



SOUTH GIPPSLAND TALKS WATER

URBAN WATER STRATEGY 2022
INTERIM ENGAGEMENT REPORT



START SAFE 
WORK SAFE 
HOME SAFE 

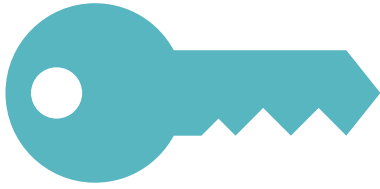


THANK YOU

We'd like to thank the 114 customers and community members who gave their time to share their thoughts on the next 50 years of water and wastewater services for our region. We'd also like to thank those who have volunteered to become part of our new Community Advisory Committee.

- South Gippsland Water

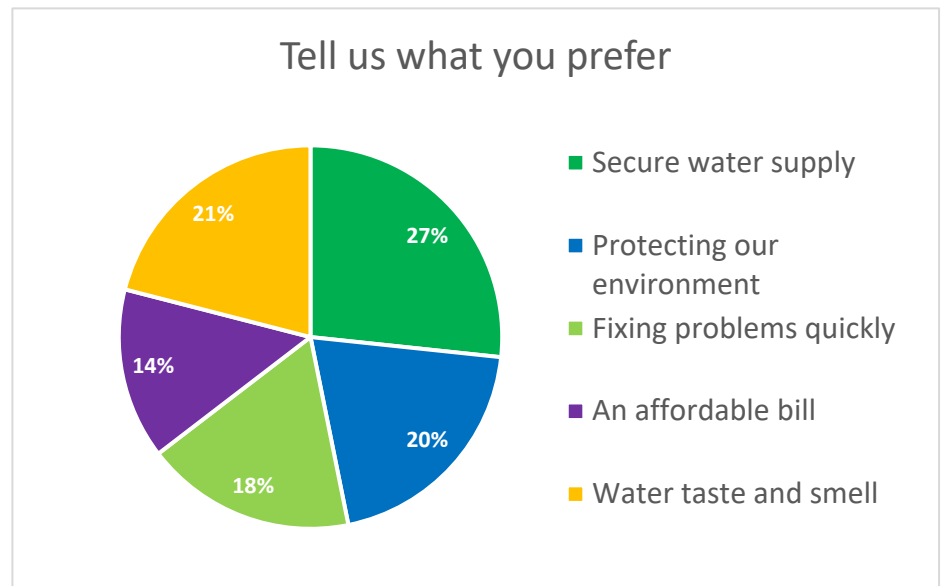




KEY FINDINGS

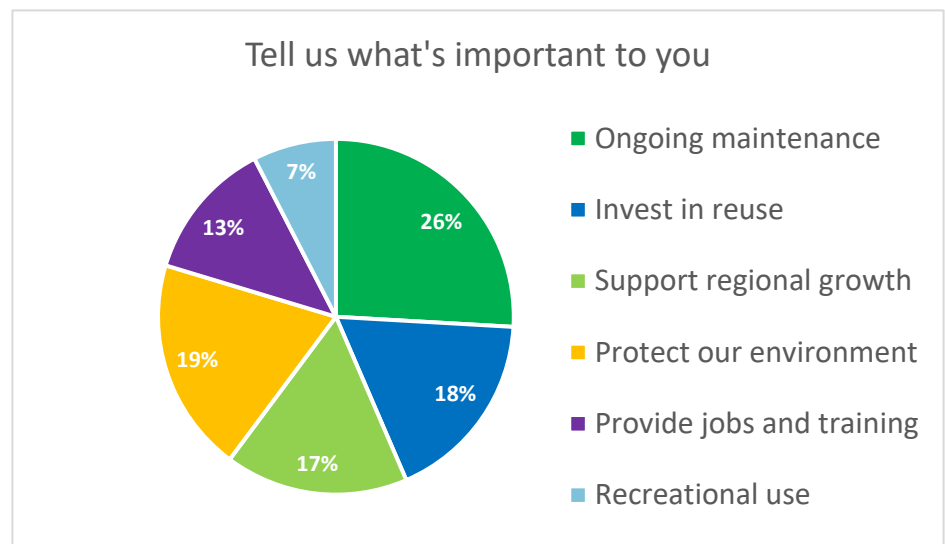
SECURE OUR WATER SUPPLY

Our customers said it's the most important thing to them when asked to compare this with other priority areas. An affordable bill was the last preference. Respondents were asked to rank their preference from 1 to 5. The chart below has scored the responses based on these preferences.



