



UrBAC Interim Steering Committee Stakeholder Workshop



'Future Directions'



Survey and Workshop Report

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Foreword

Urbanisation is now regarded as one of the most significant negative influences on biodiversity especially in the Western world. South-east Queensland is experiencing the most rapid population growth, primarily through internal migration, of any region in Australia. This region is also home to a remarkable diversity of native plants and animals, many of which are directly being impacted by human developments and disturbances. However, our understanding of these processes is currently being undermined by a lack of information relating to the special issues associated with 'ecology in and of' the city. Traditionally, urban areas have been greatly neglected by scientists and ecologists.

Interest in many relevant aspects of urban ecology has been increasing dramatically both nationally and world-wide. The challenge currently relates to improving knowledge and improving access to that knowledge. With this challenge in mind, the Urban Biodiversity Awareness Consortium (UrBAC) has been developed to facilitate the collation and dissemination of relevant information. Originally, UrBAC was an initiative of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland during 2003 and now has core funding from several key regional organisations and broader positive endorsement and active interest from over forty community groups and government agencies.

Although in its infancy UrBAC has already come a long way. UrBAC has intentionally focused its approach on advocacy not adversity and communication not conflict. With the SEQ Fire & Biodiversity Consortium creating an enviable model, UrBAC has made great leaps forward and is now ready to formalise what has been achieved and press one with the task of setting longer term strategic direction. The contribution of the Interim Steering Committee and the agencies that have supported them is gratefully acknowledged.

Many of these agencies have now cemented their commitments through the contribution of not only staff time but also with significant funding. This has allowed UrBAC to employ a part-time coordinator and commence greater efforts in the concentration of current knowledge and experience of urban biodiversity and its many fascinating elements.

Alan Barton: Founding Member and Former Chair of UrBAC

Outline

In conjunction with UrBAC's first stakeholder workshop event, held on May 6th, 2005, a survey was sent out to all stakeholder representatives in an effort to ascertain perspectives on UrBAC's future directions. Both the survey and the workshop proved to be greatly successful, and each has assisted UrBAC's newly formed Steering Committee (SC) in formulating strategies aimed at providing stakeholders with crucial information and research services in relation to urban biodiversity. This report summarises the results of the survey as well as some of the key priorities for action identified at the stakeholder workshop event.

Survey Results

The survey consisted of 13 questions, two relating to administration, the other 11 pertaining to the following four broad areas:

1. General stakeholder urban biodiversity-related interests and concerns
2. Current urban biodiversity knowledge gaps
3. Level and quality of, and accessibility to, urban biodiversity information/research
4. UrBAC's role and potential contribution in regard to questions (1), (2) and (3)

In total, 18 surveys were returned from a total of 45 that were sent out, constituting a relatively representative sample (40%) of UrBAC's wider stakeholder collective. The results for each broad area are provided below. For brevity, only the most common responses are discussed.

General stakeholder urban biodiversity-related interests and concerns

Question 2 of the survey was open-ended, aimed at elucidating why urban biodiversity issues and values are important to the respondent's organisation. Keywords from each response were used to create an overall summary. The most common responses were related to the threat to biodiversity posed by rapid urbanisation in the region, coupled with the need for sustainable development and the need for effective biodiversity conservation programs.

Wildlife management and welfare were also commonly cited. Other areas mentioned were related to land use conflicts, habitat regeneration, community education & participation and fire management.

Question 3 was multiple choice, designed to provide a clear indication of common areas of interest and concern. Figure 1 shows a bar chart, each bar associated with a particular response. The three most common responses in rank order were (3a) *Ecosystem/landscape conservation/management*; (3b) *Threatened species conservation/management* and (3f) *Planning and policy development and implementation*.

