

Regulatory and Assurance Framework Understanding Service Needs Survey Results

Water and Sewer
January 2025

Understanding Service Needs Survey Results

Executive Summary

NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water sets the expectation that the local water utilities understand their customer's service needs. The NSW Regulatory and Assurance Framework for Local Water Utilities gives guidance on achieving the outcome for understanding service needs to a reasonable standard.

Meeting service needs are a key objective of Singleton Council (Council). Service needs determine the requirements for operation, maintenance and capital works. This, in turn, drives key elements of strategic planning, including service levels, assets and workforce and financial (expenditure and revenue) planning.

Under section 3.2 of the Regulatory and Assurance Framework, local water utilities are to achieve the strategic planning outcome "understanding service needs" to a reasonable standard. This includes considering:

- What are customers' needs, values, and preferences?
- What current and future demands are placed on water supply and sewerage systems?
- How will the local water utility consider and address objectives, priorities and evidence of other relevant state or regional strategic planning, including the NSW Water Strategy and regional water strategies?

To understand the needs of our customers Council has developed a survey to capture this information.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this survey was to help Council gain a deeper understanding of the needs, expectations, and experiences of our customers. By collecting feedback, Council is better positioned to identify priorities, improve service delivery, and plan for future community needs. The survey was open from 25 November 2024 to 20 December 2024 and invited responses from a wide range of participants, including property owners, residents, local businesses, and visitors to the area. This broad approach ensured that the results reflect a diverse set of perspectives and provide meaningful insights into how Council can continue to support and engage with the community.

2. Methodology

Council invited community members to participate in the survey using a range of communication channels to maximise awareness and accessibility. Promotion included the Council's webpage, social media platforms, posters displayed at Council locations, the Mayoral column, advertisements in local newspapers, and a direct mail-out to the community. In total, 91 responses were received from the community, which represented residential, commercial and industrial customers. This provided a valuable cross-section of views from residents, property owners,



businesses, and visitors, although the results may not fully reflect the opinions of the entire community.

3. Survey Results

The survey results are presented below.

3.1 Service/Product Quality

Rating the following options 1 to 6 where 1 is most important, I expect Singleton Council's Water and Sewer Services to: (Please rank the options by clicking and dragging them, with 1st as the most important and 6th as the least important.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	TOTAL	SCORE
Provide high quality water and sewer services Supply water that is clean, transparent and without noticeable odour or taste. Water and sewer services should be reliable and infrequently interrupted.	55.56% 50	34.44% 31	6.67% 6	1.11% 1	1.11% 1	1.11% 1	90	5.39
Provide value for money and be affordable Keeping bills as low as possible by being efficient and looking for ways to save money.	37.78% 34	41.11% 37	10.00% 9	4.44% 4	2.22% 2	4.44% 4	90	4.94
Ensure water security Plan ahead and use water resources wisely so you have enough water to support the health and prosperity for our region, now and in the future, no matter the weather.	3.33% 3	17.78% 16	63.33% 57	10.00% 9	4.44% 4	1.11% 1	90	4.02
Deliver great customer experience Provide clear, accurate information via a preferred channel, have your issue resolved quickly and be kept informed.	1.11% 1	1.11% 1	12.22% 11	56.67% 51	18.89% 17	10.00% 9	90	2.79
Be sustainable Care for the environment; protect it during our operations (using green energy and reducing carbon emissions), "treading lightly on the planet" and being fair to future generations by acting on big challenges like climate change.	1.11% 1	5.56% 5	4.44% 4	10.00% 9	22.22% 20	56.67% 51	90	1.83
Be community-focused Provide water to keep our area liveable and green, raise awareness about the water cycle and be open to feedback.	1.11% 1	0.00% 0	3.33% 3	17.78% 16	51.11% 46	26.67% 24	90	2.02

In addition to ensuring Water + Sewer Services bills remain as low as possible, please rate the following options 1 to 5 in order of importance to you

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Reducing carbon emissions as quickly as possible	4.55% 4	4.55% 4	15.91% 14	15.91% 14	59.09% 52	88	1.80
Addressing water supply services issues such as low pressure, odours, or taste	77.27% 68	17.05% 15	1.14% 1	3.41% 3	1.14% 1	88	4.66
Addressing sewer services issues such as sewer spills, odour, or blockages	15.91% 14	68.18% 60	12.50% 11	1.14% 1	2.27% 2	88	3.94
Building new digital capabilities to make it easier to engage with Singleton Council	0.00% 0	2.27% 2	23.86% 21	50.00% 44	23.86% 21	88	2.05
Rolling out digital meters to enable real time usage and monitor leak detection	2.27% 2	7.95% 7	46.59% 41	29.55% 26	13.64% 12	88	2.56



Would you support projects to improve drinking water quality (taste, colour and smell) and/or pressure (force of water from your tap)? Council's current water quality is as mentioned in our Customer Service Plan –Water and Sewer Group, Levels of Service which meets minimum legislative requirements.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No, I am satisfied with current service	30.77%	28
Yes, if there are no additional costs to me	62.64%	57
Yes, with additional costs to me (please specify what additional costs you are comfortable with on the next page)	6.59%	6
TOTAL		91

