

Department of Planning and Environment

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What we heard report

Draft Greater Sydney Water Strategy consultation

January 2022





Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Planning and Environment acknowledges that it stands on Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and we show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places in which Aboriginal people are included socially, culturally and economically.

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Executive summary

The NSW Government is developing the Greater Sydney Water Strategy, which charts a pathway for delivering sustainable and resilient water services to Greater Sydney for the next 20 to 40 years, servicing a growing Greater Sydney, including the Illawarra and Blue Mountains, and safeguarding our city even in times of prolonged drought and extreme weather events.

The draft strategy sets out priorities and actions for the delivery of water, wastewater, recycled water and stormwater services into the future in a way that is integrated with land use planning. The strategy will:

- support economic growth and community wellbeing by providing confidence in the sustainability of Greater Sydney's water supply to meet growth and adapt to a changing climate to 2040 and beyond
- support delivery of the Greater Sydney Region Plan – A Metropolis of Three Cities and the Premier's priorities for greening the city
- identify the strategic pathways for decision making in consultation with customers and the community
- set the pathways to identify highest economic value and most affordable investment portfolios for water infrastructure.

This *What we heard* report details the feedback on the draft Greater Sydney Water Strategy, captured during a series of online engagement activities, both targeted and for the wider public, from Tuesday 29 September to Monday 8 November 2021.

The community and stakeholders have informed the strategy through this engagement, to collaboratively address the big water challenges faced by Greater Sydney into the longer term.

The engagement process supported genuine, accessible, targeted and meaningful engagement. The engagement has delivered robust and valuable feedback on the draft strategy through:

- targeted stakeholder engagement and community information sessions with Aboriginal people focussing on key Aboriginal-centric issues
- targeted stakeholder engagement and community information session with local government focusing on local government-centric issues
- online submissions and survey responses from the wider community and other stakeholders such as individuals, organisations and community groups
- public engagement and online community information session.

During the public exhibition of the draft strategy, over 700 people directly engaged with the department through a range of engagement activities, including online community information sessions, formal submissions, a comprehensive online survey and direct contact with the department.

Feedback received from the community and stakeholders demonstrated a moderate to strong degree of support for most of the objectives, priorities and actions proposed by the draft strategy.

There was strong public support for water conservation initiatives, integrated water cycle management approaches, better adoption of water sensitive urban design and a cooler and greener Greater Sydney with healthier waterways and protection of biodiversity.

A majority of people supported the potential for purified recycled water for drinking, particularly the proposal to build a demonstration plant to highlight the safety and efficacy of the technology. A small number of respondents raised concerns about the use of purified recycled water for drinking.

More people supported than did not support expanded desalination options for Greater Sydney.

There were also moderate levels of concern around these technologies that may need to be addressed through further community education and engagement into the future. There was less support for the building of further dams in Greater Sydney and for the use of groundwater as part of the water supply.

Overall, more people supported or strongly supported the objectives, priorities and actions proposed by the draft strategy than opposed or strongly opposed them. The feedback also indicated that people understood the need for a range, or portfolio of future water supply options rather than relying upon a single option.

With the levels of support and positive or constructive feedback provided during the public exhibition, the department did not make significant changes to the broad content within or direction charted by the Greater Sydney Water Strategy when preparing the final strategy document to be published in 2022.

An implementation plan will also be developed to outline how we will deliver the Greater Sydney Water Strategy over the short-term (the next 3 financial years), which is the time horizon that aligns with the current price determination for Sydney Water and WaterNSW set by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).

The department and relevant water agencies will continue to engage with stakeholders and communities as the strategy is implemented.

Two things are very clear from the feedback: that there is a significant level of support for the principles and intent of the strategy, including strong support for many of the initiatives identified, and we need to continue to build relationships with our targeted key stakeholders to make sure we continue to explore all the themes of the feedback in more detail.

About this report

This report provides an overview of what we have heard from submissions on the draft Greater Sydney Water Strategy.

The purpose of this document is to provide the community with an understanding of the broad and varied feedback we received on the draft strategy. It also aims to assure community and stakeholders that we have heard concerns and issues raised and will provide an implementation plan to support the strategy.

The report consists of:

- an overview of the engagement process and participation by community members
- an overview of feedback and views on the priorities in the strategy
- a summary of the key themes arising from feedback during the draft strategy's public exhibition
- key overarching insights from the engagement process
- detailed feedback in relation to the actions identified in the strategy
- next steps for review of submissions and the finalisation of the strategy.

The key insights from public engagement were:

- community support for water conservation measures to save drinking water and use water more efficiently
- significant support for more rainfall-independent water supplies
- support for ways to better reuse our water, including the potential for purified recycled water for drinking and increased stormwater reuse
- understanding from the community that future water supplies will rely on a mix of all the various water supply and water conservation options
- community willingness to pay more on water bills to ensure Greater Sydney has enough water supplies independent of rainfall – noting more work will need to be done and there are regulatory processes in place to manage this
- support for sustainable water systems into the future that are resilient to extreme climate and weather events and manage growth
- an understanding that the community needs to change the way it thinks about and uses water into the future including using water more wisely
- support for a mix of ways to protect and improve the health of Greater Sydney's waterways including improved water treatment measures
- community ideas on how to create a cooler, greener and more liveable Sydney including more stormwater reuse, tree canopy coverage, better resource use and planning
- a desire by Aboriginal people to be more involved in decision making around water in Greater Sydney, with greater focus on cultural and economic opportunities and a need for protection of cultural sites and waterways

- a willingness by local government stakeholders to continue to work with water authorities to assist in implementing the strategy, with more detail sought on ways they can be involved, specific projects and governance
- more people strongly agree or agree with the priorities and actions in the draft strategy than disagree or strongly disagree.

The final strategy will be published in 2022 and include an implementation plan with proposed initiatives, roles and responsibilities that describes how the strategy will be implemented over the next three years.

Introduction

The Greater Sydney Water Strategy is the NSW Government's long-term strategy setting the direction for the management of water resources in the Sydney, Illawarra and Blue Mountains regions. The strategy will chart a direction for delivering sustainable and integrated water services to Greater Sydney for the next 20 to 40 years.

The strategy identifies priorities and actions for the management of water, wastewater, stormwater and recycled water in the region, so that these services can be delivered sustainably and equitably into the future.

The strategy, which replaces the Metropolitan Water Plan, has been developed taking into account the lessons learnt in recent years with the extreme and prolonged 2017-2020 drought, and impacts the subsequent bushfires and unprecedented floods had on water security and certainty.

To ensure community members had a chance to have their say, the department held a series of engagement events, including public community information sessions, between Tuesday 28 September 2021 and Monday 8 November 2021.

Feedback from the community during the engagement will be reviewed by the department and taken on board when finalising the strategy and developing the implementation plan. The final strategy and implementation plan is expected to be released in 2022.

Engagement overview

The public engagement for the draft strategy aimed to receive feedback from a range of water stakeholders including other state and local government and non-government entities, Aboriginal groups and individuals as well as the wider community. The department engaged early with key government stakeholders to help in the development of the draft strategy, intending for their input to lead to greater acceptance and 'buy-in' across the sector.

A communications and engagement plan was documented and implemented to allow the department, in collaboration with Sydney Water and WaterNSW, to clearly communicate and engage with key stakeholders and the wider community throughout 2021. The objectives of the engagement plan are to:

- build greater awareness, understanding and trust in the need for a Greater Sydney Water Strategy
- ensure target audiences (internal and external) have access to trusted, accurate and timely information about the development of a strategy that is relevant to their needs
- communicate and engage with relevant stakeholders, water management, local water utilities/councils, Aboriginal stakeholders, metropolitan and regional communities
- choose appropriate user-centric channels and methods to ensure accessible opportunities are provided for optimum stakeholder input to the strategy

- ensure effective, respectful and culturally sensitive communication and engagement with Aboriginal communities
- provide a transparent and meaningful feedback and reporting process to address stakeholders and local community concerns as they arise and demonstrate accountability.

For the launch of public engagement on Tuesday 28 September 2021, the department launched a Greater Sydney Water Strategy webpage with links to the draft strategy and supporting documents—such as frequently asked questions, high-level information and details of how the public could register to attend community information sessions.

The public engagement program ran over a six-week timeframe and included a range of events and announcements, communications tools and a diverse feedback, insights and data capturing approach. It included the following key activities:

- sharing information online including direct communications to those on the department's stakeholder database and a dedicated Greater Sydney Water Strategy website
- online webinar community information sessions open to the broader community
- media activities including social media promotion, online advertising and local print advertising in mainstream and multilingual publications to encourage engagement by Greater Sydney's culturally diverse communities
- stakeholder meetings and briefings with targeted key groups including a specific Aboriginal briefing and information session, and a specific local Government session
- feedback/data capture via an online survey.

Before the public engagement started, the project team had planned to conduct face to face engagement but had to pivot to online engagement because of the stay-at-home orders issued by the NSW Government as part of the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The online nature of the consultation proved effective in soliciting feedback from stakeholders across Greater Sydney.

Stakeholders that were identified and engaged or communicated with include:

- government bodies and organisations
- local government
- peak groups
- Aboriginal community groups
- environmental groups
- the broader community.

A summary of engagement statistics is provided in Figure 1.

