Catchment**CARE**

Community Actions for Resilient Ecosystems

CatchmentCARE River & Catchment Attitude Survey

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CatchmentCARE
River & Catchment Attitude Survey

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Disclaimer:
The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission or the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Acknowledgements:
We acknowledge contributions by Con McLaughlin, Donegal County Council

Executive summary

This section provides a summary of the findings from the study commissioned by CatchmentCARE aimed at exploring the awareness and attitudes of local community group members and general public to river catchments and water quality issues across the 3 targeted catchment areas (Arney, Blackwater & Finn).

A total of 107 face-to-face interviews were conducted as a baseline survey in 2019, whilst a further 95 were carried out as a 'post project' comparison survey in late 2022 and early 2023.

All surveys were carried out with adult populations across the 3 Catchments Quotas were ***NOT*** applied to the survey, however we did try to ensure that it was representative in relation to age, gender, socio-economic groups and catchment areas.

Awareness

Sources of information on local rivers and river catchments

Before the initial attitude survey was conducted, CatchmentCARE Officers Andy Griggs & Tom Woods carried out brief research to ascertain the main sources of information that local populations would be exposed to for information regarding local water quality, river catchment and associated biodiversity issues. It was concluded that following sources were most likely to be availed of:

- Television
- Newspapers and magazines
- Internet
- News and documentaries
- Observing nature

Main Findings from Pre and Post Project Attitude Surveys

Below is a summary of the main questions asked to participants during both the pre and post project surveys.

Awareness of the term 'Catchment'

The pre project survey revealed that recognition of the term 'Catchment' appeared to be quite high amongst those surveyed with nearly 75% saying they have heard of the term and understood its meaning. By the end of the project this had risen to over 90%. It is understood that the reason for the increase in understanding of the term was due to the on the groundwork carried out through CatchmentCARE's river restoration, community engagement and communications work. It was also discovered that a large amount of knowledge exchange took place not only between CatchmentCARE Officers and local groups but also between these groups independently. This may have positively influenced the understanding of the term Catchment throughout the duration of the project.

Local River Usage

Pre project surveys showed a wide range of river usage amongst those asked. 10% of respondents said that they used their local river 'everyday', whilst 48% said 'sometimes or 'often' and the remaining 42% used it 'rarely' or 'never'. By the end of the project, the numbers had significantly changed showing an increase in

river usage by the vast majority of those questioned. 22% said they now use their local rivers 'everyday' for a variety of reasons, whilst 61% saying they used them 'sometimes or 'often'. Post project, only 17% of respondents said they used their local rivers 'rarely' or 'never'. From a project perspective, this is a hugely positive impact and shows an excellent legacy coming out of the work completed over the 5 years.

Main benefits of local river systems

Respondents were asked to state what they saw as the most important benefits of rivers (in order from 1 being the highest to 10 being the lowest). 'Providing Health & Wellbeing', 'Access for Recreation', 'Wildlife Havens / Nature Value' and 'Water Supply' were the most popular answers in the pre project survey and were often scored in the 1-5 range. Other answers included 'Providing volunteering opportunities', 'Land drainage' and 'Providing flood protection and wetlands'. These appeared to be less of a perceived benefit to those questioned. By post project the same answers were received with not much movement in terms of the hierarchy of scoring. More people did however rate 'Providing volunteering opportunities' far higher at this stage of the project, an excellent reflection and legacy of the 'Community Incentive Scheme (CIS)' which provided training and equipment for local groups to facilitate volunteers to engage with their local river systems.

Main threats to local river systems

During the pre-project survey, most people saw 'Agriculture' as the main threat to our local rivers. This was followed by 'Climate change', 'Litter / Fly tipping' and 'Water extraction'. People also highlighted 'Damage to Riverbanks' and 'Invasive species' as threats. According to the pre project survey, these answers were still the top priorities with 'Invasive species' being mentioned more often. Also, at this stage 'Damage to riverbanks' had become a concern.

Volunteering activities pre and post project

Pre-project survey revealed that approx. 40% of respondents had engaged with their local river in a voluntary capacity, either via a local club, group or through an organised event (Litter pick / scrub clearance, tree planting, education days etc.).

By the time the post project survey was administered, this number has dramatically increased to over 65%. This can be explained through CatchmentCARE's project activities such as the CIS scheme, Education programmes and targeted online training programme which gave local people and groups the funding, equipment, opportunities, skills, knowledge and experience to become involved in a volunteering activities such as 'Riverfly monitoring', 'Water quality analysis' and 'Awareness campaigns' regarding water quality issues.

Background

CatchmentCARE Project

CatchmentCARE is an EU-funded project that aims to improve freshwater quality within the North Western and Neagh Bann international river basins. The project is focussed across three cross-border catchments, the Arney, Blackwater and Finn. The aims will be achieved through development of water quality improvement projects and installation of groundwater monitoring stations across the region. The project overall is grounded in the Water Framework Directive (WFD). The WFD takes an integrated approach to the protection, improvement, and sustainable management of the water environment.

Project Partners

Donegal County Council, Lead Partner	University of Ulster
Agri-Food and Bioscience Institute	British Geological Survey
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Geological Survey Ireland
Loughs Agency	Armagh City Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council

The CatchmentCARE project included a series of activities aimed at:

- Supporting community engagement, knowledge transfer and project legacy outcomes
- Advancing initiatives that took an innovative approach to Knowledge Exchange (KE), bringing together stakeholders with innovative visions of sustainable catchment management.
- Supporting actions that were inclusive of stakeholders across multiple sectors e.g. farmers, anglers, and tourism, who worked together to enhance KE and build their capacity to support sustainable land use in their catchment.

Catchment is the term given to an area of land where water collects when it rains, often bounded by hills. As the water flows over the landscape it finds its way into streams and down into the soil, eventually feeding the river. Some of this water stays underground and continues to slowly feed the river in times of low rainfall.

River is the term given to a natural flowing watercourse, usually freshwater stream, flowing on the surface or inside caves towards another waterbody at a lower elevation, such as an ocean, sea, bay, lake, wetland or another river.

Biological diversity or Biodiversity is the term given to the variety of life on Earth, and the natural patterns formed as a result.

