



## INDICATOR: AWARENESS OF BIODIVERSITY AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO HUMAN HEALTH

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION:** Engage People

**TARGET:** 2. By 2015, 50% of Ontarians understand biodiversity and its role in maintaining their health and well-being.

**THEME:** Conservation Response – Education and Awareness

### **Background Information:**

It has long been recognized that biodiversity plays an important role in the health and well-being of humans. “Our personal health, and the health of our economy and human society, depends on the continuous supply of various ecological services that would be extremely costly or impossible to replace” (CBD 2010). Clean air and water, access to outdoor recreational opportunities, and medical research are just a few of the ways that biodiversity impacts human health and well-being.

People are more likely to take actions to conserve biodiversity if they understand the concept and its importance to their lives. *Ontario’s Biodiversity Strategy, 2011*, (OBC 2011) includes the key action that the relevance of biodiversity be communicated to the public and the vision that “people value, protect and enhance biodiversity and the ecosystem services essential for human health and well-being.”

The Canadian Nature Survey (FPTGC 2014) found that 71% of the 1,011 Ontario mail-in survey respondents had heard of the term ‘biodiversity’ and around the same number were familiar with the term ‘ecosystem services’. Respondents were provided with the definition of biodiversity and were not asked questions regarding their understanding of the term. Because Target 2 of the Ontario Biodiversity Strategy relates specifically to Ontarians’ understanding of biodiversity and its importance to human health, the Ontario Biodiversity Council commissioned telephone surveys to report on this target.

This indicator presents the results from the Biodiversity Awareness Surveys, conducted in October 2014 and again in October 2016.

### **Data Analysis:**

Data about Ontarian’s understanding of biodiversity were collected as part of a phone survey done on behalf of the Ontario Biodiversity Council by ECO Environmental Communication Options and Oracle Poll Research in October 2014 (ECO 2014) and again by Oracle Poll Research in October 2016 (Oracle Poll Research 2016). Respondents were asked 10 questions related to biodiversity. This indicator uses data from four of the survey’s questions related to understanding of the term biodiversity and its relationship to our health and well-being, and compares results over time.

Survey questions related to this indicator:

1. Are you aware of the term biodiversity?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Don’t know



2. Which of the following definitions best fit your understanding of biodiversity?
  - The environment and nature
  - The variety of life on earth
  - Sustainable development
  - Human, religious and cultural variety
  - Parks and protected areas
  - Don't know
3. Biodiversity plays an important role in maintaining my health and well-being.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  - Don't know
4. In your opinion, what aspect of biodiversity has the greatest impact on your health? (pick one)
  - Medicines sourced from wild species
  - Prevention of diseases
  - Availability of healthy food
  - Cleaner air and water
  - Improved physical and mental health from outdoor experiences
  - Climate regulation
  - Don't know

The poll was administered to 1,000 people aged 18 years or older. The margin of error is  $\pm 3.1\%$ , 19/20 times.

Results from the Ontario survey are reviewed against data collected for select countries around the world for comparative purposes.

