

Belmont Sustainable Neighbourhood Community Attitudes Survey

December 2010

A report on the attitudes of the Belmont community, prepared by Lake Macquarie City Council as part of the Sustainable Neighbourhoods Program, February 2011.

BACKGROUND

Council's Sustainable Neighbourhoods Program provides support to communities to plan and make changes that will reduce their ecological footprint at a neighbourhood scale.

In September 2010, Council and members of the Belmont Community together hosted a community workshop to initiate and support the growth of a Belmont Sustainable Neighbourhood Group and neighbourhood action plan. This survey is the next stage of discovering what the residents of Belmont are most passionate about.

This report presents the results of the Community Attitudes Survey undertaken in Belmont in December 2010. The survey aims to gauge community attitudes to the natural environment, sustainable living, and climate change issues in order to inform the development of a Belmont Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan.

The survey forms part of a program of community development and engagement activities to collect input from the broadest possible range of Belmont residents. Public workshops, information stalls, school engagement, and hands on activities will also be used to gain input from residents. The survey captures some of the values, attitudes, and concerns of residents who may not participate in other engagement activities, and gives a broader perspective to guide local projects.

METHODOLOGY

In November 2010, the survey was posted to approximately 1150 households in Belmont using to mailing addresses in Council's ratepayer database. The survey was a self-return format, with a prize draw promoted on the front cover as an incentive for residents to complete it.

Instructions on the front of the survey asked for respondents who:

- have lived in Lake Macquarie City for more than six months
- were over 18 years old; and
- are one of the key decision makers in your household.

In total, 99 surveys were completed – a return rate of just under 9%.



Key Findings

Local sustainability issues in Belmont

Respondents are most concerned about issues within the following broad categories:

- Waste management
- Lakes, beaches and waterways
- Infrastructure

Individual issues raised most frequently included litter, lake pollution and anti-social behaviour.

The issues rated of most importance are:

- Protecting and improving the natural environment
- Reducing waste
- Improving streetscape and stormwater systems through environmental design

Climate change over the next 20 years

59% of residents agree that climate change will directly impact their life over the next 20 years, with the main impacts being:

- Changes in weather / extreme weather events
- Rising sea levels
- Increased temperatures / warmer weather

Your sustainability choices

Most respondents report to have these items on their property:

- Water efficient appliances and fittings (82%)
- Energy efficient appliances (73%)
- Household insulation (70%)

Food scraps and organic waste

Only the minority of respondents recycle food scraps, reporting the following behaviours:

- Composting (22%)
- Chooks/domestic fowl (5%)
- Worm farms (3%)

The most common reasons for not having a compost or worm farm include:

- My living circumstances are not appropriate
- I do not have time
- Attract pests
- I do not need or want a worm farm / compost

GreenPower

17% of respondents purchase GreenPower, with comments indicating some confusion about what it is. The main reasons for not purchasing GreenPower are:

- I cannot afford GreenPower
- I do not know much about GreenPower

Public transport

Most respondents (75%) reported that they never or seldom use public transport. The most common reasons included that:

- I prefer to use my car
- Prefer to walk or cycle
- The route and timetables for public transport in my area is not convenient

Motivation

Respondents ranked 'Saving money' as their primary motivation for improving their environmental behaviour, followed closely by 'A personal responsibility to do the right thing for the environment' and 'Rebates and incentives'.

Sustainability actions in your neighbourhood

Activities that respondents indicate they are most likely to participate in include:

- Taking part in home audits (energy, waste, water usage)
- Programs to monitor the health of the local environment (eg Water Watch, flagship species, bird observers etc)

The Sustainable Neighbourhoods Program

One third of respondents had either heard of (28%) or participated in (6%) the Sustainable Neighbourhoods program, with a flyer being the primary way they had heard about it.

Sixty-one respondents (62%) indicated that they would like to be kept informed about neighbourhood projects in Belmont.

About Belmont

Respondents have a high level of agreement that:

- Natural features in my neighbourhood should be protected and improved by residents
- I can call on a neighbour if I need help

By far, the two most popular things people like about living in Belmont include:

- Proximity to lakes, ocean, bushland and beaches
- Close to amenities, facilities, medical services and shops

Your Ideas

Respondents contributed over 50 ideas and suggestions about how Belmont residents and/or businesses could improve the environment or community of Belmont. These were grouped into a number of categories, the most popular being waste management and community safety/civic pride. This was consistent with the most commonly raised issues in question one.

Implications for the Belmont Sustainable Neighbourhood Project

Values and Assets

The suburb of Belmont is set in a beautiful natural setting, surrounded by the lake, extensive wetlands, and beach. The proximity to these natural assets and the community's appreciation for them highlight the potential for neighbourhood involvement in managing and protecting their surrounding environment.

Belmont is home to a range of facilities and services including a large business centre, sporting facilities, medical and education centres. Respondents valued the accessibility of these and had an interest in ensuring they were well maintained and remained vital.

Belmont residents also identified that they live in a friendly community, and wanted to ensure that the sense of community continues into the future. A common sense of community pride is a significant asset and foundation for the development of a more sustainable and resilient neighbourhood.

Issues

Respondents identified a broad range of issues in their neighbourhood. Waste management, notably litter issues, and protecting the lake, were foremost in people's minds. The need for more policing and anti social behaviour, particularly that connected to late night drinking was also a common concern.

Other significant issues were waste reduction, recycling, cycling, and walking tracks, reducing water and energy use, public infrastructure, urban development and government services.

Ongoing identification of these issues using various engagement techniques with the Belmont community is essential as a basis for future sustainability actions that address the priorities of a cross-section of Belmont residents.

Actions

The survey results provide insights into potential neighbourhood projects and an indication of actions that are likely to gain support from the Belmont community. Potential actions highlighted by the survey include:

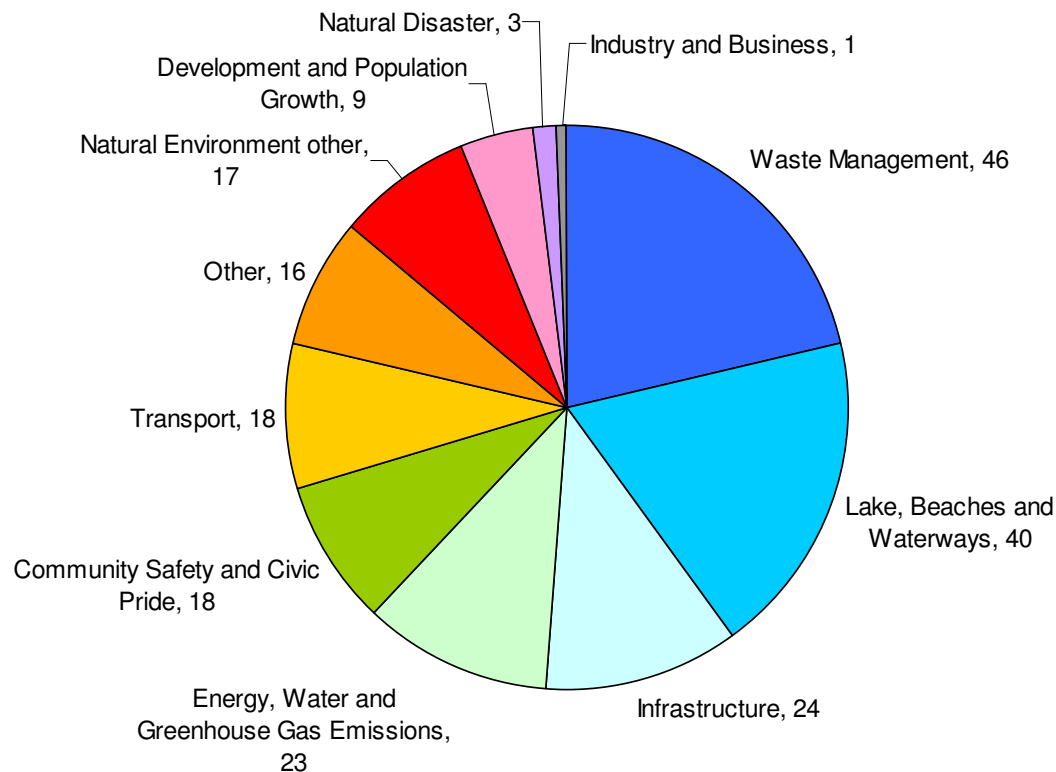
- Establish a cycle route between the Fernleigh Track and town centre/foreshore and otherwise encourage improved and safer cycleways and pedestrian pathways
- Variety of projects to protect and enhance the lake and lakeside environment, Belmont Wetlands, adjoining coastline, and beaches
- Initiatives to create more recreational opportunities for the youth
- Litter, waste reduction and recycling programs
- Hands on home water/energy reduction audits and education programs

Detailed Results

1. LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES IN BELMONT

Q1a. What are the three most important environmental issues in your neighbourhood today? (List no more than 3)

