



Technical Paper 1 Customer and Community Engagement

September 2025

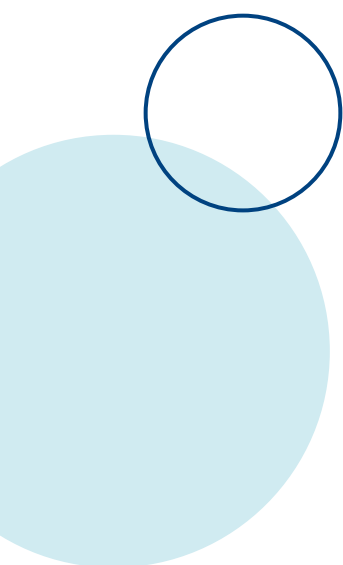
Central
Coast
Council

Water
and Sewer

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1 Key Points

- Central Coast Council (Council) has transformed the engagement approach with our community to better understand and prioritise their needs. This includes incorporating innovative tools, diverse methodologies, and a commitment to transparency and building trust.
- Council's community engagement is aligned with the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's (IPART's) 3Cs model: Customers, Costs, and Credibility.
- Adoption of a Water and Sewer People's Panel allows integration of community feedback into Council's decision-making process.
- Appointment of the Community and Customer Liaison positions, ensuring that customers are kept up to date with information during infrastructure works, emergencies and environmental events.
- Development of the Water and Sewer Community Engagement and Education Approach.
- Continued development of a dedicated Water and Sewer education team.
- Adoption of the Water and Sewer Customer Charter and Complaints Management Framework.
- Delivery of robust education campaigns.



2 Putting customers first

Council's water and sewer directorate have made significant progress in engaging with our customers to understand what matters most to them. The engagement approach follows the sentiment in IPART's 3C framework, as well as alignment to Council's broader Community Engagement Strategy.

The engagement approach focuses on:

- increasing face-to-face engagement activities
- understanding the community values and expectation of delivered services
- promoting engagement activities to reach wider community members
- making our communication and information clear, relevant and easy to understand
- ensuring engagement opportunities are accessible to everyone
- where possible and appropriate, undertaking place-based engagement
- Strengthening relationships with First Nations groups for their insights on matters specific to water and sewer.

2.1 Incorporating the 3Cs model

In July 2023, IPART introduced its new regulatory framework. The framework focuses on customers, costs and credibility, referred to as the 3Cs. This framework is underpinned by 12 guiding principles which both IPART and water businesses use to develop and assess pricing proposals. Refer Figure 1: 3Cs framework. Source: IPART Water Regulation Handbook July 2023



Figure 1: 3Cs framework. Source: IPART Water Regulation Handbook July 2023

2.1.1 Customers

In adapting to IPART's 3Cs model, Council has embedded the following into the business:

- Adapting our engagement practices to preferences identified through consultation.
- Renewed focus on the *what*, *why* and *how* to inform community engagement activities.
- Introduction of the People's Panel, where a representative group of the community are engaged for key decisions, enabling integration of community preferences into our business practices.
- Adopting a Human Centred Design (HCD) approach, which involves inviting customers to co-design a new water bill format.
- Central Coast Water Security Plan (CCWSP) engagement, where a representative community group were taken on a journey to learn about their water values and educate them on the different water supply and demand options being considered, including a series of future improvements.
- Ongoing engagement to understand community values and expectations in relation to water and sewer services. This also includes the community preferences on existing performance targets and response times to incidents.
- Bill structure and its composition (flat or escalating) over the determination period, including preferences for a higher usage charge and lower service charge (or vice versa).
- Future Service Options engagement program where our community was asked to discuss optional investments to improve services.
- Feedback from our community regarding increases in operational expenditure to improve performance for water quality and reliability.
- Unserved properties (linked to Water and Sewer Masterplan) where Council sought feedback from residents and businesses regarding subsidisation for unserved properties.

Additionally, as part of its ongoing commitment to inclusive decision-making, Council has refined its process for developing key strategic documents. These documents are shared publicly to encourage community feedback and participation.

Key documents include:

- Central Coast Water Security Plan (CCWSP)
<https://www.centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/residents/water-and-sewer/about-water-and-sewer-services/central-coast-water-security-plan>
- Community Engagement Strategy
[Community Engagement Strategy | Central Coast Council](#)
- Water and Sewer Customer Charter and Complaints Management Framework
<https://www.centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/residents/water-and-sewer/about-water-and-sewer-services/water-and-sewer-customer-charter>
- Water and Sewer Performance Reports and Delivery Plan
<https://www.centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/residents/water-and-sewer/about-water-and-sewer-services/water-and-sewer-performance-reports-and-delivery-plan>

Water and Sewer's community engagement principles link to the broader Council principles highlighted in Figure 2.

Community engagement

Our principles

Our approach is guided by the five principles outlined in Council's adopted Engagement Framework as shown below.



Figure 2: Community engagement principles

2.1.2 Costs

Engagement with the community included understanding what they value in relation to services, long term investments, future planning, price structure and future service options, where willingness to pay for additional services was discussed.

Key engagement outcomes related to:

- **Long term investments** – specific to future investments under the Central Coast Water Security plan. The community appeared to have a positive attitude toward water usage and conservation. There were many water values that emerged that Council needs to be cognisant of, when planning water for the future such as reliability, affordability and environmental impact.
- **Robust costs** – Council modelled four price scenarios and used these scenarios to engage with our community to understand bill impact and affordability.
- **Commitment to improve value** – improving the information presented to the community including showing expenditure related to community values and efficiencies.

Using insights from the 2023–2025 engagement, Council ensures service pricing reflects both community expectations and actual value. Report available under the Community Engagement phase tabs - [Future Water and Sewer service options | Your Voice Our Coast](#).

2.1.3 Credibility

Based on an understanding of what our community value and expect from Council, it is important that promises made are delivered during any determination period. For the existing determination period, Council demonstrated credibility to its community by publishing the Water and Sewer Delivery Plan 2022-2026, which detailed the actions included in the IPART 2022 Determination, tracking progress on initiatives under the key focus areas of Asset Management, Community Engagement and Accountability.

Council also publishes both annual and quarterly performance reports. These reports evaluate performance across water quality, effective planning, reliable services, environmental focus, quality treatment and affordability. The reports allow customers to monitor long-term trends and observe Council's ongoing accountability to deliver.

In addition, Council remains committed to continuously improving its engagement activities, with a focus on inclusive and transparent communication. This ongoing engagement builds on several key initiatives in collaboration with the community, including:

- Customer defined water and sewer values and outcomes
- Co-design of the Customer Charter
- Co-designing the People's Panel Terms of Reference
- Co-designing Council's 'New Look' water notices
- Connecting with dissatisfied customers to listen to their feedback
- Quarterly customer satisfaction survey to understand customer satisfaction
- Willingness to pay
- Water usage versus service charges.

For the future determination period of 2026-2031, Council's credibility to our customers will be driven by a newly established Accountability Strategy that has been informed by the insights from the engagement programs undertaken during 2023 to 2025.

2.2 Understanding Council's customers and community

Council is a major water utility with over 139,000 connected properties. This results in a broad customer base that includes residents, businesses, hospitals, schools, universities, community groups and more.

While not everyone in the community pays for services directly (visitors or individuals who reside outside the LGA) all the community interact in the same environment and are impacted by the decisions made by Council. Council is committed to working closely with its customers and community to make decisions in the best interests of the whole community.

To capture a full spectrum of perspectives over the last four years, Council implemented a comprehensive engagement process that emphasises inclusion and accessibility. By working with demographic experts, we've engaged hard-to-reach populations, such as vulnerable community members and high-consumption businesses (Council's Top 100 water users), ensuring a balanced representation of voices in Council's planning.

As part of this work, we've also developed detailed customer profiles to better understand the unique needs of Council's customers. These insights help us tailor engagement services and communications more effectively, ensuring they remain responsive and relevant to the community they serve.

2.2.1 Customer profiles

Council aims further understand its diverse community to improve engagement and meet varied water and sewer service needs. Customer profiles were developed by id – Informed Decisions in August 2023 based on demographic data from the 2021 ABS Census, with future community surveys planned to gather further understanding. Please refer Figure 3 for a snapshot of our community demographics.



