Understanding public conservation awareness within the Waikato Conservancy, New Zealand

Jackie Fitchman

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ABSTRACT

This report presents results of a telephone survey of 303 people, drawn randomly from within the geographic boundaries of the Waikato Conservancy of the Department of Conservation (DOC), on their awareness of DOC and its role, awareness of local conservation issues, frequency of visits to DOC land, type and frequency of recreation activities, and attitudes towards conservation. There was an overall high level of awareness of what DOC is and does, but an overall low level of awareness (when unprompted) of local conservation issues. However, when prompted, the level of recognition and perceived importance of local conservation issues increased and there was a higher level of awareness of national conservation issues. In general, respondents were positive in their attitudes towards conservation. It was concluded that a social marketing strategy for conservation awareness needs to address: effective use of the DOC website as an awareness-raising tool; target audiences and distribution for DOC publications; and DOC's profile amongst 18–29-year-olds.

Keywords: conservation awareness, community relations, social marketing, public awareness, Department of Conservation, Waikato Conservancy, New Zealand

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1. Introduction

This report contributes to the development of a social marketing strategy for conservation awareness for the Waikato Conservancy of the Department of Conservation (DOC), by helping to better understand the public's awareness of conservation and DOC, and their recreational use of DOC land. The purpose of the strategy will be to provide direction and focus for the public awareness work of the Waikato Conservancy by identifying key public awareness messages, key target audiences for these messages, and the most effective means of communicating them. The ultimate goal is to broaden and deepen the public's understanding of the benefits of conservation and achieve enhanced conservation outcomes.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The aims of the research were to:

- Ascertain the level of awareness of general conservation issues by the Waikato Conservancy's public, and determine demographic profiles of people within each level of awareness
- Ascertain the level of awareness of specific local conservation issues and determine the means by which people became aware of these issues
- Identify DOC's profile locally
- Identify people's actual and desired recreational use of natural areas

2. Research approach and methods

As a key objective of this research was to collect demographic information to identify target audiences for conservation awareness campaigns, the approach chosen was a survey rather than focus groups.

A research company was commissioned to conduct telephone interviews of people over the age of 18, drawn randomly from within the Waikato Conservancy's geographic boundaries using Telecom's Teleranges Service. The sample size, of 303, provided a maximum margin of error of $\pm 5.7\%$, at the 95% confidence level. A pilot survey was carried out to enable detection of any problems with the questions contained in the survey. A combination of prompted and unprompted questions was used. Appendix 1 provides the questions used in the survey. The topics covered were:

- · Awareness of DOC and its role
- · Awareness of local conservation issues
- · Frequency of visits to DOC land
- Type and frequency of recreation activities

- Attitudes towards 1080 used for pest control
- · Attitudes towards conservation

The sample size used was determined by budgetary constraints. Some groups within the community (for example, Chinese or other Asian people, or Pacific Island people) were not represented in the survey, as they either did not appear on the list of randomly sampled telephone numbers or declined to take part. The number of questions asked of respondents was deliberately limited due to it being a telephone survey. The time restriction involved is one of the key drawbacks of surveys, and telephone surveys in particular. Generally respondent fatigue increases and the quality of response decreases the longer a survey is. It can also be more difficult to recruit people to complete longer surveys, as most are reluctant to spend long periods of time on the telephone (Versus Research 2005). For these reasons, the survey was kept to less than 7 minutes long.

3. Results

3.1 AWARENESS OF DOC AND ITS ROLE

The first question that respondents were asked was if they knew which government organisation in New Zealand has the main responsibility for the conservation of natural and historic heritage. Overall, there was a high level of spontaneous identification of DOC being that organisation, with 62% identifying DOC unprompted. The age group that most often identified DOC unprompted was 40-59-year-olds, with 68% correctly identifying DOC. More males (66%) were aware of DOC unprompted than females (58%). Rural residents (67%) had a higher awareness than those living in towns (59%). Despite this overall level of awareness, 54% of 18-29-year-olds surveyed could not correctly identify DOC or did not know unprompted that it is the government organisation in New Zealand with the main responsibility for conservation. When respondents offered an organisation other than DOC, the most frequently given response was the Green Party (32%), followed by Environment Waikato (21%).