The information we presented was consistent for all targeted stakeholder group meetings, however groups were chosen to allow similar stakeholder groups to question and provide feedback constructively together. The department ensured a diverse range of broader voices were represented at the webinars to reflect Sydney's current and future community.

Submissions were received from water industry stakeholders, peak bodies, local government, environmental academics and community groups, researchers, and the public.

Figure 1. Engagement statistics snapshot



Engagement methods

The methodology used to engage with key stakeholders and the wider community about the draft strategy aligned with the department's principles for engagement:

- **purposeful:** undertaken with a clear understanding of what was to be achieved, and delivering on NSW Government priorities and the department's corporate goals
- **inclusive:** identifying and enabling the participation of all relevant stakeholders
- **timely:** allowing enough time for meaningful engagement, outlining timeframes up front and conducting engagement activities in an efficient manner

- **transparent:** explaining the engagement process, providing information to allow meaningful participation and setting clear expectations around how participants' input would inform outcomes
- **respectful:** acknowledging the needs, experience, perspective, and expertise of participants.

Following is a description of two key engagement methods used – an online survey and webinars.

Online survey

Online community information sessions were chosen as a primary communication and consultation method with stakeholders and the community because Greater Sydney was under government stay-at-home orders at the time.

An online survey was used as a primary engagement method. Through the online survey, we aimed to:

- use a data capture method that was unbiased, accommodating and accessible to respondents
- allow respondents to be open and honest with their feedback
- base decisions on objective, quantitative information and not rely on 'gut feelings' to make important key decisions
- provide a snapshot of the attitudes and behaviours around the strategic priorities and themes – including thoughts, opinions, and comments
- use feedback as a baseline to measure and establish further benchmarking.

The department received a total of 481 survey responses during the public engagement period. Survey respondents were provided with supporting information to help them provide informed responses.

Online community information sessions

Five online sessions were held throughout September and October 2021 (Table 1). Two were targeted to Aboriginal community groups and one was targeted at local government representatives. Two were open to the wider community, with one of these specifically seeking feedback on issues important to Aboriginal community members.

A total of 148 people were in attendance across the five sessions. The webinars were advertised through:

- a dedicated webpage on the department's website
- posts on the department's social media channels
- electronic direct mail outs from the department to stakeholders
- traditional and social media advertisements, including advertising in multiple non-English publications
- digital information kits provided to local government to help amplify the messaging about the consultation
- direct invitations from the department to local government and Aboriginal groups.

The purpose of the community information sessions was to:

- inform the community, both targeted and wider community, about the draft strategy
- build relationships with stakeholders and community
- create awareness and understanding of the strategy through face-to-face (albeit online) interaction
- directly respond to any questions or concerns raised
- understand how the strategy was received by stakeholders and community and if there were gaps in the strategy
- encourage the targeted stakeholders and wider community to complete the online survey and provide a submission during the public engagement period
- record any questions that could not be answered immediately and respond afterwards.

Table 1. Details of online community information sessions/stakeholder meetings

Date	Meeting	Time	Attendees
Thursday, 23 September	Pre-briefing with NSW Aboriginal Land Council and Local Aboriginal Land Council representatives	12.30 pm – 2.30 pm	9
Wednesday, 6 October	Second briefing with NSW Aboriginal Land Council and Local Aboriginal Land Council representatives	12.00 pm – 1.00 pm	9
Tuesday, 12 October	Aboriginal stakeholder online community information session—open to the wider community	3.00 pm – 5.00 pm	7
Thursday, 14 October	Online community information session—open to the wider community	11.00 am – 12.00 pm	58
Friday, 29 October	Local government online information session—targeted	11.00 am – 1.00 pm	65

The number of attendees at the wider community and local government sessions was above average for similarly scoped engagement programs. The level of interest in the draft strategy and knowledge of water and the water industry was considered to be very high.

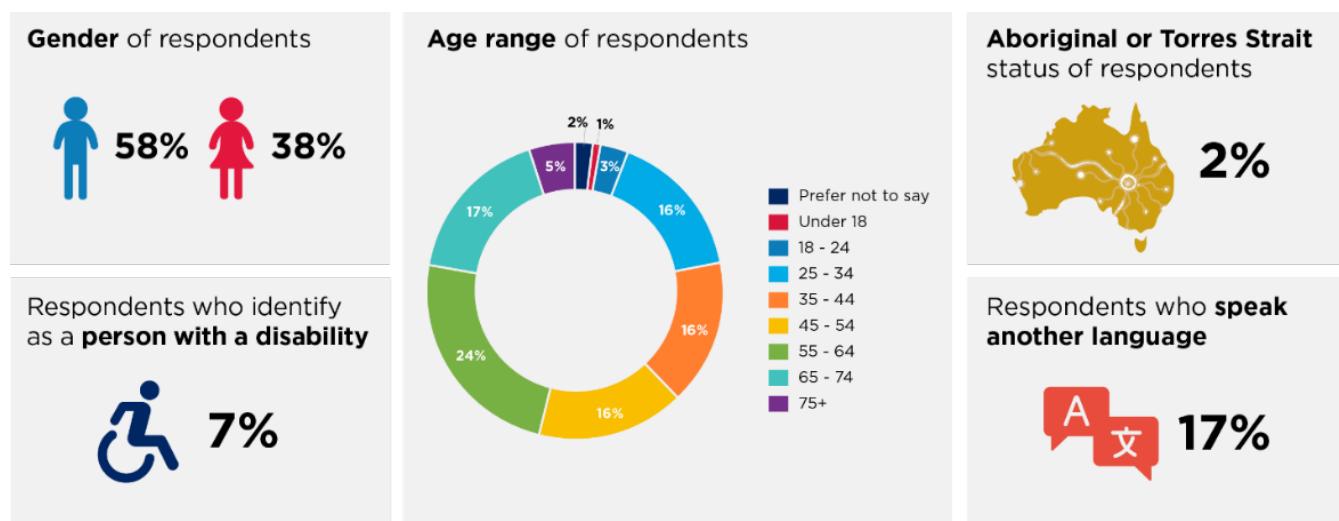
Who we heard from – engagement statistics

A total of 481 survey responses and 41 written submissions were received from different respondents during the public exhibition of the draft strategy between 28 September and 8 November 2021.

The survey respondents were spread across age groups, locations and language groups throughout Greater Sydney, providing a robust indication to the department that the feedback is representative of the general public.

The different methods and activities as part of the engagement period enabled the department to provide adequate and timely information to inform stakeholders and community members in making their submissions and provided the department with a strong base of feedback on the draft strategy.

Figure 2. Demographic information of survey respondents



Aboriginal engagement

The department is committed to recognising and protecting Aboriginal water rights, interests and access to water, including Aboriginal heritage assets. The department is building on prior work with Aboriginal communities to improve water management outcomes and ensure that Aboriginal knowledge informs water management approaches in a culturally appropriate way.

The department invited local Aboriginal community representatives to participate in the public engagement. In attendance were representatives from NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council, Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council and La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council as well as other key representatives.

The department employed different engagement approaches to empower self-determination and co-design as set out in *Our Place on Country: Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2020–23* and in our Aboriginal Engagement Plan.

The approach and methodology used included:

- partnering with an Aboriginal stakeholder engagement specialist advisor to facilitate engagement and assist in gathering feedback from Aboriginal perspectives
- engaging early with pre-briefings and to build working partnerships
- working with Aboriginal community representatives to find harder to reach stakeholders.

The key themes of feedback raised by Aboriginal people include:

- be more involved in ownership and decision making around water in Greater Sydney
- have greater focus on Aboriginal cultural and economic opportunities
- ensure protection of cultural sites and waterways
- demonstrate care for Country with healthy waterways and learn from experience
- maintain and improve access rights.

The department is looking forward to working in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, custodians, knowledge holders and communities to further develop and implement actions to support the strategy in line with Aboriginal people's water rights, interests and aspirations.

Local government engagement

Working collaboratively with the local government sector is important to the department. This way of working helps the department tap into local knowledge and supports councils to deliver positive environmental and land use outcomes for their communities.

The department is continuing to work with local governments and their communities to improve water resource planning and management decisions. This ensures local knowledge underpins future strategies and projects.

The department invited local government representatives to participate in the public engagement. A targeted information session provided them with an opportunity to discuss local government-specific issues as they considered their feedback on the draft strategy.

During the public engagement, the department found a willingness from local government stakeholders to continue to work with the department and water utilities to implement the strategy. Stakeholders were keen to know ways they could be involved, including specific projects and governance arrangements.

The submissions provided show broad support, at varying levels, for the objectives and augmentation options proposed in the draft strategy. Councils expressed constructive views around certain water supply approaches and options. One local council did not support the proposed use of purified recycled water for drinking.

The key themes of feedback raised by local government include:

- willingness to work collaboratively with government and utilities to implement solutions
- interest in how programs will be funded and governance arrangements
- strong support for better resource management including water reuse and stormwater
- emphasis on need for improved planning for growth
- focus on urban sensitive water design and holistic approaches.

In response to the feedback received during the consultation period, the department:

- wants to focus on supporting local government to identify and deliver solutions that can sustain water-based community facilities such as public swimming pools, aquatic recreation centres and passive recreation spaces centred on water features

- recognises the willingness of local government to contribute to future plans and strategies and will continue to seek stakeholder feedback throughout this process.

The department will continue to work closely with local government as the strategy is implemented to align with key NSW economic, infrastructure and land use strategies, plans and programs.