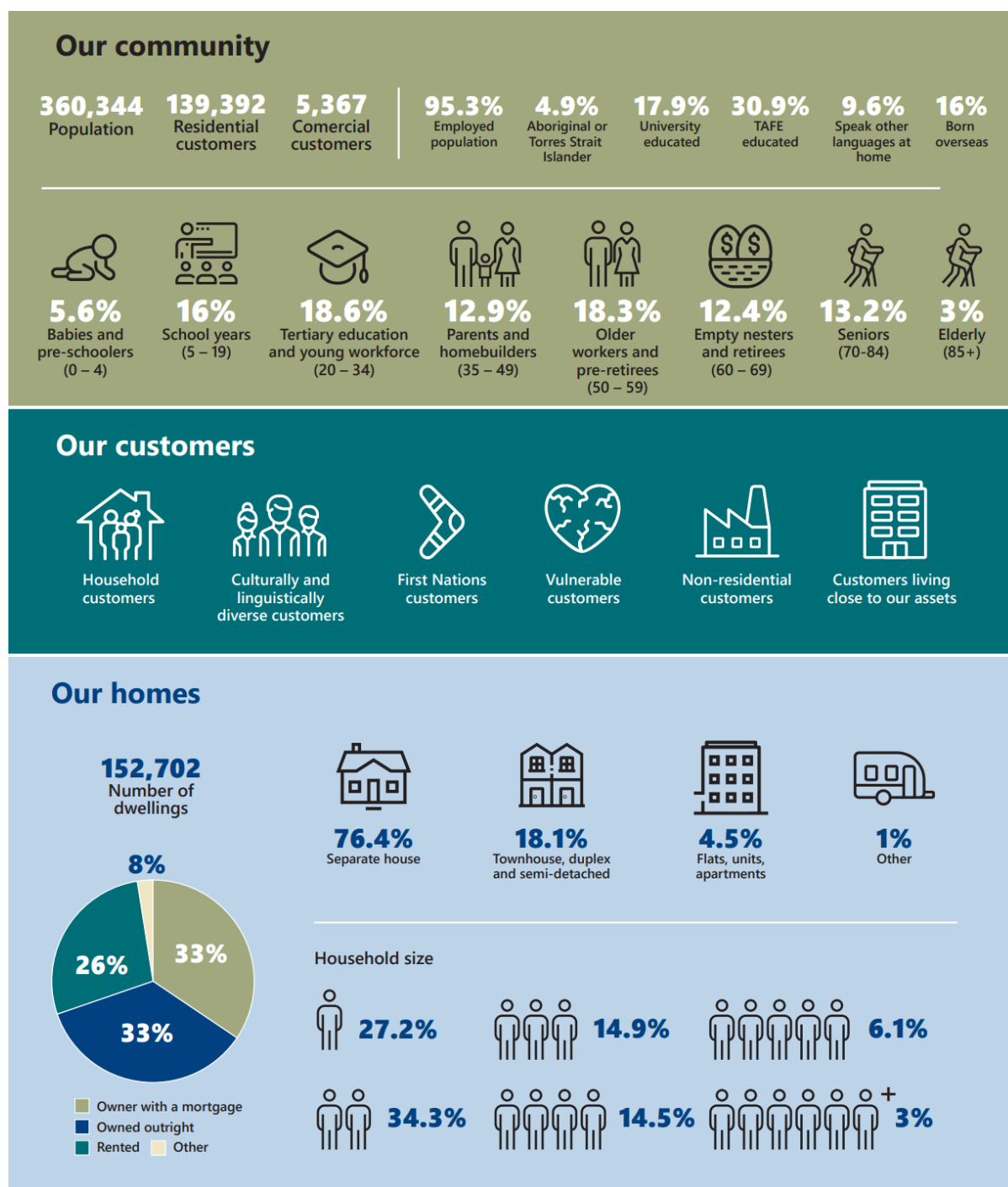


Figure 3: Community snapshot

Findings from the consultant helped Council to identify that the Local Government Area (LGA) community is represented by:

Household customers

- Large families
- Small families
- Older empty nesters
- Older lone residents
- Student share houses

First Nations customers

- The median age of First Nations residents on the Central Coast is 23 years (compared to 43 years for the LGA's population overall)

Community members near water and sewer assets

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) customers

- Recent arrivals
- Non-English speakers

Vulnerable customers

- Persons with disabilities
- Chronic health conditions
- Low income

Non-residential customers

- Large business owners
- Small business owners

2.3 Engagement strategy and methodologies

In alignment with the Council-wide engagement framework, a tailored Water and Sewer Community Engagement and Education Approach has been developed, demonstrating the engagement with the community on water and sewer services, projects or initiatives that impact the community.

The revised approach aligns with the principles of the IAP2 Framework, which supports inclusive, transparent, and meaningful public participation. Council have designed a comprehensive and adaptable engagement methodology that reflects the diversity, values, and expectations of the community.

By aligning with IAP2's core principles, the approach empowers the community to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. Feedback gathered through these engagements directly shapes service delivery, policy development, and project outcomes. The strategy includes a mix of consultation formats—from digital engagement to in-person discussions—to ensure broad accessibility and participation.

Key components of Council's methodology include:

- Early and consistent engagement across all project stages
- Diverse communication channels tailored to community needs
- Iterative feedback loops to validate and report back on what we heard
- Collaborative engagement formats such as focus groups and panels.

2.3.1 Tools and technology in engagement

Up until late 2024, the lack of a specialised engagement platform restricted the ability to collect and analyse meaningful data. This limitation hindered Council's capacity to fully understand community sentiment and integrate insights into planning and decision-making.

To address this, Social Pinpoint was adopted, an innovative digital engagement tool that enables real-time feedback and two-way communication. The platform's features—including follow and notification functionalities—help community members stay updated on the topics they care about, building transparency and trust.

A particularly valuable feature is the ability to create private project spaces. These are now used for People's Panel, facilitating ongoing dialogue between participants and the project team, and ensuring that their contributions remain central to the decision-making process.

2.3.2 Developing a community engagement database

Another key improvement to managing customers and community was the development of a dedicated Water and Sewer database using Hubspot¹. The development of this list included the introduction of new processes which included:

- Improved data capture during consultations
- Implementation of webforms for customers to express interest in project updates
- Active promotion of sign-ups through multiple customer touchpoints, including online, phone, and field-based interactions.

This opt-in database now includes over 1,750 registered members, each of whom receives project updates and relevant information on water and sewer services. The database supports more personalised, timely, and effective communication with the community.

Residents are also able to reach out to scan QR codes on project letters to receive a call or email to their enquiry.



¹ HUBSPOT is an application used for connecting with customers using emails, meetings or calls.

3 Council's engagement journey 2022-2026

Over the determination period, Central Coast Council Water and Sewer has engaged the community in a variety of decisions and matters regarding their water supply and sewerage services. Refer to Figure 4 for the engagement blueprint.

In August 2021, to help ensure a resilient future water supply, an online submission form was introduced to gather feedback on the Central Coast Council Water Security Plan (CCCWSP).

In 2023, engagement activity continued with community forums, targeted interviews and surveys, facilitating deeper discussions between the organisation and its customers and community. Key focus areas included establishing core customer and community values, as well as understanding performance reporting preferences.

Following this, between 23 November and 14 February 2024, feedback was sought from residents and businesses in two phases on the small urban and rural communities across the Central Coast that do not have access to water and/or sewerage services. These properties are known as 'unserved properties'.

Your Water and Sewer Services, conducted during April to July 2024, delivered an ambitious consultation program aimed to help us gain valuable insights into customer preferences. The engagement was to retest and prioritise the values identified in 2023. Council also sought feedback in relation to engagement preferences and an initial discussion was held around bill phasing and response times to incidents.

During February to June 2025, Council conducted an engagement program called Future Service Options, which essentially gauged community appetite to pay for improvements on our service performance areas, that aligned with their prioritised values. For more information, please refer to Technical Papers 2 and 11.

Our community was reintroduced to a number of options regarding bill phasing, whereby they indicated a preference for flatter bill structure. The community preferred one increase in their bills and then to remain stable (other than CPI). In addition, the preference was to have a higher water usage charge, as it would allow better control over the bill. The forecast bill shows the split that 78% is from water usage and 28% from service charges. Sewer charges are different where most of the bill comes from the service charge and not the deemed usage.

Council has also committed to a future engagement program in early 2026 to better define and categorise response times to incidents, as published in the Water and Sewer Customer Charter.