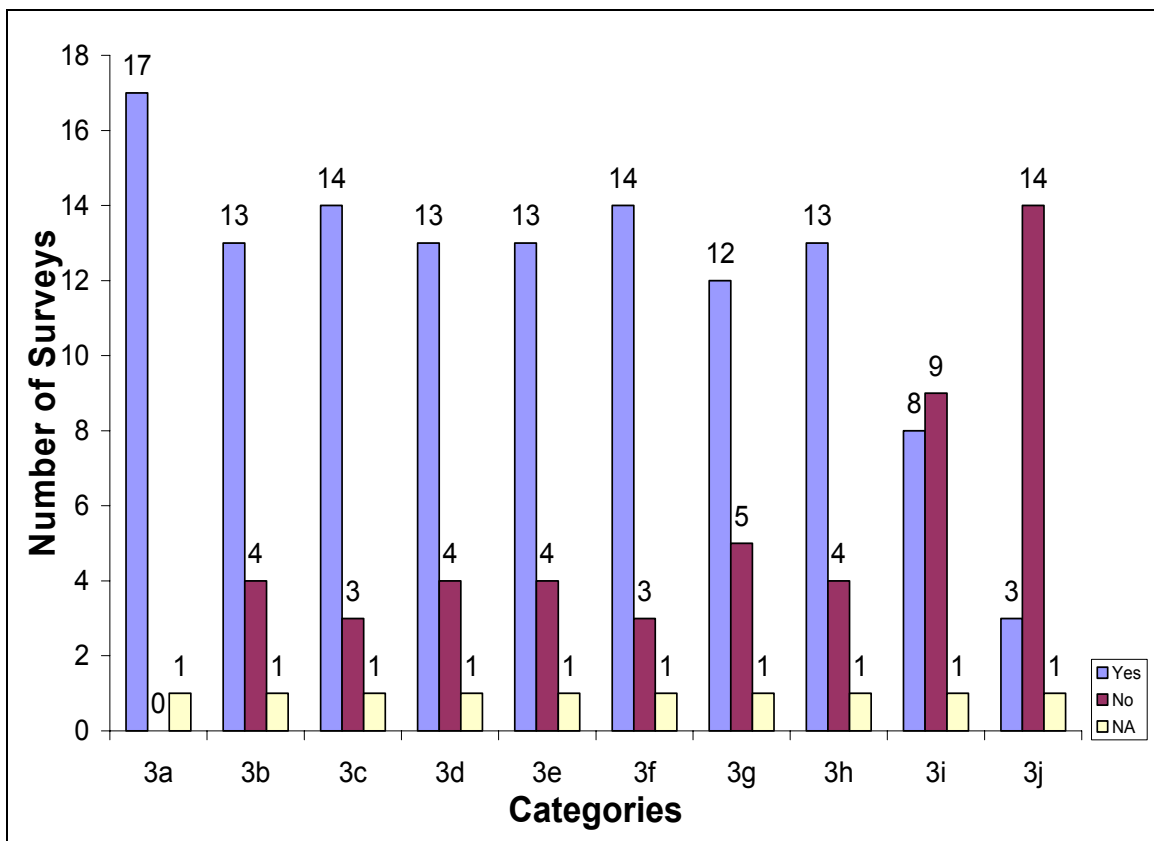


Figure 1. Bar chart summarising responses to question 3: “Which of the following topics represent the greatest areas of concern or interest to you or your organisation in relation to urban biodiversity?”

Current urban biodiversity knowledge gaps

Question 7 was open-ended and related to stakeholder views on current knowledge gaps associated with urban biodiversity. As with question two, keywords provided a means to summarise responses. The most common gaps identified related to fauna and flora surveys (i.e. species lists; presence/absence, distribution and abundance data) followed by information relating to best-practice biodiversity/urban wildlife management. Information about sustainable development practices, pest species management and habitat requirements and assessments in relation to threatened species and biodiversity.

Level and quality of, and accessibility to, urban biodiversity information & research

Questions 4, 5 and 6 were all single choice questions. Question 4, asked respondents to rate their views on their organisation's level of awareness about urban biodiversity issues (4a) and values (4b). Question 5 asked respondents to rate their views on current levels of accessibility to information about urban biodiversity, both in general (5a) and specifically in relation to their priority areas of interest and concern (5b). Finally, question 6 asked respondents to rate their views on the current quality of information about urban biodiversity, both in general (6a) and in relation to their priority areas of interest and concern (6b). Figure 2 provides a bar chart summarising results for all three questions and sub-questions. Generally, *moderate* responses were commonly listed for each question and sub-question and only seven *high* responses were listed across all questions.