What we heard

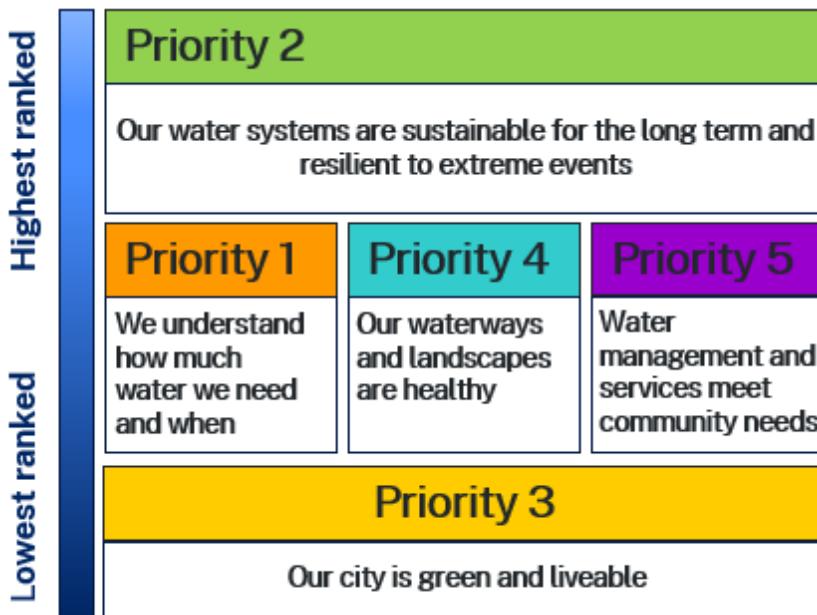
Figure 3. Key insights into what we heard

Key insights from community feedback	
	Strong community support for water conservation measures to save drinking water and use water more efficiently
	Significant support for more rainfall-independent water supplies including strong support for purified recycled water and moderate support for desalination
	Support for ways to better reuse our water, including the potential for purified recycled water for drinking and increased stormwater reuse
	Understanding from the community that future water supplies will rely on a mix of all the various water supply and water conservation options
	Willingness to pay more on water bills to ensure Greater Sydney has enough water supplies independent of rainfall, noting more work will need to be done and there are regulatory processes in place to manage this
	Support for sustainable water systems into the future that are resilient to extreme climate and weather events and manage growth
	An understanding that the community needs to change the way it thinks about and uses water into the future, including using water more wisely
	Support for a mix of ways to protect and improve the health of Greater Sydney's waterways including improved water treatment measures
	Community ideas on how to create a cooler, greener and more liveable Sydney including more stormwater reuse, tree canopy coverage, better resource use and planning
	A desire by Aboriginal people to be more involved in decision making around water in Greater Sydney, with greater focus on cultural and economic opportunities and a need for protection of cultural sites and waterways
	A willingness by local government stakeholders to continue to work with water utilities to assist in implementing the strategy, with more detail sought on ways they can be involved, specific projects and governance
	More people strongly agree or agree with the priorities and actions in the draft strategy than disagree or strongly disagree

Community views on priorities

There are five priorities in the draft Greater Sydney Water Strategy. The community was asked to rank these priorities to understand where they felt attention and resources should be applied. The community ranked the priorities in the order shown in Figure 4. It is important to note that while these priorities have been ranked as part of the quantitative survey process, qualitative analysis of feedback shows that community and stakeholders deemed them all important priorities to achieve.

Figure 4. Ranking of priorities by online survey respondents



Priority 1

We understand how much water we need and when

Details: One of the fundamental questions for the Greater Sydney Water Strategy is how to make sure there is enough water to meet the needs of the global city and all customers over the long-term, while recognising that water restrictions may still be necessary in times of drought.

This means we need to understand historical and current patterns of water use, how these might change in the future and how much water we will need and when. We also need a more sophisticated understanding of the likely impacts of climate change on our water supply and future demand for water.

Ranking: In the online survey, this priority was ranked equal second with priorities four and five. Feedback received in the online survey, through submissions and at the community information sessions indicated the majority of respondents and participants:

- are changing the way they think about future water needs and embracing more rainfall independent options (creating an enduring supply)
- recognise future drought and climate resilience factors as key drivers in decision making
- have already begun to change their water usage habits and reduce water consumption.

Priority 2

Our water systems are sustainable for the long-term and resilient to extreme events

Details: There are several big issues to tackle to ensure that our water system is sustainable and resilient to extreme events, including severe and prolonged drought. We need to consider a combination of solutions – from changing our behaviour to investing in new assets – to build resilience and flexibility, support a growing population, manage system risks and use our water more efficiently and sustainably.

Ranking: In the online survey, this priority was ranked the highest. Feedback received in the online survey, through submissions and at the community information sessions indicated the majority of the respondents and participants:

- have a strong focus on water conservation and efficiency
- want to make best use of the assets we have by optimising use of the Sydney Desalination Plant
- want the department to plan for new infrastructure with a focus on rainfall-independent supply.

Priority 3

Our city is green and liveable

Details: We need water to create an attractive, green and liveable city. Water sustains trees, parks and bushland, supports outdoor recreation and improves the amenity of local neighbourhoods. Using water in urban design improves air quality, reduces ambient temperatures, and boosts resilience to a changing climate.

Cooler, greener places also provide habitat for animals and birds. We know that we can't rely on the drinking water system alone to meet these needs. We need to get much better at using recycled water and stormwater to support a highly liveable city by retaining water in the local landscape, particularly in Western Sydney where it is hotter and drier.

Ranking: In the online survey, this priority was the lowest ranked. Feedback received in the online survey, through submissions and at the community information sessions indicated the majority of the respondents and participants support:

- integrated water cycle and land use planning
- design principles for Greater Sydney Water Strategy
- alternative water sources for greening and cooling of the environment
- a circular economy approach for water services.

Priority 4

Our waterways and landscapes are healthy

Details: Greater Sydney has a rich diversity of aquatic and marine environments, from the sandstone gorges of our drinking water catchments and the majestic Hawkesbury–Nepean River to coastal lagoons, beautiful beaches and the stunning Sydney Harbour and Illawarra escarpment.

Within the city, waterways and estuary foreshores provide nature refuges and habitat for wildlife and are highly valued by urban communities. As we explore our future water options, we must also find the right mix of solutions to better protect, maintain and improve these environments.

Ranking: In the online survey, this priority was ranked equal second with priorities one and five. Feedback received in the online survey, through submissions and at the community information sessions indicated the majority of the respondents and participants:

- want to maintain and improve ecosystem health
- want to see more blue-green planning particularly in Western Sydney
- want to see more investment in wastewater management
- recognise the need for improved stormwater management
- want to see more investment in recycled water.

Priority 5

Water management and services meet community needs

Details: Water planning and management is not just about filling the supply gap. It also has to ensure that the needs of customers and the community are met in affordable and fair ways. The community has to have confidence in the water sector and understand the implications of water supply and management decisions.

We also need to recognise Aboriginal knowledge and science around water and identify actions to support Aboriginal water rights and access in Greater Sydney.

Ranking: In the online survey, this priority was ranked equal second with priorities one and four. Feedback received in the online survey, through submissions and at the community information sessions indicated the majority of the respondents and participants:

- recognise and want to protect Aboriginal water rights, interests and access to water
- want to continue with transparent conversations and see more collaboration between the department, water utilities, catchment management authorities and local government
- show a willingness to pay more for water services to meet community needs and to invest in rainfall-independent supply options.

Key themes

To support the review of the engagement outcomes, key themes important to the broad community were identified through the data analysis process. The themes help to clarify the feedback received through the online survey, community information sessions and in written submissions. These themes were:

- water conservation
- recycled water uses including purified recycled water
- desalination
- greening and cooling
- climate resilience
- water supply options and willingness to pay
- stormwater
- water restrictions
- waterway health
- managing growth through better approaches
- biodiversity.

In addition to the above themes, targeted engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders identified a set of key issues of cultural significance to the Aboriginal community. These were:

- Aboriginal ownership and management of water across Greater Sydney
- cultural significance around water
- protection of cultural sites
- access rights to water and sites
- economic opportunities
- preferences on water sources.

