by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation.

On 11 March 2020, Future Earth Australia hosted a multidisciplinary symposium at the Shine Dome in Canberra. Representatives from academia, industry, and government were invited to provide input on the first stages of the 10-year strategy. This paper describes the main discussion points and outcomes of the workshop.



Context setting

To kick off the symposium, participants were surveyed on their attitudes toward Australia's oceans and coasts using wordcloud software. The live results of the survey were projected onto the main screen, and the group responded to these results in plenary discussions.

First, participants reflected on the current state of Australia's oceans and coasts. The most popular responses centred around three main ideas: threatened, fragile, and crowded (Fig. 1).

For those that answered 'threatened' and 'fragile', these terms referred to the multiple interacting pressures impacting Australian oceans and coasts. Social, economic, and environmental issues are compounding in these areas, and these will likely worsen without intervention, placing these ecosystems in a precarious position. Other participants thought the term 'threatened' implied a false sense of delay regarding when impacts will be felt; these participants felt that oceans and coasts are already 'declining', 'degrading', 'impacted', and 'poor'.

Another group of participants thought of oceans and coasts as 'crowded'. Some used the term to refer to the complex way these areas are governed, which

leads to crowding of responsibilities. Others focused on the fact that most Australians live near the coast, crowding the area with development. This diverged from participants who characterised oceans and coasts as 'unpopulated' and 'fragmented', referring to the wide geographic spread of Australia's population relative to other countries, as well as the uneven distribution of governance structures across the country.

In contrast to these warnings about oceans and coasts, some participants highlighted more positive traits like 'unique', 'beautiful', and 'wild'. Others acknowledged the threats impacting these areas, but instead focused on the 'adaptability' and 'opportunity' that could emerge from addressing ocean and coastal issues.

For the next response, participants described how they envision Australia's oceans and coasts in the future (Fig. 2). The majority were optimistic, envisioning 'vibrant' and 'beautiful' areas. Responses like 'sustainable' and 'resilient' were also common, suggesting a future for oceans and coasts that is

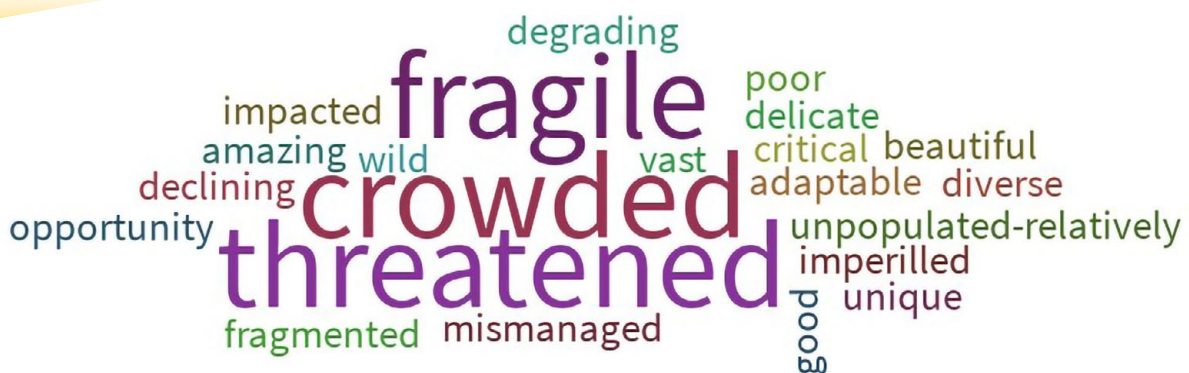


Figure 1: Wordcloud responses to describe the current state of Australian oceans and coasts



Figure 2: Wordcloud responses to describe the future of Australian oceans and coasts

both dynamic and abiding. This led naturally to the next question, which asked participants how to move from a 'threatened' situation today to a 'healthy' future.

The most-used terms to describe the issues in moving from today to participants' vision for the future were 'climate', 'governance', and 'support' (Fig. 3). Many participants highlighted climate change as a multifaceted stressor that encompasses direct impacts on coasts as well as indirect ones such as bushfires and cyclones. They also noted that it is a global issue that could complicate local efforts to protect oceans and coasts.