Attitude Survey

Attitudinal surveys measure opinions and perceptions about a topic, policy, or planning measure. They also reveal likely adoption rates of new services or products. These surveys can elicit public opinion and perceptions about important or emerging topics.

One of the targets for the CatchmentCARE project was therefore to develop an Attitudinal Survey to measure the public awareness and attitudes to Water Quality and local River Catchments. The Survey was to be carried out at the beginning of the project and repeated at the latter end of the work.

Key Findings

Do you know the name of your local river / stream / watercourse?

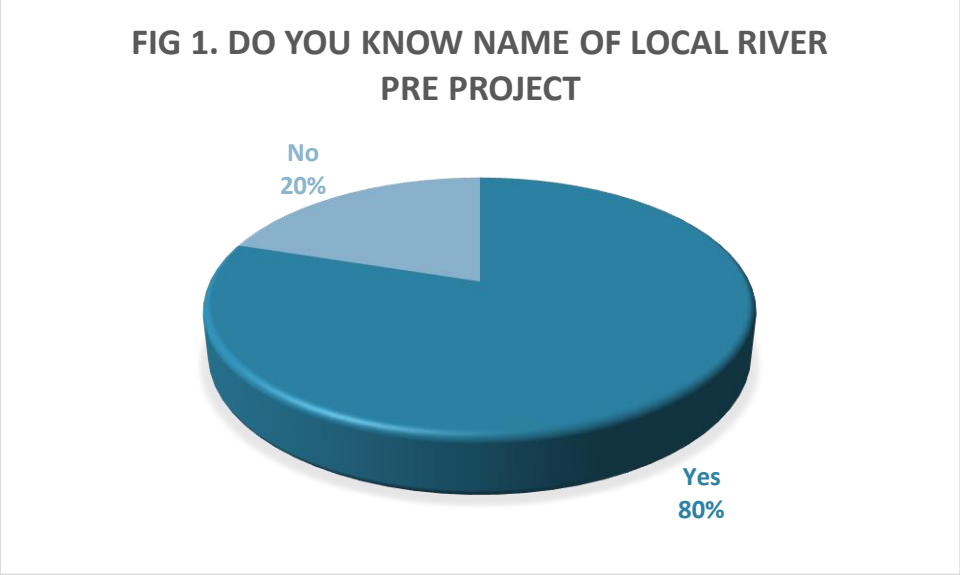

Fig 1.

The pre-project survey revealed that recognition of local rivers was quite high amongst those surveyed with nearly 80% saying they knew the name of their local river system.

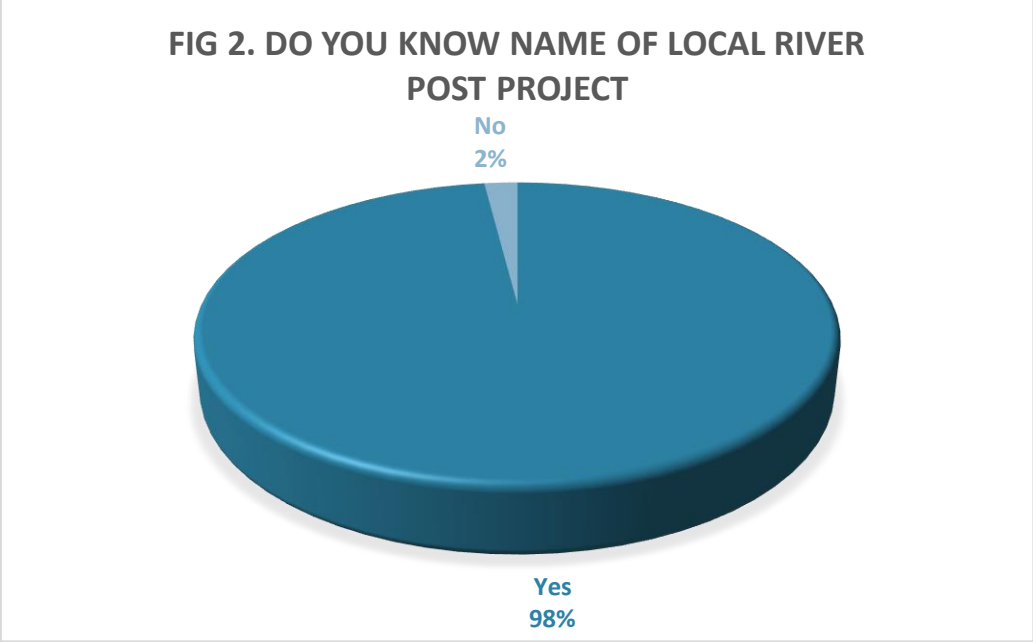

Fig 2.

The post project survey revealed that this recognition of local river names had increased significantly to approximately 98%, with only 2% of those surveyed being unaware or unsure of this.

Do you know the name(s) of the Townland(s) it flows through?

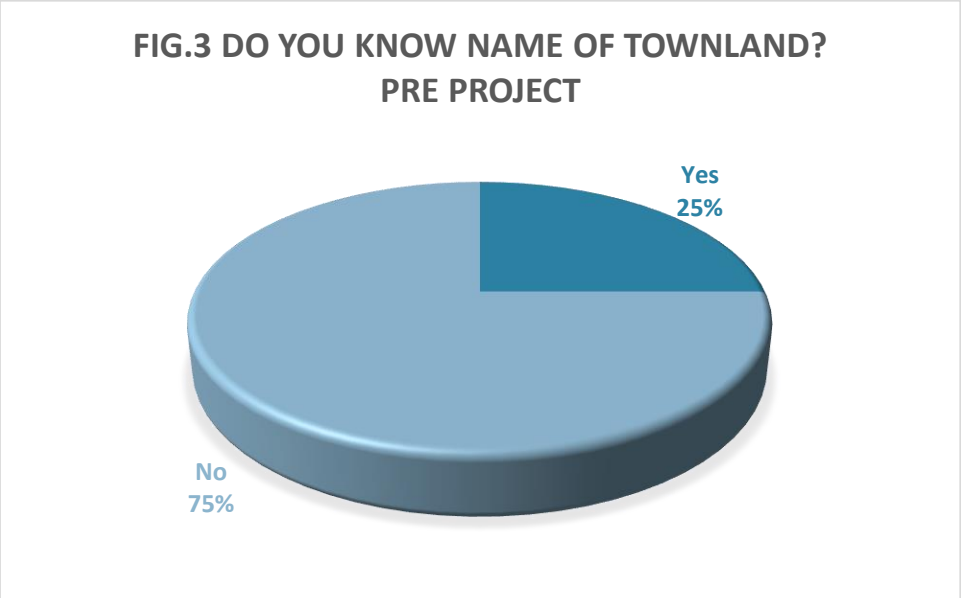

Fig 3.