Our customer connection blueprint: Engaging today, shaping tomorrow

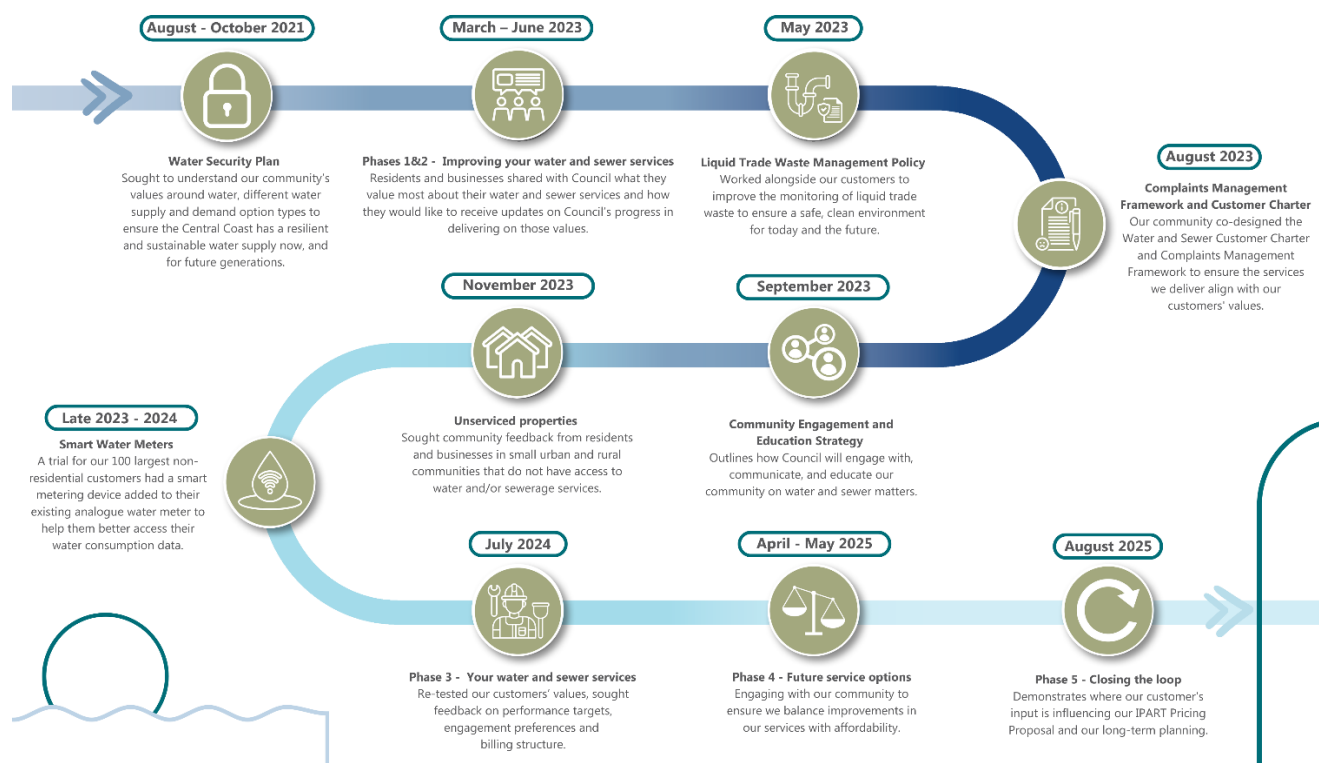


Figure 4: Customer Connection blueprint

3.1 Customer satisfaction

Council receives an average of 23,000 customer requests related to water and sewer services per annum. The requests are received through a series of channels including phone calls, emails, face-to-face and Council's online customer portal.

Council measures customer satisfaction four times a year through Customer Satisfaction surveys. These surveys capture customer interaction after the completion of a service request. It includes a Net Promoter Score question, which helps identify whether customers would recommend Council, based on the service received for that request. Water and Sewer has received feedback from 270 customers in the last 12 months.

Key highlights of this survey results include:

- 39% of customers received a same day response, with 18% receiving a next day response
- Customer Satisfaction Score of 77% over the past 12 months
- Net Promoter score (+37)
- Customer Effort Score (83%)

This data is also tracked over the longer term, allowing us to identify trends and aim towards sustainable improvement.

The big picture in the last four years:

- Net Promoter Score improved from +18 to +45 (+27)
- Customer Effort Score improved from 73% to 92% (up by 19%)
- Customer Satisfaction Score improved from 71% to 84% (up by 13%)

What's working well?

- Speed to respond – Customers appreciate how fast we respond to service requests
- Contact methods – Customers feel connected and appreciated with our communication
- Easy to interact – Customers valued simpler interaction with water and sewer.

What still needs work?

- Closing the loop – Customers have expressed the desire to have communication advising when a job is completed
- Proactive in setting expectations – There is an opportunity to set better expectations when speaking to customers regarding certain request types
- Explore further communication methods – Customers have expressed a desire for a text message service to facilitate faster and more effective communication.

These satisfaction metrics are more than numbers, they reflect a growing trust and a shared commitment to continuous improvement.

Over the past 12 months, Water and Sewer has delivered consistent results in our Customer Centric Metrics, Net Promoter Score, Customer Effort Score and Customer Satisfaction. We listened to our customers and learned from our opportunities. This has been consistent over the past four years, resulting in significant progress in how we connect with and support them.

By responding faster, using the correct contact methods, and making it easier for customers to interact with Council, water and sewer is delivering experiences that are increasingly valued by the community.

But we know there's still more we can do. Customers have told us they want more clarity when jobs are complete, clearer expectations upfront, and better communication options — especially using phone messaging. A series of improvements is currently being investigated on how we can close some of the gaps identified.

3.2 Customer Liaison roles fostering continuous improvement

Customer Liaison Officer (CLO) positions were established to strengthen community engagement and trust in essential water and sewer services. This initiative directly addresses long-standing challenges in customer communication during major environmental incidents, infrastructure projects, and emergency service interruptions.

Through proactive engagement, CLOs serve as the vital link between residents and operational teams, ensuring timely, transparent, and meaningful communication.

Since their inception in March 2023, CLOs have connected with over 17,200 customers by either phone, email or letter, door-knocked 822 homes and facilitated 164 site visits and 31 community meetings. Their contributions to key projects have enhanced stakeholder engagement and participation and strengthened relationships with critical customers.

A key outcome of these efforts has seen an increase and stabilisation in every customer-centric metric as indicated in Customer Satisfaction 3.1 of this document.

CLOs also maintain close collaboration with Water Operations Centre staff, Assets and Projects, and Network Maintenance teams to:

- Expedite resolution of service disruptions
- Enhance internal coordination
- Embed lessons learned into future service delivery processes.

This initiative exemplifies best-practice community engagement in local government, demonstrating a strong commitment to customer-focused service delivery. By prioritising direct communication and proactive outreach, the CLO program has transformed community perceptions, reduced frustration, and fostered lasting relationships, ensuring residents have a voice in vital infrastructure decisions.

3.3 Water Operations Centre (WOC)

Central Coast Council's WOC is an adjunct call centre to Customer Contact, and provides a 24/7 arrangement, where staff work on a rotating roster that provides coverage for all business hours and after-hours incidents.

The WOC comprises specialist staff that manage the resolution of customer water quality enquiries, maintenance requests and complaints. They are also responsible for creating and dispatching work to civil crews and communicating with crews who are undertaking the works.

3.4 People's Panel

To enhance community engagement and ensure informed public input into key decision-making processes, the Water and Sewer directorate introduced the People's Panel in late 2024. This representative group was independently recruited to reflect the diversity of the Central Coast community and was established to contribute to initiatives such as the water and sewer IPART pricing proposal.

As part of a commitment to transparency and informed engagement, Panel members participated in a structured education program—including site tours of major water and sewer assets—to build their understanding of services and infrastructure. This initiative supports more accountable, transparent, and community-driven decision-making. The People's Panel were also instrumental in co-designing content for the Future Service Options deliberative forums.

3.5 Deliberative forums

To address the distinct water and sewer service challenges in different areas, engagement sessions were conducted based on geographical regions—North and South. This approach ensured that community feedback reflected the specific needs and priorities of the entire Local Government Area.

From March 2023 to July 2025, a total of 48 hours of structured deliberative engagement was facilitated through community forums.

The 2025 sessions focused specifically on gathering input regarding proposed Future Service Options, which had a direct influence on the expenditure proposed in our IPART submission.

3.6 Community pop-ups

In 2024, eight pop-up engagement sessions were conducted across the Central Coast to raise awareness and collect feedback from a broad cross-section of the community. These sessions were strategically held in high-traffic and culturally significant locations such as ferry wharves, NAIDOC Week events, shopping centres, train stations and local parks to ensure broad community representation.

In 2025, additional pop-up engagement occurred across five shopping centres, involving 338 residents. The focus of these interactions was on Future Service Options. Residents also used these opportunities to ask broader questions about Council services.

Council pop-ups provide an alternative to online engagement and are popular with community members who prefer a face-to-face engagement with Council staff.

3.7 Engagement Programs

The engagement programs Council undertook aimed to:

- Understand community values and expectations
- Inform Council's IPART pricing submission
- Align service delivery with customer priorities
- Build trust and transparency through inclusive consultation.

There were four key engagement phases:

3.7.1 Phases 1 and 2: Improving your water and sewer services

This program comprised community forums, in-depth interviews (CALD, ATSI, youth, large customers) and performance measure testing.

Our community engagement journey began with a discovery phase to understand what our customers value most about their water and sewer services – refer Figure 5.

Understanding our customers' values helped us align our services with what matters most. With that feedback, we made informed decisions about service levels, investment, and future planning. This ensures Council delivers reliable and affordable services that reflect our customers' set of core values.

As a result of this engagement program, Council now publicly reports our performance to ensure transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. By sharing key metrics such as water interruptions, response times, and water quality complaints, our customers can see how we are meeting expectations, where we can change and how we are improving.



Figure 5: Water and sewer customer values

In parallel, Council also engaged the community regarding unserviced properties.

Council sought community feedback from residents and businesses in two phases on the small urban and rural communities across the Central Coast that do not have access to water and/or sewerage services. These properties are known as 'unserviced properties'.

Engagement comprised:

- Woolcott Research surveyed 500 residents and small businesses who are connected to Council's water and/or sewerage services.
- A targeted survey amongst 1,352 people who occupy, own, or operate a business from an 'unserviced property' on the Central Coast.