## **Results:**

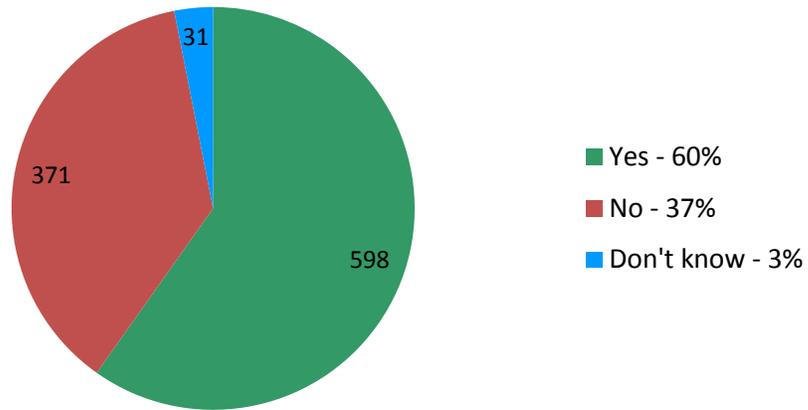
**Trend:** Baseline

**Data Confidence:** High

**Geographic Extent:** Provincial



## Are you aware of the term "biodiversity" Survey Responses 2014



## Survey Responses 2016

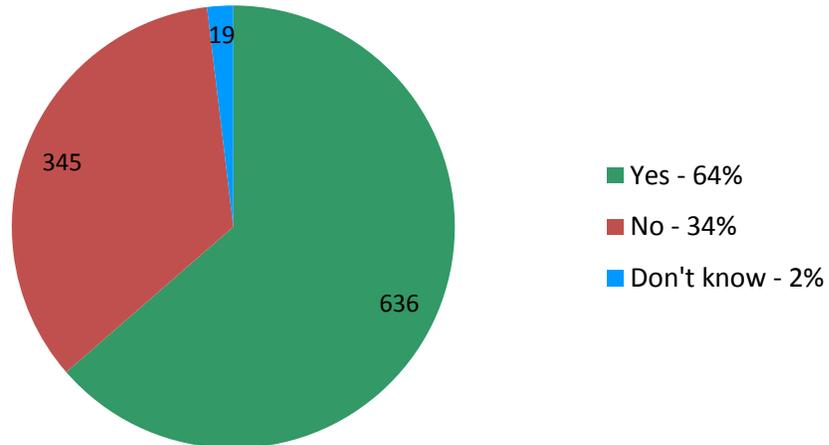


Figure 1. Biodiversity awareness survey responses by percentage in 2014 and 2016 ( $n = 1,000/\text{yr.}$ ).

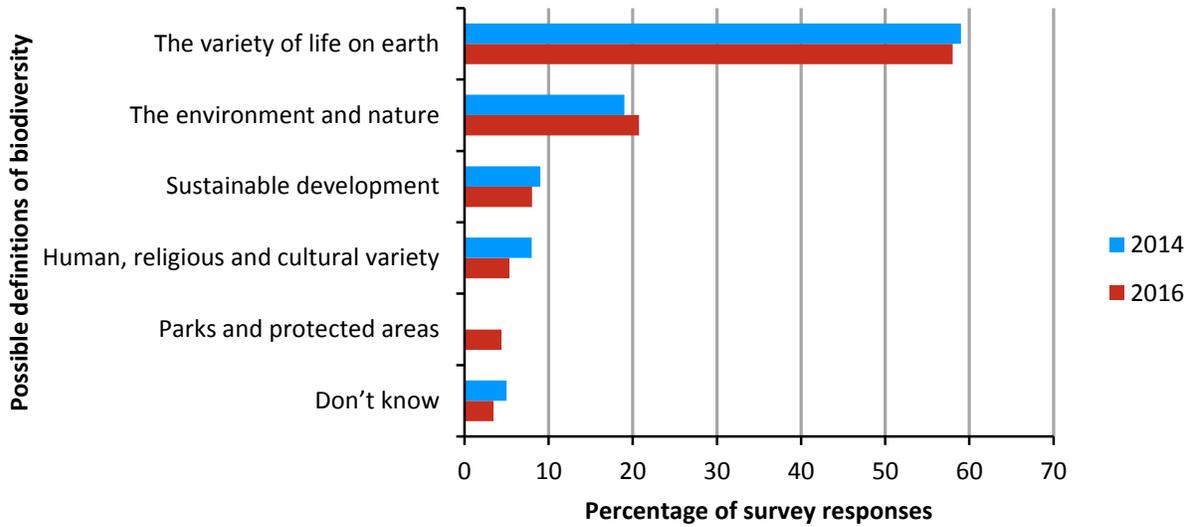


Figure 2. Survey respondents' definitions of biodiversity in 2014 ( $n = 598$ ) and 2016 ( $n = 636$ ). Only respondents that were aware of the term biodiversity were asked this question. Parks and protected areas was a new option added in 2016.