The pre-project survey surprisingly perhaps revealed that a low proportion of those surveyed (25%) appeared to know the name of their local townland.

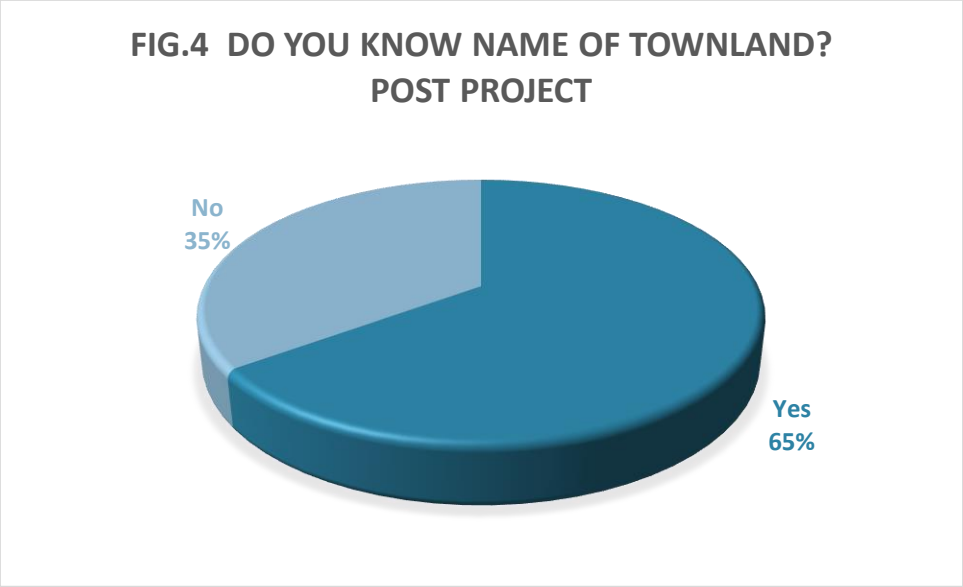

Fig 4.

The post project survey revealed that this recognition of local townland names had increased significantly to approximately 65%, with the remaining 35% of those surveyed being unaware of the townland name.

What do you understand by the term 'River Catchment'?

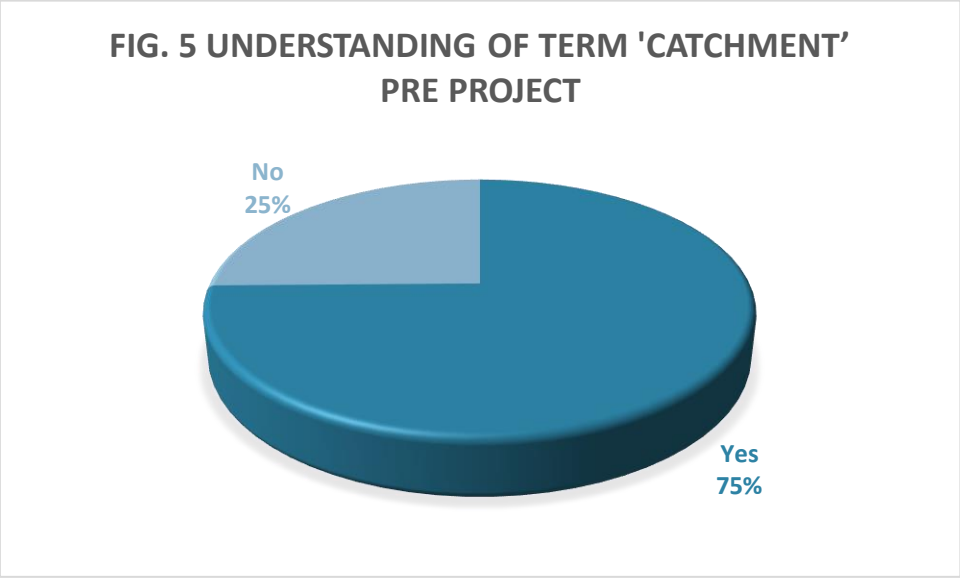

Fig 5.

Pre-project, recognition of the term 'Catchment' was quite high amongst those surveyed with nearly 75% saying they have heard of the term and understood or put down on the survey some kind of explanation of its meaning.

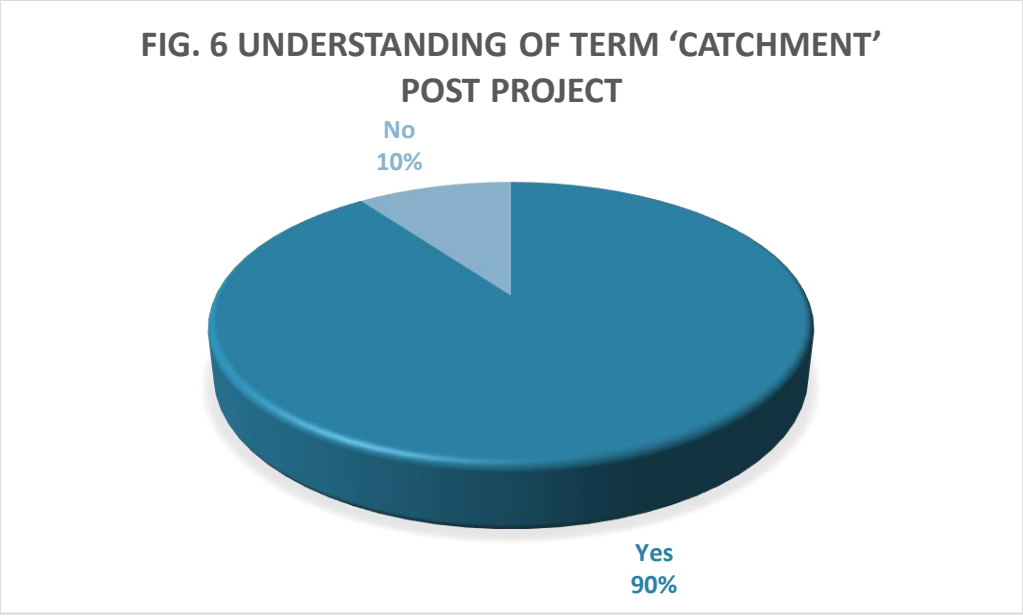

Fig 6.