You answered Yes, with additional costs to me. Please select the most relevant to your answer in terms of additional costs to support projects to improve drinking water quality.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1-4% increase	50.00%	3
5-9% increase	50.00%	3
10-15% increase	0.00%	0
TOTAL		6

Would you support projects to improve the quality of treated sewage discharged from the sewage treatment plant? Council's current sewage effluent discharge is as mentioned in our Customer Service Plan – Water and Sewer Group, Levels of Service which meets the requirements set by NSW Environment Protection Authority.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No, I am satisfied with current service	30.00%	27
Yes, if there are no additional costs to me	62.22%	56
Yes, with additional costs to me (please specify what additional costs you are comfortable with on the next page)	7.78%	7
TOTAL		90

You answered Yes, with additional costs to me. Please select the most relevant to your answer in terms of additional costs to support projects to improve the quality of treated sewage discharged from the sewage treatment plant.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1-4% increase	42.86%	3
5-9% increase	42.86%	3
10-15% increase	14.29%	1
TOTAL		7



3.2 Communication & Support

How would you like to be informed about water and sewer outages/interruptions? (Council's current practice is as mentioned in our Customer Service Plan - Water and Sewer Group, Levels of Service) What else would you like?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Satisfied with current process	24.18%	22
24x7 service outages map on Council's website (similar to Hunter Water, Ausgrid, etc)	41.76%	38
Social media posts (during office hours only)	8.79%	8
Letterbox drops (for planned works only)	17.58%	16
24x7 customer service phonenumber	2.20%	2
Door knocks (24x7)	0.00%	0
Door knocks (from 7am to 7pm only)	1.10%	1
Other (please specify)	4.40%	4
TOTAL		91

Singleton Council Water and Sewer Services produce around 2,400tonnes of carbon emissions per year. Are you willing to pay more to reduce carbon emissions before the NSW Government's net zero target by 2050? Within the last 5 years carbon emissions have been reduced by approximately 790 tonnes by installing solar panels and infrastructure upgrades.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No, I am satisfied with the 2050 target	86.81%	79
Yes, with additional costs to me (please specify what additional costs you are comfortable with on the next page)	13.19%	12
TOTAL		91

You answered Yes, with additional costs to me. Please select the most relevant to your answer in terms of additional costs to reduce carbon emissions before the NSW Government's net zero target by 2050.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1-4% increase	58.33%	7
5-9% increase	16.67%	2
10-15% increase	25.00%	3
TOTAL		12



3.3 Open Feedback

Analysis of the open-text comments revealed that the key themes from the community centred on the quality of supply and cost of the service. Many respondents highlighted concerns regarding the reliability of supply and consistency of the service. These insights provide Council with a clear indication of the area's most important to the community and highlight opportunities to review service delivery and pricing strategies to better meet customer expectations.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Quality	28%	11
Cost	23%	9
Other	13%	5
Planning & Regulatory	10%	4
Maintenance & Repairs	8%	3
Happy with Current Situation	8%	3
Communication	5%	2
Reliability	5%	2
Carbon Emissions	3%	1
TOTAL		40

4. Analysis

Community feedback indicates strong expectations for Council to continue providing high-quality, reliable and affordable water and sewer services that represent value for money. The community places importance on addressing ongoing service issues such as low water pressure, odours, taste concerns, sewer spills, odour emissions, and blockages.

While there is broad support for projects that improve drinking water quality and the quality of treated effluent from the Sewage Treatment Plant, this support is conditional on there being no additional cost to the community. Noting that the requirement to improve drinking water and treated effluent quality is often driven by regulatory requirements and not a decision of Council.

Overall, residents are satisfied with Council's existing communication processes regarding service outages and interruptions. However, they expressed a preference for the introduction of a 24/7 online outages map to enhance transparency and access to real-time information. This is a priority action for Council to implement in 2025/26.

The community also indicated that they are not willing to pay higher charges to accelerate carbon emission reductions ahead of the NSW Government's Net Zero 2050 target.



5. Recommendations

Based on the community survey results, it is recommended that the following themes are integrated into Council's future strategic planning:

- *Maintain service quality and affordability:* Continue prioritising reliable, cost-effective delivery of water and sewer services while addressing recurring issues such as low water pressure, odour, and blockages.
- *Targeted improvement projects:* Progress water quality and sewage treatment upgrades only where they can be delivered without additional cost to the community.
- *Enhance communication tools:* Develop and implement a 24/7 online outages map to improve transparency and real-time service information for customers.
- *Sustainability alignment:* Focus carbon reduction initiatives on efficiency gains and compliance with the NSW Net Zero 2050 pathway, without imposing additional financial burden on ratepayers.

6. Conclusion

Community feedback highlights a strong emphasis on maintaining affordable, reliable, and high-quality water and sewer services. Residents value current communication practices and support practical service improvements, provided these do not increase costs. Future planning should therefore focus on efficiency, transparency, and alignment with state sustainability targets, ensuring community expectations continue to be met in a financially responsible manner.