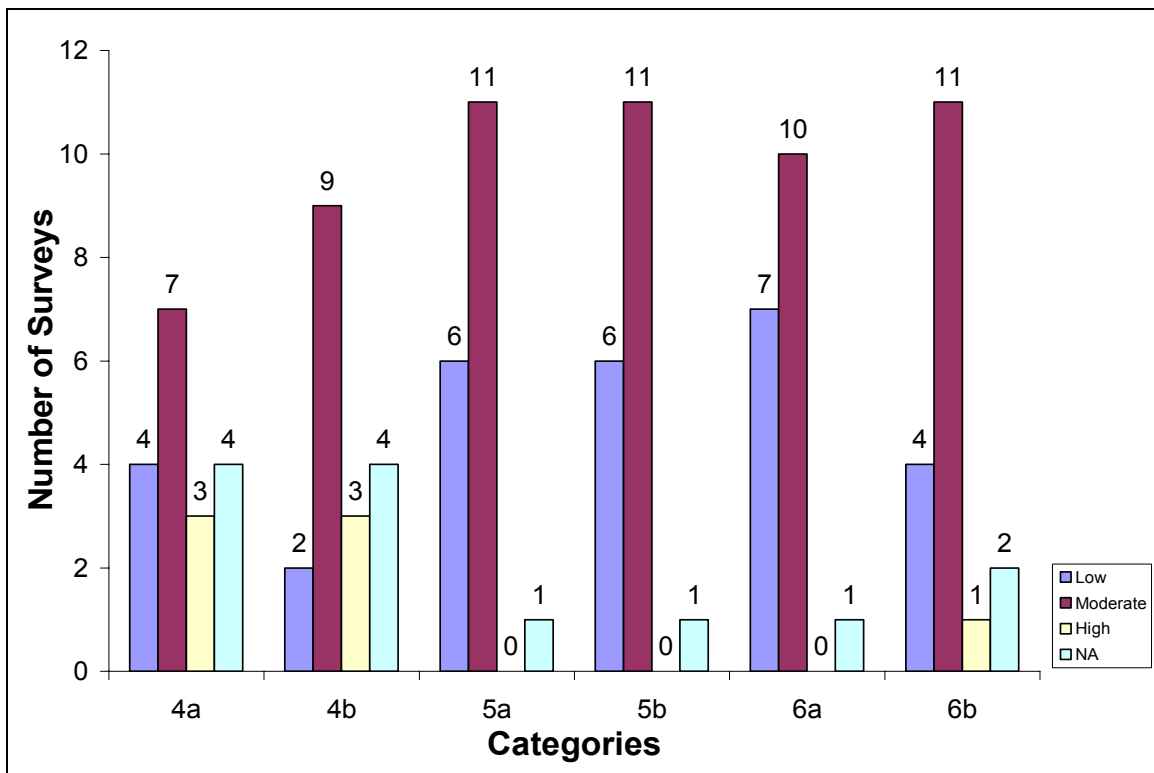


Figure 2. Bar chart summarising questions 4, 5 and 6, which are described in the main text

UrBAC's role and potential contribution in regard to questions 1, 2 and 3

Questions 8, 9, and 11 were all multiple choice, and pertained to respondent's views on the *Information Resources*, *Information Services* and *Research Services* (respectively) that UrBAC should aim to provide. Figure 3 shows a bar chart summarising the responses for question 8. The three most common responses were (8c) *Literature reviews*, (8f) *Discussion briefs/papers* and (8e) *Reprints, journal publications and conference proceedings*.