The post project survey revealed that this understanding of the term 'Catchment' had again increased to around 90%. Again, many people replied with an explanation of the word, with very few respondents leaving this area of the survey blank or giving a nil response.

Local River Usage

How often do you use your local river / watercourse?

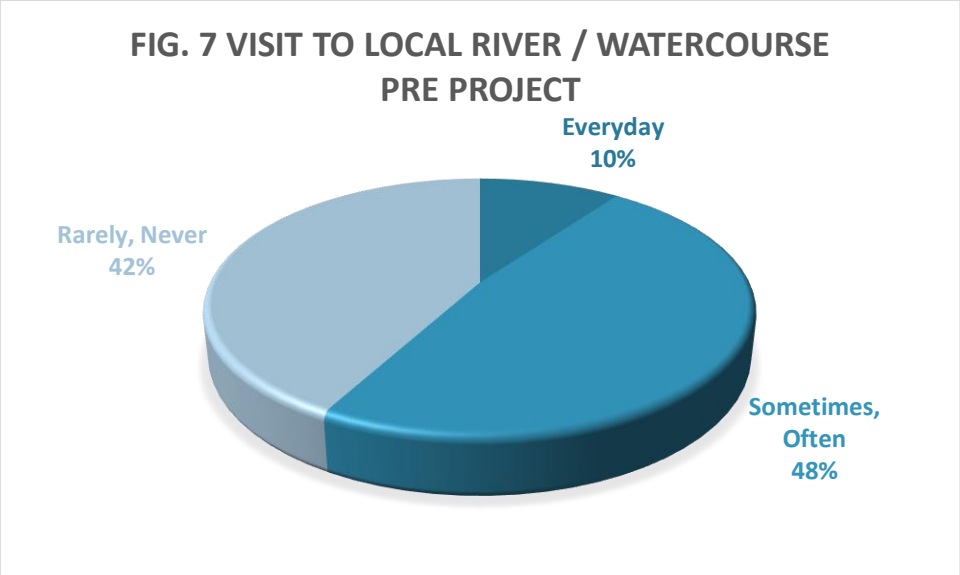

Fig 7.

Pre -project surveys showed a wide range of river usage. 10% of respondents said that they used their local river 'everyday', whilst 48% said 'sometimes or 'often' and the remaining 42% used it 'rarely' or 'never'.

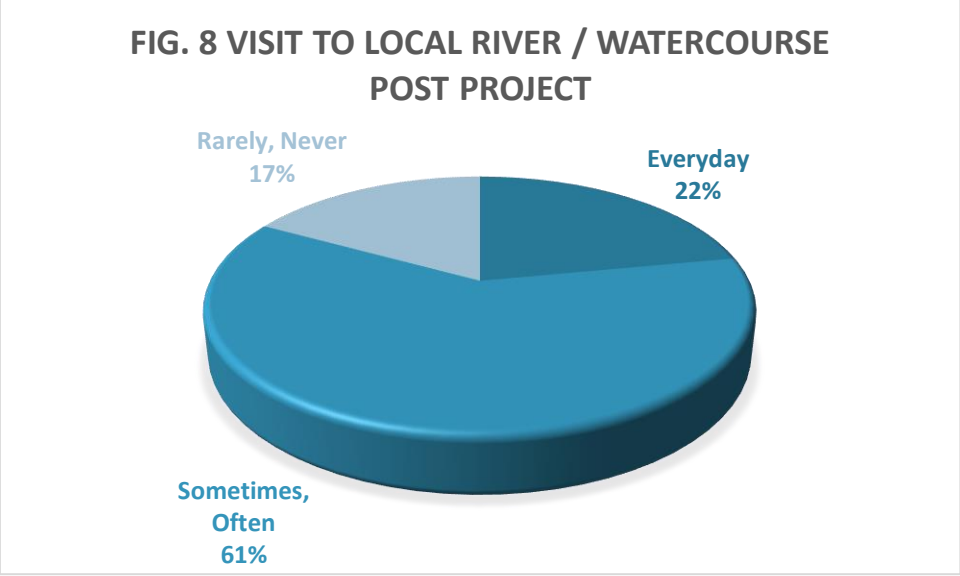

Fig 8.

Post-project surveys showed a doubling of the 'Everyday' use of local rivers by respondents and a significant increase in those using the 'Sometimes' or 'Often. The numbers of people 'never' using their local rivers had also dropped from 42% to 17%

Main benefits of local river systems

What do you see as the main benefits of your local river?

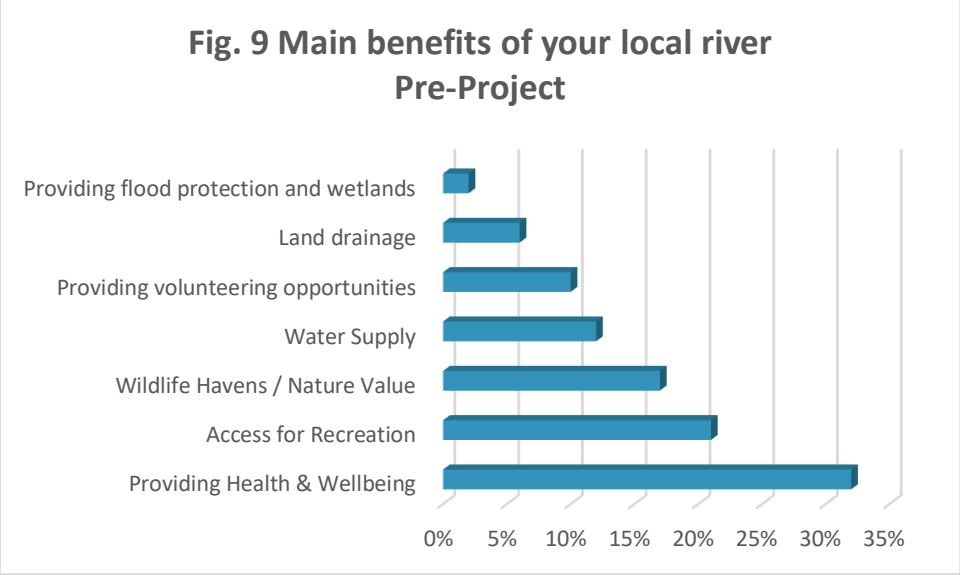

Fig 9.

