Rautaki Whakarato ā-Tāone Nui: Pūrongo mō te Tūhonohononga

Metropolitan Servicing Strategy: Engagement Report

Mahuru 2025 | September 2025

Watercare

Mihimihi

E whakatere mā te awa tipua,
ki te Toi o te Rangi,
Pae o ngā Atua,
Takenga o te Puna Waiora.

Rukuhia te Puna Waiora,
koinā te kaihoroi
i ngā para o te Ao.
Kauhorahia te Tai Moana–
Tokonga o te Matapae Huarere
Ārai o Para-whenua-mea.

Whītikihia
ko te tātua o Tawhirimātea
hei pārai i ngā haukino o te wā.

Whakamaua ō kamo
ki ngā rārangi maunga,
hei toka herenga whakaaro,
mauri kōpaki wairua,
tāhuhu whakairinga
i te mana atua,
mana whenua,
mana tangata.

Koinei te oha
ka tohia nei e tatou
ki te wai.

Tūturu ōwhiti
Whakamaua e Rongo kia eke!
Eke panuku, eke tangaroa,
Haramai te toki a haumi e, hui e, tāiki e!

A tribute

Travel the path of the sacred river,
to Heaven on High,
the Mantle of the Gods
to the Wellspring of Life itself.

Delve the depths of the Water Font,
curer and cleanser
for all the World's waste matter.
Treat well the Oceans–
Harbinger of Climate
Fortress against Inclement Weather.

Gird yourself
with the waistband of Tāwhirimātea,
to ward off the harsh winds of time.

Fix your gaze
upon the mountain chain,
to anchor your best intentions,
to embrace your inner being,
and focus
on the wisdom of gods,
the wellbeing of land,
and the continuance of mankind.

This is our purpose
and commitment
to water.

Bring these things to fruition
Rongo, God of Goodness and Plenty,
Bind us to be purposeful in this–
indivisible, unrelenting and successful!

Ngā ihirangi | Contents

Whakarāpopototanga matua

Executive summary

Priyan Perera - Chief strategy and planning officer

Water is essential to life, to our wellbeing, and to the future of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. At Watercare, we are responsible for delivering safe, reliable water and wastewater services that enable our city's growth, the continued health and wellbeing of our people and environment and the economic prosperity of the region. Our Metropolitan Servicing Strategy is a long-term blueprint to guide how we plan, invest in, and manage the infrastructure that moves and treats water and wastewater across our city[1]. Servicing strategies are not just technical exercises, they must be grounded in the realities of the people they impact. By shaping strategies with communities, we ensure that our decisions reflect lived experience, earn public trust, and deliver services that are efficient and aligned with the behaviour and aspirations of the people who use them.

Our engagements sought to clarify the challenges ahead and understand the preferred approaches of our diverse communities, insofar as reasonable level of agreement or a liveable consensus is possible. We know our communities want greater transparency in decision-making and are finding it harder to access clear information that they can rely on. This report outlines how we engaged, who we spoke to, what we heard, and what it means for our Metropolitan Servicing Strategy. It's part of our commitment to working alongside our communities to deliver reliable, affordable services as Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland continues to grow and change in the decades ahead.

Figure 1: Watercare strategy and engagement staff at the University of Auckland, 2024 Servicing Strategy Hackathon.

[1] Covering the area from Whangaparāoa in the north to Pukekohe in the south, the metropolitan network serves around 90 per cent of the region's population with around 19,000 kilometres of water and wastewater pipes.

We asked communities what they know and value about our services, what challenges and opportunities they see for the city in the long-term, and in that context, what trade-offs they are willing to make to achieve the outcomes that they want. We now have a much clearer idea about how people are thinking about the future, what we didn't know to ask about, and the different schools of thought about how we should prepare the city's water infrastructure for the future.

The engagement findings reveal a community that is thoughtful, future-focused, and willing to support increased investment in water services, provided they see that there is transparency, fairness, and the basics are taken care of. Partnering with Aucklanders in shaping the management of water services will remain central to our approach as we go forward.

