

Lower Hunter Water Security Plan – Public exhibition feedback summary

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Public exhibition process

The Lower Hunter Water Security Plan is a whole of government approach to ensuring the region has a resilient and sustainable water future that contributes to regional health and prosperity and is supported by the community.

Following over three years of extensive community engagement throughout the development of the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan, final feedback on the draft plan was sought through a public exhibition process. The process was widely promoted and was open for seven weeks, from 9 August to 26 September 2021.

Feedback on the draft plan could be provided either by completing a guided submission survey or by providing a written submission either as an individual, or on behalf of an organisation.

During the public exhibition period Hunter Water engaged closely with all Councils in their area of operations, local Members of Parliament as well as various stakeholder and community groups including Business Hunter and the Committee for the Hunter. Information was provided about the key points of the plan and how to provide a submission.

A special Lower Hunter Water Security Plan edition of Hunter Water's The Fountain newsletter was distributed to 235,000 homes and businesses encouraging customers to provide feedback on the plan.

A good response was received on the draft plan during the exhibition period, this is outlined below.

This is a summary of what we heard throughout the consultation period. Full details can be found at yourvoice.hunterwater.com.au/water-future.



1,600

visits to the
LHWSP Your Voice
webpage



157

downloads of
the full
draft plan



235,000

households received the special
LHWSP edition of the Hunter
Water's The Fountain newsletter



48

community
members attended
a virtual webinar



10

presentations to
stakeholder/
community groups



25

items of media coverage

**Social media across Hunter Water's
channels received:**

15,350

Engagements

152,716

Impressions

This promotion resulted in a wide range of submissions from individuals and organisations.



112

guided submission
surveys were completed



76

written submissions
from individuals



23

written submissions
from organisations

LHWSP = Lower Hunter Water Security Plan

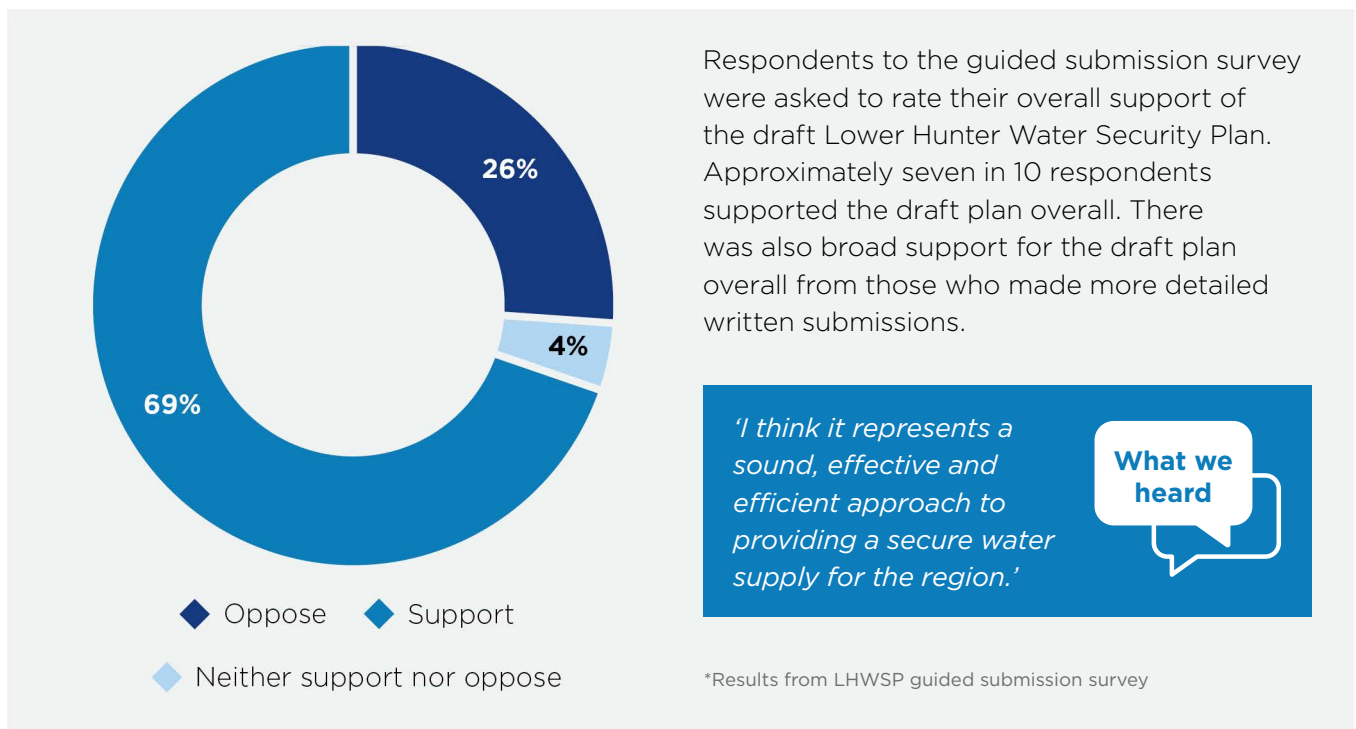
What we heard

Feedback from the community through both the guided submission survey and written submissions reflected broad support for the draft Lower Hunter Water Security Plan overall. It was evident from the responses received that having a diverse program of actions that increase water security for the region is highly valued by the community.