Pre-project, when asked to state what they saw as the most important benefits of rivers (in order from 1 being the highest to 10 being the lowest). 'Providing Health & Wellbeing', 'Access for Recreation', 'Wildlife Havens / Nature Value' and 'Water Supply' were the most popular answers.

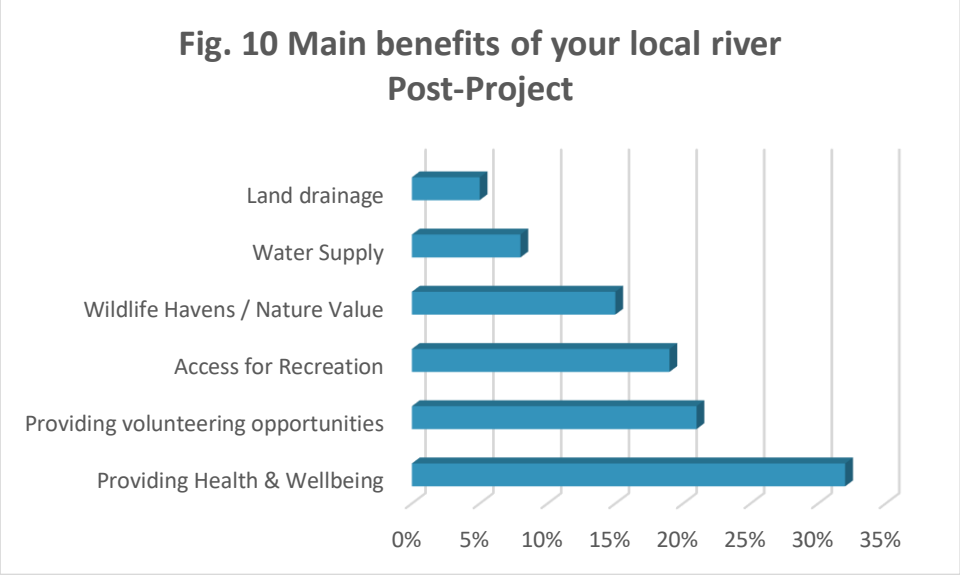

Fig 10.

By post project the same answers were received, with not much movement in terms of the hierarchy of scoring. More people did however rate 'Providing volunteering opportunities' far higher at this stage of the project, an excellent reflection and legacy of the 'Community Incentive Scheme (CIS)' which provided training and equipment for local groups to facilitate volunteers to engage with their local river systems.

Main threats to local river systems

What do you see as the main threats to your local river / water quality?

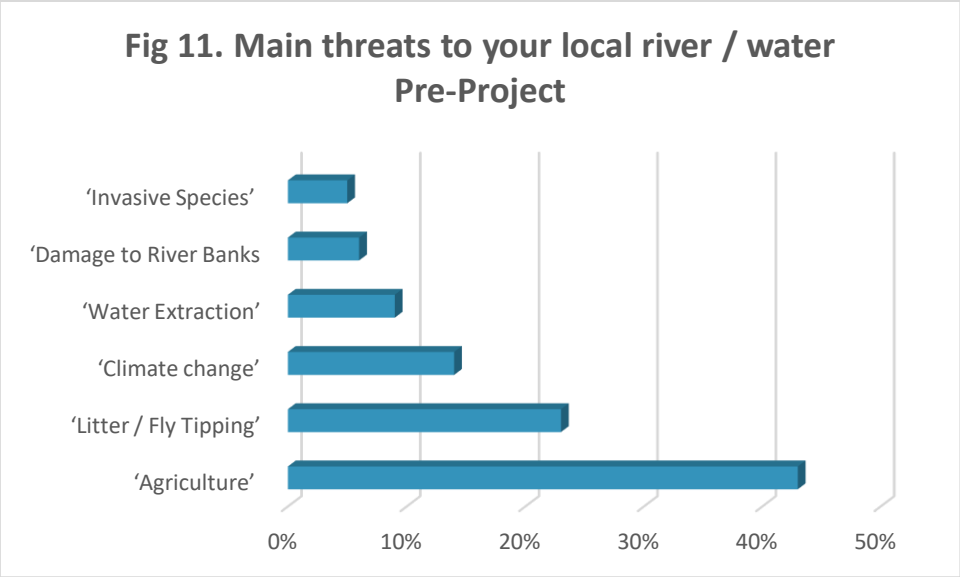

Fig 11.

During the pre-project survey, most people saw 'Agriculture' as the main threat to our local rivers. This was followed by 'Climate change', 'Litter / Fly tipping' and 'Water extraction'. People also highlighted 'Damage to Riverbanks' and 'Invasive species' as threats.

