



The Australian Experience of Rip Current Campaigns Managing Change in a Paradigm Shift

Anthony Bradstreet
Public Safety Manager
Surf Life Saving Australia



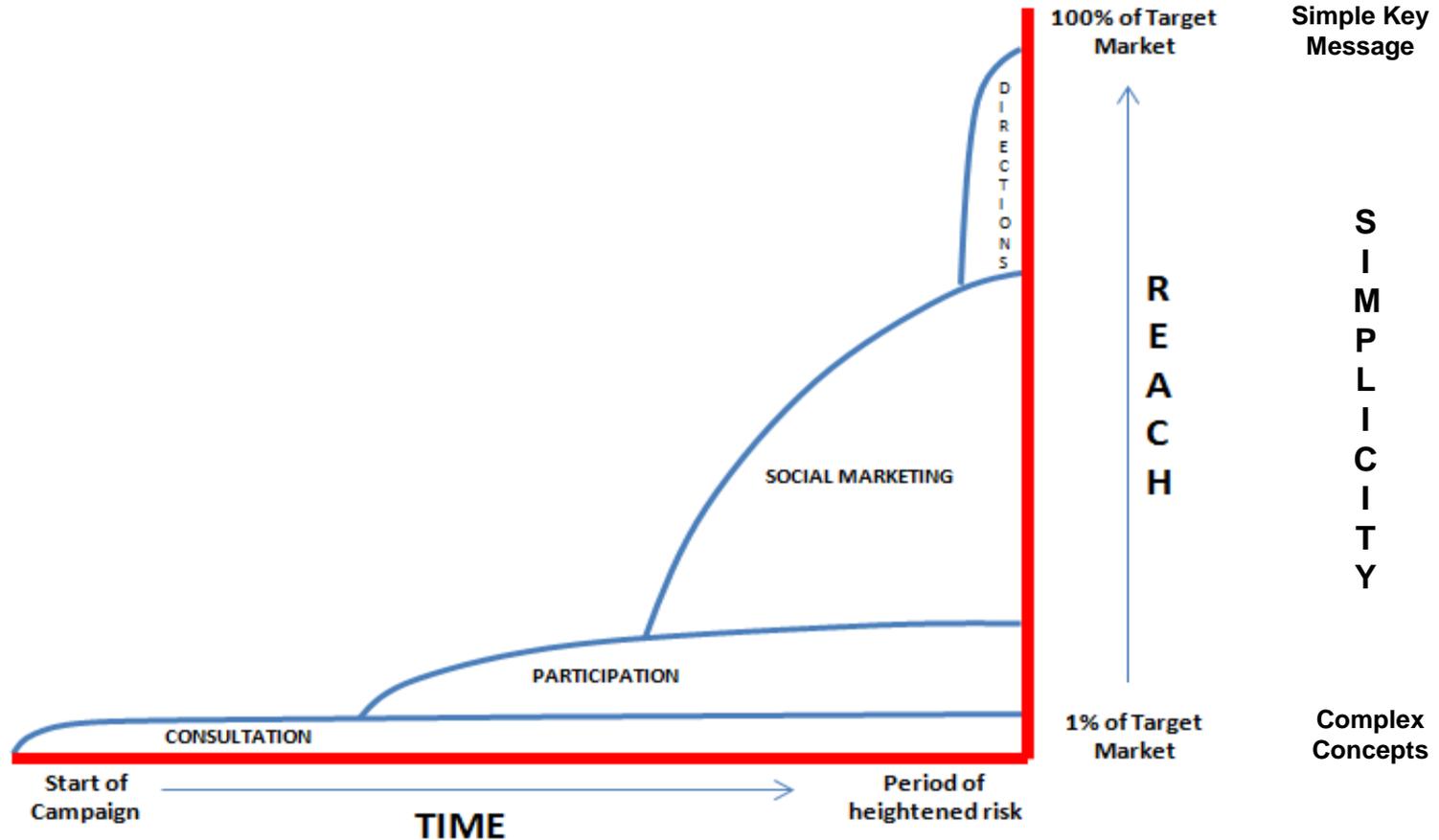
The Challenge

On average 21 people drown in rip currents each year.