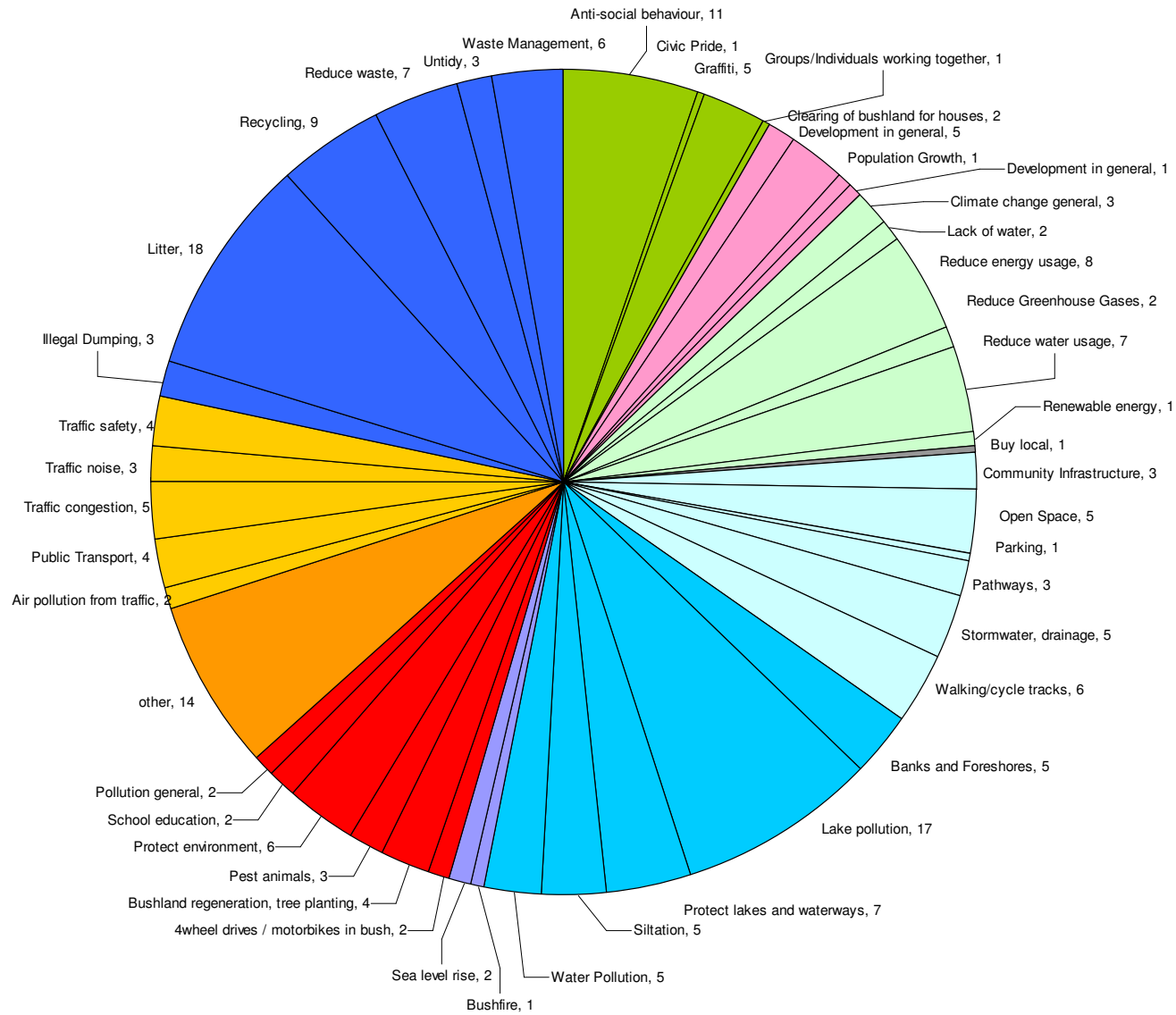
Categorised responses



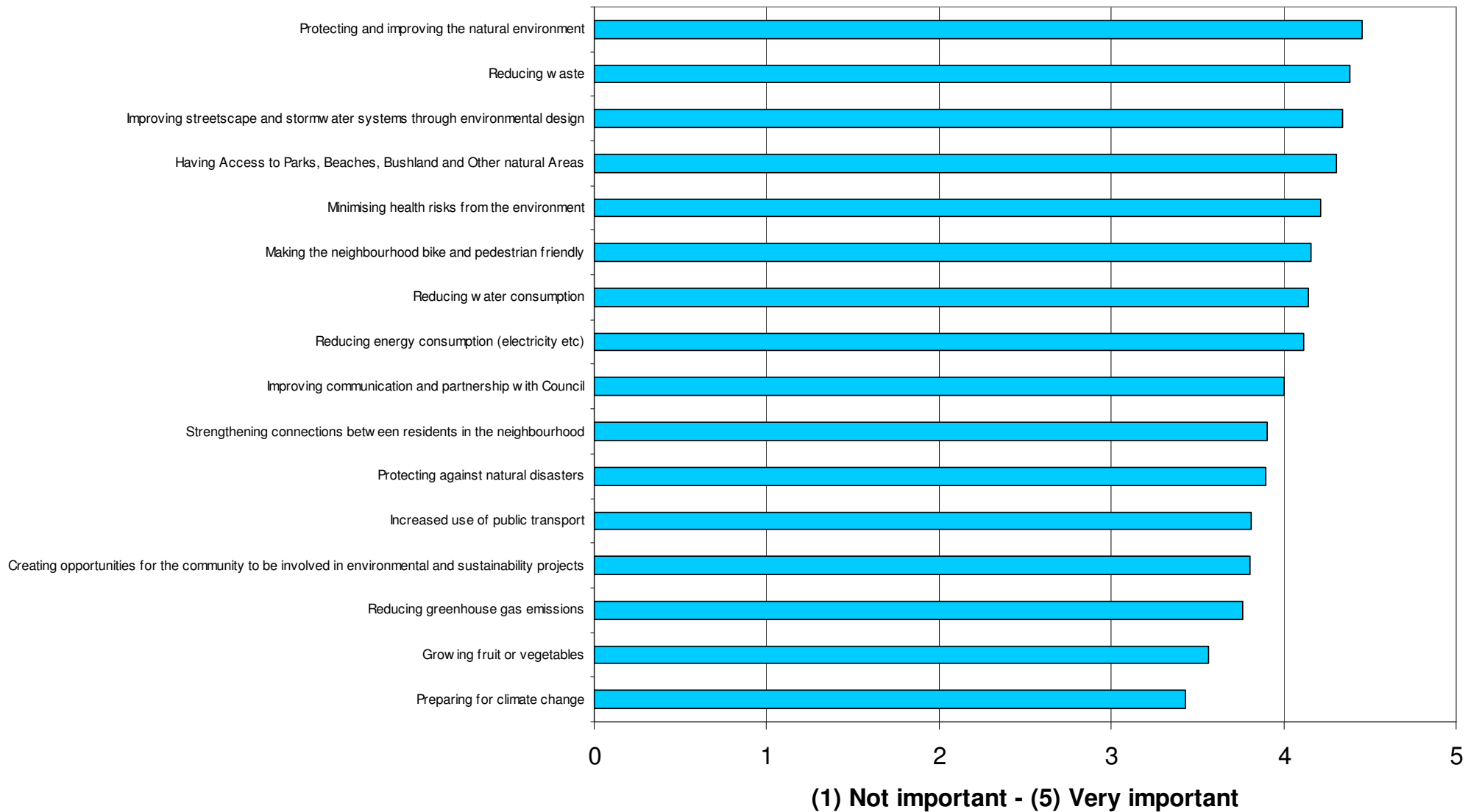
Other responses included:

- More facilities for dogs (leash free areas, café)
- Odour problems associated with Hunter Water Belmont 6WWPS
- We need to see the council ranger more often
- council neglect
- Cut down on health risks
- Belmont lagoon remaining accessible for everyone to enjoy for free, bushwalks etc
- The high level of wages and financial fees paid to management
- The green party should loose itself in the bush,
- Forget climate change climate is change
- Safe swimming
- Closure of Library book return slots
- Lack of letter boxes (how about one in Woolworths)

Q1a. What are the three most important environmental issues in your neighbourhood today?

