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Your submission for this review:

I write on behalf of the owners of [REDACTED] a community of residents and ratepayers whose interests are impacted by the proposed substantial and ongoing increases to Sydney Water's charges. We understand that the cost of maintaining and improving essential infrastructure is necessary; however, we strongly oppose the proposed hikes for the following reasons:

- 1. Excessive and Unwarranted Increases in the Context of a Cost of Living Crisis** The proposed increases in water rates are excessive, particularly in light of the ongoing cost of living crisis facing many Australians. The price of essentials such as food, energy, and housing has been rising steadily. Adding a significant financial burden through higher water rates will exacerbate the hardship experienced by many ratepayers, particularly those in strata communities where residents are already struggling with escalating living costs. A sudden and substantial hike in water rates would be seen as unreasonable and out of touch with the everyday struggles of ordinary residents.
- 2. No Evidence of Water Shortages** There is no indication that Sydney is facing any immediate or foreseeable water shortages that would justify the dramatic increases in water rates. While Sydney Water plays a critical role in managing and maintaining the city's water supply, the proposed hikes appear to be primarily driven by financial or infrastructure goals, rather than by any urgent need for additional water supply or conservation measures. Given the abundance of water resources and the current reliability of Sydney's water network, the argument for a significant increase in rates is hard to justify.
- 3. The Impact on Strata Communities and Residents** Strata communities, which often consist of a diverse range of residents including retirees, families, and individuals on fixed incomes are particularly vulnerable to increases in utility costs. Water charges are typically shared by all owners and tenants, and a rise in these charges places an additional burden on strata corporations, potentially leading to higher levies for residents. The ripple effect of these increases would likely be felt across entire communities, making housing in already expensive areas even more unaffordable.
- 4. Public Backlash and Political Sensitivity** Politicians and decision-makers should be mindful that any increases in water rates, particularly those that are perceived as excessive or unwarranted, could lead to significant public backlash. The electorate is highly sensitive to any proposals that impact their living standards, and such a measure could undermine public trust in both Sydney Water and the politicians who are responsible for signing off on these increases. It is essential to consider how the public will respond to rate hikes at a time when families are already struggling to make ends meet. Politicians must recognize that issues like utility price hikes have a direct impact on voter sentiment, and failure to listen to community concerns may result in negative political consequences.
- 5. Request for Further Consultation and Consideration of Alternatives** We respectfully request that Sydney Water reconsider the scale and frequency of the proposed increases, especially in light of the financial hardship many residents are facing. We also encourage Sydney Water to engage in further consultations with the community to explore alternative ways of ensuring the long-term sustainability of water services without imposing undue financial strain on ratepayers. Consideration of gradual, smaller increases, or the exploration of more efficient methods of delivering water services, would be more appropriate given the current economic climate.

Conclusion The proposed water rate increases are excessive and not warranted by current circumstances. In particular, the lack of a water shortage and the ongoing cost of living crisis highlight the need for a more measured and considerate approach. Politicians and decision-makers should carefully consider the negative impact these increases could have on the electorate, particularly those in vulnerable strata communities. We urge Sydney Water to reconsider its position and engage in further consultation with affected stakeholders to find a more equitable solution. Thank you for considering our submission. We trust that Sydney Water will take these concerns into account when making decisions that will directly affect the wellbeing of Sydney's residents.

Yours sincerely, Peter Ross Principal CEO
Strata Pty Ltd