It is possible that some respondents found it difficult to correctly answer this question because the mention of 'historic heritage' confused them. DOC's role in conserving historic heritage is generally less widely known amongst the public than its role in the conservation of natural heritage. This was confirmed in the survey question about DOC's activities, with a significant percentage of respondents being unaware that they included historic heritage.

Respondents were also read a list of activities and asked to identify in turn which ones DOC carries out. Overall, there was a high level of awareness of what DOC does. Protection of native species and natural areas, and pest control were the most highly recognised, these activities being correctly identified by over 90% of people. The protection of historical places was the least correctly identified DOC role, with 32% of respondents either not knowing or giving a negative response to this activity. Management of the water quality in rivers was the most

commonly incorrectly identified role, with 66% of respondents responding that DOC is involved in this activity.

3.2 AWARENESS OF LOCAL CONSERVATION ISSUES

The second question of the survey asked respondents if they could tell the interviewer any general conservation issues or problems that they were aware of in the King Country, Waikato, or Coromandel areas (roughly the catchment area of the Waikato Conservancy). This unprompted approach revealed a low level of awareness of local conservation issues/problems (i.e. within the Conservancy). Thirty five percent of people were not able to spontaneously identify any general conservation issues or problems that they were aware of in the King Country, Waikato or Coromandel areas. The conservation issue that was most frequently offered was water pollution/run-off/quality (15% of respondents). However, important local conservation issues that DOC deals with directly, such as wetlands and pest control, were much less frequently mentioned (2% and 10% respectively).

Later in the survey, respondents were prompted with a list of conservation issues and asked to identify those concerning New Zealand's natural environment and that they were aware of prior to the survey (Fig. 1). At least 75% of people were aware of all of the issues. The highest awareness was around the protection of forests and plants, the threat of extinction of some native animals, and plant and animal pests (90% or above). Breeding problems for shorebirds such as dotterel had the lowest level of awareness (75%).

When offered examples of various local conservation issues and asked to rate them in terms of their importance in the King Country, Waikato and Coromandel areas, the majority of people (at least 70%) rated all of the issues either 'very important' or 'fairly important'. The protection of forests and plants (91% responded very/fairly important), the protection of native animals (85% responded very/fairly important), and the threat of extinction of native animals (87% responded very/

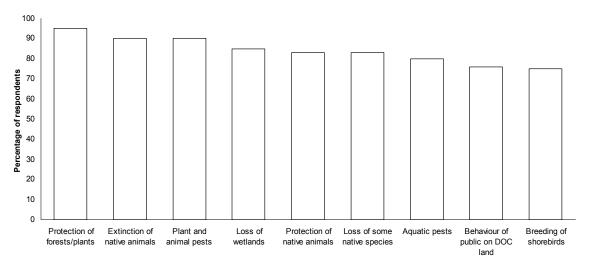


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents aware of conservation issues prior to the present survey.

fairly important) were seen to be the most important issues. Loss of some species of native insects, loss of wetlands, aquatic pests, and breeding problems for shorebirds were all seen as less important local issues, but at least 70% of people still thought these issues were very/fairly important.

For the local conservation issues that respondents rated as very/fairly important, the most frequently given means of becoming aware of these issues was newspapers (an average of 29% across all issues). Television and personal observation (each with an average of 19% across all issues) were the next most frequently given means. The two least frequently given means of becoming aware of issues were DOC publications (an average of 3% across all issues) and the DOC website (an average of less than 1% across all issues).

3.3 FREQUENCY OF VISITS TO DOC LAND

Older people (60+ years old) visit natural areas less frequently than other age groups; only 48% of them reported visiting natural areas more than annually, compared with 72% of 18-39-year-olds and 70% of 40-59-year-olds.

