

# ENGAGING THE COMMERCIAL AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY AS WATER QUALITY MONITORS

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## Background to Gold Coast Waterwatch

Gold Coast Waterwatch is a program managed and funded by Gold Coast City Council. Gold Coast City Council has recognised the need for a targeted community education and monitoring program within the region to supplement their own extensive monitoring works. Consequently Gold Coast City Council has provided funding and called for tenders to supply the required services.

**EnviroCom Australia** is the current contractor and has been delivering the Gold Coast Waterwatch Program since 1999. EnviroCom Australia is a specialist environmental education, training and research consultancy with offices in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

The published and personally communicated aims and objectives of Queensland Waterwatch provide the parameters the Gold Coast Waterwatch Program. The traditional monitoring aims have been slightly modified as Gold Coast City Council provides an extensive water quality monitoring program themselves. Therefore the Gold Coast Waterwatch Program is primarily an educative and participatory program. The data collected through the Gold Coast Waterwatch Program is utilised by the Gold Coast City Council to flag water quality problems for further investigation.

## Introduction

On the Gold Coast, the commercial sector has long been identified as a potential target audience for the Waterwatch Program, but the exact nature and capacity of this sector has never previously been fully explored. Gold Coast Waterwatch targeted the commercial sector for involvement in the '*Gold Coast 2004 Bug Snap Shot*' as part of National Water Week Celebrations within the Gold Coast region.

In the 2004 Gold Coast Waterwatch Program a strategy to actively engage the commercial sector was developed. The strategy recognised the preconceived and real limitations of engagement for this sector and identified the key aspects of developing successful long term engagement as being:

- Demonstrating the simplicity of participation
- Recognising the resource constraints (primarily time) of potential participants
- Providing a credible framework in which to participate
- Providing outcomes (for the community and the organisations)

The strategy developed for the project had six phases.

1. Identify the critical parameters – i.e. which industries, what will be the focus points in time and objectives, what are the intended outcomes, what are the limitations to participation and achievement of goals
2. What resources (written, promotional, assistance and support) will assist in addressing the critical parameters

3. Pre-production trials of the resources and concepts
4. Producing resources and implementation of the framework
5. Implementing testing
6. Following up to achieve all outcomes

### **Exploring the National Water Week Experience**

During the preparatory phase the desired outcomes of the project were considered. The initial questions explored were, “Why target commercial organisations in the Gold Coast Waterwatch Program?” and “What can commercial organisations provide to the Waterwatch Program?”

Answering these initial questions provided the project framework. In simple terms the Gold Coast Waterwatch program wants to target commercial organisations as they are an important part of the Gold Coast community. Developing long term relationships with these groups can deliver additional resources to the Gold Coast Waterwatch Program and enable communication with individuals that may not be accessed through the normal networks of the ‘converted’ (eg bushcare, landcare and catchment management organisations).

Objectives focused on the involvement of the commercial sector, rather than the gathering of high quality water quality data. However, it was still seen as very important for these organisations to collect meaningful water quality data. To achieve this balance it was decided that the commercial organisations would collect water quality data in the form of biological assessment rather than physical or chemical water quality parameters.

This decision then led to the development of the ‘*Gold Coast 2004 Bug Snap Shot Project*’. The aims of the project were to engage at least one commercial organisation from each of the fourteen Gold Coast City Council Divisions to undertake water bug sampling in a local waterway on the Monday or Tuesday in National Water Week 2004. It was decided that information collected would have to be of a standard expected of high school environmental clubs or general community organisations presently working in conjunction with the Gold Coast Waterwatch program so as to be comparable with existing and future data.

The planning phases then turned to the delivery of the project. Three aspects of the project were defined as critical to its success.

**Table 1 Key program aspects**

<b>Critical Aspect</b>	<b>Considerations for Success</b>
<b>1. How to engage commercial organisations</b>	<b>Selection process, rewards</b>
<b>2. How to train/inform commercial organisations</b>	<b>Resources and instructions</b>
<b>3. How to collect the information from the participating organisations</b>	<b>Data entry and transfer systems</b>

### **Engaging Commercial Organisations**

To achieve the desired geographic distribution of commercial organisations, to improve participation rates and to eliminate potential non-participation from organisations without access to a freshwater water course it was decided that direct and personal communication would be the best way to approach commercial organisations. The personal invitation approach was considered to have the additional benefits of relationship development and a greater sense of commitment to the project than would be achieved through the provision of written invitations.

To facilitate the engagement, an examination of the commercial sector of the Gold Coast was undertaken. From this investigation a number of organisations were selected for the personal invitation. Criteria used for selection included the industry type, size and proximity to a **freshwater** watercourse. It was decided that organisations with a connection to the development sector be targeted for this project, however this was not always possible given the distribution of the commercial sectors.

As selection and personal invitation were considered critical to successful participation for the project, so was providing a reward for the participants. Public recognition was identified as an ideal incentive for commercial organisations. Therefore, a recognition aspect was integrated into the project. It was decided that along with a standard participation certificate, thanking the organisation for participation, an advertisement in the largest regional newspaper (The Gold Coast Bulletin) would publicly thank the organisations for their commitment, while also disseminating the water quality information to the community.

Response rates from the selected commercial organisations were very good. Only one organisation refused the invitation to participate and two others cited the lack of water in their local waterway as the only reason for not participating. All other organisations approached agreed to participate and all but two followed through with their data from the testing period.

