A Community Engagement Pop Up at 2024 Central Coast NAIDOC Community Day

Your Water and Sewer services

Community engagement summary

2024

Central Coast Council | Water and Sewer

This community engagement summary highlights key themes and findings that will inform the work we deliver and ensure that our customers are at the centre of everything we do.

To read the full outcomes report search '**water and sewer customer engagement report**' at '**centralcoast.nsw.gov.au**'.

Background

Central Coast Council's Water and Sewer department, along with engagement consultant, Captivate Consulting delivered an ambitious consultation program aimed to help us gain valuable customer insights and preferences to inform our upcoming pricing proposal. This proposal to IPART (Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal) will guide the prices that Council charges for water and sewer services.

Under IPART's new framework, the pricing proposal must involve our customers in setting the service priorities and outcomes that matter most to them. The proposal must also promote our customers' values and demonstrate that we understand our customers' preferences.

As a result, we designed and implemented an extensive engagement plan aimed at reaching a diverse range of customers and community members across the Central Coast LGA.

Engagement activities included targeted telephone surveys, an online survey, face to face meetings with two groups from our top 100 water consumers, 20 hours of engagement across four sessions at both Wyong and Gosford, pop-up sessions and more.

Through this engagement, we sought to:

1. understand what our customers and community value most about their water and sewer services
2. understand how our customers prefer us to communicate and engage with them
3. define a customer bill structure preference
4. understand our customers expectations around how soon we respond to an issue
5. gauge our customers understanding and seek feedback on our performance targets.

A Community Engagement Pop Up at West Gosford Shopping Village

During the consultation period, our community identified various topics that were outside of the scope of this project.

The themes listed below will be shared with the relevant business units for attention/ action.

- Stormwater drainage.
- Weed management on roadways.
- Flood management.
- Beach safety ratings.
- Wildlife protection around lakes.
- Access to water bubblers.
- Customer Service call centre.
- Education on Aboriginal matters.

We also received customer feedback that relates to areas or functions that cannot be influenced or changed, primarily due to legislative constraints. Whilst this feedback has been recorded, in order to ensure ongoing legislative compliance, no action will be taken by Council to implement the suggested changes.

Key Themes

1 Engagement

The consultation revealed that 92% of participants believe that community engagement is important, with almost half expressing a desire to be consulted on pricing proposals. One customer shared "***I would definitely like to be consulted so I can share my ideas***".

However, none of the respondents felt they had a significant influence on water and sewer services.

Our telephone survey found only one-third of residents were satisfied with the current opportunities to voice their opinions on these services, highlighting a need for improved engagement.

Customers expressed strong disagreement with the notion that they only care about water and sewer issues when there is a problem, emphasising a broader concern for the wider community especially in regard to the importance of long-term supply of water.

When asked about preferred engagement methods, residents reported that they are most likely to engage with Council on water and sewer projects via phone surveys (72%), online via surveys and forms (62%) and by reading printed materials (49%).

One resident saying, "***I prefer to receive updates via email, it's easy and quick***".

2 Business Engagement

We found that our top 100 water users expressed a desire for Council to facilitate quarterly meetings and build an online engagement hub to share learnings and connect with each other.

Early notification regarding unplanned and planned works was identified as being important for allowing adequate time for businesses to arrange alternate water supply.

Overall, businesses expressed a keen interest in building positive working relationships with Council and looked forward to opportunities to share learnings and explore innovations.

3 Education

The consultation results found a strong desire for greater education on water and sewer services. Respondents emphasised the importance of being well-informed about not only outages but also broader issues, such as how our services operate, environmental impact, future planning, long-term water supply and infrastructure.

4 Communications

Among those who reported that community engagement is important, 66% of respondents selected that their most desired way to be kept informed is through email followed by rates notices, newsletters and letters and brochures.

The top topics that residents want to see published on Council's website include water quality (specifically the safety of consumption), issues and disruptions (both planned and unplanned), and updates on major projects.

Almost half of the respondents had accessed Council's website within the last 12 months, indicating a significant level of digital engagement. However, results indicate a clear need for accessible reporting methods and a transition towards more digital formats for communications.

Redesigning the website to improve customer experience and make information more accessible was a high priority, along with the need for better communication in multi-lingual formats to reach a broader audience.

Requests from the community for innovative communications tools included a water usage app, a portal to view planned works and SMS messaging for planned and unplanned outages.

5 Building trust

The community survey revealed a significant concern around trust in Council, particularly regarding water quality and financial transparency.

Many respondents felt that the Council was not taking sufficient accountability for water quality. There was also a strong demand for greater transparency in water testing processes to reassure the community about the safety of their water.

Residents emphasised the importance of knowing where their money is being spent, particularly in terms of how developer contributions are utilised.