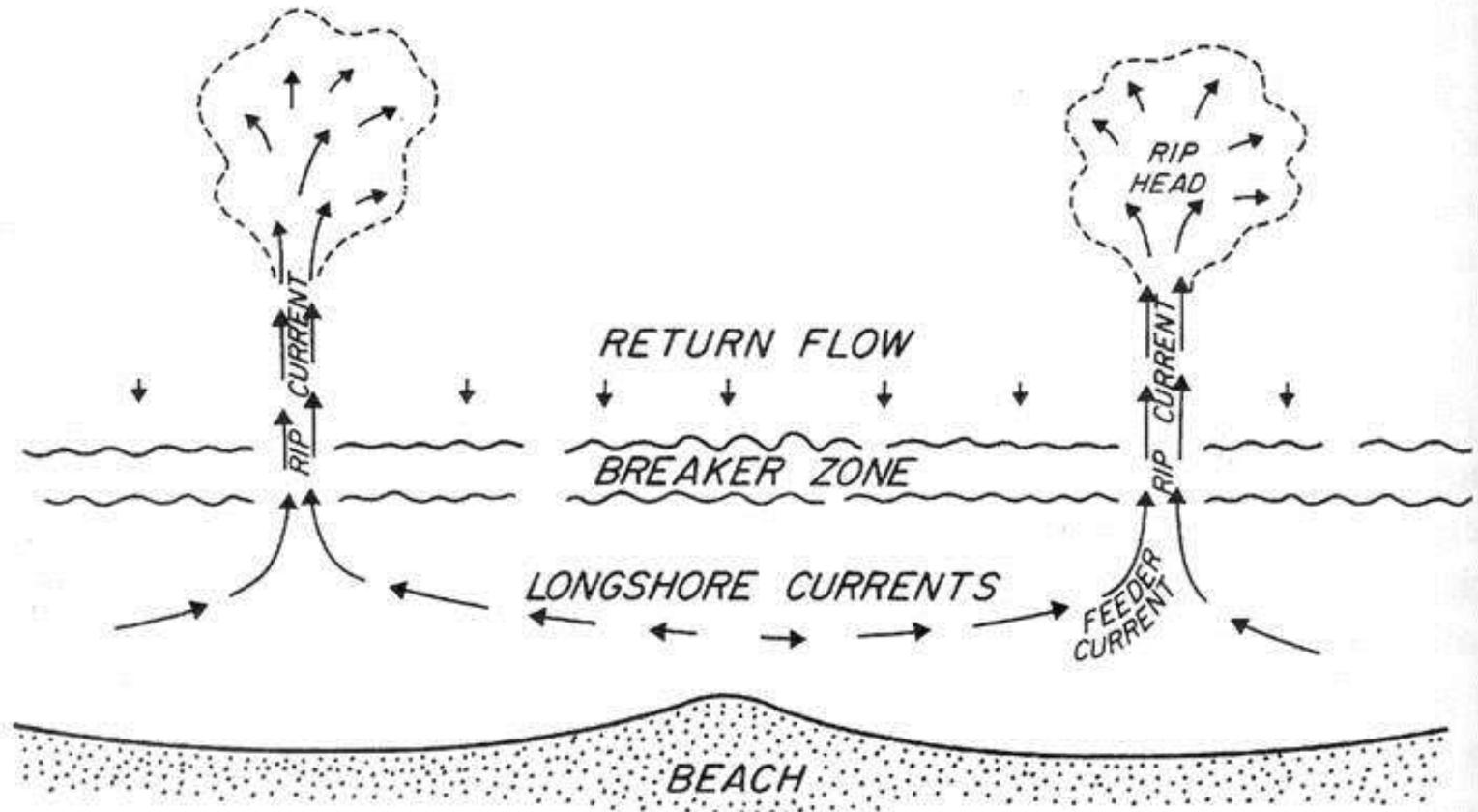
Most are young men, at unpatrolled beaches.



Our Risk Communication Framework



The Hazard Context

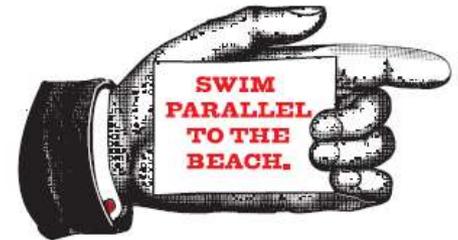


Komar (from Hayes, 1985)

The Campaign



Too many people are drowning in rip currents on Australian beaches every year. Some are good swimmers. Some are fit and healthy. Many are young. Most of them panic. Yet survival is simple. To escape a rip current stay calm and swim parallel to the beach. And remember always swim between the red and yellow flags. ripcurrents.com.au



The campaign was based on traditional understandings of rip current science.