Guided submissions

There was strong support for the draft plan in the guided submissions, with 69% of respondents supporting the draft plan overall.

Overall support for the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan*



In addition to feedback on the draft plan, overall responses to the guided survey showed that:

- support for the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan 'principles' ranged from 79% to 88%
- support for the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan 'priority areas' ranged from 79% to 93%
- support for Lower Hunter Water Security Plan actions ranged from 51% (Central Coast connection) to 97% (water conservation). This broadly aligned with previous feedback from the community on these options.

Reasons why respondents agreed with the principles included:

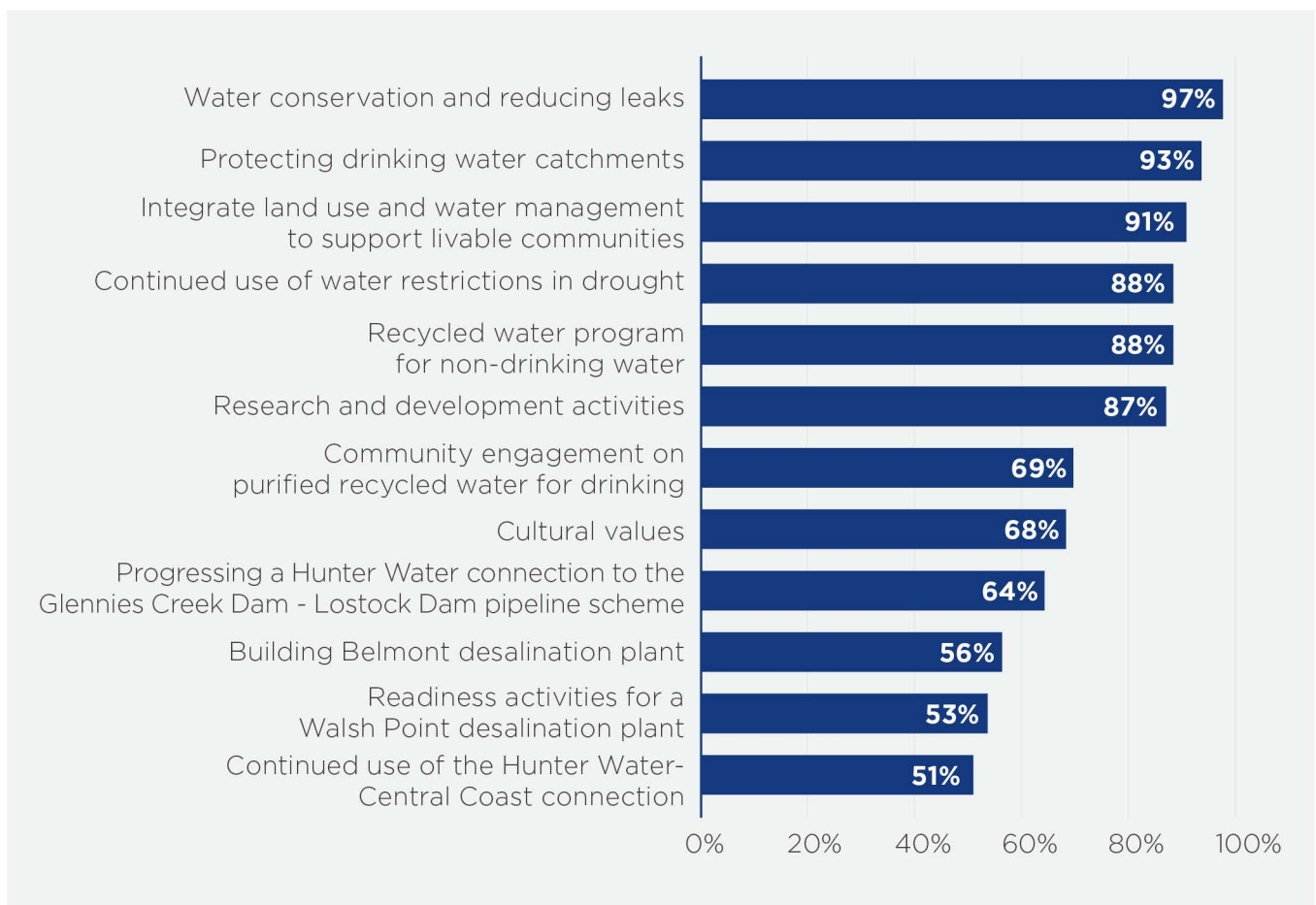
- the need for a diversified mix of supply options
- the need to provide a secure water future
- the impact of climate change
- the imperative to start the learning/planning process in time for when we need it
- because we live in a changing world
- potential current and future technological innovation that could be employed.