6 Service level performance

Feedback revealed a strong focus on improving service level performance, particularly in relation to water quality and reliability. Recurring issues with discolouration were highlighted as a key concern, with respondents calling for better water quality that ensures no health impacts on customers or workers. Additionally, minimal odours from water treatment were seen as important for maintaining quality standards.

Water and Sewer Education 2024 Pop Up at The Entertainment Grounds, West Gosford

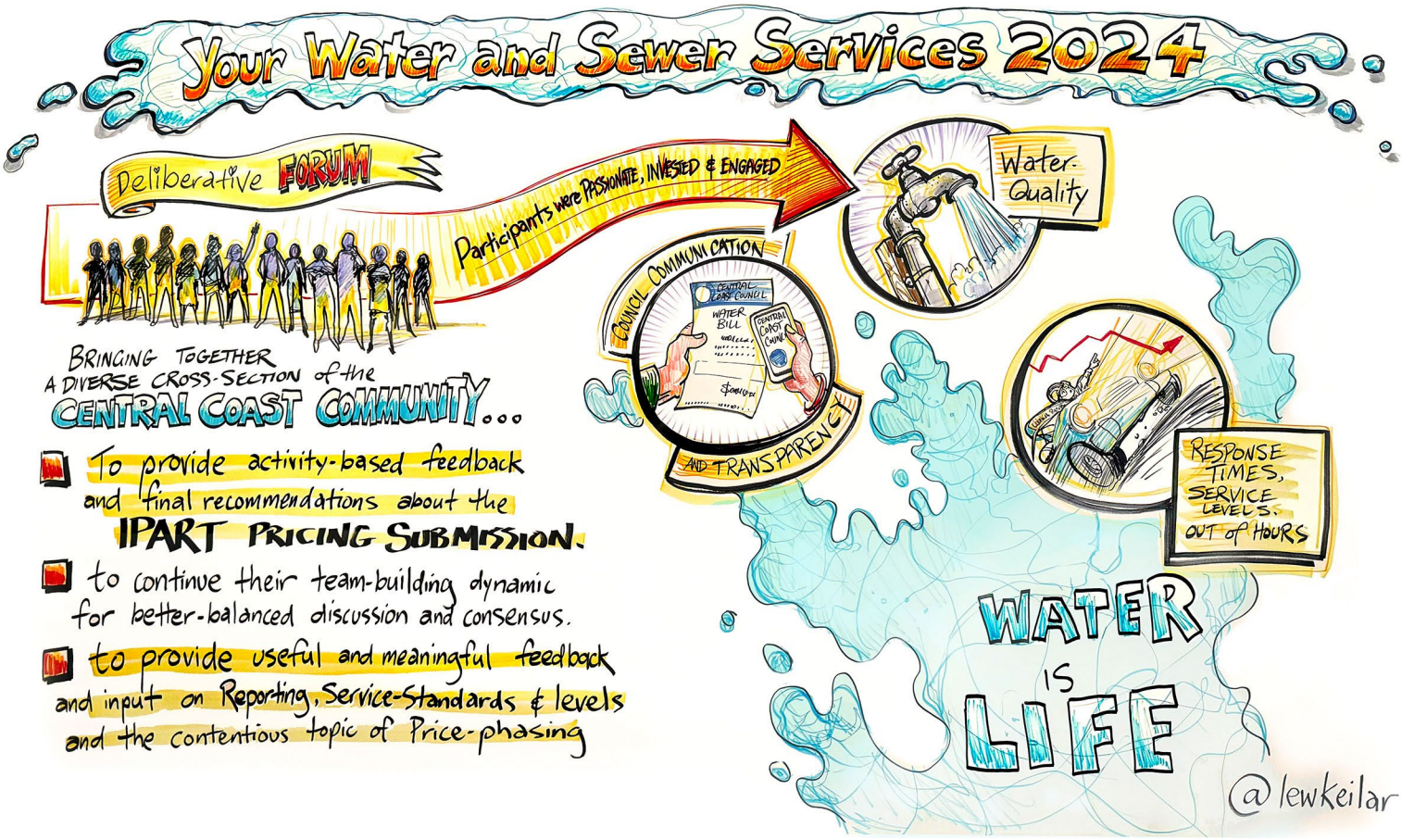
The survey ranked good quality water as the most important overall water value closely followed by the need for reliable service.

One customer voiced that "***Good quality water that is clean, clear, and safe to drink is essential***".

Quality treatment, followed by reliable service were rated the most important values for sewer services, reflecting the community's desire for uninterrupted, dependable infrastructure.

Respondents also emphasised the need for quick responses to issues like overflows and broken pipes. A well-maintained sewerage network with regularly checked equipment was viewed as essential in preventing service failures.

