

# Engagement Report

## Stormwater Drainage Charge Transfer



Between 31 October 2025 and 11 January 2026, Central Coast Council sought community feedback on the proposal to transfer the Stormwater Drainage Charge from the water bill to the rate notice.

From 1 July 2026, Council can no longer levy the charge under the Water Management Act.

To enable the transfer of the charge to the rate notice, an application for a Special Variation to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) is required. Council needs IPART approval for this change and sought community feedback before applying.

The community could share their feedback by:

- completing the online submission form
- writing to Council via email or post
- providing in-person feedback at a people's panel on Wednesday 10 December 2025.

Council received a total of 1,313 submissions. 1,099 via the online submission form, 193 via email, 5 via post and 16 via the people's panel. Of all submissions, **69%** of respondents do not support the transfer of the charge, while **25%** support the transfer, leaving **6%** of submissions either indicating they were neutral, not sure or just had questions.

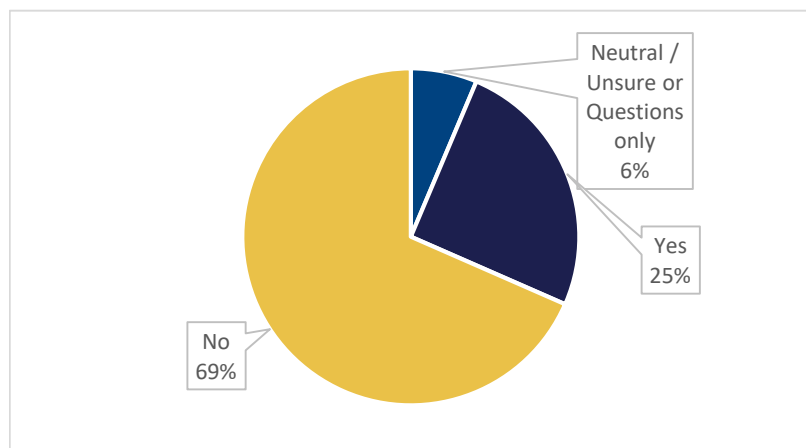


Figure 1: Sentiment for transferring the Drainage Charge from the water bill onto the rate notice, all 1313 response

## How you connected



A total of **1,313** submissions received



Website banner with **879,325** web views during period



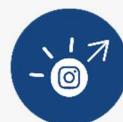
Targeted letter delivered to **138,249** ratepayers



Your Voice Our Coast **9,160** views



Facebook **26,564** people reached, generating **166** reactions



Instagram **2,050** people reached, generating **44** reactions



LinkedIn **1,075** impressions, generating **11** reactions



Paid Social Media Advertising reaching **43,596** people generating **3,186** landing page views



Coast Connect print – **60,000** readerships



Coast Connect eNews – Delivered to **20,493** people



People's Panel workshop **16** participants

## Overall submission sentiment by engagement mechanism

To gain a clearer picture of the varied perspectives expressed through different engagement channels, Figure 2 sets out the percentage breakdown for each mechanism. Notably, the people’s panel demonstrated the highest level of involvement, actively participating in activities to deepen their understanding of the issue and drawing on their local knowledge. This group showed the strongest support for the transfer compared to others. Further detail of the Peoples Panel workshop is provided below.