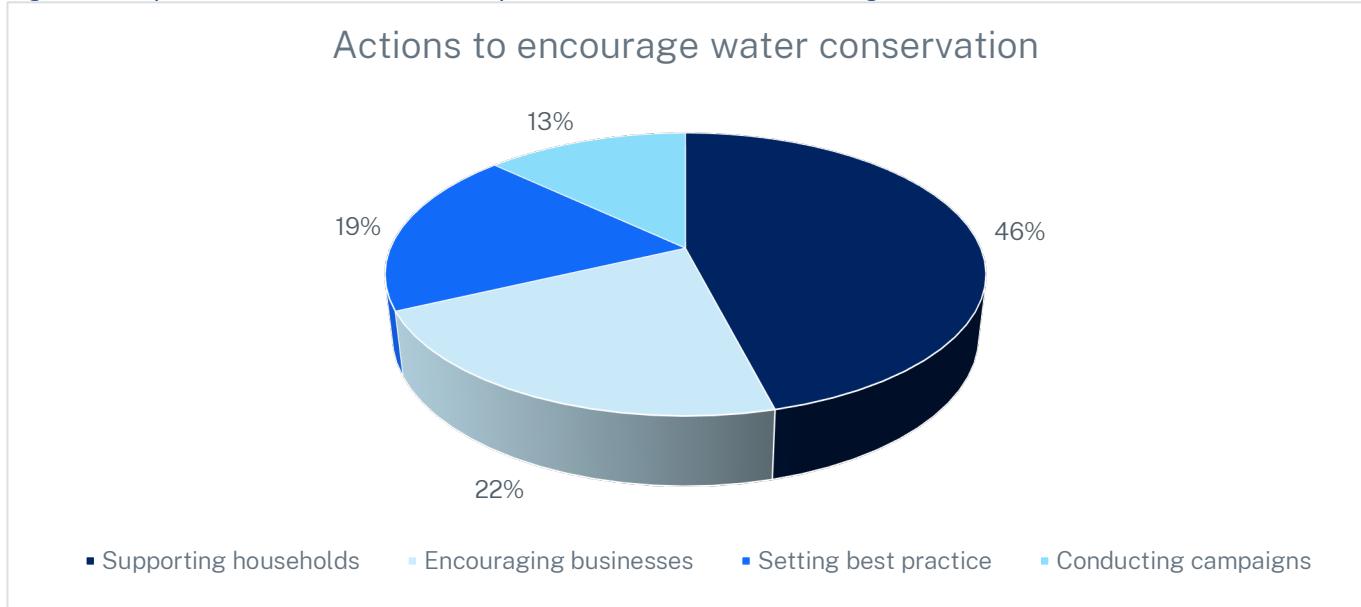
High level of support for water conservation and efficiency

Description: Water conservation, which includes leakage management, water restrictions in drought and programs to improve water efficiency, makes our drinking water supply go further at relatively low cost and can delay the timing of investment in new large-scale supply infrastructure.

Feedback: Water conservation and efficiency is overwhelmingly supported by the community and stakeholders as a ‘first action’ in providing a more sustainable and resilient water supply for Greater Sydney. We heard a broad range of views on how best to conserve water and those views are strongly held and supported particularly around saving drinking water and using water more efficiently.

When asked to identify areas of focus to encourage the community to be better at water conservation and efficiency, respondents demonstrated strong support for the following actions to encourage water conservation. (Figure 5)

Figure 5. Respondents nominated their first preference of actions to encourage water conservation



1. **Supporting households** to save water (46% as first preference), such as buy-back programs for inefficient appliances, incentives for rainwater tanks, free repairs to leaky taps, and helping people to use water more wisely in their gardens.
2. **Encouraging businesses** to save water (22% as first preference), via replacement programs for inefficient commercial appliances and help to find and fix leaks.
3. **Setting best practice** water efficiency standards for buildings and appliances and providing ratings and labels to help people choose water-efficient products (19% as first preference).
4. **Conducting campaigns** to make people more aware of ways to save water in their everyday lives and the benefits to the wider community of water conservation (13% as first preference).

Strong support for recycled water uses including purified recycled water

Description: Water recycling involves treating and reusing wastewater, greywater and stormwater for use in and outside the home, in industry, for irrigation and agriculture. Recycled water systems in Greater Sydney are a mix of residential third pipe systems (such as Rouse Hill), industrial schemes (such as BlueScope Steel), agricultural irrigation schemes (such as Picton Farm), golf courses and an environmental flow replacement scheme based at St Marys.

Feedback: We heard a broad range of views strongly supporting the use of recycled water particularly around different methods and uses and the potential for purified recycled water for a range of uses including drinking. While there was significant support for purified recycled water for drinking, there were moderate levels of concern from a minority of respondents over the appropriateness of this source.

Seventy-five per cent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that purified drinking water should be a water supply option for Greater Sydney.

Many local water utilities and local governments want to progress options for purified recycled water and identified the need to work with the community closely and effectively to increase understanding and acceptance of the concept before it can be applied.

The idea of a demonstration plant for purified recycled water to increase understanding and acceptance from the community was well received at the community information sessions, in survey responses and in written submissions.

The department acknowledges the need to work with Sydney Water to inform the community and support community consultation around options to use purified recycled water for drinking before any future decision is made to include it in Greater Sydney's water supply options.

Support for desalination with some concerns over energy use

Description: Desalination is the process of removing salts from water. The Sydney Desalination Plant at Kurnell for example, turns seawater into fresh water, which is treated to standards set by the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, making it safe to drink from the tap.

Feedback: 53% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that desalination should be a water supply option for Greater Sydney.

We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that people welcome desalination as an option especially in building an enduring reliable supply but believe the process may be expensive and energy intensive.

A number of respondents noted that desalination is a practical option given Sydney's proximity to the coast, that the technology has gained community acceptance over time and that the Sydney Desalination Plant has provided a reliable contingency supply of water in response to extreme climate events.

The department acknowledges that an emphasis on environmental sustainability should be a core feature of a desalination plant's operations – powered by renewable energy, consistent ecosystem and biodiversity monitoring and potentially creating conservation areas around the plants as is the case with the Sydney Desalination Plant which is entirely powered by renewable energy.

Greening and cooling is important for a more liveable city

Description: The department recognises that we must put water at the heart of planning for Greater Sydney. We need to improve how we plan for and manage land use, stormwater and water in the landscape to improve liveability. This includes addressing threats such as intensifying urban heat and urban flood risk and having water available for additional greening, cooling and amenity.

Feedback: We have heard a range of community ideas on how to create a cooler and greener Sydney, particularly in Western Sydney, including:

- stormwater reuse
- wastewater reuse
- urban sensitive water design and holistic approaches
- better rainwater management
- tree canopy coverage.

Acceptance of a need for climate resilient water management

Description: Future climate risks and extreme events mean we currently cannot meet our water needs by only using traditional water supply approaches. We need to plan and build a water supply system that is resilient to extreme events — including droughts and floods — that may be more extreme than we have experienced in recent history.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that people understand there is an imperative to build in greater resilience measures in Greater Sydney's water supply. Feedback received demonstrates that after the severe 2017-2020 drought, there is more of an understanding and acceptance of the need for much earlier planning for additional supply options including desalination and recycled water.

A range of stakeholders commented positively that water security planning is taking place now, at a time when dams are at high levels, rather than planning reactively when Greater Sydney enters the next drought.

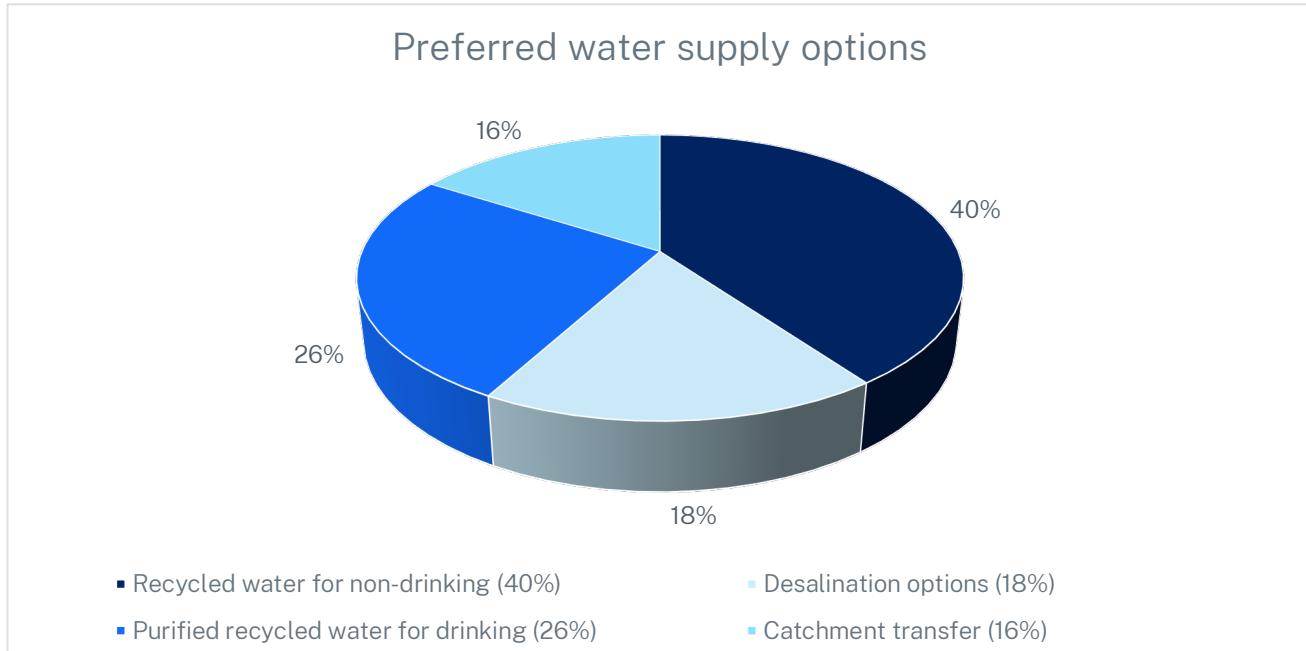
Support for diversification of water supply options and willingness to pay for these

Description: Strategic planning studies have identified a wide range of water supply options that could contribute to future water security including:

- surface and groundwater options
- desalination options
- purified recycled water options
- transfer options

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that rainfall-independent options must be explored to better diversify water supply options in Greater Sydney. Survey **respondents ranked recycled water for non-drinking and purified recycled water for drinking higher** than desalination options and transfer from other catchments options (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Respondents' first preferences for rainfall-independent water supply options



We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that they would be **willing to pay extra for the rainfall-independent water supply options.**

The chart in Figure 7 shows which drinking water sources survey respondents said they were willing to pay extra for, with 50% of respondents identifying they would pay extra for purified recycled water, 44% willing to pay extra for water conservation measures, 34% willing to pay extra for dam storage and 29% willing to pay extra for desalination.