### **Training and the Provision of Information**

To facilitate the project a resource kit was developed by Gold Coast Waterwatch. The kit utilised a combination of existing and new resources developed by Gold Coast Waterwatch. The kit contained:

- Personal letter of invitation
- Brochures – general Gold Coast Waterwatch, general stormwater management, web card (providing contact and content details for the Gold Coast Waterwatch website) and Gold Coast Waterwatch postcards
- Water Bug Pocket Guide
- Water bug identification sheet
- Data sheets
- CD-Rom Multimedia instructions and guide
- Contact information and business card for Waterwatch Coordinator

Of these resources, two are seen as the primary tools for the successful participation in the project. These were the Water Bug Pocket Guide and the CD-Rom Multimedia instructions and guide.

The Water Bug Pocket Guide is an eighty-page resource previously printed by Gold Coast Waterwatch with photographs and descriptions of water bugs, including their SIGNAL Index sensitivity. This is the primary identification resource provided to participants, with the bug identification sheets only including an image and sensitivity rating extract from the book.

The CD-Rom Multimedia instructions and guide contains all the printed materials as well as short presentations explaining the '*Gold Coast 2004 Bug Snap Shot Project*'. Step by step instructions were provided in this resource, including video of sampling and sorting processes. Additionally, an electronic data sheet generated as a web based form that calculated the SIGNAL Index and Species Richness results, while emailing the data to the Waterwatch Coordinator, was included. A CD-Rom based resource was developed so as to

be cheap to replicate while providing enhanced information delivery available through video and audio presentations. It also facilitates the development and use of web-based forms that calculate and send without the need for specific knowledge about the interpretation of the data.

The kit was developed to be self explanatory and simple in order to facilitate independent use by the participants.

### **Collecting and Collating the Data**

As highlighted previously, multiple approaches for the collection of data were provided to participants. They could choose from direct contact with the Waterwatch Coordinator (as each of the participants groups had previously meet the Waterwatch Coordinator direct contact was provided as an option), fax/post back hard copy data sheets, electronic entry and processing of data.

The provision of a range of data return options catered for the personal preferences of the range of participants.

Only one group did not provide data or an explanation for their non-participation, indicating that the communication links provided suited the participants needs.

### **Review of the Project**

The '*Gold Coast 2004 Bug Snap Shot Project*' was considered to be a success. The modified aims of the project were met, with 12 organisations providing data. However, not all of these organisations were directly from the commercial sectors targeted. This was primarily due to constraints arising from desired geographic spread of participants. Not all Gold Coast City Council divisions contained commercial organisations within a suitable proximity to a freshwater watercourse (or even contained freshwater watercourses). In these cases other organisation were utilised in the project (eg school communities, incorporating student environmental groups external to curriculum participation).

Of the participants, some were not able to test on the desired days either due to their own limitations or those imposed by the drought breaking rains encountered on the nominated testing days (>106mm rain fell on the nominated testing days). However, participation rates were still very high.

While the high rainfall had a limited impact on the rates of participation, it had a significant impact on the quality of the data collected. Few water bugs were collected in the raging waterways that resulted from the rains during the project period. Therefore it is difficult to assess the success of the project in the collection of comparable data.

### **Lessons from the Experience**

#### **Engaging Commercial Organisations**

The engagement plans were simple; organisations would be identified and approached with a hook to secure participation in the project, this being the provision of public recognition of the organisations involvement in the '*Gold Coast 2004 Bug Snap Shot Project*'. However, experience demonstrated that the provision of public recognition was not the powerful hook it

was anticipated to be. Reactions ranged from scepticism, through mild interest to basic support. No genuine enthusiasm for public recognition was encountered.

Support and participation stemmed from a desire to be involved, the assurance that the data would be useful and in one case the assurance that Waterwatch was a credible organisation.

The second major element in securing the involvement of the commercial sector was effectively clarifying what was expected of participating organisations. In particular it was noted that all organisations committing to the project needed to have any human and financial resource requirements clearly explained in the initial meeting.

However, monitoring for the '*Gold Coast 2004 Bug Snap Shot Project*' was undertaken, in all cases, by the individual manager or senior staff member the Waterwatch Coordinator had originally met with. No organisation delegated the testing to other staff. All of the individuals who participated in the project indicated that they had staff that they could direct to undertake the project but chose to undertake all actions themselves.

Additionally, all of the participants initially indicated that they would not participate in the project if there were financial responsibilities. However, when the project was completed a number of the participants did indicate that they would be happy to continue their participation with the Gold Coast Waterwatch program into the future, in whatever ways were required. It was apparent that the relationships developed by the project have assisted in the development of ongoing commitment to the Gold Coast Waterwatch Program that can be expanded on in the future.

## **Conclusion**

Gold Coast Waterwatch identified the commercial sector as a target for inclusion in the Water Quality Monitoring Network on the Gold Coast. To do this successfully a staged and targeted engagement policy was determined. The first step of which was to consider the limitations of the target group. Time resources in the commercial sector were perceived to be precious, so a monitoring program designed to gather viable data while limiting the time required training participants and conducting monitoring was established.

National Water Week was identified as providing the ideal opportunity for engaging the commercial sector as participants. Research was conducted to identify target organisations and resources were developed to facilitate macro-invertebrate assessments of waterways. Commercial organisations were personally invited to participate while being offered free public recognition for their actions. Engagement with this sector demonstrated that the usefulness of the data collected to the broader community was a greater incentive to participate than public recognition. High participation rates and follow through rates were noted amongst the invited businesses. However the quality of the data was lower than anticipated due to significant rainfall events in the testing period.

While the environmental conditions eliminate an accurate assessment of the quality of the results an overall evaluation of the project highlight the opportunities to engage with the commercial sector if the resource limitations of this sector are clearly understood, the linkages with valuable community benefits can be clearly demonstrated and the resources provided are flexible, while remaining simple enough to be utilised by all in the community.