Figure 2: Watercare staff member draws the feedback she hears at the Manukau deliberative workshop, 14 May 2025.

Key insights from our engagements include the following:

- **The local environment is a key concern for Aucklanders we talked to:** People want to see visible improvements to environmental outcomes, particularly those that prepare us for climate change, reduce local pollution, and accommodate population growth. Willingness to pay for these outcomes was commonly linked to transparency, fairness, and affordability.
- **People expressed a desire for shared responsibility:** People we spoke with valued open, two-way communication and opportunities to work together to solve problems rather than just paying to have the problems go away. As climate-related risks increase, many felt that communities working together and sharing knowledge would help reduce vulnerability and foster resilience in a cost-effective way.
- **We all need to think smarter about how we use resources:** There was strong support for circular approaches, including better use of biosolids and wastewater. Many wanted Watercare to leave space for technological advances and be open to adopting useful innovation in our planning, while balancing this with core service delivery and affordability.
- **Delivering the basics is essential:** People wanted reassurance that Watercare is focused on delivering core services reliably today while also planning for how we will do so in conditions of extreme weather, and for a larger population. Confidence in the fundamentals was seen as a foundation for broader ambition.

These insights will inform the development of our servicing strategy and guide future investment, service delivery, and priorities.

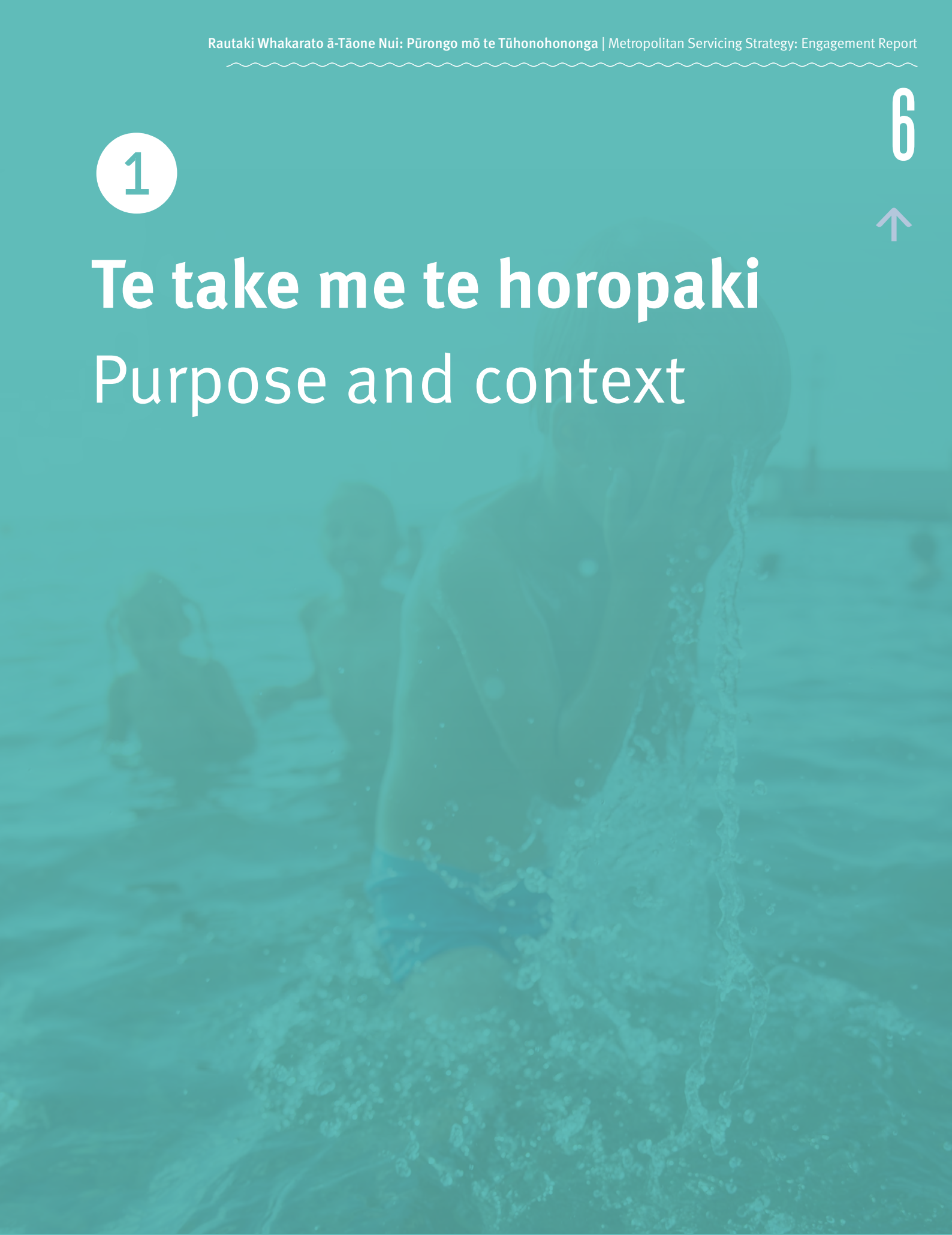
We are grateful to everyone who took the time to share their ideas, questions and insights. We will ensure that these voices, which are vital to shaping a meaningful and enduring strategy, are included in our planning for the future. We also acknowledge mana whenua as partners of Watercare and value our continuing relationship as we work together to care for the lands and waters of Tāmaki Makaurau. We also thank the stakeholders, elected members and others who contributed to our understanding of our people and the opportunities ahead. We hope these engagements serve as a foundation for continued conversation and progress on our shared goals.