The Results

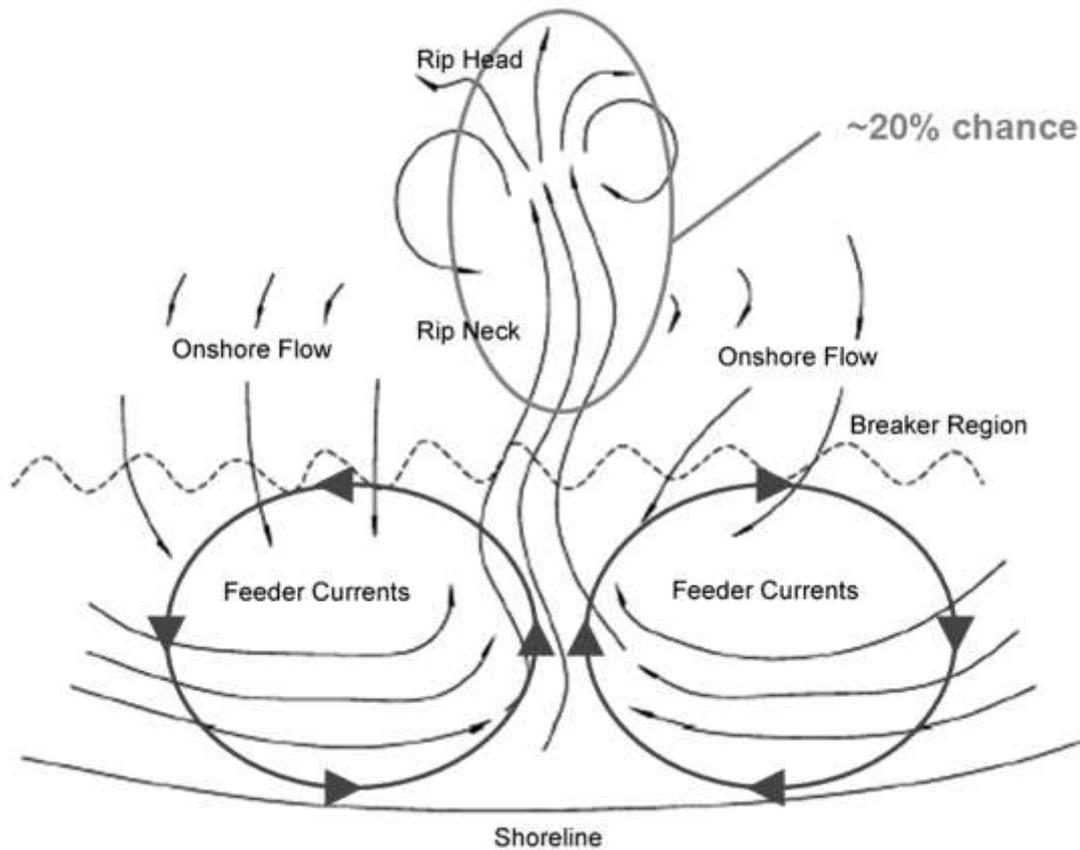


84% of Australians could accurately describe a rip current. Increase of 59%.

Awareness of active survival strategies increased by 23%.

Rip current related drowning rate dropped by 40%.

A Paradigm Shift?



MacMahan et al, 2010



Consultation and Collaboration

This resulted in significant debate about the validity of swimming parallel vs floating as survival strategies.

