



WaterNSW Pricing Proposal 2025 – 2030

# Phase 1 Customer and Community Insights Report

September 2023

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## Acknowledgment of Country

WaterNSW acknowledges all First Nations people throughout NSW, their connection and legacy to this country is continually shown through their ongoing spiritual, physical and cultural knowledge and practices of the lands and waters.

We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge their ongoing connection and commitment to the waters and lands on which we operate.

We recognise their vast cultural knowledge and management of country and will work with them to implement an Engagement Strategy that captures this knowledge, and the issues that matter most to our First Nations communities when it comes to the future of water in NSW.

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# Executive summary

WaterNSW has made a commitment to better listen and respond to customers, stakeholders and the community, placing customers at the front and centre of decision making.

In 2022 and 2023 WaterNSW embarked on a new way of interacting with its stakeholders. It has been listening and analysing, using data and insights, having multiple conversations all around the state and asking people for their thoughts on what is important to them, about how water services are managed by WaterNSW.

In order to provide its essential delivery services and to adequately respond to challenges, WaterNSW needs to understand the services that customers value, as well as the varied and sometimes changing needs of customers.

This Customer and Community Insights Report (Phase 1 Report) contains a summary of those conversations, the insights and intel gathered over the period January to September 2023, who WaterNSW spoke to and how they went about it. The Report has been prepared to guide and support WaterNSW's Pricing Proposal submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in 2024, covering the period 2025-2030.

These conversations and consultations have been the starting point for identifying topics and issues to feed into this pricing proposal. Activities in this first phase of consultation aimed to capture high-level thinking around issues and desired outcomes from customers, stakeholders and the wider community for the period 2025-2030.

WaterNSW adopts an ongoing approach to engagement with its customers and stakeholders. Conversations continue to update stakeholders on developments and projects, and strategies are regularly tested.

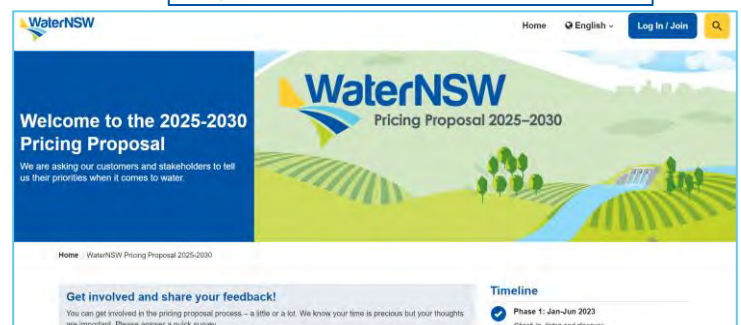
## Our engagement objectives

The engagement approach was underpinned by IPART's six principles for good engagement:

- Meaningful and sincere engagement
- Diverse and inclusive engagement that is accessible and tailored to the customer base
- Balance customer, and environmental needs
- Relevant, timely, and appropriate
- Transparent and accountable
- Representative, reliable, and valid design

We are mindful of the cost shares for WaterNSW bulk water charges; 66% is met by customers and 33% met by the wider community through their taxes via the NSW Government.

WaterNSW's *Customer and Community Engagement Strategy 2023 and 2024* published in May 2023. (above) The engagement process is supported by a comprehensive campaign website.



With this in mind, we wanted to introduce the Pricing Proposal to as many people as possible and give them an opportunity to:

- Receive information
- Provide their feedback
- Participate in discussions on the 13 pricing proposals for the delivery of bulk water to regulated rivers across NSW and to Greater Sydney via Sydney Water.

## Our achievements

We reached out to

- Our 41,000 customers
- Over 11,000 direct email points
- All local governments across New South Wales
- The wider community, with ads in 26 publications

We spoke to

- Our customers, largely comprised of:
  - People holding a water access licence
  - Private irrigators and irrigation companies
  - Environmental water holders, and
  - Local councils
- Industry groups
- Environment experts
- First Nations communities across NSW
- The wider community

- IPART, our regulator

We attended

- Six regional field days
- Four water industry and association briefings
- Specialist events for recreational groups and environment groups
- 36 meetings with the WaterNSW customer advisory groups

We heard from

- More than 500 people at field days and other in-person events.
- Over 550 respondents to our online survey
- Over 95 different organisations belonging to the WaterNSW customer advisory groups.

## The process of engaging with customers and the community

The flowchart below summarises the steps to consider what our customers and the community need from WaterNSW for the period 2025 – 2030. The engagement is designed around these key questions. Phase 1 forms the first step in this process.

What are the issues our customers see for 2025-2030? What outcomes do customers and community need and want?

What do those things cost? What are the wider costs required in 2025-2030? Does this change the outcomes we want to see?

What do all the costs look like together and what customer charges are required? Does this change the outcomes we want to see?

How do we measure success in the period 2025-2030?

Phase 1 – this report

## What we heard leading up to 2023

The insights gained from conversations and feedback from 2020 to 2023 led to a starting point for this engagement. These information sources are listed below.

### 2020/2021

- Voice of the Customer research
- Stakeholder perceptions audit
- Kitchen table conversations
- WaterNSW Customer feedback and complaints
- Customer Advisory Group meetings
- Ministerial submissions

### 2022/2023

- Voice of the Customer research
- WAMC – What matters to our customers
- WaterNSW Customer feedback and complaints
- Customer Advisory Group meetings
- Ministerial submissions

The topics from all of this data are listed below and became our starting point for considering the outcomes that people want to see from WaterNSW and water delivery.

#### Service Delivery

- Delivery and management of water
- Availability of water including flows and allocations
- Sustainability issues
- Levels of service to different customers
- Adaptability – can we effectively change our processes in accordance with new circumstances?
- Rural flood mitigation

#### Relationships

- Customer touch points need to be effective and efficient customer support when it is needed
- Customer education
- Information and updates
- Ability for customers to provide feedback

#### Commercial matters

- Affordability
- Transparency of pricing
- Value for money and service levels
- Landowner and business operator financial vulnerability



## What we heard in 2023 - January to September

### Across the state

When looking more broadly across the state and at prior engagement and research, we learnt that (in no order):

- Reliable and consistent customer service delivered by local WaterNSW staff is highly valued.
- Customers understand that prices are increasing but this increase must be at a sustainable rate and communicated clearly. Small agricultural producers in particular are strained by a history of price increases and external costs.
- Customers feel doing business with WaterNSW could be improved. Systems are complex and time consuming.
- WaterNSW investment in good corporate citizenship, including environmental care projects, would be supported.
- Water reliability and security is a priority – with the drought approaching and some felt fairer distribution of water between customers is needed.
- There is support within First Nations communities for a review in Cultural Water Access and Licensing, to better enable First Nations' communities to directly manage water in support of their values and cultural sites. Greater engagement is needed with First Nations communities.

Amongst our online survey respondents, the three key issues that mattered the most were (in order):

- Water security
- Water affordability
- Sustainable water and land management.

### From our Customer Advisory Groups

The Customer Advisory Groups by their nature are operationally focused. As a result, their big picture issues and subsequent outcomes, identified over two sessions in February and July 2023, focused on topics that would make a material difference to how they operate.

Big picture issues included the need for (in no order):

- Local and on the ground WaterNSW services with local knowledge and relationships considered vital to agricultural producers.
- Improved ease of doing business with WaterNSW, and improved transparency into WaterNSW activities and charges.
- Improved sustainability – river health, water quality and carbon neutrality.
- Water security and conservation.
- Infrastructure maintenance activities and transparency around costs.
- Financial sustainability to be considered as part of planning delivery services. This was the priority for participants with the request that if charges and costs are to increase, they do so at a rate that is sustainable to businesses. Financial sustainability was a particular concern for small businesses.
- Issues of fairness and some flexibility in rule making and enforcement, with examples of the impracticability of some rules.

In July and August the Customer Advisory Group members considered the outcomes they wanted to see in 2025-2030. They refined their issues to changes they felt were material and achievable. Across all the groups their combined top three priorities were to achieve:

- Much greater transparency of WaterNSW and Water Administration Ministerial Corporation costs and pricing
- Water security and an assurance of allocations being delivered, to help them plan ahead
- Better drought planning, priorities for water restrictions and water conservation

## Across the valleys

Overall, the top issues raised in our conversations across the valleys were consistently the following:

- Water security
- Water affordability
- Sustainable water and land management.

Each valley has a different makeup of customers, community and physical environment (river conditions, regulated assets such as dams etc), resulting in differences in how people prioritise their issues. Below is a brief snapshot of what was uniquely raised in each valley.

### Murray-Lower Darling

*Pricing that is good for all parties (is my priority).*

Customers value and support sustainable initiatives but not if this negatively affects water affordability and customer charges.

### Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee

*...We should ensure good quality water is available where and when it is needed...*

Reliable and accessible water is paramount. A consistent supply of water and water allocations means farmers, for example, have enough water to do their work and maintain their livelihood and that of their communities.

### Gwydir

*While understanding the needs of big irrigators, it is crucial to balance their requirements with environmental considerations.*

Participants in this valley seek a balance between ensuring reliable access to water for local irrigators and maintaining a healthy river environment and ecosystem (including water quality).

### Border Rivers

*An attempt to simplify allocation decisions, and make them more transparent would be appreciated...*

Simplified and transparent water allocations are desired. Closely tied to this was the importance placed on access to local WaterNSW staff.

### Namoi-Peel

*WaterNSW should be providing fair and equitable fees and achieving efficiencies over the long term.*

Customers in this valley desire greater ease and accessibility in their working relationship with WaterNSW. Fair and accessible fees for services were requested.

### Macquarie-Cudgegong

*Affordable, secure and reliable water supply is very important.*

People desire a reliable water supply and effective water management including improved timeframes for approvals and licensing processes. As part of this, customers want fair and transparent water allocations and direct relationships with the river operators who they see as highly knowledgeable.

### Lachlan

*The emphasis should be shifted from irrigation requirements to environmental considerations regarding the release of water.*

Safe and secure supply of water was seen as a priority to ensure drinking supply, healthy environmental flows, and a stable farming industry. Clearer communications and tariff reform is also a key issue for this area.

### Barwon-Darling

*It is key that environmental water managers and WaterNSW continue to work together.*

This is an unregulated river system and as such their interest relates to Water Administration Ministerial Corporation charges. Clear, effective, and transparent wider communication on river water management and to customers providing much more clarity on invoicing is important. A better understanding of the rules, for example floodplain management, is also important. Customers want to understand how allocation decisions are made given the size of farms and have concerns about the rules for water pumping over specific short time periods and the impact this has on large farms operations.

## Greater Sydney

*Regular monitoring and testing of the WaterNSW network. A coordinated approach will allow us to guarantee the supply of water for future generations and safeguard the population against flood risks.*

The majority of WaterNSW charges for the Sydney Basin go to Sydney Water and combined with the magnitude of infrastructure supplying water to Sydney, Sydney Water is a critical customer. Other smaller customers include irrigators, industry and local government.

The issues raised in Sydney Water's engagement process relevant to water supply and WaterNSW prioritise:

- Protecting and maintaining safe and clean drinking water
- Ensuring waterways/water recreation areas remain clean and safe to use
- Enhancing the water network's resilience to drought

Of lesser importance are outcomes relating to water smell and taste and reducing the frequency and duration of severe water restrictions.

The North Coast, South Coast, Hunter regions are different in that the river systems are unregulated – there are many rivers from the great dividing range to the coast and customers also extensively use groundwater.

*We want transparency about smaller expenditures that matter to day- to-day operations.*

Customers in this valley are facing increased prices for maintaining this ageing infrastructure despite their reduction in water usage. They are concerned about quality, price and availability of water pressures – especially as we enter the next dry period. Future planning and close coordination with the two customer councils is important.

## Next steps engagement for the pricing proposal

As noted on the flow chart on page 2, the focus of Phase 2 is to examine:

- What does it cost to achieve these outcomes?
- What are the other costs needed in 2025-2030?
- Does this understanding of cost and charges change the outcomes we want to see?

The customer and community inputs to the proposal are obtained from several engagement mechanisms shown below.

Phase 2 engagement in the second half of 2023 focusses on

- the 2025-2030 Water Working Groups which are consulting with a wide range of customers and community on charges, and
- the Customer Advisory Groups which have a specific focus on future improvements to the water delivery mechanisms.



For the first time, the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation (WaterNSW; Department of Planning and Environment – Water, and the Natural Resources Access Regulator) have joined together with a diverse group of customers and community to explore outcomes and costs for the period 2025-2030.

# 1. Structure of this report – how we have presented engagement findings





## 1.1 Engagement leading up to 2023 (ongoing conversations)

Prior to 2023, a number of customer and community engagement activities gathered valuable insights.

In 2021, WaterNSW conducted a perceptions audit study. This study assessed stakeholder needs, examined WaterNSW's reputation, identified driving factors, and evaluated trust levels with customers and stakeholders. The primary insights gained from this audit were instrumental in shaping subsequent engagements.

Another initiative called "Kitchen Table conversations" took place in 2021. This program encouraged people to engage in discussions using a provided discussion kit. Valuable insights were gathered through these conversations creating an understanding of stakeholders' perspectives.

Additionally, over the years the Customer Advisory Group meetings played a crucial role

in regular consultations with a diverse range of customers. These meetings provided a platform for discussing issues relevant to WaterNSW's obligations under the WaterNSW Operating Licence and Customer Service Charter.

NSW Department of Planning and Environment – Water (DPE Water) conducted a comprehensive desktop analysis of 17 relevant engagement outcomes reports on Draft Regional Water Strategies and other materials. This analysis provided valuable inputs to inform WaterNSW's decision-making.

Overall, these pre-2023 activities have greatly contributed to WaterNSW's understanding of stakeholder needs, customer preferences, and priorities, forming a solid foundation for the current engagement program and the forthcoming Pricing Proposal.

### About our Customer Advisory Groups (CAGs)

- The CAGs have been developed as broadly representative groups across each NSW river valley to engage in water delivery planning and administration issues.
- Membership of CAGs includes WaterNSW customers from regulated, unregulated and groundwater systems, including industrial and commercial water users, stock and domestic water users, major water utilities, local water utilities, local government, environmental water users and Aboriginal cultural heritage water users.
- The CAGs reflect some 95 different water user organisations and meet several times a year.
- Historically they have called for greater transparency in billing and water administration for all water users, both large and small.
- The CAGs have noted the difficulty faced by WaterNSW (and themselves) in engaging all water license holders and have called for more water license voices to be heard in the Pricing Proposal process.
- They have accepted the wider engagement approach for this Pricing Proposal and urged WaterNSW to have more in field conversations.
- Their recommendations for good practice engagement are outlined in further detail on page 44.

## 1.2 Engagement for Phase 1, 2023

The purpose of engagement for Phase 1 was to test and deepen our understanding of customer priorities, to meet IPART's requirement for broader engagement and to lay the foundations for developing meaningful engagement in the next phase. This holistic approach aimed to capture wider insights, ideas and issues with a view to:

- Assessing what customers value,
- Discussing how to improve cost efficiency, and
- Achieving a higher level of credibility in the community and establishing enduring engagement.

To achieve this, engagement activities for Phase 1 2023 have included attending:

- Regional Field Days and conducting intercept surveys
- CAG meetings
- Industry group discussions
- First Nations discussions
- Reconciliation Action Plan Committee discussions

- First Nations Roadshow
- A recreational water festival
- Rice Growers Conference and other water user events.

At all these events we encouraged customers and community to participate in a survey. We handed out postcards that identify the WaterNSW website and how to get involved.

WaterNSW has also increased its outreach by:

- Promoting links to the website and survey to 39,000 followers on its social media pages (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Including information on the price engagement in over 15,000 newsletter inserts to customers, and in approx 23,000 bills.
- Publishing advertisements in 21 newspapers in regional NSW (online and print).
- Engaging with media
- Using industry and networks to spread the word.



## 1.3 How the issues have been captured

This report examines the issues raised across all engagement activities. The insights prior to 2023 provided the starting point for the engagement program on the Pricing Proposal, resulting in a set of topics used to start the process more formally with the customer advisory groups.

From this, a wider and more nuanced list of issues was developed. These are considered in the subsequent analysis.

The issues list below guides how we arrange and analyse the results of this engagement.

The table classifies the issues by two tiers: Tier 1 represents overarching, high-level problems, while Tier 2 consists of more specific sub-issues derived from Tier 1.

The results of these insights and of Phase 1 activities are presented in three ways:

- By Tier 1 and 2 issues (list is below).
- By stakeholder segment.
- As issues across the state and then as issues by regulated river valley.

### Issues list

Tier 1	Tier 2
Engagement and relationships	Ongoing information flow and access to data
	Early warning systems
	Information to help businesses
	Education about WaterNSW functions (and how funds are spent)
	Advocacy for water access licence holders regarding perceptions on their water impact
	Ongoing role of the Customer Advisory Groups
Water affordability	Transparency of costs and pricing
	Tariffs and cost sharing
	Postage stamp pricing
	The cost of water and the ability for small farms to operate
Water security and delivery including delivery rules	Water security and assurance of allocations being delivered
	Water delivery rules and services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allocations and water provided</li><li>• When customers are charged</li><li>• Accuracy of meters and flexibility</li></ul>
	Water infrastructure and other delivery costs
	Asset maintenance management and communication with licence holders
	Requirement for valley specific water rules
	Floodwater management and access (fair and accessible)

Tier 1	Tier 2
Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules	Ease of doing business water ordering
	Water ordering system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of mind rules</li> <li>• Ability to trade with other people ordering water</li> </ul>
	Customer incentives for water preservation during or planning for a drought
Bill transparency	Transparency of costs and pricing
	Transparency of WaterNSW investment costs in the system
Good customer experiences	Customer information packs and educative tools
	Issues relating to the difference in regulated and unregulated systems
	Customer confusion regarding the regulatory roles of WNSW and DPEW, NRAR
	Communication of upcoming infrastructure works and cyclical maintenance programs that affect water access
	Customer service and the shift to digital
	Lack of field staff, suggested ways to improve customer service
Easy access to data and information	Water Insights platform
	Water models and datasets need alignment
	Data transfer and management
Sustainable water and land management	Water quality in the river systems (BAU)
	Water quality post flood events
	Environmental water – flow, timing, allocation, rule flexibility
	Environmental accountability and responsibility
	Better drought planning, priorities for water restrictions and water conservation
	Water licence trading and transparency Hazard reduction burns around regional NSW dams
Cultural water	Capacity building for First Nations Peoples
	Engagement methodologies
	Demonstrate better governance of water
	Ownership of infrastructure for cultural water usage
	Shared knowledge of Aboriginal women as a priority
	Recognition of cultural relationship to water
Access to good recreational facilities at WaterNSW sites	

Table 1: Tier 1 and 2 issues list



## 2. About WaterNSW and the Pricing Proposal for the period 2025-2030



## 2.1 WaterNSW 5-year Corporate Strategy 2021

At WaterNSW our purpose is customer focused: *Water, delivered when and where it matters.*

Our vision is to support the resilience of NSW communities through our leadership in delivering water services, for generations to come.

We have five strategic priorities to help us deliver for our customers and realise our vision, shown below. Each reflect what is important to our stakeholders, communities and customers.



Figure 1: WaterNSW Corporate vision 2023



## 2.2 WaterNSW services and activities

With 41 dams across the State, WaterNSW supplies two-thirds of the water used by regional towns, irrigators, Sydney Water Corporation and local water utilities.

We own and operate the largest surface and groundwater monitoring network in the southern hemisphere; we build, maintain and operate essential infrastructure.

We provide services to around 41,000 licence and approval holders across 13 rural river valleys in NSW and Greater Sydney.

We are responsible for delivering environmental flows on regulated rivers. Our customers across these locations are largely comprised of:

- Private irrigators and irrigation companies

- Environmental water holders, and
- Local councils

Each valley in NSW is a water management area and has a water source. The map below shows all the valleys across the state, which have different tariff arrangements and water delivery infrastructure. In effect a decision on future charges is made for each valley.

We are committed to improving our engagement with First Nations peoples across all aspects of our operations and projects, including this Pricing Proposal.

Figure 2: NSW Water Valleys receiving bulk water delivery



# Agencies that are involved in the delivery of water across NSW.

The image below shows the objectives of:

- The Department of Planning – Water
- WaterNSW
- The Natural Resources Access Regulator
- Other local water utilities such as Sydney Water

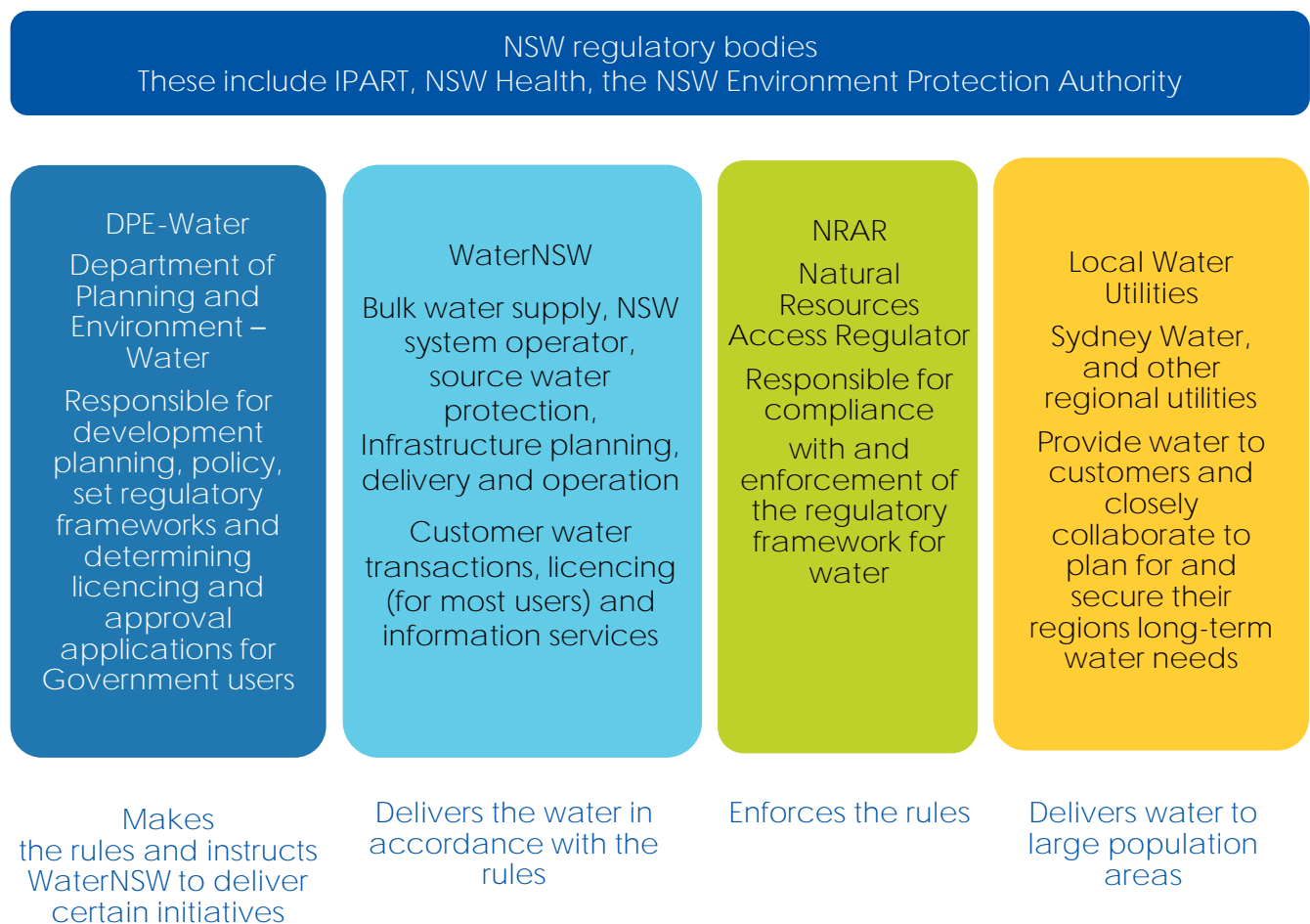


Figure 3a: NSW water agencies overview



## Services Provided

The services each agency provide are listed in the image below, and this reflects how charges appear on a water customer's invoice.

There are charges provided to customers for:

- WaterNSW bulk water supply to rural valleys and Sydney Water
- WAMC services
- Murray Darling Basin Authority services

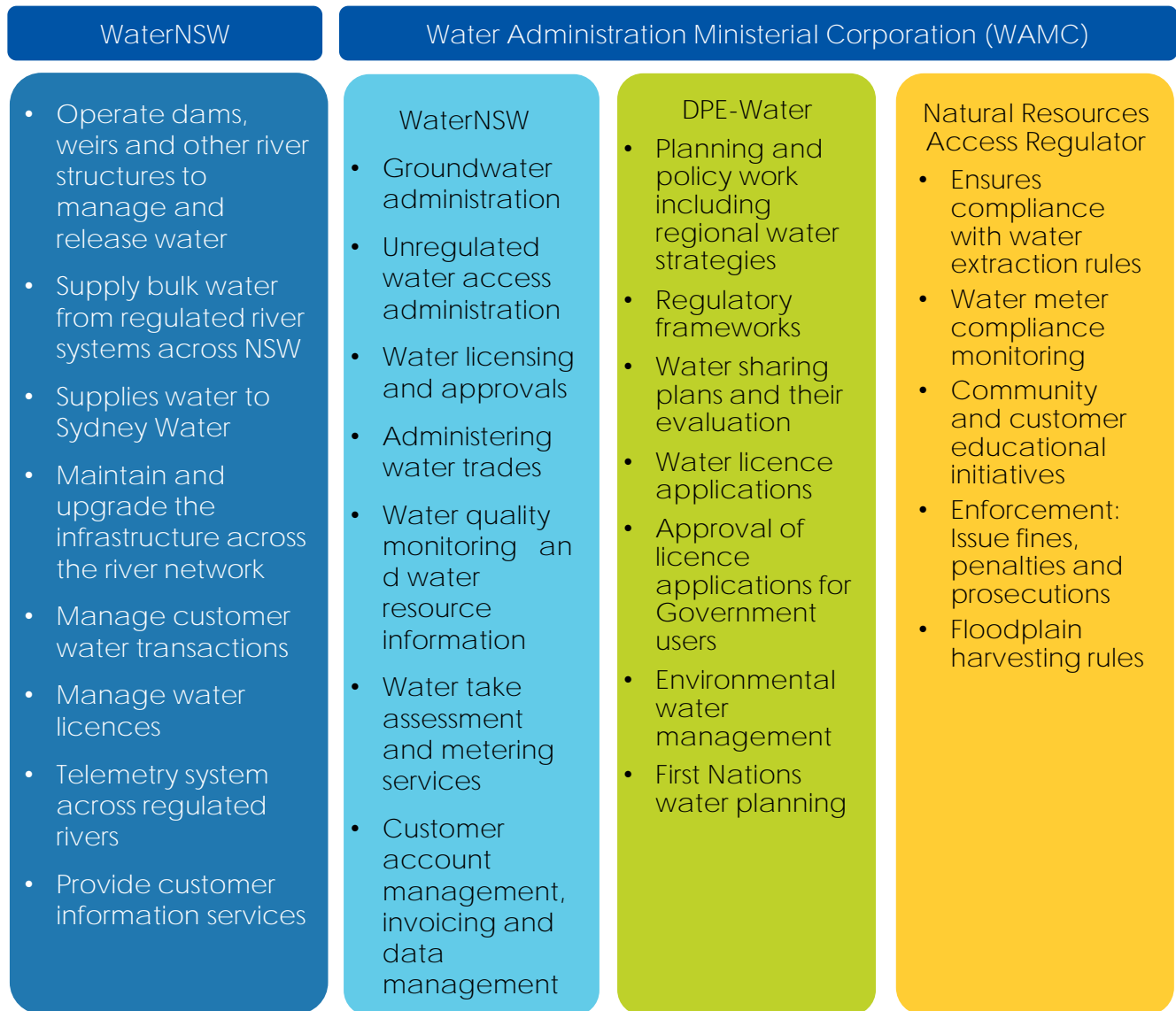
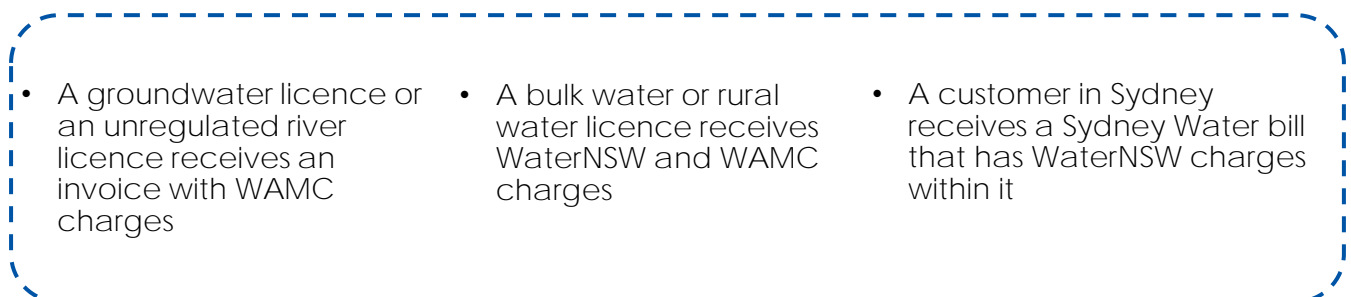


Figure 3b: NSW water agencies overview of services provided

### How charges appear on customer bills



## 2.3 The 2025-2030 Pricing Proposal

### Focusing on what matters most to our customers and community

This Customer and Community Insights and Outcomes Report (Phase 1 Report) has been prepared to guide and support WaterNSW's Pricing Proposal submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in 2024 for the period 2025-30.

A pricing proposal is a document submitted to IPART that sets out how we propose to deliver our essential services, meet operating licence conditions, and deliver on agreed customer outcomes.

IPART's regulatory framework is centred around customer value. This enables water businesses to focus on efficiently providing services that customers value.

IPART assesses these pricing proposals using the '3Cs' Framework:

- Customer value: services and expenditure
- Costs: transparent, prudent and efficient costs
- Credibility: assurance that a Proposal is deliverable and can continuously improve.

Attachment A explains the IPART guiding principles.



## 2.4 Our 2023/2024 engagement journey

WaterNSW adopts an ongoing approach to engagement with our customers and stakeholders. Conversations continue to keep stakeholders updated on developments and projects, and strategies are regularly tested. This approach to engagement has provided a robust starting point for the 2025-2030 Pricing Proposal, where WaterNSW will place its customers front and centre of decision-making.

The journey map below shows the steps for engaging on the pricing proposal – how we plan to capture customer priorities to shape the business's strategic and investment plans for the period 2025-2030.