Ngā mihi nui

Priyan Perera and the Watercare strategy and planning and stakeholder teams.

1

Te take me te horopaki
Purpose and context



1 Te take me te horopaki

Purpose and context

As we look ahead, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland faces some pressing infrastructure questions:

- How do we prepare our water and wastewater services for climate change?
- How do we support a growing and thriving population and economy?
- How can we ensure we leave our environment, and the right portfolio of water and wastewater assets, in the best possible condition for generations to come?

To make the best use of what we have, we need to consider these as social challenges needing community insight to get the best outcomes. The optimal solutions will balance our collective responsibility to the environment and the wellbeing of future generations with our commitment to ensuring affordable access to lifeline services now. Engaging with Aucklanders ensures that the decisions we make are socially grounded; understood and supported as much as possible by the voices of those who will live with their outcomes. In this way, the Metropolitan Servicing Strategy will reflect shared values: sustainability, affordability, equity, and long-term thinking. This reflects our commitment to the Auckland Plan 2050, the Auckland Water Strategy, and our purpose statement, all of which call for collaborative, future-focused planning that supports resilient and liveable communities. We strive to incorporate the guidance of our mana whenua partners around the use, care and sustainability of the environment, not just for the short- to medium-term, but for many generations to come.

Figure 3: Collateral from our engagement explaining why public engagement matters.

Previous research with Aucklanders on infrastructure challenges showed that 'fairness' is of paramount importance when communities consider our decision-making: decisions about water and wastewater should be seen through a 'prism of fairness' (fair to me, fair to others, fair to future generations[2]). Despite its importance, fairness can be too abstract to serve as a practical decision-making tool in a community with diverse views, incomes, and lived experiences. For that reason, our engagement sought to understand how Aucklanders view their roles and what they want to see in a more applied way. Our conversations were about expectations for the environment, the role of water efficiency, Aucklanders' willingness to pay to improve services and resilience, their inclination to support new innovations, and their desire to repurpose waste (among others).

[2] The report states: 'Fairness is a critical lens Watercare will be judged through across: services, water restrictions, when applied, and infrastructure investments and subsequent impacts to pricing.' *Understanding Aucklanders' Relationship with Water*, TRA, 2020. p19.