There are approximately 7,500 of these properties on the Central Coast. These properties are not connected to the Council water and sewer network. Typically, owners of these properties store their own drinking water, and collect, treat and dispose of their own sewerage.

The surveys built upon earlier engagement with the community and will inform development of Council's Water and Sewer Masterplan to deliver services for Council's customers into the future.

Engagement Results

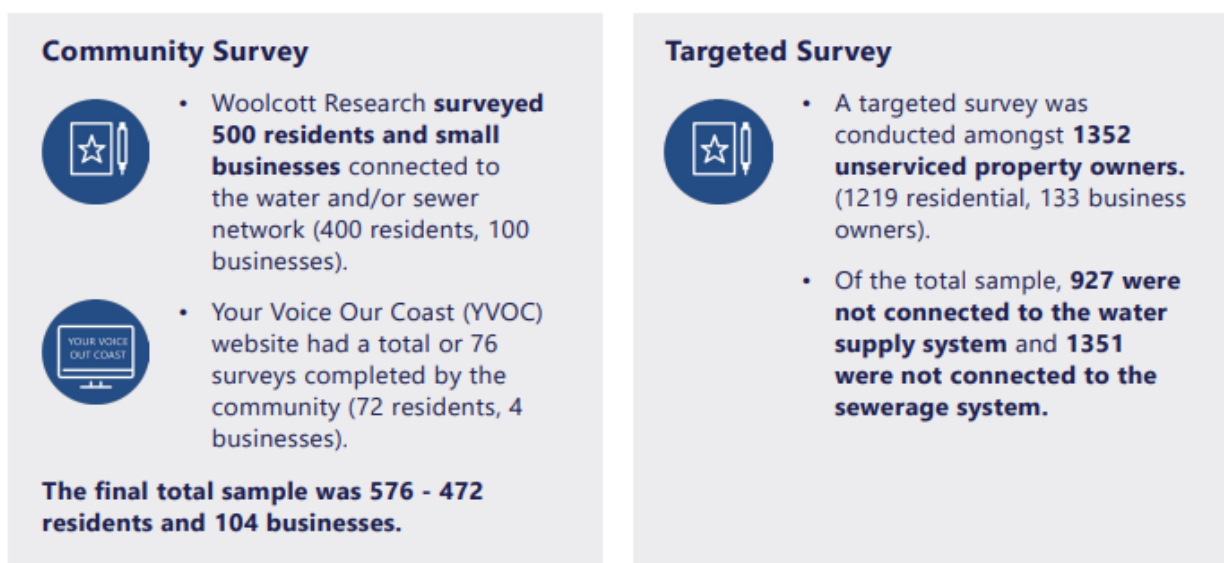


Figure 6: Unserviced properties engagement results

The Unserviced Properties survey was a requirement of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). The data from the recent engagement with unserviced properties will be used to help form one component of the Water and Sewer Masterplan. The Masterplan was originally expected to be published in 2025/26 but is now proposed to be completed 2026/27. Outcomes relating to unserviced properties may be addressed as early as 2025-26. Any properties being considered for future connection will first require extensive consultation and engagement.

3.7.2 Phase 3: Your water and sewer services

This engagement activity comprised broader community input via targeted telephone surveys, pop-ups, deliberative forums and engaging vulnerable customers.

This phase of the engagement program sought to:

- understand what our customers and community value most about their water and sewer services
- understand how our customers prefer us to communicate and engage with them
- define a customer bill structure preference
- understand our customers' expectations around how soon we respond to an issue
- gauge our customers understanding and seek feedback on our performance targets.

The customer insights from this phase confirmed our customer values, so that Council could focus on the priority-ranked set of values. We also gained valuable feedback into our engagement methods and topics that the community would like more information on.

Future bill structures were discussed, to raise awareness with our community around how they can start to influence our 2025 IPART pricing proposal. Their preferences would also be raised and validated during Phase 4 of our engagement program.

Customer sentiment around performance level targets was used to determine future projects and expenditure that would be deliberated as part of Council's Future Service Options (willingness to pay) assessment in Phase 4.

Service level discussions at this phase highlighted the need for clearer definition of terms in our Customer Charter around response to incidents. As a result, Council will conduct a dedicated engagement activity in early 2026 to achieve clear customer expectations on service levels.

3.7.3 Phase 4: Future service options

This program involved a co-design of forum content, deliberative forums, online survey, panel survey, community pop-ups, People's Panel workshop, meeting with customer advocate groups and non-residential customer workshops.

During this phase, we asked our customers for their feedback on Council's essential costs to provide our water and sewer services.

We also asked for their preferences on a small number of 'optional' items that aligned to our customers values.

Bill structure preferences were validated from previous Phase 3 engagement results whereby participants were presented with three ways in which bill increases could be rolled out to our customers. Most participants preferred a flatter bill structure with the first year of increase and then CPI each year after that. This option was seen to be beneficial to customers as it would make budgeting easier and reduce the amount of 'bill shock'.

Finally, our customers were asked to nominate how they would like the ratio of water service charge and usage charge balanced, with a firm preference shown for most of the increase to be recovered from usage charges.

Some key insights were:

- There was majority support for increased water mains cleaning to achieve improved performance
- There were mixed results for installation of special valve in water pipes and an additional CCTV truck for proactive inspections
- There was little support for residential rebate program for water efficient fixtures
- Bill structure preference was confirmed to be a flat structure
- Customers preferred most of the bill cost to be contained within the usage charge.

3.8 Engagement Channels

- Face-to-face forums and workshops
- Online surveys and ideas walls
- Telephone interviews (CATI)
- Pop-up stalls across the LGA
- Targeted outreach to vulnerable groups, businesses, and First Nations communities
- People's Panel
- Targeted workshops with high volume non-residential customers.

Alignment with IAP2 Framework

Council's engagement programs were designed in accordance with the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum:

IAP2 Level	Council activities
Inform	Website updates, brochures, flyers, email notifications
Consult	Online surveys, telephone interviews, pop-up feedback
Involve	Community forums, stakeholder workshops
Collaborate	Deliberative forums, co-design sessions
Empower	Consensus-building activities in deliberative forums

This alignment ensured that engagement was inclusive, transparent, and participatory, with community input directly shaping decision-making.

4 Integrating engagement insights into Pricing Proposal and business operations

Council's Water and Sewer Directorate undertook a robust and lengthy engagement program to help understand our customers preferences and inform not only our 2025 Pricing Proposal but to embed these preferences into our ongoing business practices.

The program commenced in 2022 and will be ongoing, adapting, as needed, to ensure alignment to changing customer values and sentiment.

This section shows how insights were translated into pricing structures, performance measures, and investment priorities.

4.1 Pricing Structure and Phasing

Community Feedback: Preference for predictable bills, with only modest increases

Proposal Response:

- Flat or CPI-based increases
- Clear justification linking our expenditure to service improvements
- Enabling customer bill control and promoting water conservation by proposing a higher proportion of water usage charge within the bill.

4.2 Performance Measures

Community Feedback: Desire for meaningful, transparent metrics

Proposal Response:

- Accountability Strategy to guide the implementation of improved reporting to our customers, including efficiencies.
- Adjusted our performance targets in relation to water quality complaints.
- Included additional expenditure to improve water continuity.
- Annual and quarterly reporting aligned with IPART's 3Cs framework and customer preferences.

4.3 Investment Priorities

Community Feedback: Support for infrastructure upgrades and sustainability

Proposal Response:

- Council's proposed capital projects have been mapped within the customers' values and in consideration of the associated outcomes for our water and sewer products.
- The operational expenditure forecast for the upcoming 2026-31 period aligns with community values, primarily focusing on improving water and sewer service reliability and quality. Most of the allocated funds are directed towards these critical areas, aiming to address community concerns and priorities.
- Long term strategies related to the CCWSP, specifically the Desalination Readiness project.
- Investment priorities linked to growth, being major upgrades at both the Gwandalan and Charmhaven Sewage Treatment Plant (STPs).
- Strategies linked to environment in relation to climate change and ocean outfalls.

4.4 Customer Charter and Complaints Management Framework

Community Feedback: Strong support for a clear, concise charter

Proposal Response:

- Customer Charter co-designed with customers
- Reflects community input and outlines service standards.

Through collaboration and engagement, Council and the community have co-designed the Water and Sewer Customer Charter and Complaints Management Framework to ensure the services we deliver align with Council's customers' values.

The Customer Charter specifically highlights:

- Council's standard of service to the customer
- customer expectations
- how customers can help us to help them
- mutual rights and obligations.

The Complaints Management Framework covers:

- Council's commitment to customer complaints
- how we handle complaints
- Council's escalation and response process.

As part of Council's ongoing commitment to improve customer outcomes related to water and sewer, we collected customer feedback on these draft documents before they were finalised.

Demonstrating influence

Council will demonstrate to our customers how they have, and will continue to, influence our business by:

- Publishing an Efficiency Strategy
- Improving our accountability to our community in relation to our performance, expenditure and efficiency target on our website
- Embedding a 'close the loop' activity into any future engagement programs
- Continuing to deliver robust, iterative engagement programs that inform our business operations
- Undertaking community education programs to uplift knowledge about water and sewer.