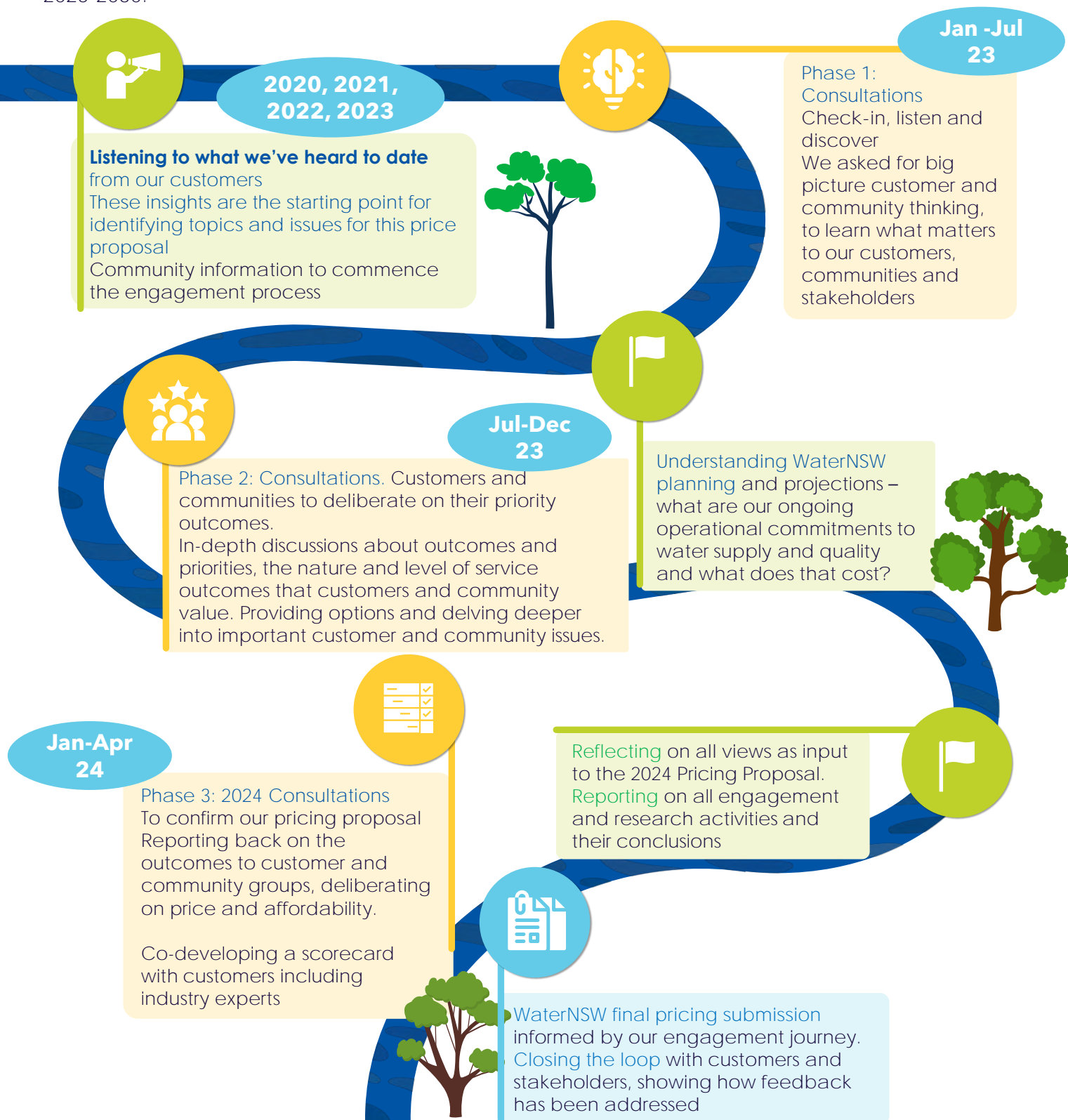


Figure 4: Our journey at a glance

## 2.5 IPART's expectations for this process

### IPART's requirements for the Pricing Proposal

As noted, Attachment A explains IPART's guiding principles. Our work has paid particular attention to the following advice from IPART's guidelines:

#### Good engagement

*Businesses are expected to detail how it incorporated insights and learnings from customer engagement into its plans and proposal. This includes:*

- *how customer engagement was used to identify the focus principles underpinning a business's proposal*
- *how the business considered and balanced any divergent views*
- *how it proposes to manage any potential trade-offs to keep the long-term interests of customers at the core of all plans.*

*A business's proposal would set out customer, community and environmental outcomes and associated performance measures.*

#### Understanding the outcomes that customers want

*We expect a business to develop customer, community and environment outcomes through its engagement with its customers.*

*Outcomes are statements that reflect what customers want and value. Proposed outcomes should reflect the feedback provided and decisions made in response to customer engagement, driving improved customer value.*

*They should be written from the customer's perspective, be short and succinct, avoid technical jargon and be readily understood by the business's customers, as well as being within the business's realm of control (ie credible). There is no set limit on how many outcomes a business must develop. However, we would expect the business to propose outcomes across each of the customer, community, and environmental dimensions.*

### What does good engagement look like to IPART?

IPART has six principles for good engagement, and these have been adopted by WaterNSW, as follows.

1. Meaningful and sincere engagement
2. Diverse and inclusive engagement that is accessible and tailored to the customer base
3. Balance customer and environmental needs
4. Relevant, timely, and appropriate
5. Transparent and accountable
6. Representative, reliable, and valid design



## IPART's expectations are to engage with both customers and the wider community

Our customers and stakeholders are located across wide geographic distances. They include all those who interact with our dams, storages and river operations, local communities and customers – big and small. Customers use water in different ways and in different volumes. It is important to us and our regulator that everyone can contribute to the discussion about the priorities and outcomes that matter most to them. As such, we are engaging both customers and the wider community on their outcomes and priorities when it comes to water in NSW.

### Customers

Customers drive outcomes

- Propose outcomes based on customer engagement that capture what customers want delivered.
- Link proposed expenditure to these outcomes

Performance measures support outcomes

- Propose performance measures for each outcome.
- Propose performance targets for each measure referencing IPART's principles with:
  - internally consistent short-, medium- and long-term targets
  - targets justified based on past performance and other suitable industry benchmarks
  - targets that, at a minimum, meet customer protection operating licence standards and other regulatory requirements.

Accountability for customer outcomes

- Clear mechanisms ensure the business is accountable for delivering outcomes.

### Community

Identify community outcomes

- Engage with and consider the broader community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to identify community outcomes.
- Assess the benefits and costs to the customer of delivering on broader community values, as they relate to the provision of regulated services.
- Consider costs, benefits and bill impacts before proposing expenditures.

Community outcome performance measures

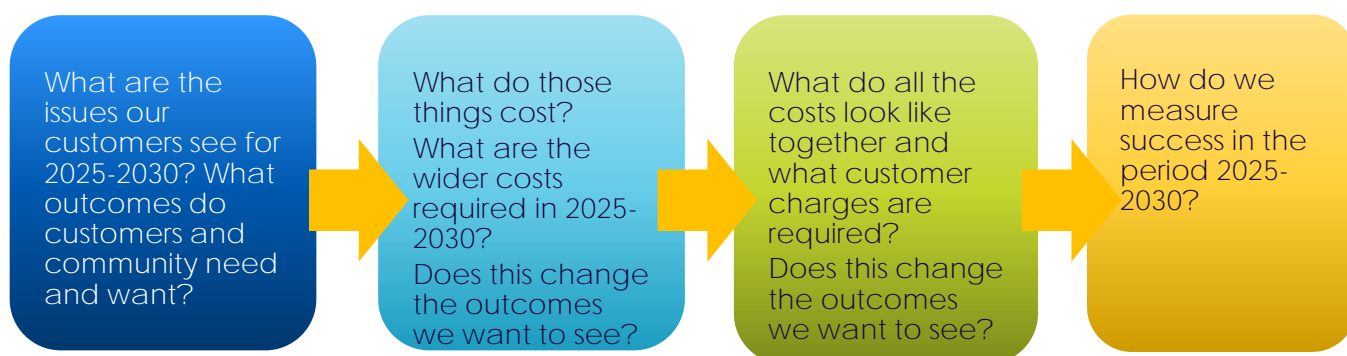
Community outcomes have targets that are measurable, have intermediate steps and milestones built in (as needed).

Accountability for community outcomes

Clear mechanisms ensure the business is accountable for delivering community outcomes.

Source: IPART handbook

The questions that we need to ask our customers and the community and the steps to do that is described in the image below.




## 2.6 International Association of Public Participation – a best practice engagement framework

Best practice community engagement is established by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2). The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is shown below. It helps with the selection of the level **of participation that defines the public's role** in any community engagement program.

The spectrum shows that different levels of participation depend on the goals, time frame, resources and levels of concern in the

decision to be made. Most importantly, the spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each level of participation.

Across our 41,000 customers there are varying expectations and preferences to be engaged in driving the WaterNSW regulated valleys investment plans. Customer engagement on the Price Proposals ranges from information to collaboration.

Increasing impact on the decision 					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Our engagement is underpinned by the following IAP2 core values:

- A belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
- Includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- Promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
- Seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
- Seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
- Provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
- Communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

### 3. Who are our WaterNSW customers and community?



## 3.1 Engagement segments

Below is a snapshot of our customers and stakeholders. Some may fall into more than one category.

When speaking with customers and the broader community, we have asked them to identify their river valley location and how they would describe themselves and their relationship to WaterNSW.

Our stakeholder groups include:

- Regulated river customers
- Unregulated river customers
- Groundwater customers
- Environmental stakeholders
- First Nations stakeholders
- Community members and groups
- Government agencies
- Recreational water users
- Industry groups



### Customers

Customers can be small or large water users. They can depend on water partially or wholly for their operations.

- People who hold a water access licence in regulated rivers
- People who hold a licence for unregulated rivers and groundwater
- Environmental water customers
- Local water utilities and councils
- Sydney Water
- Commercial users of our dams



### First Nations communities

- Aboriginal water holders
- WaterNSW RAP Working Group
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council
- Native Title Bodies
- Stakeholders across the 13 valleys



### Peak groups whose members rely on water

- This includes groups that represent agriculture, industry, community consumption or recreation activities



### Government

- Local councils across NSW
- State government agencies or state-owned corporations
- Federal government agencies such as the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder
- The various water regulators (State and Federal)



### Interested stakeholders and community

- People who use our dams/rivers for recreational purposes
- People who work in agriculture, industry and other water licence holders
- Community groups and organisations focusing on specific issues
- Environmental groups



### WaterNSW internal or business delivery stakeholders

- WaterNSW Board
- WaterNSW staff
- Corporate partners
- Contractors and suppliers



## 3.2 What challenges does this engagement process have?

The challenges faced by WaterNSW are multi-faceted. With more than 40,000 diverse customers and stakeholders, it is crucial that we manage expectations of our water delivery operations.

- There is a level of customer and community confusion regarding the roles of WaterNSW, DPE-W and NRAR, and the complexity of setting and reforming rules and regulations, delivering water and rules enforcement.
- The sharing of WaterNSW and WAMC costs between customers and the community is not well understood.
- **WaterNSW's** customers have provided views about the engagement approach we need to undertake. Understandably, the cost of services and water delivery plays a crucial **role in customers' ability to deliberate**. However, in order to have these discussions we must first seek their feedback on a range of customer and community outcomes. We will then report back with cost analyses against nominated outcomes (this process is shown under Our Engagement Journey).

From our conversations with customers to date (including our Customer Advisory Groups), we know there are questions regarding:

- How WaterNSW will consult widely, who will be involved, and how will they provide input.

- The weight given to non-water licence holders in discussions on water pricing.
- The lack of understanding of the negotiables and non-negotiable services and activities required for 2025-2030.
- Pricing fairness – some customers have raised the need to discuss some fees in detail such as administrative fees.
- Some customers want an exploration of the impact of an impactor pays principle. Some of the cost shares could be considered for greater beneficiary pays pricing. We understand IPART has chosen not to undertake a new review of cost shares as part of the current process.
- The efficiencies gained from the previous determinations – some customers have asked how cost structures from previous determinations have contributed to improved efficiencies for customers.
- The perceived complexity of this consultation. There is a lack of clarity as to why WaterNSW is required to consult the broader community when it comes to water delivery.
- Some have expressed the view that WaterNSW has not adequately adopted feedback in the past and felt previous consultation methods have fallen short.

### How we are meeting these challenges

- Offering clear and repeated commitments to consultation that meets customer and regulator expectations.
- Being transparent around the costs involved in running the business – clearly showing what elements are fixed and what can be negotiated with customers.
- Explaining IPART requirements and how we are planning to meet them.
- Providing plain English summaries of cost information, WaterNSW and WAMC services, and the engagement process.
- Adopting a longer-term, iterative engagement approach. Our aim is to return to customers at multiple points and demonstrate how we are responding to their feedback.
- Phase 2 will involve holding a series of pricing working groups with customers and community. Most of these (3/5) are being jointly run with DPE and NRAR in an effort to reduce engagement fatigue and confusion about what each agencies does. We are aiming to be efficient with the feedback each agency gathers from our participants.

4. What have customers been telling us prior to 2023?



## Customer priorities prior to 2023 – a summary

WaterNSW and the Department of Planning and Environment-Water completed significant engagement and research prior to the 2023-2024 engagement program for the Pricing Proposal. Relevant insights are documented here.

### 4.1 WaterNSW Voice of the Customer 2020 – Pulse Check Research Report

In 2020 WaterNSW conducted a snapshot survey on customer engagement experiences with WaterNSW for the preceding 12 months. The aims were to unpack customer opinions on **WaterNSW's** regional community engagement, seek to understand interactions with WaterNSW over the 12 months prior, identify things that customers would value in WaterNSW, and consider the reputation and performance of WaterNSW.

A total of 285 customers were surveyed using a combination of telephone and online surveys. These stakeholders comprised 115 Regulated, 91 Unregulated, and 79 Groundwater customers. The key findings follow.

- Only a minority of customers agreed that WaterNSW had a good local presence and grasp of water delivery issues, and just over half agree that WaterNSW should be more involved in supporting their local community with water planning and delivery.
- Customers expressed their support for **WaterNSW's** community engagement, though many wanted to ensure that this does not come at the expense of WaterNSW not delivering on their core activities.
- Half of respondents either could not comment or suggested WaterNSW focus on their core water delivery activities, others offered unprompted ideas to enhance community support and their local presence.

When prompted with potential WaterNSW activities, the following were seen by at least half of respondents to have some community value:

- Local water-related news coverage (81%)
- Town hall style meetings to initiate community dialogue (73%)
- Schools water education program (72%)
- Vocational training program sponsorship (58%)

#### *Good customer experiences*

Key reputational and performance metrics remained consistent with the research conducted prior to this study. WaterNSW maintained a reputation score of 40%, with skyline metrics including customer service, quality of relationship, quality of services, and overall value for money remaining on par with previous waves.

### 4.2 WaterNSW Stakeholder Perceptions Audit 2021

WaterNSW completed a perceptions audit study in 2021 that assessed stakeholder needs, WaterNSW reputation and its key drivers, as well as trust levels with its customers and stakeholders. Its primary insights included the following issues.

#### *Water security and delivery*

**WaterNSW's** core business – to manage water security and delivery for NSW's rivers and dams – is considered stable and trustworthy. This was by some margin considered **WaterNSW's** best attribute and was a view generally expressed across all stakeholder groups.

## 4.3 Kitchen table conversations 2021

WaterNSW undertook a “Kitchen Table conversations” program that encouraged people to facilitate conversations at home using a supplied discussion kit. Some 21 people participated.

Key theme responses included:

- Pricing
- Regulatory complexity
- Licensing and managing sleeper licences
- Water accounting
- Contact and communication
- Reform costs
- Local representation
- More dams

Its primary insights follow.

### *Licences and rules*

#### Sleeper licences

- Some users were happy for an admin fee to be charged to small or sleeper licences.
- Some felt that the presence of sleeper licences added to water security during dry periods.

#### Flexibility

- Some users saw water accounting as an answer to seasonality. For example “The carry-over of water from year to year allowing for 3 years rolling average on fractured rock water. This would even out usage to seasonal conditions and help with viability.”
- Being able to transfer allocations between farms subject to physical water availability would help.

### *Good customer experiences*

At this time, customers reported that WaterNSW did not deliver high quality customer engagement and service. This was due to a number of reasons, including:

- Poor legacy impacting the business's current reputation.
- The perception of a lack of strong Executive leadership.

- A need to better communicate with customers and the community about what is happening in the river system in a proactive and transparent way.
- Poor customer service during issues resolution.
- Aboriginal community engagement was felt to be falling short of what was required.

Other insights showed:

- There was room to improve WaterNSW's interagency relationships within the sector. There was a strong desire for more consistency, simplification, and local input from suggestions that the three water agencies be centralised into one.
- WaterNSW has potential to lead on a number of water issues, including contributing to policy solutions.
- The need to improve practical communication with customers, such as a greater investment in promoting its projects and activities.
- There was a wide range of feedback for WaterNSW's customer communications that ranged from the very positive to detailing immense survey fatigue.
- Requests for WaterNSW to invest in local representatives to improve communication with customers and ensure better and faster decision-making.
- Others had difficulty with the “layers of regulatory complexity” and the communication confusion that resulted.



## Water affordability

- Respondents expressed concern about customer cost increases impacting their capacity to continue operating their businesses and the overall impact of water affordability.
- Cost structure fairness was also raised in the context of Postage Stamp Pricing (the price we pay for water should be the same across the state, and not differ based on where you live). This could be more acceptable with a + or -20%.
- Cost sharing issues:
  - The return on capital for the cost of dams should not have to be paid by water users.
  - Beneficiaries could pay more of the cost share starting point.
  - Environmental customers should pay a greater portion of costs, (fixed fees at 100%) as a taxpayer-funded entity, and budget each year for the water they hold, even if they **don't** use it.
- Issues around water accounting and fairness emerged in response to questions around additional admin charges and **customer's** experiences with seasonal variability in water usage
- User borne costs of water reforms were regularly cited in the feedback, with some users not understanding the cost impact of these reforms or not seeing the value created by them.
- There is a perception of overlapping agency functions and a lack of efficiency.



Let's talk.

We invite our customers to download our Kitchen Table Discussions kit and engage in an open dialogue with us over the next few years to help determine our future (2025) rural water and services pricing.

Learn more and download the kit here: [bit.ly/3icUxEk](https://bit.ly/3icUxEk)



3:20 PM · Jul 16, 2021

## 4.4 Customer Advisory Group meetings in 2022

Customer Advisory Groups (CAGs) are a key forum for WaterNSW to regularly consult, on an area basis, with a broad cross-section of its customers on issues relevant to the performance of WaterNSW's obligations to customers under the WaterNSW Operating Licence and WaterNSW Customer Service Charter.

The CAGs generally meet three times a year in regional locations, for a day. Both customers and WaterNSW staff travel considerable distances to discuss and review the activities of the water agencies, including policy, water delivery and enforcement issues.

In 2022, the key concerns focussed on rising water access costs, the complexity of weather impacts delaying harvest and impacting crop quality. Many discussions had a 'cost impact' origin, making it clear cost of living and doing business remains top of mind for many.

### *Water affordability*

- Ensure bills remain affordable given on-farm expenses are increasing, and costs are being closely monitored.
- Tariff structures have been discussed, across CAGs, noting their valley specific issues with current structures and arrangements.

### *Good customer experiences/customer service and the shift to digital/ water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules*

- Customers expect a better level of customer service when interacting with WaterNSW, with concerns about the loss of local representatives.
- Requests for direct contact with local system operators rather than the contact centre, particularly for river operations and ordering water.
- Customers want the Water Regulation Application process to be quicker and more efficient and for WaterNSW to provide regular status updates.
- Face-to-face is the preferred choice of engagement, however online engagement is convenient and should continue to be offered.

### *Cultural water*

- Concern of impact on local water availability - customers are eager to learn about the granting of Cultural Water Licences, how they will work, who is providing the water, and understand how it will impact Available Water Determinations.

## 4.5 Voice of Customer research 2022

Round 6 of the WaterNSW Voice of Customer Research took place between April and July 2022. The report assessed overall satisfaction metrics across multiple areas between 2021 and 2022. There was a statistically significant decline in customer sentiment against various program areas.

These focused on:

- Customer Service
- Quality of Relationships
- Quality of Services
- Reputation
- Value for money

and included the following segments.

### Water Delivery

That deliveries meet amounts ordered, having enough water, delivery timeliness, accessibility of water if needed, and overall satisfaction of delivery.

### Applications and Approvals

Access to information required to submit, clarity on how to submit, application process efficiency, ease of application process, team responsible for managing applications, and overall satisfaction of applications and approvals.

### Help Desk

WaterNSW ownership of issues/queries, responsiveness to issues, quality of responding staff, consistency of service, kept informed of ordering delays, efficiency of water trading application processing, and overall satisfaction of help desk.

### Customer service

Support given to customers, interactions with staff, access to capable staff. clarity on how to get support, and overall satisfaction with customer service

### Information and Communications

Major environmental issues communication, availability of water communications, sufficient water trading information, supplementary events communication, access to relevant information, and overall satisfaction of communications and information.

### Billing

Accuracy of billing, comprehension of bills and invoices, clarity on fees and charges, billing errors rectified quickly, and overall billing satisfaction.

### Pricing

Overall satisfaction of prices paid for water.

### Metering

Overall satisfaction of policy, implementation, and impact to business.

### Reputation

Staff expertise and capability, quality of products and services, ethics and integrity, overall value for money, ease of business, working for customers, overall WaterNSW reputation, and sustainability of WaterNSW for community.

### Presence

Local presence, regional presence, understanding of local issues.

A summary of customer feedback and findings on issues pertinent to this Insights Report are found overleaf.

## Water Delivery

An influx of water due to weather events since the previous period saw improved satisfaction in the “access to water”, “have enough to meet your needs”, and “overall water delivery” metrics among all unregulated, regulated, and groundwater customers.

Participants provided feedback on the following issues.

- Access to, and allowances of, water was felt to be restrictive given water was plentiful as compared to the previous years.
- Customers suggested building more dams.
- The insights on environmental flows varied, some wanted more flows, others less as they were seen to deprive irrigators and farmers of necessary water.
- Improved transparency and communication of policy and water strategy was requested.
- There was some interest in improving water quality.

## Applications and Approvals

Regarding the

- “process”,
- “the ease of the process”,
- “the accessibility of vital information needed to submit applications”,
- “clarity on how to submit an application”,

and other water ordering, application and approval metrics fell across stakeholders.

## WaterNSW help desk

Satisfaction levels remained steady between 2021 and 2022. Regulated customers expressed falling approval regarding the “responsiveness of the help desk” metric.

## Customer Services

Satisfaction remained across the year. Regulated customers were the most satisfied

segment, but small declines were noted across all of the metrics.

Participants provided feedback on the following issues.

- Simple and effective outcomes for queries were desired.
- Face to face customer service is necessary.
- The effective resolution of issues was quite a-ways from ideal.
- The applications process was seen as costly, difficult, and time consuming. The processes and systems for this were seen as needing simplification.

WaterNSW was felt to need to provide better customer support to address:

- complex rules and legislation,
- WaterNSW providing contradictory information,
- an overall too complex and not easily understood system by lay-people,
- a perceived lack of knowledge among staff in the call centre; unreturned calls, lack of desire to help. Some felt that it was much too hard to try to get issues resolved.

## Information and Communication

There were slight year-on-year declines across all metrics, but regulated customers were still the most satisfied customer group.

Participants provided feedback on the following issues.

- there needs to be clearer and more concise information provided to customers.
- there should be a focus on quality over quantity of information – this was seen as overwhelming and complicated.
- water releases should be better communicated and advanced notice be provided.
- water forecasting should be improved across the board.



## Billing

Dissatisfaction rose across the board in all metrics, particularly among groundwater customers. The “timely rectification of errors” metrics declined the most compared with 2021.

Participants provided feedback on the following issues.

- Bills need simplification – customers suggested consolidating bills, efforts to increase bill transparency, and visualization of previous and current meter readings as means of addressing this.
- The changing of billing details was seen as difficult by some.

## Pricing

This was by far the area in which customers were most dissatisfied. There was a decline in satisfaction across the board across all metrics as compared with 2021.

Participants provided feedback on the following issues.

- The onus on customers, especially smaller customers, to install their own meters were seen as highly resource, cost, and time expensive. Some customers suggested that this could foreseeably, or already has, crippled their businesses.
- Paying for unsupplied/unconsumed water – domestic users felt that they should not need a commercial licence for domestic water consumption.
- The absolute cost of water, fixed costs, application fees, and groundwater were the most cited areas of frustration among customers.

## Metering

Customers expressed major dissatisfaction across the board, this area alone accounted for a considerable proportion of overall customer satisfaction results.

Participants provided feedback on the following issues.

- A disproportionate impact on smaller customers was felt due to the use of a blanket approach to metering requirements.
- Unclear policy – especially where exemptions to rules may apply.
- The consistent application and letter of policy across NSW.
- The necessity of meters and metering.
- Specialists who can assist with the metering process were highly desired.
- Conflicting information – circular issues resolution and the perceived shifting of customers to other areas/staff/departments without addressing concerns.

## Policy

Policy was the area seen as being in highest need of improvement. The following issues arose as common issues among customers.

- Metering – felt to be unnecessary, unfair, and inconsistent.
- Water allocations and more access to water.
- The building of more dams for sustainability purposes.
- Licencing rules – some suggested that trades should be easier, some wanted to stop trades.
- Environmental flows – some wanted more flows, others less.

## Key Accounts Managers

The VOC 2022 survey also explored customer views on liaising with Key Account Managerial staff members.

Across the customer types surveyed, administrative, farm managers, Government, and industry, there were high levels of satisfaction with interactions with these staff. The responsiveness and helpfulness of these key account managers was highly regarded.

## 4.6 What matters to our customers: Insights Report (Water Administration Ministerial Corporation) 2023

DPE-Water undertook a desktop analysis of 17 relevant engagement outcomes reports on Draft Regional Water Strategies and other materials, including Voice of Customer survey feedback to provide customer insights and to identify themes, priorities and customer values for the 2025-2030 price proposal.

Overall themes identified, and sub-themes contained within, are noted below.

### Impacts of climate change on water

- Impact of longer and more severe wet/dry periods, concerns over ecology and hydrology, water quality, and water reliability.

### Groundwater management

- Understanding of groundwater for sustainable management, integration of ground and surface water, modelling and cost shares, and groundwater metering and measurement dissatisfaction.

### Environmental water management

- Health of rivers and waterways, and cultural water priorities.

### Water reliability and security

- Balancing water allocations to satisfy industrial and other customer needs, water sharing framework adaptability to climate related risks, adaptive water security planning, system operation and management services responsiveness to climate events, water connectivity through structure modifications, water infrastructure cost/benefit concerns, first nations water security and involvement in water management, and recreational water use.

### Decision-making and enforcement

- Monitoring and modelling data transparency, new monitoring, visibility of compliance activities improving trust, roles and accountabilities of WAMC agencies, collaboration between agencies, utilities, and government in decision making.

### Value for money and affordability

- Impact of metering charges on smaller customers, trade-offs and costs understandings for new infrastructure.

### Customer service, experience and stakeholder engagement

- Understanding of water policies and programs, water licencing service and experiences, climate data, information, and modelling publishing, improvements to first nations stakeholder engagement, water flow communications and consultation, and little awareness of NRAR policy education efforts.

Issues pertinent to WNSW follow:

### Water security and delivery including delivery rules

- Water reliability and security was a priority across the four most represented customer or stakeholder groups – local government and local water utilities; community and recreational water users; stock managers, irrigators and other landowners; and First Nations stakeholder groups.

## Sustainable water and land management

- Priorities included improving water reliability for regional and Aboriginal/First Nations communities while meeting the requirements of local industry, as well as action to address the impacts of climate change.
- Groundwater management was a priority for local government.
- Requests for greater consideration of **First Nations' voices to inform** water management and policy.
- Some support for a review in cultural Water Access Licenses to better enable **First Nations' communities to directly** manage water in support of their values and cultural sites.
- A need to better communicate with customers and community about water flows.
- Overwhelmingly, customers strongly preferred demand management initiatives rather than infrastructure investments to increase supply to manage water security and reliability.
- Evidence of compliance activity improves confidence and trust in water management for many customers, however some believe the fines and infringements for misuse of water allocations were not strong enough and the enforcement of rules was too low.
- Strong support for publishing climate change information, new climate datasets, models and modelling to help individuals better manage their own risks as well as assisting councils with their future strategic planning processes.

## Water affordability

- Impact of metering charges was felt most acutely by smaller industry customers who were finding it harder to compete against large corporation farms paying the same amount.

- While new water infrastructure projects had both supporters and detractors, customers wanted more information on any increased costs of water and to better understand the trade-offs and costs for water licence holders for new infrastructure.

## Good customer experiences

- Customer service, experience and stakeholder engagement was important to community and recreation water users, irrigators and other landowners; and Aboriginal/First Nations stakeholders /stakeholder groups.
- Poor customer service levels and experiences related to water licence applications and approvals that required agency coordination.
- Requests for status updates with a preference for face-to-face or online meeting opportunities to clarify their specific requirements instead of email enquiries.
- Limited and infrequent engagement with First Nations stakeholders with requests for more detail to be able to provide better feedback.

## 4.7 Customer feedback via Ministerial correspondence

### Across the valleys

Below are some of the most common issues raised by valley in representations through NSW Members of Parliament either via the Minister for Water or directly, from 2021-2023 (347).

#### Murray-Lower Darling

- The majority of issues related to rural flood mitigation.
- Licencing, including metering licencing was raised.
- Water monitoring, and river operations and delivery were also issues.

#### Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee

- The majority of issues related to rural flood mitigation.
- Water monitoring was also raised.

#### Gwydir

- The main issue related to rural flood mitigation.
- Licensing was also raised.

#### Border Rivers

- The main issue related to asset maintenance.
- Licensing for applications was raised.
- Harvestable rights were also an issue.

#### Namoi-Peel

- The majority of issues related to licensing, relating to applications and metering.
- Asset management was raised.
- New infrastructure was also an issue.

#### Macquarie-Cudgegong

- The main issue related to flood mitigation.
- Licensing, including application licensing, was raised.
- New infrastructure was also an issue.

#### Lachlan

- The majority of issues related to flood mitigation.
- New infrastructure was raised.
- Property was also an issue.

#### Barwon-Darling

- Issues related to flood mitigation and water monitoring.