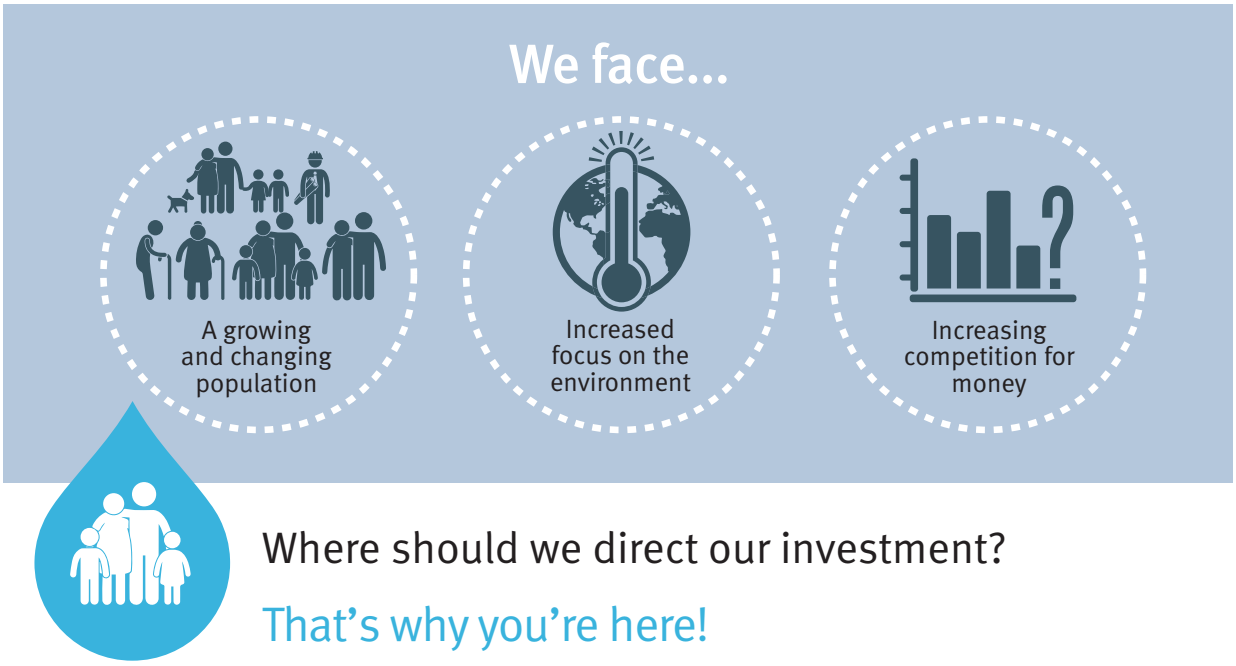


Figure 4: Collateral from our engagement booklet providing context to our challenges.

Over two months, we held engagements across Auckland and interacted with thousands of people across the city. We used a variety of methods to engage with the public and ensured the materials were easy to read and the engagement was accessible through both face-to-face and online channels.

Our engagement also included working closely with our dedicated Māori engagement team for ongoing conversations with mana whenua alongside our public engagement efforts. Mana whenua we talked to support the long-term approach of the Metropolitan Servicing Strategy, and iwi reminded us of the importance of understanding past choices and their current consequences[3]. Mana whenua appreciated being consulted early and wanted to know how we can truly partner in decision-making. In parallel, we engaged with local boards and the Auckland Council's policy and planning committee on these same issues. We are grateful for the support we received from our partners.

Figure 5: Collateral from our engagement booklet describing three upcoming challenges.

[3] Wananga held in 20 and 26 November feedback from some mana whenua representatives.