Figure 8 shows how much extra respondents are willing to pay on their water bills for different water supply sources. While one quarter of respondents said they did not want to pay more, the majority of respondents were willing to pay more – 38% of those were willing to pay up to \$100 more on their water bills.

Figure 7. Drinking water sources respondents are willing to pay extra for

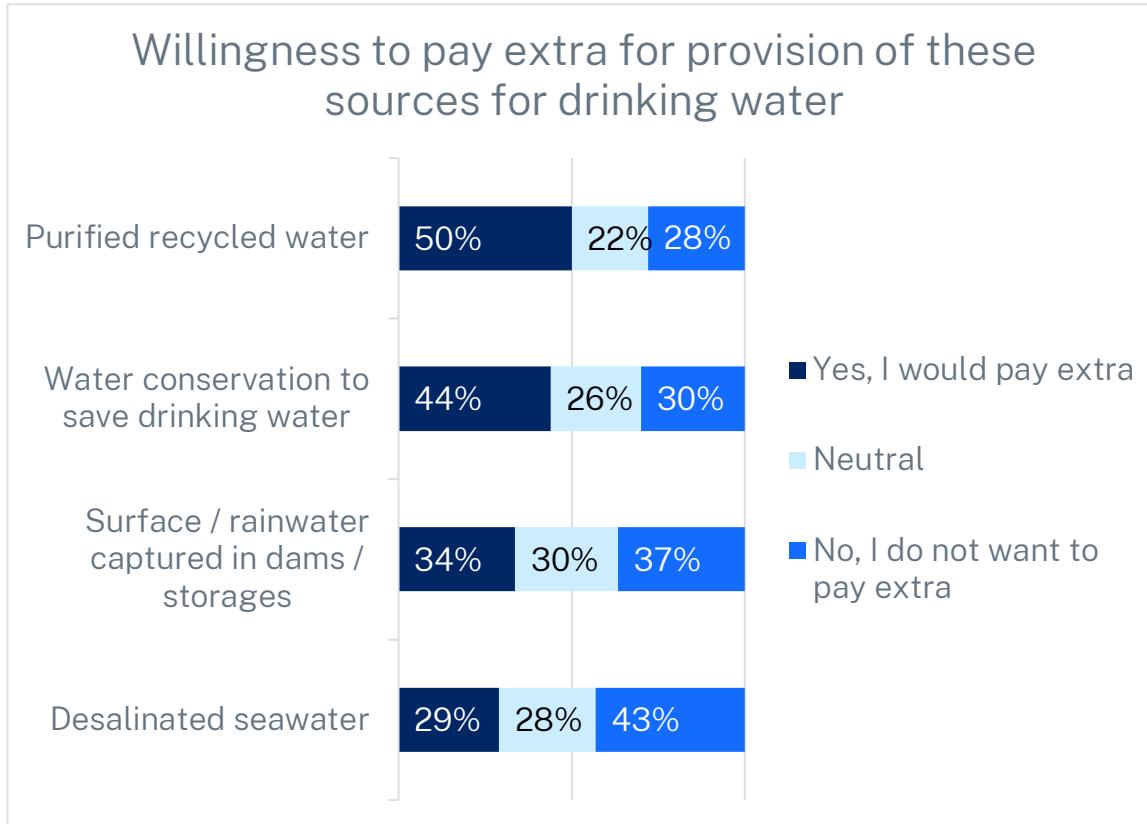
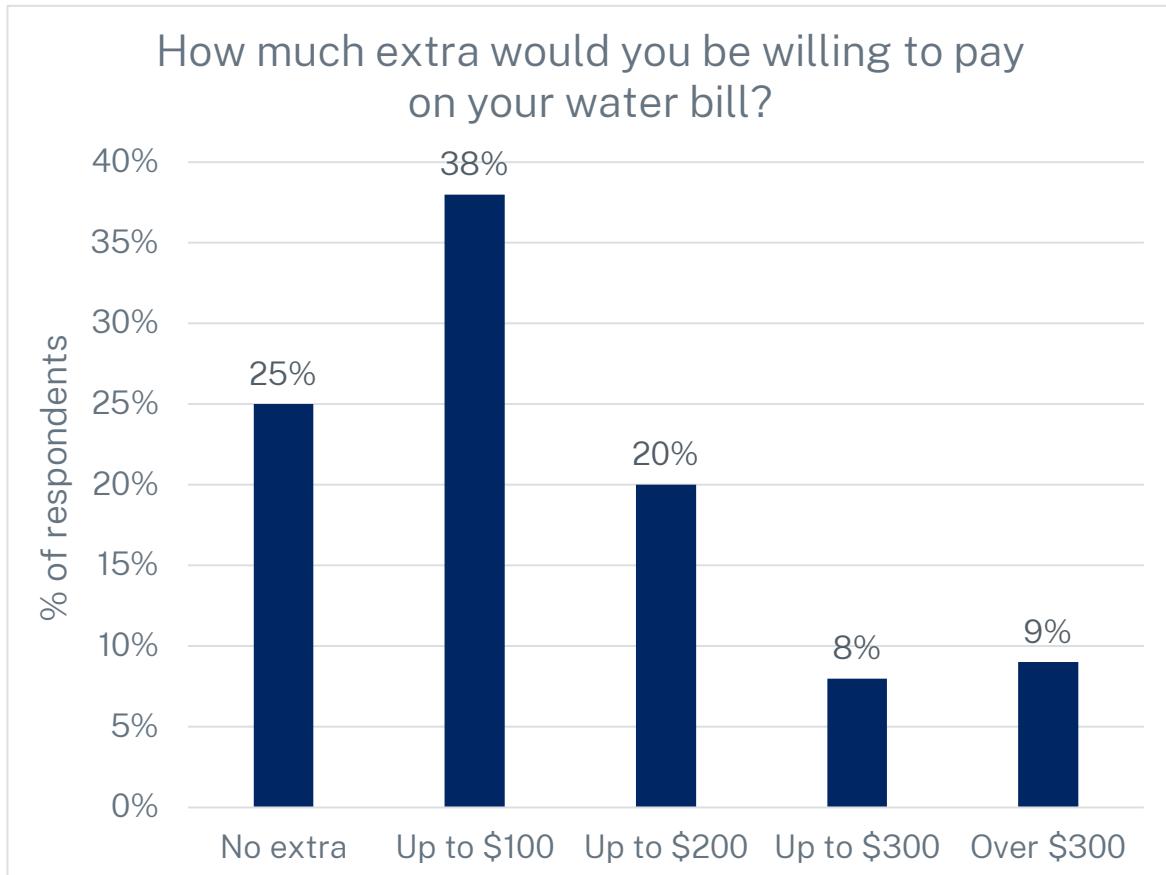


Figure 8. Additional amount survey respondents are willing to pay for different sources of drinking water



High level of support for better stormwater reuse

Description: Stormwater is runoff from rain that falls on hard surfaces such as roofs, roads, footpaths and car parks. This runoff flows from property drains into street drains typically owned by local councils. It then flows into much larger channels and pipes that run to waterways and the ocean.

Stormwater is a highly valuable resource and greater efforts have been made in recent years to collect, clean and re-use urban stormwater. In 2020, there were more than 70 stormwater harvesting projects across Greater Sydney providing water for parks and gardens, irrigating sporting fields and golf courses, and flushing public toilets.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that there is **significant support for ways to better recycle and reuse our stormwater, particularly in Western Sydney.**

Support for increased stormwater harvesting, treatment and reuse was particularly strong from key stakeholder groups including local government stakeholders. Feedback received indicates that there is work for government to do to improve policies, regulations and institutional frameworks to make it easier and more cost-effective to harvest and reuse stormwater.

A range of stakeholders commented that:

- there are a wide range of potential uses for stormwater particularly in greenfield growth areas in Western Sydney, including for outdoor irrigation, watering to increase tree canopy cover for cooler and greener places and for non-potable use in buildings
- local government in particular has a key role to play in facilitating, designing and implementing stormwater reuse opportunities, and that these opportunities will have significant environmental benefits, but for them to be viable government support and funding may be needed
- for stormwater to be harvested and used for wider purposes, government should support the development of new treatment technologies, capture, storage and transfer methods and regulatory standards and controls.

Acceptance of need for water restrictions

Description: Our water supply system will need to be resilient to extreme events—including droughts and floods—that may be more extreme than we have experienced in recent history. Implementing mandatory or enforceable controls—such as water restrictions—on the way we use water during times of drought is one tool to help support our water supply system.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that they would be **willing to have significant water restrictions during drought.** They also raised the issues around:

- more water-saving measures being installed
- seeing long-term planning that increases the available supply before the restrictions start
- making sure we use the water we have more efficiently
- restrictions not just on households but some businesses as well
- changing attitudes to restrictions.