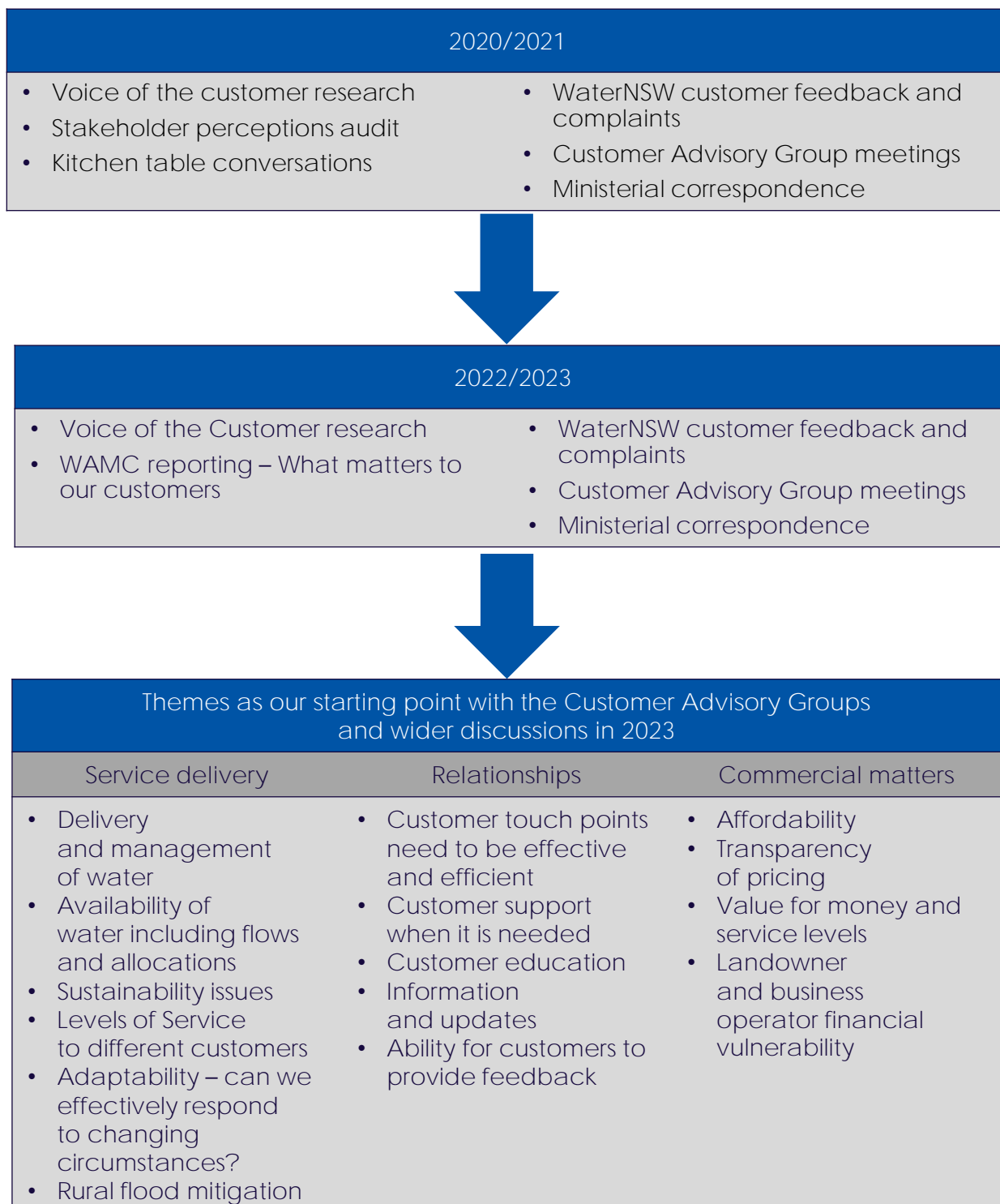
#### Greater Sydney

- The majority of issues related to flood mitigation.
- Recreational use of assets was raised.
- New infrastructure was also an issue.



## 4.8 Summary of the things that matter to customers, leading to this engagement process

The insights gained from these detailed conversations listed below led to the starting point for this 2023 pricing proposal engagement.



## 5. Pricing Proposal Community and Customer Engagement in 2023



## 5.1 The IPART submission engagement program

Below is a high-level timeline of the IPART engagement program spanning the listening, prioritising, consolidating, and confirmation phases of the Pricing Proposal. It contains an overview of activities employed and methods utilised in this engagement.



The timeline consists of various activities aimed at engaging stakeholders and gathering input on the issues important to them.

Community Advisory Group (CAG) meetings were held to gather feedback on critical customer facing issues.

An engagement website and survey, along

with newsletter inserts were used to reach a wider audience. Community forums and webinars provided additional opportunities for public input, while industry group discussions focused on specific sector concerns.

WaterNSW RAP Committee interviews incorporate diverse perspectives.

# 5.2 Gathering Phase 1 customer and community insights

WaterNSW actively collects customer and community insights through various channels to ensure inclusive decision-making and improve its services.

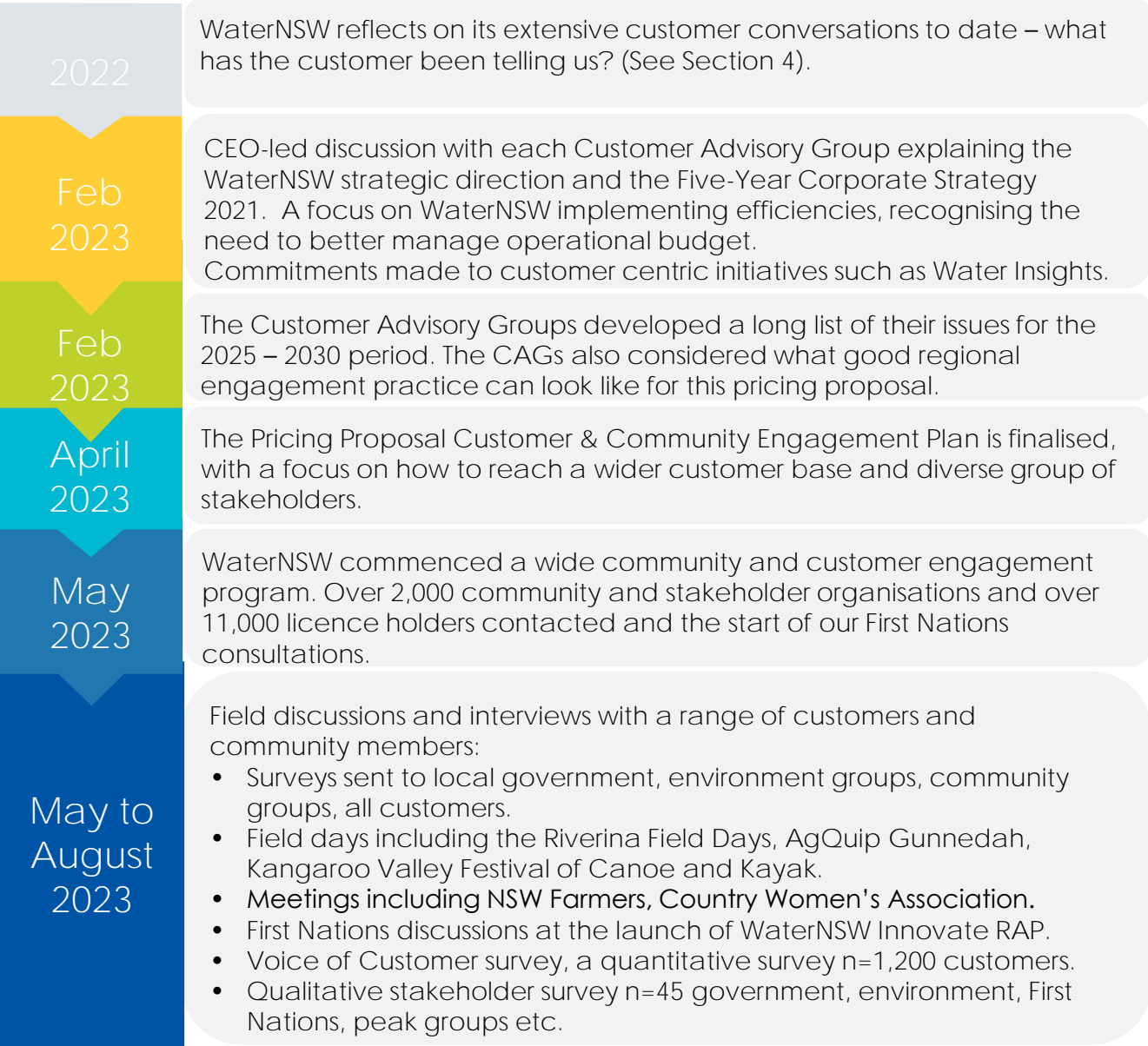
The collection process included Customer Advisory Group meetings, a comprehensive community and customer engagement program, surveys targeting local government, environment groups, community groups, and all customers.

Field days, including Riverina Field Days, AgQuip Gunnedah, and the Kangaroo Valley Festival of the Canoe and Kayak provided opportunities for direct interaction. Meetings with representative bodies like

NSW Farmers, NSW Irrigators' Council and the Australian River Restoration Centre provided valuable insights. First Nations discussions at the launch of WaterNSW's Innovate RAP promoted collaboration and inclusion.

Additionally, WaterNSW conducts Voice of Customer surveys. This involved a quantitative survey with 1,200 customers to gather statistical data, while qualitative surveys captured in-depth feedback.

These initiatives ensured that WaterNSW understands the needs and perspectives of its diverse stakeholders. The Phase 1 process is described below.





## 5.3 A wide geographic spread of activities

WaterNSW and SEC Newgate have attended various events across NSW between May to September 2023 to ensure face-to-face engagement occurs with regional communities.

The types of events attended include field days, group meetings to discuss this proposal, annual Conferences. Engagement activities that have been attended are shown on the map below.

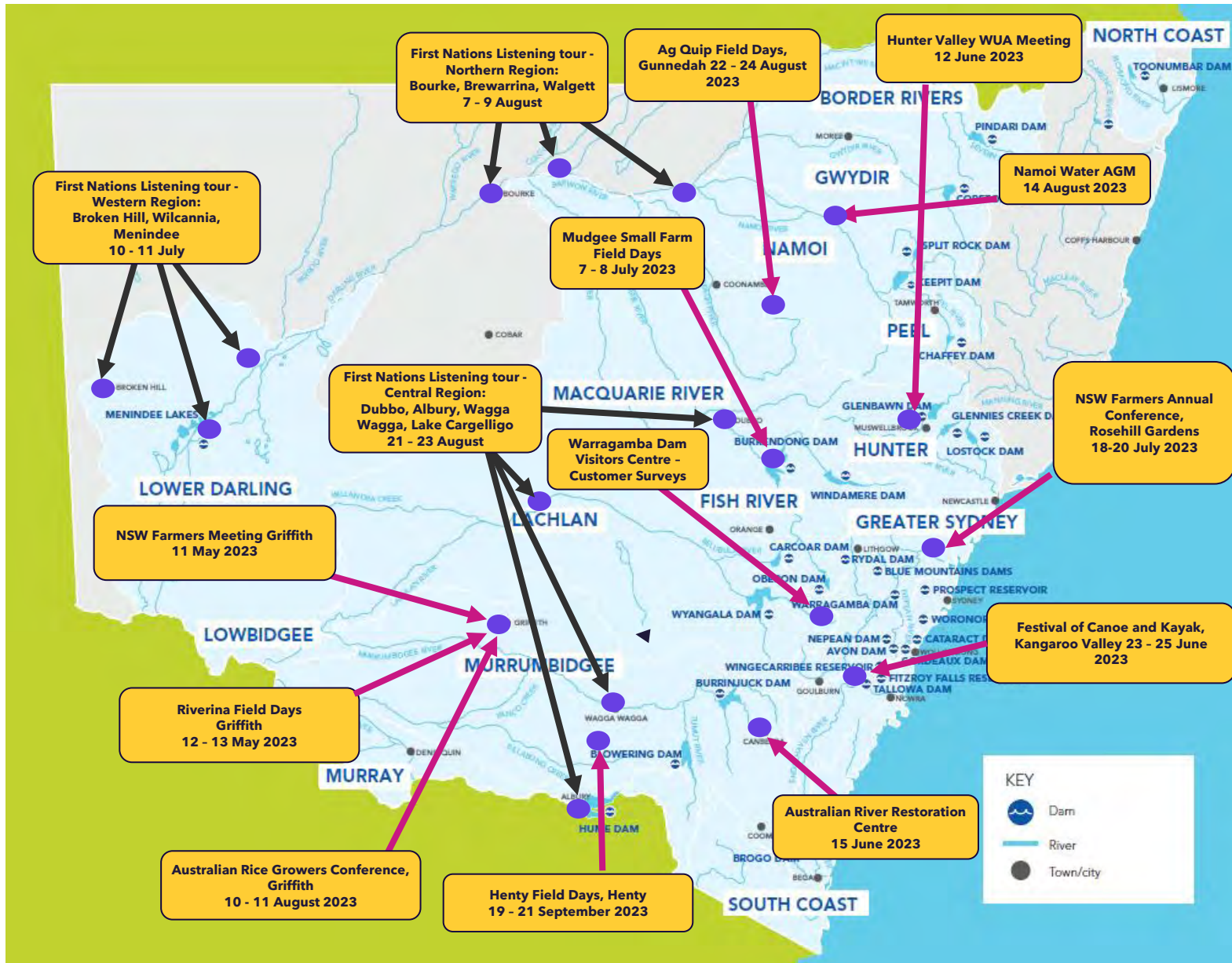


Figure 5: Map of WaterNSW major engagement activities

## 5.4 First Nations regional engagement

The engagement with First Nations includes WaterNSW team discussions, discussions with the Reconciliation Action plan Working Group and the NSW State Aboriginal Land council. In addition, Aboriginal community is an invited member of the Customer Advisory Groups. The team participated in the First Nations Roadshows in Menindee, Broken Hill, and Wilcannia, Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett and Dubbo, Albury, Wagga Wagga and Lake Cargelligo to gather insights and hear about First Nations priorities in these regions.

First Nations outcomes for river water management relate to:

- Communications and Engagement
- Policy – Access to Cultural Water and Water Sharing Plans
- Infrastructure
- Drinking supplies

and as such issues raised are conveyed to the DPE – W team as important inputs to the WAMC price proposal.

Our approach focused on the ROLL method: Respect; Observe; Listen; Learn. During this community consultation we have engaged with a wide range of groups and organisations to understand their water needs in a culturally respectful manner. This includes the following:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • NSW Native Title Group Aboriginal Corporation              | schools   |
| • NSW Local Aboriginal Land Corporations and Tribal Councils | • Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups                |
| • Aboriginal Working Party Groups                            | • Aboriginal Community Elders Groups                      |
| • Aboriginal Health Services                                 | • Local Aboriginal Community Working Party                |
| • <b>Aboriginal Women's Services Safehouse</b>               | • Local Cultural Academy supporting young Aboriginals     |
| • Aboriginal support team at the local TAFE campus           | • Local Education and Training for Aboriginal people      |
| • Regional Enterprise Development Institute                  | • Three Rivers Regional Assembly                          |
| • Aboriginal Outreach and Drop-in Centre                     | • Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) |
| • Aboriginal members from the central                        |   |

### WaterNSW Reconciliation Action Plan

The WaterNSW Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) has been a key focus for the organisation since 2022.

The RAP provides guidance for building relationships with Aboriginal communities, encouraging collaboration, design and participation of First Nations Peoples and communities. This provides greater appreciation and understanding of Aboriginal connection for non-Aboriginal staff. The RAP strengthens knowledge around heritage, culture and connection of the waterways, as First Nations Peoples and community gave a moral obligation to care for water under their law and customs.

The collaboration with Traditional Owners is a mechanism for input on water management and infrastructure. The plan will form part of the 2025 – 2030 investment.

## Community visits planned in Phase 2

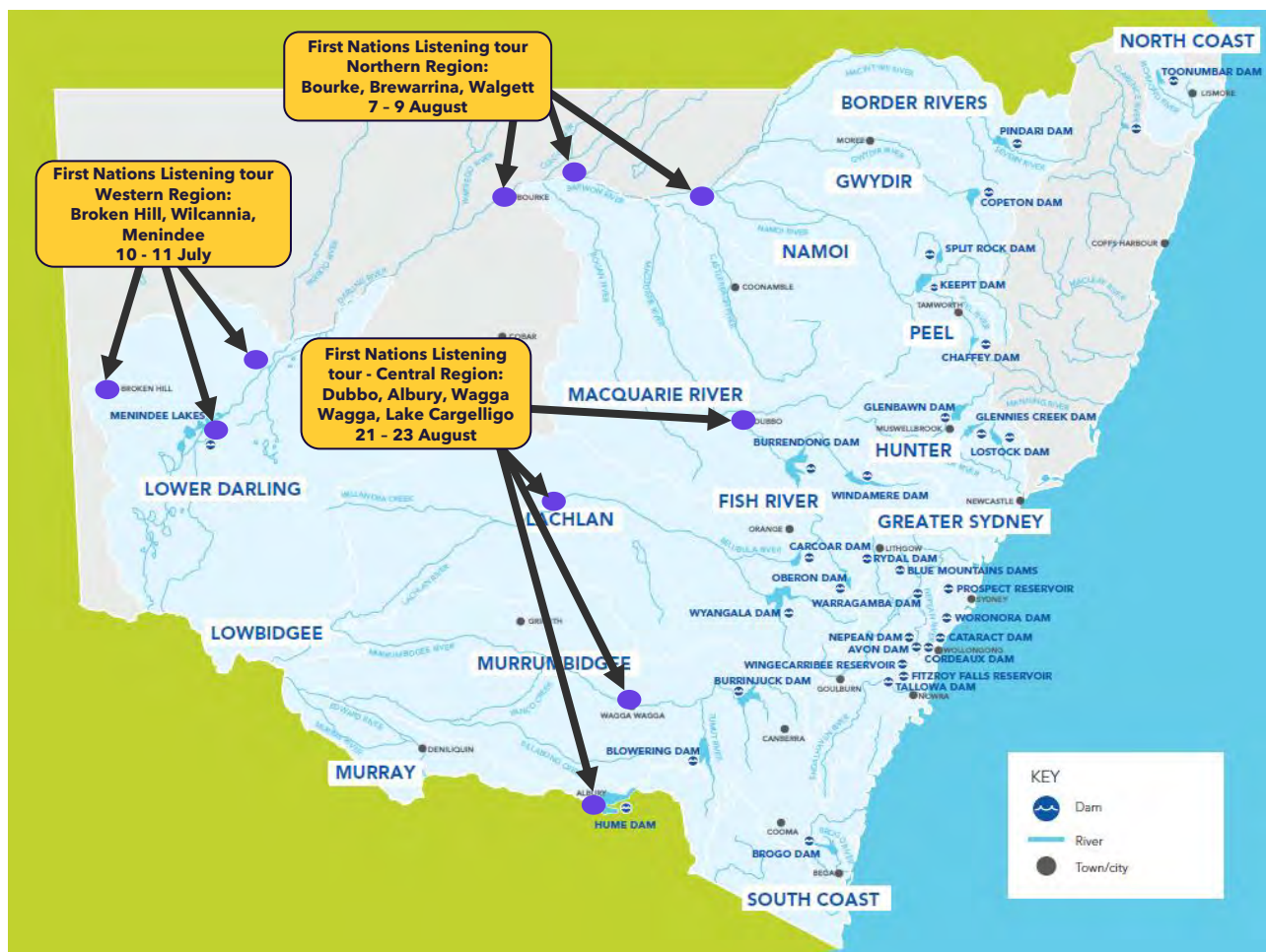
First Nations direct engagement will occur in various communities around NSW across the Western, Northern, and Central regions of NSW. The table below lists the Phase 2 engagement.

Stage	Location
Stage 1	Western Region - Here we will be meeting with Elders and local community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broken Hill (Wiljaali Peoples)</li> <li>Wilcannia and Menindee (Barkindji Peoples)</li> </ul>
Stage 2	Northern Region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walgett (Gamilaraay Peoples)</li> <li>Brewarrina (Ngemba Peoples: this location homes people from Ngemba, Murrawarri, Weilam, Gamilaraat, Wiragjuri, Barkindji, Wongaibon, Koamu and Burranbinji tribes as it was previously a Mission)</li> </ul>
Stage 3	Central Region and Wiradjuri <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dubbo</li> <li>Albury</li> <li>Wagga Wagga</li> <li>Lake Cargellico</li> </ul>

Table 3: First Nations engagement phase 2 plan

This is shown in the map below. The communities that we are reaching may want to discuss these or other issues in-depth. Time is limited in each of these communities, and we will need to respectfully hold space for some other conversations to build a relationship and trust.

There is uncertainty whether these communities have a current water licence, and if it is paid or part of the Aboriginal water strategy and Closing the Gap.





# 5.5 Media advertising to recruit participants

A summary of our published advertisements for the Pricing Proposal is below. This table lists all advertisements we have published to promote our proposal engagement process.

Table 4: Advertisement publication list

Publication	Date Published
Goondiwindi Argus	10-May-23
The Land	11-May-23
The Western Herald	11-May-23
Inverell Times Newspaper	11-May-23
Moree Champion Newspaper	11-May-23
Cowra Guardian Newspaper	11-May-23
Forbes Advocate Newspaper	11-May-23
Parkes Champion Post	11-May-23
Bega District News	12-May-23
The Area News	12-May-23
Daily Liberal Newspaper Dubbo	13-May-23
Barrier Daily Truth Broken Hill Newspaper	13-May-23
Sunraysia Daily Mildura Newspaper	13-May-23
Border Mail	13-May-23
The Daily Advertiser Newspaper, Wagga	13-May-23
Northern Daily Leader	13-May-23
The Country Leader	15-May-23
IndyNR	Ad ran 11th-18th May-23
The Daily Telegraph	13th-May-23 - Print 13th-27th May-23 - Online
The Weekly Times	17-May-23
Walgett Spectator	17-May-23

Figure 7: Advertisements

www.parkesmulticulturalartgroup.com.au

**NEWS**

Thursday May 18, 2023 PARKES CHAMPION POST 7



Members of the new Parkes Multicultural Art Group met on May 2 to work on their vision for the community centre, which is coming along slowly. Picture: Amanda

### New Multicultural Art Group

CHIEF is a new art group to engage multicultural communities and share their talents. The group is made up of people from various backgrounds and more. And as part of the group, they will be able to share their talents and skills with the Parkes community and the wider region.

The highly popular local art group has been running for many years. And the group has been successful in showcasing the talents of its members. The Parkes Multicultural Art Group is a new group to engage multicultural communities and share their talents. The group is made up of people from various backgrounds and more. And as part of the group, they will be able to share their talents and skills with the Parkes community and the wider region.

They met on the first of May at the Parkes Library. The group is made up of people from various backgrounds and more. And as part of the group, they will be able to share their talents and skills with the Parkes community and the wider region.

The group is made up of people from various backgrounds and more. And as part of the group, they will be able to share their talents and skills with the Parkes community and the wider region.

**WaterNSW**  
Pricing Proposal 2025-2030

We want to hear about your priorities when it comes to your water in 2030.

WaterNSW is looking for the voices of 2030. We want to hear about your priorities when it comes to your water in 2030. We want to hear about your priorities when it comes to your water in 2030.

Get involved and have your say!

WaterNSW is looking for the voices of 2030. We want to hear about your priorities when it comes to your water in 2030. We want to hear about your priorities when it comes to your water in 2030.

**Flowers for Mother's Day For Sale**

Flowers for Mother's Day For Sale. Flowers for Mother's Day For Sale. Flowers for Mother's Day For Sale.



### One in six Australians experience hearing loss.

Having a hearing test helps to detect the early signs of hearing loss, so we can keep our hearing healthy for longer.

Book a hearing check, talk to a health professional, or visit [health.gov.au/hearing](http://health.gov.au/hearing) for more information.

Australian Government





The ad ran on the front page of the *Country Leader* newspaper (left), which circulates in the North and North West and New England regions of NSW and is a supplement in many local papers.

An article on *The Mirage* website outlined the Pricing Proposal and has a neutral sentiment.

The piece from the *Namoi Valley Independent* relates to 2024 charges.

Publication	Title	Date Published
The Mirage	WaterNSW Pricing Proposal 2025-2030	12 May 2023
Namoi Valley Independent	IPART delivers final report on increases to WaterNSW's rural bulk water charges	8 June 2023
The Singleton Argus	Hunter Valley irrigators say they need more information and in a timely manner from the state's water bureaucracy	23 June 2023

Table 5: Media reporting

News article mention published in the Mirage newspaper  
Figure 8: Media mentions

## 5.6 Customer contributions to a good engagement process

Early conversations with our 10 CAGs raised a number of considerations to our process that are important to our conversations over the next year.

Our CAGs have longstanding relationships with WaterNSW and understand local needs and issues when it comes to water generally and when operating a water dependent business. They have asked us to keep the below in mind when engaging with them and other customers.

When talking with our customers and asking for their input we should:

- Clearly explain their role and level of influence in the proposals that are part of the WaterNSW submission.
- Ensure we allow time to build up the knowledge of customers who may not be across all the issues we want to engage on. Capacity building is important in order to gather accurate feedback from our customers.
- Provide the option to have face-to-face discussions. A lot of customers are time poor with limited availability to complete online activities. We should come to them.
- Offer a way for customers to provide feedback that is reflected directly to IPART.

When talking with our customers and asking for their input we should:

- Acknowledge the disparity between large and small water users around the issues of affordability and vulnerability.
- Larger water customers may be able to afford a price increase and consulting only with these groups may skew the consultation results.
- In saying this, larger customers also expressed concerns about affordability. The increasing cost of living and business is affecting all.

- Segment customer and community feedback on prices by regulated valley and by customer size and type.
- Provide the bill impacts of the proposals being discussed. Customers should understand the financial implications before communicating their preferences.
- Customers are also interested in how the Murray Darling Basin Authority examines their fees that are passed through to customer. Why are customers not consulted on the MDBA priorities? What conversations will take place regarding affordability? This is not **within WaterNSW's remit to provide** information on, but we should listen and note this feedback.
- Provide the cost rationale for our submission, including risk analysis, detailed cost recovery information and administrative costs. How have our costs been calculated?

## 6. Phase 1 activities and their results



## 6.1 Participation snapshot

The table below illustrates engagement statistics to date. Data in this graphic is taken from the 3 of May 2023 to the end of September 2023.

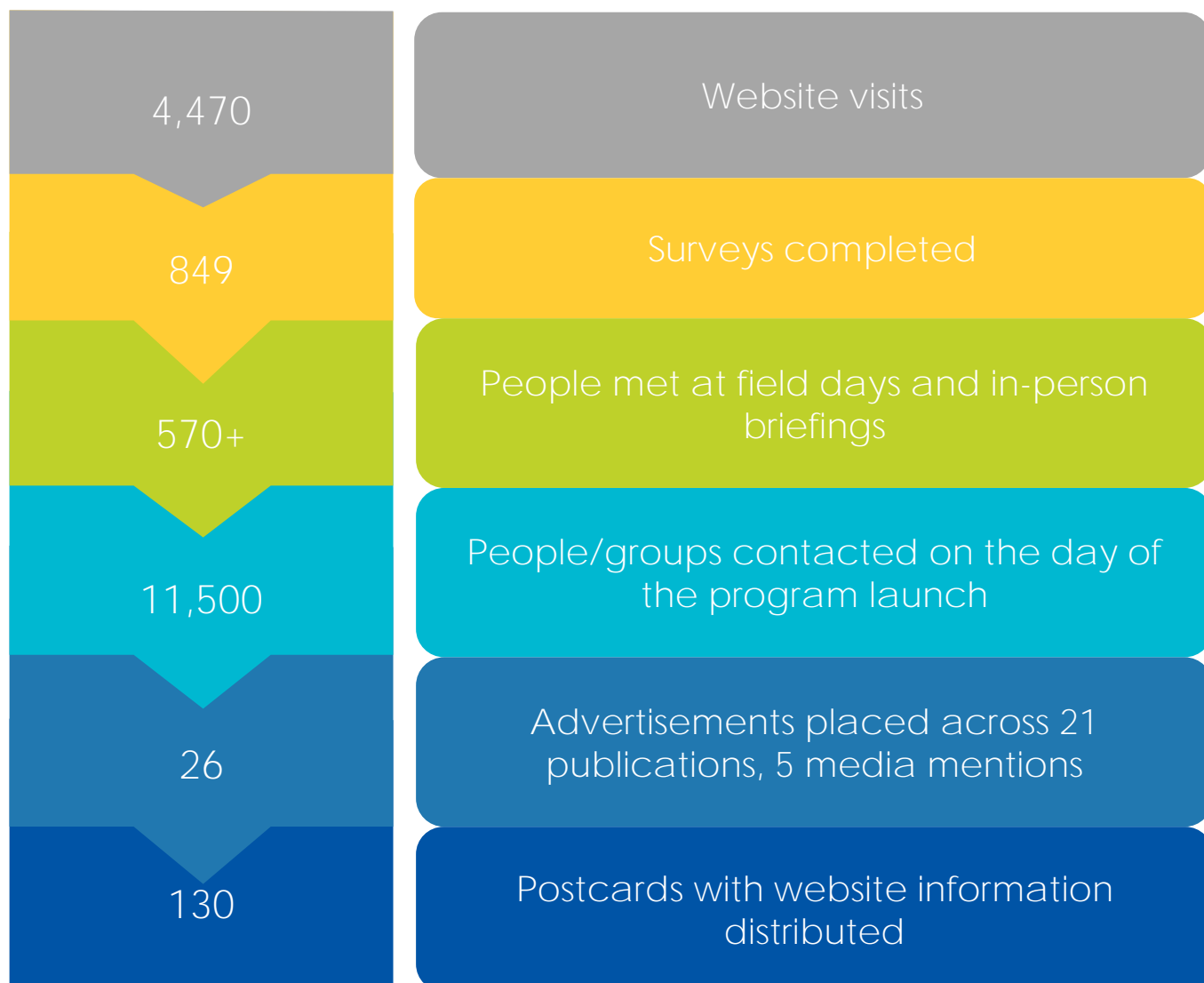


Table 6: Engagement statistics

### Groups also circulating our information Rivers of Carbon (Australian River Restoration Centre) 2 August 2023

The Rivers of Carbon group is an on-ground program of the Australian River Restoration Centre, which works with landholders to protect and restore waterways. In August 2023 Rivers of Carbon sent out its monthly newsletter to 1,959 people, inviting them to participate in WaterNSW's Pricing Proposal survey.

Country Women's Association of NSW posted information on their facebook about the engagement.





## 6.2 Community and customer surveys

Some 849 completed surveys were submitted to WaterNSW. Among the contributing stakeholders:

- three valleys were the most actively involved: Murrumbidgee, Greater Sydney, and Coastal – Hunter.
- three customer groups made substantial contributions: Regulated customers, Community or Community group members, and Recreational users.

Examining the primary issues raised, three key concerns stood out.

1. Water affordability, reflecting the shared worries about the rising costs associated with accessing and utilising water

resources. Stakeholders emphasised the need for fair and affordable pricing structures.