In all of our engagements, our intention was to build a shared understanding of the complex challenges ahead, and to obtain informed feedback to ensure that our long-term planning reflects the values and priorities of the people we serve. While we bring technical expertise to the table, our communities bring their own realities. They understand their neighbourhoods, what they value, their personal economic situations and stages in life and what matters most to them in the long-term. We had an opportunity to be honest about the constraints we face (why we can't 'just do' a given solution), and to listen to people who respect and care about the work our teams do and offered pragmatic solutions to the problems we raised.

Figure 6: Participants discuss resource recovery costs and benefits with their table host at our Manukau deliberative workshop.

These perspectives will help us to plan for a water future that most people can support and afford. From this we hope to build an effective servicing strategy that is accessible, encourages informed dialogue, and enables sound decision-making with our customers' ambitions for Auckland in mind. By listening deeply, we lay the foundation for decisions that are more trusted, and more aligned with our community's aspirations.

Figure 7: A participant in our Manukau event explains her views on how we could safeguard the city for the future.

2

Tā mātou tukanga tūhonohono

Our engagement approach

❷ Tā mātou tukanga tūhonohono

Our engagement approach

From March to May 2025, we engaged with thousands of Aucklanders. Events were mostly face-to-face, and included drop-in and pop-up events across the city, with interactive token drop activities, as well as youth-specific events and an online platform called Buzzly to capture younger voices.

Prior to this, we ran pre-engagement workshops to ensure that our collateral was fit for purpose and to learn what questions, ideas and ways of presenting challenges resonated with diverse audiences. We were keen to hear from the widest possible range of voices and gain the broadest reach with the resources and funding available. Of particular importance was discovering which questions might be raised by the public during our consultation, so that we could be prepared to answer complex questions. Our approach – Our city, our water: shaping the water future together – was designed to appeal to the many different people who call our city home. As a long-term strategic initiative, we were keen to hear from renters, younger residents, and people who don't normally receive any communication from us (e.g. people who live in apartments). We went to markets, malls, libraries and community centres to engage with people.

We used insights from our ongoing customer research programme throughout the planning and delivery of our engagements. We considered our learnings and commitments from previous engagements with Aucklanders on long-term issues to sense-check our assumptions and further our understanding of the people we serve[4]. We worked with council groups and local boards to extend our network before and during the formal consultation period.

Figure 8: illustration of the different kinds of people we talked to during our March – May engagements.

[4] Such as our 2022 Citizens Assembly and our 2023 engagements on our Wastewater Network Strategy.

a) What we did

We needed to meet people in a way that allowed all kinds of people to be comfortable enough to talk about our challenges, form and express opinions, and change their minds when better options emerged. Our primary goal was to make our engagements inclusive and cheerful, where people would ask questions about what they don't understand and deliberate respectfully with others, and with us. We also wanted people to offer up what we didn't know to ask about – be it bottled water, immigration or fluoride – which happens easily when people believe that their voices matter.

Multi-channel approach

We collected feedback through a range of channels to ensure broad and inclusive participation. These included a dedicated website, surveys, youth events and in-person engagement across the city. We also held two targeted 2.5 hour workshops to dive deeper into specific themes.

