

Estuarine cultural ecosystem services valued by local people in New South Wales, Australia, and attributes important for continued supply

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#### ABSTRCT

Cultural ecosystem services (CES) are the non-material benefits obtained from natural ecosystems that contribute to human wellbeing through aesthetic and recreational experiences, and spiritual enrichment. While research on CES is rapidly increasing in line with growing recognition of important contributions to wellbeing, little is known about CES derived from estuaries: some of the most densely populated and highly impacted ecosystems worldwide. A broad-scale assessment of CES derived from estuaries in New South Wales (NSW) was conducted using a questionnaire survey that targeted people residing near estuaries. The study aimed to determine: (i) CES important to respondents; (ii) perceptions of threats to the provision of CES; and (iii) attributes considered important by local people for their continued enjoyment and recreational use of estuaries in NSW. A total of 463 people completed the questionnaire and results revealed estuaries were highly valued by all respondents for supplying a range of CES; with aesthetics, intrinsic/existence/future, and nature/biodiversity being the most highly valued CES. The top three perceived threats with the potential to negatively affect supply of CES were: development, pollution, and poor water quality. Good water quality, maintenance of biodiversity, and litter prevention were the three most important attributes considered crucial by respondents for the provision of CES. Further, natural attributes were positively associated with CES. Overall, almost all respondents believed their estuary was very important in contributing to their wellbeing. These findings have important implications for spatial planning and the management of estuarine areas to ensure a continued provision of CES.

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