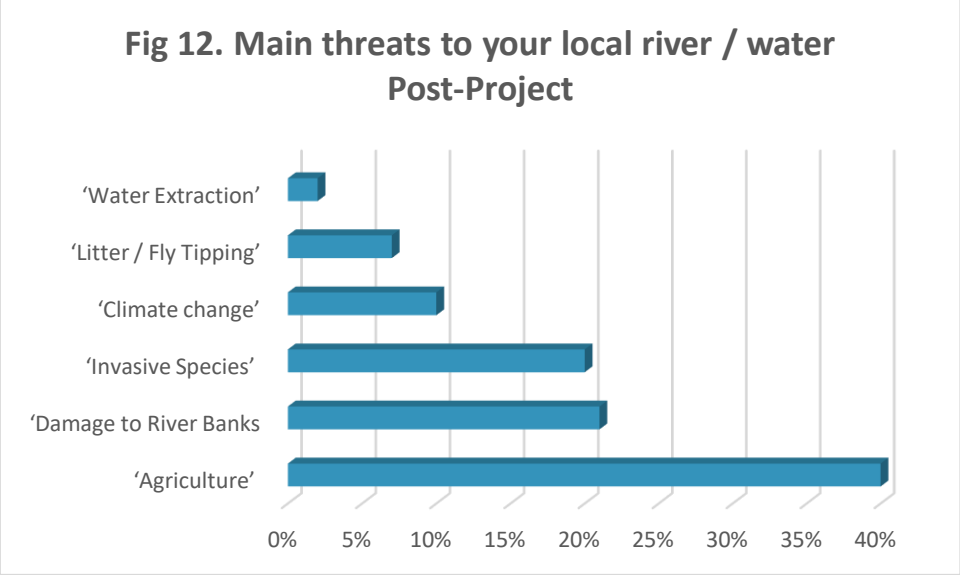

Fig 12.

According to the post-project survey, these answers were still the top priorities with 'Invasive species' being mentioned more often. 'Damage to riverbanks' had also become a concern.

Volunteering activities pre- and post-project

Have you carried out any volunteering activities on your local river in the past 12 months?

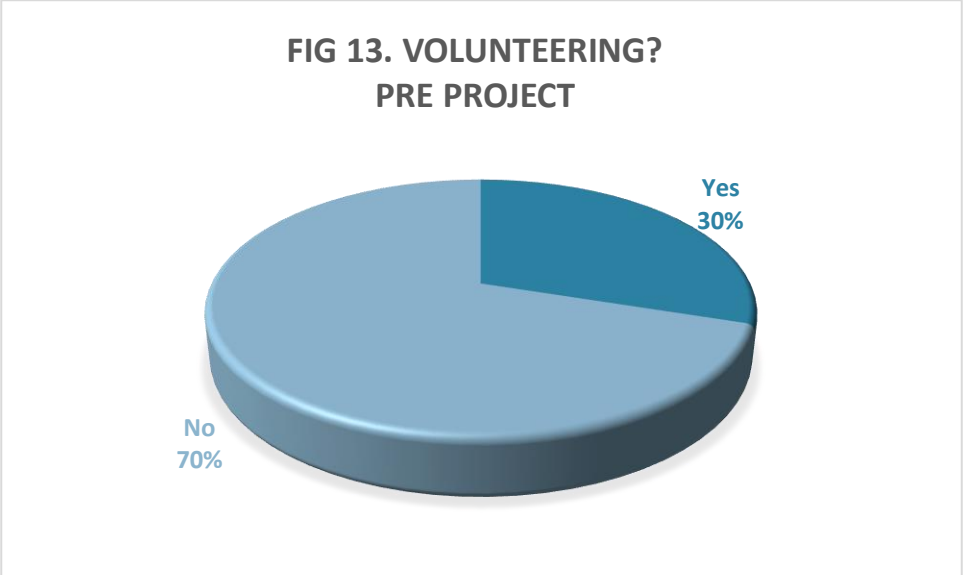

Fig 13.

Pre-project, the survey revealed that 30% of respondents had engaged with their local river in a voluntary capacity, either via a local club, group or through an organised event (litter pick / scrub clearance, tree planting, education days etc.).

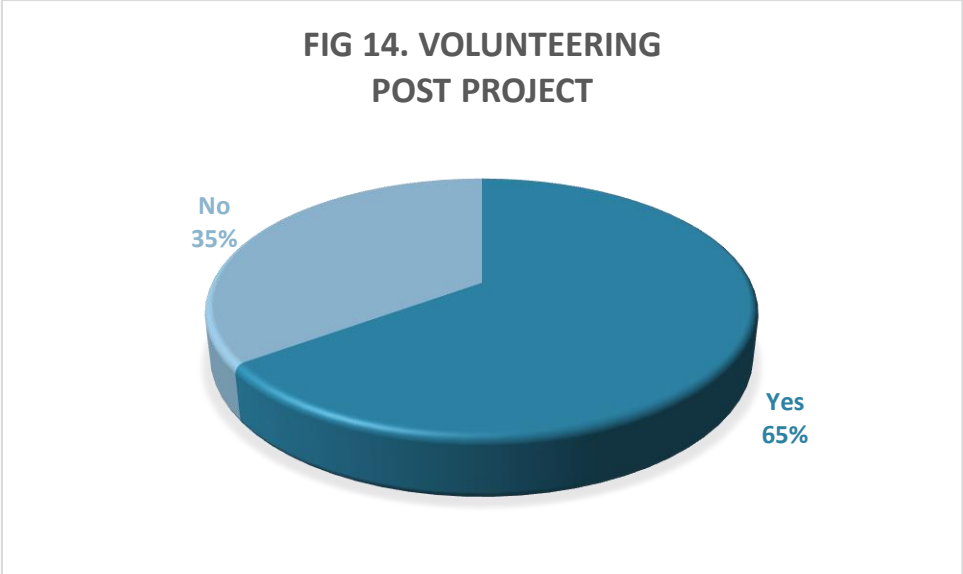

Fig 14.

By the end of the project, this number had dramatically increased to over 65%. This can be explained through CatchmentCARE's project activities such as the CIS scheme, Education programmes and targeted online training programme which gave local people and groups the funding, equipment, opportunities, skills, knowledge and experience to become involved in a volunteering activities such as 'Riverfly monitoring', 'Water quality analysis' and 'Awareness campaigns' regarding water quality issues.

Would you be interested in volunteering or getting involved with activities on your local river?