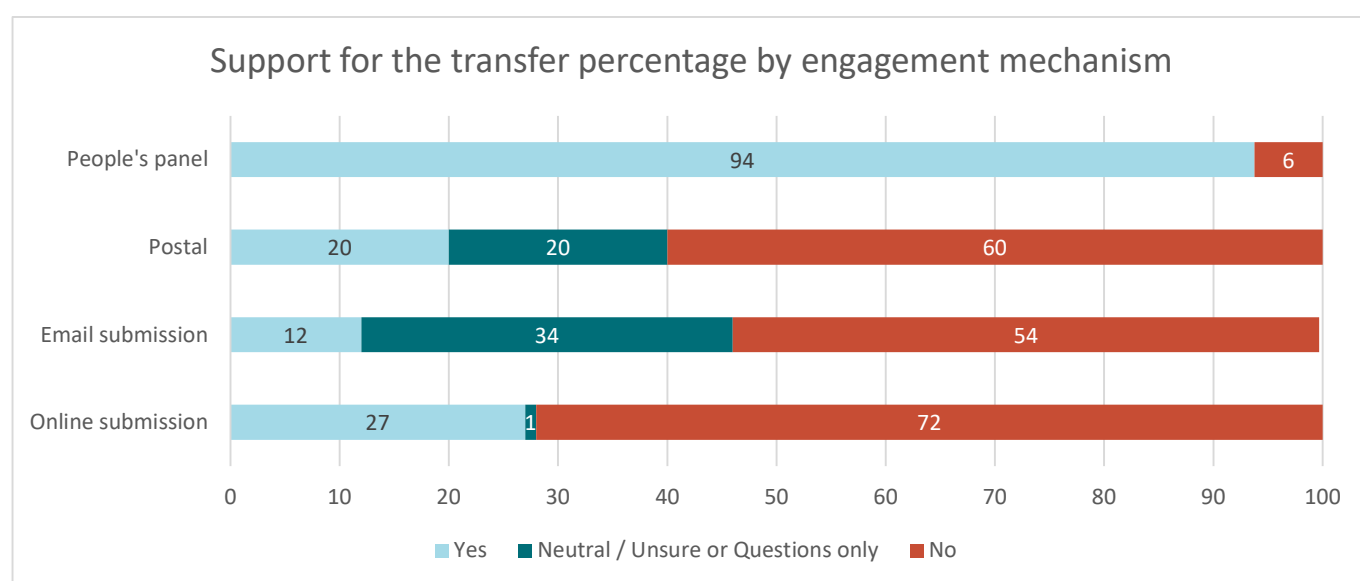
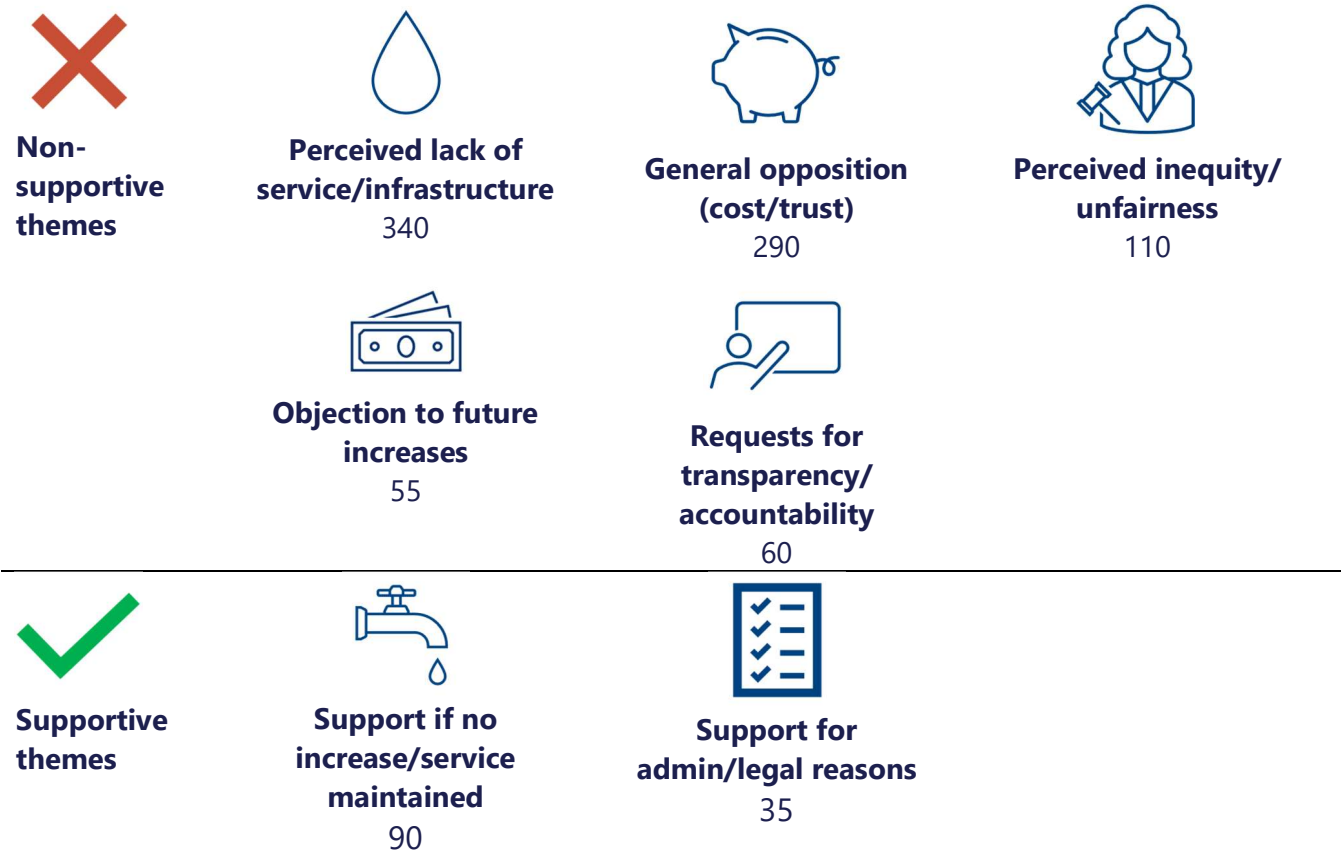


Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who support transferring the drainage charge, categorised by each engagement mechanism (1,313 responses).