2. Water security and delivery. Stakeholders expressed their concerns about the reliability and resilience of water supply systems, particularly in the face of growing demand and changing climatic conditions.
3. Sustainable water and land management was a significant issue raised by stakeholders. There was agreement among contributors regarding the necessity of preserving and protecting water resources and the surrounding land ecosystem.

Home / WaterNSW Pricing Proposal 2025-2030

**Get involved and share your feedback!**

You can get involved in the pricing proposal process – a little or a lot. We know your time is precious but your thoughts are important. Please answer a quick survey.

[Start survey](#)

**Timeline**

**Phase 1: Jan-Jun 2023**


**Check-in, listen and discover**

We are asking for big picture customer and community thinking to learn what matters to our customers, community and stakeholders.

[See more](#)

[ABOUT THE 2025-2030 PRICING PROPOSAL](#) [CUSTOMER PRIORITIES](#) [FAQS](#)

**About the 2025-2030 Pricing Proposal**



**WaterNSW**

WaterNSW supplies two-thirds of the water used by regional towns, irrigators, Sydney Water Corporation and local water utilities. We own and operate the largest surface and groundwater monitoring network in the southern hemisphere. We build, maintain and operate essential infrastructure.

### Location

This graph indicates where stakeholders who completed the survey are located. The graph was created using data collected from website surveys, Slido results and intercept surveys from respondents all over NSW. Participants were able to choose more than one response for this question.

River Valley/Location (n=849)

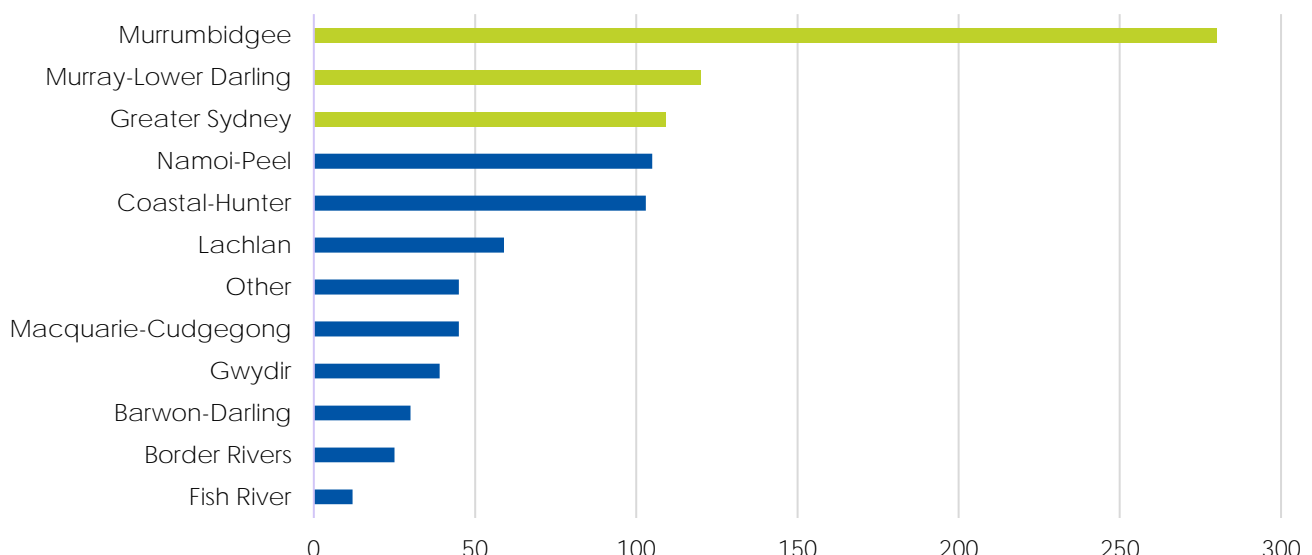


Figure 9a: Survey respondents by valley

## Participating stakeholder type

The water usage type of survey respondents is shown below. The graph was created using data collected from website surveys, Slido results and intercept surveys from respondents all over NSW. Participants were able to choose more than one response for this question.

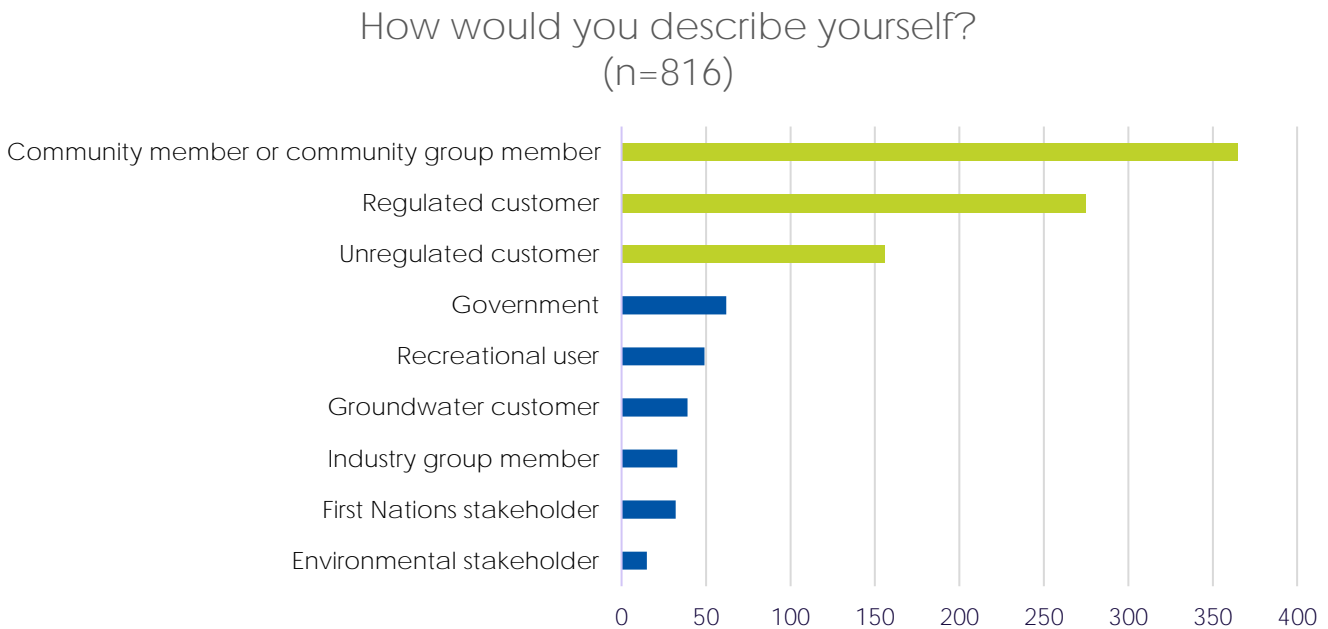


Figure 9b: Survey respondents by stakeholder type

## Key issues

This graph identifies the Tier 1 issues of concern identified in from all survey responses. The graph was created using data collected from website surveys, Slido results and intercept surveys from respondents all over NSW.

Participants were able to choose up to 3 important issues.

The 3 key issues that mattered the most to survey respondents were:

1. Water security
2. Water affordability
3. Sustainable water and land management.

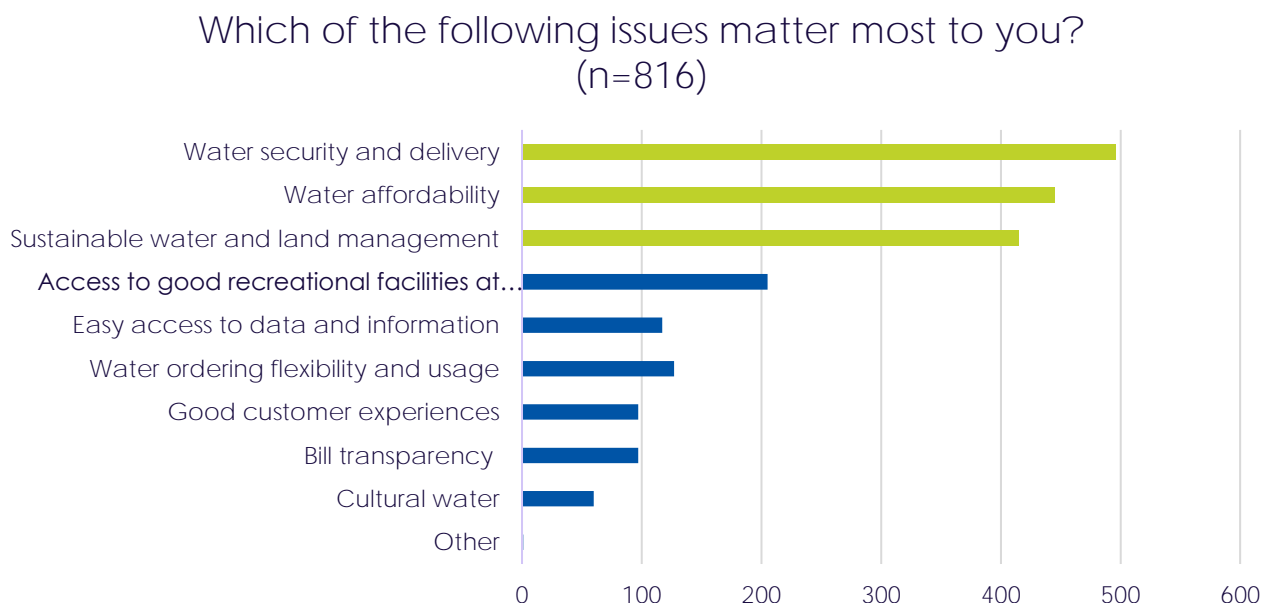


Figure 9c: Survey responses on issues

## 6.3 Field days and meetings

### NSW Farmers Meeting Griffith, 11 May, 2023

WaterNSW participated in the NSW Farmers meeting in Griffith, engaging with the President and team from NSW Farmers and local members. We presented on the IPART process and facilitating a discussion on those water management topics that are critical to this group.

The key issues raised with us included:

- The problem with separating water licences from the land. This has created a tradeable commodity that is escalating the price of licences, forcing small farms off the land and making it hard for other farmers to purchase water.
- Information on water allocations is provided to farmers in a way that is not timely in line with planting cycles.
- Not receiving your full allocation is a risk that greatly impacts farmers – making agricultural planning difficult.
- Local communities feel unheard when expressing their concerns and believe the consultation from WaterNSW and the water agencies has been lacking.
- Concerns exist regarding the impact of sustained environmental flows on trees, as excessive water or water over long periods can drown them. Running rivers too high can also destroy habitats, with a decline in Platypus sightings and tree death reported by locals.

### Riverina Field Days 12-13 May 2023

At the Riverina Field Days stakeholders gathered to discuss various aspects of agriculture and rural life in the Riverina region.

It provided an opportunity for networking, showcasing products and services, and exchanging knowledge and ideas related to farming, water management, and rural industries.

WaterNSW was hosted by NSW Farmers, and actively engaged with stakeholders across the event on water management and allocation.

A high level summary of responses follows.

- Stakeholders emphasised the importance of flexibility in managing environmental flows to achieve improved ecological outcomes - over that which is occurring today. Some stakeholders had queries on how the current flow regime is assisting the environment, noting that sporadic high and low flows created variability in the river beds.
- Increased transparency and accuracy in river flow data is necessary to enable informed decision-making.
- Compensation was requested for farmers who did not receive their full water allocation.
- The need for a fair and efficient water allocation process.



Figure 10: Riverina Field Days

## Hunter Valley Water Users Association Meeting, 13 May, 2023

Approximately 33 attendees were at the Hunter Valley Water Users Association (HVWUA) meeting with 12 completing the online survey. WaterNSW shared a presentation with HVWUA.

Water users discussed their requests for 2025 – 2030.

- *Communication*

- More and better notice on water releases would be beneficial to allow planning.
- Keeping the WaterNSW website up to date with new information.
- Pushing customers to electronic communications using email to ensure efficient and timely communication. This could be aided by providing a deadline, so people have time to create accounts and provide details if needed.

- *Cost sharing*

- The need for non-customers (wider community) to contribute financially to **WaterNSW's** costs to manage dams and water infrastructure.
- The need for greater level of responsiveness by WaterNSW in regards to customer services.

- *Customer accessibility to WaterNSW*

- Customer services currently do not respond in a timely manner. Improved response times in the future.
- Update the customer database
- Maintaining or increasing the number of local customer service officers so that help is easily accessible.
- Encouraging customers to switch to electronic communications was emphasized.

Discussions considered the IPART engagement activities. This is described in Section 8 and related to:

- The possibility of using HVWUA's mailing list for internal communication and deliberative forums.
- WaterNSW to ensure water user diversity in the deliberative forums.
- The importance of providing ongoing feedback on the IPART consultation process and making this survey and other results and reporting public.
- Clear clarification of the Coastal-Hunter area information and results.

## Orange Agricultural Institute Open Day - 22 May 2023

The Orange Agricultural Institute Open Day is an annual event that showcases the latest advancements and innovations in agriculture, horticulture, and related research. Farmers, industry professionals, students, and the general public attend demonstrations, and interactive workshops, providing insights into cutting-edge agricultural practices, crop management and sustainable farming techniques. WaterNSW attended the event to show the work of the Water Monitoring Team and the wider work of WaterNSW.

Comments regarding the 2025-2030 investment included:

- significant interest in learning about WaterInsights and its potential applications in their work. This tool was supported.
- the data from flood monitoring sites during the November 2022 floods, which affected Eugowra and Molong, sparked several questions and concerns from attendees.



Figure 11: Hunter Valley Water Users Association Meeting



## Festival of Canoe and Kayak 23-25 June 2023

The Festival of Canoe and Kayak in the Kangaroo Valley is an annual event that serves as a gathering for canoe and kayak enthusiasts of all skill levels.

The festival offers activities such as guided tours, competitions, and workshops to enhance paddling techniques for recreational paddling, whitewater rafting, and flatwater racing.

During this engagement, WaterNSW connected with numerous stakeholders, fostering meaningful conversations and gaining valuable insights.

The high level issues and outcomes this community would like to see with river systems 2025-2030 include:

- a lack of access to sites for recreational activities along NSW waterways.
- an awareness that protection of the natural environment, Indigenous heritage, and safety precautions are necessary.
- WaterNSW should improve the level of education of the public about the river system and the restrictions in place.
- WaterNSW could improve its direct communications and involvement with recreational tourism operators and other recreational use organisations as a means of deepening relations in the recreational space.



## NSW Irrigators' Council briefing 8 August 2023

The Irrigators' Council is the peak body representing irrigators and irrigation communities in NSW with member organisations in every Murray-Darling Basin valley of NSW, and several coastal valleys, representing over 12,000 water access licence holders.

A dial in briefing was arranged with the Council for all their representative members, to provide them with an update and details on the pricing consultation and to answer any questions. This was to allow them to keep their members and stakeholders informed and promote participation in the consultations and water working group process, planned for the second half of 2023. Thirteen participants from across the state joined the briefing.

Points raised by stakeholders in the discussion included:

- Impactor pays versus beneficiary pays and how this differs in NSW to the objectives in the National Water Initiative.
- A desire to see greater education of community to demystify the complexity of water use, the strict rules governing the water sharing plans and the Basin plan.
- More education on how water is used in urban, non-urban settings and agriculture.
- Support for the environmental water holders to participate in the water working groups.
- Interest in seeing the baseline cost of essential services and then cost of add-ons.
- For differing levels of service, consider offering a fee for service model if customers want additional services.
- Challenges getting traction on consultation over irrigation season
- A number of members on the briefing planned to nominate for the water working groups and offered to promote the process to their members to ensure their voices were heard.

Figure 12: Festival of the Canoe and Kayak

## Australian River Restoration Centre, 15 June 2023

WaterNSW and Australian River Restoration Centre representatives met in June 2023 regarding priorities and outcomes when it comes to water delivery. A summary of discussion points and key insights follows.

- The definition of affordable water should note its relationship with water quality. The less water is treated, the cheaper water could become, but at a cost to health.
- Price increases are inevitable, but communicating why that is and the benefits of community investments will be important.
- A greater amount of environmental management measures and initiatives has the potential to reduce water prices. The cost savings should be communicated more clearly to higher-water users who may not understand this relationship and the business benefits it could mean for them.
- The contribution of environmental care projects like Rivers of Carbon to human health should be considered in pricing structures. There is a link to health, biodiversity benefits, and sustainable farming from such projects that landholders are willing to invest in. It was felt that WaterNSW has aligning priorities and that investment in good corporate citizenship should be an overall priority.

## Rice Growers Conference 10-11 August 2023

Taking place in Griffith over two days; industry peak bodies, agronomists, digital farming service providers, land services, rural financial service providers, low-carbon farming solutions providers, and RnD practitioners met to discuss and learn about the state of the Australian Rice Industry. In a series of panels and presentations, Rice Growers Association partners discussed the challenges that customers are and will be facing, and developments in the technological analyses and projects that seek to provide them with solutions.

WaterNSW conducted 30 intercept surveys and spoke with 33 industry representatives, growers, exhibitors and attendee stakeholders, some from as far afield as Queensland and Victoria. Water efficiency was the main topic, whether large customers or small.

WaterNSW met with service providers from the burgeoning data-driven farming solutions industry, as well as university and VET agricultural RnD practitioners who demonstrated innovative satellite mapping practices, developments in water efficient and climate resistant rice genetics, and other cutting-edge technologies.

Key insights were:

- Improvements are needed to public water literacy.
- Water allocations are needed for research and development purposes.
- Stakeholders from the Murrumbidgee valley, were predominantly concerned with water affordability and availability
- The need for effective planning for the upcoming dry period and the pressures of reduced supply – with the need to meet increasing water prices in the region.



Figure 13: Australian Rice Growers Conference

## Namoi-Peel Water Users Association meeting 14 August 2023

Namoi Water is the peak industry group for irrigated agriculture in the Peel, Upper Namoi, and Lower Namoi valleys in north-western NSW. Roughly 25 participants attended the Namoi Peel Waters Users Association (NPWUA) AGM, with five respondents completing the online survey.

The event sparked constructive dialogues and valuable perspectives. WaterNSW delivered a presentation to the NPWUA, sparking discussions on user requirements for improved access to, and quality of, ground water data telemetry, updates on WaterNSW projects relevant to the region such as Gunidgera Weir and the Fishways program, and the overall ease of accessing WaterNSW's information system as WaterNSW transitions to WaterInsights.

Attendees emphasised:

- The significance of diverse water user representation in the deliberative forums
- The need to push for transitioning customers to digital communications.
- The importance of regional and local presence and the ability to resolve matters in a timely manner.
- The need for clarity on the services WaterNSW already has in place

## AgQuip Field Days 22 - 24 August 2023

AgQuip field days target farming professionals and broader rural community members by showcasing products, services, technology and innovation in the field of agriculture. The annual event attracts over 100,000 visitors over a three-day period in a permanent, purpose-built site just outside of Gunnedah.

WaterNSW conducted 162 intercept surveys with people representing a broad cross-section of stakeholders who travelled from across the state to attend the field days.

The feedback was insightful and varied. A summary of comments raised follows.

- Water security and delivery was a key emergent theme, particularly with an imminent drought being forecast for NSW.
- A number of people specifically pointed out that they would encourage WaterNSW to build more dams in the near future to improve water security by storing water and preventing the excess from flowing onwards into the ocean.
- Access to good recreational facilities was a priority for many participants in the survey, highlighting the importance of water activities (including, fishing and kayaking) for locals and visitors alike.
- Water quality was a commonly raised topic with certain geographic areas mentioning specific issues pertaining to water quality in their townships.
- Sustainable water and land management was also a commonly highlighted theme, including the importance of responsible water use and environmental flows.
- Several regulated participants mentioned challenges regarding the cost of meters.



Figure 14: AgQuip Gunnedah Field Days



## Henty Machinery Field Days 19 – 21 September 2023

- The Henty Machinery Field Days have run for the past 60 years, making it one of NSW's biggest agricultural events.
- At this multi-day event, machinery, farm equipment, outdoors products, country lifestyle, government, agribusiness and finance services all come together to showcase services and tools for agricultural communities.

WaterNSW conducted 266 intercept surveys over the three days at the Henty Field Days, which had an overall attendance of 55,000 people.

Key issues raised with the engagement team included the following.

- Water ordering flexibility and usage was a key priority prominent in survey responses, with respondents stating they want the ability to store and access water at their convenience.
- Sustainable water and land management was a theme mentioned by various respondents, who stated that water releases often have the unintended negative effect of flooding towns downstream and needs to be addressed as soon as possible.
- Water security and delivery was another major issue, with respondents noting that water wastage is an issue that regularly occurs, particularly during releases. This water should be safeguarded for periods of drought. To do this more dams need to be built.
- Another key issue was water affordability. Attendees noted that the existence of water brokers is an issue that heavily affects affordability as they artificially inflate the price of water, leaving many smaller farmers struggling to pay for water rights. Additionally, water licences should be held by Australians who produce and have an active role in agriculture.



Figure 15: Henty Machinery Field Days



## 6.4 First Nations discussions

### WaterNSW National Reconciliation Week event – 29 May 2023

An event held at WaterNSW's Parramatta offices to celebrate National Reconciliation Week. This allowed consultation with First Nations people in a face-to-face setting.

Key attendees included Dr Phil Duncan, Aunty Glenda Chalker, and Fred Hooper.

A summary of issues raised for 2025-2030 follow.

*Capacity building and training for management and navigation of complex water distribution.*

- Request for capacity building and training for First Nations customers to be better equipped to navigate the complex water distribution system.
- Historically, Aboriginal peoples' rights to water have largely been excluded from **Australia's complex water planning and management policies and programs.**
- An investment in self-managed water operations for First Nations Peoples.

Avoiding consultation fatigue and adopting an inclusive co-design approach.

- First Nations Peoples and groups are currently being over consulted by a wide range of Government and non-Government agencies.
- Consultations are not considered meaningful as feedback to the participants is not being provided.
- Actions are required if the engagement is to be meaningful. Closing the loop means information sharing across the sector from previous engagements.

Demonstrating good governance to build trust.

- Issues raised include river water not being governed as well as it could be. The rivers run too low, not enough water in the system.

*First Nations to own infrastructure for cultural water use e.g., pumping water to billabongs.*

- Request for infrastructure to ensure that water is available specific to cultural requirements.

- Greater access and availability of billabongs as a source of cultural water and activity.

Directly drawing on the knowledge and experience of First Nations women as a priority.

- The knowledge, information and experience of First Nations Women needs to be tapped into and given greater recognition. First Nations men are often sought to provide insight and information relating to First Nations Peoples.
- Women have a special and distinct relationship to water, which is rooted in cultural beliefs, social practices and **economic contexts as well as in women's** role in reproduction. As such, it has been recommended that women are prioritised in conversations pertaining to cultural water and accessibility.

Differentiating between Cultural Water, Aboriginal Water (broader use) and water access licencing.

- Aboriginal rights in water are not adequately recognised by Australian law and policy.
- Cultural water rights and Aboriginal water rights have significant differences in the accessibility and usage of water. They would like to see an increase in access to river water, aligning with Aboriginal water rights.



## Meeting with the NSW Aboriginal Land Council July 2023

The main outcomes raised by the Council are as follows.

- **Water Quality:** Water quality management is a priority, including contamination, cleanliness and salinity. Some communities prefer to drink bottled water as the quality of water available is not acceptable and/or cannot be trusted.
- **Building the Capacity of various NSW Aboriginal Regional Councils:** It's important to build the capacities of councils so they can continue to work with different entities in the water space.
- **Greater Water Education:** The water system is confusing. There seems to be a lack of coordination between the different organisations working in this space.
- **Water trading:** The ability to "trade back" water, i.e. the flexibility to be able to return to the system water allocations that have not been utilised.
- **Cultural water:** Need to change the narrative around cultural water and shift it to Aboriginal water rights. This would result in viewing water as more than just a tradeable or commercial commodity. Water is a bloodline for the Aboriginal community.
- **Engagement and communication:** A more coordinated, inclusive and responsive approach to consulting with Aboriginal communities, bringing more people to the table and working with Aboriginal Land Councils on the ground.
- Is there a means for a Land Council to obtain a water licence and to benefit from it financially?



Figure 16: Buuja Buuja Dancers performing at WaterNSW NRW event.



New South Wales  
Aboriginal Land Council

## 6.5 Customer Advisory Groups

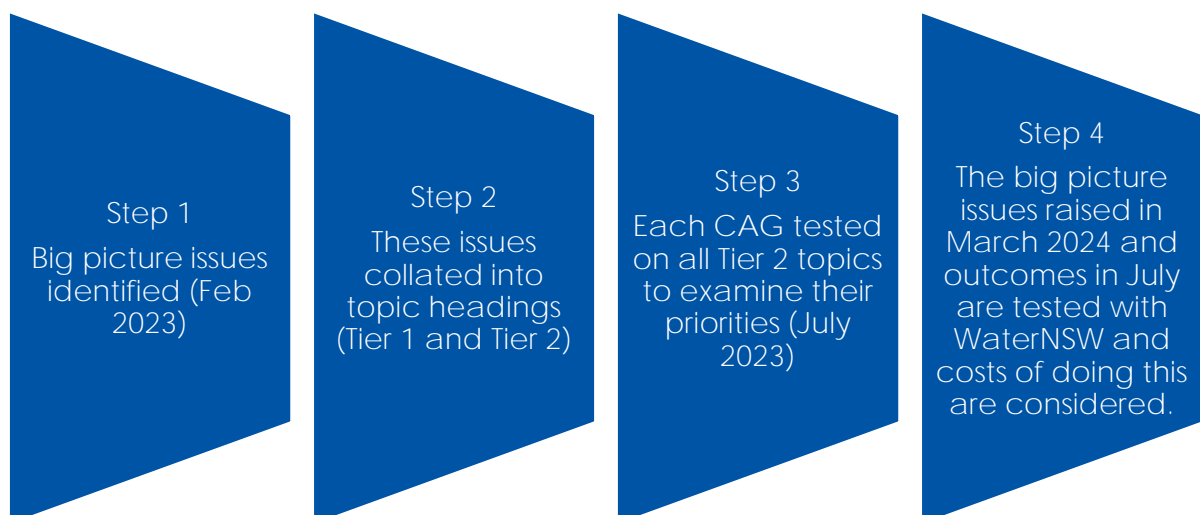
Understanding the big picture issues and outcomes that customers want

The following flow chart shows the process of working with the Customer Advisory Groups. The meeting schedule for Phase 1 activities was as follows.

CAG Meeting 1 (Feb-Mar session)	Date	CAG Meeting 2* (July-Aug session)	Date
Objective: Establish priority list of Tier 1 issues		Objective: Refine and prioritise a list of Tier 2 outcomes	
Murray-Lower Darling CAG	22/2/23	Murray-Lower Darling CAG	12/7/23
Murrumbidgee CAG	23/2/23	Murrumbidgee CAG	13/7/23
Gwydir CAG	14/3/23	Coastal-Hunter CAG	20/7/23
Border Rivers CAG	15/3/23	Greater Sydney CAG	21/7/23
Namoi-Peel CAG	16/3/23	Lachlan CAG	25/7/23
Greater Sydney CAG	21/3/23	Macquarie-Cudgegong CAG	26/7/23
Coastal-Hunter CAG	21/3/23	Barwon-Darling CAG	27/7/23
Macquarie-Cudgegong CAG	22/3/23	Gwydir CAG	1/8/23
Lachlan CAG	29/3/23	Border Rivers CAG	2/8/23
Barwon-Darling CAG	30/3/23	Namoi-Peel CAG	3/8/23

Table 7: CAG meeting schedule for Phase 1

The Phase 1 four-step process of working with the Customer Advisory Groups across NSW to consider their priorities for the period 2025-2030 is explained below.



By their nature the Customer Advisory Groups, are very focused on operations – water delivery and productivity. As a result, their big picture issues and their subsequent outcomes identified over two sessions in February and July 2023 focused on the topics that would make a material difference to how they operate.

In July/August the Customer Advisory Groups met to consider their priority topics. They were asked to rank their top 10 priorities from the Tier 2 list of headings.

The first tranche of CAG priorities follows.

- WaterNSW delivering greater transparency of their costs and pricing (charges).
- Water security and customers receiving an assurance of their water allocations being delivered (to allow for agricultural planning).
- Better drought planning, consideration of the priorities for water restrictions and water conservation.

Followed by

- [Managing] water infrastructure and the costs to do so
- Water delivery rules and services – allocations and the amount of water provided, when customers are charged, accuracy of meters and flexibility of the system
- [Improved] ongoing information flow

Followed by:

- The cost of water and the ability for small farms to operate
- Environmental water – flow, timing, allocation, rule flexibility
- Early warning systems

The phase 2 report will detail WaterNSW and WAMC responses to these desired outcomes.

The full list of tier 2 issues is found in attachment H

Figure 16: Tier 2 priorities among CAG slido respondents



## February/March Customer Advisory Group priority topics

The outcomes each customer advisory group would like to see for the period 2025-2030 are listed in Attachment F.

