

Updating the Metropolitan Water Plan

Community Views – Summary of findings from Phase 1 of the consultation

The *Metropolitan Water Plan* is the NSW Government's plan to make sure greater Sydney has a secure and sustainable water supply. The four major parts of the Plan: dams, recycling, desalination and water efficiency, together with its adaptive approach, prepare us for drought conditions, variable rainfall, the potential impacts of climate change and a growing population.

The NSW Government is currently updating the Plan for the longer term, with the revised Plan to be released in 2010. This document is a summary of the first phase of the community consultation to provide input into the updated Plan.



Community Input is an important part of the review of the *Metropolitan Water Plan*. The community consultation is designed to enable better understanding of the community's priorities, values and attitudes in regard to water management so these can be incorporated into the decision-making process.

Consultation is in two parts. The first phase is now complete and the findings are summarised herein. The second phase, to take place in late 2009, will involve the community in discussion about the proposed options for the updated *Metropolitan Water Plan*.

Community Input – Phase 1 involved 10 workshops across greater Sydney, an online survey and a review of existing social research on attitudes to water use and management. It was undertaken by Elton Consulting on behalf of the NSW Government's Office of Water.



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Maintaining a healthy environment is the vital and basic thing...
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How the public was involved

Community

Eight workshops attended by 219 community and business representatives from all over greater Sydney were held at Blacktown, Wollongong, Parramatta, Menai, Campbelltown, Katoomba, Redfern and Epping.

Stakeholders

Two further workshops were held with key stakeholders including representatives of local government, catchment management authorities, industry, environmental groups, water users and recreational bodies.

An online survey was conducted to provide an opportunity for the greater public to have their say in the planning process, while community attitudes towards water use were incorporated via a review of existing research.

Findings

There was strong consistency in the findings across all of the workshops, the online survey and existing research.

Three key values emerged from the workshops:

- Having a safe and dependable water supply for homes
- Considering the needs of future generations in decision-making and planning on water use
- Ensuring human needs for water are balanced with those of the environment.

These and other important issues raised are summarised as follows.

Safe and reliable supply

- Providing a clean, safe water supply for homes was the most important value in all community workshops except one, where it was among the top three.
- Diversifying water supply options and using water that is 'fit for purpose', such as recycled water for flushing toilets, was widely supported.
- Secure supply of water for use in the home was the most common concern. Other concerns were providing water for food production and for uses such as fighting bushfires.
- Participants supported the need to make the most of water resources by saving and recycling water. There were strong reactions to water waste, whether by individuals, industry or government, which included personal feelings of shame or guilt about wasting water.
- There was wide support for water restrictions and some concern that lifting restrictions completely would undo good habits.
- Views varied on the minimum level for combined dam storages to still represent a secure supply and acceptable level of risk. Most people regarded a drop in dam levels to about 30% as the point where they would become very concerned about the security of our water supply. Signs of drought such as brown playing fields, dying vegetation and dust increased concern. Media coverage also tended to trigger concern.
- Security in the sense of protecting the water supply from natural disasters or terrorism was also raised.



Everyone should be educated to conserve water so less is needed



Safeguarding future generations

- Ensuring long-term water availability and quality for future generations is an overarching value that was strongly supported.
- Long-term planning, investment and innovation were emphasised as critical to sustainable water management.
- Community workshops indicated that individuals, households, industry and government shared a responsibility to manage water wisely.

Environmental health

- Balancing human needs for water with those of the environment was understood as being complex. Human needs were awarded a higher priority by some, however most agreed a healthy environment was essential for sustaining all life.
- Many saw the condition of rivers and catchments as a broad indicator of the health of the environment and that water quality is contingent upon healthy rivers and catchments.
- The community looks to the government to educate people and ensure the environment is considered in decision-making.
- Environmental flows are poorly understood however the community used the example of the Murray-Darling to indicate that rivers should not reach a degraded state.

Fair and equitable management of water

- Access to water is a basic human right and everyone should have affordable water for essential needs. Beyond those was some support for discouraging excessive use through higher pricing. However, it was understood and a concern that this may disadvantage groups such as tenants or low income households, as they may not be able to reduce water use through structural changes to their homes.
- Balancing the water needs of residents, industry, agriculture and the environment requires coordination. Planning of housing developments and land use across Sydney is also important as part of securing our future water supply.
- The rebate system was raised as being unfair for low income households, since upfront payment is required before receiving the rebate.
- The need for greater awareness and consideration of water requirements in food production for the region was identified.
- Improved alignment between the *Metropolitan Water Plan* and the Water Sharing Plans for the Sydney catchment was sought by stakeholders.

Strong governance and accountability

- Government is expected to provide leadership on water security measures, including innovative and sustainable ways to manage demand and supply.
- While it was considered important for government to take the lead in long-term planning, all sectors of society are expected to play their part in securing greater Sydney's future water supply.

- The community expects to be involved in decision-making, such as through the community consultation workshops, and to be kept informed about decisions.
- It was expected that government policy and planning support and reflect the willingness of individuals and households to save water as well as minimise the risk to water security and the environment.
- There was support for the desalination plant as an alternative water source and 'insurance' measure to enable further solutions to be found. Transparency in government decision-making was seen as being important to measures being accepted.

Maintaining public health

- Sydney's water quality is seen as good. Concern was expressed over the potential drop in quality if recycled water was added to the drinking water supply; the 'yuck' factor was expressed.
- Managing water catchments is also seen as important for public health.

Water's role in quality of life

- Sydney's high quality water is a reflection of the city's high quality of life in general. City dwellers appreciate that water is essential to creating green spaces in the city. The community identified access to local waterways as important in creating a connection to water and its value.



We owe it to future generations to not only use this water wisely now but to invest in the infrastructure to meet future needs...



Further insights from workshop participants

Participants from the community and stakeholder workshops expressed a range of attitudes and opinions towards water management. The key issues raised are summarised below.

Stormwater runoff

Stormwater was identified as an undervalued source of water and in need of further government attention. People would like to see more done to seek to capture and use stormwater, despite the practical and cost difficulties.

Community education

Community education about water use was widely promoted as key to saving water. There was a need for increased understanding on individual water usage and savings, as well as greater choice of water-saving actions.

Trade-offs

Effective and wise management of existing resources should ensure that no major trade-offs would be required, particularly in relation to the environmental health of rivers.

How the Government will use these findings

The community input has been provided to the Independent Review Panel charged with overseeing the review of the *Metropolitan Water Plan* on behalf of the community.

Identifying key community values allows for these to be given proper emphasis in the review of the Plan. Community input will help shape the analysis of the costs and benefits of the various options being considered.

Once the options are developed later in 2009, Community Input – Phase 2 will commence. In Phase 2, participants will be involved in discussions about the proposed measures and provide feedback.

Many water security measures depend upon community support for their success. The first phase of consultation has indicated strong support for continued community education and identified gaps in knowledge that can be used to shape future education materials and better target water use and water management communications.

For more information on the *Metropolitan Water Plan* visit www.waterforlife.nsw.gov.au