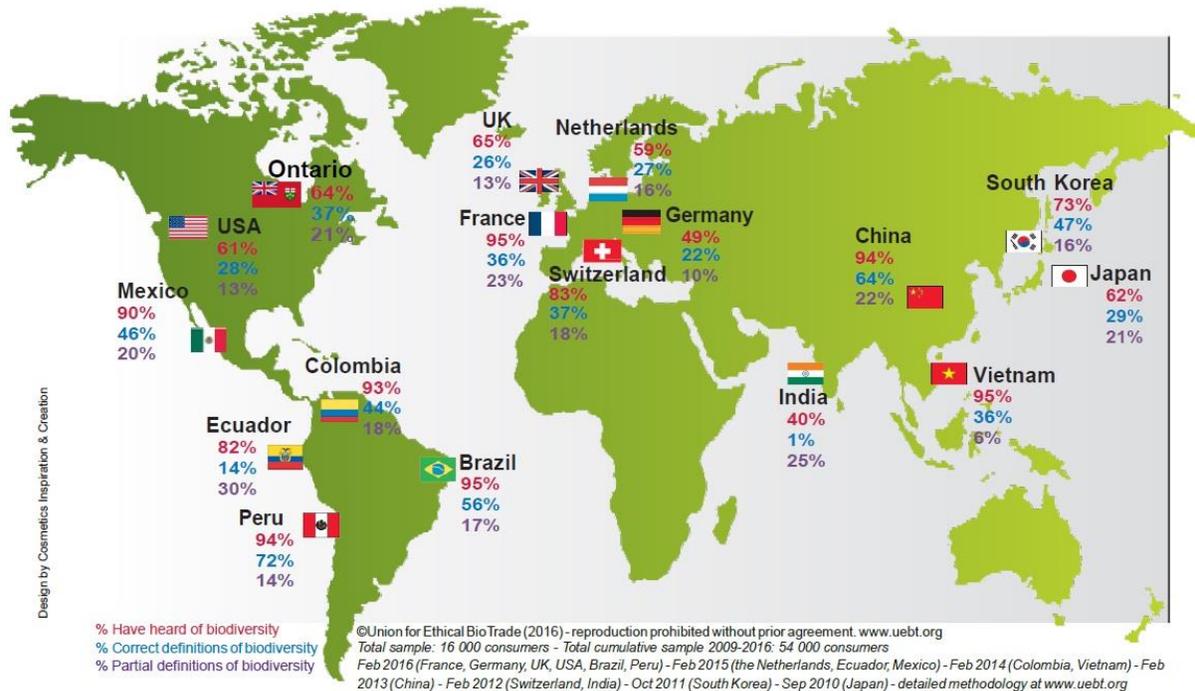


Figure 3. Ontario biodiversity awareness levels compared to countries around the world. Image reproduced with permission from the Union for Ethical BioTrade.

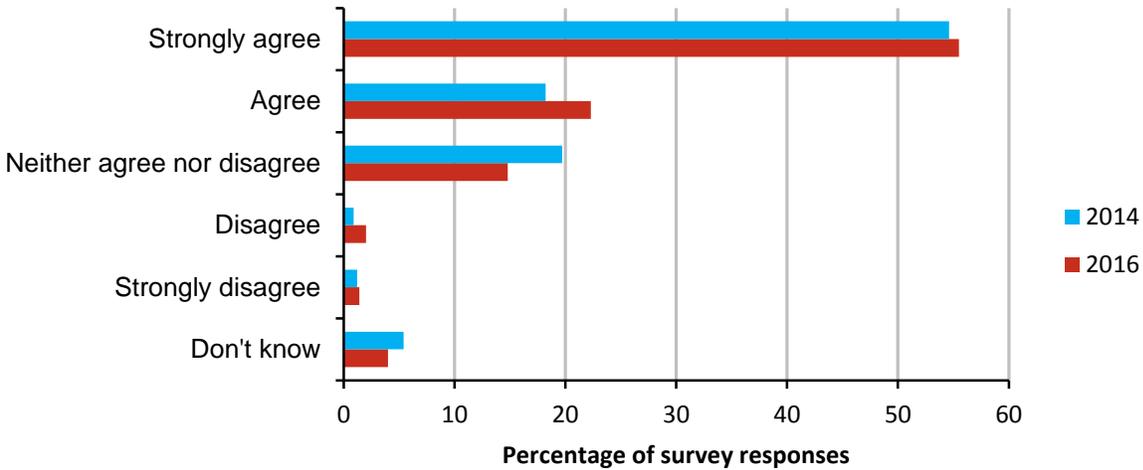


Figure 4. Percentage of survey responses to the statement, 'Biodiversity plays an important role in maintaining my health and well-being' in 2014 and 2016 ( $n = 1,000/\text{yr.}$ ).