For those people who visit natural areas less than annually or never, the reason most commonly cited was being too busy (28%) (Fig. 2). However, for both groups combined, equal numbers of people said natural areas were too difficult to get to (18%) or too far away (10%). The most common response (46%) to this question fell into the category of 'other', which included such reasons as old age or not being interested.

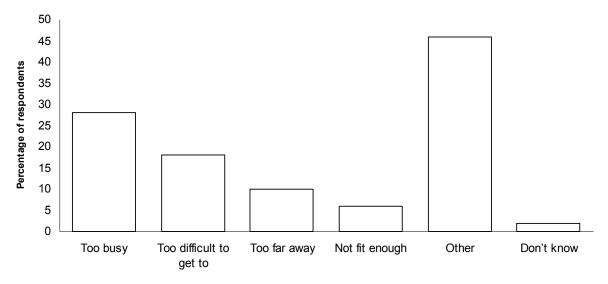
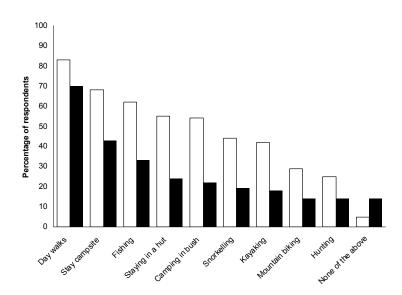


Figure 2. Reasons given for visiting natural areas less than annually or never.

3.4 TYPE AND FREQUENCY OF RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Respondents were read a list of activities and asked which they find appealing. It was explained to them that these could be activities they already do or would like to do (Fig. 3).

Figure 3.
Percentage of respondents
to whom recreation activity
appeals (would like to do/
currently do) (white) and
percentage of respondents
who currently do activity
(black).



Overall, day walks were the most appealing activity (83%), followed by staying in campsites you can drive to (68%), and then fishing (62%). Only 5% of people said none of the activities listed were appealing.

There was an association between people's employment status and the activities they find appealing. More of those in full-time employment found the activities listed appealing (with the exception of day walks) than the rest of the sample. Conversely, the number of retirees that found the activities listed as appealing was substantially lower than the rest of the sample.

People with higher incomes tended to find most of the activities appealing.

Whether or not respondents had dependent children (under 15 years of age) living at home was related to the activities they find appealing. Kayaking, staying in a hut as part of an overnight walk, staying at a campsite you can drive to, mountain biking, camping in the bush as part of an overnight walk, and snorkelling all appealed more strongly to those with dependent children than to those without. However, this result does not indicate higher levels of actual participation in these recreation activities by this group. The number and ages of children may be the key determinants of family leisure activities. Stage in family life cycle not only affects the participation in outdoor recreation activities as a whole, but also participation in specific activities. The presence of children causes moderation of recreation activities from the more active pursuits (tramping, hunting) to the less active (picnics, short walks, driving for pleasure) (Devlin et al. 1995).

Whether someone lives in a town or the country appeared to make little difference to what activity they find appealing.

Of the recreation activities that they found appealing, respondents were asked to indicate which ones they already do (Fig. 3). Day walks remained by far the most popular activity (70%), but fishing (43%) surpassed staying in campsites you can drive to (33%). The percentage of people who actually undertake the activity that they said appealed to them varied between activities. Most people who found day walks appealing actually do this activity (84%). The recreation activities with the lowest levels of actualisation were staying in a hut as part of an overnight walk (33%), kayaking (40%), mountain biking (42%), camping in the

bush as part of an overnight walk (44%), hunting (47%), and staying at a campsite you can drive to (47%).

The age of a respondent appeared to affect which activities they actually already do. The 18-39-year-olds had the highest level of positive responses to the following activities: snorkelling (11% as opposed to 8% for 40-59-year-olds and 3% for 60+ year-olds), kayaking (10% as opposed to 7% for 40-59-year-olds and 1% for 60+ year-olds), and mountain biking (7% as opposed to 6% for both 40-59-year-olds and 60+ year-olds). The 60+ year-olds had the highest level of positive responses for day walks (32% as opposed to 25% for 40-59-year-olds and 22% for 18-39-year-olds).

