

# It's time to talk water, sewer and stormwater prices – data driven results

Central Coast Council

## Engagement summary

Your water, sewer and stormwater prices are set by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal – also known as IPART – and Central Coast Council is currently developing its pricing submission to IPART for the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2026.

Part of this submission to IPART involves us checking in with the community to make sure their views are considered.

Between 1 March and 28 March 2021 Council sought community feedback on what's important to them about how we provide water, sewer and stormwater drainage services. We did this through four distinct methods:

- **Residential – structured:** A structured (representative of the Central Coast community) survey amongst 510 residents aged 18+
- **Residential – Council YVOC:** An opt-in online (non-representative) survey open to residents through Your Voice Our Coast website, which resulted in 620 responses
- **SME:** A phone survey of 120 small to medium (SME) sized business decision makers
- **Group discussions:** Two qualitative group discussions amongst residents aged 18+ conducted online via Zoom

The survey and discussion groups targeted the following four areas:

- **Performance** – looking at satisfaction rates around water quality, reliability of water supply, response time to fix interruptions, water pressure, and sewage overflows on properties and in the community
- **Drainage** – looking at the support levels of drainage charges being set by Central Coast Council as part of general rates, to be in-line with how other councils charge for this, instead of determined by IPART.
- **Scarcity pricing** – looking at support levels around increasing the price of water during times of drought, when water reserves run low.
- **Price alignment** – looking at the support level for a single price for sewerage services to be introduced for all Central Coast residents in the future so that any future investment in sewerage services will be based on asset expenditure requirements, not on previous local government area boundaries.

## How you connected



1358 visits to the Your Voice Our Coast website



11,000+ stakeholders were kept up-to-date through four separate issues of e-news.



230 stakeholders were kept up-to-date through two separate EDMs



42 advertisements were ran during March, reaching 140,000+ residents



1578 emails and letters were sent to stakeholders



1250 surveys completed



20 people participated across two live video discussion groups.

## Engagement Results

Below is an overview of the results of this survey. For results on specific questions, check out the consultation report, located on the Your Voice Our Coast project page.

### Performance

Satisfaction was highest for 'reliability of water supply':

- 80% of the Residential – Structured respondents rating it 4 or 5 out of 5, while 81% of the Residential – Council YVOC respondents, and 97% of the SME respondents did likewise.
- Only 4% of the Residential – Structured respondents expressed dissatisfaction for reliability (by providing a rating of 1 or 2 out of 5), while 6% of the Residential – Council YVOC respondents, and none of the SME respondents expressed dissatisfaction in this area.

Dissatisfaction was highest (though still relatively low in overall terms) for 'water quality':

- 60% of the Residential – Structured respondents rating it 4 or 5 out of 5, while 57% of the Residential – Council YVOC respondents, and 64% of the SME respondents did likewise.
- 16% of the Residential – Structured respondents expressed dissatisfaction for water quality, while 23% of the Residential – Council YVOC respondents, and 10% of the SME respondents expressed dissatisfaction in this area.

Sewerage overflows to personal properties did not appear to be a major issue for the survey respondents.

- 6% of the Residential – Structured respondents had experienced such an incident, while 7% of the Residential – Council YVOC respondents, and 6% of the SME respondents also indicated that they had.

However, a larger proportion claimed to be impacted by overflows into the community.

- 24% of the Residential – Structured respondents claimed that they/their household had been impacted by this, while 30% of the Residential – Council YVOC respondents, and 20% of the SME respondents also indicated that they had been impacted.
- 43% of the Residential – Structured respondents expressed concern about flows into the environment, while 55% of the Residential – Council YVOC respondents, and 50% of the SME respondents also indicated that they were concerned (by rating this with a 4 or 5 out of 5).

From the exploration of these results, it was evident that when overflows do occur in community spaces they appear to have high visibility – particularly in and around beach areas which are of significant concern to residents.



## Drainage

There was not a clear level of support for the idea of drainage pricing being set by Council as part of general rates.

- Residential – Structured: 26% of the respondents showed support, and 31% were opposed.
- Residential – Council YVOC: 17% of the respondents showed support, and the majority (55%) were opposed.
- SME: 33% of the respondents showed support, and 25% were opposed.

The analysis of this issue revealed that the sentiment expressed by the community on this matter is likely to have been influenced by the current economic position of Council.

However, there was majority support for the idea of all Central Coast residents contributing to the funding of drainage infrastructure.

- Residential – Structured: 57% of the respondents showed support, and 15% were opposed.
- Residential – Council YVOC: 63% of the respondents showed support, and 18% were opposed.
- SME: 55% of the respondents showed support, and 15% were opposed.

The exploration of this issue through group discussions showed that the idea of being treated equally and as one region (not divided) was seen to be a strong reason for change.

There was not a large amount of support for all business properties receiving the same drainage charge. 21% of the SME respondents supported this, while 40% were opposed to the idea.

## Scarcity pricing

There were mixed reactions to the scarcity pricing concept (introduced as increasing the price of water during times of drought):

- Residential – Structured: 38% of respondents showed support, and 36% were opposed
- Residential – Council YVOC: 32% of respondents showed support, and the majority (56%) were opposed
- SME: 42% of respondents showed support, and 37% were opposed.

One potential barrier to acceptance to emerge from the analysis was the potential impact this price structure could have on vulnerable customers. So, if this were to be introduced, safeguards would need to be in place for this customer group, and this would need to be clearly communicated to the community.



## Price alignment

There was majority support for the discontinuation of location-based sewer services pricing – with the idea of creating an average of the two price levels resonating with most.

- When the initial concept was revealed it was supported by 58% of the Residential – Structured respondents, 61% of the Residential – Council YVOC respondents, and 63% of the SME respondents.
- When the full pricing implications were revealed it was supported by 59% of the Residential – Structured respondents, 66% of the Residential – Council YVOC respondents, and 66% of the SME respondents.

While there was a lower level of support amongst residents in the former Wyong Council area (who are likely to have to pay slightly more than they are currently), the support level was still relatively high amongst that sub-group.

The idea of treating all residents equally came through in the exploration of this.



## What's next?

We are using the results of this consultation to shape Council's submission to IPART, which is due for lodgement with IPART in September 2021 and will determine what prices Council can charge for these services from 1 July 2022 until 30 June 2026.

After we provide IPART with our submission, IPART will release an Issues Paper and the community will have the opportunity to provide further comment to IPART at this time.

Current prices will not change until a new determination is made. Any changes made as a result of the new determination will come in to effect from 1 July 2022.

Find out more and stay up to date at [yourvoiceourcoast.com](https://yourvoiceourcoast.com)