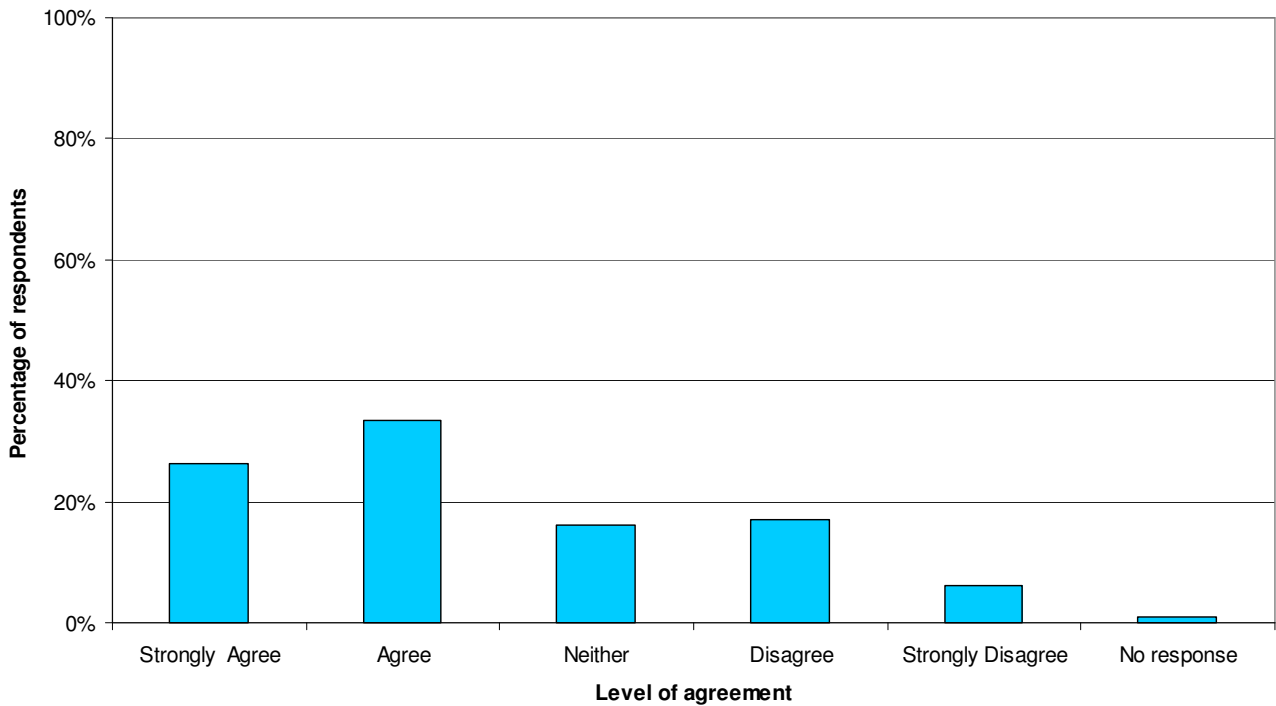


Q1b. Please rate how important you think the following are to your neighbourhood

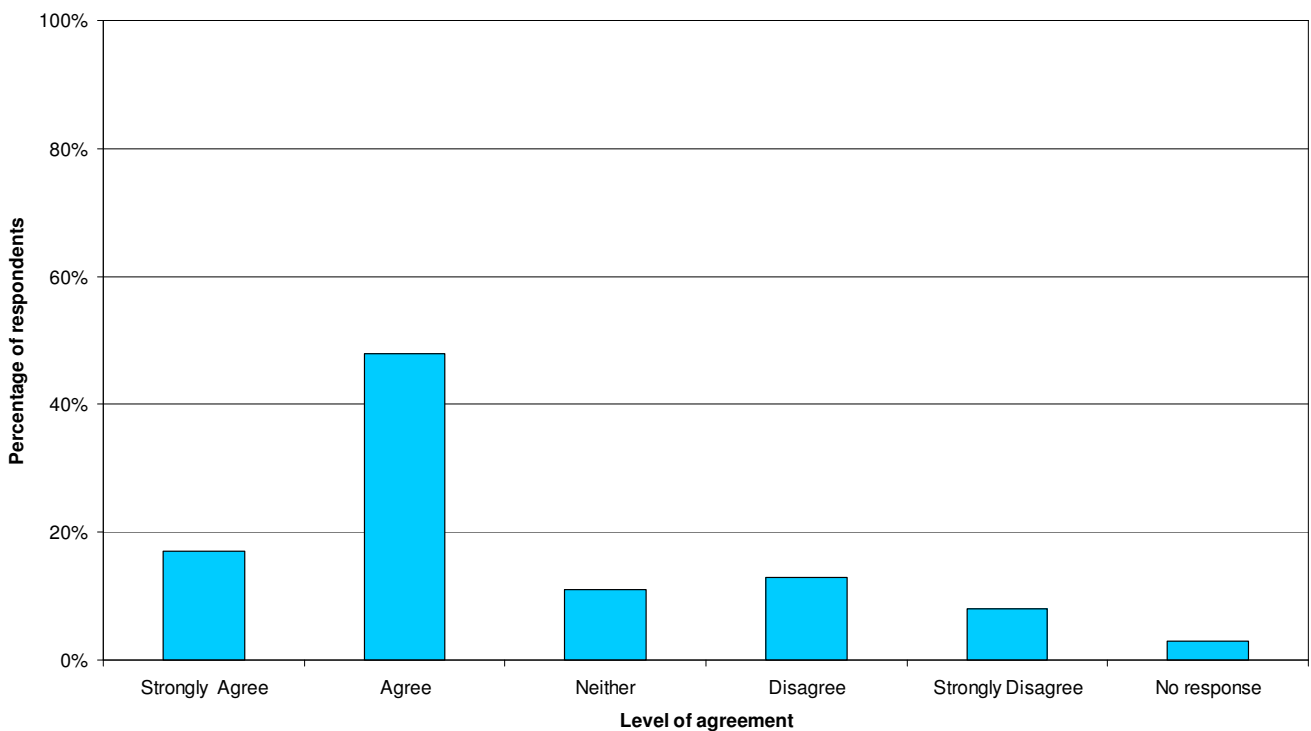


2. CLIMATE CHANGE OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS

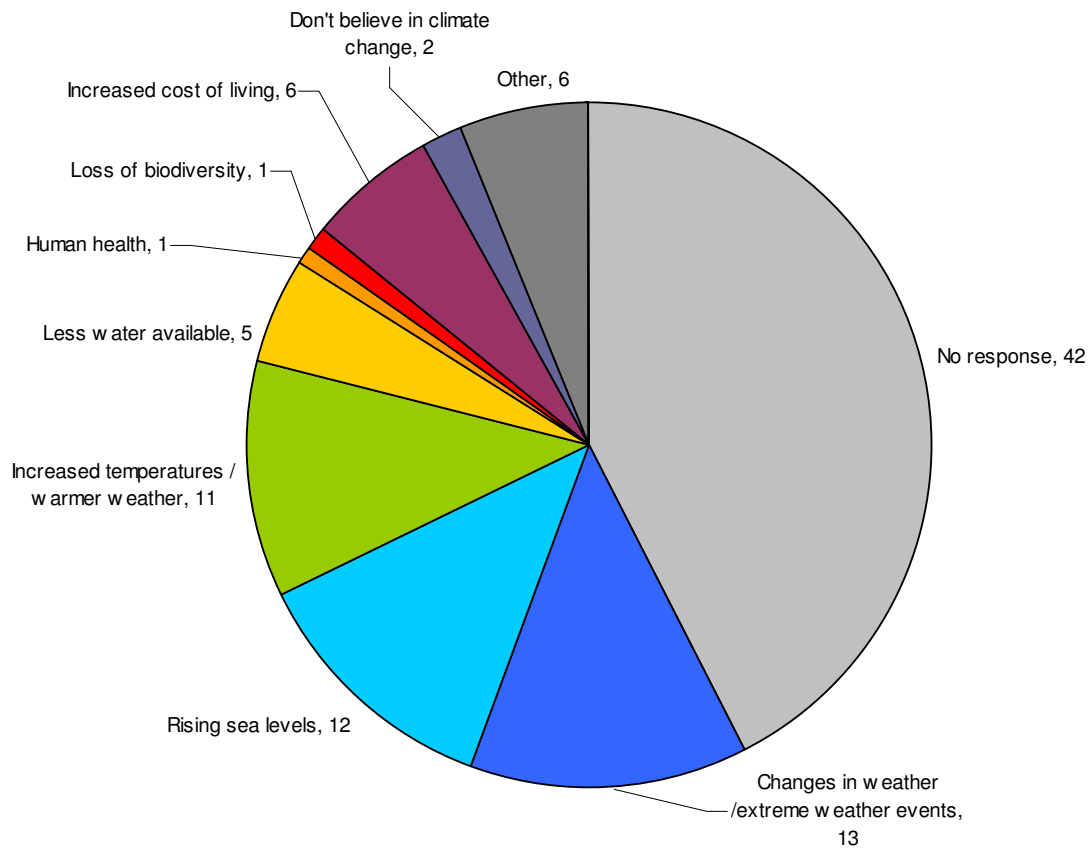
Q2a. How strongly do you agree, or disagree, that climate change will have a direct impact on your life over the next 20 years?



Q2c. How strongly do you agree, or disagree, that the actions of the average person have a large impact on slowing climate change?