The full engagement program has ensured that the pricing proposal is community-informed, transparent, and aligned with our customers set of core values. This approach strengthens Council's accountability and builds public trust.

Full engagement outcome reports from all phases are available at www.yourvoiceourcoast.com.



5 Supporting our customers

5.1 Pensioner rebates

Council provides eligible pensioners with rebates on their rates notice and water account. A proportionate rebate is provided where eligible pensioners are joint property owners with non-eligible people, or if a customer's eligibility changes during the year.

5.2 Hardship assistance

If customers are having trouble paying their rates or water account on time, Council provides hardship assistance and a personalised payment plan to help them get back on track.

Depending on their needs, we can provide them with information about:

- payment options, including help to set up weekly, fortnightly or monthly direct debits
- personal payment plans to help them pay off their overdue rates at the same time as addressing future instalments in one easy plan
- referral to financial counselling services
- advice on how to manage their water usage to save money.

5.3 Home dialysis concessions

- Eligible residents undergoing kidney dialysis treatment at home are provided an allowance allocated against their water accounts
- Dialysis patients are also provided specialist care and engagement during planned and unplanned outages.

5.4 Sewerage connection financial assistance

- Eligible residents have the choice to pay their sewer connection charges off over a 20-year period
- The debt is a property debt and paid out at property settlement, if not paid before.

5.5 Concealed leak financial assistance

- Where a hidden water leak on a property isn't visible or audibly detectable and is confirmed by a licensed plumber, the customer may be eligible for financial assistance, if certain criteria is met.

5.6 Water and Sewer Concessions and Rebate Policy

Council revised its Water and Sewer Concessions and Rebate Policy, which was put on public exhibition for comment. Feedback received from our community ensures that the policy provides a consistent and fair approach when assessing rebate applications and supporting financially vulnerable customers, while maintaining the sustainability of Council.

Key highlights:

- This policy outlines the financial assistance and rebates available to eligible residential customers of Council who are facing hardship due to water usage, sewerage connection expenses, or concealed leaks.
- It applies to residential customers using water for dialysis, those connecting to the sewer system, and those impacted by concealed water leaks.



6 Education

These programs do more than inform—they inspire. Events like Dam Day Out and Carp to Croc foster a sense of pride, environmental stewardship, and community connection, turning education into celebration. The Water and Sewer Education team at Council designs and delivers a broad range of programs to ensure Council's community is water and sewer smart. Council's initiatives span across multiple formats and audience groups and include:

- Information sharing through brochures, posters, displays, newsletters, and more
- Interactive engagement including tours, workshops, competitions, and open days
- Media and communications via press releases, launches, advertising, social media, videos, and other digital platforms
- Formal education, creating tailored programs for early learning through to adult education, including teacher resources, school incursions/excursions, and activity sheets
- Community events, participating in and hosting events such as National Water Week, Water Night, World Environment Day, Dam Day Out, Carp to Croc, and pop-up displays at local fairs and markets.



Lakes Festival 2024

These programs support the following goals:

- Increase community understanding of Council's role as a water utility provider
- Improve awareness and adoption of water conservation and waterwise practices
- Build water and sewer literacy within the community and schools
- Promote behaviour change around appropriate sewer use, particularly what should and shouldn't be flushed or poured down the drain
- Gather insights into customer satisfaction with water and sewer services.

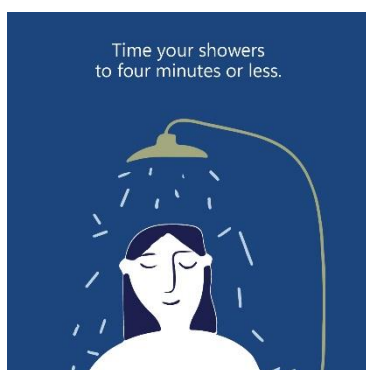
6.1 Water & Sewer Education Campaigns

Love Water: The Love Water Campaign encompasses all Council's water conservation and behaviour change marketing and educational collateral. Council is part of an alliance with Hunter Water and Sydney Water. Hunter, Sydney and the Central Coast have all agreed to use the "Love Water" approach, with each region adding a unique tagline. The Coast's is *Love Water: Use it wisely!* Hunter Water currently still utilise Love Water in most of their water conservation materials, although Sydney Water has moved away from the Love Water branding in recent times.

The aims of the Love Water campaign include:

- Encourage all community members to value water as an asset that should be conserved, even when Central Coast is not in drought
- Promote a goal of using 150 litres of water per person, per day
- Inform the community about dam levels, water-wise behaviours and Council's water-wise guidelines
- Increase water literacy within Council's community and develop a better understanding of how Council delivers clean drinking water from water sources to the tap.

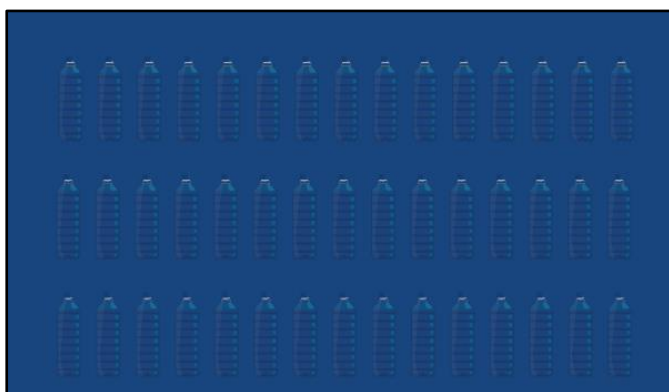
Council's Love Water Poem is an example of an effective and engaging piece of collateral developed as part of our Love Water Campaign. The poem has been used on radio, YouTube ads and in cinemas for advertising and promotion on water wise behaviours and improving water literacy.



Key communication messaging include:

- Love water: Use it wisely! (tagline for the campaign)
- Can you "Live to 150L?"
- Become a Water Wise Warrior!
- Can you strive for five?
- It all starts with a drop
- Love water, garden wisely.

love water
use it wisely



Did you know a 10 minute shower can use 90 litres of water?

Challenge yourself and shorten your shower to just 4 minutes. You could save up to 54 litres each time!

Central Coast Council | Water and Sewerage

For more water-wise tips go to lovewater.centralcoast.nsw.gov

Let's live to 150L!

The Central Coast is expecting drier conditions. We are challenging everyone to use no more than 150 litres of water per day.

On average, we each use 180 litres of water per day. If we all save three buckets of water each day, we will reach our target and live to 150L.

Can you save 3 buckets?



Central Coast Council | Water and Sewerage

love water
use it wisely

Use the QR code to find out more tips and tricks on how you can live to 150L.



Dunny Do's & Dunny Don'ts

With the impact of the millennium drought, Council's educational materials and campaigns previously focused on water conservation, water restrictions and water-wise behaviours, leaving a large gap in sewerage system collateral and resources.

Dunny Do's and Dunny Don'ts focusses on encouraging the community to be sewer wise and only flush the three Ps – pee, poo, and toilet paper.

Sewer blockages and chokes cause significant issues on the Central Coast's sewerage system, costing customers money and potentially impacting the environment in a negative way.



Dunny Do's & Don'ts campaign includes:

- Encouraging community members to only flush the three Ps
- Explaining the financial impact to customers if the wrong items enter Council's sewerage network
- Informing the community on the environmental and human health impacts of sewer chokes, blockages and overflows
- Bag and bin items such as wet wipes, tissues, sanitary products and cotton tips.

Council's -Dunny Do's and Dunny Don'ts animation.

Key communication messaging include:

- Dunny Do's and Dunny Don'ts
- Wet Wipes block pipes!
- Tissues cause issues
- Bag it and bin it
- Flush right, keep it tight.

Protect Your Pipes

Accompanying the Dunny Do's and Dunny Don'ts campaign is the Protect Your Pipes campaign which primarily focuses on sinkable items or items that can safely be disposed of down a drain or sink.

Sinking oils, fats and grease cause significant issues in Council's sewerage system. These items combine with inorganic materials potentially causing 'Fatbergs' (wet wipes and rags mixed with fats and oils) which block pipes and choke pumps with a financial impact on customers.

Alongside this message, Council is also promoting correct chemical, motor oil and paint disposal to discourage these items being poured down drains and into Council's sewerage systems.

The aims of the protect your pipes campaign include:

- Encouraging community members to only let water, soap and toothpaste go down the sink
- Explaining the financial impact to customers if the wrong items enter Council's sewerage network
- Informing the community on the environmental and human health impacts of sewer chokes, blockages, and overflows
- Educating the community on how to properly dispose of fats, oils, grease, chemicals, and motor oils.

Key communication messaging includes:

- Protect your pipes
- Think before you sink
- Add fats, oils and grease to a container and dispose of in the red lid bin
- Recycle motor oils and chemicals at Chemical Cleanout Events or at Buttonderry Community Recycling Centre
- Soap, water, toothpaste that's the go!



Campaign Promotion

Water & Sewer education campaigns were shared via the following mediums with the Central Coast community:

- Social media
- Radio commercials
- Cinema advertising
- Service station advertising
- Video on demand
- Bus shelter advertising
- Static shopping centre advertising
- Convenience advertising.