3.5 ATTITUDES TO 1080

To ensure the relevance of the succeeding question, respondents were asked if they knew what 1080 was. Eighty-eight percent of people responded affirmatively. These people were then asked to choose an attitudinal statement that best described them in regards to their opinion of the use of 1080. The percentage of respondents who chose 'On the whole, I think 1080 should be used' (37%) was identical to the percentage who chose 'I am against the use of 1080'. Twenty-four percent of those who knew what 1080 was did not have an opinion about its use.

An almost identical percentage of respondents was against 1080 across all age groups. The greatest support for 1080 came from the 40-59-year-olds, with 45% in favour. The age group with the most respondents not having an opinion about 1080 was the 18-39-year-olds (34%). Males were more likely to be in favour of 1080 (48%) than females (27%). More females did not have an opinion about the use of 1080 (29%) than males (19%).

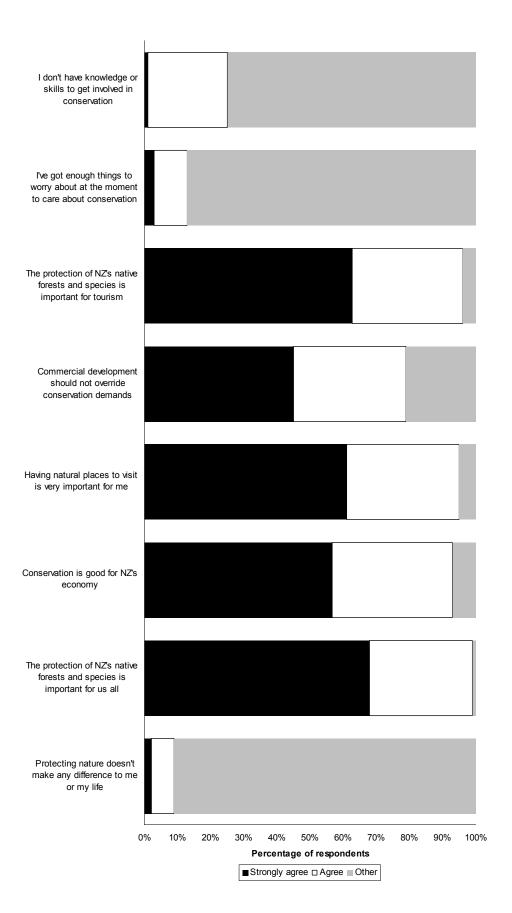
Respondents' place of living (town or rural) and whether or not they had dependent children did not appear to bear any relation to their opinion about 1080 use.

3.6 ATTITUDES TOWARDS CONSERVATION

The survey results indicate that, in general, people are very positive about conservation, with over 90% agreeing or strongly agreeing with all but one of the positive statements about conservation (Fig. 4). The statement that fared least well in this respect was 'Commercial development should not override conservation demands', but even so, 79% of respondents still agreed or strongly agreed with it. However, one of the major problems with this type of attitude measurement is that respondents often develop attitudes in response to questioning, even though they actually did not hold that opinion prior to the research (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith 1999). Many people may have developed their opinion on the spot and may not have thought about the issue before.

Overall, people with dependent children (under the age of 15) living with them were more favourable to the pro-conservation attitudinal statements and less

Figure 4. Responses to pro- and anti-conservation statements.



favourable to the anti-conservation statements. More urban people (31%) felt that they did not have the skills to get involved in conservation than did rural people (16%).

Younger people were more likely to strongly agree that protecting nature makes a difference to their lives, that having natural places to visit is important to them and that commercial development should not override conservation demands.

Fewer people over 60 and people without dependent children living with them thought conservation was good for New Zealand's economy. However, many of those over 60 would be a subset of people without dependent children living with them and therefore these results are likely to be correlated. Twenty-nine percent of the sample was over 60 years of age and 69% of the sample did not have dependent children living with them.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The research findings are likely to influence the Waikato Conservancy's conservation awareness social marketing strategy in several ways.