Others focused on governance as the primary issue in moving into a sustainable future. Discussions centred around the siloed and fragmented nature of the governance system for Australian oceans and coasts, given the spread of related sectors across governments, researchers, First Nations peoples, industry, and society. Indeed, participants spoke to the need for a systems approach that would draw sectors together and manage them holistically.

However, it was suggested that moving to a systems approach at a national scale could overlook local-scale needs. Therefore, it would be important to represent the diverse values of distinct coastal and oceanic environments in a national strategy.

Participants also explored the concept of 'support', describing the complex and nuanced relationships between ownership, social acceptance, and institutional frameworks. While policies demand action, cultural ownership and community buy-in are key elements to creating supported, and therefore sustained, change. Therefore, communities must be engaged in order to move to a sustainable future for oceans and coasts.

Overall, participants expressed the desire for sustainability, of the environments themselves as well as the methods for ensuring their future. With cooperation and collaboration across sectors and meaningful community engagement, changes both incremental and transformational can be achieved.



Figure 3: Wordcloud responses to describe the issues in moving to the future of Australia's oceans and coasts

Towards a national strategic plan

What are the elements of a national strategy for oceans and coasts?

Following the wordcloud exercise, participants reflected on a series of questions in breakout groups. First, the groups considered the key elements of a national strategy for oceans and coasts. A common response was the need to establish a unified vision for the strategy. Many participants expressed the need to balance environmental, social, and economic sustainability of oceans and coasts without letting

one value take precedence at a detriment to the others. Some went further, suggested that concepts like 'wellbeing' should take precedence over GDP as metrics for progress towards prosperity. Others thought the vision should include elements of equity, such as fair and responsible access to land and oceans. Another group saw adaptability as a key element of the strategy—in the context of an environment facing instability and unpredictability, a strategy would need to have flexibility to adapt to these changing conditions.



This discussion of vision revealed a tension inherent in creating a national strategy: the need to encompass a diversity of stakeholder values, while also finding common ground between them. Australia's ocean and coasts are breathtakingly diverse—from the heavily developed tourist beaches of the Gold Coast to the indigenous-owned expanses of the Northern Territory—and the stakeholders that use oceans and coasts have just as varied needs. Yet a national strategy must unite these disparate areas and users under a common vision. Participants thought this tension could be addressed by making space for local values in the strategy, while still creating general national principles that states could respond to differently.

Participants also identified a consideration of governance structures to be an element of a national strategy. These structures are complex in Australia; because there is no national coastal administration, states have different approaches to governance which filter to the local level. COAG, meanwhile, acts to manage interactions between the national government and states. In some states like the Northern Territory, First Nations peoples own a large proportion of land and sea country. Additionally, there are international activities on oceans and coasts to consider. Navigating and understanding these many modes of governance will be a key factor to creating a cohesive and effective national strategy.

Yet governance is only one aspect of a national strategy, a top-down approach. Bottom-up ideas and values should also be incorporated, and the community must be meaningfully engaged. Indigenous involvement was thought to be a particularly important element of community engagement. Indeed, indigenous approaches to understanding the catchment to coast continuum were thought to be useful examples of coastal integration. Another key stakeholder, industry, might be brought into the strategy by incorporating investment strategies that focus on opportunities for businesses rather than restrictions.

This idea of including both top-down ideas of governance and bottom-up elements of community engagement was thought to be critical to the development of a national strategy. Participants also highlighted the need for the strategy to be transdisciplinary, co-produced, and co-designed, all key elements of Future Earth Australia's approach. The strategy should be integrated horizontally, across the geography of coasts, as well as vertically, across governance structures. Some participants also suggested that the strategy should be outcome focused, promoting value creation rather than simply protection. Indeed, many thought an implementation plan would be a critical element to a national strategy.

Finally, participants highlighted the rich literature that already exists in the ocean and coastal space, with a variety of strategies, plans, networks, policies, and analyses already in place. These resources can bolster the strategy and reveal the overlaps and underlaps in existing structures. Additionally, there are examples of success stories, nationally and internationally, that can reveal where systems and institutional arrangements have worked in the past and what engendered those successes. Based on this discussion, participants thought an outcome of the symposium should be a literature review in the ocean and coastal space.

Key points

- Ocean and coastal issues are diverse across the Australian landscape; a national strategy must make space for this diversity while moving towards a common goal
- The strategy should consider top-down ideas of governance as well as bottom-up elements of community engagement
- A literature review of ocean and coastal issues will give examples of success stories and define gaps and overlaps in existing structures.