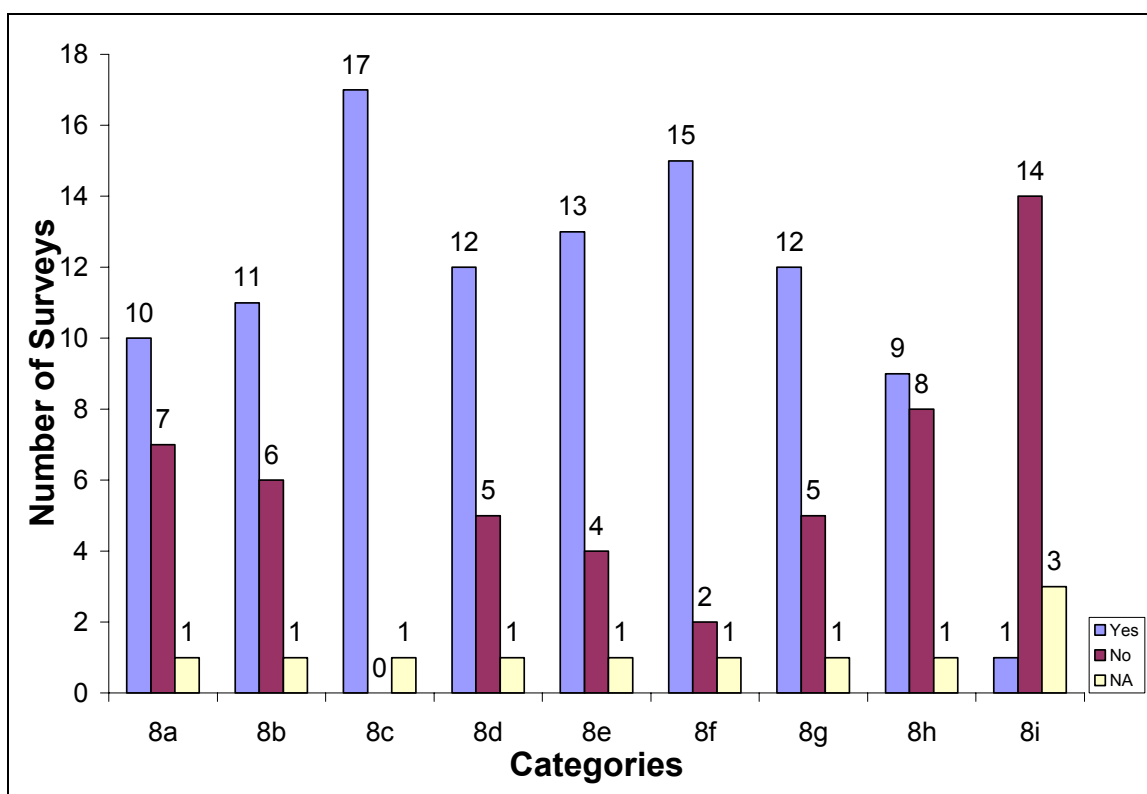


Figure 3. Bar chart summarising responses for question 8: “Which of the following information resources would be of most value to you or your organisation if able to be provided by UrBAC?”

Figure 4 shows a bar chart summarising the responses for question 9. The three most common responses were (9a) *Website/automated digital library*, (9c) *Commissioned searches or requests for information* and (9d) *Newsletter*.