NSW river valley	Topics that CAG customers identified their preferred outcomes against
Murray-Lower Darling	Water Affordability Water Security and Delivery Including Delivery Rules Bill Transparency Good Customer Experiences Sustainable Water and Land Management
Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee	Water Affordability Water Security and Delivery Including Delivery Rules Good Customer Experiences Sustainable Water and Land Management
Gwydir	Water Security and Delivery Including Delivery Rules Water Ordering Arrangements, Flexibility and Usage – Including Ordering Rules Good Customer Experiences Easy Access to Data and Information
Border Rivers	Good Customer Experiences Easy Access to Data and Information Sustainable Water and Land Management
Namoi-Peel	Water Affordability Good Customer Experiences Easy Access to Data and Information
Macquarie-Cudgegong	Water Affordability Water Ordering Arrangements, Flexibility and Usage – Including Ordering Rules Easy Access to Data and Information Good Customer Experiences Sustainable Water and Land Management
Lachlan	Water Affordability Water Security and Delivery Including Delivery Rules Good Customer Experiences
Barwon-Darling	Water Affordability Water Security and Delivery Including Delivery Rules Engagement and Relationships
Greater Sydney/Coastal-Hunter	Water Affordability Water Ordering Arrangements, Flexibility and Usage – Including Ordering Rules Good Customer Experiences Water Security and Delivery Including Delivery Rules Sustainable Water and Land Management

Table 8: Tier 1 results from the February/March CAG meetings by valley

## All customer advisory groups respondents, a ranking of their Tier 2 priorities (n=91) part 1

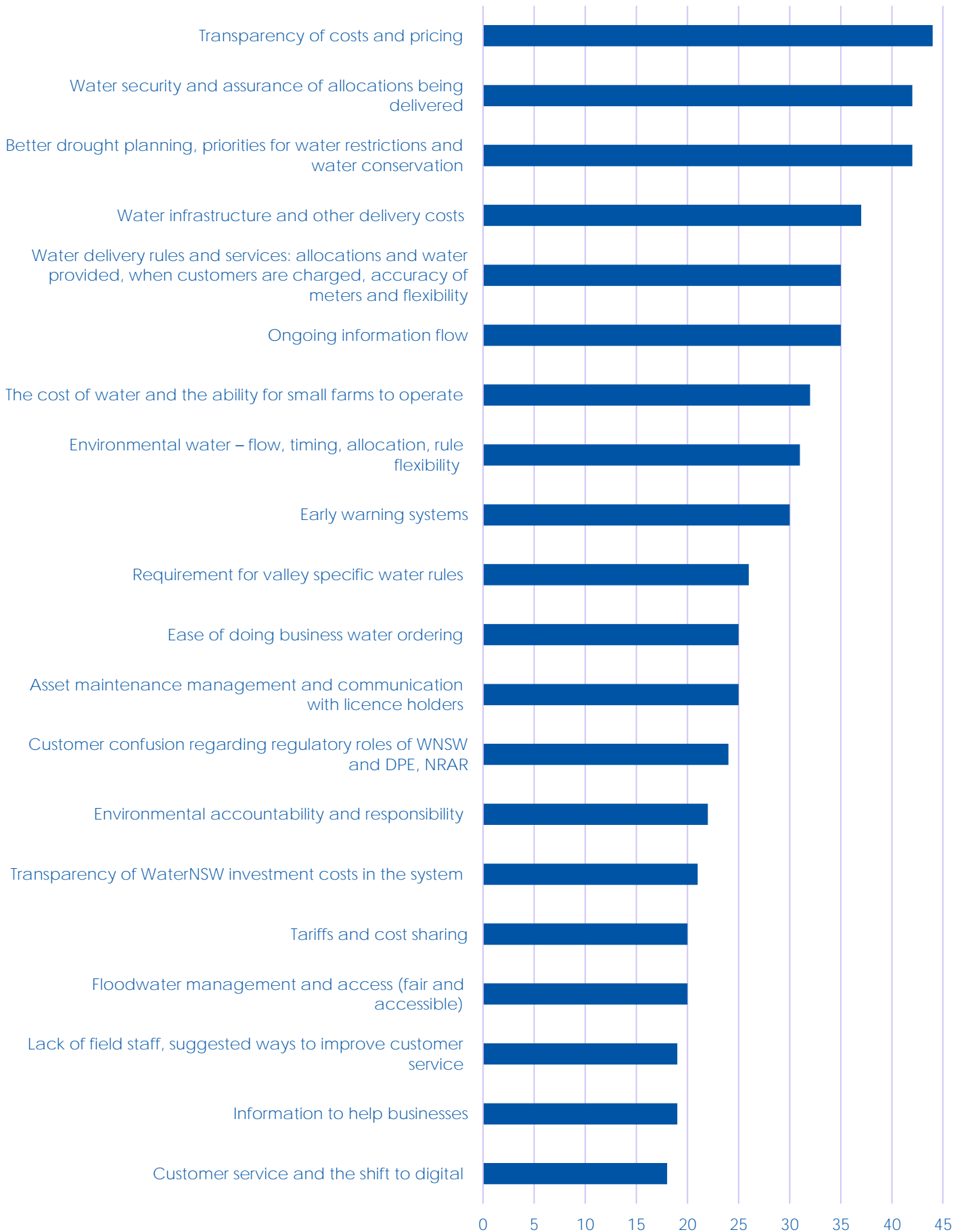


Figure 17a: Tier 2 priorities among the CAG respondents part 1

NB: A full list of tier 2 issues is found in Attachment H  
NB: Graph split into two for ease of readability

## All customer advisory groups respondents, a ranking of their Tier 2 priorities (n=91) part 2

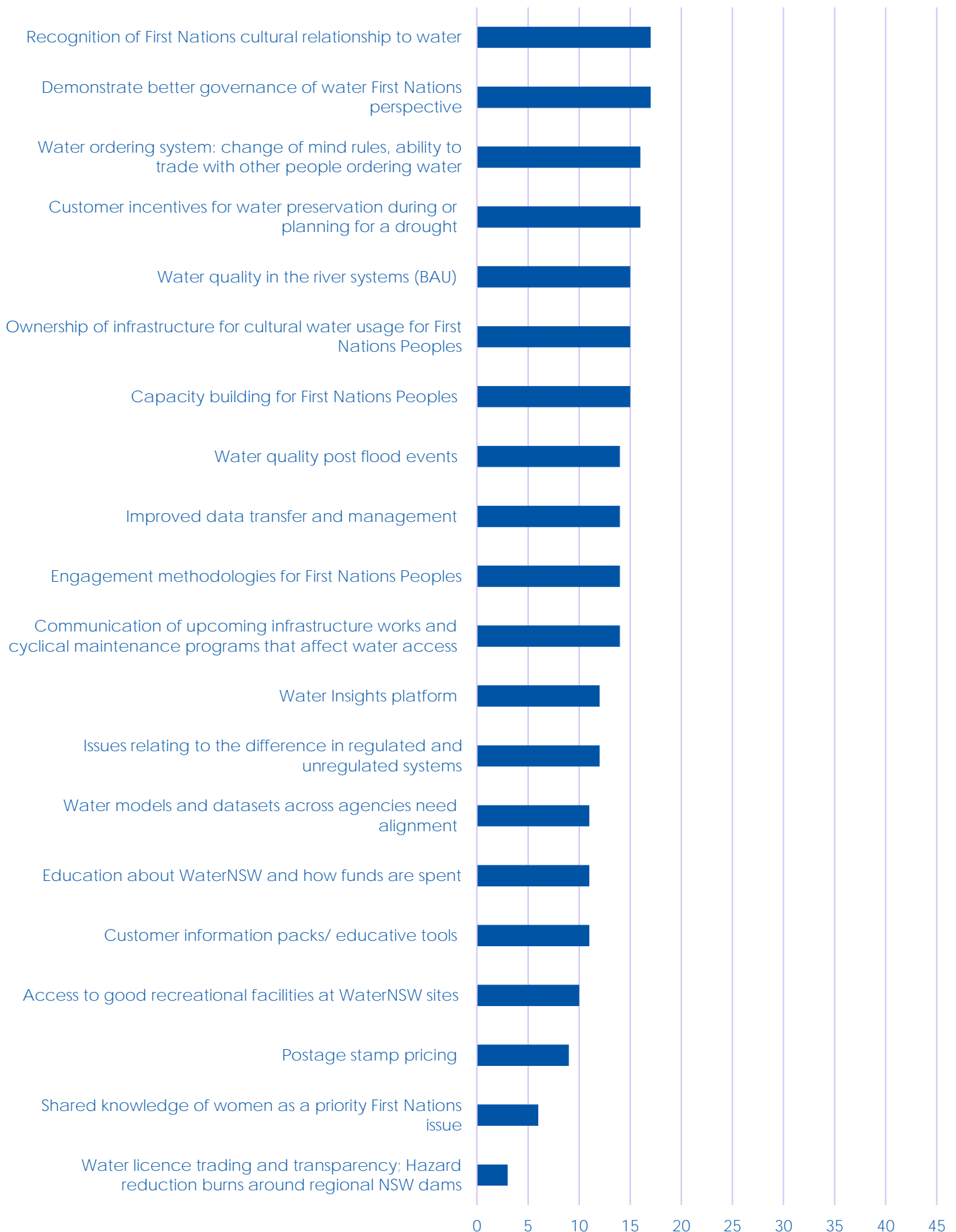


Figure 17b: Tier 2 priorities among the CAG respondents part 2

NB: A full list of tier 2 issues is found in Attachment H  
NB: Graph split into two for ease of readability

## 6.6 Voice of Customer Research 2023

This jointly commissioned research reflects a higher level of cooperation between the three water agencies, WaterNSW, Department of Planning and Environment-Water (DPEW) and the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) informing greater efficiencies.

The results of this research supplement the insights gained from other feedback and contributes to the Phase 1 insights prepared for the proposal submission to IPART.

### Overview

The 2023 Voice of Customer Research program was designed to provide all of the WAMC agencies (WaterNSW, Natural Resource Access Regulator, and Department of Planning and Environment) with a view of water planning and delivery performance from a wide variety of stakeholders. Sitting within this research in 2023 are three projects:

- Voice of Customer Quantitative Feedback Study/Public Sentiment Quantitative Feedback Study - (n=1118 completed surveys)
- Stakeholder Qualitative Feedback Study - (n=47 participants)

Data collection for all three projects commenced in May 2023 and concluded in mid-July.

### Purpose

The survey focused on evaluating how the three water agencies are delivering long-term value to customers and the broader NSW community regarding water management, planning, and compliance responsibilities. The collected feedback is instrumental in informing the decision-making processes and identifying areas for improvement in performance and services.

This research only examined current customer performance issues. Future planning issues such as climate change or asset hardening were not part of the customer research.

### Voice of customer quantitative feedback study/public sentiment quantitative feedback study

Interviews were conducted by a mixture of telephone and online surveys, a breakdown of surveys by customer type is as follows:

- Regulated customers – 267 surveys (201 telephone, 66 online)
- Unregulated customers – 457 surveys (351 telephone, 106 online)
- Groundwater customers – 394 surveys (359 telephone, 35 online)

### Stakeholder qualitative feedback study

We invited stakeholders to participate in the July 2023 survey. The stakeholders covered a range of groups including:

- Associations and Peak Bodies
- Government
- Local Government
- Recreation, Fishing, and Boating
- Environment
- Indigenous

Stakeholders were invited to take part in a 45-minute phone or online interview. Participants were encouraged to provide frank feedback, and they had the option to disclose their identity or remain anonymous.



## Key insights

For WaterNSW specifically:

- WaterNSW held consistent its overall level of satisfaction metric in the past 12 months, delivering a solid year on year performance.
- There was relatively positive feedback on WaterNSW staff performance – Help Desk, assessments and approvals staff, river operators, and local regional branch staff.
- More consistent and formalised engagement is needed with communities and stakeholder groups (building relationships with ongoing dialogue).
- More direct engagement with a large range of groups is needed rather than just talking with customers through the CAGS – however, acknowledging this can be hard noting everyone is very busy.
- The River Operations Stakeholder Consultation Committees were valued by customers (run during drought).
- Paying to maintain a licence when people are not using it is problematic for customers – creating hardship.
- Policy, rules, and the price to comply with metering were the major pain points – it has become a very complex system. The barriers to farming ‘entry’ are now very high and small operators are finding themselves ‘stranded’ and unable to attend to policy. Policy and rules are seen as a business impediment.

## Satisfaction with systems and processes

### Delivery

Regulated customers continued to express higher levels of satisfaction in the delivery, process, timeliness, and staff involved in water delivery. Despite this score falling from 2021 levels, overall satisfaction rose in this area in 2023.

### Billing

Satisfaction levels across billing metrics were largely on par with 2022 levels though down from a 2021 high point.

## WaterNSW help desk

The willingness of WaterNSW staff to help customers was highly regarded, jumping above the previous high watermark 2021 levels of satisfaction.

However, the issues with the systems and processes that staff must navigate continues to be a sore point, detracting from the genuinely well-regarded efforts of staff.

## Applications and approvals

As with Help Desk staff, Applications and Approvals staff were rated substantially higher in their efforts, at an average of 7.17 in their willingness to assist, than other aspects of the applications and approvals process. Ease, cost, clarity, and processing time of Applications and Approvals and other process were sore points and detracted again from staff efforts.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### Systems and processes

From a customer perspective, the genuine efforts of staff are often undercut by complex, time consuming, and costly systems and process difficulties. For staff to be able to provide customers with quality experiences, the systems and processes need to allow them to.

### Relationships and perceptions

Stakeholders of all types relied on ad hoc informal interactions with WaterNSW rather than consistent relationships.

Where regionally located contacts were present, they were highly praised. There was a strong demand for more in-person local presence.

Strong, regular, in-field relationships between WaterNSW staff (relationship managers, community liaison staff etc.) need to be established systematically. Councils, small farmers, and environmental agencies expressed a desire for greater and more personalised engagement.

There was a perception in customers of some favouritism towards the larger water customers.

## Peak bodies

These groups have a disproportionate level of dissatisfaction compared with the wider results and perceptions.

Peak body representatives largely presented perspectives on WaterNSW drawn from stakeholders who have raised negative feedback with them regarding levels of service.

Peak bodies and user groups often became proxy support services where there is no local WaterNSW branch available.

## Customer Advisory Groups

Wider customers are concerned about the CAGS being guided by the lens of the participants rather than being representative of the breadth of customers.

Some respondents saw these sessions as WaterNSW using them for information rather than collaboration. It was recommended this model needs rethinking to create greater customer value.

## Issues by stakeholder segment

Given the diversity of stakeholders; their experiences, conditions, locations, and personal circumstances, stakeholders were grouped into four overall stakeholder segments. These were based on the expression and sentiments held toward the same primary concerns rather than by customer category, river valley, or licence type.

The stakeholder segments defined the share of customers within, and lowest marked issues are outlined below:

**Advocates - 19%** - This group is generally happy with how things are going, gave overall higher ratings, and don't want much more from the water sector.

Around half (50/50) of these customers were using water and were most likely to hold groundwater licences (42%).

They typically had positive interactions with WaterNSW and don't see a need for more

engagement.

**Neutral - 32%** - These people still have the same issues, are engaged, but are more pragmatic with their relations with the system, around the middle with ratings of 4-6/10 on most metrics.

Around half (50/50) of these customers were using water and were most likely to hold unregulated licences (41%).

They were frustrated at paying WAMC charges but typically paid much less. They had the same issues as other segments but did not express them as negatively.

**Policy Concern - 32%** - This group overall rated water delivery quite highly but marked their satisfaction of water rules and sharing plans lower.

Around half (50/50) of these customers were using water and were most likely to hold groundwater licences (39%).

They saw the sector as too complicated and as a result it is pricing small farmers out of the industry.

**Aggrieved Customers - 17%** - These customers were typically angry about one issue that led them to apply a negative lens to all other issues.

More than half (57%) of these customers were not currently using water, with almost half (47%) holding unregulated licences.

Policy and water management were key concerns, for which they blamed WaterNSW. They opposed paying WAMC charges despite not using water.

## 7. Summary of what we've heard – 2022 and 2023



## 7.1 How the insights have been summarised

Phase 1 activities have captured a significant level of data across WaterNSW's customer types, stakeholders and service areas regarding the issues they would like to see addressed.

For ease of reading, insights have been segmented and reported on in the following ways.

### Survey results

The survey and face to face discussions were the primary data capturing tool in Phase 1.

849 surveys were completed up to end of September 2023 across:

- The WNSW Pricing Proposal webpage.
- Meetings where we could survey participants using an online polling tool.
- Intercept surveys at field days where we could fill in surveys manually.

The full results for all questions are provided in Attachment G. Discussions were logged in consultation manager and summaries of qualitative conversations can be found in Section 6.

More details and analysis relating to the survey responses are included in the Phase 2 Consultation Report.

### Heatmap tables

Table have been created to show the priorities of:

- NSW as a whole, by customer type
- Each valley specifically, by customer type.
- We understood from the WaterNSW Customer Advisory Groups that although an overall perspective for the state is helpful, reporting should be segmented by customer or community type so that we can distinguish between the different outcomes desired by different parts of the community.

The purpose of the heatmap tables is to show at a glance the priority issues for customers and communities in each area. These tables are shown on pages 77-94.

### Quotes

Quotes are provided to illustrate the different types of conversations held and to provide the insights in the participants' own words.



## 7.2 Broader insights from across different NSW-wide sample points



### Key takeaways

Five wide ranging events or meetings formed the basis of a NSW-wide perspective. Overall, these touchpoints demonstrate a broad and diverse response to the issues of delivering water for different customer uses across NSW.

#### Engagement and relationships

##### *Relating to customers*

- WaterNSW to focus on consistent and formalised customer engagement, with a renewed focus on customers (in addition to the customer advisory groups).
- Reliable, consistent river information is important and the water insights platform, when people understand it is available, is valued.
- Local, on the ground staff are valued for their local knowledge and the relationships that can be formed. There is demand for a high quality, sustained local presence to assist with water decision making.

##### *Relating to wider stakeholders*

- Stakeholders of all types across NSW rely on ad hoc, informal interactions with WaterNSW rather than consistent relationships, e.g. Councils. This should be addressed at a system wide level, not by individual staff members.

#### Water affordability

##### *A history of price increases*

Many agricultural producers feel exhausted by the increasing bureaucratic burden that is being placed on them. This includes paperwork, complex water planning, and the ongoing uncertainty of receiving their allocations (water availability).

*There are fewer and fewer farmers now and I feel really disgruntled and exhausted. We are tired of being consulted.*

Murrumbidgee valley farmer



### Information Sources

1. 2023 WAMC Insights Report
2. The 2023 Voice of Customer Surveys Across NSW
3. 2023 Conversations with the River Restoration Centre
4. 2023 Festival of the Canoe and Kayak discussions
5. 2023 State Aboriginal Land Council discussions
6. Meetings with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder

#### Current delivery charges

- Customers understand prices are increasing but this increase must be at a sustainable rate.
- Smaller customers feel the impact of metering charges to a greater extent.
- The definition of affordable water should note its relationship with water quality.
- A lot more can be done to improve water quality (for environmental health purposes, eg remove carp) and this will cost to do and cost customers more to extract. Industrial discharge to waterways need to be better managed.
- The less water is treated, the cheaper water could become, but at a cost to river health.

#### Easy access to data and information

##### *Ease of business procedures*

- Customers feel doing business with WaterNSW could be improved - the value of well-trained and easy to talk to staff is impacted by the complex, time consuming and costly systems in place. Repetitive inputting of data is frustrating
- This stops customers from accessing solutions quickly.

#### Sustainable water and land management

- Achieving carbon neutrality is desirable.
- WaterNSW investment in good corporate citizenship, including environmental care projects, is important.

### Water security and delivery

- Fairer distribution of water between customers is desired. This is felt to be currently weighted towards larger irrigators leaving lesser amounts for environmental flows.
- Water reliability and security was a priority across the customer or stakeholder groups – local government and local water utilities; community and recreational water users; stock managers, irrigators and other landowners; and First Customers
- A range of feedback to WAMC over the last few years notes demand management initiatives rather than financial investments should be used to increase supply and to manage water security and reliability.

### Bill transparency

*To generate increased customer and community confidence in the system*

- Price increases are inevitable, but communicating why that is, and the **benefits of WaterNSW's delivery** investments, will be very important to customers.

### Current good customer experiences

- Statewide surveys note relatively positive feedback regarding WaterNSW interactions with stakeholders– the Help Desk, Applications and Approvals staff, the River Operators and local regional branch staff are greatly appreciated.

### Cultural Water

- There is support within First Nations communities for a review in Cultural Water Access and Licencing, to better enable **First Nations' communities to directly** manage water in support of their values and cultural sites.
- There is currently limited and infrequent engagement with First Nations stakeholders - a more coordinated, inclusive and responsive approach to consulting with Aboriginal communities, bringing more people to the table and working with Aboriginal Land Councils on the ground is needed.

### Access to good recreational facilities at WaterNSW sites

- There is a perceived lack of access to sites for recreational activities along NSW waterways and this has worsened over time.
- Recreational users feel WaterNSW could:
  - o improve its communications with tourism operators to build this relationship.
  - o increase public education on the river systems in NSW, including how to take care of them.
  - o increase the amenities provided at recreational sites.

### Communications

- Greater transparency in reporting environmental flow decision making and including the 'where' and 'when' for public scrutiny.
- More timely responses by WaterNSW to communications from customers.
- Broadening communications to customers and improving the user experience of online services.
- Information sharing and education - providing more information to participants on water levels and the science behind the operation of our regulated rivers.
- Offering educational sessions or resources at agricultural teacher conferences, focusing on providing valuable insights into **the industry's operations.**

## 7.3 Valley specific data

### Murray-Lower Darling Valley

	Murray-Lower Darling Valley									
	Priority 1		Priority 2		Priority 3		Also discussed			
	Water affordability	Water security and delivery	Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage	Bill transparency	Good customer experiences	Easy access to data and information	Sustainable water and land management	Cultural water	Access to good recreational facilities at WaterNSW sites	Engagement and relationships
Customer Advisory Group <sup>1</sup>										
Regulated customers <sup>2</sup>										
Unregulated customers <sup>3</sup>										
Groundwater customers <sup>4</sup>										
Environmental stakeholders <sup>5</sup>										
Community member or groups <sup>6</sup>										
Recreational <sup>7</sup>										
Industry <sup>8</sup>										
Government <sup>9</sup>										

Table 9a: Murray-Lower Darling issues heatmap



#### Key takeaways

- Affordable water or ways to reduce cost to customers is the priority for the 2025-2030.
- People value sustainable initiatives in the management of water and water quality, however, the cost to customers needs to remain affordable.
- Ensuring customers receive sufficient contact with WaterNSW employees is of high importance to ensure that water delivery is achieved in a timely manner.
- In surveys for the Murray-Lower Darling Valley, Regulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Sustainable Water and Land Management, and Water Affordability were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



#### Information Sources

(1) CAG meeting notes Feb/Mar 2023  
(2-9) Open surveys up until 24 August 2023, n=35

# Murray-Lower Darling Valley



## Example Quotes

"Improved customer service - metering/DQP area specificity. Some customer service staff are terrible to deal with whilst others are **amazing**."

"Protect the interests of the local community."

"Pricing that is good for all parties (is my priority)."

"The difficulty in accessing resources remains a pressing issue, particularly during dry years when farmers face tough restrictions."

"Too many beneficiaries of the regulated river system do not contribute to WaterNSW revenue."

"Better management of the whole system is needed, including a focus on long term goals, not short term for the benefit of the whole system."

"I don't think water should be a commodity to be traded. I know stories about people selling their entitlement and then their land is worth nothing. I don't think water should be divorced from land."

"If you're going to add more infrastructure the payment shouldn't come from the members of the CAG, it should be from the Federal Government."

"There **needs** to be a significant reduction in fees for low volume users who make no income from the water they use. The costs, and especially change to the metering is just too much money!"

[Regarding communications when flood emergency protocols started, and SES took over as the provider of essential information]  
"You dropped the customer and left us feeling abandoned."

"Stop taking water off of irrigators. Many cannot irrigate anymore because they cannot afford it. We don't need any more environmental flows."

"Working more in partnership with locals who have water knowledge to ensure the region remains productive."



# Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee Valley

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Also discussed
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	Water affordability	Water security and delivery	Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage	Bill transparency	Good customer experiences	Easy access to data and information	Sustainable water and land management	Cultural water	Access to good recreation facilities at WaterNSW sites	Engagement and relationships
Customer Advisory Group <sup>1</sup>										
Regulated customers <sup>2</sup>										
Unregulated customers <sup>3</sup>										
Groundwater customers <sup>4</sup>										
Environmental stakeholders <sup>5</sup>										
Community member or groups <sup>6</sup>										
Recreational <sup>7</sup>										
Industry <sup>8</sup>										
Government <sup>9</sup>										

Table 9b: Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee issues heatmap



## Key takeaways

- Survey responses expressed the importance of the need for better river management and the fulfillment of water allocations.
- People want reliable access to affordable and quality water when required. These flows need to be consistent and WaterNSW representatives who have local knowledge need to be engaged with the community and accessible during moments that need a fast-tracked decision.
- Respondents want environmental water to remain dedicated to environmental purposes and not be turned into saleable water. There is a request for increased transparency in reporting on environmental flow decision-making.
- In surveys for the Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee Valley, Regulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Water Affordability, and Sustainable Water and Land Management were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



## Information Sources

- (1) CAG meeting notes Feb/Mar 2023  
 (2) NSW Farmers Federation meeting Griffith  
 (2-9) Open surveys up until 24 August 2023, n=126

# Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee Valley



## Example Quotes

"Farmers need enough water to irrigate the food we grow. A consistent flow is crucial. Water allocation feels inadequate compared to other states. Examining cities and improving maintenance is priority."

"Providing customers with a pricing and structure that is fair and reasonable, reflecting the actual service rendered is important. Additionally, maintaining transparency in billing is essential."

"Pricing should be fair and reasonable, reflecting the actual service provided to customers. We should ensure good quality water is available where and when it is needed, maintaining reliability."

"Access is a big issue. Restrictions during dry years is tough on farmers – blue-green algae in the local lake has stopped access. It was very popular 15 years ago - now not much."

"Access and affordability - I see a lot of stressed farmers in my work (mental health)."

"Water delivery when required. Engagement with customer service officers who are on the ground and have local knowledge and engagement with water users. Water ordering timing needs to be reduced."

	Priority 1				Priority 2		Priority 3	Also discussed		
	Water affordability	Water security and delivery	Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage	Bill transparency	Good customer experiences	Easy access to data and information	Sustainable water and land management	Cultural water	Access to good recreation facilities at WaterNSW sites	Engagement and relationships
Customer Advisory Group <sup>1</sup>										
Regulated customers <sup>2</sup>										
Unregulated customers <sup>3</sup>										
Groundwater customers <sup>4</sup>										
Environmental stakeholders <sup>5</sup>										
Community member or groups <sup>6</sup>										
Recreational <sup>7</sup>										
Industry <sup>8</sup>										
Government <sup>9</sup>										

Table 9c: Gwydir issues heatmap



## Key takeaways

- Responses highlight the need to find a sustainable approach that ensures water availability for irrigation purposes while safeguarding the health and preservation of the environment.
- People want support for farmers during difficult times and ensuring they have access to water resources. It is suggested that this is achieved by better regulating water and having effective deterrents for people who choose not to abide by the rules.
- In surveys for the Gwydir Valley, Community Members or Community Group Members comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Sustainable Water and Land Management, and Water Security and Delivery were the first and second most selected issues chosen overall, Cultural Water and Water Ordering Flexibility and Usage tied as third most selected choices overall.



## Information Sources

(1) CAG meeting notes Feb/Mar 2023  
(2-9) Open surveys up until 24 August 2023 n=33



## Example Quotes

"While understanding the needs of big irrigators, it is crucial to balance their requirements with environmental considerations."

"Better regulation of the resource and an update of the regulations to ensure that the penalties better address the problem of water theft & are a deterrent not just considered a cost of business"

"There needs to be people from the local communities on the ground with responsibility and monitoring of the water."

"Improvements to water quality and flow of the river system. When it gets to Walgett, there is no water."

"Ensure dams do not run dry and more dams are needed in the catchment area."

"Reliable water resources for the environment (land and biodiversity). Water should be used sensibly and not overused."

"We need more dams in strategic places. Education for farmers to use moisture well on their own properties."

"Water is incredibly important. Irrigation can impact on bores and wasting water is a real issue."

"Happy customers are important! Listen to your customers concerns and provide good engagement."



# Border Rivers Valley

	Priority 1				Priority 2		Priority 3	Also discussed		
	Water affordability	Water security and delivery	Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage	Bill transparency	Good customer experiences	Easy access to data and information	Sustainable water and land management	Cultural water	Access to good recreation facilities at WaterNSW sites	Engagement and relationships
Customer Advisory Group <sup>1</sup>										
Regulated customers <sup>2</sup>										
Unregulated customers <sup>3</sup>										
Groundwater customers <sup>4</sup>										
Environmental stakeholders <sup>5</sup>										
Community member or groups <sup>6</sup>										
Recreational <sup>7</sup>										
Industry <sup>8</sup>										
Government <sup>9</sup>										

Table 9d: Border Rivers issues heatmap



## Key takeaways

- Responses highlight the importance of ensuring clean and less polluted rivers. They highlight the need for monitoring pollution levels in the river system, indicating the significance of regular assessments to maintain water quality.
- Water affordability is also noted as an important matter as smaller scale water users are unable to keep their business afloat due to the high cost of water.
- There is a need to increase the number of local customer service officers to ensure customer needs are met.
- In surveys for the Border Rivers Valley, Regulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Water Affordability, and Easy Access to Data and Information were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



## Information sources

(1) CAG meeting notes Feb/Mar 2023  
(2-9) Open surveys up until 24 August 2023 n=13



## Example Quotes

"Ensuring clean and less polluted rivers is crucial. Monitoring pollution levels in the river system is essential."

"An attempt to simplify allocation decisions, and make them more transparent would be appreciated. We also want costs to be kept as low as possible to keep our enterprises viable."

"Cost effective, transparent water allocations and management. Strong local presence in community, easily accessible local help."

"The whole process of trying to locate water in our property and timeliness of any controlled allocations is frustrating. If there is not going to be an allocation within a certain period, perhaps advertise."

"The issues that matter include all of the options other than bill transparency. There needs to be more detail across the state that all community members can access."

"Everyone at WaterNSW is as helpful as they can be and very timely in their responses. Thank you. I think WaterNSW has improved significantly."

"Improved water management to balance out the droughts and flood water supply."

"Drilling a bore is the largest expense we will encounter, there seems no real explanation on how these very precise locations were selected."

# Namoi-Peel Valley

							Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Also discussed
	Water affordability	Water security and delivery	Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage	Bill transparency	Good customer experiences	Easy access to data and information	Sustainable water and land management	Cultural water	Access to good recreational facilities at WaterNSW sites	Engagement and relationships
Customer Advisory Group <sup>1</sup>										
Regulated customers <sup>2</sup>										
Unregulated customers <sup>3</sup>										
Groundwater customers <sup>4</sup>										
Environmental stakeholders <sup>5</sup>										
Community member or groups <sup>6</sup>										
Recreational <sup>7</sup>										
Industry <sup>8</sup>										
Government <sup>9</sup>										

Table 9e: Namoi-Peel issues heatmap



## Key takeaways

- Pricing and accessibility were expressed as a concern by respondents. Both fair and equitable fees from WaterNSW are necessary for the long-term viability of businesses.
- People desire improved accessibility to WaterNSW staff to address issues and resolve problems in a more time efficient manner. This includes a reduction in paperwork when water meter failures occur.
- Respondents want to partake in genuine community consultation and engagement.
- In surveys for the Namoi-Peel Valley, Community Members of Community Group Members comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Water Affordability, and Water Ordering Flexibility and Usage were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



## Information Sources

(1) CAG meeting notes Feb/Mar 2023  
(2-9) Open surveys up until 24 August 2023 n=96

# Namoi-Peel Valley



## Example Quotes

"WaterNSW should be providing fair and equitable fees and achieving efficiencies over the long term. Customers need to be able to access WaterNSW staff to work on issues and solve problems freely".

"I would like everything to be so much easier. It is difficult to speak to someone at times and if you make a mistake it is difficult to fix. It would be great if IWAS and NSW spoke together."

"Better consultation and community engagement. It needs to be genuine, I want to see that we have been listened to. I want to see better employment opportunities, project partnership and job security"

"Difficult to access knowledgeable people. Local officials work from home."