Reasons why respondents supported the priorities included:

- that safe drinking water and water for liveability is essential for our lives
- using our current system efficiently is valued
- having a diversified mix of options is seen to be important.

There was broad support for all proposed actions in the draft Lower Hunter Water Security Plan. The actions with the highest levels of support were related to making the best use of current resources (water conservation and reducing leaks and protecting drinking water catchments). Those with the lowest levels of support were around desalination actions and water sharing with the Central Coast. Concerns around Belmont and Walsh Point desalination were predominantly around perceived environmental impacts and costs.

Support for the actions in the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan



All proposed Lower Hunter Water Security Plan actions were supported.

'Existing supplies need to be used as efficiently as possible'

What we heard

Two-thirds of respondents (66%) accepted that increased water security requires investments that result in higher bills for customers.

Just over half of respondents (52%) indicated that Hunter Water should deliver the proposed program of actions which will increase their water bill, with 23% preferring to delay some of the actions and accept the associated risk of running out of water.

Written submissions

Feedback from written submissions is outlined below:

- Around 80% of submissions from organisations (including local MPs, local Government, and NGOs) were supportive of the draft plan and associated actions.
- Around 40% of individuals' submissions were positive, 28% neutral, and 31% negative in sentiment.

Key themes raised in the written submissions included:

- recognition and support for the process, particularly the extensive community and stakeholder engagement throughout the development of the draft plan

- support to improve the region's water security, the diversified nature of the recommended actions and catchment management
- concerns were raised in some submissions regarding:
 - potential impacts on local residents and water users from the proposed Lostock Dam to Glennies Creek Dam pipeline scheme
 - lack of commitment regarding the use of renewable energy and/or carbon offsets to mitigate impacts from desalination
 - bill impacts and affordability considerations, particularly for lower income households.

'Desalination must be powered by renewable energy. It is unacceptable that this wasn't made mandatory when the plant received planning approval.'

- Individual submission

What we heard

I congratulate Hunter Water for deleting the dams from the plan and progressing towards diversified rainfall and independent strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change on the current vulnerable supply systems.

Fast tracking of the desalination plant gives all residents in the Lower Hunter security to know our water supply is safe at all times, including drought.'

- Individual submission

What we heard

Understanding community feedback and incorporating it into the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan

Potential impacts from the Glennies Creek Dam – Lostock Dam pipeline scheme and Paterson River offtake

The NSW Government, in consultation with Hunter Water, is leading the development of a Final Business Case for the two-way pipeline scheme and the offtake from the Paterson River.

The Final Business Case process will be comprehensive and will provide important information that will inform decision-making on the proposed project, this will include:

- comprehensive technical and environmental studies
- options analysis for the water offtake near Paterson and transfer to Hunter Water's supply system
- detailed modelling of streamflow and salinity in the Paterson River, and development of operating rules for water extraction.

Ongoing engagement with stakeholders, including water users and landowners, will continue as this work proceeds so that concerns are understood and appropriate options are identified to manage any potential impacts.

Energy use associated with desalination

In response to community feedback, the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan has been updated to include a commitment that all proposed actions in the plan, including desalination, will be incorporated into Hunter Water's Carbon Strategy. The Carbon Strategy, currently under development, will consider the timeframe and associated actions for Hunter Water to reach net zero emissions. This aligns with broader NSW Government commitments to net zero and the environmental objectives of the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan.

Costs for the program of actions in the plan

Further analysis is required to confirm funding arrangements for the proposed investments within the plan and to identify how best to introduce and manage any bill increases for customers.

The NSW Government will continue to ensure that hardship policies, concessions and other measures are available so that everyone has access to water. Hunter Water will continue to offer support programs to help customers having difficulty managing their water use or paying their water bills.

It is also important to appreciate that an unreliable water supply has economic impacts. Running out of water would be a catastrophic event that would impose very substantial financial costs on Lower Hunter households, businesses and the regional economy.