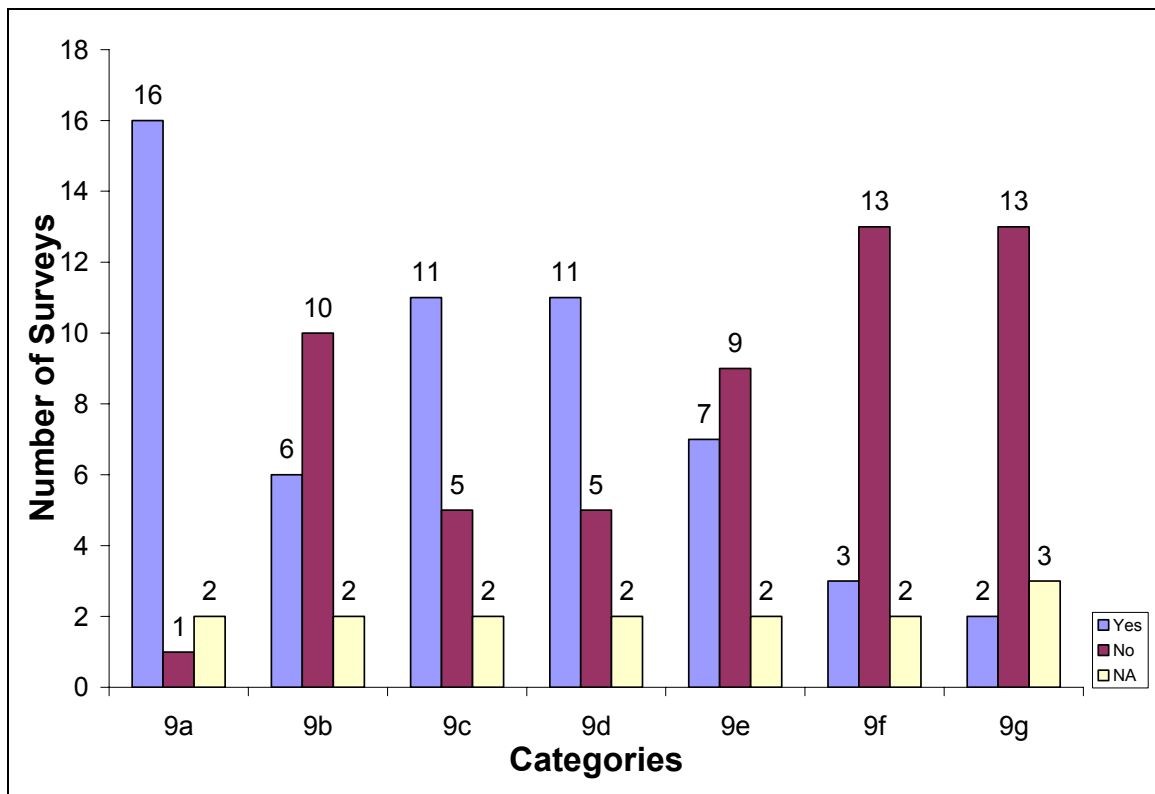


Figure 4. Bar chart summarising responses for question 9: “Which of the following information services would be the most effective means for you or your organisation to access or obtain information about urban biodiversity if provided by UrBAC?”.

Figure 5 shows a bar chart summarising the responses for question 11. The three most common responses were (11a) *Research/researcher database*, (11c) *Student research experience program* and (11d) *Stakeholder commissioned research*.