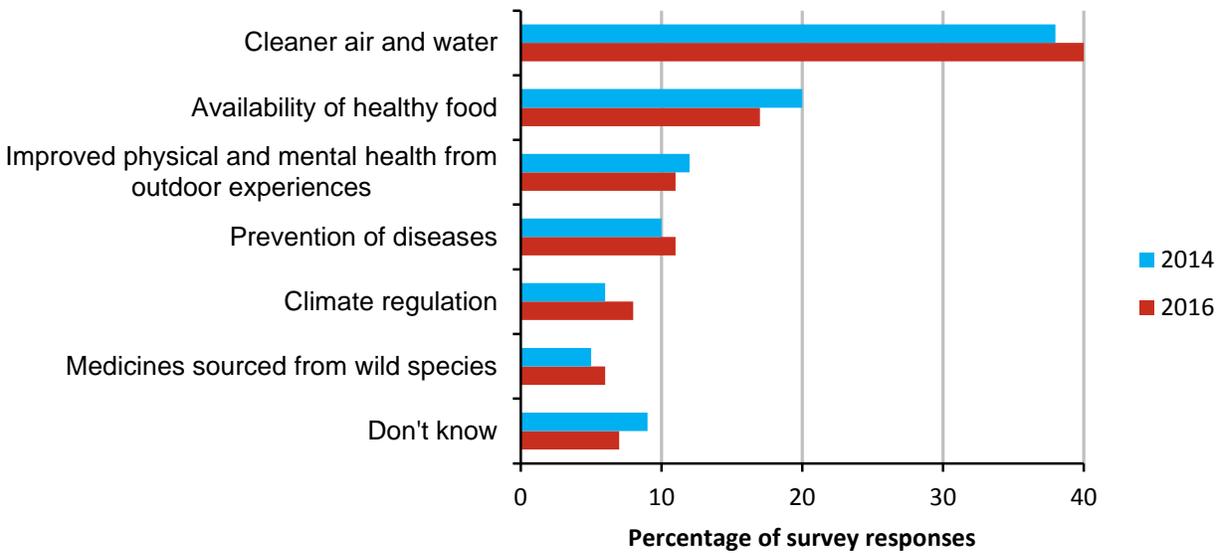


Figure 5. Percentage of survey participants' responses regarding which aspect of biodiversity has the greatest impact on their health in 2014 and 2016 ( $n = 1,000/\text{yr.}$ ).

**Status:**

- 64% of respondents were aware of the term biodiversity, representing a 4% increase over 2014.
- Of the respondents aware of biodiversity, 58% defined it correctly and another 33% chose a partial definition of the term.
- 78% of respondents agreed (22%) or strongly agreed (56%) that biodiversity plays an important role in maintaining their health and well-being, representing a 5% increase over 2014.



- In 2016, cleaner air and water was chosen as the aspect of biodiversity with the greatest impact on human health (40%), followed by availability of healthy food (17%), improved physical and mental health from outdoor experiences (11%), and prevention of diseases (11%).
- The survey results suggest that Ontarian's awareness about biodiversity and its importance to their health is approaching the 50% target outlined in Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy, 2011.

## **Links:**

**Related Targets:** N/A

**Related Themes:** N/A

## **Web Links:**

Union for Ethical BioTrade <http://ethicalbiotrade.org/>

Canadian federal, provincial and territorial working group on biodiversity <http://www.biodivcanada.ca>

## **References:**

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). 2010. United Nations. [Available at: <http://cbd.int/2010/biodiversity/>].

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Oracle Poll Research. 2016. Biodiversity 2016 Report. Ontario Biodiversity Council, Peterborough, ON.

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## **Citation**

Ontario Biodiversity Council. 2016. State of Ontario's Biodiversity [web application]. Ontario Biodiversity Council, Peterborough, Ontario. [Available at: <http://ontariobiodiversitycouncil.ca/sobr> (Date Accessed: November 2016)].