We need frameworks and systems to protect water quality

Description: Our climate is changing and we need to be prepared for more extremes in weather than we have experienced up until now. Our water system needs to be more resilient to droughts and floods, as well as to bushfires, which can affect water quality in Sydney's catchment areas.

We want to build on existing strategies, policies and plans to maintain focus on enhancing water quality, with particular attention on high priority causes of urban water pollution including managing pollution caused by past industrial activity.

We can also explore ways to better manage and protect waterway and marine values and uses, and improve how we monitor and report on water quality and waterway health.

Feedback: We have heard through feedback that people believe government should prioritise maintaining a high-quality drinking water supply which is subject to challenges such as the contamination of water supply dams by bushfires and floods.

A range of stakeholders commented that:

- protecting water quality is important to the community as a whole and has a particular significance for those in disadvantaged socio-economic groups including some Aboriginal community members
- government should ensure that the impacts of development are carefully managed and development is implemented appropriately to ensure there is no impact on water quality in the catchments
- the approach of building a demonstration plant for purified recycled water, to ensure the community has a chance to consider, observe and understand the technology works and how water quality is assured.

Waterway health is essential

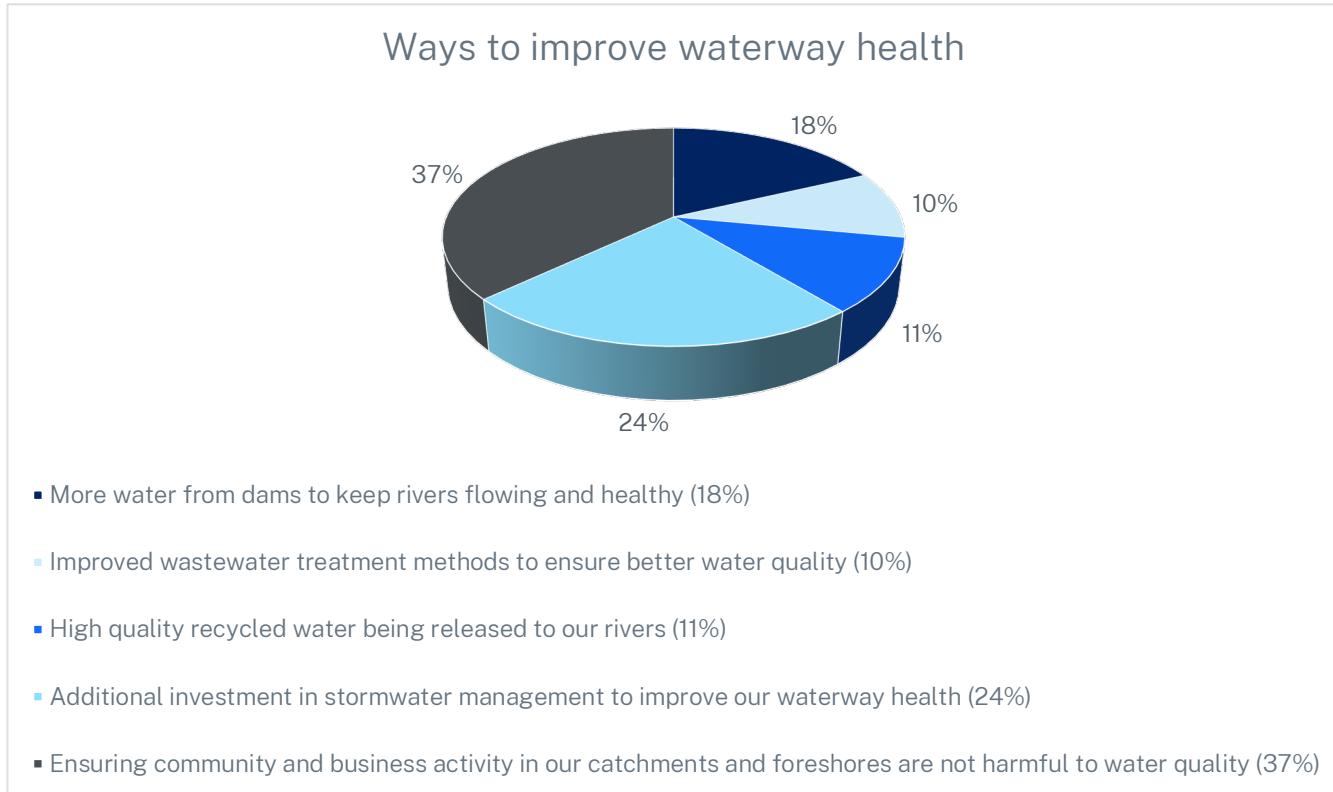
Description: Healthy waterways are a priority for the community. Our cities are built around the stunning coastline, harbours, lagoons, rivers, and creeks that characterise the Greater Sydney region. However, urbanisation and development create many challenges for waterway health and biodiversity.

We need to support future growth while maintaining and improving the health and value of our waterways, as well as working within existing urban landscapes and communities to better protect our waterways.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that there is **support for a mix of ways to protect and improve the health of Greater Sydney's waterways** including improved water treatment measures, better reuse of stormwater and better catchment protection.

Most local government feedback agreed with the need for healthy waterways but **recognise this is complicated by water ownership** across levels of government and private landowners.

Figure 6. Support levels for waterway health initiatives



Managing growth through better approaches

Description: Sydney is growing and changing and responding to this population and development growth and its impact on water resources and the environment by considering concepts such as water sensitive urban design, integrated water cycle management, increased water recycling and a circular economy.

A circular economy is one that values resources by keeping products and materials in use for as long as possible, and simultaneously recovering energy and other resources. The Greater Sydney Water Strategy provides an opportunity to re-think our view of water management beyond the narrow focus of water services.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that in Greater Sydney we should be moving to a circular economy approach encompassing reuse and recovery of resources across water, materials, energy, food production, ecological health and jobs.

A range of stakeholders commented that:

- water services can reduce their own carbon and ecological footprints and provide resources for other uses.
- energy should be recovered from wastewater treatment and water supply systems,
- regional bioresource hubs should be established that co-locate and integrate energy, water and organic waste management.

Enhancing biodiversity

Description: The restoration, maintenance or re-discovery of local ecosystem services within the city is essential for a productive, sustainable, liveable and ultimately successful Sydney.

The challenge we face is not simply working out how we grow without further degrading the remaining health and value of our waterways, but in reshaping the past 100 years of urban development to a form and system that works with the natural water cycle and enhances the region's natural ecosystems and biodiversity.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that biodiversity and waterway health are intertwined and must be considered particularly in the planning stages of projects.

A range of stakeholders commented that:

- they have a preference for water supply and wastewater management options that improve biodiversity outcomes
- there is community concern at past environmental impacts and degradations and a need for environments to be 'cleaned up' to improve biodiversity into the future
- waterway health improvements and initiatives should be implemented with key biodiversity outcomes in mind including improvements in the way wastewater is treated and discharged.

Aboriginal themes

Ownership and management of water across Greater Sydney

Description: The department recognises further work needs to be done to ensure Aboriginal people's rights and interests, particularly in regard to water ownership, access and economic prosperity, are actively addressed and incorporated.

The department is looking forward to working in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, custodians, knowledge holders and communities to further develop and implement actions to support the Strategy in line with Aboriginal people's rights, interests and aspirations.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that Aboriginal people should have opportunities to be more involved in ownership and decision making around water in Greater Sydney.

Aboriginal stakeholders noted that the finalised strategy must be built on deep and lasting connection to Country: beginning, ending and be accountable to Country.

Aboriginal stakeholders expressed a willingness to work in partnership with government on water management more broadly in Greater Sydney and:

- be more involved in decision making
- help the department set up and maintain a solid framework to care for Country
- take on a co-design and co-creation role.

Cultural significance of water

Description: Water is deeply entwined with Aboriginal culture. Water provides food, kinship, connection, recreation, stories, songlines and healing.

Healthy waterways are critical to the culture and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities across NSW. We need to improve water management in NSW to give greater recognition to Aboriginal water rights and interests and improve access to water, waterways and water-dependent cultural sites.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that cultural significance around water for Aboriginals should be more incorporated into the strategy.

Aboriginal stakeholders expressed a lack of Caring for Country and recognition of the spiritual significance of water in the draft strategy and requested more detail how the department would incorporate this into the strategy.

Protection of cultural sites

Description: Numerous Aboriginal cultural sites across NSW are near or are in water (such as fish-traps). The department recognises the cultural significance of these sites and their importance to Aboriginal people and NSW.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that protecting cultural sites around water for Aboriginal people should be further incorporated into the strategy.

Aboriginal stakeholders expressed a concern that cultural sites have been degraded since 1788 and more robust measures are needed to protect sites. They were also reluctant to publish specific locations over further fears of degradation.

Access rights to water and sites

Description: Water is deeply entwined with Aboriginal culture, health and wellbeing. While engagement with Aboriginal people around water management is improving, communities still lack access to water for cultural, social and economic purposes. We will work with Aboriginal people in Greater Sydney to develop appropriate outcomes and actions for the Greater Sydney Water Strategy, and also to review the Greater Sydney Water Sharing Plan.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that access rights to water and sites for Aboriginal people should be more incorporated into the strategy.

Aboriginal stakeholders expressed a strong need for access to water and sites to maintain a strong cultural connection to Country. There was also a need for recognised and improved rights and robust frameworks for access.