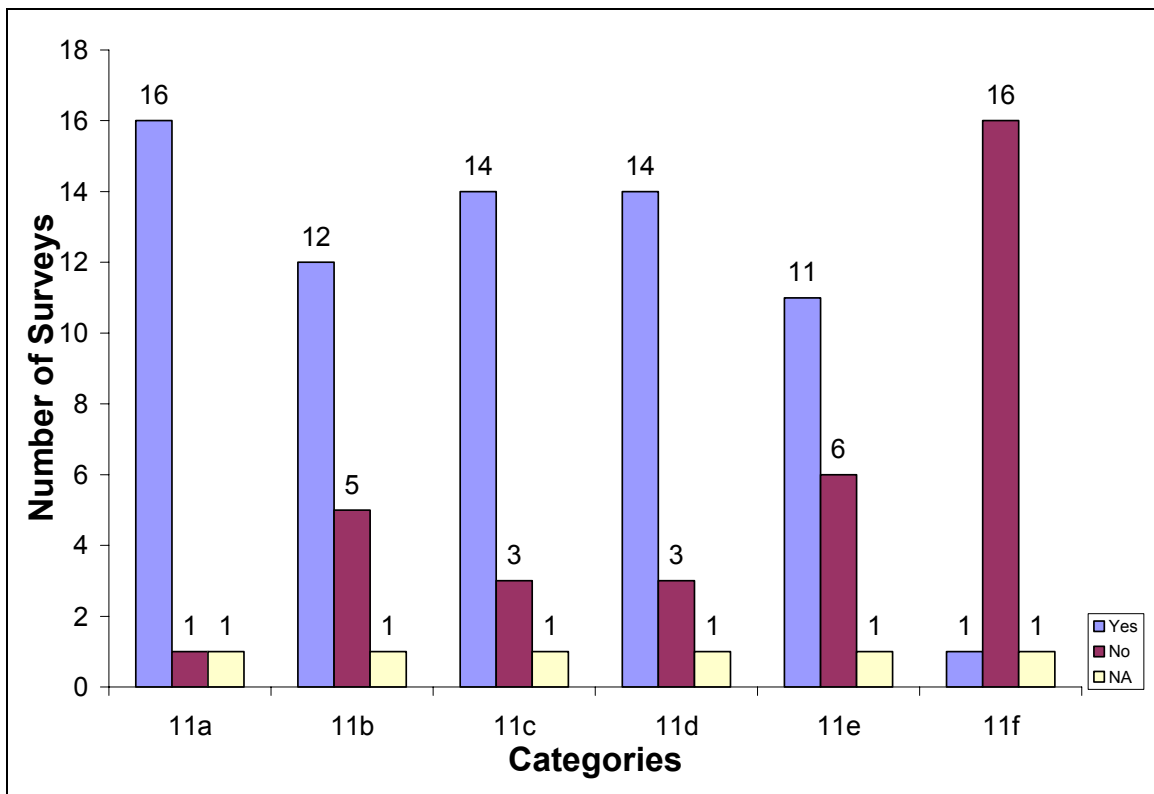


Figure 5. Bar chart summarising responses for question 11: “Which of the following research services would be of most value to you or your organisation if able to be provided by UrBAC?”.

Question 10 related to each respondent’s position of UrBAC facilitating exchange between stakeholder organisations of internal or unpublished materials. The majority (83%) of respondents were in favour of an information exchange under the conditions that managerial approval was given, in addition to due acknowledgment of the source and/or author for any information shared.

Workshop Summary

Held on the 6th of May, 2005, UrBAC’s first stakeholder workshop event was attended by over 40 representatives from a diverse array of city and shire councils, government agencies and conservation & community groups. Like the survey, the workshop was designed to garner stakeholder’s views on UrBAC’s

future directions. The following is a brief summary of the concluding session of the workshop, in which stakeholders were asked to indicate their preferences for UrBAC's future operations. Table 1 provides a list of all key areas of interest and concern raised throughout the workshop and the results of a ballot in which all attendees were asked to apportion a set amount of points to areas they considered to be of a high priority. The top scoring areas within each theme were, *Urban Planning-Guidelines*, *Research-Connectivity/planning guidelines* and *Information & Education-Information products*.

Table 1. Key areas identified within the three main themes of the workshop

Urban Planning	
Guidelines	11
Spotter/catcher	7
Domestic animal management	7
Policy responses	0
Incentives	1
Stakeholder relationships	1
EIS standards	5
Regional consistency	1
IPA changes	1
Nature Smart Suburbs recommendations	8
Issues statements	1
Economics of wildlife/ecosystem services	3
Total	46
Research	
Community attitudes/involvement	4
Conflict-specific research	7
Conectivity planning/guidelines	16
Pet management	0
Translocation	5
Environmental variables	0
Aquatic systems	1
Total	33
Information & Education	
Community engagement	0
Guidelines	8
Information products	13
Establishing/implimenting student research	2
Promotion	5
Product database	1
Roll out communication plan	0
Total	29

Discussion

Based upon the results of the survey and discussions held at the workshop, a number of short-term and long-term objectives have been identified, successfully meeting the primary aim of both endeavours. The first actions taken have been to establish a formal Steering Committee and a number of working groups to begin undertaking prioritised actions. At this stage, three working groups have been convened, following the three major themes of the workshop; *Research, Information & Education* and *Urban Planning*. Over the coming months, each working group will focus upon creating products such as discussion briefs and literature reviews on key topics.

UrBAC's website (<http://urbac.wildlife.org.au/>) will continue to serve as the primary conduit for all products and services. Future endeavours will include publishing an online newsletter and facilitating engagement and discussion on priority research projects.

There are also plans for a forum where issues and concerns can be broached and discussed, and continuing efforts in relation to promoting UrBAC and the services it provides as well as ongoing collaboration with agencies and organisations working on urban biodiversity-related projects.

Conclusion

There has been a need to prioritise UrBAC's activities in order to best-utilise the relatively limited resources, both monetary and otherwise, presently at hand. The survey, in conjunction with the stakeholder workshop event, has assisted the SC in achieving this objective and the SC is grateful to all stakeholders who participated in both initiatives. Finally, the SC thanks all member organisations for their continued support of UrBAC and looks forward to future collaboration.