



22 March 2021

### **Community open to all options that deliver water security**

The Lower Hunter community has shown support across all seven preliminary option portfolios developed for community feedback as part of the review of the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan (LHWSP).

Hunter Water, in partnership with the NSW Government, the community and other stakeholders, is carrying out the major review of the LHWSP to provide a resilient, secure and sustainable water supply for the Lower Hunter, now and for the longer term.

During the most recent phase of community and stakeholder engagement that ran from November 2020 until February 2021, more than 1,100 participants responded to a detailed online community survey with their views about water security, environmental goals and their preferences across seven portfolios of supply and demand side options. Other activities were targeted at specific stakeholders such as schools, business associations and industry groups.

There were high levels of support from the community for all seven preliminary portfolios, as well as support for investment to ensure enough water can be supplied to meet minimum customer demands in a long and severe drought.

The reliability of the water supply during drought was valued most highly followed by cost, environmental and social impacts.

The high levels of support across all portfolios indicate that no portfolios should be ruled out of consideration at this stage.

The broad support, ranging from 73% to 61% for the seven preliminary portfolios, included the options of water conservation, recycled water, inter-regional water transfers as well as purified recycled water for drinking, desalination and dams.

Participants were supportive also of additional investments to achieve environmental goals for biodiversity protection and greenhouse gas emission reductions.

In thanking the community for their feedback during the extensive and in-depth consultation process, Hunter Water Managing Director, Darren Cleary, acknowledged the very wet summer and recent flooding across the region.

“I’m very aware of the impact that the recent heavy rain and flooding has had on many in our community over the past few days.

“Hunter Water’s Field Crews and Operation Teams are on the ground working hard in difficult conditions to manage the effect of the rain and flooding on our water and wastewater network and reduce the impact on our customers and community where possible.

“While we’re seeing our water storages at the healthiest levels in years, Hunter Water continues the vital strategic planning work for the Lower Hunter’s long-term water security.

Mr Cleary said the LHWSP community engagement results indicate there’s not a strong differentiation in community views across any of the option portfolios.

“These are really valuable results and I am grateful to the Lower Hunter community, businesses and Councils for taking the time to provide input to the LHWSP review.

“Hunter Water will be incorporating the community’s views as it moves into detailed assessment of the options portfolios.

“This is a very important body of work for our region, particularly as we know the climate is changing and our population is forecast to grow.

“What’s very heartening is the community’s strong support for water conservation, in line with all the work Hunter Water has been doing to reduce leaks and save this precious resource.

“Interestingly the community has shown support for portfolios that include the supply option of purified recycled water (PRW) for drinking,” said Mr Cleary.

Mr Cleary added that analysis of the options for the LHWSP review is nearing completion.

“Hunter Water’s work now focuses on finalising how the portfolios stack up against the decision-making criteria. These have included community values, economic assessment across financial, social, environmental and resilience criteria, and stress testing against future uncertainties.

A report on the LHWSP engagement is available at [www.yourvoice.hunterwater.com.au/water-future](http://www.yourvoice.hunterwater.com.au/water-future)

The community will have another opportunity to provide feedback when the draft of the LHWSP goes on public exhibition, expected mid-year.

**Hunter Water media line: 4979 9669 | [media@hunterwater.com.au](mailto:media@hunterwater.com.au)**