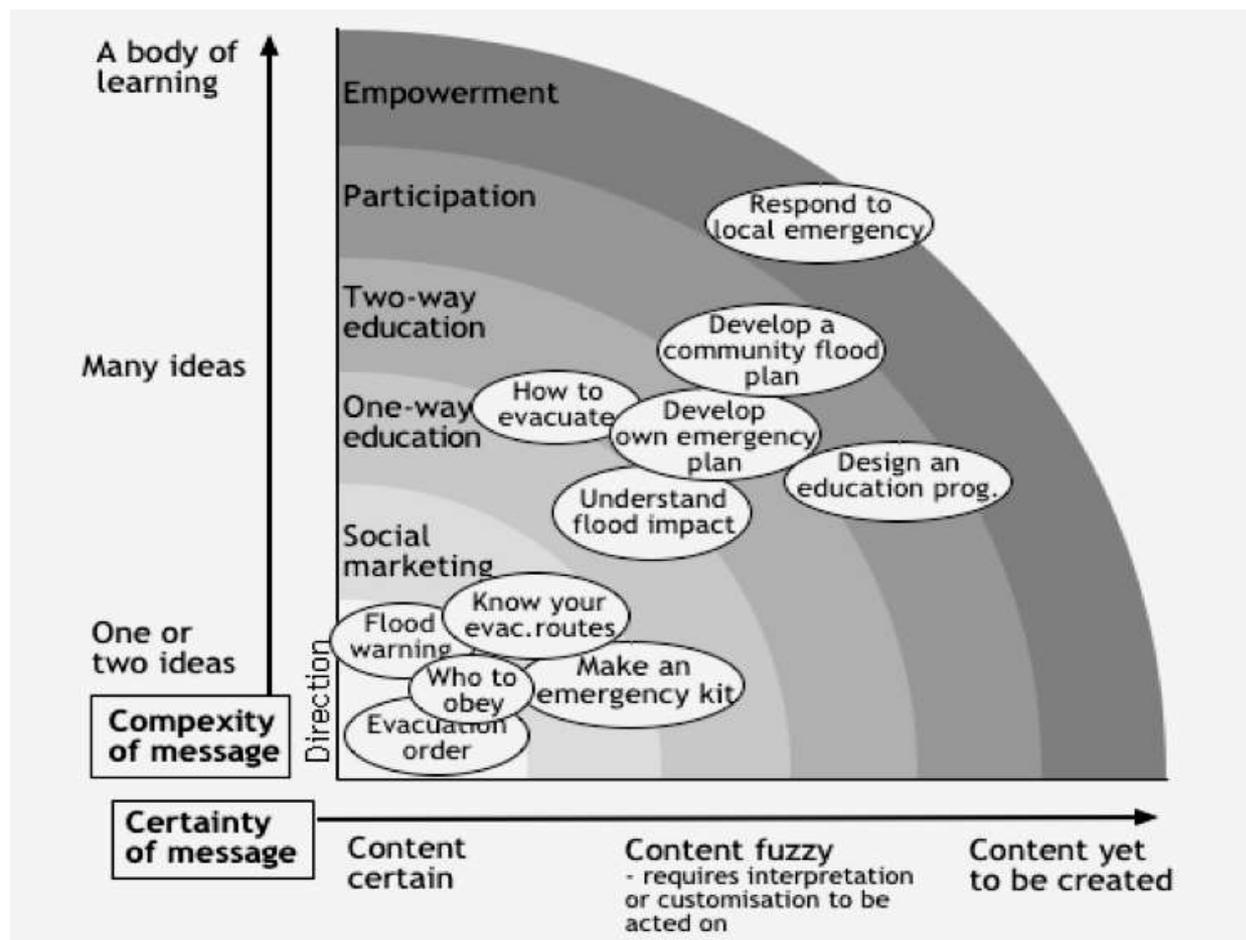
We found ourselves in a possible paradigm shift. The fundamental historical basis for rip current science and the 'swim parallel' advice was questioned.

We needed to;