"More staff on the ground to help fix meter problems, account compliance and to check up on compliance in the mine by arriving unannounced any time day or night, public holidays."

"I would like to see water metering made less onerous especially when meters fail, the paperwork is ridiculous!"



# Macquarie-Cudgegong Valley

	Water affordability	Water security and delivery	Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage	Bill transparency	Good customer experiences	Easy access to data and information	Sustainable water and land management	Cultural water	Access to good recreational facilities at WaterNSW sites	Engagement and relationships
Customer Advisory Group <sup>1</sup>	Priority 1	Also discussed	Priority 1	Also discussed	Priority 1	Priority 1	Priority 1	Also discussed	Also discussed	Priority 1
Regulated customers <sup>2</sup>	Priority 2	Priority 2	Priority 1	Also discussed	Priority 3	Priority 1	Priority 1	Priority 3	Priority 2	Also discussed
Unregulated customers <sup>3</sup>	Priority 3	Priority 2	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Priority 1	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed
Groundwater customers <sup>4</sup>	Priority 2	Priority 1	Priority 1	Priority 2	Also discussed	Priority 2	Priority 2	Priority 2	Also discussed	Also discussed
Environmental stakeholders <sup>5</sup>	Also discussed	Priority 1	Priority 1	Also discussed	Also discussed	Priority 2	Priority 1	Also discussed	Priority 3	Also discussed
Community member or groups <sup>6</sup>	Also discussed	Priority 2	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Priority 1	Also discussed	Priority 3	Also discussed
Recreational <sup>7</sup>	Priority 3	Priority 1	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Priority 1	Also discussed	Priority 2	Also discussed
Industry <sup>8</sup>	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed	Also discussed
Government <sup>9</sup>	Also discussed	Priority 3	Priority 1	Also discussed	Priority 2	Priority 2	Also discussed	Priority 3	Also discussed	Also discussed

Table 9f: Macquarie-Cudgegong issues heatmap



## Key takeaways

- Survey responses expressed the importance of a reliable and good supply of water. They emphasise the need for cost-effective and transparent water allocations and management.
- People desire a reliable water supply, effective water management, and sustainable land practices that consider both environmental conservation and economic benefits.
- In surveys for the Macquarie-Cudgegong Valley, Unregulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Sustainable Water and Land Management, Water Security and Delivery, and Easy Access to Data and Information were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



## Information Sources

(1) CAG meeting notes Feb/Mar 2023  
(2-9) Open surveys up until 24 August 2023 n=32

# Macquarie-Cudgegong Valley



## Example Quotes

"Water and land should not be removed from each other. Affordable, secure and reliable water supply is very important."

"Commit to improving water management in NSW by giving greater recognition to Aboriginal water rights and interests as well as improving access to ownership of water for cultural, spiritual, social and economic benefit to communities."

"More water buy backs from willing customers. Assess and regulate all flood plain harvesting extraction. No more dams. Stealing water should result in [the] loss of [your] licence. Progress cultural water."

"Making sure the rivers are clean and less polluted is important, which needs to be done by monitoring the amount of pollution that is in the river system."

"Water security in times of drought specifically. More forward thinking - don't want to get to a position like we were in a few years about with less than 1% in Burrendong Dam!"

"Better water management. Assistance to advocate against poor developments impacting communities. Communities won't be resilient in the face of a silver mine which could leech lead into the water here."

"Better environmental outcomes. Better water quality. Concerned about silver mine that has been approved. It will poison the water and it should never have been approved."

"Better regulation of water sales, restriction of water trading by corporations/wealth building investments with no rural background. Lack of long-term planning regarding crops."

	Priority 1				Priority 2		Priority 3		Also discussed	
	Water affordability	Water security and delivery	Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage	Bill transparency	Good customer experiences	Easy access to data and information	Sustainable water and land management	Cultural water	Access to good recreation facilities at WaterNSW sites	Engagement and relationships
Customer Advisory Group <sup>1</sup>										
Regulated customers <sup>2</sup>										
Unregulated customers <sup>3</sup>										
Groundwater customers <sup>4</sup>										
Environmental stakeholders <sup>5</sup>										
Community member or groups <sup>6</sup>										
Recreational <sup>7</sup>										
Industry <sup>8</sup>										
Government <sup>9</sup>										

Table 9g: Lachlan issues heatmap



## Key takeaways

- Survey responses highlight the importance of safe and sufficient drinkable water for households at an affordable cost. They express the desire for reduced water costs, increased efficiency, and improved outcomes.
- A review of the current flow regime across NSW was requested to more accurately address the requirements and considerations for water releases.
- People requested an increased number of local customer service officers to ensure customer needs are met.
- In surveys for the Lachlan Valley, Community Members or Community Group Members comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Water Ordering Flexibility and Usage, and Sustainable Water and Land Management were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



## Information Sources

(1) CAG meeting notes Feb/Mar 2023  
(2-9) Open surveys up until 24 August 2023 n=33



## Example Quotes

"Pricing should be fair and reasonable, reflecting the actual service provided to customers. We should ensure good quality water is available where and when it is needed, maintaining reliability."

"Understand the challenges faced by farmers. Restrictions during dry years make farming difficult."

"The emphasis should be shifted from irrigation requirements to environmental considerations regarding the release of water. The current flow regime across NSW is inadequate."

"Remove the ability for people to only buy and sell water. Allow farmers access to that water."

"Instead of asking customers what they want, WaterNSW should provide clear information to customers what the cost of their services will be, and how they've improved the efficiency of their operations."

"Water quality has deteriorated in recent years, however extraction has increased."

"The emphasis should be shifted from irrigation requirements to environmental considerations regarding the release of water. The current flow regime across NSW is inadequate."

"Stop restricting water going to farmers - they should have as much as they want."

Less water to irrigators - more to other farmers."

"Be upfront about what the costs will be."

"More storage dams need to be built and existing dams enlarged so more irrigation areas can be opened up and long-term security delivery can be assured for investment in these areas. The population continues to grow and so will our nation's food supplies. The financial impacts of floods also need to be reduced by increasing the dam storage areas. We need a longer term vision to account for the future growth."



# Barwon-Darling Valley

	Priority 1				Priority 2		Priority 3	Also discussed		
	Water affordability	Water security and delivery	Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage	Bill transparency	Good customer experiences	Easy access to data and information	Sustainable water and land management	Cultural water	Access to good recreational facilities at WaterNSW sites	Engagement and relationships
Customer Advisory Group <sup>1</sup>										
Regulated customers <sup>2</sup>										
Unregulated customers <sup>3</sup>										
Groundwater customers <sup>4</sup>										
Environmental stakeholders <sup>5</sup>										
Community member or groups <sup>6</sup>										
Recreational <sup>7</sup>										
Industry <sup>8</sup>										
Government <sup>9</sup>										

Table 9h: Barwon-Darling issues heatmap



## Key takeaways

- Respondents express the need for better and broader communication regarding water-related matters. They emphasise the importance of clear and effective communication channels to keep customers informed. People also spoke about the importance of affordable water, improved water pressure supply, and efficient use of environmental water.
- Community members or community group member groups have a disproportionate level of dissatisfaction compared with the wider results.
- Peak body representatives largely presented perspectives on WaterNSW drawn from stakeholders who have raised negative feedback with them regarding levels of service.
- Peak bodies and user groups often became proxy support services where there is no local WaterNSW branch available.
- In surveys for the Barwon-Darling Valley, Community Members or Community Group Members comprised the largest group of respondents. Water Security and Delivery, Cultural Water, and Water Affordability were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



## Information Sources

(1) CAG meeting notes Feb/Mar 2023  
(2-9) Open surveys up until 24 August 2023 n=23



## Example Quotes

"It is key that environmental water managers and WaterNSW continue to work together".

"It feels like water allocations & management is increasingly occurring inside a black box where users/stakeholders have limited ability to see/understand how decisions are being made. An attempt to simplify allocation decisions and make them more transparent would be appreciated. We also want costs to be kept as low as possible to keep our enterprises viable."

"Delivery data should be provided in a timely way. Better systems for electronic orders and water transfers. Tax invoices raised automatically and correctly. Tailored dashboards. Smoother with LRS."

"If you don't own land where the water you own can't be used, the water you have can't be bought or sold. Make water something for farmers to own and use not people to buy and trade in. It's not money, it's water and peoples lives. Stock and domestic water should come before irrigation and the fish should come first."

"I would like to see a much improved water pressure supply, currently I pay more for my water than those in Sydney yet my pressure is not enough for my water pressure machine to work."

"Manage water and land assets better. Rewards or encouragements to save water (incentives)."

"I want to see employment opportunities come from the information and insights that we provide during consultation and engagement. There needs to be better awareness about the accessibility and availability of clean, drinking water. Employ locals who know the river system and understand sustainability. First Nations Peoples are sought for information and expertise, but we are not included in the further opportunities."

# Greater Sydney, North and South Coast and Hunter Valleys

Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Also discussed
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	Water affordability	Water security and delivery	Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage	Bill transparency	Good customer experiences	Easy access to data and information	Sustainable water and land management	Cultural water	Access to good recreational facilities at WaterNSW sites	Engagement and relationships
Customer Advisory Group <sup>1</sup>										
Regulated customers <sup>2</sup>										
Unregulated customers <sup>3</sup>										
Groundwater customers <sup>4</sup>										
Environmental stakeholders <sup>5</sup>										
Community member or groups <sup>6</sup>										
Recreational <sup>7</sup>										
Industry <sup>8</sup>										
Government <sup>9</sup>										

Table 9i: Greater Sydney, North and South Coast and Hunter Valley issues heatmap



## Key takeaways

- Survey responses express the desire for affordable and clean water, as well as ensuring a continuous and secure supply of healthy water. There is a call for reduced fees for low-volume users, particularly those who do not generate income from the water. This included addressing metering fees and approval times for licencing.
- Respondents noted the importance of balancing water usage between the environment and productivity. Additionally, educating the public on river systems was noted as a key action that WaterNSW needs to complete.
- In surveys for the Greater Sydney and Coastal-Hunter Valleys, Regulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Affordability, Water Security and Delivery, and Sustainable Water and Land Management were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



## Information Sources

(1) CAG meeting notes Feb/Mar 2023  
 (2-9) Open surveys up until 24 August 2023 n=185  
 Discussions with farmers leading up to Phase 2 activities

# Greater Sydney, North and South Coast and Hunter Valleys

## Quotes

"We can't earn more, we can't increase our wages...with water price increases there won't be horticulture in the Hawkesberry in the future. There won't be orchards."

"Addressing the issue of trading is important to ensure a fair and transparent system"

"An enormous decrease in assessment times for licencing and approvals is necessary".

Regular monitoring and testing of the WaterNSW network. A coordinated approach will allow us to guarantee the supply of water for future generations and also safe guard the population against flood risks.

"The metering standards are too difficult to achieve, and costly to install and maintain."

"Better education about river systems among the public. I want to see better communications, and more WNSW on ground presence in the regions."

# Greater Sydney

## Our Water Our Voice

Sydney Water's 'Our Water Our Voice' is a series of phased customer and stakeholder engagements conducted over a 12-month period.

The results below are drawn from the exploratory phase 1 and capture qualitative insights from stakeholders on their desired outcomes. These have been grouped below into issues relating to water supply, water delivery, and wastewater management respectively. The blue box contains insights relevant to WaterNSW.

## Qualitative research

The below is taken from a consolidated list of findings across all customer research inputs contributing to Sydney Water customer qualitative insights, which comprised 2 deliberative forums (n=86 in Sydney, n=90 in Parramatta), 8 focus groups with CALD community members, 2 First Nations focus groups, 6 focus groups with small/medium businesses, and 10 one-on-one interviews with people living with disability.

The broader outcomes for Sydney Water stakeholders are shown in the next section.

Sydney Water customers Issues regarding water supply	Sydney Water customers Issues regarding water delivery	Sydney Water customers Issues regarding wastewater management
Water Quality – Maintain water quality and cleanliness at current levels	Water Quality – Maintain water quality and cleanliness at current levels	Stormwater Management – Improved stormwater management, storage and capture in local areas and homes
Water Quality – Ensure waterways and water recreation areas remain clean and safe to use	Water Quality – Ensure waterways and water recreation areas remain clean and safe to use	Wastewater Management – Reduce the discharge of wastewater pollution to rivers and the ocean beyond current standards
Water Quality – Reduce the risk of drinking water experiencing issues with odour or taste after occasional changes in the environment (such as flooding, heatwave, fire or high wind events)	Water Conservation – Minimise and reduce breakages in the network	Sustainability – Contribute to a cooler environment through the maintenance of green public spaces
Drought Resilience – Improve resilience to drought (through increased uptake and usage of recycled water or desalination)	Water Delivery – Minimising the impact of outages (both planned and unplanned)	Sustainability – Reducing net carbon emissions to zero by 2050
Drought Resilience – Reduce the period in which Greater Sydney experiences or requires water restrictions	Customer Service – Maintaining a standard of customer service that meets or exceeds customer expectations	
Water Conservation – Increase water savings/reduce water usage across Greater Sydney AND improve community knowledge about water and how to minimise usage	Communications – Proactively modernize communications with customers (e.g. live updates on dam levels, traffic light levels for water restrictions)	
Affordability – Ensure water and wastewater bills remain affordable		

Table 10: Our Water Our Voice phase 1 insights – Sydney Water customers issues



## Refined customer outcomes (Sydney Water)

Qualitative insights were further refined into actionable priority outcome areas.

The safety and cleanliness of drinking water, waterways/water recreation areas, water aesthetics, water network resilience, water restrictions, and water savings programs emerged as relevant to WaterNSW.

Customers (n=1537) were then asked to rank the top 15 issues by relative importance, giving

a snapshot of sentiments where customers were forced to trade off some issues for others.

Overall, maintaining safe and clean drinking water, water and wastewater bill affordability, and the cleanliness and safety of waterways and water recreation areas were ranked most highly.

A breakdown graph of customer ranked priorities is provided on the following page.

Sydney Water customers Outcomes regarding water supply	Sydney Water customers Outcomes regarding water delivery	Sydney Water customers Outcomes regarding wastewater management
Outcome: Maintain safe and clean drinking water	Outcome: Maintain safe and clean drinking water	Outcome: Reducing water loss to the ocean by improving stormwater management, storage, and capture
Outcome: Ensuring waterways and water recreation areas remain clean and safe to use (by reducing wastewater pollution to rivers and the ocean)	Outcome: Ensuring waterways and water recreation areas remain clean and safe to use (by reducing wastewater pollution to rivers and the ocean)	Outcome: Ensuring waterways and water recreation areas remain clean and safe to use by reducing wastewater pollution to rivers and the ocean
Outcome: Reducing the chances of your drinking water occasionally smelling or tasting different after unplanned events	Outcome: Reducing water loss by minimising leaks and breaks in <b>Greater Sydney's pipe networks</b>	Outcome: Contributing to a cooler environment and more pleasant green public spaces through the establishment/maintenance of trees and vegetation
Outcome: Enhancing the water network's resilience to drought through building more water recycling and/or desalination capacity	Outcome: Minimising the impact of outages (both planned and unplanned) AND; maintaining a standard of customer service that meets or exceeds your expectations	Outcome: Reducing net carbon emissions to zero by 2050 or sooner through more energy-efficient operations and greater use of renewable energy
Outcome: Reducing the frequency and duration of water restrictions	Outcome: Ensuring better informed customers by improving and modernising communications to assist them with managing their water use	
Outcome: Increasing water savings and reducing usage through community-based water saving programs		
Outcome: Ensuring water and wastewater bills remain affordable (through careful cost management, guarding against future cost spikes and offering payment plans that help to make bills more manageable)		

Table 11: Our Water Our Voice phase 1 insights – Sydney Water customers outcomes

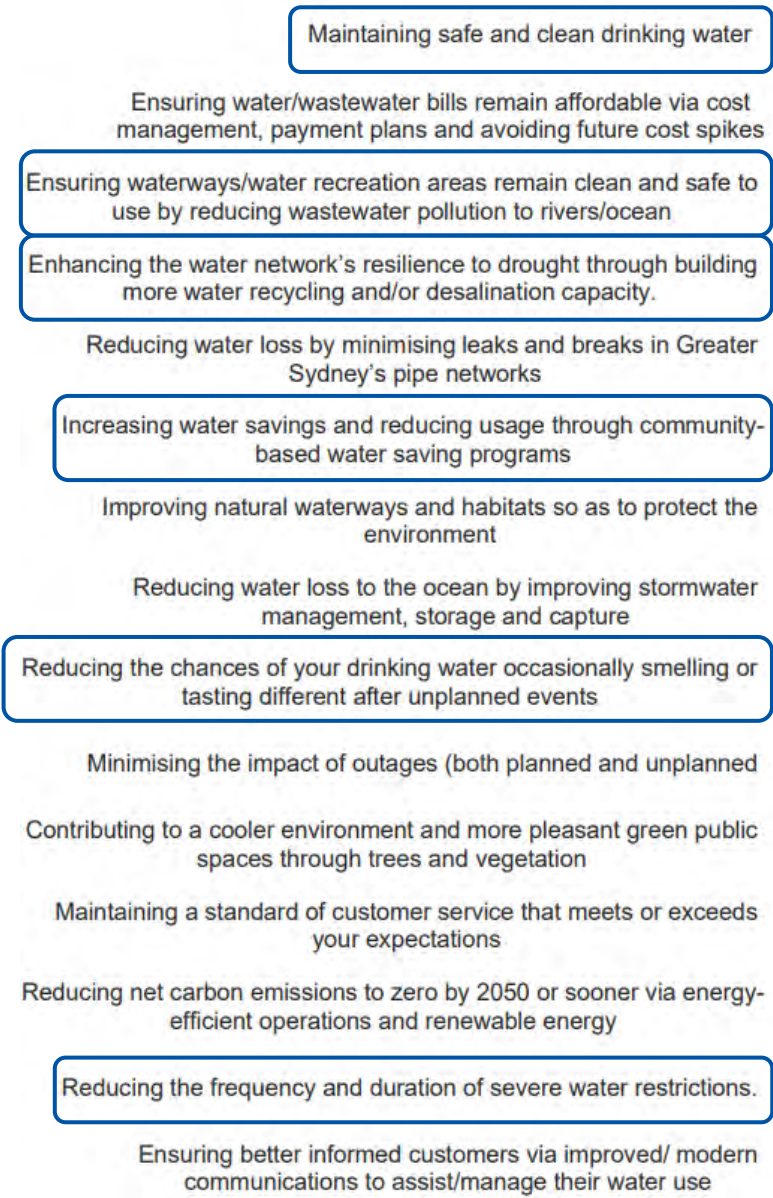
# Ranking of outcomes by Sydney Water customer importance

The below graph outlines the overall relative importance of the 15 issues identified in the exploratory Phase 1.

Through Best-Worst Scaling, customers were asked to rank their priorities in relation to other issues. It should be noted that bottom-ranked issues should not be taken as having no value to customers.

The 3 issues ranked most highly by customers overall were:

1. Maintaining safe and clean drinking water
2. Ensuring water/wastewater bills remain affordable via cost management, payment plans and avoiding future cost spikes



3. Ensuring waterways/water recreation areas remain clean and safe to use by reducing wastewater pollution to rivers/ocean

The issues identified as relevant to the work of WaterNSW, circled in blue, were overall ranked fairly high among the 15 issues identified. The three highest ranked issues relevant to WaterNSW respectively were:

1. Maintaining safe and clean drinking water
2. Ensuring waterways/water recreation areas remain clean and safe to use by reducing wastewater pollution to rivers/ocean
3. Enhancing the water network's resilience to drought through building more water recycling and/or desalination capacity

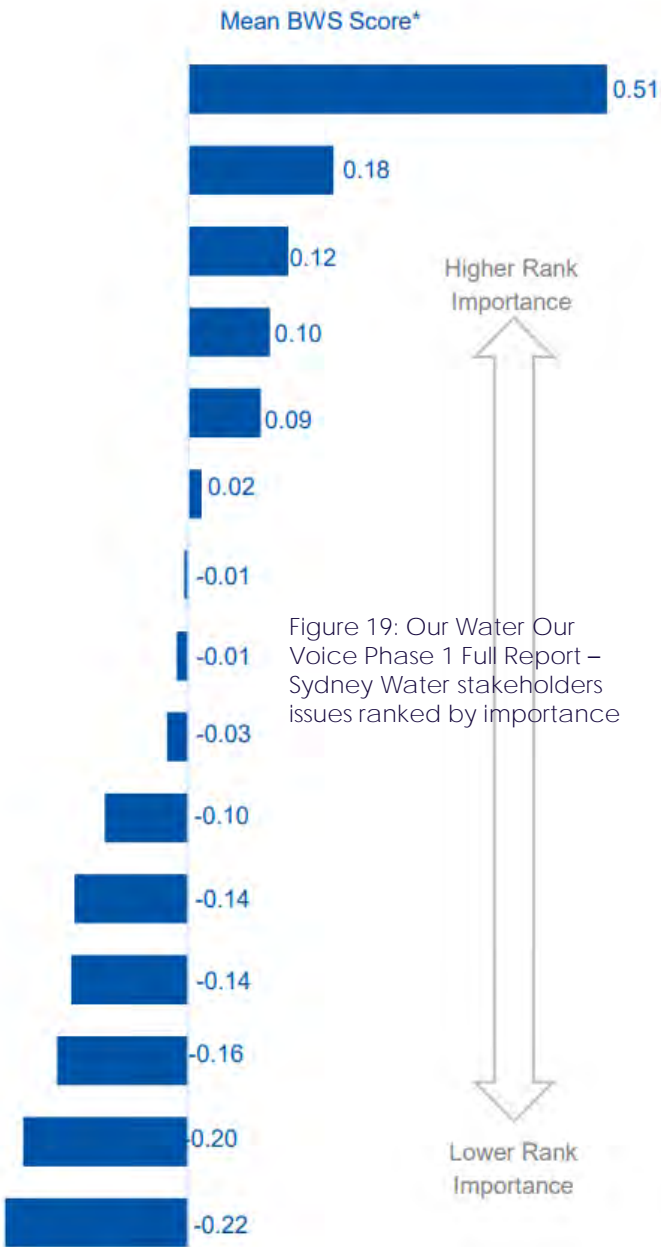


Figure 19: Our Water Our Voice Phase 1 Full Report – Sydney Water stakeholders issues ranked by importance

## Engagement with Sydney Water

Sydney Water is a critical customer to WaterNSW. WaterNSW engages regularly with Sydney Water as a customer through multiple teams and channels on day-to-day planning and delivery, as well as on a project basis.

The Sydney Water, WaterNSW, IPART Pricing Working Group meets monthly to consider approaches, the needs of Sydney Water customers, and projects relevant to the 2025-2030 IPART pricing proposal. This is supported by active working groups, focused on continuous improvement.

Team to team discussions between WaterNSW and Sydney Water are occurring regarding a range of discrete projects and operating expenditure.

Other customers have direct access to the Warragamba pipeline for rural activities and production.

WaterNSW has significant engagement and joint planning underway with Sydney Water. These are focussed on capital activities and captured in the regular meetings to develop and deliver on the Long Term Capital Operational Plan.

We meet with Sydney Water counterparts across portfolios – eg water monitoring and delivery teams every week.

The current consultation for the Long Term Fish River Strategy has also included Sydney Water as a significant stakeholder in its development. Blue Mountains water supply is supplemented by Fish River water.

We are planning further targeted engagement with major customers including Sydney Water, in Phases 2 and 3 of the consultation.

# Fish River

## Background and consultations

In January 2023 the Fish River Water Supply Strategic Plan was submitted to the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE). As a water supply authority, WaterNSW must comply with the water supply planning requirements that are stated in the 2018 Water Management General Regulation, as well as the DPE's planning guidelines.

WaterNSW is developing The Plan for Fish River Water Scheme (FRWSS). Phase 1 identified issues with consultation of customers and relevant stakeholders, particularly major customers, and Phase developed a Strategic Plan. There are 302 customers to this valley. The Phase 1 Issues Paper describes issues regarding the infrastructure failing to meet regulatory compliance and customers' service needs.

## Customer issues

A Customer Consultation Workshop (21<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2022) had representatives from major FRWSS customers; Lithgow City Council, Oberon Council, Energy Australia, Sydney Water, and DPE-Water, to discuss operations. Stakeholders raised the following.

### Communications

- Customers are not getting sufficient notices regarding outages.
- During outages, local customers do not have drinking water. WaterNSW may need to distribute bottled water via the Council to the customers.

### Allocations

- The allocations provided to Sydney Water require a review, given actual customer usage is well below these allocations.
- Costs are increasing despite water usage falling.
- Energy Australia's actual use being below their allocation.
- It was suggested that unused portion of allocations be redistributed more equitably, or offered back into the scheme, to assure Councils of water security.

### Water quality

- Ongoing issues with manganese, organic carbon, algae, and turbidity in raw water supplies managed by WaterNSW.
- Water chlorination was highlighted and raised by Councils in other discussions.
- A lack of publicised scientific backing

regarding E-flows, given its impact on water quality.

- Dirty water - when lines turn back on after the water breaks, most of the time dirty water comes. Sometimes a number of days.

### Asset reliability

- The average length of time to rectify pipe bursts.
- The lack of formal reporting process of customer complaints relating to asset malfunction and breakdowns, including the cause and location of the complaint.
- The reliability of pipeline infrastructure was especially important to Council customers.

### Water restrictions and distribution during low storage periods

- Support for keeping the status quo of water restriction arrangements as outside of the revised water access licence.
- Standardisation of water restrictions among neighbouring councils is desired. It was noted that this is a council responsibility outside of the FRWSS.
- Better drought planning and climate change.
- The 80/20 fixed to usage cost pricing structure is aggravating these problems.

### Uncertainty

- The difficulty of long-term usage projections, the prospect of some customers leaving the FRWSS, and the uncertainties these would entail for remaining customers.
- Transparent information and effective customer issues resolution were highly regarded.



## Key takeaways

- FRWSS customers are concerned with high prices for declining usage, particularly in light of forthcoming dry period.
- Core operations and reliability and utility of WaterNSW assets.



## Information sources

- Fish River Water Supply Scheme – Strategic Plan Customer C
- CAG Meeting Notes
- Surveys completed n=13



## 7.4 Issues regarding tariffs and pricing structures

Pricing and tariff structures have been a consistent point of concern for customers in discussions over the last few years.

Customers have raised concerns about:

- water affordability across all valleys.
- the difference in prices and price structures across different valleys
- the need for reforms to pricing structures in ways that align with the specific conditions in each valley and customer group.

Transparency of tariffs and more locally relevant cost share balances are requested.

Comments have focused on equity issues. For those prices to be set in an equitable pricing structures that does not unfairly impact low volume water users or people living in a specific location.

Concerns have been raised about periods in **which water may not be available...**

*"High fixed cost does not take into account the variability of access to water. It would be a huge burden on water users in dry times when low production already places pressure on income streams. Costs should be related to usage as much as possible."*  
2021 customer conversations

### Customer Advisory Groups

The Customer Advisory Groups raised

- cost sharing arrangements between customer and government and
- the structure of tariffs

in February/March 2023.

In the **Murray – Lower Darling Valley** an 80/20 fixed variable ratio is requested to be examined.

#### In the Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee valleys

- The 2019 IPART cost share review resulted in a significant change in the proportion of charges given to customers. Concerns are raised about the fairness and accuracy of these cost sharing decisions.
- There is variability in the customer base, with some paying minimal amounts and others paying much higher fees.

#### Border Rivers valleys

- Transparency around cross-valley pricing calculations is needed as this has been considered opaque by some customers.

#### Greater Sydney/Coastal regions and the Hunter Valley

- Request a breakdown of all tariff components for transparency and clarity, customers need greater confidence in the pricing structures and its resulting valley-to-valley price discrepancies.

#### Lachlan Valley

- The 80/20 or 70/30 fixed: variable price tariffs require customer discussions. It is felt that the Lachlan Valley water delivery prices are too high.
- The Lachlan CAG had surveyed customers previously to consider a preferred new tariff structure. People with a general use licence have a different view to people with a high security licence and more information from WaterNSW is sought.
- The cost share decisions are felt to need further examination.

#### Barwon-Darling Valley

- Request transparent information about tariff breakdowns and pricing, to ensure customers understand.

The feedback we have received on the issue of tariffs and price structures demonstrates the substantial interest in discussing tariff issues and ways of reforming them.



Further to the CAGS, comments were provided on tariffs and pricing structure in the online surveys. These are summarised below.

Valley	Online survey comments
Murray-Lower Darling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cheaper water is required.</li> <li>Prices set at a rate that is suitable for all parties.</li> </ul>
Barwon-Darling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cheaper water is required.</li> </ul>
Border Rivers	<i>No tariff specific comments at this stage.</i>
Coastal-Hunter	<i>No tariff specific comments at this stage.</i>
Fish River	<i>No tariff specific comments at this stage.</i>
Greater Sydney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower rates or no cost water.</li> <li>Fair and equitable pricing structure that accounts for environmental conditions such as drought and provides quality drinkable water.</li> <li>Equal water pricing for all NSW users.</li> <li>Reduction in fees for low volume users who do not make an income [commercial profit] from the water.</li> <li>The changes to pricing and metering are unaffordable.</li> </ul>
Gwydir	<i>No tariff specific comments at this stage.</i>
Lachlan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to change water pricing structure from 40:60 (fixed:usage) to 80:20 (fixed:usage).</li> </ul>
Macquarie-Cudgegong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pricing structure that is based on usage for sewerage.</li> </ul>
Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cheaper water [is needed].</li> <li>Equitable pricing that does not unfairly impact upper catchment users.</li> <li>Cost effective water pricing and metering.</li> <li>Fair and equitable pricing and structure for customers in line with service that is provided.</li> <li>Closer parity [is needed] between irrigation users and domestic pricing.</li> <li>Lack of reticulated supply creates out of pocket costs to ensure that there is a reliable water source, which should be taken into account in the pricing structure.</li> <li><b>Movement from the current 'impactor pays' to user pays system</b> reflects the diverse beneficiaries in NSW and is consistent with the pricing frameworks found in other states.</li> <li>Price relief for river charges [is required].</li> <li>Reduction in cost until the management of allocating and delivering water to users improves in the Murrumbidgee, which is currently severely underused due to policy management of the dams.</li> <li>User-pays cost sharing arrangements for water management/infrastructure.</li> </ul>
Namoi-Peel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cheaper water.</li> <li>Fair and equitable pricing structure.</li> </ul>

Customers have requested a way forward regarding these tariff and pricing structure discussions, with the next steps for engagement described below.