Economic opportunities

Description: Aboriginal people make invaluable contributions to Australia: our places, communities and economy. This strategy supports equity of access to market opportunities and improves financial security for Aboriginal families and communities.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that economic opportunities around water for Aboriginal should be further incorporated into the strategy.

The department want to work with Aboriginal people to grow the demand for Indigenous businesses, products and services. We continue to support entrepreneurs and communities to take advantage of commercial opportunities to start and expand businesses on eco-tourism, education and aquaculture using their invaluable cultural knowledge.

Preferences on water sources

Description: Water is considered by Aboriginal people to be a sacred gift that is critical to their identity and existence, as well as being economically important. The protection of water is bound by traditional lore and customs, which also have an influence on different water sources.

Feedback: We have heard through survey respondents, written submissions and community information session attendees that protecting cultural sites around water for Aboriginal people should be further incorporated into the strategy.

Aboriginal stakeholders expressed a view that in order to care for Country, we need to ensure better use of resources, better recycling and reuse, better ways of managing water to reduce impacts on Country and waterways.

Detailed feedback on priority actions

Priority 1: We understand how much water we need and when

Priority Action	Feedback received
1.1 Change the way we think about future water needs (enduring supply)	<p>There was strong support for changing how we think about future water needs including through the adoption of improved water conservation, adoption of new technology and supply solutions and improving how growth and land use is planned and managed</p> <p>There are varying levels of support for investments in future rainfall-independent water supply options, with very high levels of support for recycled water, strong support for purified recycled water and moderate support for desalination</p> <p>There was particular support for investigating recycled water options for non-drinking as well as the potential for purified recycled water, with a level of support for desalination</p> <p>A minority of community members expressed reservations about both purified recycled water for drinking and desalination due to perceptions around aspects of both technologies</p>
1.2 Consider future drought and climate risks	<p>There was a strong understanding from the community that water supply and demand planning needs to take into account uncertainties around climate and extreme weather events</p> <p>Community members indicated that while highly supportive of the need to plan for these events, more detail is needed in the final strategy</p> <p>Specifically, community members and stakeholders noted that more information is needed on potential options, locations and costs of rainfall-independent infrastructure.</p>

Priority 2: Our water systems are sustainable for the long-term and resilient to extreme events

Priority Action	Feedback received
2.1 A strong focus on water conservation and efficiency	<p>There was very high levels of support for water conservation and efficiency measures including those identified as options in the strategy.</p> <p>The community indicated that of all the supply and demand options on the table, water conservation and efficiency measures including the use of rainwater tanks, was the most preferable option.</p> <p>Community members provided feedback on a range of ways they believe water can be saved, with preferences towards improving water efficiency at the household and business levels.</p>
2.2 Make best use of the assets we have by optimising use of the Sydney Desalination Plant	<p>More people agreed than disagreed that desalination is an acceptable source of water to supply Sydney now and into the future.</p> <p>Some community members stated that it makes sense to use the Sydney Desalination Plant all the time, as the investment has previously been made and the infrastructure is in place to do so.</p> <p>There were some concerns at the energy intensity of the desalination process and cost impacts of running the plant continuously.</p>
2.3 Plan for new infrastructure with a focus on rainfall-independent supply	<p>There was a general view from the broader community that with dams currently at high levels, now is the right time to be carrying out planning work for rainfall independent supply.</p> <p>Key stakeholders including from some peak groups commended the approach of commencing discussions with the community around various options now, rather than waiting for another drought.</p> <p>The community and some stakeholders also expressed the view that long term planning should be equally focused on new rainfall independent supply as well as water conservation options.</p>
2.4 Manage location-specific or asset-specific risks	<p>There was an understanding among some stakeholders that more needs to be done to shore up the Greater Sydney water supply system in specific locations where the water supply is more vulnerable.</p> <p>Stakeholders and some community members noted that the Macarthur and Illawarra regions will require potential additional water supply sources or connections.</p> <p>A significant number of stakeholders commented on the need to identify risks in wastewater treatment and discharge and manage risks so as to reduce impacts on waterways.</p>

Priority Action	Feedback received
2.5 Respond to the impacts of flood mitigation decisions on the system	<p>There was significant commentary from the community demonstrating an understanding of separate decision-making processes on flood mitigation options such as Warragamba Dam wall raising.</p> <p>While there was not a broad level of support for the raising of dams and new dam infrastructure, key stakeholders demonstrated an understanding of decisions around flood mitigation on the overall system.</p>

Priority 3: Our city is green and liveable

Priority Action	Feedback received
3.1 Integrate water cycle and land use planning	<p>There were very high levels of support from the community and stakeholders for better integrated water cycle and land use planning.</p> <p>Key stakeholders, particularly in local government, expressed a clear willingness to work with and across government so that water and land use planning is more coordinated and holistic.</p> <p>Local government representatives expressed a strong interest in partnering with the department, Sydney Water and other agencies, at the same time expressing the need for new funding mechanisms and institutional frameworks to facilitate this.</p>
3.2 Support the design principles for Greater Sydney	<p>Local government stakeholders stated that the objectives, priorities and actions in the strategy including supporting the design principles for Greater Sydney, are broadly aligned with council objectives and strategies.</p> <p>Councils expressed strong support for specific actions to support the design principles, including urban sensitive water design, regulations such as BASIX, and greater reuse of water in greenfield growth areas.</p> <p>Stakeholders including local government requested that further specific information and case studies, and specific actions and funding information, be included in the final strategy.</p>
3.3 Prioritise alternative water sources for greening and cooling	<p>There was a very high level of support from across the community and among key stakeholders for using alternative water sources for greening and cooling.</p> <p>A significant volume of feedback included support for urban irrigation using captured and treated stormwater as well as recycled water.</p>

Priority Action	Feedback received
	Some stakeholders noted that new institutional frameworks and regulatory systems may be required to remove barriers to increased reuse for cooling and greening.
3.4 Progress a circular economy approach for water services	<p>There was a consensus among community members and stakeholders that a circular economy approach is required for Greater Sydney into the future.</p> <p>Key areas of concern from people were the need to reduce wastage including wasting of water, and the need to make better use of resources including water and energy, to assist in moving to ‘Net Zero’.</p> <p>Some stakeholders commended key initiatives such as Sydney Water’s plans for a bioresource hub in Western Sydney, but commented that more needed to be done and more specific examples should be included in the final strategy.</p>

Priority 4: Our waterways and landscapes are healthy

Priority Action	Feedback received
4.1 Maintain and improve ecosystem health	<p>A significant proportion of community members engaged with indicated a preference for water supply and wastewater management options that reduced environmental impacts and footprints.</p> <p>Community members and stakeholders living near and with interests in major waterways and natural environments expressed concern at past environmental impacts and degradations and had a strong desire to see environments ‘cleaned up’.</p> <p>There was a recognition of the profound importance of waterway health in terms of improvements to and protections of ecosystems with a wide range of suggested improvements and initiatives.</p>
4.2 Invest in wastewater management	<p>Community members and stakeholders understood the need for investments to improve, repair and replace wastewater assets including aging assets.</p> <p>People were strongly in support of options to reduce the impacts of wastewater discharges to the environment, although they would like to see more specific options and details in the final strategy.</p> <p>They understood and supported innovations and changes to how wastewater is managed, with a clear agreement that less wastewater should be discharged to coastal and river systems after only being used once, and more should be reused.</p>

Priority Action	Feedback received
4.3 Improve stormwater management	<p>Feedback from the community and stakeholders included a strong consensus that more stormwater needs to be captured, treated and reused.</p> <p>Stakeholders including local government showed a clear recognition that new growth areas in greenfield sites provided the most practical and cost effective way of reusing stormwater.</p> <p>Key stakeholders provided constructive feedback around the need for better frameworks, investment in treatment technologies, consideration of pollutants and most likely end uses of stormwater.</p>
4.4 Protect water for recreation	<p>Community members noted the importance of our waterways and their role in recreation in a metropolis surrounded by major iconic waterways.</p> <p>Some key stakeholders provided suggestions around improving or introducing recreational opportunities in waterways, for example improving swimmability in the Hawkesbury-Nepean River, and introducing recreation access to Prospect Reservoir.</p> <p>Community members and stakeholders including Aboriginal stakeholders expressed concern at the degradation of recreational waterways over time and expressed a strong desire for improvements.</p>

Priority 5: Water management and services meet community needs

Priority Action	Feedback received
5.1 Recognise and protect Aboriginal rights, interests and access to water	<p>Aboriginal stakeholders, local government and the wider community supported the need for greater Aboriginal involvement in ownership and decision-making in water management in Greater Sydney.</p> <p>Significant themes and feedback included emphasis on ensuring water access rights are maintained and improved to enable cultural and economic opportunities for Aboriginal people.</p> <p>Aboriginal stakeholders expressed a willingness to continue to work in partnership with government to guide the development of policy and initiatives.</p>
5.2 Enhance community confidence through	<p>Community members and stakeholders including Aboriginal and local government representatives expressed a clear desire for openness and transparency in decision-making around water management options.</p>

Priority Action	Feedback received
engagement and transparency	<p>A significant proportion of people commended the approach of building a demonstration plant for purified recycled water, to ensure the community has a chance to consider, observe and understand the technology works and how water quality is assured.</p> <p>Some community members expressed a view that there needs to be further levels of engagement on the priorities and actions in the strategy and the specific initiatives that may arise out of implementation of the strategy.</p>
5.3 Manage price impacts for customers	<p>Community members were generally understanding and supportive of the need to ensure funding is in place for new rainfall independent supply options.</p> <p>People are willing to pay moderately more on their water bills to support water conservation and recycling initiatives, though they are less willing to pay more for storage dams and desalination options.</p> <p>A proportion of community members expressed concerns over the potential for investment in the wrong priorities, with some also concerned about the impacts of higher water prices on socio-economically disadvantaged groups.</p>

Response to feedback

The table below gives an overview of the department's response to feedback received throughout the consultation period, which will be used to develop the final Greater Sydney Water Strategy and Implementation Plan.