# Most common sentiment themes

These themes have been analysed from all written responses (n=1094) received from the open text field of the online survey and from all email and postal submissions. From the 1099 online surveys completed 203 did not include a written response.

Numbers indicated below reflect the number of people who explicitly mentioned that theme. Each response may align with more than one theme, so counts are not mutually exclusive.



## Written submission engagement outcomes

The below information provides further detail of the feedback themes derived from written submissions, received via online survey, email or post. Appendix 1 in this document provides the verbatim comments from which these themes were derived.

### Non-supportive themes

#### Perceived lack of service or infrastructure

This is the most prominent theme. Many respondents (n=340) object to the transfer of the drainage charge because they do not receive what they perceive to be direct stormwater services or infrastructure at their property. They mention the absence of kerb and guttering (n=70), stormwater drains or any Council-managed drainage system. Some highlight that they have had to install and maintain their own drainage solutions at personal expense, or that their stormwater simply runs off into natural land or private pits. This theme often includes frustration at being charged for a service that is not provided, and a sense of unfairness about paying for infrastructure that benefits other areas but not their own. Council's communications did clarify that kerb and guttering is *not* funded from the Stormwater Drainage Charge, but the responses indicate there is still confusion among the community in this regard.

#### Example quotes:

- "There's zero stormwater at our residence. Why we're paying for it at all is a joke."
- "We do not have storm water drains in my street... it is absurd that we have to pay for something we don't have!"
- "I have no curb [sic] and guttering or any storm water drainage on my road."
- "All my stormwater runs to my backyard into underground rubble pit/absorption trench."

#### General opposition to the transfer/charge (cost of living, Council trust)

A large number of respondents (n=290) oppose the transfer or the charge itself due to broader concerns about affordability, rising rate and distrust in Council's financial management. Many mention the high cost of living, recent rate increases or the perception that Council has mismanaged funds in the past. This theme is often expressed as a general 'no' to any new or continued charges, with a sense that residents are being asked to pay more for less, or that Council should find efficiencies rather than increasing costs for ratepayers. These concerns are further influenced by a widespread sense of community distrust in government at all levels, which is increasingly common today, regardless of which level of government is responsible.

#### Example quotes:

- "Rates are already too high, with rising cost of living, these payments are already difficult to pay."
- "Council already charges exorbitant fees as a result of mismanagement in recent years."
- "We pay enough rates as it is and getting nothing back for it."

## Perceived inequity or unfairness

This theme captures responses that focus on the perceived unfairness of the charge's application. Submitters (n=110) note that only some ratepayers are charged, while others who benefit from stormwater infrastructure are not. Others point out that the charge is not applied equitably across the region, or that it entrenches inequality between those who receive services and those who do not. Some also mention that the charge should be spread across all ratepayers if the benefits are community-wide, or that exemptions and criteria are unclear.

### Example quotes:

- "...charging only a subset of ratepayers, while confirming that properties not currently paying the charge will remain unaffected. This entrenches inequity between ratepayers who receive the same community-wide benefits."
- "If the charge is used to benefit everyone, why doesn't everyone have to pay the charge?"

## Requests for transparency and accountability

Respondents in this theme (n=60) are not necessarily for or against the transfer, but want clear, transparent information about how the funds are used, how the change will affect their bills and what safeguards will be in place to prevent misuse or future increases. They request side-by-side comparisons of current and future charges, annual reporting on stormwater expenditure and clear communication about the criteria for who pays.

### Example quotes:

- "I request clear assurance that there will be no net increase to total household charges, including a comparison of current water bill stormwater charges against the proposed rates increase, and confirmation that water bills will be reduced accordingly."
- "Council commits to annual public reporting on drainage expenditure and outcomes."
- "Transparency is critical. I ask that Council ensure this Special Variation is strictly limited to replacing existing stormwater revenue, with clear accountability for how these funds are spent."

## Objection to future increases

This theme reflects concerns (n=55) that the transfer will allow Council to increase the charge more easily in the future, or that both rates and water bills will rise, resulting in 'double dipping.' Respondents fear that once the charge is embedded in rates, it will be subject to annual rate increases or special variations, and that there is no guarantee water bills will decrease as a result of the transfer.