RANK OUR SERVICES

To clarify, we asked our customers to rank what were our most important services. Ongoing maintenance was a clear winner.





A CHANGING CLIMATE

DROUGHT AND FLOODING RAIN

We asked our customers to tell us what level of water restrictions they would be comfortable with. A surprising number indicated they would be happy with one year in five for stage one restrictions, and one year in 10 for stage three restrictions. This is a continuing trend when compared to our previous surveys and consultation – that people would be willing to accept more restrictions in the future. There could be several explanations for this.

EXTREME EVENTS

While the majority of respondents said they were willing to accept more water restrictions, they also wanted us to plan for more extreme weather events.

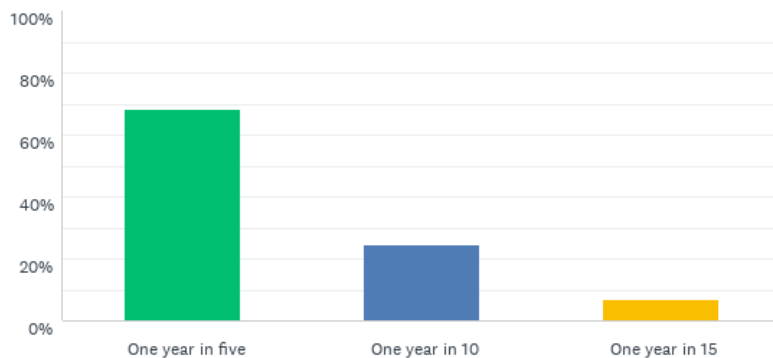


66.67% of respondents said they wanted us to prepare for one in 25-year weather events.

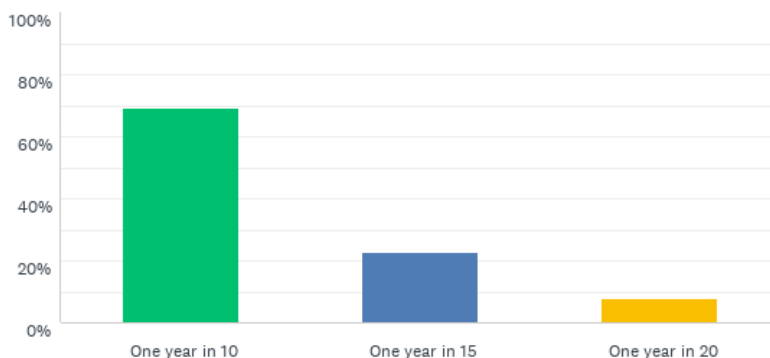
This is in line with the most recent evidence which shows 70 per cent of rural and regional Australians have an understanding of climate change and its impacts, seeing it firsthand on the ground (see *Climate Council, On the Frontline: Climate Change in Rural Communities Report, 2016, p60*).

- We're an agricultural, predominantly beef and dairy community, with a strong understanding of the seasonal, changing nature of climate and rainfall (*Climate Council, On the Frontline: Climate Change in Rural Communities Report, 2016, p60*)
- When asked to choose between three options, statistically people are most likely to choose the first one. For example, the first option presented was for one in year in five stage one restrictions. (*UC Berkeley Haas School of Business – First is Best study 2012*).