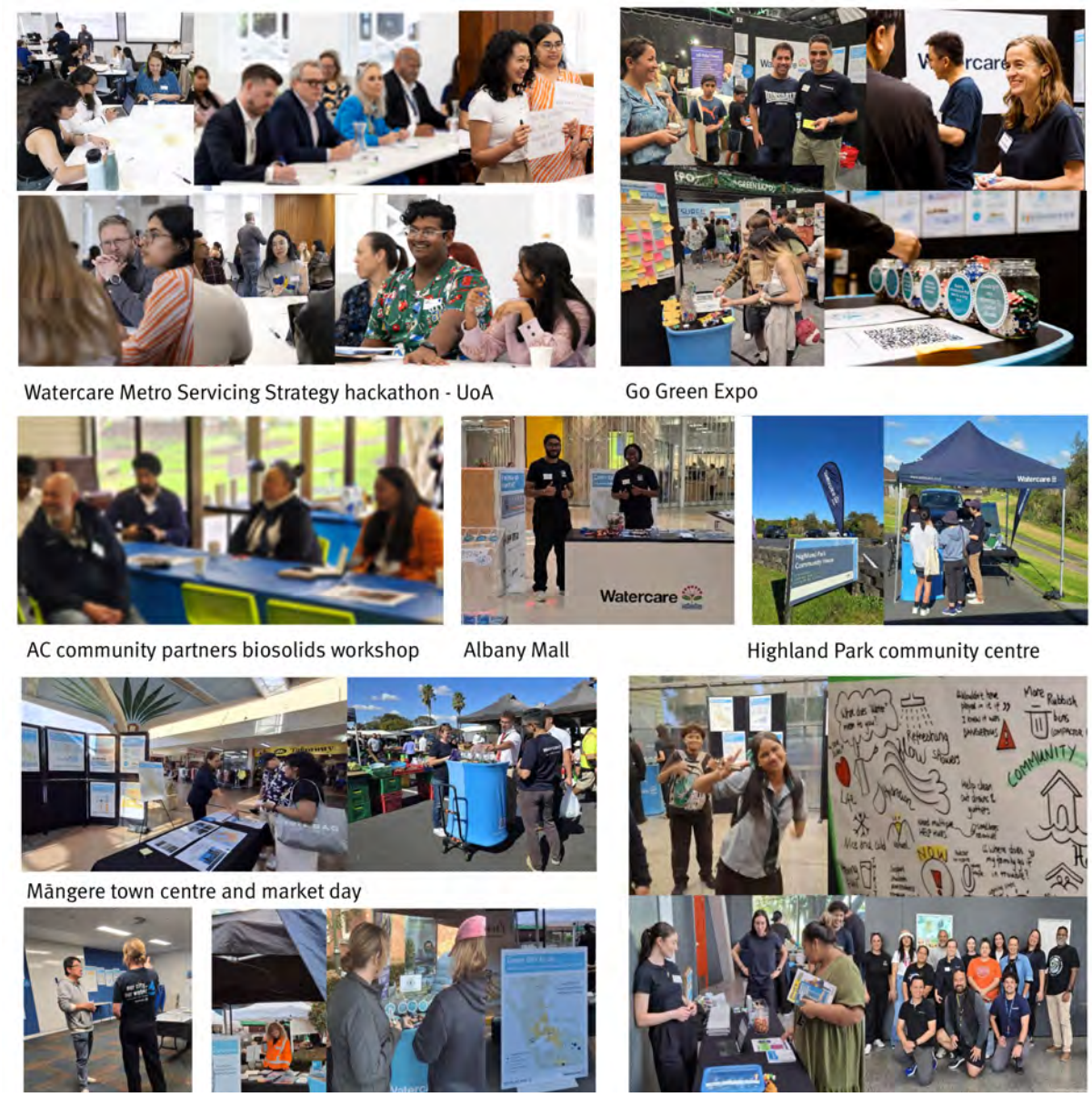


Figure 9: Different engagements across the city.

Simplified information booklet

Knowledge of the water system is often relatively low in Auckland[5]. Prior to our engagement period we worked closely with youth and people from different backgrounds (especially those with English as a second language) to understand how best to convey complex infrastructure topics to get the most out of our engagement efforts.

Figure 10: Information booklet to help people understand the challenges we face, the metropolitan network and the level of influence that they have.

These early conversations were instrumental in helping us design more inclusive, accessible, and meaningful engagement collateral and activities during the formal consultation period.

[5] See WSAA 2023, Measuring Water Literacy Research Report. Auckland ranks lowest in water literacy of all participating Australasian regions. Note that Watercare was the only New Zealand organisation participating in the research.

Buzzly youth challenge

Youth (yr 12-13) school holiday workshop - Newmarket

Global café workshop - Manukau

Figure 11: Different engagements across the city.

