Harbour report cards build community confidence

The challenge

Gladstone Harbour in Queensland is home to one of Australia's busiest ports as well as an aluminium smelter, natural gas liquefaction plants and other heavy industry.

The Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership (GHHP) is a group formed in 2013 by stakeholders from industry, community and government – including AIMS – to improve public understanding of the harbour's environmental, social, cultural and economic health.

GHHP members realised that existing environmental monitoring was not capturing the full picture, so they set out to develop a more comprehensive program with better reporting to give the community confidence in the management of the harbour.

The approach

AIMS researchers worked with partners in GHHP to promote evidence-based understanding, not only of the environmental health of the harbour, but also of its economic, social and cultural health.

They settled on a report card approach, which provides accessible letter-grade summaries based on expert environmental assessments for coral, mangroves, fish and crabs, community surveys for social and cultural scores, and economic data on shipping, tourism and commercial fishing.

The team built custom software that takes in data from different organisations, makes it easy to validate, and then combines it to produce both user-friendly scores and detailed technical reports.

The impact

Annual report cards have been published online since 2014. Members of the public and other stakeholders can now easily view different aspects of the harbour's health at any level, from overview to detailed analysis, and track how they change over time.

The cards form a solid evidence base for the GHHP's engagement activities. Surveys show that members of the Gladstone community now feel they have more understanding of how the harbour is managed and are increasingly optimistic about the harbour's future health.

The data system developed for the project is a powerful tool for environmental monitoring and reporting, with the potential to be used in many other situations.

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS:
22

AREAS MONITORED
13

ANNUAL REPORT CARDS PRODUCED:
5

COMMUNITY TRUST:
INCREASED