STAGE ONE RESTRICTIONS



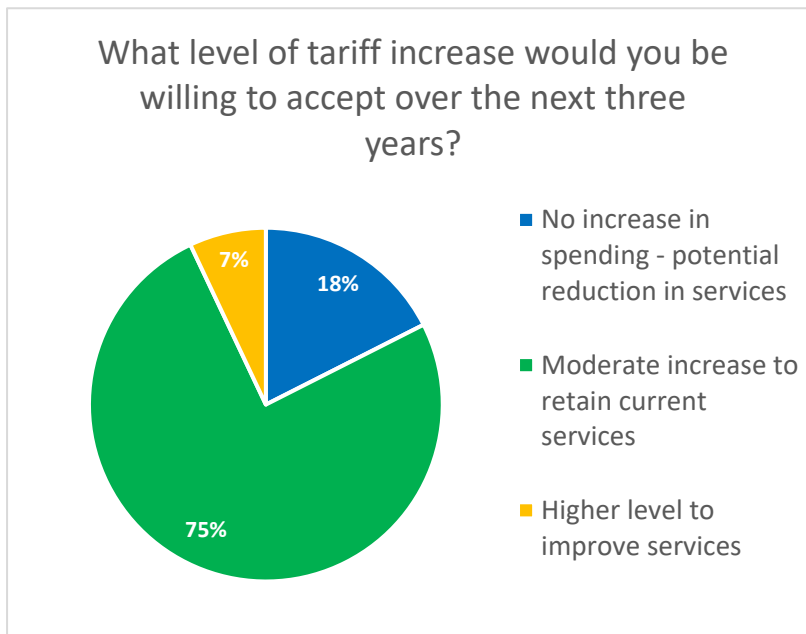
STAGE THREE RESTRICTIONS





PRICING OUR SERVICES

A clear majority of our customers (75.44 per cent) said they would accept a moderate increase in spending over the next three years, with resulting increase in customer tariffs, of \$20 to \$50 per account per year, to maintain service standards as they currently are. Again, this is in line with our previous consultations during the Price Submission process in 2020. It will be noted as part of our consultation for the Price Submission process for 2023.



WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS VALUE

We asked our customers what they most valued in terms of the services we provide. The word cloud below indicates the most common comments. We're known for our reliable services and friendly customer service.



YOU TOLD US...

South Gippsland Water constantly strives to improve to deliver quality, sustainable water and wastewater services to our customers.

We value the commentary our survey respondents provided.

What we do best (direct quotes from survey):

- ☞ The fantastic customer service from both the customer service team and the maintenance team.
- ☞ Clean water and good waste disposal.
- ☞ Reliable, high quality water supply.
- ☞ Your help during the recent power outage. Keep us going with water during the severe storm.
- ☞ Prompt attention to problems.
- ☞ Efficient, friendly customer service, regular updates on Facebook.
- ☞ Connecting our towns to wastewater services as we are currently seeing an influx of new residents.
- ☞ Environmental protection and revegetation of waterways.

Note the responses on this and the following page are drawn from the survey responses, so reflect the thoughts of the individual participant, rather than a region-wide view.

“Your service and attendance to problems, advertising, knowledge given to the public, fresh, clean, safe water – we are very privileged to have this service.”

☞ Survey respondent,
25/06/2021



WHAT YOU'D LIKE TO SEE



OUR ENVIRONMENT

Planning for future water storages/climate change, looking after the environment. Invest in waterway restoration projects. New focus on carbon neutral future. Lobby the Government to make us drought proof. Look at more natural solutions. Look at stormwater use.



EMBRACE CHANGING TECHNOLOGY*

More online capabilities for customers. More website interactive forms, self-access for customers. Provide SMS of planned works or incidents in my area.

**Note in previous consultations customers also raised their desire for SMS services.*



POTENTIAL TO EXPAND WASTEWATER SERVICES*

Increase reach of services to all residential blocks. Connect Stony Creek to the sewerage system next door. Provide wastewater services to Fish Creek. Notify people of what they need to do with their sewerage when power is out.