The Greater Sydney Water Strategy Implementation Plan 2022-2025 shows the priorities, actions, responsibilities and key dates for implementing the strategy over the next 3 years.

Table 2 shows how the actions in the implementation plan link to key feedback on the draft strategy.

Table 2. How we have responded to feedback

Feedback	Who raised the issue	Proposed action in implementation plan
To provide a more sustainable and resilient water supply for Greater Sydney	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Survey respondentsWider public submissionsLocal government submissions	<p>2.1 a) Develop and maintain a detailed 5-year Water Efficiency Plan consistent with the long-term water efficiency goals for Sydney to save 38 GL/year of drinking water by 2030 and 49 GL/year by 2040.</p> <p>3.1 a) Embed integrated water management approaches in land use planning, including changes to regulatory instruments and processes to enable improvements in urban water cycle management.</p> <p>3.1 b) Complete a strategic plan taking an integrated approach for Sydney's urban water cycle including water, wastewater and stormwater to identify investments needed to address the risks from climate change, ageing infrastructure and a growing population, and to support delivery of waterway health objectives.</p>
To maintain and improve Greater Sydney's water quality and waterway health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Aboriginal webinar participantsSurvey respondentsWider public submissions	<p>4.1 a) Update water quality objectives for waterways, based on community and Indigenous cultural values in collaboration</p>

Feedback	Who raised the issue	Proposed action in implementation plan
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government submissions 	<p>with councils, Aboriginal communities and local catchment groups.</p> <p>4.1 b) Scope a water quality and river health monitoring governance framework for Greater Sydney's waterways, including assessment of existing data in relation to water quality objectives.</p>
Plan and deliver new infrastructure with a focus on rainfall-independent supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey respondents • Wider public submissions • Local government submissions 	<p>2.5 b) Construct and commence operation of a purified recycled water demonstration plant in the Sydney Basin by July 2023.</p> <p>2.5 c) Engage with the community to understand preferences for additional water supplies—including the use of purified recycled water—and demand management measures to secure water supplies and help make Sydney a more liveable city within 3 years.</p> <p>Any new water supply option, including desalination and purified recycled water, would only be introduced to Sydney's water supply system following community consultation and stringent Government approvals.</p>
To explore and maximise water supply options and investigate funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey respondents • Wider public submissions 	<p>2.3 a) Complete planning for portfolios of rainfall-independent supply augmentation, system resilience and water security options. This will include how to manage system risks associated with resilience and climate change.</p> <p>5.3 a) Work with Sydney Water and IPART to identify mechanisms that can lessen price increases and ensure investment in water</p>

Feedback	Who raised the issue	Proposed action in implementation plan
		<p>infrastructure is supported by fair and reasonable pricing structures.</p> <p>5.3 b) Facilitate the reintroduction of water developer charges.</p> <p>5.3 c) Review and refine hardship policies, concessions and other measures.</p>
Improve stormwater management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey respondents • Wider public submissions • Local government submissions 	<p>4.3 a) Complete a strategic assessment of a regional approach to stormwater management in the Western Parkland City.</p> <p>4.3 b) Continue to work with local government to improve stormwater management across established suburbs, including measures to improve waterway health and amenity through stormwater renewals and integrated water cycle planning for urban infill and redevelopment areas.</p>
Optimise operation of the Sydney Desalination Plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey respondents • Wider public submissions • Local government submissions 	<p>2.2 a) Amend the Sydney Desalination Plant operating rules to provide flexible operation and optimise its contribution to water supply security and drought management.</p> <p>2.2 b) Report annually on the operation and production of the Sydney Desalination Plant.</p>
Support greening and cooling principles for Greater Sydney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey respondents • Wider public submissions • Local government submissions 	<p>2.5 a) Complete long-term capital and operating plan detailing 20-year investment needs to meet growth, renewals, service standards, and Greater Sydney Water Strategy outcomes adopting an integrated water cycle management approach.</p>

Feedback	Who raised the issue	Proposed action in implementation plan
		<p>3.2 a) Review BASIX and NABERS to improve water management and sustainable water use.</p> <p>3.3 a) Promote integrated water cycle management approaches to enable alternative water sources to support place-based outcomes including amenity cooling and greening.</p>
Consider future climate change and drought risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey respondents • Wider public submissions • Local government submissions 	<p>1.2 a) Publish information on the latest climate change modelling and consider how this modelling and data might be used to consider future supply and demand projections to inform future infrastructure planning.</p> <p>1.2 b) Contribute to the development of the <i>NSW Climate Change Adaptation Strategy</i> (under development).</p>
Drive towards a circular economy and net zero emissions for water services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey respondents • Wider public submissions • Local government submissions 	<p>3.4 a) Develop a strategy and implementation plan to transition water services in Sydney towards a circular economy model to support delivery of the NSW Government's targets of net zero emissions by 2050 and to reduce emissions by 50% below 2005 levels by 2030.</p> <p>3.4 b) Explore opportunities to incorporate food, energy, water and waste processing in new or upgraded wastewater treatment facilities.</p>
Recognise and protect Aboriginal rights, interests and access to water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal webinar participants • Survey respondents • Wider public submissions • Local government submissions 	<p>5.1 Recognise and protect Aboriginal rights, interests and access to water.</p> <p>5.1 a) Deliver actions through the NSW Water Strategy.</p>

Feedback	Who raised the issue	Proposed action in implementation plan
		5.1 b) Embed aboriginal water values and knowledge in water planning and management supported by data sovereignty and intellectual property protections.

Next steps

During the public exhibition of the draft Greater Sydney Water Strategy, over 700 people directly engaged with the Department of Planning and Environment through a range of engagement activities, including online community information sessions, formal submissions, a comprehensive online survey and direct contact with the department.

Feedback received from the community and stakeholders demonstrated a moderate to strong degree of support for many of the objectives, priorities and actions proposed by the draft strategy. There was strong public support for water conservation initiatives, integrated water cycle management approaches, better adoption of water sensitive urban design and a cooler and greener Greater Sydney with healthier waterways and protection of biodiversity.

A range of positive feedback was received around the potential for purified recycled water for drinking, particularly the proposal to build a demonstration plant to highlight the safety and efficacy of the technology. More people supported than did not support expanded desalination options for Greater Sydney. There were also moderate levels of concern around these technologies that may need to be addressed through further community education and engagement into the future. Any future decision to include purified recycled water in the drinking water supply would be subject to community consultation and require stringent Government approvals. There was less support for the building of further dams in Greater Sydney and for the use of groundwater as part of the water supply.

Overall, more people supported or strongly supported the objectives, priorities and actions proposed by the draft strategy than opposed or strongly opposed them. The feedback also indicated that people understood the need for a range, or portfolio, of future water supply options rather than relying upon a single option.

The department recognises further work needs to be done with Aboriginal organisations and communities to incorporate the themes into the strategy:

- ownership and management of water across Greater Sydney
- cultural significance of water
- protection of cultural sites
- access rights to water and sites
- economic opportunities
- preferences on water sources.

The department recognises the significant effort from stakeholders and community in contributing to the development and finalisation of the Greater Sydney Water Strategy.

Finalising the strategy

With the levels of support and positive or constructive feedback provided during the public exhibition, the department does not envisage the need for significant changes to the broad content or direction of the draft when finalising the strategy.

The final strategy includes an implementation plan with proposed initiatives, roles and responsibilities to ensure a more sustainable and resilient water supply for Greater Sydney.

Community feedback received on the draft GSWS has been a significant influence on the shaping and development of the implementation Plan. Many of the actions in the Implementation Plan recognise the need for further community input being a major consideration in shaping the Implementation Plan.

Framework for review

Once the strategy is finalised and publicised, we will establish an integrated framework for reviewing and reporting against the strategy and will formally evaluate, review and update the Greater Sydney Water Strategy at least every five years.

The strategy will be supported by a robust monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework for the implementation of the plan including information on how the initiatives and actions identified will be underpinned by long-term investment.

Continual monitoring is essential to give the community confidence that the actions from the strategy are being implemented correctly, that they are benchmarked, and that these targets are delivering on the environmental, economic, social and cultural objectives of the strategy.

Further engagement

The NSW Government acknowledges the importance of better communication with, and the more effective involvement of, all stakeholders in water management decisions and water resource planning.

This includes Aboriginal communities, environmental groups, industry, local government and the broader community. We recognise that these diverse water users need access to reliable and timely information to make informed decisions on business and investment risk, and to participate in the water market.

We continue to improve how we consult on water-related projects, reforms and strategies and we are committed to making clear and concise information about water sharing and management easy to find and understand.