4.1 DOC WEBSITE

The survey results suggest that the DOC website does not currently appear to be effective as a tool for raising awareness of local conservation issues in the Waikato Conservancy within the 18+ year-old sample surveyed, although if school-aged children had been included in the sample, the website might have been mentioned more frequently.

A possible explanation for the low use of the DOC website for conservation information is that, in the past, this website has not been used by the Waikato Conservancy as a communication tool in conservation awareness campaigns because it has not lent itself to this purpose. Directing people to a specific page of conservation information would have involved providing a long URL. Prior to March 2006, the search engine on the website was not user-friendly, so relying on this was not a viable alternative for website users. (A new, vastly improved search engine was installed on the site in March 2006.) The survey results also align with the findings of a report on the DOC website prepared by Optimal Usability in 2004 (Ng et al. 2004). Their research showed that the majority of people visiting the website (67%) did so to obtain information about recreation opportunities on conservation-managed land, with the second most common reason to visit it being to get information about conservation (29%).

With the launch of a new DOC website in 2006, the Waikato Conservancy could plan to raise the awareness of potential recreational users about the conservation values of the Conservancy's recreation sites, and the work undertaken by DOC to protect these values. The longer-term aim would be to convert them into active conservation participants. The new website also offers the possibility of providing simple, marketable addresses for specific web pages, and thus the option to increase the use of the website as a communication tool in conservation awareness campaigns.

4.2 DOC PUBLICATIONS

The survey results suggest that in many instances DOC publications may not be as effective as they could be as a tool for raising awareness of local conservation issues. To increase their effectiveness, they should be written and distributed with their intended target audience in mind and should be included as a part of overall awareness campaigns.

4.3 AWARENESS OF DOC

DOC should focus on raising its profile amongst the 18-29-year-old age group, as the survey revealed a significant number who could not correctly spontaneously identify DOC as the organisation with the main responsibility for conservation in New Zealand. Examples of activities that could raise DOC's profile amongst this group include having a DOC presence at events that attract this age group, such as music festivals, and university career days, and obtaining media coverage and advertising in relevant publications or on television or radio.

4.4 ATTITUDES TOWARDS CONSERVATION

The survey results suggest that the majority of people are favourable, in theory, to the conservation ethic. In addition, the research company that conducted the surveys noted that there was a higher than usual response rate to the survey, which also indicates a general interest in, or support of, conservation issues (respondents were not at any stage told that the survey was for DOC). However, it is possible that the people who took part in the survey were more likely to be favourable to conservation, as potential respondents were told that the survey was about conservation issues before they were asked to accept or decline to answer the questions. It is possible that some respondents who were opposed to the conservation ethic, or who had no interest in conservation, declined to take part upon discovering the nature of the survey.

The survey indicated a low level of awareness of local conservation issues in the Waikato Conservancy. The social marketing strategy must address how to best raise the awareness of the Waikato Conservancy's public of local conservation issues.

The survey revealed that urban people, as compared to rural people, were more likely to feel that they did not have the skills to get involved in conservation. When promoting opportunities to get involved in conservation projects, via interpretation, recreation publications, or the DOC website, clarification of what is involved and what skill level is needed is clearly required for this group.

4.5 RECREATION ACTIVITIES

The levels of actualisation for various recreation activities (i.e. the percentage of people who actually undertake activities that they reported were appealing to them) can provide an indication of some activities on the DOC estate which could be promoted more heavily. Activities that had lower levels of actualisation combined with higher levels of appeal were: staying in a campsite you can drive to (of the 68% of respondents who found it appealing, only 47% actually do it), staying in a hut as part of an overnight walk (of the 55% of respondents who found it appealing, only 33% actually do it), and camping in the bush as part of an overnight walk (of the 54% of respondents who found it appealing, only 44% actually do it). The promotion of these activities, combined with more detailed recreation information about how to go about these activities (e.g. lists of suitable equipment and clothing, best types of food to take, etc.) would be likely to increase the numbers of people who actually undertake these activities, rather than just thinking they would be nice to do. However, staying in a campsite you can drive to, staying in a hut as part of an overnight walk, and camping in the bush as part of an overnight walk all involve a night away from home and, although they are highly appealing, a major reason that they may have low levels of actualisation may be time constraints and the level of organisation and preparation required to undertake them.

5. Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following are the questions used in the survey. The introduction and any instructions intended for the interviewer conducting the survey have been omitted.

1. Firstly, do you know which governmental organisation in New Zealand has the main responsibility for the conservation of our natural and historic heritage? Department of Conservation (DOC)

Some other organisation mentioned [WHICH?]

Don't know

2. Can you tell me of any general conservation issues or problems that you are aware of in the King Country, Waikato or Coromandel areas?

ROLE	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Provides for outdoor recreation activities (e.g. tracks/walks)			
Protects native species (e.g. birds/trees)			
Protects natural areas (e.g. land/forest)			
Pest control and eradication (e.g. weeds, possums etc.)			
Protects historical places/landmarks			
Protects marine environments and species			
Manages the water quality in rivers			
Issues resource consents (permits that allow you to use or take natural resources)			
Looks after injured introduced species			
Pest control and eradication (e.g. weeds, possums, etc.) on private property			
Protects native plants on private property			
Other [SPECIFY]			

- 3. Which of the following things do you think the Department of Conservation does?
- 4. Approximately how often do you visit natural areas like scenic reserves/ national parks/lakes/forests?

At least weekly

Between every 2-3 weeks

Monthly

Every few months

Annually

Less than annually

Never

Don't know

5. Can you tell me the reasons why you don't visit natural areas like parks/lakes/ forests very often?

Too busy

Too difficult to get to

Too far away

Don't know what kind of activities I can do in these places

Don't enjoy outdoor activities

Don't know where they are

Not fit enough

Don't know what I need to do to go tramping etc.

Other [specify]

Don't know

Don't know where to get information

6. I am now going to read out a list of things. Can you tell me which you think are issues concerning NZ's natural environment and you were aware of prior to this survey?

Goats and weeds

Aquatic pests such as koi carp

Loss of wetlands

The threat of extinction of some native animals such as species of birds and frogs

The loss of some species of native insects such as species of weta

Protection of forests and plants

Protection of native animals like Maui's dolphin

The behaviour of some members of the public on DOC land

Breeding problems for shorebirds such as dotterel

7. Now can you tell me how important you think these issues are in the King Country, Waikato or Coromandel areas?

ISSUE	VERY	FAIRLY	NOT VERY	NOT AT ALL	DON'T
	IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	KNOW

Goats and weeds

Aquatic pests such as koi carp

Loss of wetlands

The threat of extinction of some native animals such as species of birds and frogs

The loss of some species of native insects

such as species of weta

Protection of forests and plants

Protection of native animals like Maui's dolphin

The behaviour of some members of the public on

DOC land

Breeding problems for shorebirds such as dotterel

8. How did you become aware these were conservation issues locally?

Newspaper

Magazines

TV

Radio

DOC website

DOC publication

Someone told me

Don't know/can't remember

Other [SPECIFY]

9. I am now going to read out a list of statements. Can you tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.

Protecting nature doesn't make any difference to me or my life.

Protection of NZ's native forests and species is important for us all.

Conservation is good for NZ's economy.

Having natural places to visit is very important for me.

Commercial development should not override conservation demands.

Protection of NZ's native forests and species is important for tourism.

I've got enough things to worry about to care about conservation.

I don't have the knowledge or skills to get involved in conservation.