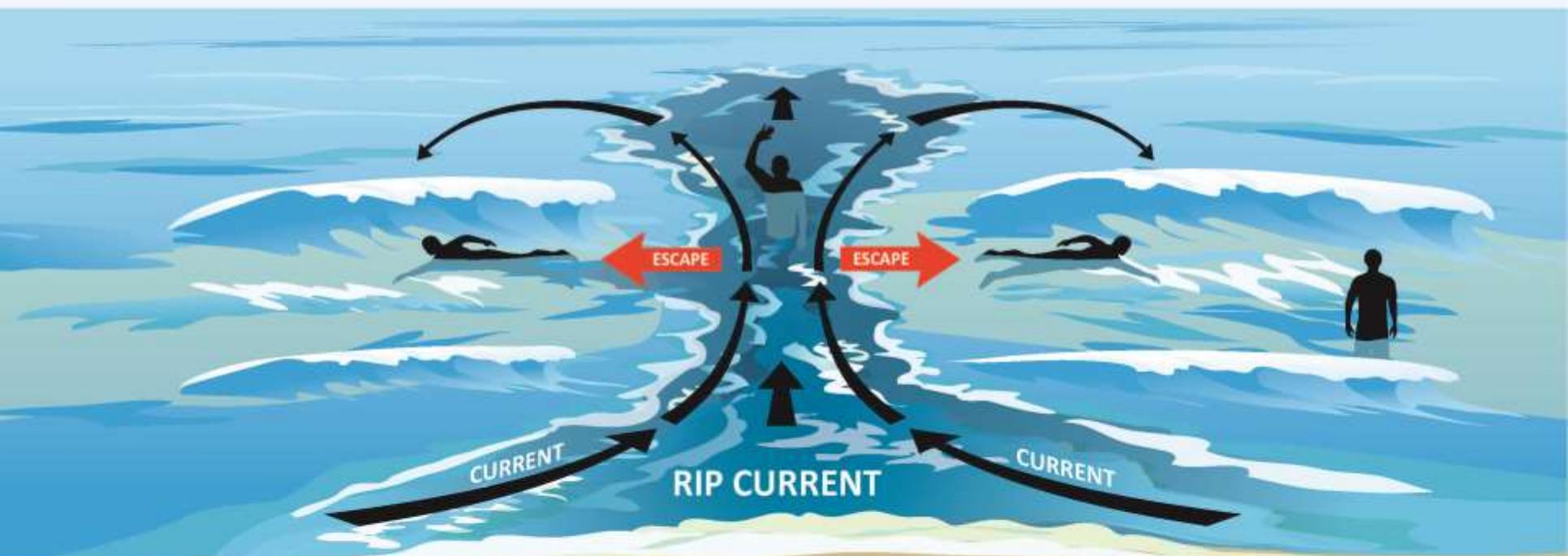
- 1) reassess the key message, and
- 2) repeat research to establish validity.



The Effect on Key Message



YOU CAN SURVIVE A
RIP CURRENT
BY KNOWING YOUR OPTIONS



AVOID RIP CURRENTS, ALWAYS SWIM BETWEEN THE RED AND YELLOW FLAGS



TO ESCAPE A RIP CURRENT, SWIM PARALLEL TO THE BEACH



FOR ASSISTANCE, STAY CALM, FLOAT AND RAISE AN ARM TO ATTRACT ATTENTION



CONSERVE YOUR ENERGY, WAVES CAN ASSIST YOU BACK TO THE BEACH

Surf 'Ed Ed

More than just fun and games



Great Programs, but...



In the year after the swim parallel campaign the rate of awareness about rip currents has dropped by 18%.

Multi-channel campaigns have the ability to reach more people, but people have short memories.

Research

We partnered with the University of New South Wales and international partners to conduct further research.

The research investigated geomorphological properties, psychological and sociological aspects.

Similar projects are established in the UK and US.





The Research Results

The research program that began in 2010 is now entering its final phase.

The hard data and journal article outputs across both geomorphological research and sociological findings will be published over the coming year.



The Research Results

We now turn our attention to translating the evidence into principles, and then principles into practice.

In summary, rip currents are highly variable dynamic systems that may require a combination of responses to successfully escape or survive an accidental exposure.



SEEK INFORMATION

Learn about rip currents, including how to identify and avoid them before you go to the beach



SWIM BETWEEN THE RED AND YELLOW FLAGS

Avoid rip currents by always swimming between the red and yellow flags.

NOT SWIM BETWEEN THE RED AND YELLOW FLAGS

Identify and avoid the rip currents before you go into the water. If in doubt, don't go out.



LIFEGUARDS ARE THERE TO HELP

If you need help stay calm, float and wave an arm to attract attention. The lifeguards will see you, and come to your aid.

CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT

You realise you are in deep water moving away from the shoreline



FOLLOW THE RIP SURVIVAL PRINCIPLES

If you get caught in a rip current, stay calm, conserve your energy, and consider your options outlined in the rip current survival principles



CAUGHT IN A RIP CURRENT
You realise you are in deep water moving away from the shoreline

CONSERVE YOUR ENERGY AND CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS

FLOAT
Stay calm, floating with the rip current may return you to a shallow sandbank.

STAY CALM & SEEK HELP
If you need help, stay calm, float and wave to attract attention.

SWIM
Stay calm, you may escape a rip current by swimming parallel to the beach towards the breaking waves.

REGULARLY REASSESS THE SITUATION
If your response is ineffective, stay calm and consider an alternative response. A combination of responses may be required to escape a rip current.

RETURN TO SHORE
You will often return to shore with the assistance of breaking waves over a shallow sandbank, or with the help of a rescuer.

Complex Scenario = Complex Message?