Additional improvements to the plan

In response to additional feedback received during the public exhibition period, the following changes were also incorporated in to the plan:

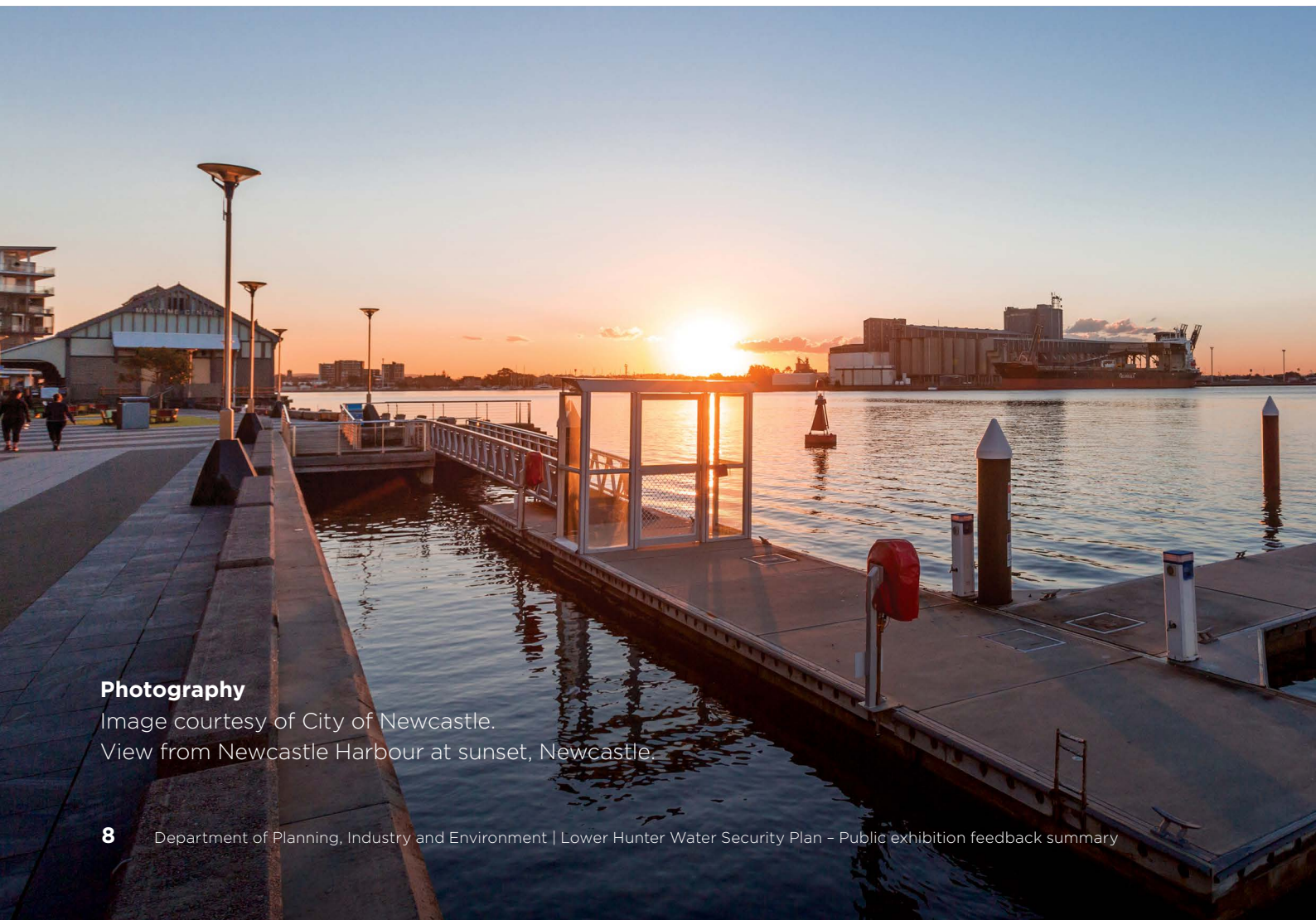
- more clarity was provided regarding the water for life priority and collaboration with First Nations and Aboriginal people to develop the plan
- greater detail regarding the range of supply and demand options that were considered in the development of the plan
- more in depth description of climate scenarios and analysis
- greater explanation of rainfall independent supply options
- additional information about the technical aspects of the plan was included to improve transparency.

We sincerely thank everyone who took the time to consider the draft Lower Hunter Water Security Plan and to make a submission.

All submissions and matters raised by the community will continue to be considered by the NSW Government as the approval and adoption process progresses during early 2022.

To keep up to date visit:

yourvoice.hunterwater.com.au/water-future



Photography

Image courtesy of City of Newcastle.

View from Newcastle Harbour at sunset, Newcastle.