	<b>Early consideration</b>	Customers raised issues about the tariff split between fixed base costs and flexible usage costs. They also expressed interest in understanding IPART’s cost sharing framework and opportunities for this to be review in this next regulatory period.
	<b>WaterNSW development of options</b>	WaterNSW considered options to better ensure their ability to recover the costs to deliver water and promote stability in customer’s prices and/or bills, including managing external risk and challenges.
	<b>Early discussions with customers</b>	The Customer Advisory Groups represent some 95 different water groups. In July and August 2023 the CAGS considered the early principles and outcomes related to tariff options. They sought more information by way of worked examples.
	<b>Worked examples and refined options</b>	WaterNSW refine the options and prepare worked examples of what is being considered for the November CAGS. The responses from each CAG to be widely circulated to all CAGS to increase the transparency of these discussions.
	<b>Further discussions 2024</b>	Return to the Customer Advisory Groups in 2024 for further deliberation
	<b>Pricing proposal</b>	Customer discussions, responses and ideas addressed in the WaterNSW Bulk Water Pricing Proposal.

Table 12: Phase 2 and 3 steps to engage on tariff proposals

## 8. Feedback and next steps engagement



## 8.1 Feedback from community and customers on the engagement process

Feedback on the engagement process from customers and stakeholders is a key takeaway for WaterNSW to both improve the current Pricing Proposal process and for ongoing conversations about water delivery projects.

This section includes insights from several meetings.

### Insights from meetings

The meetings provided a meaningful discussion and feedback on WaterNSW's pricing proposal engagement process. Meetings included:

- Customer Advisory Group meetings (held in February 2023)
- Customer Advisory Groups Chairs meeting (held in June 2023)
- Hunter Valley Water Users Association meeting (held in May 2023).

### CAGS

CAG customers wanted reassurance that the Water Working Groups in Phase 2 would be reflective of customer issues and that rich feedback would be provided to the CAGS.

### Customer Advisory Groups Chairs meeting, June 2023

WaterNSW organised a meeting with 10 CAG Chairs to discuss the methodology for the IPART customer and community engagement planned for the second half of 2023.

Attendees felt there could be improvements in the following areas.

#### Communication

As there are multiple meetings over an extended period it is necessary to accommodate attendance for people who many not be able to attend each session due to work or distance, as well as people who

may need to participate online. Attendees should be made to feel comfortable enough to ask questions during meetings without feeling judgement.

- *Information sharing and education*

WaterNSW should provide information on existing costs and make clear whether they will take responsibility for delivering to those costs and not exceeding them. Additionally, WaterNSW should be forthcoming in - what they can do better, what needs to be changed and what is required.

Information is requested on how the costs from the last reset have been delivered (against itemised actions) to ensure transparency.

- *Protection of community interests*

Transparency regarding the proposed WaterNSW pricing is essential to highlight what people may be paying for, and whether they feel it is value for money.

The process is felt to be overcomplicated, for a matter that is simple. The non-discretionary items should be listed and everything else considered as to whether it is affordable.

- *Online survey*

Clarity needs to be given on how much weight will be given to survey results from individuals who have not participated in the IPART process, as their understanding of regulated water in rural valleys may influence the process and also the results for customers.

WaterNSW noted the previous IPART determination that requested all issues that stakeholders have be noted, so that water issues can be better identified and addressed, which is why all types of stakeholders were being consulted for input. This was in addition to IPART's requirements in their new engagement framework.

## Insights from the online survey

Survey feedback on the engagement process was collated from completed surveys on the Pricing Proposal website, intercept surveys captured during Field Days, as well as Slido responses collected during meetings.

Respondents stated that they felt that there needed to be improvements in:

- *WaterNSW Communications*
  - Increased clarity and transparency in the information being shared, such as the cost of services, how water allocations and management occurs, as well as identification of how services have become more efficient.
  - The system is very complex – many customers do not fully understand 'how it all works'.
- *Protection of customer interests*
  - WaterNSW exists to deliver water to customers, and protection of local customer interests is important.
- Consultations with the community should recognise the importance of customers. Wider information should show how the water agencies are actively addressing issues, such as the building of illegal levy banks.
- *Customer Data*
  - Use the customer database to inform people.

## Hunter Valley Water Users Association (HVWUA), May 2023

WaterNSW attended this meeting and spoke to approximately 33 attendees about the Pricing Proposal.

Attendees stated they felt there could be improvements in:

- *Communication of the IPART process*
  - WaterNSW to make their IPART survey results public.
  - A lack of clarity on the regions, such as for the

Coastal-Hunter region. Providing maps with the regions identified would cause less uncertainty and confusion.

- Give users feedback on the IPART consultation while it is underway.

- *Protection of community interests*

- Provide reasoning to participants as to why pricing structure is set as it is. For example, non-customers as well as domestic and stock customers are being serviced by the dams and so currently do not pay charges .

- Ensure a diverse representation on deliberative forums (the right people).

- *Survey*

- The survey does not allow for other issues to be raised. It would be ideal if there was a way for people to raise a broad range of issues.



## 8.2 How we will use this feedback

The feedback from various meetings and surveys has and will influence the processes adopted by WaterNSW to better meet the needs of its customers and stakeholders.

### **WaterNSW's customer, community and stakeholder consultation for the pricing proposal and more broadly**

- All water access issues will be heard and documented – whether they relate to other of the water agencies, not just WaterNSW.
- WaterNSW will ensure it seeks out and invites a diverse representation of stakeholders to all deliberative forums.
- The CAG chairs meeting on the process resulted in each of these issues being carefully considered in the design of, and information provided to the 2025-2030 Water Working Groups.
- The feedback provided by community and customers will be transparent (ie published). This Phase 1 and the Phase 2 report will be published on the website and widely circulated, including to all CAG members.
- The feedback from various engagement activities, where possible, will be segmented by stakeholder type, to assist with understanding the different perspectives provided (noting that stakeholder groups may not necessarily align on a perspective).
- WaterNSW will clearly recognise that water users are their customers and have a role in considering future costs and charges. They pay both through their taxes (NSW Government share of WaterNSW costs) and directly through their water access licence charges.
- Three water agencies manage the water system – Department of Planning and Environment – Water; Natural Resources Access Regulator; WaterNSW. The concern expressed by community and customers that their issues raised are relevant to all three agencies is recognised, and as a result a much greater collaboration across the agencies for Phase 2 Engagement activities is planned.

## 8.3 Next steps

### Next steps engagement for the pricing proposal

As noted in Section 2, the focus of Phase 2 is to examine:

- What does it cost to achieve these outcomes?
- What are the other costs needed in 2025-2030?
- Does this understanding of cost and charges change the outcomes we want to see?

The customer and community inputs to the proposal are obtained from several engagement mechanisms shown below.

Phase 2 engagement in the second half of 2023 focusses on:

- the 2025-2030 Water Working Groups which are consulting with a wide range of customers and community on charges, and
- the Customer Advisory Groups who have a specific focus on future improvements to the water delivery mechanisms.



**2025-2030 NSW Water Working Groups**  
For the first time in the bulk water and WAMC pricing proposals engagement process, the Water Administration Ministerial Corporation (made up of WaterNSW; the Department of Planning and Environment – Water, and the Natural Resources Access Regulator) have

joined together with a diverse group of customers and community to explore water rules, delivery and enforcement outcomes and the cost of implementing those outcomes. This engagement process is called the 2025-2030 Water Working Groups and will be addressed in the Phase 2 Report.

# 9. Attachments

Attachment A – Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal guiding principles

Attachment B - Stakeholder groups provided with information and invited to participate

Attachment C - Survey detail

Attachment D – Collateral

Attachment E – Customer Advisory Groups

February/March meeting, broad-picture issues raised for each valley

Attachment F – Customer Advisory Group outcomes determined by valley

Attachment G – Survey results by valley

Attachment H – Full list of tier 2 issues



# Attachment A – The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal guiding principles

There are 12 guiding principles under IPART's 3C's framework for developing and submitting pricing proposals. These principles are used by IPART to assess proposals on a scale of leading, advanced, standard, and sub-standard, and are used to make any necessary revenue adjustments. WaterNSW is aiming for a 'standard' achievement, conscious of customer expectations and cost sensitivities.

WaterNSW uses this framework to demonstrate that our Pricing Proposal promotes customer value and meets their long-term needs and expectations.

Principles should be in line with customer priorities. Discussions with customers in the early stages of engagement will help us identify our focus principles.

Customer	
1. Customer-centric services and expenditure	Better customer service delivery and responsiveness + put customers at the heart of decision making
2. Reflects customer engagement feedback	Collaborate with stakeholders, customers and community to improve water outcomes
3. Promotes better customer outcomes	Understand and maximise value of water for customers
4. Meets broader community needs	Proactive, two-way customer, community and stakeholder engagement + Easy to communicate and do business with + Deliver reconciliation action plan
5. Supports environmental sustainability	Evolve strategic partnerships to manage sustainable, secure and healthy water resources + Adopt ESG that aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goals + Reduce waste and increase reuse
6. Promotes choice of services	Fair and transparent prices
Costs	
7. Robust costs	Digital solutions, to streamline, automate and digitise much of operations to help uplift capabilities, enable efficiencies and respond to needs of customers and stakeholders
8. Balance of risk and long-term performance	Whole-of-system asset management to benefit customers and communities
9. Commitment to improve value	Fair and transparent prices
10. Equitable and efficient cost recovery	Ensure we are more efficient with our costs and expenditure
Credibility	
11. Business is delivering	Work with NSW Gov and water agencies to achieve and sustain regional prosperity, improve water resilience and water quality
12. Demonstrates continuous improvement	Innovate to provide thoughtful leadership and better practice

## Attachment B – Stakeholder groups provided with information and invited to participate

Stakeholder Types	Definition and examples
All NSW customers	<p>All of WaterNSW's customers located in NSW.</p> <p>Examples are included in the table below.</p>
Regulated customer	<p>Holders of licences and approvals on regulated rivers (rivers controlled by a major storage or dam to supply water are regulated rivers as the flow of water is controlled) including irrigators and the NSW and Commonwealth Government environmental agencies.</p> <p>Examples include irrigator associations, Commonwealth stakeholders.</p>
Unregulated customer	<p>Extractive licence and approval holders on unregulated rivers (rivers without a major storage or dam to supply water are unregulated rivers as the flow of water is not controlled, however, use of the water is still subject to "legal regulation").</p> <p>Examples include landholders with licences.</p>
Groundwater customer	<p>Extractive groundwater licence and approval holders (customers who draw water from a bore).</p> <p>Examples include bore water user associations, landholders.</p>
Environmental stakeholder	<p>A person with an interest or concern in environmental activities.</p> <p>Examples include landcare groups.</p>
First Nations stakeholder	<p>A First Nations individual, group or organisation that stands to be impacted by the outcome of the project.</p> <p>Examples include Local Aboriginal Land Councils.</p>
Community member or community group member	<p>Community member is any member of the public. A community group member is a person who comes together with other people for a common purpose or shared interest.</p> <p>Examples include individual customers located in NSW and community groups.</p>
Government	<p>Any State Government or Commonwealth customer who uses water supplied by WaterNSW.</p> <p>Examples include public schools and Local Councils.</p>
Recreational (water) user	<p>A person who uses recreational water for activities, such as swimming, diving, boating and fishing.</p> <p>Examples include boat and golf clubs.</p>
Industry group member	<p>A person or business who is part of a particular group of companies or businesses that have an interest in water.</p> <p>Examples include national or state associations/councils for specific industries.</p>



# Attachment C – Survey detail

Below are the contents of the online survey used in the engagement

## Full name (required)

Type your answer here...

Next

## Email

This is how we will send you updates on the program, if you wish to be contacted by email.

Type your answer here...

Next

## Contact number

Type your answer here...

Next

## How would you describe yourself? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Regulated customer
- ☐ Unregulated customer
- ☐ Groundwater customer
- ☐ Environmental stakeholder
- ☐ First Nations stakeholder
- ☐ Community member or community group member
- ☐ Government
- ☐ Recreational user
- ☐ Industry group member
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Next

## River Valley/location (select all that apply)

- ☐ Barwon-Darling
- ☐ Border Rivers
- ☐ Coastal - Hunter
- ☐ Fish River
- ☐ Greater Sydney
- ☐ Gwydir
- ☐ Lachlan
- ☐ Macquarie - Cudgong
- ☐ Murray - Lower Darling
- ☐ Murrumbidgee
- ☐ Namoi-Peel
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Next

## If you are a WaterNSW customer, please share your Customer Account Number. This is not a mandatory question.

WaterNSW customers will find this on the top right of their bill, as shown in the image below.



Type your answer here...

Next

## Do you want to receive future updates about this project?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Next

## How do you want to stay in touch? (select all that apply)

- ☐ By email
- ☐ Online via webinar
- ☐ Attend a session in person
- ☐ Not interested in being involved for now
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Next

## What would you like to see WaterNSW deliver in the period 2025-2030? (200 characters)

Type your answer here...

You have 200 characters left.

Next

## Which of the following issues matter the most to you in relation to WaterNSW? (select up to three)

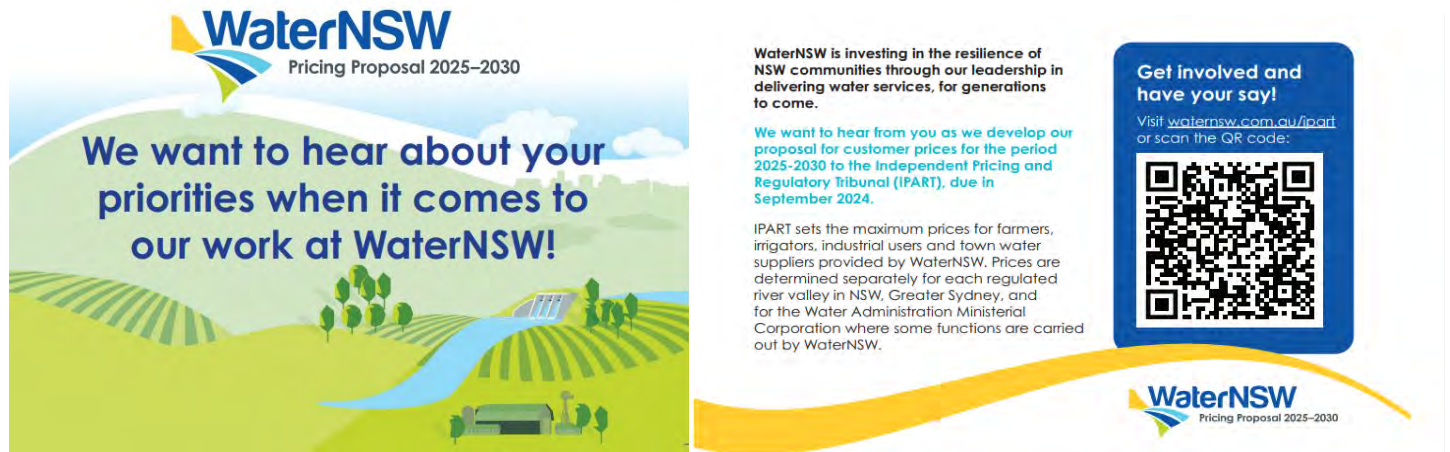
- ☐ Water affordability
- ☐ Water security and delivery
- ☐ Water ordering flexibility and usage
- ☐ Good customer experiences
- ☐ Bill transparency
- ☐ Easy access to data and information
- ☐ Sustainable water and land management
- ☐ Cultural water
- ☐ Access to good recreational facilities at WaterNSW sites

Next

# Attachment D – Collateral

## Postcard

The below images contain the front and rear sides of the postcard used throughout this engagement. Containing a survey QR code and short explanatory note.



## Print advertisement

The below image contains the print advertisement containing a survey QR code and an invitation to participate in the engagement process



## Pullout banners

The images to the right contain pullout banner designs used at various events throughout the engagement.



# Attachment E – Customer Advisory Groups

## February/March meeting, broad-picture issues raised for each valley

Valley	Tier 1 Issues	Tier 2 Issues
Murray-Lower Darling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Bill transparency</li> <li>• Engagement and relationships</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> <li>• Community engagement for this Pricing Proposal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency of costs and pricing</li> <li>• Tariffs and cost sharing</li> <li>• Transparency of WaterNSW investment costs in the system</li> <li>• The cost of water and the ability for small farms to operate</li> <li>• Water security and assurance of allocations being delivered</li> <li>• Water delivery rules and services:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allocations and water provided</li> <li>- When customers are charged</li> <li>- Accuracy of meters and flexibility</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Customer service and the shift to digital</li> <li>• Lack of field staff, suggested ways to improve customer service</li> <li>• Environmental water – flow, timing, allocation, rule flexibility</li> <li>• Environmental accountability and responsibility</li> <li>• Better drought planning, priorities for water restrictions and water conservation</li> <li>• Engagement process with customers and community</li> </ul>
Murrumbidgee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Engagement and relationships</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> <li>• Community engagement for this Pricing Proposal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tariffs and cost sharing</li> <li>• Transparency of costs and pricing</li> <li>• Water security and assurance of allocations being delivered</li> <li>• Customer service and the shift to digital</li> <li>• Lack of field staff, suggested ways to improve customer service</li> <li>• Environmental water – flow, timing, allocation, rule flexibility</li> <li>• Engagement process with customers and community</li> </ul>
Namoi-Peel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Community engagement for this Pricing Proposal</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Postage stamp pricing</li> <li>• Engagement process with customers and community</li> <li>• Customer information packs/educative tools</li> <li>• Issues relating to the difference in regulated and unregulated systems</li> <li>• Lack of field staff, suggested ways to improve customer service</li> <li>• Water Insights platform</li> <li>• Data transfer and management</li> </ul>

Valley	Tier 1 Issues	Tier 2 Issues
Border Rivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> <li>• Community engagement for this Pricing Proposal</li> <li>• Engagement and relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency of costs and pricing</li> <li>• Water security and assurance of allocations being delivered</li> <li>• Water delivery rules and services</li> <li>• Ease of doing business water ordering</li> <li>• Water ordering system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change of mind rules</li> <li>- Ability to trade with other people ordering water</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Customer information packs/educative tools</li> <li>• Water Insights platform</li> <li>• Data transfer and management</li> <li>• Engagement process with customers and community</li> </ul>
Greater Sydney/Coastal-Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> <li>• Community engagement for this Pricing Proposal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency of costs and pricing</li> <li>• Tariffs and cost sharing</li> <li>• Ease of doing business water ordering</li> <li>• Water ordering system</li> <li>• Customer information packs/educative tools</li> <li>• Customer confusion regarding regulatory roles of WNSW and DPE, NRAR</li> <li>• Water security and assurance of allocations being delivered</li> <li>• Environmental water – flow, timing, allocation, rule flexibility</li> <li>• Environmental accountability and responsibility</li> <li>• Customer information packs/educative tools</li> <li>• Customer confusion regarding regulatory roles of WNSW and DPE, NRAR</li> </ul>
Lachlan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Community engagement for this Pricing Proposal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water security and assurance of allocations being delivered</li> <li>• Transparency of costs and pricing</li> <li>• The cost of water and the ability for small farms to operate</li> <li>• Engagement process with customers and community</li> </ul>

Valley	Tier 1 Issues	Tier 2 Issues
Macquarie-Cudgegong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency of costs and pricing</li> <li>• Water security and assurance of allocations being delivered</li> <li>• Water Insights platform</li> <li>• Improved data transfer and management</li> <li>• Customer information packs and educative tools</li> <li>• Lack of field staff and ways to improve customer service</li> <li>• Environmental water – flow, timing, allocation, rule flexibility</li> <li>• Environmental accountability and responsibility</li> </ul>
Barwon-Darling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Community engagement for this Pricing Proposal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer confusion regarding regulatory roles of WNSW and DPE, NRAR</li> <li>• Customer information packs and educative tools</li> <li>• Lack of field staff and ways to improve customer service</li> <li>• Environmental accountability and responsibility</li> <li>• Water security and assurance of allocations being delivered</li> <li>• Engagement process with customers and community</li> </ul>
Gwydir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Engagement and relationships</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water delivery rules and services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allocations and water provided</li> <li>- When customers are charged</li> <li>- Accuracy of meters and flexibility</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Asset maintenance management and communication with licence holders</li> <li>• Ease of doing business water ordering</li> <li>• Water ordering system</li> <li>• Customer information packs/ educative tools</li> <li>• Customer confusion regarding regulatory roles of WNSW and DPE, NRAR</li> <li>• Water Insights platform</li> <li>• Data transfer and management</li> </ul>



## Attachment F – Customer Advisory Group outcomes determined by valley

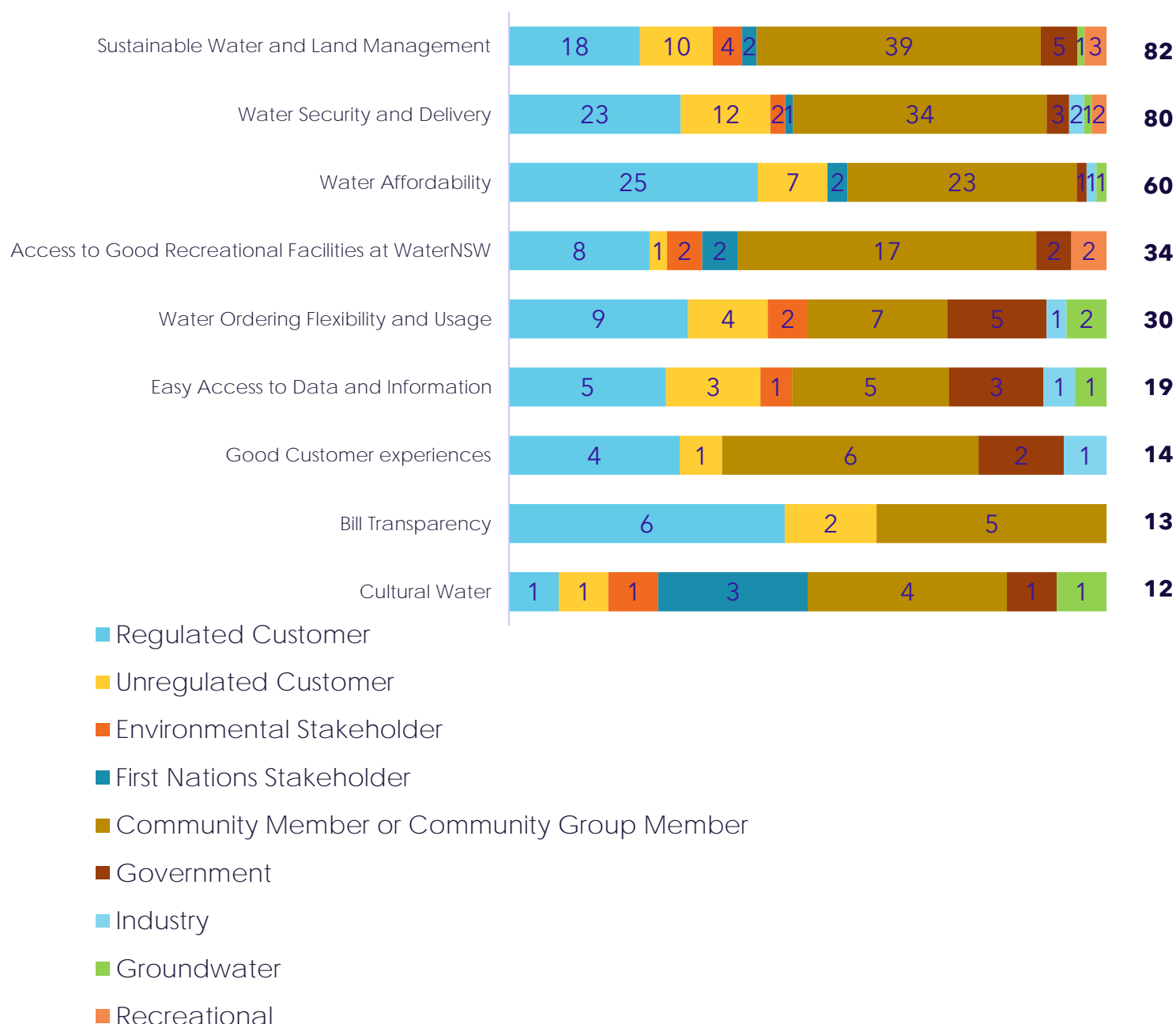
Valley	Initial priorities	Refined outcomes
Barwon-Darling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Engagement and relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> <li>• Engagement and relationships</li> </ul>
Border Rivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>
Coastal-Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Effective communication and good customer service</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>
Greater Sydney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> </ul>
Fish River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Good customer experiences and communication</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> </ul>

Valley	Initial priorities	Refined outcomes
Gwydir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Engagement and relationships</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> </ul>
Lachlan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> </ul>
Macquarie-Cudgegong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water ordering arrangements, flexibility and usage – including ordering rules</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>
Murray-Lower Darling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Bill transparency</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Bill transparency</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>
Murrumbidgee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Water security and delivery including delivery rules</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> </ul>
Namoi-Peel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water affordability</li> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good customer experiences</li> <li>• Sustainable water and land management</li> <li>• Engagement and relationships</li> <li>• Easy access to data and information</li> <li>• Water affordability</li> </ul>

## Attachment G – Survey results by valley

### Murray-Lower Darling Survey Data by Customer Type, n=124 completed surveys

*\*respondents could choose up to 3 issues*

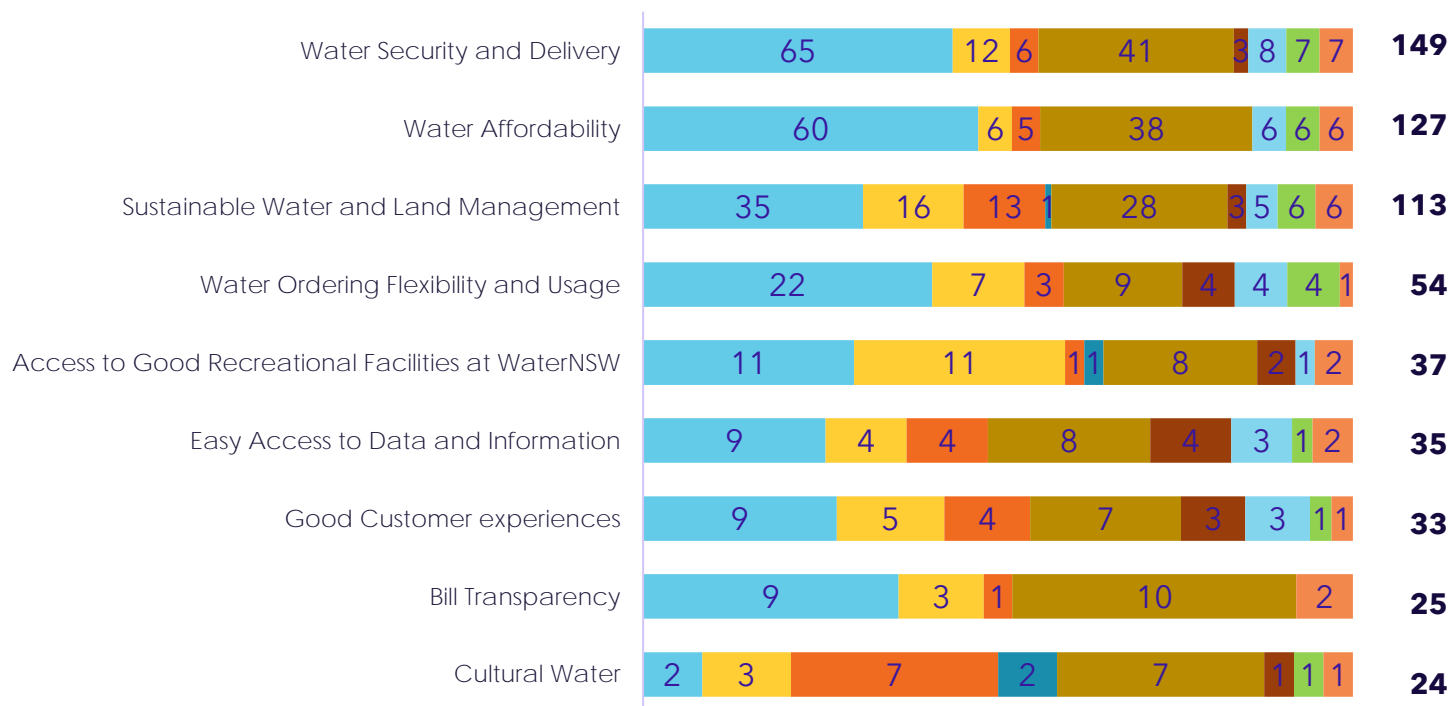


In surveys for the Murray-Lower Darling Valley, Regulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Sustainable Water and Land Management, and Water Affordability were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.

# Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee

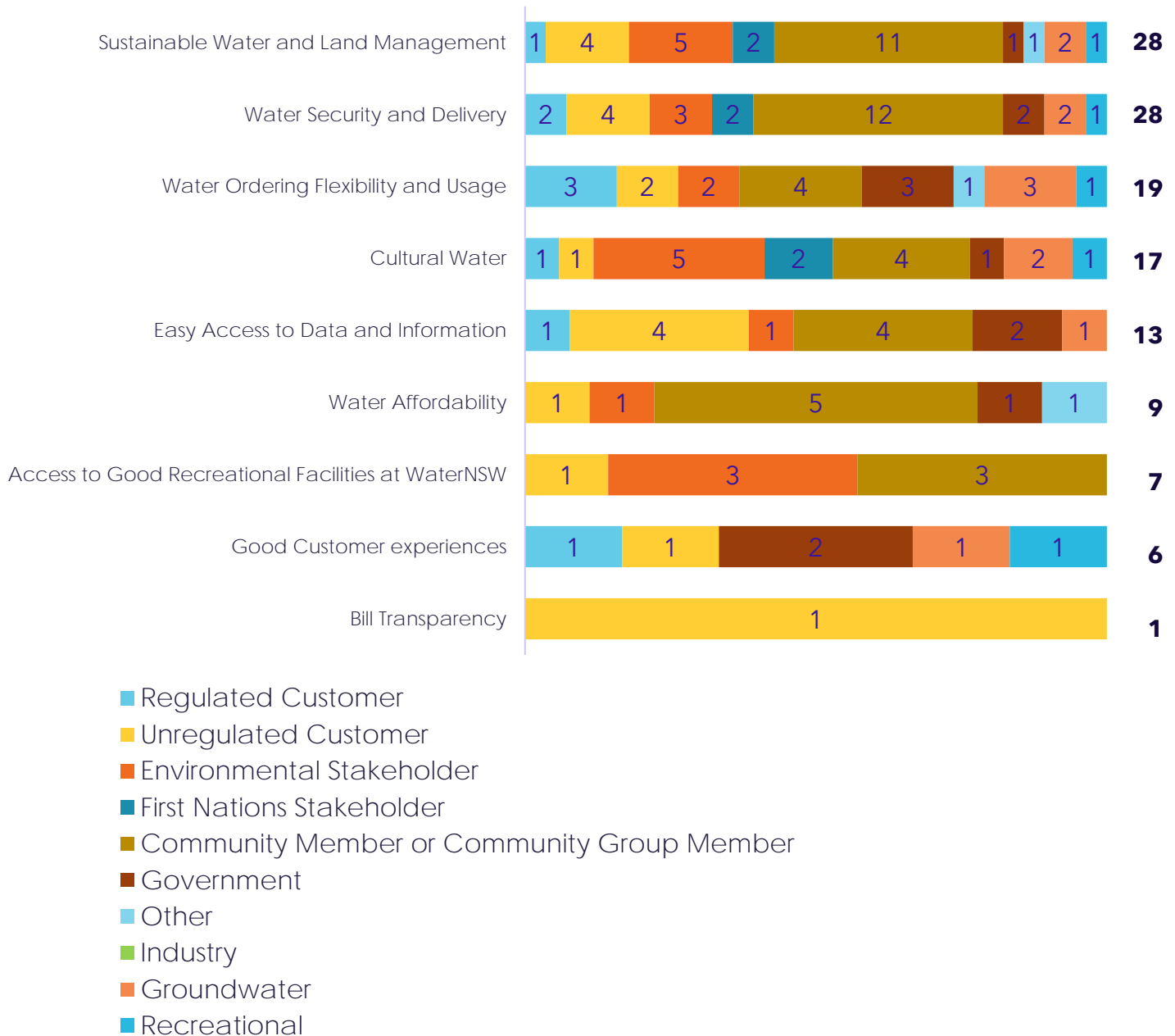
## Survey Data by Customer Type, n=246 completed surveys

*\*respondents could choose up to 3 issues*



- Regulated Customer
- Unregulated Customer
- Environmental Stakeholder
- First Nations Stakeholder
- Community Member or Community Group Member
- Government
- Industry
- Groundwater
- Recreational

In surveys for the Murrumbidgee-Lowbidgee Valley, Regulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Water Affordability, and Sustainable Water and Land Management were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



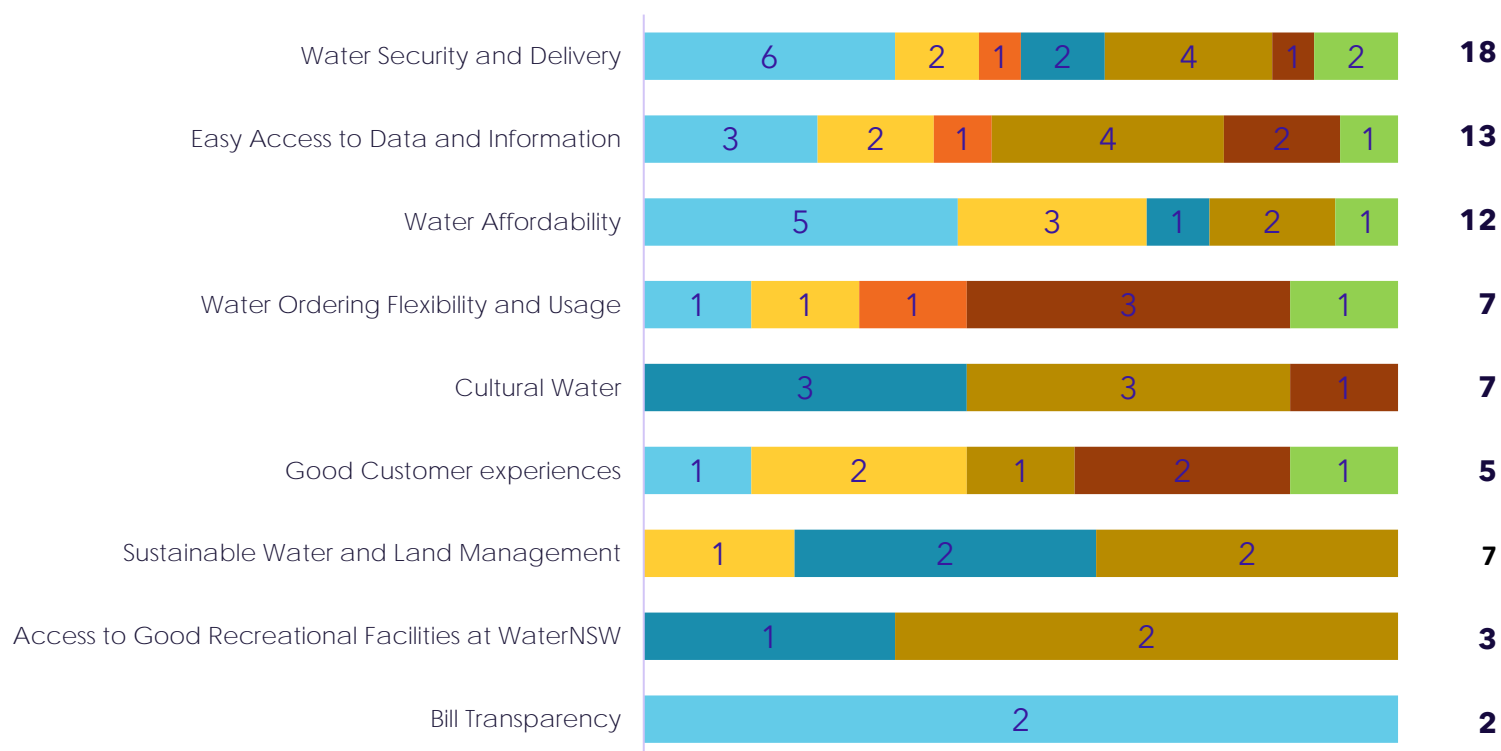
In surveys for the Gwydir Valley, Community Members or Community Group Members comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Sustainable Water and Land Management, and Water Security and Delivery were the first and second most selected issues chosen overall, Cultural Water and Water Ordering Flexibility and Usage tied as third most selected choices overall.



## Border Rivers

### Survey Data by Customer Type, n=18 completed surveys

*\*respondents could choose up to 3 issues*



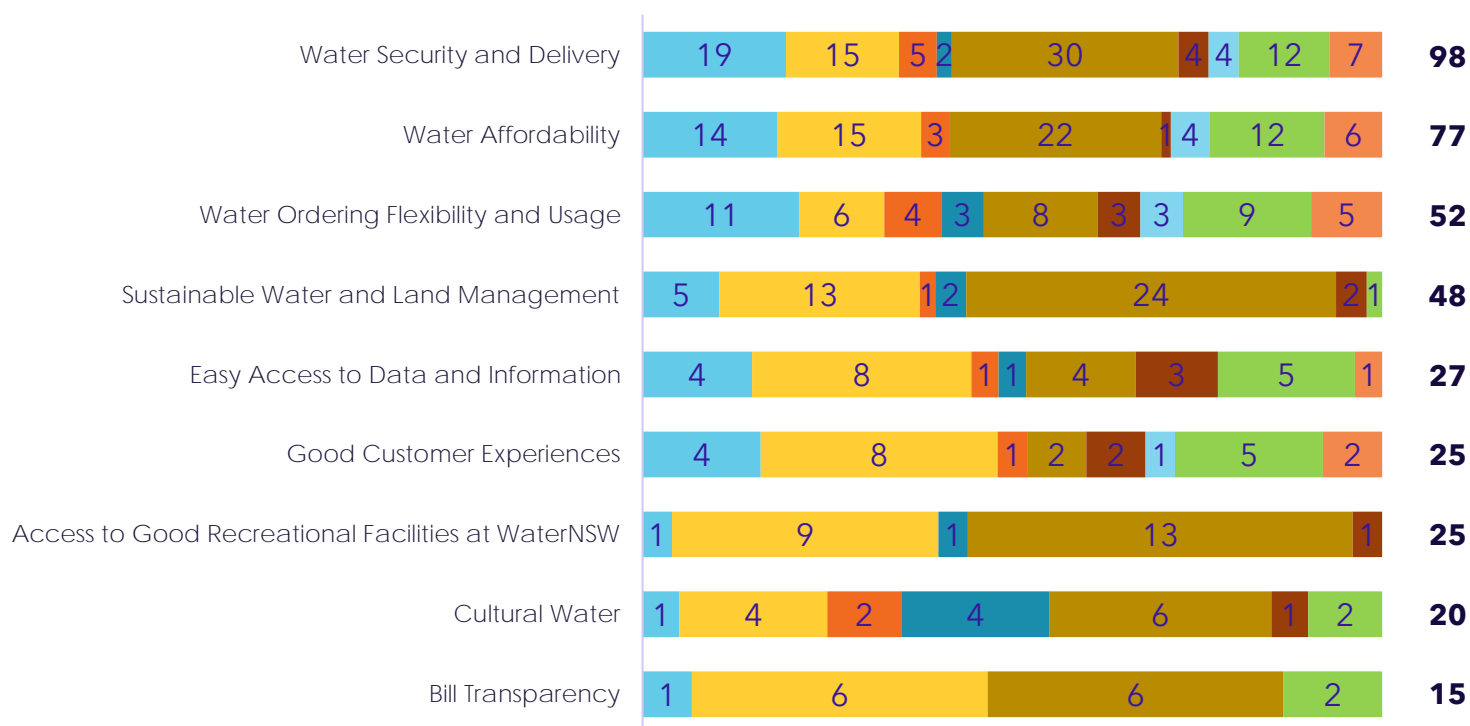
- Regulated Customer
- Unregulated Customer
- Environmental Stakeholder
- First Nations Stakeholder
- Community Member or Community Group Member
- Government
- Industry
- Groundwater
- Recreational

In surveys for the Border Rivers Valley, Regulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Water Affordability, and Easy Access to Data and Information were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.

# Namoi-Peel

## Survey Data by Customer Type, n=97 completed surveys

*\*respondents could choose up to 3 issues*



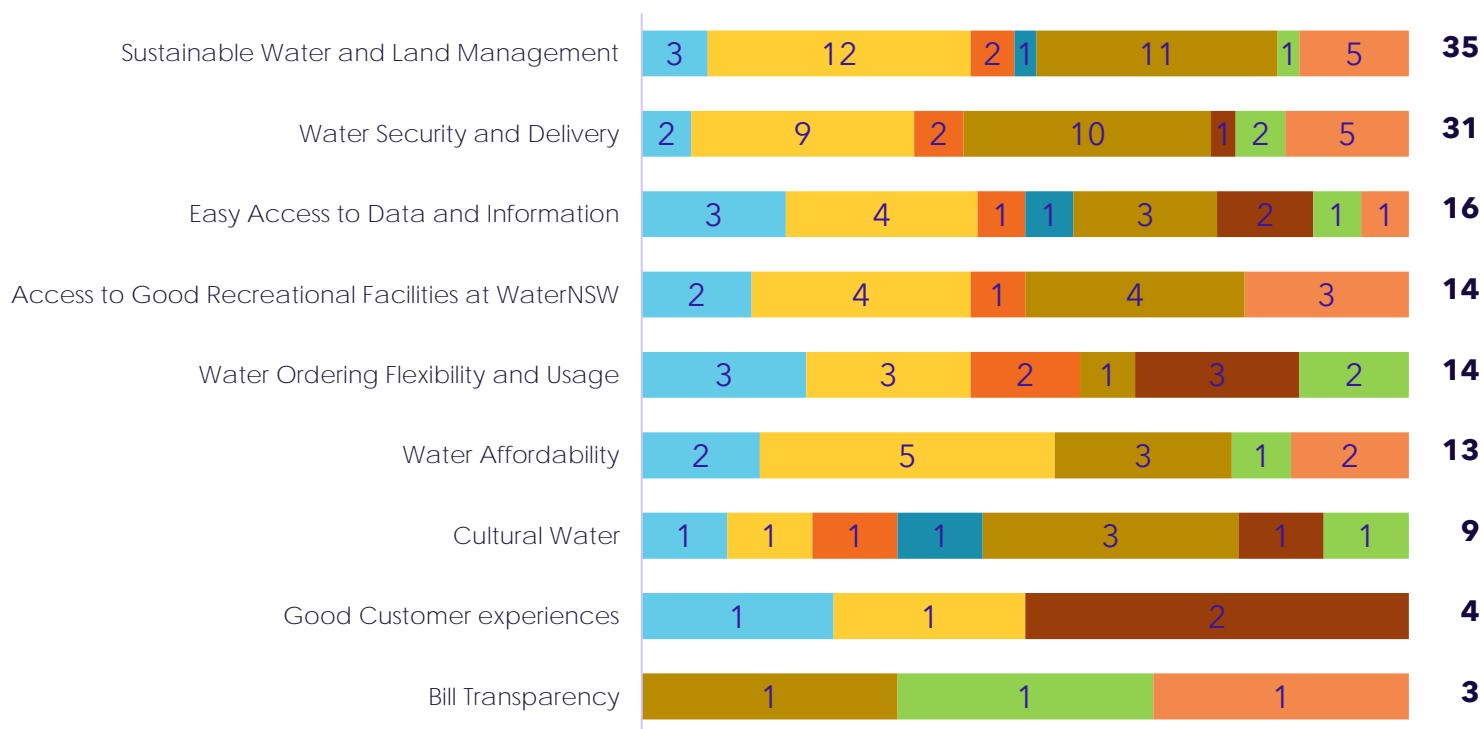
- Regulated Customer
- Unregulated Customer
- Environmental Stakeholder
- First Nations Stakeholder
- Community Member or Community Group Member
- Government
- Industry
- Groundwater
- Recreational

In surveys for the Namoi-Peel Valley, Community Members of Community Group Members comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Water Affordability, and Water Ordering Flexibility and Usage were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.

# Macquarie-Cudgegong

## Survey Data by Customer Type, n=35 completed surveys

*\*respondents could choose up to 3 issues*



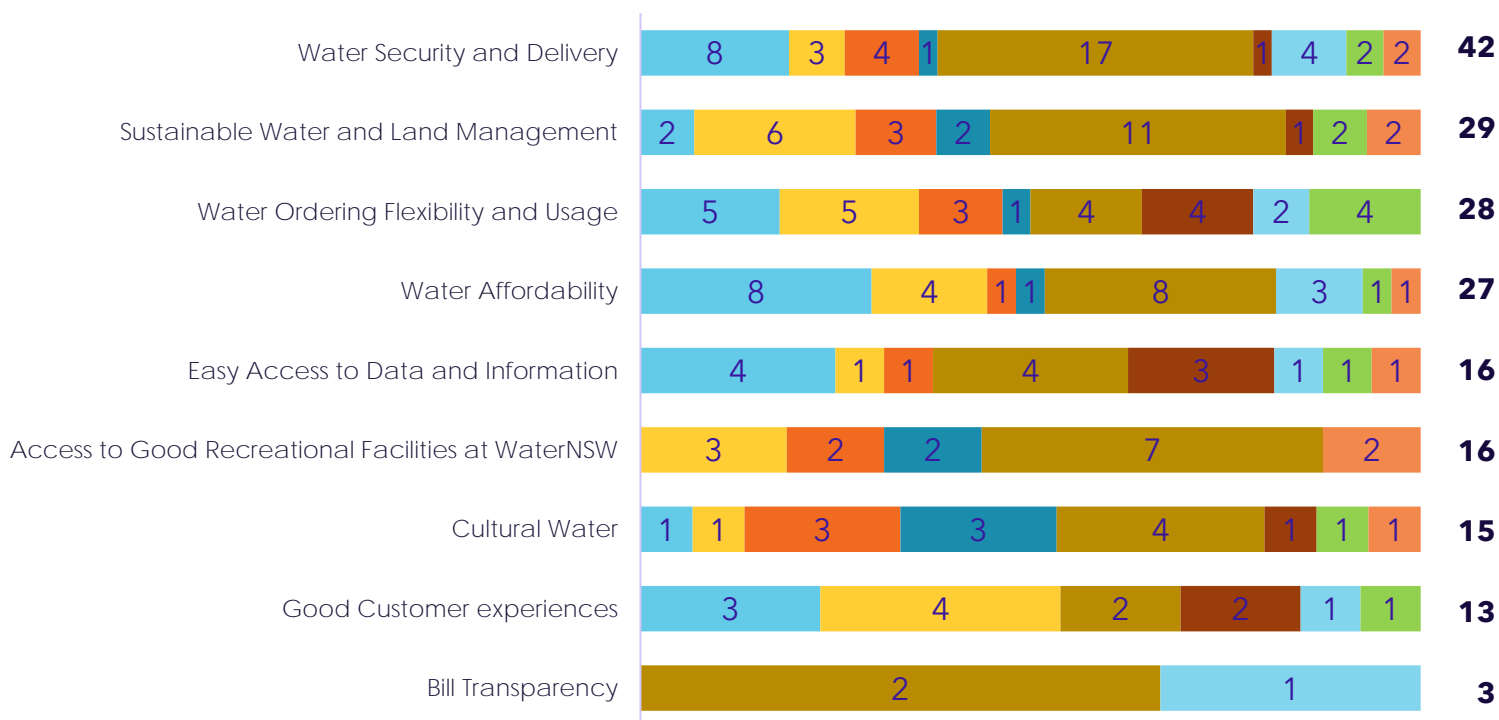
- Regulated Customer
- Unregulated Customer
- Environmental Stakeholder
- First Nations Stakeholder
- Community Member or Community Group Member
- Government
- Industry
- Groundwater
- Recreational

In surveys for the Macquarie-Cudgegong Valley, Unregulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Sustainable Water and Land Management, Water Security and Delivery, and Easy Access to Data and Information were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.

# Lachlan

## Survey Data by Customer Type, n=171 completed surveys

*\*respondents could choose up to 3 issues*



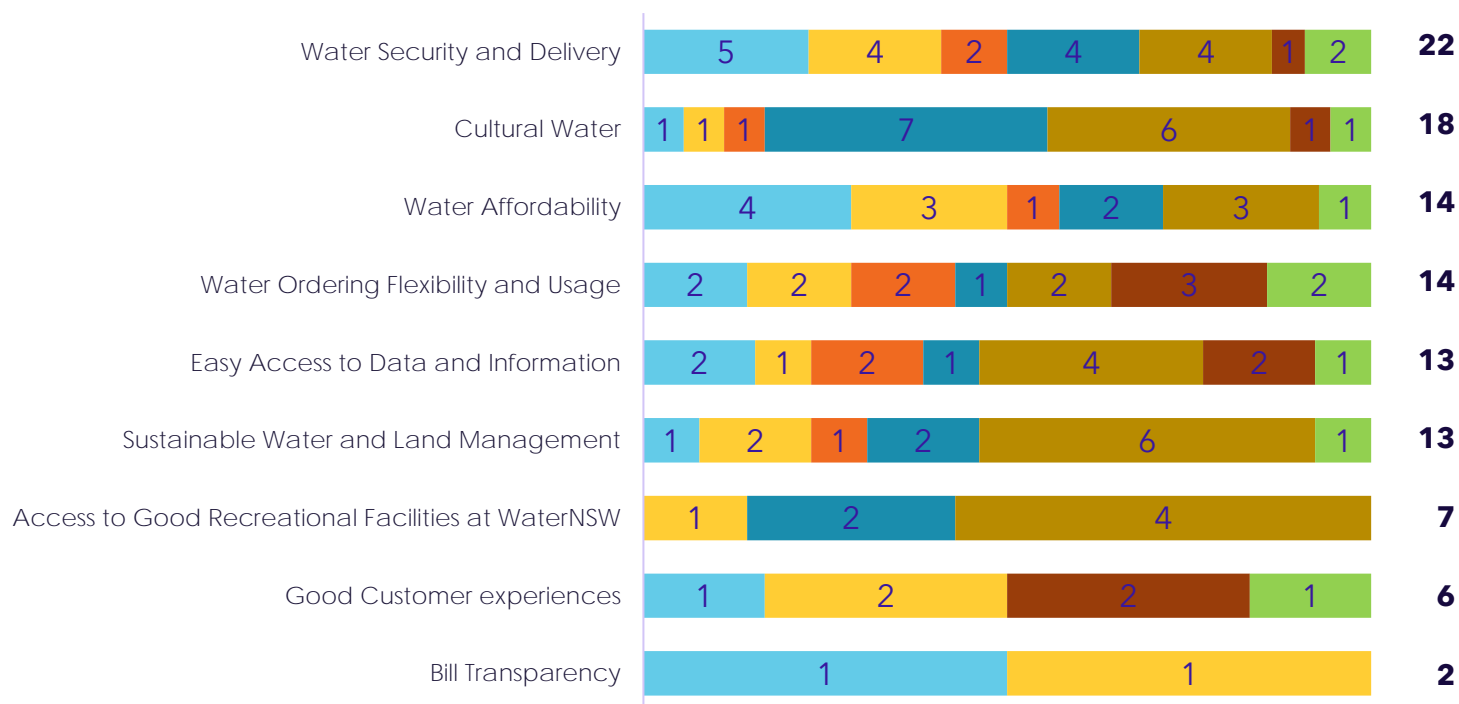
- Regulated Customer
- Unregulated Customer
- Environmental Stakeholder
- First Nations Stakeholder
- Community Member or Community Group Member
- Government
- Industry
- Groundwater
- Recreational

In surveys for the Lachlan Valley, Community Members or Community Group Members comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Water Ordering Flexibility and Usage, and Sustainable Water and Land Management were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.

# Barwon-Darling

## Survey Data by Customer Type, n=24 completed surveys

*\*respondents could choose up to 3 issues*



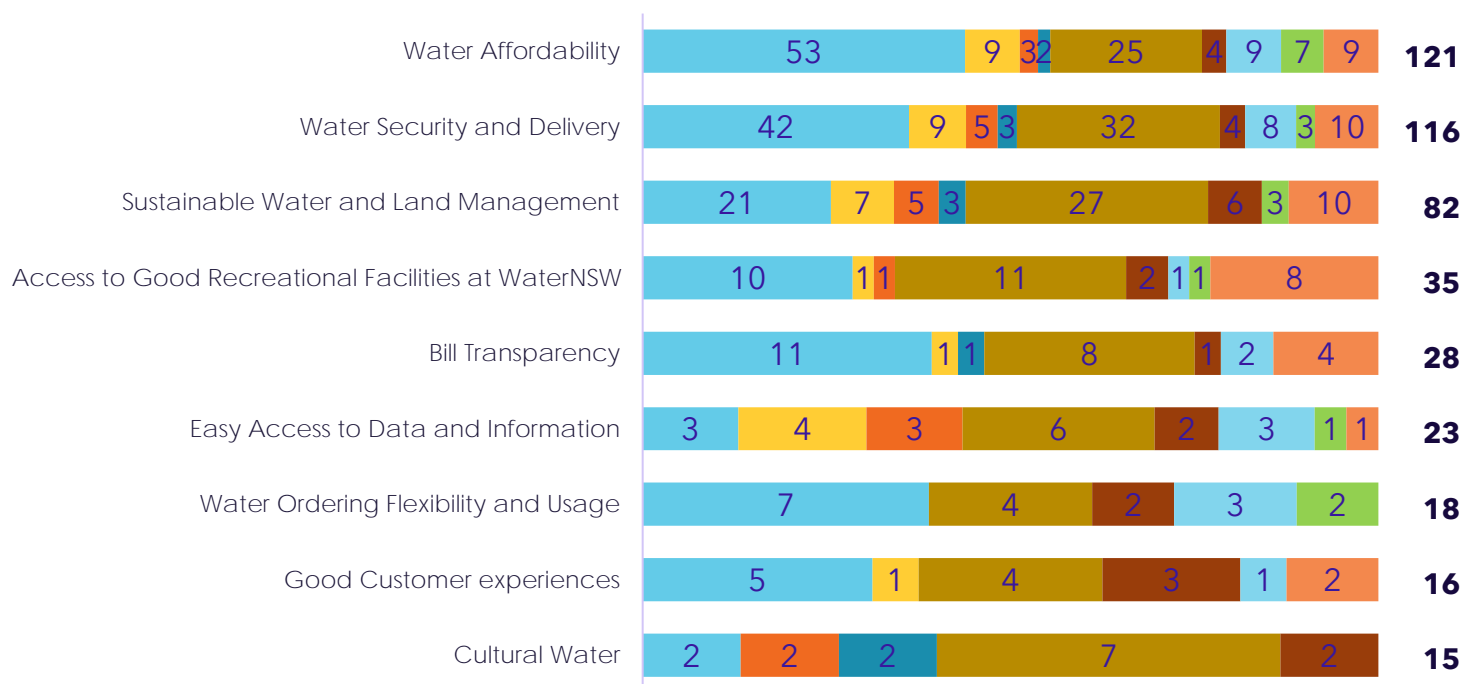
- Regulated Customer
- Unregulated Customer
- Environmental Stakeholder
- First Nations Stakeholder
- Community Member or Community Group Member
- Government
- Industry
- Groundwater
- Recreational

In surveys for the Barwon-Darling Valley, Community Members or Community Group Members comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Cultural Water, and Water Affordability were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.



# Greater Sydney, North and South Coast and Hunter Valleys Survey Data by Customer Type, n=199 completed surveys

\*respondents could choose up to 3 issues – Coastal-Hunter and Greater Sydney results are combined in this chart



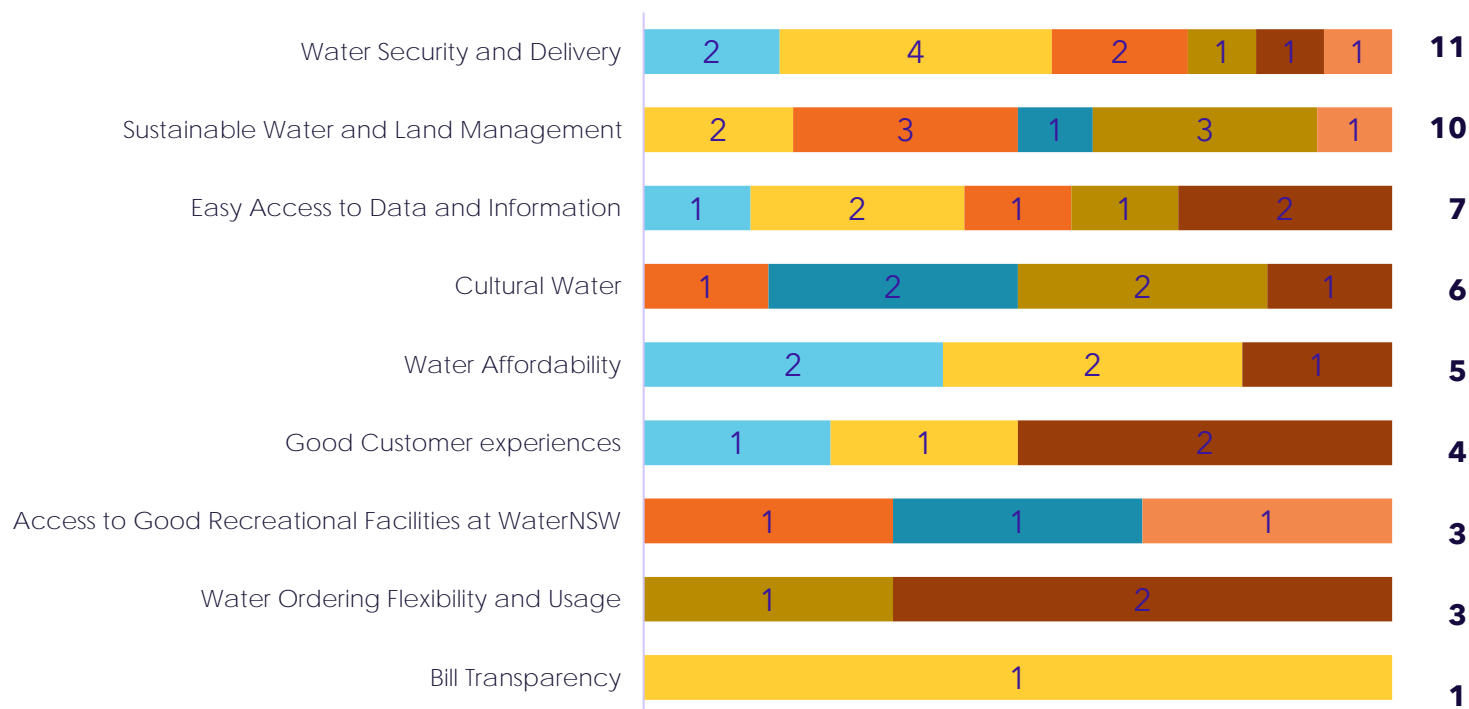
- Regulated Customer
- Unregulated Customer
- Environmental Stakeholder
- First Nations Stakeholder
- Community Member or Community Group Member
- Government
- Industry
- Groundwater
- Recreational

In surveys for the Greater Sydney and Coastal-Hunter Valleys, Regulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Affordability, Water Security and Delivery, and Sustainable Water and Land Management were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.

## Fish River

### Survey Data by Customer Type, n=13 completed surveys

\*respondents could choose up to 3 issues



- Regulated Customer
- Unregulated Customer
- Environmental Stakeholder
- First Nations Stakeholder
- Community Member or Community Group Member
- Government
- Industry
- Groundwater
- Recreational

In surveys for the Fish River Valley, Unregulated Customers comprised the largest group of respondents overall. Water Security and Delivery, Sustainable Water and Land Management, and Easy Access to Data and Information were the top three issues chosen overall respectively.

# Attachment H – Full list of Tier 2 issues

Access to good recreational facilities at WaterNSW sites
Asset maintenance management and communication with licence holders
Better drought planning, priorities for water restrictions and water conservation
Capacity building for First Nations Peoples
Communication of upcoming infrastructure works and cyclical maintenance programs that affect water access
Customer confusion regarding regulatory roles of WNSW and DPE, NRAR
Customer incentives for water preservation during or planning for a drought
Customer information packs/ educative tools
Customer service and the shift to digital
Demonstrate better governance of water First Nations perspective
Early warning systems
Ease of doing business water ordering
Education about WaterNSW and how funds are spent
Engagement methodologies for First Nations Peoples
Environmental accountability and responsibility
Environmental water - flow, timing, allocation, rule flexibility
Floodwater management and access (fair and accessible)
Improved data transfer and management
Information to help businesses
Issues relating to the difference in regulated and unregulated systems
Lack of field staff, suggested ways to improve customer service
Ongoing information flow
Ownership of infrastructure for cultural water usage for First Nations Peoples
Postage stamp pricing
Recognition of First Nations cultural relationship to water
Requirement for valley specific water rules
Shared knowledge of women as a priority First Nations issue
Tariffs and cost sharing
The cost of water and the ability for small farms to operate
Transparency of costs and pricing
Transparency of WaterNSW investment costs in the system
Water delivery rules and services: allocations and water provided, when customers are charged, accuracy of meters and flexibility
Water infrastructure and other delivery costs
Water licence trading and transparency; Hazard reduction burns around regional NSW dams
Water models and datasets across agencies need alignment
Water ordering system: change of mind rules, ability to trade with other people ordering water
Water quality in the river systems (BAU)
Water quality post flood events
Water security and assurance of allocations being delivered
Water Insights platform



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