Getting it done

How does this group react to the four pillars that underpin FEA's methodologies for national strategies?

Next, participants were asked to react to the four pillars that underpin FEA's methodologies for national strategies: vision, stakeholder engagement, institutional design and governance, and knowledge (Fig. 4). Participants expressed approval for the pillars and made suggestions for improvements and additions to this framework.

The first pillar, **vision**, was generally agreed to be a crucial element of the strategy. Participants raised a number of questions to refine the vision, such as 'Who is this strategy for?' and 'What does success look like?'. Other participants thought the idea of a singular vision should be expanded to encompass a broader set of shared principles, values, ethics, and

morals to underpin the strategy. Yet as previously, the need to capture varied values under a common vision was emphasised.

Participants saw the second pillar, **stakeholder engagement**, as particularly critical. Engagement can create buy-in and commitment from stakeholders if stakeholders are involved from the outset and participate throughout the process, as has been FEA's strategy in the past. Some participants honed in on the many possible definitions of 'engagement', pointing out that the term can refer to a spectrum of activities ranging from informing stakeholders about actions to come, up to empowering stakeholders to make their own decisions; it was thought that this strategy should aim for the latter definition. Others thought the term might be better reframed as 'community engagement' to avoid narrowing the pool of interested parties. Yet despite the clear need for community engagement, some participants thought

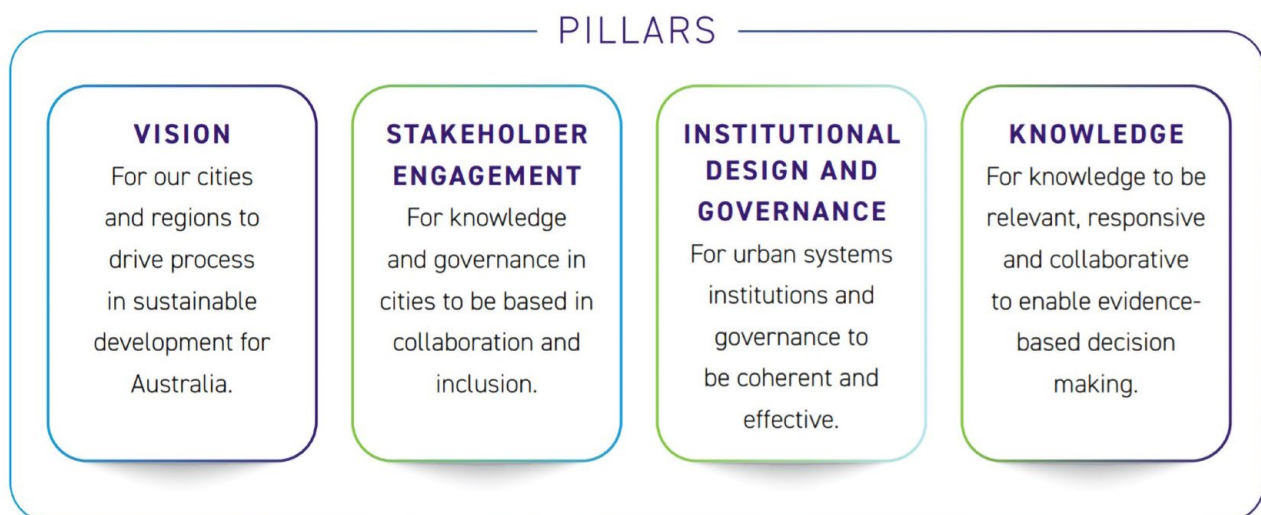


Figure 4: Future Earth Australia's four pillars

it was important to avoid workshop fatigue in some coastal stakeholders that have been consulted many times in the past. In order to combat this fatigue, the strategy should explain its unique values to the community.

Institutional design and governance, the third pillar, was seen to be a challenging but important element of the strategy. Participants acknowledged the complexity of governance structures and institutions in Australian oceans and coasts, including multiple management structures, bioregions, catchment regions, and political boundaries. Yet they saw the high number of existing structures as an opportunity; if these governance structures could be mapped, showing the linkages and gaps existing in the current framework, then the strategy could identify ways to improve existing standards and practices to move action forward more quickly. This mapping could help to identify existing bodies to implement the plan, define responsibilities for these bodies, find opportunities for investment, and define where this strategy can add value to existing plans and organisations. Still, risk factors such as a lack of political will and fragmentation were acknowledged.