Additional advertising to push education campaign messages have included:

Direct email, Council newsletters and water rates inserts, local newspapers and media releases.

Protect water resources with sustainable practices

Central Coast Council is once again encouraging the community to get involved in National Water Week 2024, running from October 21 to 27, under the theme Accelerating Action.

This year's theme highlights the urgency of protecting our water resources and taking proactive steps to address the climate crisis through sustainable water practices.

With climate change increasing pressure on our water supplies, Council's Director of Water and Sewer, Danielle Hargreaves, emphasised the need for collective action to secure a sustainable water future.

"Water is an essential part of our everyday lives, and each of us has a role to play in protecting this valuable resource," Hargreaves said.

"This year, National Water Week is all about taking immediate steps toward better water management and making sustainable practices part of our daily routine. Now is the time to act.

"Small actions can make a significant difference when it comes to saving water.

"Reducing your shower time, using water-efficient appliances, and fixing leaks at home are simple ways to conserve water.

"During National Water Week,



Dive into Accelerating Action this Water Week

we'll share tips on how to make these changes and why today they matter more than ever," Hargreaves said.

Central Coast Council Mayor

Lawrie McKinna is inviting residents to participate in Water Night on October 24, encouraging everyone to turn off their household non-

essential taps between 5pm-10pm.

"Water Night, much like Earth Hour, is a national event aimed at raising awareness of water use and how we can all reduce unnecessary consumption," McKinna said.

"Many of us are unaware of how much water we use each day. Water Night gives us a chance to pause and reflect on our water habits, and how even small changes can lead to big impacts for both the planet and our wallets."

In addition to Water Night, Council will host a series of events, educational workshops, and activities across local schools and in the community during National Water Week to

promote water conservation and climate action.

Households, businesses, and schools will also be encouraged to view Council's resources and implement water-saving strategies.

Join in this National Water Week 2024 and sign up for Water Night on October 24 at: waternight.com.au

To book into one of Council's workshops, visit: centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/whats-on

For water-saving tips, and information on how you can make a difference: lovewater.centralcoast.nsw.gov.au/save-water

Coast Community News

Community education event numbers

Over 4,000 residents participated in water and sewer community education events since 2023 comprising:

- 33 education pop-up events at local festivals, markets, and shopping centres
- Seven workshops focussing on water-wise gardening and green cleaning techniques
- Four tours of Council's water and sewer assets
- Four bespoke events: Dam Day Out 2024, World Rivers Kayak Tour 2024, Dam Day Out 2025, and Carp to Croc 2025.

Education pop ups

Council has renewed its visibility within the community by setting up educational stalls in local markets, festivals and shopping centres which provides opportunities to inform the community about water and sewer wise behaviours and engage Council's community on their preferences when it comes to their water and sewer services.

Workshops

Community education workshops have been recognised as a priority in terms of educating and engaging with Council's community. Workshops provide hands-on learning within an environment that may cater towards other interests but include water and sewer learning opportunities.

- Love Water Garden Wisely Workshop: participants at each session built their own wicking garden bed, which they were able to take home with them. The benefits of these workshops was to reduce the impact of water used outside the home, specifically in the garden and include increased general awareness and education on outdoor water conservation strategies, the importance of substrates on water retention, broadening of waterwise gardening set-ups including wicking beds, drought tolerant plant selection including edible perennials, and improving Council's relationships and reputation with the community.
- Protect Your Pipes - Chemical Free Cleaning Workshop: aims to achieve a reduction of chemicals and nutrients entering Council's sewerage network and treatment plants from participants learning natural cleaning alternatives.

Mangrove Creek Dam Visitor Centre

The community and visitors travelling through the Central Coast hinterland can visit the informative new visitor centre and learn about the history of Mangrove Creek Dam over the years, insights into the water supply system, natural environment, and cultural heritage of the surrounding area. The visitor centre is utilised for tours, events, and education programs.

The centre includes:

- New interactive visitor education centre with signage and digital displays
- Accessible family friendly amenities
- Children's play space
- Revitalised picnic area with new picnic table shelters, bins, and bench seating.

Dam Day Out

The Dam Day Out event, hosted at the Mangrove Creek Dam Visitor Centre, has quickly become a highlight of Central Coast Council's community event calendar. Launched in June 2024 as part of the Harvest Festival, the event has now run successfully for two consecutive years, attracting over 1,000 attendees across 2024 and 2025.

The day offers a unique opportunity for the community to learn about the journey of water from the dam to their taps, all while enjoying the picturesque views of Mangrove Creek Dam. Attendees arrived at the event via shuttle bus from Kulnura and were officially welcomed to the lands via a Welcome to Country facilitated by the Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council.

- Each year, the event has featured a diverse range of free, family-friendly activities
- Live theatre performances engaging children in water education through storytelling
- Face painting and interactive displays for younger audiences
- Water-wise gardening and green cleaning workshops
- Educational pop-ups from Kulnura Rural Fire Service, Local Land Services, and Council's Waterways, Catchment, Weeds, Biodiversity and Water and Sewer Education Teams, offering hands-on learning experiences
- Dam wall tours allowing participants to get a behind-the-scenes experience of the dam.

The success of Dam Day Out has been reflected in positive community feedback, highlighting its value in promoting environmental awareness, water literacy, and community connection.



Dam Day Out 2024

Carp to Croc

Council invited the community to fish for a cause and participate in the inaugural Carp to Croc Fishing Competition. Carp are one of the most destructive invasive species in Australia's freshwater systems, degrading water quality and outcompeting native fish. Carp to Croc provided a chance to help restore Council's local waterways—while ensuring the catch is put to good use. The program consisted of a launch event with over 300 people attending and a fishing competition period with over 100 people registering catches. The fish were donated to the freezers at BCF Tuggerah, and the frozen carp donated to the Australian Reptile Park as food for their crocodile – Elvis. The carp will sustain Elvis for six months, and some additional carp were sent to The University of Newcastle for further studies.

The launch event was held at Wyong Milk Factory, and included a fishing, electrofishing and rod rigging demonstration, carp cooking showcase from a professional chef, talks from experts at OzFish, BCF, Council, Department of Primary Industries (DPI) and WaterNSW.

The fishing competition encouraged the community to participate in a muster style fishing competition, targeting invasive carp. The fishing competition was run through the Fish Donkey app and took place from 5th April - 5th May. Prizes were awarded for certain categories.



Carp to Croc - Reptile Park 2025

School Education Program Numbers

Over 11,500 students participated in water and sewer schools' education programs from 2023 in the form of:

- 51 Walter Smart and Friends Incursions run in 35 Central Coast primary schools for 9,236 students
- 60 Little Drops Incursions run in 37 Central Coast pre-schools/Early Learning Centres for 1,327 students
- 60 Flow Forward Incursions run in six Central Coast high schools for 236 students
- 20 Flow Forward Incursions run in two Central Coast primary schools for 100 students
- Seven Story Time sessions run in local libraries for 170 children and parents
- 10 Urban Water Cycle tours for 327 students from four high schools, three primary schools, one home school group and three universities
- Two high school STEM Programs reaching approximately 120 students.



Excursion and Tours 2024

Walter Smart and Friends

Delivered in collaboration with The Water Conservancy and local company Gibber, 'Walter Smart and Friends' is an educational performance delivered to children in kindergarten through to Year 6, with workshops run for any children aged from Year 2.

The program has been developed to complement key aims of the K–6, New South Wales Education Standard Authority, (NESA) syllabus for Science and Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE), Geography and aligns with the cross-curriculum priorities that 'enable students to develop understanding about and address the contemporary issues they face' with particular emphasis on sustainability.

Walter Smart and Friends delivers a set script and workshop to increase water literacy in primary school students with the goal of being to make a substantial change in water knowledge and water usage behaviours. The performance and workshop package covers water supply, treatment, what to flush down the toilet, the 3Ps, water efficiency and waterwise behaviours.

Flow Forward Education Program

Local environmental education centre, Rumbalara, is working with Council to deliver a School Water Incursion Program. The program can be delivered at two levels: secondary school for Stage 4, either an environment group or student leadership group; and primary school for Stage 1 leadership ready group or class. The focus of the program is to work with student leadership groups to:

- Learn about water conservation through hands-on activities, with links to local catchment areas
- Conduct a water audit at schools
- Develop and implement a Water Savings Action Plan (WSAP) for schools
- Communicate water efficiency concepts to other students in schools.

