

Visitor Impacts in the Coastal Zone: A Project Summary

Overview

High-visitation sites such as Bondi Beach are increasingly challenged to deal with the environmental impacts of visitors. Traditional regulatory-based approaches are of questionable value, particularly with the increasing numbers of international visitors. This is compounded by misperceptions concerning who causes the impacts.

A novel, evidence-based approach to visitor education and participation at Bondi Beach undertaken by Waverley Council and Elton Consulting involves multi-level capacity building and stakeholder participation.

Working directly with hosts, Council and visitors, the project went beyond awareness raising to instigating organisational and institutional changes enabling people to work together to improve the environment. Interventions included volunteer litter clean-ups involving visitor groups commonly perceived as 'the problem' and a host-based best practice covenant to reduce impacts. This project was funded by the NSW Stormwater Trust.

Introduction

High visitation sites present unique challenges in environmental management. Key issues include: ownership and responsibility for issues; perceptions of blame in regards to the source of 'the problem'; the transient nature of the visitor population; potential language barriers with international visitors; conflicting stakeholder interests in the site and the fact that environmental impacts often come from a variety of sources, including non-visitor activities.

This project was focussed at Bondi Beach, one of the highest tourist visitation sites in New South Wales. Bondi Beach receives high volumes of local and international visitors. There is strong 'anti-visitor' sentiment amongst the resident population, and often backpackers are targeted as a major source of noise, pollution and crowding. This project focussed on litter reduction following the identification of litter as the primary source of stormwater pollution in the Bondi Beach catchment. The project was funded by the NSW Stormwater Trust.

Current Strategies to address visitor impacts in this high visitation site are primarily regulatory-based. These are often not enforced and there is little awareness of the consequences of littering among visiting populations. Educational campaigns are in place, however these are often not targeted at the types of visitors (and residents) which use the area.

Rationale and Approach

A capacity building approach was adopted in order to foster organisational and institutional linkages in the process of addressing visitor impacts. The advantages of this approach include:

- increased 'ownership' of issues

- creation of self-sustaining interventions and partnerships
- countering of anti-visitor sentiment

Engagement with stakeholders involved a two-way discussion approach. This focussed on both recording stakeholders' issues and communicating the broader environmental issues at stake. By engaging in two-way discussions, we were able to:

- establish good relations
- promote understanding of broad issues
- understand and address stakeholder issues
- create open channels for future maintenance and development of programs

In order to promote organisational and institutional linkages, engagement with the following stakeholders was key:

- Local council
- Small Business and organisations
- Visitor hosts (e.g. hostels, cafes)
- Corporate interests (e.g. fast food companies)
- Conservation groups (e.g. volunteer organisations)
- Key 'change agents' (e.g. visitors themselves)

Interventions

Backpacker Volunteer Clean-ups

The project team organised a regular volunteer event which was targeted at specific visitors (i.e. backpackers) but which promoted inclusive participation of other stakeholders (i.e. local residents, businesses). Volunteers worked together to pick up litter around the beach and park. An environmental tour and educative session were key components also. Emphasis was placed on raising awareness amongst other beach visitors through bright clothing, media coverage and other profile-raising initiatives. Both residents and visitors were encouraged to participate, allowing a working relationship to develop between different stakeholders and reduce negative sentiment and perceptions in the community. Importantly, the volunteer clean-up operations also helped promote a 'shared responsibility' for the local environment amongst a range of stakeholders.



Social Marketing

A significant component of the interventions involved a targeted social marketing campaign. Specific target groups were identified through the research phase and specific approaches were taken for each. A poster campaign was developed – ‘backpacker’ posters were placed in specific locations (e.g. hostel bedrooms, internet cafes) and more general ‘impact’ posters were placed around the public areas (beach and parks). A range of media were used, including radio and magazine articles and commercials.



An innovative approach which specifically targeted at capturing and educating the transient backpacker group involved a ‘welcome kit’ (see photograph above) which was given to all new hostel guests in the target area. Importantly, this kit included materials that the target audience would find useful (attractive postcards, a pen, a condom) with subtle environmental messages incorporated. Materials were market-tested and developed to maximise effectiveness for each target audience.

Best Practice Covenant

Extensive co-operative work was undertaken with local businesses in order to develop a best-practice agreement aimed at minimising the impacts of businesses on the local stormwater system. The agreement addressed issues such as litter from outdoor dining tables and business waste management. This process involved the two-way discussion approach as described above. Media coverage and publicity was generated for the businesses involved, encouraging wide-spread participation through a healthy inter-business rivalry. Other capacity building initiatives included sponsorship arrangements and provision of meals to volunteers - in this case by major fast-food providers.



Development of the best-practice covenant involved discussions across (and thus developed linkages between) institutional and organisational

boundaries. Key stakeholders included Council, Chamber of Commerce, small business management, visitor hosts, corporate management and environmental accreditation bodies.

Conclusion

High visitation sites such as Bondi Beach present unique challenges in visitor management. By undertaking a research-based capacity building approach, visitor impacts can be curbed and long-term solutions developed. This approach focuses on two-way discussion with stakeholders and research-based social marketing strategies. Key outcomes include improved institutional and organisational linkages leading to more integrated visitor management, cost savings to council, reduced environmental impacts and the development of tested and sustainable interventions.