The last pillar, **knowledge**, was thought to include ecological information such as classifications for the coastal margin and inner shelf around Australia, as well as economic metrics such as the value of the environment, the cost of doing nothing, economic modelling and the triple bottom line, and returns on investment. While most participants thought solid data was needed to make decisions, others cautioned that insisting on perfect data could delay action.

In addition to FEA's four proposed pillars, participants made suggestions for additional pillars or elements to be added to the methodology for national strategies. Many participants thought there should be an 'implementation' pillar, which would be outcomes focused and promote action. This pillar would outline a theory of change to identify how actions would happen under the strategy, and contain a value proposition to engage and sell the strategy to a variety of stakeholders. Another suggestion for a new pillar was 'monitoring and

evaluation.' The strategy should be a living document, and by building in steps for measuring and evaluating progress against the implementation phase, its progress can be followed. Another suggested pillar was 'culture and values,' representing the elements of our culture that can either help or hinder progress towards the strategy's goals.

Rather than proposing new pillars, some participants suggested elements that should be interwoven throughout the pillars. For instance, some thought that equity and wellbeing could be incorporated into an overarching theme. Another suggestion was to ensure transparency of the decision-making process; given that any strategy of this scope will involve tradeoffs, there should be a process for identifying how those decisions are made. Finally, others saw adaptability of the strategy as key. Because of climate change and other factors, zoning-based plans can quickly become outdated as sea levels rise and species shift. The strategy should focus on adaptable solutions, while ensuring that this doesn't become an invitation to make solutions generic.

After considering the key elements that underpin FEA's strategy, participants discussed the structure of the four pillars. Some participants felt that the terminology of pillars suggested a siloing of responsibilities that was at odds with the transdisciplinary and systems approach of the strategy. Rather, the key elements should be shown in an interconnected diagram. Others noted that the four pillar structure is comfortable for western science and planning discussions, but that nuanced changes might be needed to manage engagement by different communities.

Key points

- The four pillars are all critical elements of a strategy, but should be visualised as more interconnected
- Additional elements could include an implementation element, equity and wellbeing, transparency, and adaptability.

Revisiting the scope

How does this group react to the proposed scope of the strategy?

Next, participants were asked to respond to the proposed scope for the strategy: 'To enable systems transformation to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) for Australia's interlinked oceans and coasts.' Group discussions explored each of the three main components of this scope.

The first component of the scope is **'to enable systems transformation'**. While this phrase is common in certain academic disciplines, participants from other sectors found the phrase confusing and wanted a more plain English version. Others were wary of the large changes implied in the term 'transformation' and sought a gentler term to describe change. The phrase 'integrated approach' was suggested as an alternative to 'systems transformation,' as the concept of integrated ocean and coastal management is an idea that is well established and accepted in the literature.

The second component of the scope concerned **'achieving the SDGs'**. Some participants thought this was a useful and achievable set of goals, while others expressed concern at trying to achieve so many goals within the comparatively limited scope of this strategy, focused as it is on oceans and coasts. These participants thought it might be necessary to translate the global SDGs to a community level in order to create tangible goals. Others thought wellbeing was a better goal for the strategy, as it is less prescriptive in the specific benchmarks than the SDGs. It was also noted that this strategy will overlap with two UN initiatives, the decade of ocean science for sustainability and the decade of ecosystem restoration. These could provide useful benchmarks that are globally oriented but separate from the SDGs.

The last component of the scope concerns the subject of the strategy, **'Australia's interlinked oceans and coasts'**. There was a robust debate about whether the strategy should include oceans and coasts, or focus on coasts alone. On the oceans and coasts side, participants felt that ocean and coasts are inextricably linked and must be addressed as one. On the coasts alone side, participants thought that oceans had very different governance structures and industries compared to coasts, and trying to manage them all under a single strategy would be too difficult. On both sides, participants felt it was critical to outline through the strategy the inherent interconnections between oceans and coasts, as well as those between coasts and lands.