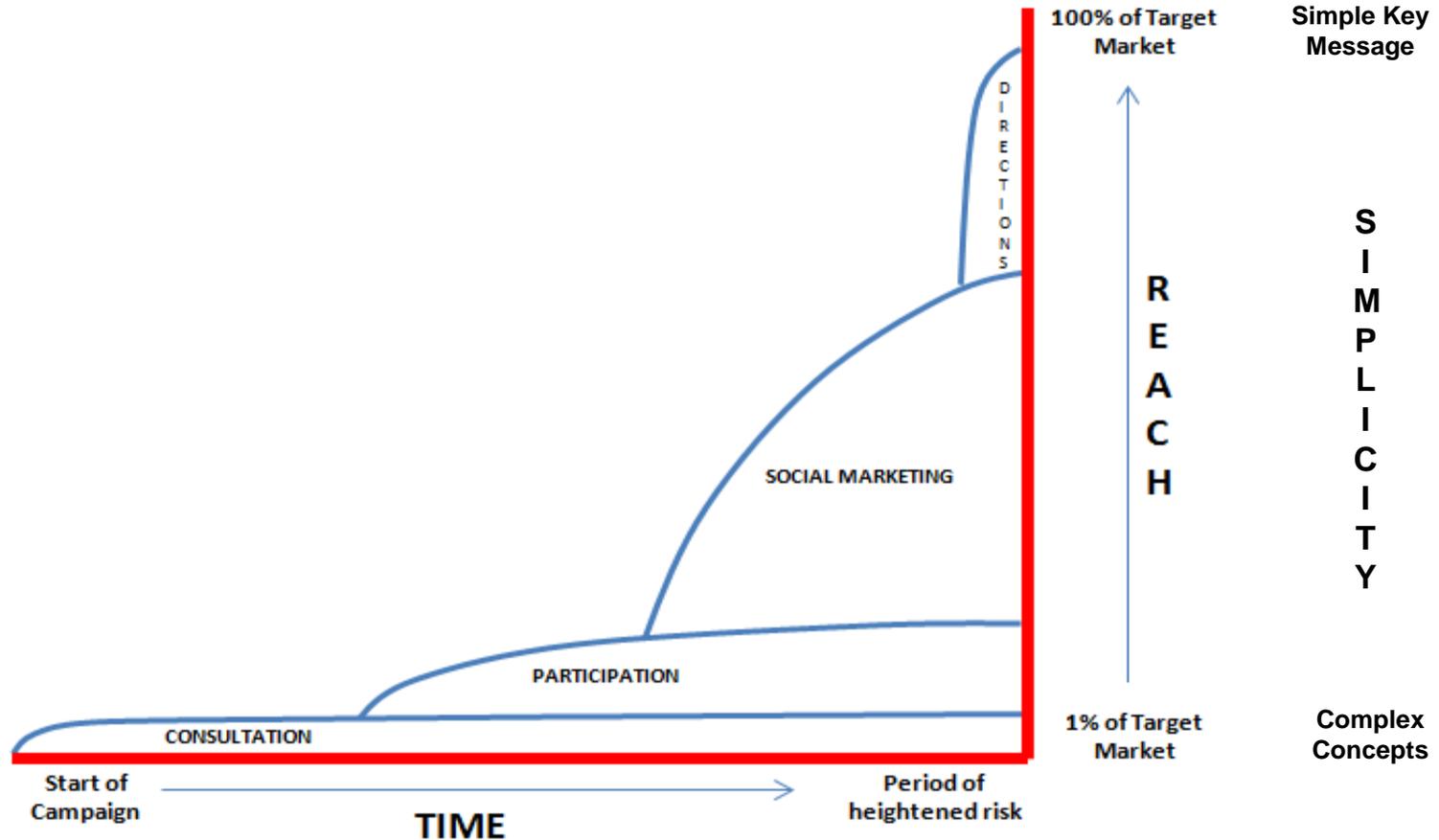


As our technical understanding of rip currents has developed, and there is greater acknowledgement of variable rip current flow behaviour, our key messages potentially become more complex.

Emergency managers have undergone similar challenges in recent years for various hazards. *Their solution?*

Develop broad preparedness and resilience in the population. Encourage greater personal responsibility.

Our Risk Communication Framework





The Journey from Here

SLSA and our research partners will be publishing a number of papers over the coming months.

Consultation of the research implications and development of industry facing principles will be pivotal to achieving consistency in communication and education.

The principles will then inform the development of future education and communication campaigns.