10. Which of the following activities appeal to you (i.e. activities you would like to do or already do)?

ACTIVITY	YES	NO
Kayaking		
Tramping		
Staying in a hut as part of an overnight walk		
Staying in a campsite that you can drive to		
Mountain biking		
Camping in the bush as part of an overnight walk		
Fishing		
Snorkelling		
Hunting		

11. If yes to any of the above activities, which of these do you already do and how often?

ACTIVITY	ALREADY DO	FREQUENCY
Kayaking		At least weekly
		Between every 2-3 weeks
		Monthly
		Every few months
		Annually
		Less than annually
		Never
		Don't know
Tramping		At least weekly
		Between every 2-3 weeks
		Monthly
		Every few months
		Annually
		Less than annually
		Never
		Don't know
Staying in a hut as part of an overnight walk		At least weekly
		Between every 2-3 weeks
		Monthly
		Every few months
		Annually
		Less than annually
		Never
		Don't know

ACTIVITY	ALREADY DO	FREQUENCY
Staying in a campsite that you can drive to		At least weekly
		Between every 2-3 weeks
		Monthly
		Every few months
		Annually
		Less than annually
		Never
		Don't know
Mountain biking		At least weekly
		Between every 2-3 weeks
		Monthly
		Every few months
		Annually
		Less than annually
		Never
		Don't know
Commission in the best secret for	-vall-	
Camping in the bush as part of an overnight v	vaik	At least weekly
		Between every 2-3 weeks
		Monthly
		Every few months
		Annually
		Less than annually
		Never
		Don't know
rishing		At least weekly
rishing		•
		Between every 2-3 weeks
		Monthly
		Every few months
		Annually
		Less than annually
		Never
		Don't know
norkelling		At least weekly
morkening		Between every 2-3 weeks
		Monthly
		Every few months
		Annually
		Less than annually
		Never
		Don't know
Hunting		At least weekly
		Between every 2-3 weeks
		Monthly
		Every few months
		Annually
		Less than annually
		Never

12. Do you know what 1080 is?

Yes

No

[If 'no' skip to Q14]

13. I am now going to read out three statements about 1080. Can you please choose the statement which best describes you?

On the whole I think 1080 should be used

I don't have an opinion about the use of 1080

I am against the use of 1080

None apply to me [DO NOT READ OUT]

14. Which newspapers do you read on a regular basis?

Waikato Times

NZ Herald

Sunday News

Sunday Star Times

Dominion Post

Other regional paper [e.g. BoP Times, Hawkes Bay Today]

Free community paper

Other

None

Don't know

15. Which radio stations do you regularly listen to?

National Radio

News talk ZB

ZM

Pacific

Rhema

More FM

Radio Sport

Classic Hits

Radio Tainui

Other local radio station [SPECIFY]

None

16. Which other local radio station? [SPECIFY]

Demographics

And finally just for our statistics can you tell me.....

17. Your age—are you?

18-29 years

30-39 years

40-49 years

50-59 years

60-69 years

70 and over

Refused to answer

18. Do you have any dependent children under the age of 15 years living with

you?

Yes

No

Don't know

19. Do you live in a town or a rural area?

Rural

Town

20. What area do you currently live in?

Thames-Coromandel

Hauraki

Waikato

Franklin

Hamilton City

Matamata-Piako

Waipa

Otorohanga

South Waikato

Rotorua

Waitomo

Other [SPECIFY]

21. Which of these best describes your employment status?

Full-time [more than 30 hours a week]

Part-time [less than 30 hours a week]

Retired

Secondary studies

Tertiary studies

At home with kids

Unemployed

Self-employed

22. Which best broadly describes your type of employment?

Professional or senior Government official

Business Manager or Executive

Business Proprietor or Self Employed

Teacher/Nurse/Police or other trained service worker

Clerical or Sales Employee

Farm Owner or Manager

Technical or Skilled Worker

Domestic Worker, Labourer or Agricultural Worker

Other

Don't know

23. Again, just for our statistics, which of these best describes your ethnic origin?

New Zealander

Maori descent

European descent

Pacific Island descent

Chinese

Indian

Other Asian

Other [SPECIFY]

Refused to answer

24. What is your gross household income from all income earners and all other sources before tax?

[READ OUT]

Less than \$10,000

\$10,000-30,000

\$31,000-50,000

\$51,000-70,000

\$71,000-90,000

\$91,000-110,000

\$111,000-150,000

\$151,000-250,000

\$250,000+

Don't know

Refused to answer

[RECORD GENDER]

Male

Female