In light of these discussions, three suggestions were put forward as new frames for the scoping of the strategy. First, 'to enhance the future wellbeing of our interlinked coasts and oceans,' which replaces systems transformation and SDGs with wellbeing, and encompasses both oceans and coasts. Next, 'to enable sustainable wellbeing of Australia's coastal systems,' a similar statement with the exception of a coastal, rather than ocean and coastal focus. Finally, 'to enable an integrated approach to achieving the SDGs for Australia's coasts,' which replaces systems transformation with an integrated approach. These suggestions will all be considered in the next steps of refining the scope of the strategy.

Key point

- The scope of the strategy will be refined by an expert reference group in the next stage of the process, focusing on defining oceans and coasts as well as finding plain-English alternatives to 'systems transformation'.

Doing it collaboratively



How does this group react to the proposed locations and format of the workshops?

Finally, there was a brief discussion around the proposed locations and format of the workshops. Participants thought the locations should be chosen based on reaching a representative sample across Australia's different bioregions, urban/regional areas, governance types, and key pressures. For instance, key pressures in the west coast are oil and gas, whereas fisheries dominate Tasmania and the south ocean, and resorts and tourism are important in the south Queensland coast. These locations should also draw a variety of different stakeholders, although Canberra might be specifically targeted to reach certain senior members of the government. To draw diverse stakeholders to these locations, FEA could map existing initiatives and processes in the ocean and coastal space, and then plan workshops around these.

For the structure of the workshops, FEA has previously relied on member organisations, which are predominantly universities and government agencies, to host the workshops. It was suggested that this strategy could branch into different types of hosts, such as businesses and coastal councils, to generate different stakeholder engagement. There was also a discussion around using technology to reach remote areas, which is especially relevant now in light of movement restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some suggestions included online meetings, telephone interviews, and webinars. These technologies can also be useful in maintaining existing relationships; for instance, supplementary webinars might be used to top and tail the process and allow for further participation, and written submissions should also be opened during the process.

Moving forward

Outcomes and next steps

Overall, participants felt positive and encouraged about the strategy (Fig. 5). Though the undertaking will be challenging, the positive reception of the participants suggests an appetite for change and action that supports FEA's initiative to create a strategy.

One of the primary outcomes of the symposium was the decision to create a literature review of relevant policies and governance structures in the ocean and

coastal context. FEA has asked participants to contribute relevant literature and will collate and perform this review. Next, FEA will convene an expert reference group that will steer the process of consultation and creation of the strategy. Together, these inputs will shape the national strategy and inform the future of Australia's oceans and coasts.

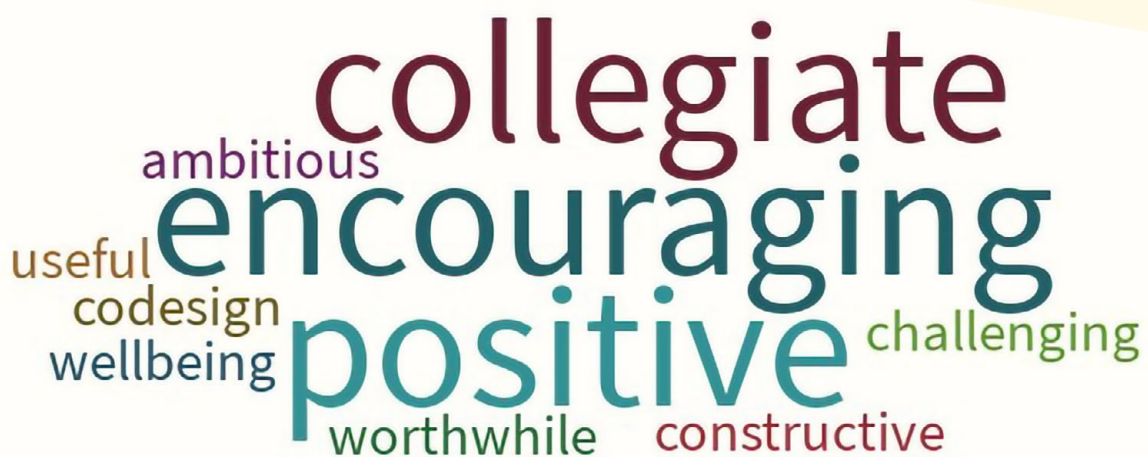


Figure 5: Wordcloud responses to describe participants' perceptions of the symposium