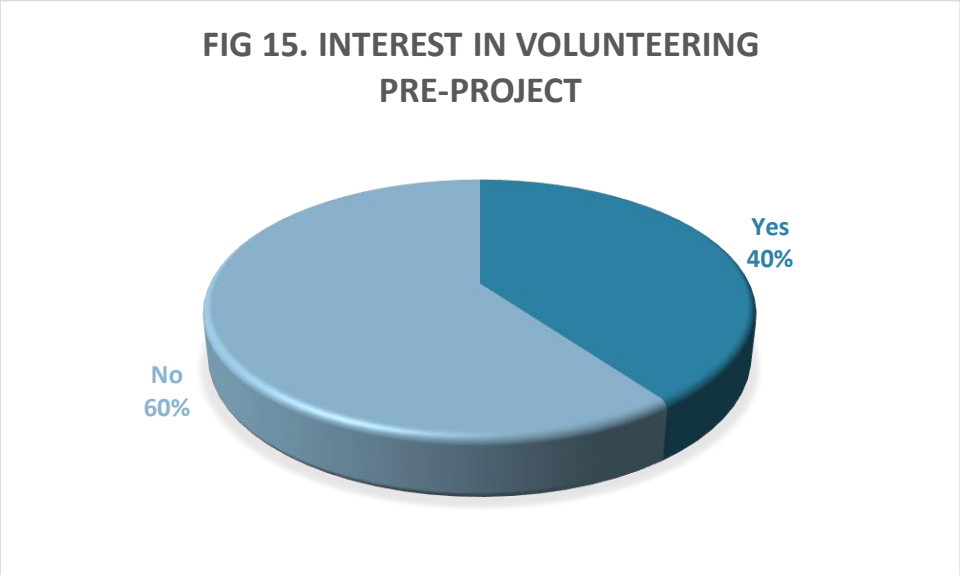

Fig 15.

Pre-project survey revealed that approx. 40% of respondents had been engaged with volunteering in some capacity on their local river, either via a local club, group or through an organised event (Litter pick / scrub clearance, tree planting, education days etc.).

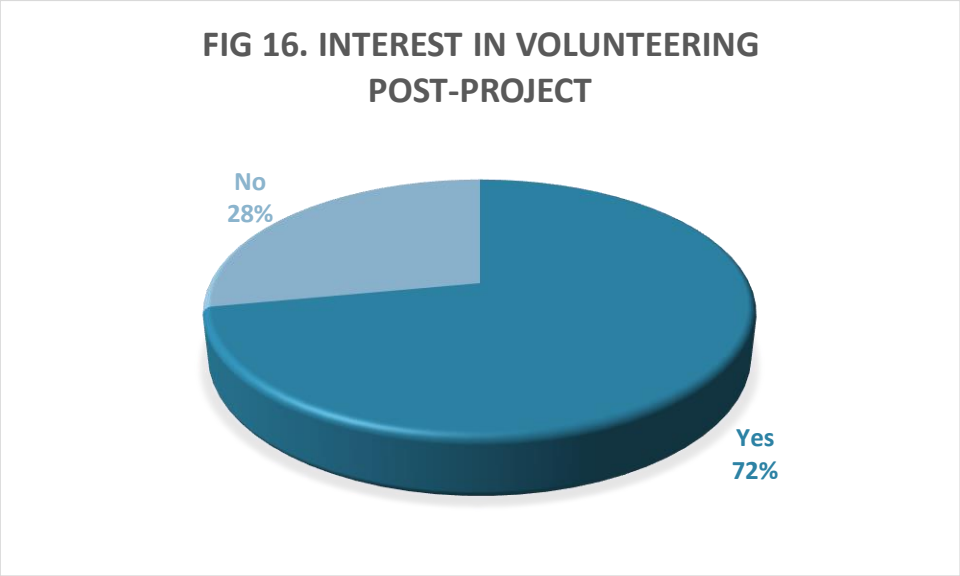

Fig 16.

By the time the post project survey was administered, this number has dramatically increased to over 65%. This can be explained through CatchmentCARE's project activities such as the CIS scheme, Education programmes and targeted online training programme which gave local people and groups the funding, equipment, opportunities, skills, knowledge and experience to become involved in a volunteering activities such as 'Riverfly monitoring', 'Water quality analysis' and 'Awareness campaigns' regarding water quality issues.

What types of activities would you be interested in becoming involved with?

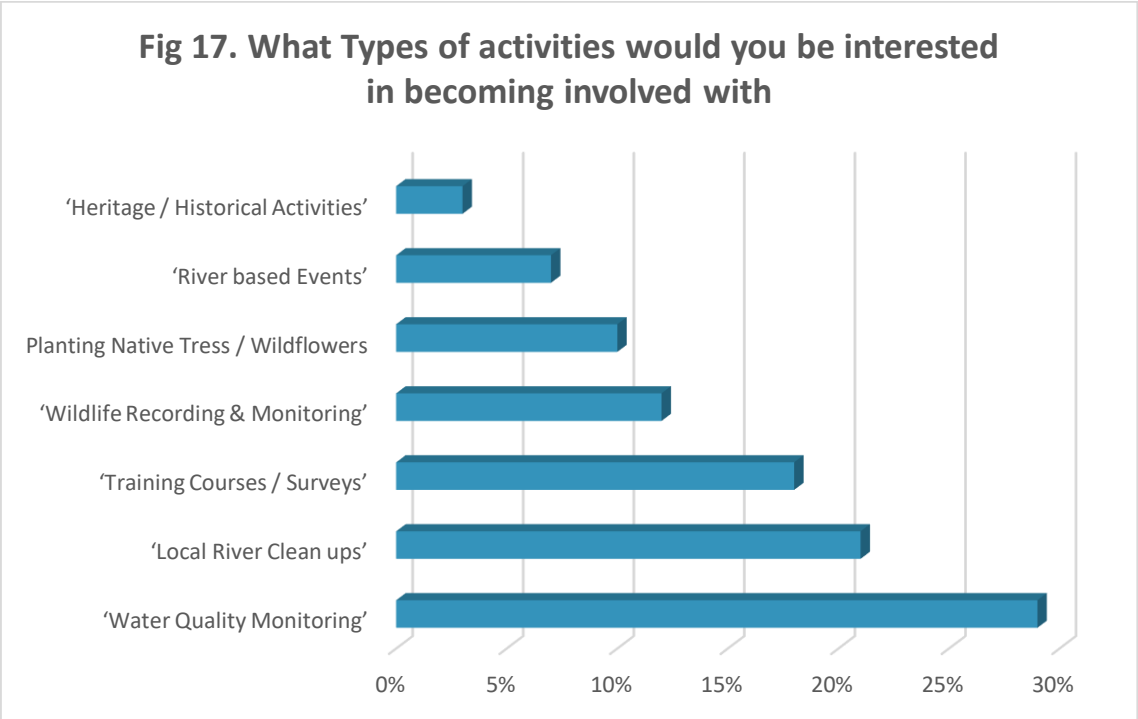

Fig 17.