### Example quotes:

- "Transferring this to the rates notice will just result in the drainage charge constantly increasing along with rates but with no increased service being delivered."
- "The charge was removed from the act for a reason. How about you take the funds from your inflated wages to cover the cost."
- "Whenever bills are split, both parts rise with less scrutiny. Just like rego and green slips."

## Supportive themes

### Support only if no increase and service maintained

Of the respondents who support the transfer, 90 mentioned their support was under strict conditions: that the total amount paid does not increase and that service levels are maintained or improved. These respondents are not opposed to the administrative change itself but are wary of any hidden

increases or reductions in service. They often request explicit guarantees that water bills will decrease by the same amount as the charge added to rates, and that the funds will be used solely for stormwater purposes.

**Example quotes:**

- "As long as the overall cost of my Council bills does NOT increase that's OK."
- "If the charge is transferred to our rates, I would expect to see a corresponding decrease in my water rates of the same amount."

**Support for administrative reasons or legislative compliance**

A smaller group (n=35) supports the transfer as a necessary administrative or legal step, or because it makes sense to combine charges for efficiency. These respondents often reference the legislative change that requires the charge to be moved, or express indifference as long as the total cost does not increase.

**Example quotes:**

- "If legislation says so, ok."
- "It makes sense to transfer the stormwater drainage charge to the rates notice in light of the upcoming changes."
- "As long as the charge remains the same, I have no objection to the transfer."
- "...it's a no-brainer, because the loss of the \$22mil has negative impacts on other infrastructure, and will do much more damage."



## People's panel engagement outcomes

Captivate Consulting supported Council to facilitate an in-person workshop. All participants (n=16) were part of the existing Peoples Panel which had been formed as part of the community consultation approach for Council's recent Water & Sewer pricing submission to IPART. The group has previously participated in several education sessions providing them with a sound knowledge of how Council services and infrastructure including water, sewer and stormwater services are structured, funded and provided to the community by Council. This background positioned the cohort well to understand the implications of council's proposal and the alternative options.

During the workshop, participants were briefed on the legislative change, the financial risk of losing \$22 million in annual revenue and the two options before Council: apply for a Special Variation to transfer the charge to the rate notice or seek to reduce expenditure through the reduction of services or service levels. Participants engaged in two distinct activities designed to build their understanding and then seek their view on an overall recommendation about the proposal.

The first engagement activity asked participants, in small groups, to articulate their understanding of the proposed change, capturing shared insights on large sheets that supported helpful clarification questions and a brief Q&A, ensuring everyone had a consistent baseline before moving forward. Everyone demonstrated a clear understanding of the issue, and their questions focused on financial stability, equity, legislative reasoning and operational impacts.

The second activity asked participants to prioritise councils core services and to consider where they would and wouldn't tolerate service reductions. This activity sparked robust discussion, revealed differing community perspectives, and encouraged participants to consider the trade-offs involved in funding decisions. This exercise revealed strong support for protecting essential services including water and sewer services, road and drainage maintenance, waste services, beach safety, bushfire and flood management.

The People's Panel concluded with a preferred option discussion, where the two groups worked together to reflect on the implications of each funding pathway. This final activity consolidated earlier discussions and ensured participants had the opportunity to advocate for what they believed would deliver the most sustainable outcome for the community.

Both groups reached a clear and consistent conclusion: **strong support for applying for the Special Variation to transfer the stormwater charge to rate notices.** Participants saw this as the fairest and most logical path forward, noting that residents were already paying the charge and that maintaining it through the rate notice would prevent a \$22 million reduction in annual funding and protect essential infrastructure and services from being reduced. While one participant advocated to delay the decision and explore alternative funding options, the majority (n=15 or 94%) agreed that proceeding with the Special Variation was the most responsible and sustainable choice for the community.

*Figures 3-5: People's Panel workshop at Central Coast Council, Wyong, 10 December 2025*



*Figure 3*



*Figure 4*



*Figure 5*

## Conclusion

The community engagement process provides Council with clear, well-considered insights into community expectations regarding the proposed transfer of the Stormwater Drainage Charge. The engagement outcomes highlight the importance of continued transparent communication and accountability to the community.



## Appendix 1 | Verbatim submission comments

**IPART note:** The council has appended submissions as part of this package. However, we have removed them in line with our privacy policy as they contain some personal information.

The submissions are available as part of the council's 27 January 2026 meeting *Attachment 3 Stormwater Drainage Charge Transfer Community Engagement Report* file via its website:  
<https://docspublished.com.au/centralcoastcouncil/document/8fc19789-74b9-4cba-a059-6df577eec05e>