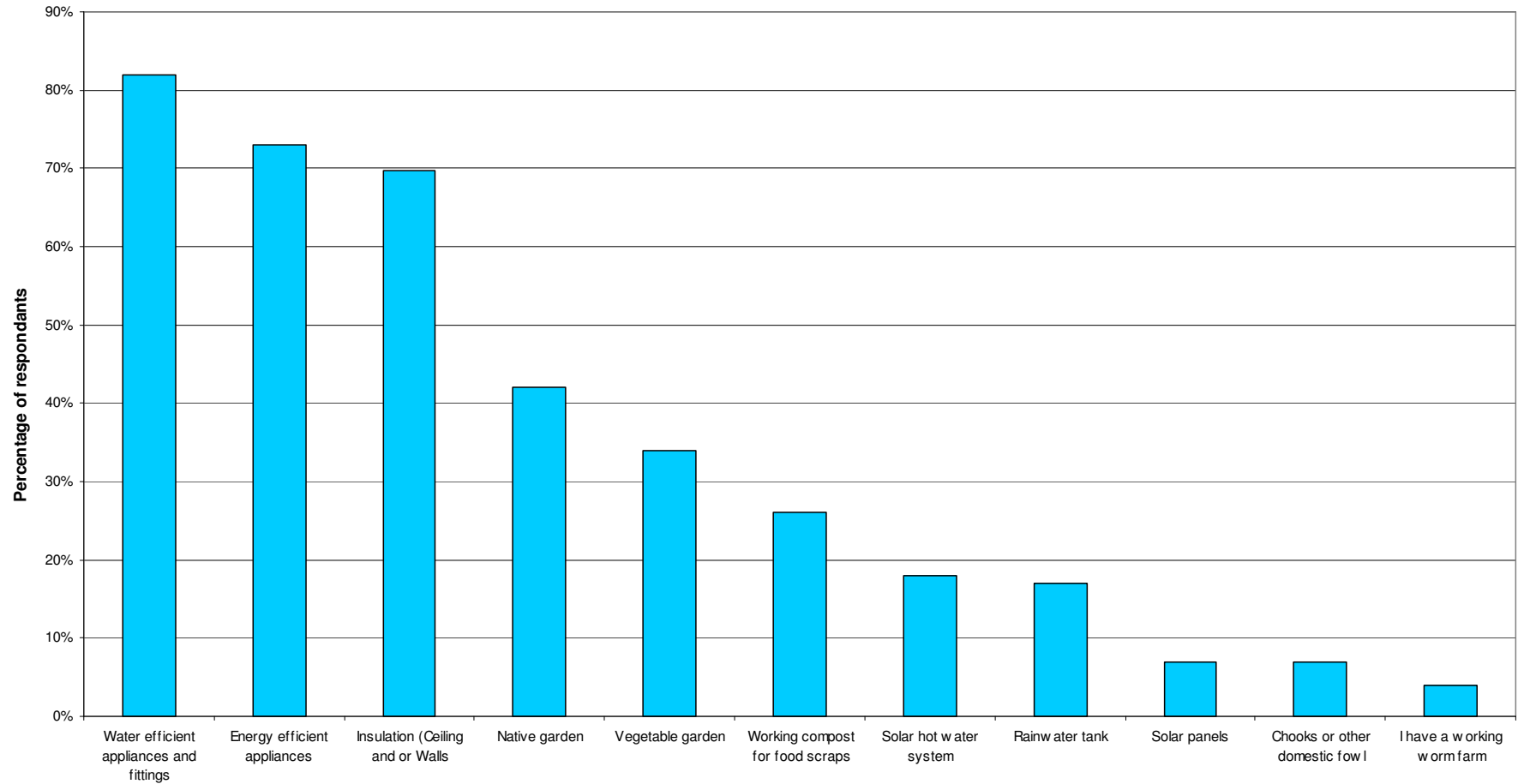


Q2b. If you agree or strongly agree with the statement in Q2a, what do you think will be the MAIN impact of climate change in the next 20 years?

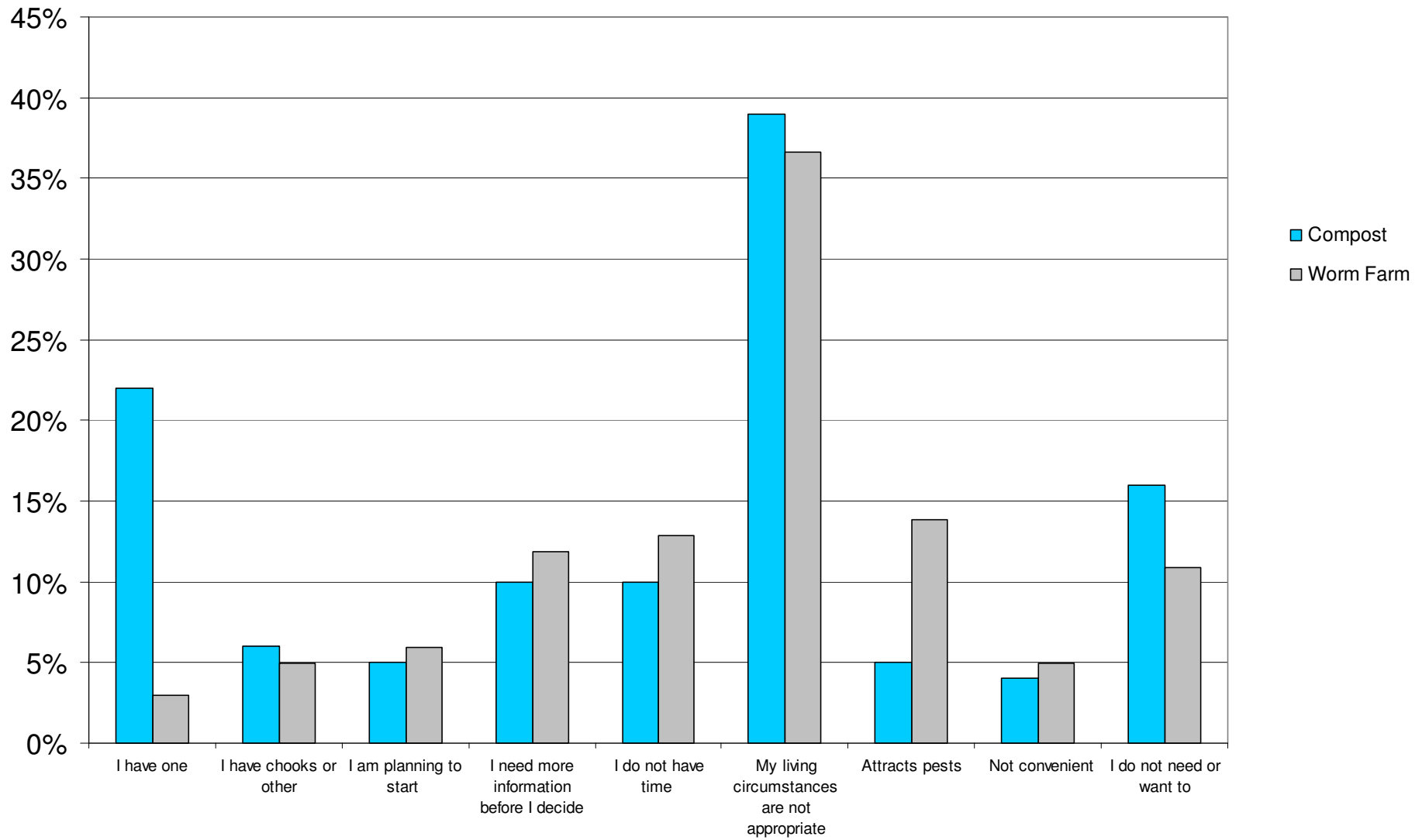


3. YOUR SUSTAINABILITY CHOICES

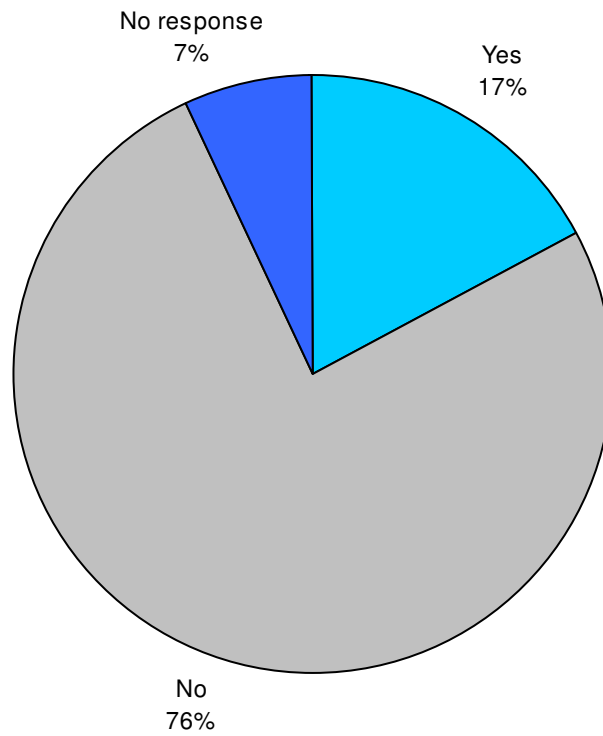
Q3a. Do you have any of the following items on your property?