Many of the respondents who had not volunteered during the previous 12 months said that they would be interested in getting involved with some kind of water quality monitoring programme, a river / litter clean up, a training course or wildlife monitoring on their local river. People were also keen to take part in tree and wildflower planting, river based events and, to a lesser extent, heritage or historical activities.

Conclusions

The CatchmentCARE Project developed a successful marketing and communications plan to help promote the project and its achievements. This included a range of actions and initiatives designed to:

- Support community engagement, and actions that would lead to strong project legacy outcomes
- Build capacity, skills, confidence and awareness raising within the target Catchments
- Encourage knowledge transfer and exchange bringing together stakeholders with innovative visions of sustainable catchment management.

In terms of "community engagement", one of the fundamental actions that took place over the course of the project was a strong link between the on the ground Catchment Officers and a range of stakeholders such as farmers, local community groups, schools, organisations and key individuals. Running parallel to this work was the delivery of 2 phases of a 'Community Incentive scheme' (CIS) which was designed specifically to support this local capacity building and knowledge exchange. The strong success of the CIS scheme (36 projects being funded) is clearly demonstrated in the post project attitudinal survey. As responses were being collected and studied in became evident that some of the key changes in awareness and attitudes were largely due to the scheme and the hard miles put in by the Catchment Officers over the duration of the CatchmentCARE project.

Several of the questions asked showed a significant positive upward trend when compare pre and post project. More participants had gained knowledge about the name of their local river / watercourse and a better understanding of what is meant by the word 'Catchment'. This increase in awareness can be put down to the work carried out with groups and individuals by project officers and through the CIS project funding.

Similarly, when participants were asked about their own usage of the local rivers, there was a significant increase in the frequency of 'river engagement'. Again it is strongly suspected that this can be explained by the community work and efforts to encourage local people to utilize their local rivers and help protect them.

One of the highlights of the survey was the changes in how people perceived the benefits of their local rivers. Between the pre and post project questionnaires, a higher % of respondents saw their local rivers as a source of 'volunteering opportunities', this doubled from 10% pre project to 21% post project.

Following on from this question, the final observation to make is the significant changes in actual volunteer activities that were taking place pre and post project surveys. The amount of people actually partaking in local river volunteering in one guise or another also doubled between the two surveys from 30% to 65%, a huge positive for the legacy of CatchmentCARE.

The types of activities people were involved in were also of huge interest to the project officers. 29% of participants said they had been involved in some form of Water Quality Monitoring' 21% in 'Local River Clean ups', 18% had been involved in some kind of 'Training Courses or Surveys', whilst another 12% had taken part in 'Wildlife Recording & Monitoring' and 10% Planting Native Tress / Wildflowers.

These findings alone are a strong indication that the project has been successful in its aims previously stated and indeed will leave a lasting positive post project legacy within the 3 cross border catchments of the Arney, Blackwater and Finn.

Appendix 1

CatchmentCARE Baseline Attitude Survey 2019

<table>
<tr><td>Background</td><td>Do you know the name of your local river / stream / watercourse?

Do you know the name(s) of the Townland(s) it flows through

What do you understand by the term ‘River Catchment’</td></tr>
<tr><td>Use of local river</td><td>Do you use your local river for any of the following activities?
Tick all that apply

<table>
<tr><td>Angling / Fishing</td><td></td><td>Relaxation / Wellbeing</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Engaging with Wildlife / Nature</td><td></td><td>Attending Events</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Dog Walking</td><td></td><td>Volunteering</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Exercise / Physical Activity</td><td></td><td>Sporting Activities – please state</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Spending time with Family</td><td></td><td>Other – please state below</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Agriculture / Domestic</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">If yes, does livestock have direct access to watercourse or is water pumped to troughs?</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
</table>
</td></tr>
<tr><td>Use of local river</td><td>How often do you visit your local river / watercourse? Please circle

Every day / Often / Sometimes / Rarely / Never

Do you feel safe visiting your local watercourse? Please circle

Totally / Very / Mostly / Not really / Not at all

Are there any factors make you feel less comfortable around your local watercourse? Please circle any that apply

Theft / Anti-social behaviour / landscape danger / threat from animals / isolated location</td></tr>
</table>

River Wildlife	**Have you noticed changes in biodiversity (wildlife) on the local river in recent years? Please circle** **Fish: increase / decrease** **Birds: increase / decrease** **Native Mammals: increase / decrease** **Protected species: Red Squirrel /Hare / Otter / Kingfisher / Bat** **Invasive species: increase/decrease – please specify if known**
Benefits of local river / catchment	**What do you see as the main benefits of your local river? Please rate each, where 1 = highest; 10 = lowest**

Wildlife Havens / Nature Value		Local Heritage / Identity	
Water supply (Agriculture/Domestic)		Access for Recreation (Angling etc.)	
Provide Health & Wellbeing		Land Drainage	
Potential or Actual Tourism Benefit		Provide Volunteering Opportunities	
Flood Protection / Wetlands		Renewable Energy	
Access to Green / Blue Spaces			

Threats to local river / catchment	**What do you see as the main threats to your local river / water quality? Please rate each, where 1 = highest; 10 = lowest**

Water Extraction		Loss of Wildlife	
Agriculture		Damage to River Banks	
Litter / Rubbish / Fly Tipping		Silting of River Beds	
Climate Change		Spread of Invasive Species / Biosecurity	
Dredging of Rivers		Waste Water Treatment	
Increased population close to rivers		Other (Please specify)	
Carcass Disposal			

Volunteering	**Have you carried out any volunteering activities on your local river in the past 12 months?**	**Yes** / **No**

If Yes, please give details

Volunteering	**Would you be interested in volunteering for / getting involved with any of the following activities connected to your local river?**

Local River Cleanups		Heritage / Historical Activities	
Wildlife Recording / Monitoring		Training Courses / Surveys	
Community River Walks		Streamscapes Projects	
River Based Events		Planting Native Trees / Wildflowers	
Water Quality Monitoring		Other (Please Specify)	