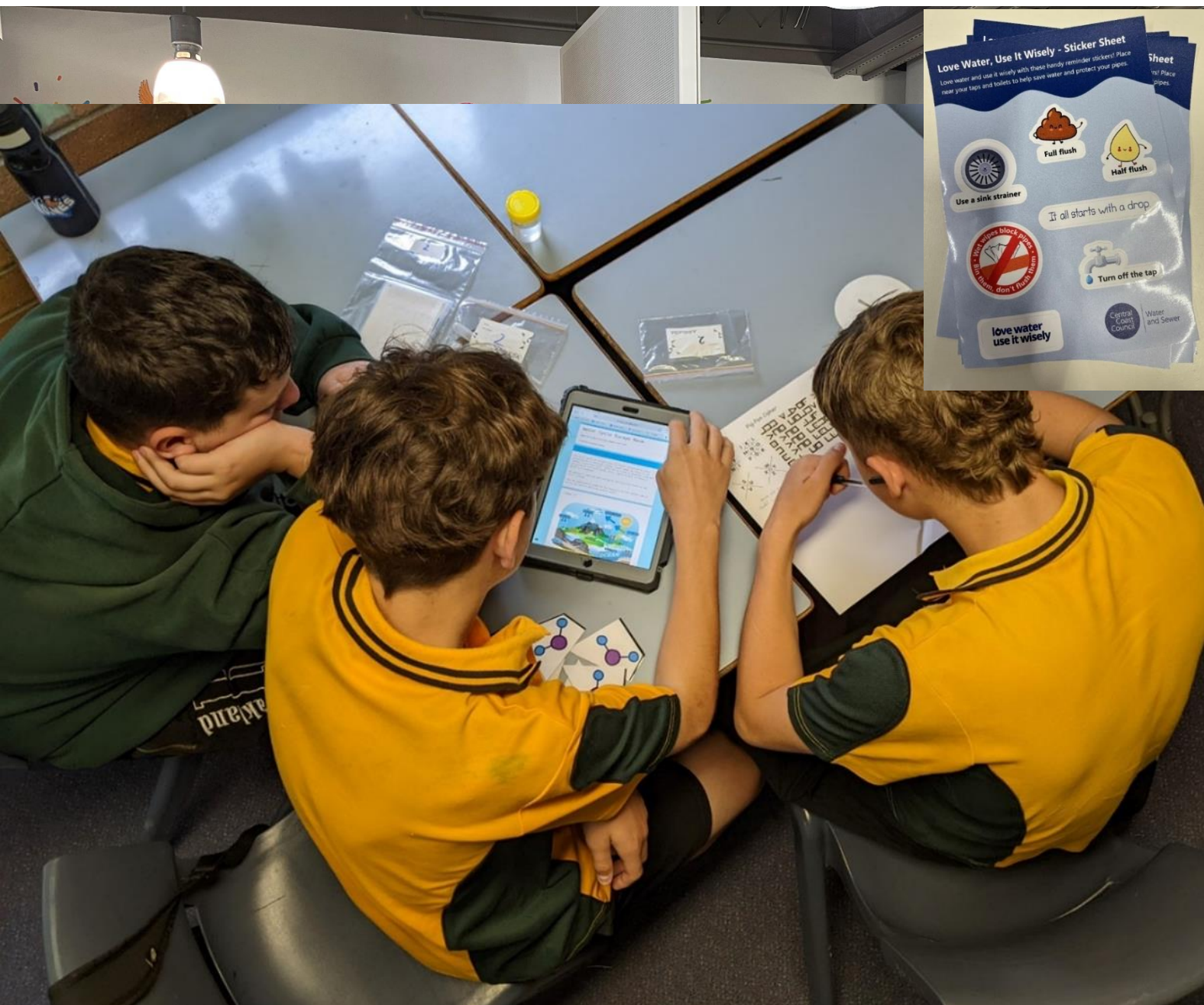
The program will be delivered by Rumbalara in partnership with Council's Water Education Officers.

The Flow Forward program has significantly contributed to both business and community outcomes through its measurable improvements in water conservation. By conducting water audits and implementing Water Savings Action Plans (WSAPs), the program enabled participating schools to identify and rectify water inefficiencies, resulting in substantial reductions in water consumption and operational costs.

The program was a finalist in the LGNSW Excellence Awards.

Little Drops Early Childhood Education Program

The water and sewer education team have developed a fun and engaging program called 'Little Drops' designed especially for Council's youngest Central Coast residents. Through interactive songs, a story book and a game, children will learn where water comes from, why it's important to use it wisely, and what should (and shouldn't) be flushed down the toilet. This engaging program helps foster lifelong water-saving habits in a way that's both educational and entertaining. Take home collateral in the form of sticker activity sheets, toilet paper branded with Council's 'Dunny Do's/Don'ts' messaging.



Flow Forward 2024

High School Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) program

A collaboration with GHD and The University of Newcastle to help promote STEM opportunities among young students, in particular women on the Central Coast. The program offers an excursion to three schools once a year for students currently studying a Science subject in Years 10–12. The program aims to inspire students to pursue a STEM career by exposing them to STEM led roles within GHD, University and Council Water and Sewer, with a site activation at each location with different opportunities. The students complete an overarching water related project throughout the term and some students are encouraged and mentored to enter the Australian Junior Water Stockholm Competition.

The students on the day experienced:

- Virtual Reality engineering & design of a desalination plant
- Drone piloting
- Ecological animal identification
- Water quality analysis
- Water treatment plant tour.



STEM Program 2024

Water Night 2024 Sponsorship

Council Sponsored Water Night in 2024 as part of its water conservation education programming. Water Night is an annual event aiming to improve everyone's water knowledge to help us all value water more. Council asks individuals and households to turn off all non-essential taps from 5-10pm with the aim to increase water awareness, leading to long term behavioural change. Council had the highest LGA individual household and internal staff sign ups out of all participating water utilities and regions and had extreme success in the Water Night Live component of the event. Some highlights of the overall campaign included:

- 38.8% increase in water literacy amongst participants
- The most signups ever – 31% increase from 2023 (5,368 households signed - 15,492 individuals)
- Total campaign reach of over 4.2M and 5.3M impressions.

The total demand on Water Night 2024 was 80.1 ML/day and the three days average post the Water Night is 90.3 ML/day. So, on Water Night Council saved approximately 9.5 – 10 ML of water. Water Night Live 24 October 2024 is the online component of the event, TV presenter and Australia's favourite gardener Costa Georgiadis invited Council to participate in a live stream for Water Night 2024. During the event, CCC Dylan Magrin joined the conversation to discuss the Council's water-saving initiatives and educational programs. . While three other councils represented, only Central Coast Council streamed the event live on Facebook.

CCC Social audience participants

Our local social media following showed remarkable engagement, and we were delighted to see so many Coasties on the call sharing their positive feedback.

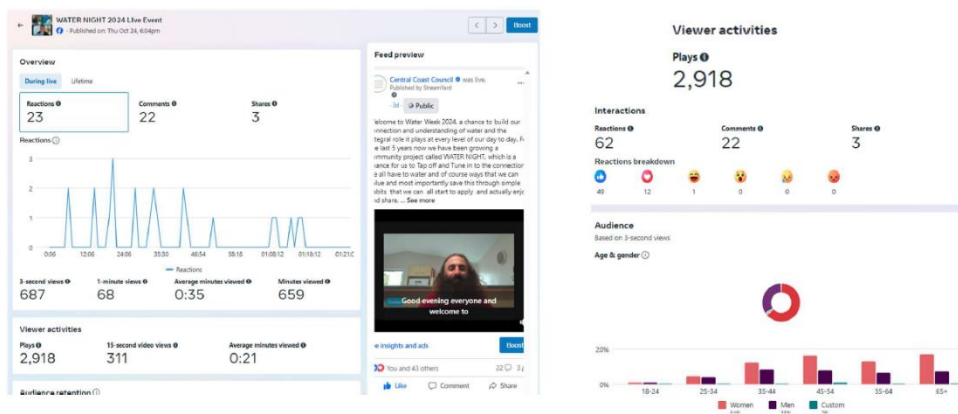


Figure 7: Internal Communication Water Night 2024

National Water Week Poster Competition

Council has run the National Water Week Poster Competition for two years in 2024 and 2025. Overall, Council received 30 submissions from more than 10 schools.

Woodport Public School student, Autumn, was named the National Winner in the Year 3–4 category of the National Water Week Primary School Poster Competition in 2024.

Council Mayor, Lawrie McKinna, Mayor, presented Autumn with her well-deserved award and thanked all local students for their creativity and commitment to water conservation.

National winner of water poster competition

Central Coast Council has named Woodport Public School student Autumn Lo as national winner in the Years 3–4 category of the National Water Week Primary School Poster Competition.

Autumn's winning artwork, chosen from thousands of entries nationwide, illustrates the essential connection between the health of our waterways and the quality of our drinking water.

Council Director Water and Sewer Danielle Hargreaves said the poster was an inspired expression of Council's water conservation and sustainability themes.

"The National Water Week Annual Poster Competition inspires young people to have a greater awareness of our precious water resource," Hargreaves said.

"We are absolutely delighted to have a local student recognised for her artwork, and encourage more schools to join



Woodport Public School Principal Judy Boland, Autumn Lo and Mayor Lawrie McKinna

the celebration of water conservation next year.

"The poster competition was just one of Council's activities for 2024 National Water Week, held in October each year.

"Our education team reached 1,700 students through its

primary education program and received over 180 responses to our community survey used to gauge community water literacy at pop-ups around the Coast.

"Additionally, as part of National Water Week, Costa Georgiadis from ABC's

Gardening Australia live streamed on Council's Facebook page during Water Night showing us how easy it can be to make sustainable choices at home – receiving over 3,000 streams.