Overall, the community placed a high value on consistent and dependable water and sewer services, with an emphasis on maintaining and improving infrastructure to prevent service interruptions.



A Deliberative Forum illustration

7 Environmental focus

The community survey revealed a strong emphasis on environmental values. Specifically related to sewer, quality treatment ranked as the most important priority.

Respondents highlighted the critical need for environmental protection, particularly around pollution concerns stemming from sewer overflows, effluent quality, and the impact on the environment.

Residents called for better management of sewer overflows and more sustainable practices in sewer services. There was a clear demand for transparency on how Council manages microplastics and prioritises environmental benefits over cost savings in decision-making.

The community advocated for the reuse of sewer waste where possible and sought to know what steps Council is taking towards achieving Net Zero by 2050.

Sustainable power sources, such as solar energy, were highlighted as important, alongside calls for renewable energy to be used in water treatment plants.

Effective water recycling and the protection of oceans and marine life were deemed essential for maintaining a healthy environment. The management of biosolids and the development of better solutions for sewerage disposal, avoiding ocean outflows, were also critical areas of concern.

Overall, participants stressed the need for Council to provide more information and outcomes around its environmental initiatives, ensuring that the protection of the natural environment remains a top priority.

8 Pricing transparency

Affordability was another key theme, with our community emphasising the need for predictable and reasonable water bills. A resident shared that, "affordable water bills are crucial," emphasising that keeping costs manageable is a priority.

When asked to discuss preferences for a model of billing over the IPART Determination period, the majority of participants voted for option 1. Their choices were:

1. Charges remain consistent, only increasing with Consumer Price Index (CPI) each financial year.
2. Charges commence low and increase over the Determination.
3. Charges commence high and decrease over the Determination.

Respondents strongly expressed a desire for clear and transparent pricing, particularly in understanding where their money is being spent and how costs are allocated.

The community emphasised the need for a fair split of costs between commercial and residential customers, ensuring that no group bears an unfair burden.

Affordability ranked as the third highest value among participants, with a focus on keeping costs as low as possible for all customers. One participant asked for "***a breakdown of charges to allow for better budgeting***".

Participants showed no interest in paying higher bills to improve performance targets, indicating that they are satisfied with the current service levels as long as prices remain stable.

A Community Engagement 2024 Pop Up at The Entrance

9 Long-term planning and sustainability

Community engagement results highlighted for the importance of long-term planning and sustainability for water and sewer services.

There was strong opposition from some participants against investing in a water desalination plant, with a call for more effective planning that takes into account the region's future needs and growth .

Residents identified concerns about water supply, particularly for vulnerable community members, and emphasised the need for scalable solutions to accommodate population growth and development.

Community feedback identified the importance of population growth and its impact on the sewerage system to be integrated into long-term plans, along with investigations into new technologies that focus on water reuse and sustainability.

Respondents expressed a desire to understand how visitors to the region impact water and sewer services and how the Council plans to respond to these pressures. There was also a strong call for a long-term vision that includes adaptation to a changing climate.

Effective planning was seen as involving a diverse range of water sources for non-drinking purposes, such as rainwater collection and reusing water at the household level. The survey also indicated a strong interest in using the latest technologies and innovations, particularly in recycled water, with suggestions to learn from other countries.

The community also called for support for commercial customers to be more water-efficient, alongside the need for reliable infrastructure that is well-maintained.

Overall, respondents stressed that future planning must be proactive and adaptable to changing environmental conditions, ensuring the region's water and sewer systems remain sufficient and sustainable for generations to come.

Questions? Contact Central Coast Council's Water and Sewer Community Liaison Manager on 02 4306 7900.

To read Council's Water and Sewer Community Engagement and Education Strategy search '**Water and Sewer Engagement Strategy**' at **centralcoast.nsw.gov.au**

A 2024 Deliberative Forum in Wyong

Get in touch

Our customer service centre can assist you anywhere anytime if you'd like to report an issue, make a request, or offer feedback.

General enquiries, billing and payment difficulties

(02) 4306 7900 - 8:30-5:00pm Monday-Friday

If you have hearing or speech impairments, call the National Relay Service on 13 36 77, and quote Council's contact number 02 4306 7900.

ask@centralcoast.nsw.gov.au

Search '**customer help**' at **centralcoast.nsw.gov.au**

Council office
2 Hely Street, PO Box 20, Wyong NSW 2259

Faults, services and emergencies

(02) 4306 7900 - 24 hours/7 days

Search 'water service interruptions' at centralcoast.nsw.gov.au

Contact us about issues with:

WATER QUALITY

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ODOURS

We invite you to

Take part in local community forums, in person or online, to provide feedback and learn about our projects and programs. Visit:

yourvoiceourcoast.com

Attend Council meetings. For more information, search '**council meetings**' at **centralcoast.nsw.gov.au**

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