**Note at this stage, expanding our wastewater services would only be economically feasible in small towns on a user-pays, government grant or additional levy basis, above any proposed price increase.*



WATER SERVICES

Water quality is so important. Improve taste of water in Korumburra, Wonthaggi and Dumbalk. Water for towns who don't currently have services. Improve taste through reducing added chemicals. Take a more proactive approach in the assessment and maintenance of water and wastewater assets.



MORE COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Update the outdated trade waste charge particularly for small community organisations. Try to keep the costs \$ to customers as low as possible. Water is cheaper in Melbourne. Teach us about where our water comes from. Public access or open days. Have a service centre in Leongatha.

FIRST NATIONS

TWO WAY LEARNING

South Gippsland Water operates over 4,000 square kilometres of southern Victoria, stretching from the towns of Nyora in the north, Wonthaggi in the west, Yarram in the east and Port Franklin in the south.

We recognise the unique diversity of the First Peoples here in South Gippsland. We are committed to an ongoing process of reconciliation and community strengthening through building strong organisational and community relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

URBAN WATER STRATEGY ENGAGEMENT SO FAR...

South Gippsland Water is proud to acknowledge the people of the Bunurong and the Gunaikurnai as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and waters we work upon.

Gunaikurnai	We are working with GLAWAC, alongside our Gippsland Environmental Agency colleagues, on their development of a whole-of-country plan to enable self-determination and empowerment. This includes Gunaikurnai desire to have more control over what happens on country, including in relation to water, biodiversity, fire and cultural heritage management. This will be a key inclusion for the Urban Water Strategy 2022.
Bunurong	We have recently been invited to become a member of the Bass Coast Reconciliation Network to better engage with Bunurong. Additionally, we have been invited to participate in Bass Coast Shire Council's inaugural Australian First Peoples Advisory Committee. Expressions of interest for the Committee closed on 11 July 2021.

PARTNERSHIPS



OUR MAJOR CUSTOMERS

South Gippsland is principally an agricultural region known for dairy and beef. Our major customers are dairy producers. We have been working with them closely to ensure their future needs will be met, particularly in relation to trade waste services, and reuse or different treatment options, will be considered in the draft Urban Water Strategy.



COMMUNITY, BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY FORUMS

As an active member of our community, South Gippsland Water works in partnership with many local and industry and groups, giving us the opportunity to hear from people with a diverse range of interests. These include, but are not limited to: GEA GLAWAC; South Coast Water Partnership (health); Choose Tap alliance; South Gippsland Shire Council, Bass Coast Shire Council, Wellington Shire Council, Water Alliance, WSAA, Smart Watermark, Bass Coast Landcare Network, West Gippsland CMA, Parks Victoria, Schools Water Efficiency Partnership, Kids Teaching Kids – Earthwatch, Meeniyah Progress Association, Poowong and District Landcare Group, Gippsland Regional Water Alliance, Vic Water, and the Intelligent Water Networks group. Their input will be factored into the next engagement report.



NOTING THE SUSTAINABLE WATER STRATEGY

The Victorian Government is updating its 10-year Sustainable Water Strategy in tandem with water corporations developing their 50-year Urban Water Strategies.

South Gippsland Water has been attending local forums, most recently one in Korumburra, as a guest to assist our understanding of community wishes.

Some key points for us to consider so far as part of the Urban Water Strategy include:

*Conserving water and the future of decommissioned reservoirs.
Environmental flows.*

New developments need to be more of a 'closed system' where water is collected and stored, rather than reliant on existing supply. Need to take into account water run-off.

Using recycled water as an option.



QUITE INTERESTING



Wonthaggi (27.19%) and Inverloch (22.81%) residents provided us with the most responses.



Given our demographic, it was not surprising to see the age groups 45-54 (25.44%), 55-64 (22.81%) and 65-74 (20.18%) well represented. 79 per cent of those surveyed owned their own home, while 21 per cent identified as tenants.