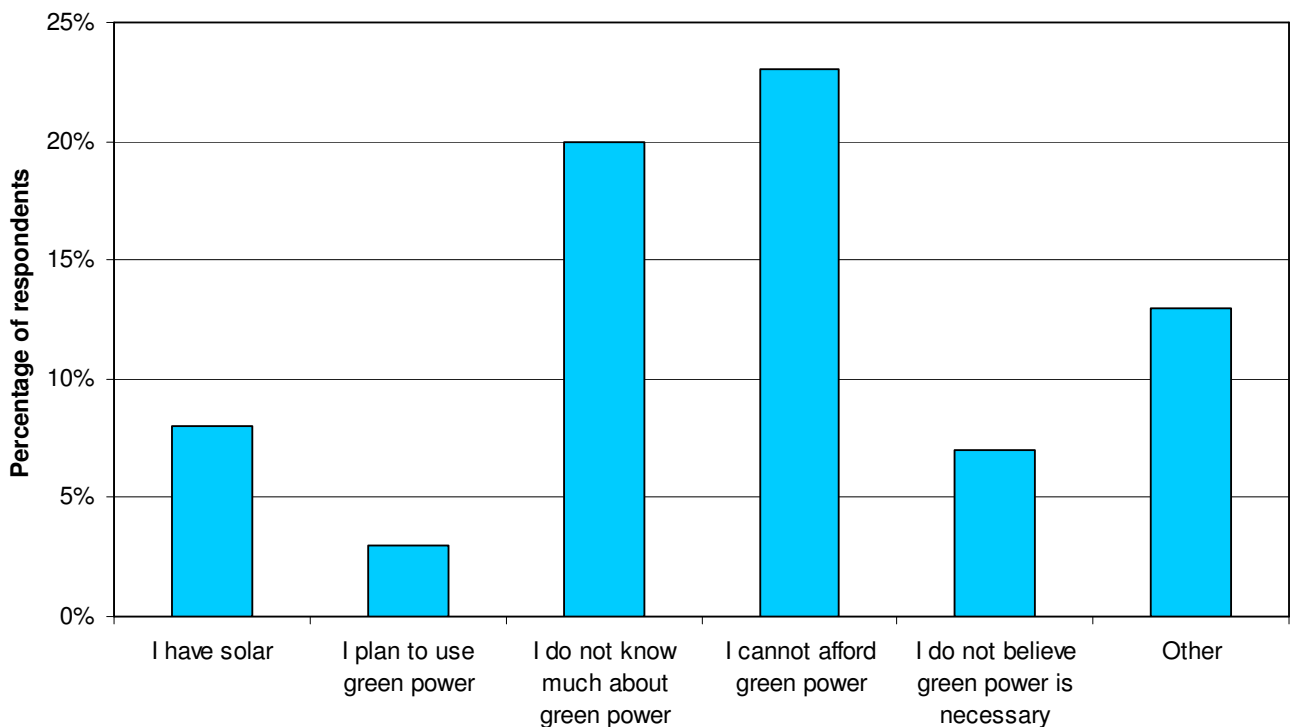
Q3b and 3c. If you do not have a working worm farm/compost food scraps, please indicate why. List all reasons that apply.



Q3d. Do you use GreenPower (renewable energy accredited by the Federal Government)?



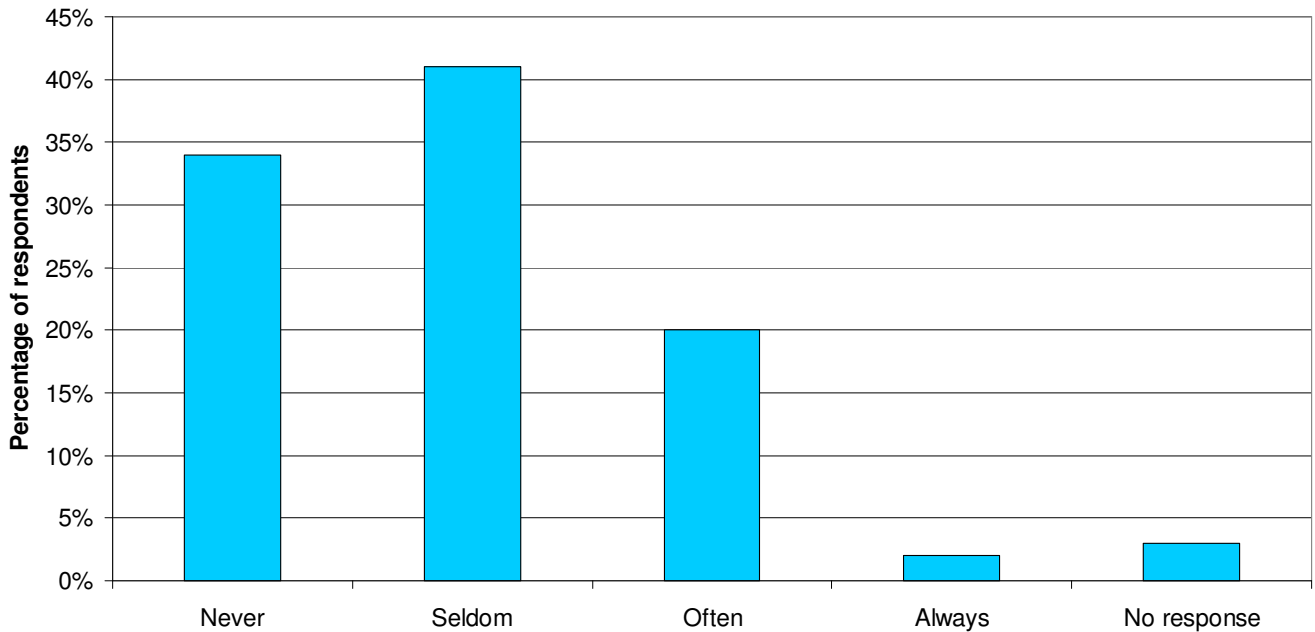
Q3e. If you do not use GreenPower, please indicate why. List all reasons that apply.



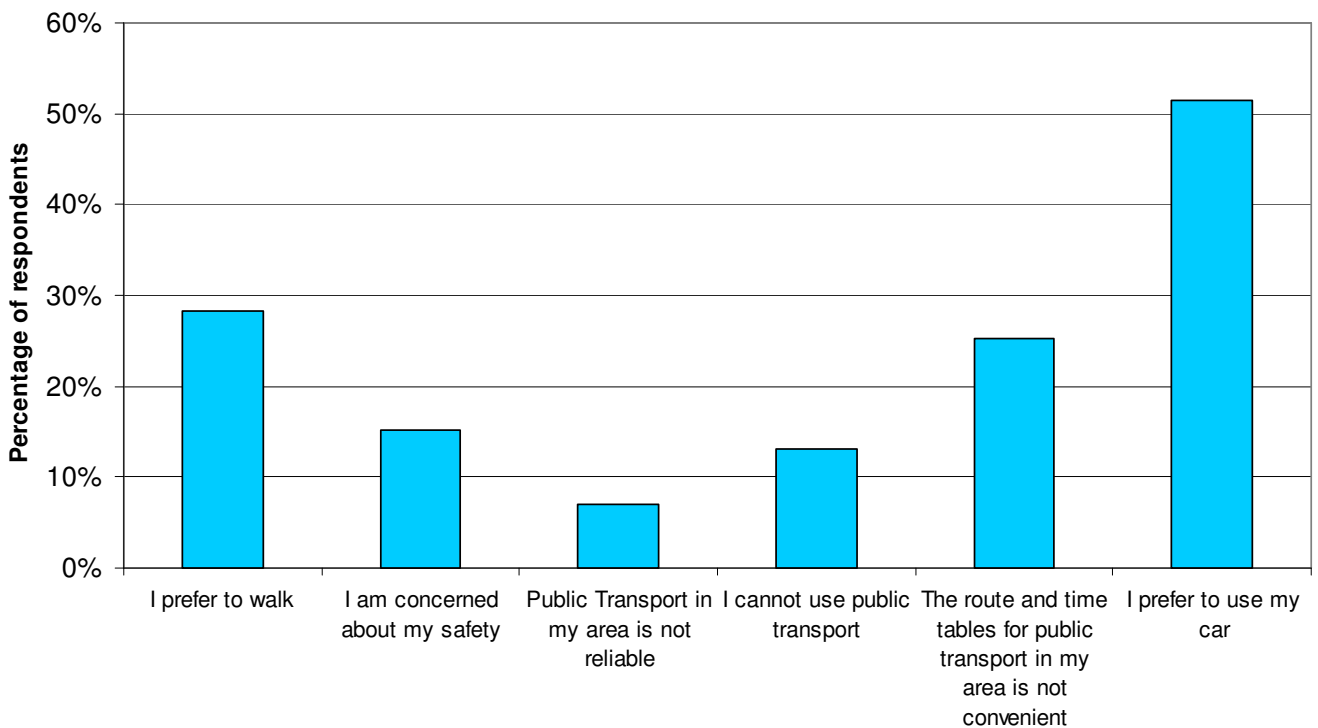
Other reasons and explanation included:

- I rent
- Living in strata apartment however we are looking into using GreenPower to cut costs
- I don't know if we use GreenPower
- We contacted Energy Australia 18 months ago for information on joining and buying green energy. We have never received any reply
- It is useless in its present form
- I live in a rental property. If I owned my own house I would definitely consider GreenPower
- I live in a rental unit
- We actively practice reducing our power usage
- I believe it to be more expensive at this time
- I remember the Northumberland County Council and it was better then now we have about 4 companies fighting for our dollar
- Having tried some solar sources I find them unreliable
- Don't know what it is
- Live in block of units

Q3f. How often do people in your household use public transport?