"It's great to see our community get involved with

our water education opportunities."

Central Coast Mayor Lawrie McKinna said it was a pleasure to present Autumn Lo with the well-deserved award and thanked all the local students who participated in the poster competition.

"Autumn's artwork serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of protecting our environment, to love water and use it wisely," McKinna said.

"Council proudly acknowledges Autumn's success and recognises all participating primary school students across the Central Coast for their creativity and commitment to water conservation.

"Students were encouraged to design, draw or paint a poster focused on important local water issues.

"It's great to see that the National Water Week Annual Poster Competition is helping to foster a water-smart community."

Coast Community News - Poster Competition

6.2 Internal Education

6.2.1 IPART regulatory framework

With the introduction of the new IPART 3Cs model, there was an identified gap in knowledge of IPART deliverables for employees in the Water and Sewer directorate. Council's Water Education Officers were tasked to create and deliver two phases of internal education to uplift their fellow employees.

6.2.2 People's Panel Education

The People's Panel provide a diverse community voice for Water and Sewer engagement on projects and policies. To ensure the People's Panel were uplifted enough to provide valuable input, they were taken through two intensive education stages.

Stage 1: Tours of assets

The Panel members were taken on a tour to Mardi Dam, Mardi Water Treatment Plant and Wyong South Sewage Treatment Plant. The group were required to complete an educational booklet along the way. Giving the group insight into the water industry and the services Council deliver meant their feedback and ideas were backed with industry knowledge and experience.

Stage 2: Future Service Options (willingness to pay)

The People's Panel played an important role in Council's Future Service Options (willingness to pay) engagement. The Panel were tasked with co-designing content used for the broader community deliberative forums. Before this engagement, an education session was held where the Panel members were briefed on:

- Outcomes from the *Your Water and Sewer Services Community Consultation 2024*
- Introduction to IPART as a regulator
- Willingness to Pay: understand how IPART sets prices, negotiables and non-negotiables and what services the community can provide input on.



People's Panel Education Tour 2024

Engagement case studies

Case study - Customer-centric excellence at the heart of it all: Central Coast Council's Water and Sewer Customer Liaison Officers

The CLO initiative is not just a service, it's a lifeline. From helping dialysis patients during emergencies to supporting families in crisis, these stories reflect the deep compassion and commitment behind Council's engagement efforts. The Customer Liaison Officer (CLO) initiative was strategically developed to enhance customer experience, project transparency, and service reliability for residents impacted by major water and sewer projects, environmental incidents, and emergency works. This initiative directly aligns with Council's commitment to provide proactive community engagement, responsive service delivery and transparent governance.

The need for dedicated CLO positions was identified as part of Council's IPART submission, which highlighted a gap in direct, proactive communication regarding water and sewer operations. Historically, residents were frustrated by insufficient notice about service disruptions, infrastructure projects, and emergency works, leading to mistrust and dissatisfaction. Addressing this issue required a structured, human-centred approach that placed customer communications at the forefront of service delivery.

This initiative was developed through these roles and involved a structured and strategic approach, including:

- Analysis of service complaints and resident feedback, revealing common issues related to delayed or unclear communication
- Benchmarking against best practices in stakeholder engagement within the infrastructure sector
- Aligning with Council's existing strategic commitments including the Water and Sewer Customer Charter and Complaints Management Framework reinforcing Council's pledge to prioritise customer needs
- Collaboration with internal teams including customer service, communications, project managers and field teams to design an effective engagement framework.

The CLO initiative aligns with key objectives outlined in Council's Community Strategic Plan and Operational Plan particularly around:

- Customer focused service delivery by strengthening direct engagement, responsiveness, and transparency
- Provides multiple avenues for residents to contribute feedback and stay informed
- Ensuring accountability in water and sewer service management
- Enhances communication during unexpected service disruptions by building resilience and emergency preparedness.

Beyond these strategic priorities, this initiative also supports Council's long-term commitment to improving stakeholder engagement, reducing complaints, and optimising service efficiency.

The CLO initiative distinguishes itself through its dedicated, personalised approach to community engagement, which goes beyond traditional council communications. Key innovations include:

- Identifying critical customer touchpoints and implementing tailored communication strategies to improve transparency and responsiveness
- Utilising a diverse range of engagement methods, including direct phone calls, letters, door-knocking, email notifications, and public meetings, ensuring that information reaches customers through multiple channels
- Establishing feedback mechanisms that allow for continuous refinement of engagement practices, ensuring that customer concerns and suggestions are actively considered in decision-making processes
- Enabling faster, more informed responses to community concerns, reducing delays in addressing issues.

The CLO initiative was designed to be cost-effective yet high impact, with funding incorporated into Council's operational budget. The structured, scalable model ensures that ongoing investment remains in-line with community needs and service demand.

Moving forward, Council aims to:

- Leverage technology and data-driven insights
- Expand the CLO framework to cover more projects
- Use community insights to drive further service improvements.

By prioritising customer experience, proactive engagement, and collaborative service delivery, the CLO initiative represents a transformative approach to community partnership.

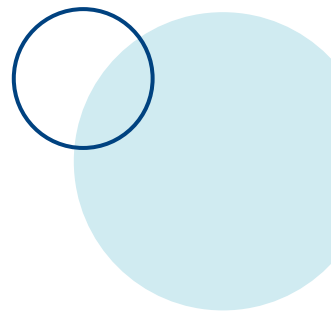
The success of the initiative is reflected in tangible engagement metrics and customer feedback. In under two years, CLOs have:

- Reached over 2,700 customers via phone and 14,500 via email/letter
- Conducted 164 site visits and 31 community meetings to provide direct project updates and address customer concerns
- Door-knocked over 822 homes, ensuring personalised engagement for those most impacted by service disruptions
- Played a key role in large-scale projects, such as the Mardi Water Treatment Plant upgrade and the Davistown Vacuum Pot System upgrade, ensuring affected stakeholders remained informed and involved
- An increase in Council's Net Promoter Scores (NPS) and improved customer satisfaction, as reflected in the Water and Sewer Quarterly Qualtrics surveys. Council's NPS increased from 10 in January 2023, to its current level of 45 and an improved customer satisfaction which increased from 68% to 83% for the same periods.

A key strength of the positions is their availability during water and sewer emergencies. When sewer and water failures occur, CLOs attend the site, day and night, including weekends, to assist affected residents. This ensures that residents feel supported during times of crisis and helps restore trust in Council services.

During these emergencies, CLOs play a vital role in explaining the situation to residents, detailing exactly what has happened, what Council are doing to restore services, and providing a clear process for recovery. They also assist with claims and insurance processes, ensuring residents understand the steps ahead. In addition, CLOs provide support services, such as helping residents with access to housing, and other critical services during service disruptions, ensuring a comprehensive approach to customer care.

A couple of examples of this include driving a dialysis patient to her dialysis during Council's boiled water alert incident in February 2025 after contacting all the critical customer including aged care, schools and childcare in the area or finding childcare for a resident whose house was unliveable after a water main break.



Case Study 2: Building community voice — The Central Coast Council Water and Sewer People's Panel

In late 2024, Council launched the People's Panel—a representative community group established to provide informed input on key decisions, including the upcoming water pricing proposal.

Panel membership was secured through a structured recruitment and registration process facilitated by an independent agency to ensure broad community representation.

Participation is limited to registered members, maintaining the integrity and inclusivity of the process.

Purpose and objectives:

- Serve as a diverse, representative voice for the Central Coast community
- Promote trust, accountability, transparency, and balanced decision-making
- Contribute to sustainably improved outcomes for the community
- Provide feedback on Council's water and sewer pricing submission
- Establish a foundation for ongoing community consultation.

Panel responsibilities:

- Hold Council accountable through informed questioning
- Engage with provided materials to remain well-informed
- Foster equal participation and respectful dialogue
- Adopt a long-term visioning approach (10+ years forward)
- Actively listen to Council, fellow panellists, and community feedback.

In alignment with Central Coast Council's Water and Sewer Community Engagement and Education Approach, Panel members underwent a tailored educational program designed to deepen understanding of Council's water and sewer assets and operations. This included an educational site tour featuring key infrastructure assets: Mardi Dam, Wyong South Sewage Treatment Plant, and the Woodbury Inn Park Sewer Pump Station.

This initiative reflects a long-term investment in informed civic participation and transparent governance, equipping community members with the knowledge required to make meaningful contributions to future water and sewer service planning.



Abbreviations

CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CCCWSP	Central Coast Council Water Security Plan (CCCWSP)
CES	Customer Effort Score
CLO	Customer Liaison Officer
CSS	Customer Satisfaction Score
DCCEEW	Department of Climate Change, Energy the Environment and Water
IPART	Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
NPS	Net Promoter Score
SPS	Sewage Pump Stations
STP	Sewage Treatment Plant
WEMP	Water Efficient Management Plan
WSAP	Water Savings Action Plan

References

Water and Sewer Concessions and Rebate Policy | Your Voice Our Coast

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Technical Paper 1

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