93.86 per cent of respondents identified as South Gippsland Water Customers. 94 per cent of these identified as residential, with the other 6 per cent as business.

BACKGROUND

GO BROAD

THE SURVEY

Our online survey launched on 21 May 2021 and closed on 11 July 2021. We designed the survey to take between five and eight minutes, in line with the *International Journal of Market Relations* recommendations for survey length.

We asked 15 questions of respondents, including three options for people to give direct feedback. All survey responses were anonymous, to protect people's privacy in line with Victorian Government guidelines.

We used SurveyMonkey to create the survey. We received 114 responses and eight applications for our Community Advisory Committee.

The questions we asked:

Q1. To start, we'd like to know a little bit more about you to help us respond to your feedback. What town are you from?

Q2. What age group are you in?

Q3. Are you a South Gippsland Water customer?

Q4. If yes, are you a business or residential customer?

Q5. If yes, are you a tenant or an owner?

Q6. When you think about our future water and wastewater services, rank the following where one is most important, and five is least important.

Q7. We deliver a range of services over 21 townships. Rank the following where one is most important, and six is least important.

Q8. What level of water restrictions would you be happy with? Stage one restrictions.

Q9. What level of water restrictions would you be happy with? Stage three restrictions.

Q10. What sort of extreme weather event, such as a flood or drought, do you think South Gippsland Water should be planning for?

Q11. What level of tariff increase would you be prepared to accept over the 3 years?

Q12. What do you value most from the services South Gippsland Water provides?

Q13. What do you think we could do better?

Q14. Do you have any further ideas or thoughts you would like us to consider?

Q15. Would you be interested in being more involved for the planning for our region by joining our Community Advisory Committee? If so, please leave your details, and our team will be in touch.



PROMOTION

We undertook a range of marketing tools to try and boost our survey responses.

Printed and distributed 700 flyers via letter-box drop and in person to residents, with a focus on the key town of Leongatha.
Printed 100 posters for display in local business windows, complete with QR code to enable people to connect more easily without going into the shop.
Emailed our customer base.
Individually spoke to more than 50 business owners and staff across the region.
Performed a “supermarket blitz” – talking to residents about the survey while they were out shopping, resulting in a significant number of responses (approx 65).
On social media we posted seven times throughout the survey period, boosting them via Facebook advertising. Our last post reached 2.3K people with 68 clicking through to the survey.
Undertook internal communications to encourage staff and their networks to share the survey.
On the web, we created a new “have your say” section, and included a banner on the homepage.
Approached existing networks and relationships such as West Gippsland CMA and councils to help us promote.
Included the information in our Pipeline bill insert, going out to entire customer base of approximately 22,000.

These actions resulted in 114 responses, and eight applications to join our Community Advisory Committee.

We hoped for more responses given our effort to seek feedback. While a greater response rate (greater than 1 per cent of our customer base) could be more statistically valid, the low numbers of engagement is a trend others are seeing in our community and the wider industry. We also experienced the fourth COVID lockdown, and the ongoing power outage due to severe storms during the survey period.

Which is not to say there are not lessons to be learnt for us, when we go to our next round of wider engagement, after release of the draft Urban Water Strategy.`



WHAT'S NEXT

DIG DEEPER

Later in July 2021, we will be meeting with our **Community Advisory Committee** for the first time, to agree their Terms of Reference, introduce them to our business, and gain their advice on a selection criteria for the long-list of options for our water supply strategies currently under development.

The Community Advisory Committee will be our main focus until the release of the draft Urban Water Strategy. At this time we will go broad again, calling for public submissions and feedback. We will also be focusing on Leongatha, talking further with businesses and residents to seek their views.

Some lessons to be learnt for next time:

- A personal approach is effective in encouraging responses – go out to the people.
- Boost all social media posts as an inexpensive way to expand reach.
- Involving local businesses via the posters, enabled us to have conversations with them and receive their feedback directly.
- While our focus was Leongatha to begin with, spending time in smaller towns such as Meeniyan also had good community benefits.