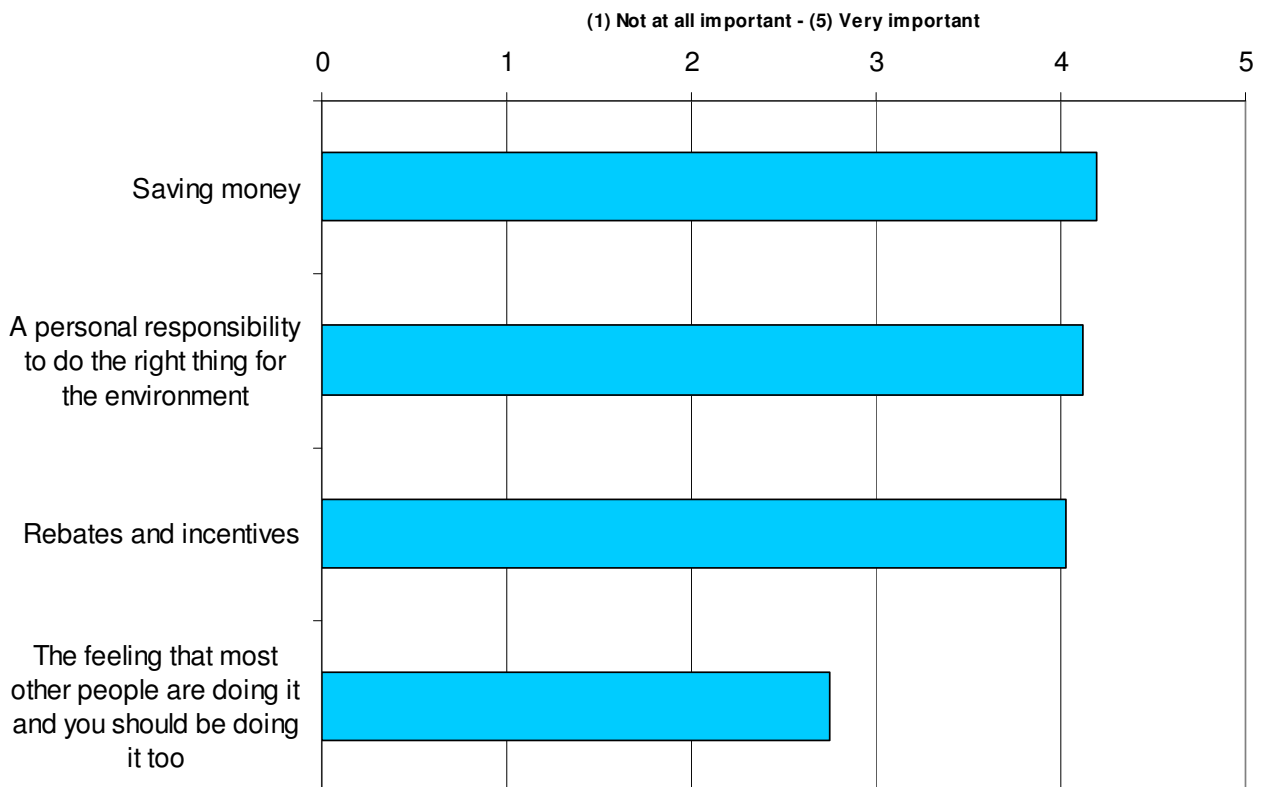
Q3g. If your household never or seldom uses public transport, please indicate why. List all that apply.



Other reasons and extra explanations included:

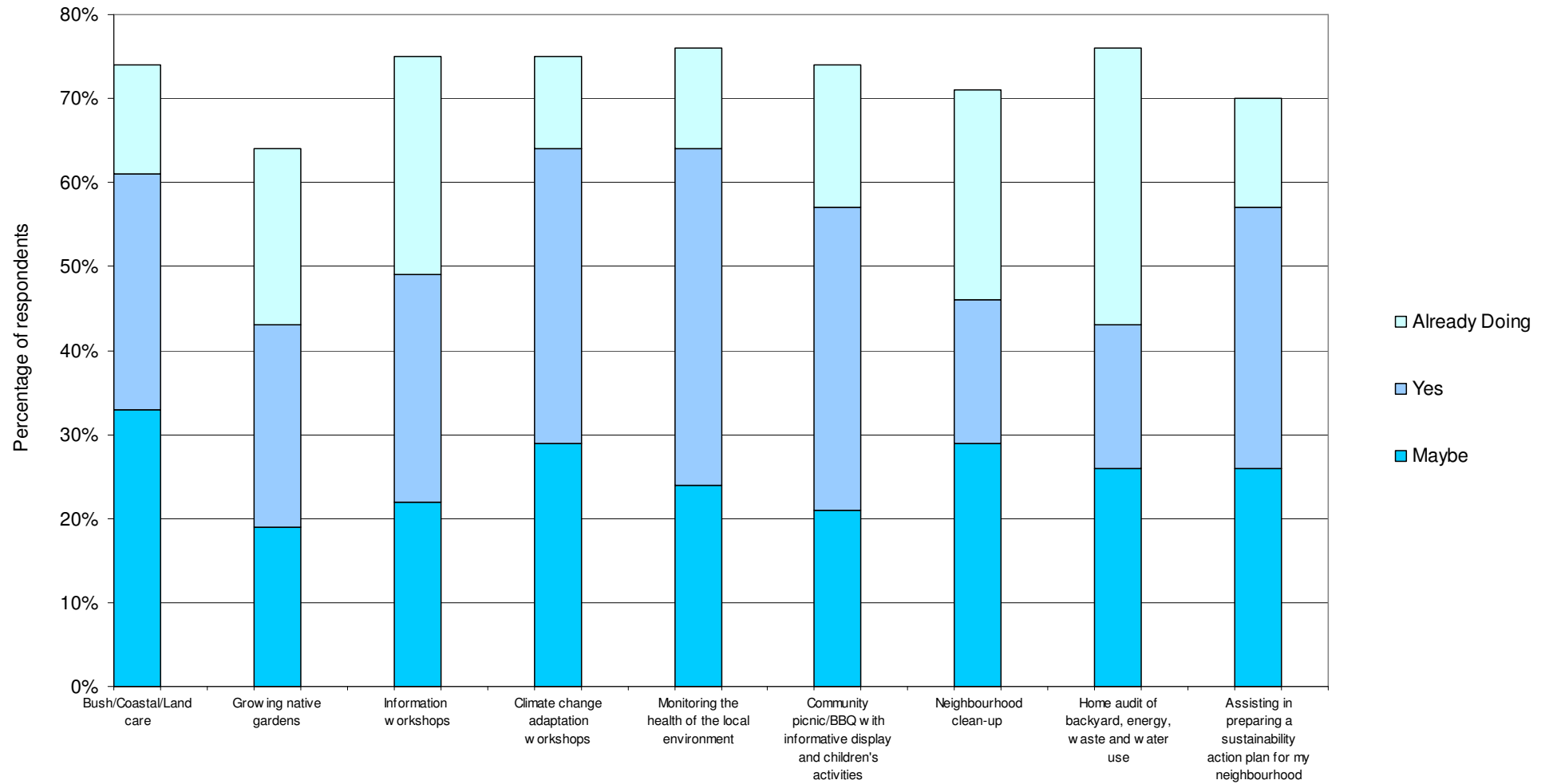
- Travelling with 4 children is not convenient
- I have to use car at times for my invalid husband
- Use day care and OOSH, husband works in the opposite direction to me, not viable
- I use my car to shop for groceries, go to the movies at night, most of the buses that we observe in our area are almost always empty. A lot of my travelling is for short distances
- Live in Belmont but work in Williamstown
- As I haven't used public transport I wouldn't know how and when to access it
- I work in a different area - driving from client to client's homes
- Jobs require your own transport
- Live in walking distance to shops
- We mainly live local presently
- Non existent train/light rail
- My wife drives
- Not appropriate for work and always working
- 95% of time I shop locally
- Concrete business - so need to drive, but I walk to the shops
- I have a family of seven so public transport would be hazardous
- Walker

Q3h. What motivates you to improve your environmental behaviour?



4. SUSTAINABILITY ACTIONS IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

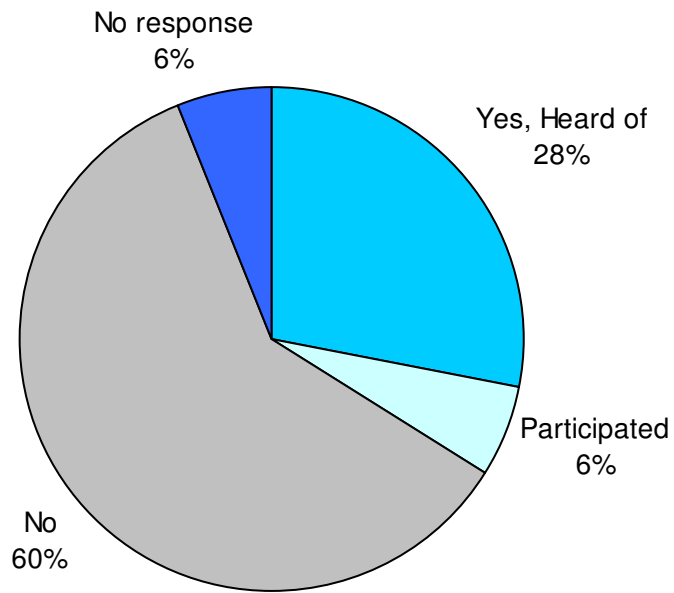
Q4a. Which of the following activities / events would you consider participating in?



