What is the problem with the coast?

Why did we undertake this study?

How we define our problems determines the solutions; yet problem framing within coastal management is rarely critiqued. Consequently, opportunities are missed for comprehensive policy response, which is vital in addressing the complex challenges impacting the coast. We addressed this gap, by exploring how Australian coastal problems and solutions are framed.

How was it done?

We assessed the problem framings within 48 institutional instruments (legislation, policies and plans) that contribute to coastal management in Australia. We then explored trends in problem framing across scales, sectors and jurisdictions.

What did we find?

An anthropocentric view of the coast dominates, but is not consistent across scales, jurisdictions or sectors.

- An anthropocentric (human-centred) framing dominates the outcomes sought via management actions across all scales. However, this is especially evident at the local scale.
- Hazard management plans are promoted under the anthropocentric framing, which directs attention to erosion and inundation, and neglects other coastal issues such as pollution and biodiversity loss.
- While prioritising one frame can enable consistency and coordination of some management actions, it also neglects alternate views, confining management response to an individual problem-solution framing.
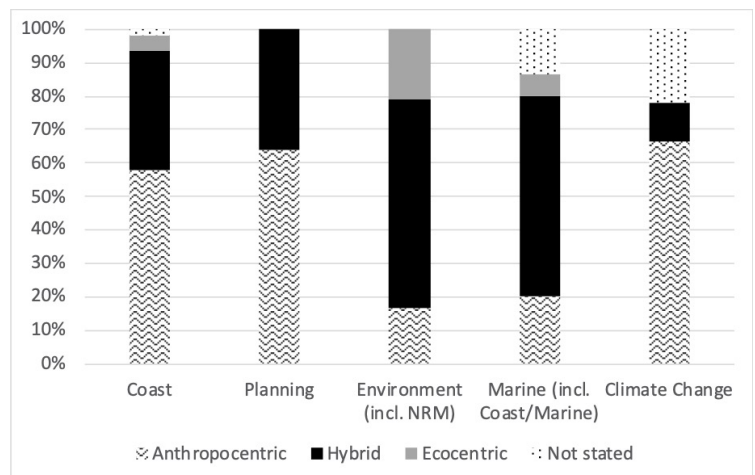

Figure 1: Coastal sustainability framings by instrument theme/sector.

What are the implications?

The findings allow coastal managers to consider the implications of different problem framings. Action can then be taken to modify problem frames, where required, to facilitate integrated coastal management. The methodological approach developed also holds value for use in other complex governance contexts.

Want more information?

The full paper is available from: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2021.10.031

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