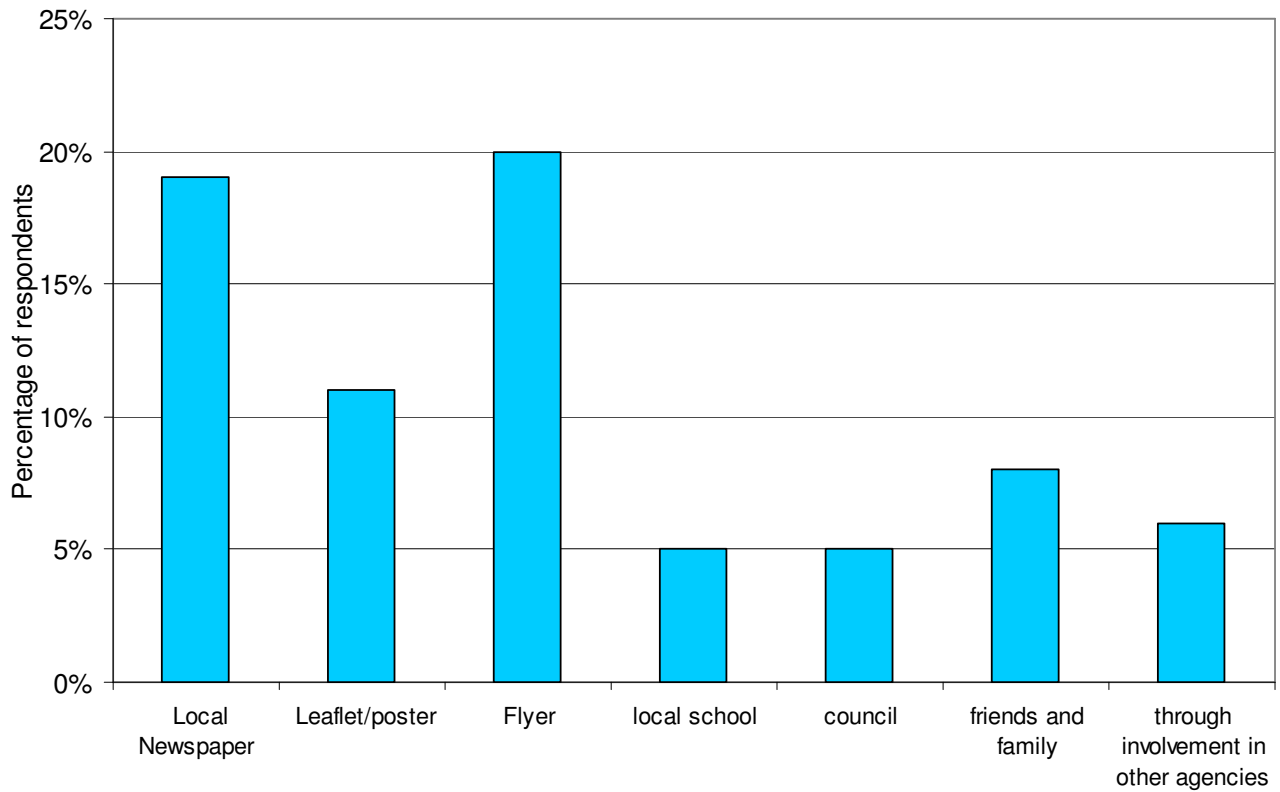
Suggestions for workshops / educational events / or other community activities included:

- Clean up and maintain footpaths
- Annual clean up Lake foreshore
- Age prohibits these participations but all are good suggestions
- Movies under the stars, Twilight markets
- Get all of them dole bludgers to do the clean ups
- Member of St Luke's Community Garden
- I am a cripple and I do my best when your legs are bad, two new knees and back operation it restricts you but I am getting a little help from friends
- Encourage use of push bikes like the Environmental Centre at Wickham does
- I participate with conservation volunteers
- Bring in water restrictions now before its imperative, I am sick of seeing retired people hosing their gardens for hours just before a storm or rain. Its frustrating and a huge water waster
- I am sorry I cannot help as I am 79 years old
- Health problems prevent me now from physically participating. In the past I always helped
- None - not well enough
- I constantly pick up rubbish when I am surfing or fishing I feel public needs more education
- Keeping beaches and lakeside free of litter
- Monthly farmers markets, fresh produce in the mall near the post office

Q4b. Have you heard of or participated in the Sustainable Neighbourhoods program?



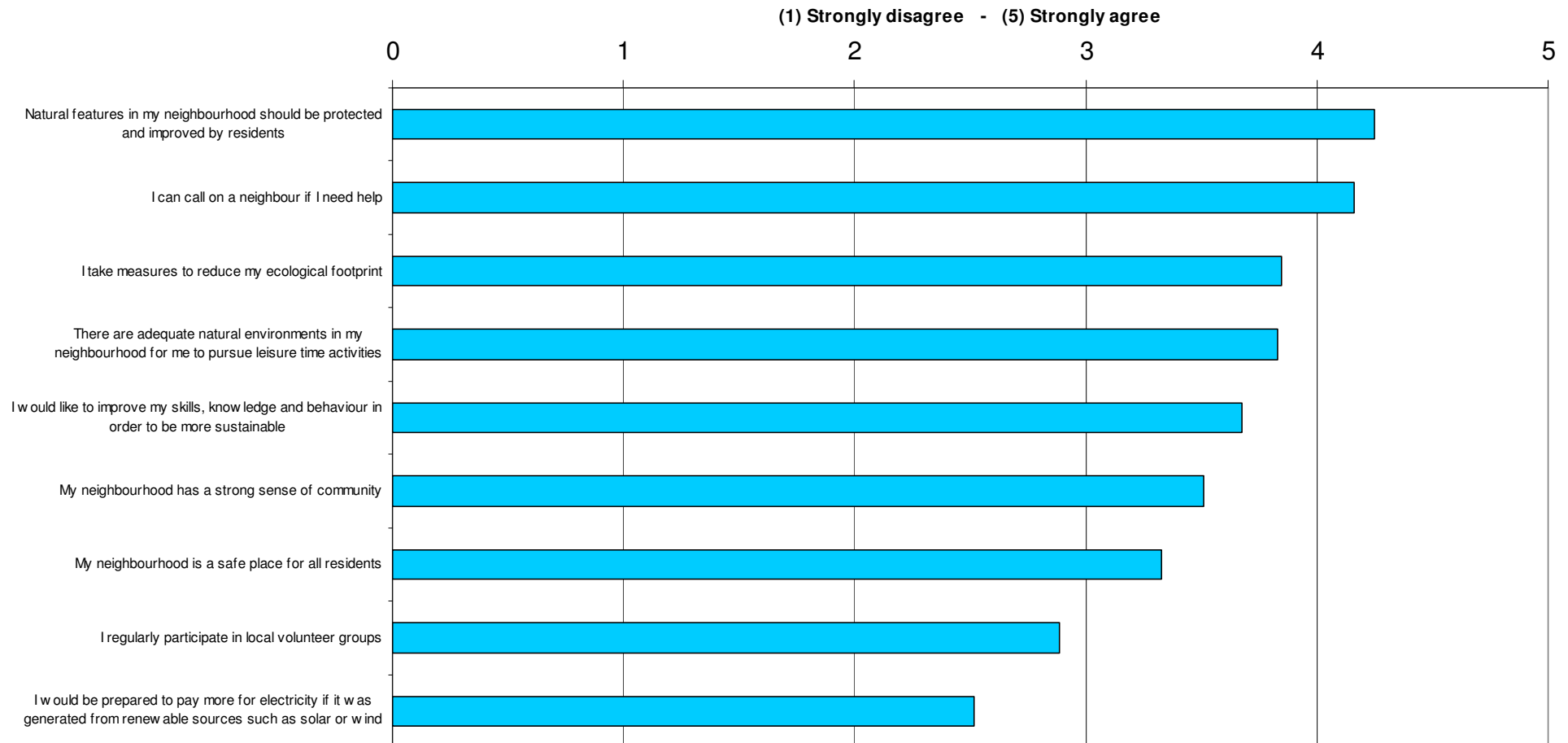
Q4c. If yes, how did you hear about this program? List all methods that apply.



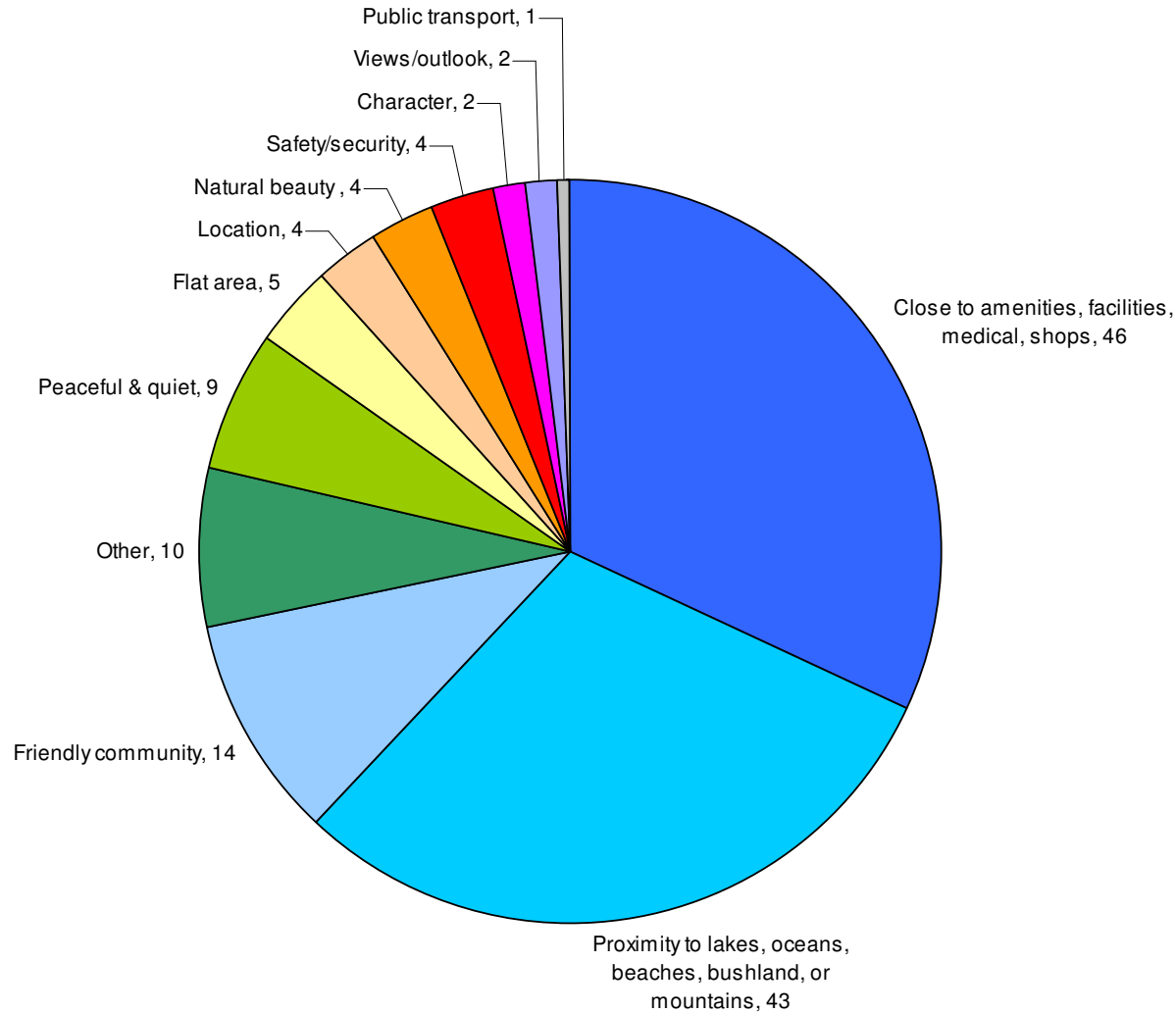
- Other responses included: Conservation and land management - TAFE

5. ABOUT YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

Q5a. Please rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.



**Q5b. What do you like most about living in your neighbourhood?
(Responses categorised)**



‘Other’ responses included:

- I did before the housing commission built high density housing only 20m away, now all the nearby houses are for sale (and damaged)
- dog areas
- Lived here all my life and wouldn't go anywhere else
- I was born in Belmont, moved away and returned to retire – God's own country
- Born and lived here all of my life
- work related
- no heavy industry
- climate and privacy
- I have multiple sclerosis I suffer with the heat, I now CANNOT afford to have my AC on, I suffer every day
- Nothing, it has become a dead duck town

6. YOUR IDEAS

Q6. Do you have any suggestions about how you, the people in your neighbourhood and/or business could improve the environment or community of your neighbourhood? *Responses have been categorised.* 45 survey participants had no response.

Infrastructure

- A decent playground for the kids (there is an awesome one on the Gold Coast between Sea World and Surfers Paradise) and more picnic family areas along the Lake
- A foot path
- I should press the powers that be to spend more of the money collected here to improve and maintain what we already have and deliver through traffic away from lake foreshore areas
- Speed humps in our street. Roundabout off our intersection to slow down the flow of traffic

Transport

- Traffic lights corner of Evans & Ross Street, Belmont
- Stick to the highway, stop taking short cuts through back streets as there are a lot of children in this area, it's very frustrating when hoons take short cuts through our street.
- Buses could run more frequently to and from Belmont - it is often overcrowded
- Somehow make it safer for cycling
- Finding a way to connect all the different cycle paths so it is an off road network
- Make shopping precinct and foreshore more pedestrian friendly

Industry and Business

- Bring more businesses, visitors, locals into the city and shopping locally to support local businesses and therefore develop a happy community
- Encourage more businesses to fill the empty shops
- I would like to see Belmont 16 Footers take more interest in their vast real estate holdings along Ross Street, Maude and Herbert Street
- McDonalds should be held responsible for cleaning up the loitering and food wrappings from their restaurant, they should also fund local environmental projects

Waste Management

- I have complained in post to council about excess junk mail. I pick it up and put it straight into the recycling bin. With the internet and radio a reduction in paper waste would be a godsend
- Don't leave shopping trolleys around streets and educate public housing residents to take trolleys back where they came from - not on footpath for others to return
- Don't litter
- As long as parks and lakeside picnic areas are kept tidy
- Belmont City Centre needs rubbish bins - outside all removed during refurbishment, We need cinemas, Big W
- Need heavy fines or something to stop people dumping rubbish
- No idea other than mindful of recycling and sensible waste disposal
- Business stop using food wrapping, people using correct rubbish bins and green waste

Waste Management (con...)

- Better maintenance of garbage and moving of foreshore
- Put more garbage's around the Lake and empty them more often as the shelter and vicinity of Belmont baths at weekends is unpleasant to see. Maybe the Ranger again more often, some of the things we see would your hair curl
- Reduction in plastic bag use, Manufacture of bio-degradable (plastic) bags, able to

put food scraps in, then a smaller receptacle for pick-up by council (tub or smaller bin), People should be encouraged to take grass clippings to community gardens

- More garbage collection days (white/green waste)
- Supermarkets could use less packaging in their meat department
- Get trolleys off streets, more garbage bins and put unemployed to work to clean up the mess they make.

Community Safety and Civic Pride

- Maybe have street meetings where people can discuss improving there areas. I think unless council is involved in planning and meetings, it needs to have small groups initially
- Converse with each other, Interact
- Curbing anti social behaviour particularly that related to public drinking also vandalism etc, The incidence of graffiti, The crackdown of anti social behaviour in Newcastle CBD seems to have increased the problems in the suburbs where we now need deterrents
- Close clubs and hotels by midnight every night, Restrict operating hours for all bottle shops and any place that sells drink, Make excessive drinking an offence as we have with smoking
- If we all were more responsible for ourselves we would not need to have the community clean up the mess from others, and the money could be spent more productively
- Demand the ending of late closing liquor establishments
- More police

- More police patrols at night along foreshore
- Plant another tree in the Mall near Australia Post to replace the other that was cut down, Three planting along footpaths to improve the look of bare streetscapes
- Watering the pot plant on the Pacific Highway
- More police presence needed
- The council organising a volunteer community workshop day in a park to promote community schemes and groups
- Designate Belmont into areas of a couple of blocks long and have small local groups and people in those groups meet to carry out specified voluntary roles for their area
- More rangers to police laws
- Police to be given more power to help clean up the teens at the Lake
- Community wide zero tolerance of anti social behaviour including graffiti, alcohol related behaviour
- Keep front yard and backyard tidy e.g. palm tree dead leaves, Water the garden so it looks nice and pull out weeds, Keep the lawns mowed

Natural Environment and Sustainable Living

- As I have already said the raw sewerage leaking into Belmont wetlands needs to be fixed and not patched again and again
- More native trees needed.
- I think being more self sufficient is important - recycle, chooks, vegetable patch, maybe a community area for these,

Especially for people who live in apartments with no yard

- I think common garden allotments area are very good neighbourhood ideas. I think that this helps both socially and mentally for people and even if they only go along to help someone else it then becomes a very viable project in each suburb

Natural Environment and Sustainable Living (con...)

- Rather than making people pay more for renewable energy, penalise those who do not use renewable energy
- Rainwater tanks could be compulsory for gardens and lawns

Development and Population Growth

- Population growth and industrialisation has created a different Lake. Regulations often intended to protect Lake and prevent removing pollution. Foreshore and reserve need constant cleaning and help to form a green team needed
- Protect the trees that are left and stop development from creating a Western Sydney style landscape - make retaining and providing for trees/regeneration part of every development - especially where blocks are sub divided, restrict height of development on the foreshore
- No more housing commission units. In my opinion the government should buy existing houses not all in the one place

Other

- Impossible for an individual to suggest how others will do or prepare to live
- Keep alert to anything out of order
- More off leash areas in Belmont for dogs,

- Deepening access to Belmont Ferry Wharf to promote ferry travel on the Lake (bring on the dredge)
- Buy a dredge and maintain depths in Lake Macquarie. Remove siltation coming from land
- Lawns/footpaths (grassed) we use a lot of water, fertilizers, and fuel to maintain those. In the future there may be a better alternative perhaps native strips and good native garden

and let people live in a normal neighbourhood. The only units that are successful are the over 55s

- Reduce the population by 50%, Shut down supermarkets, Manufacture only repairable products
- Revitalise land between Belmont and the coastline for public use, currently neither usable or valuable, Shop building apartment blocks, its driving out locals and bringing in snobs, sure it is great for the economy but who really reaps the benefits of that?
- Need a better kid's park fenced in Belmont or pool. Why don't we get funding like Warners Bay?

- No improvement is possible without the council taking measures to make it possible (council inspection required)
- Not sure do not get out due to my disability

7. DEMOGRAPHICS