Surveys

An online and paper survey was conducted during the engagement period to give people a chance to provide detailed feedback, especially if they couldn't attend in-person sessions. The survey explored what's currently working well or not, public understanding of the water system, investment priorities, climate change strategies, innovation in waste reduction, and preferences around water efficiency and timing of investment. Respondents were encouraged to read an information booklet for context before submitting their responses.

In parallel, we used our ongoing 'monthly tracker' survey to gather insights into key issues. This always-on representative survey has been running since 2018 and allows us to track trends and regional differences across Auckland over time, while also capturing perspectives from groups typically less engaged in water-related consultations, such as renters and lower-income households. By including voices with lower baseline knowledge of the water system, the survey helped provide a useful perspective compared to our predominantly homeowner customer base.

Token drop: prioritisation activity

As a quick pulse check on community priorities, we ran a 'token drop' activity during engagement events. This served two key purposes: to understand how people would allocate funding from their water bill, and to prompt conversation about the trade-offs. Prioritising one outcome meant investing less in another. Participants were given two or three tokens to 'spend' across five or six categories, acting as a proxy for preferred investment areas to prepare Auckland for the future:

- Building infrastructure that lasts for a long time
- Recycling and reusing water and resources
- Preparing Auckland for severe weather, e.g. droughts, storms and floods
- Reducing pollution and emissions
- Investing in new technology to improve services

For most of the engagements we had a sixth category: keeping costs low and improving efficiency. Section three describes the insights we gleaned. The discussion about costs, affordability and efficiency is covered in the final section[6].

Figure 12: Watercare employee talks shop at one of our deliberative workshops.

[6] See Appendix A for the breakdown of priorities between the face-to-face token drops and the two different surveys (in which we asked the same question).

After making their selections, participants were invited to explain their choices. These responses were captured on post-it notes, transcribed, and thematically analysed to further compare and inform our understanding of community values. Priorities varied across the city with background, life stage and experiences (e.g. those impacted by flooding were far more likely to 'spend' all their tokens on preparing for severe weather), but overall, clear themes emerged about how people felt that Watercare should spend money.

Deliberative workshops

To gain a deeper understanding of the conflicting views that were emerging, we ran two deliberative workshops in the south and the north of Auckland. We encouraged diverse groups of people to 'sit' with the tension and work out a balance that they could live with (rather than one view 'winning'). Watercare table hosts listened while members of the public explained why they held certain positions (on how we should prepare Auckland for 'yo-yo' weather, what role innovation should play, how we should manage waste as we look ahead), and tried to come to a consensus on an approach that they believed Watercare should take.

Figure 13: Warming up for our deliberative workshop: getting everyone to speak up is about 'how' as well as 'who'!

Engaging Aucklanders locally, with simple collateral and in a variety of ways proved essential to gathering meaningful feedback from a diverse audience. Aucklanders want to talk about the future of the city[7]. We learned that different communities in the region respond uniquely to various forms of language and outreach: what resonates in one region falls flat in another. By moving beyond traditional town hall-style meetings and ensuring that our most vocal participants expected to share 'talk time', we were able to hear from a broader cross-section of voices. This inclusive approach allowed us to surface insights that might otherwise have been missed, ensuring that our decisions are informed by a richer, more representative understanding of Aucklanders' perspectives. For more information on how we reached out, see Appendix B.

[7] 'How Watercare is planning for the future of Auckland ' is the news that Aucklanders say they most want to hear from Watercare. See Appendix D for more on this.

Figure 14: Token drop at the Go Green Expo – working out what you are willing to trade-off can be hard!

Reach and awareness

Awareness of our engagements was supported in the following ways:

- Tapped In campaign (Autumn 2025): reached approximately 440,000 households, including 320,000 via email and 120,000 through printed editions.
- Pre-event communications: distributed approximately 17,000 targeted emails in advance of local events.
- Local board engagement: collaborated with local boards and community advocates to promote awareness and participation.
- Digital outreach: social media (including local community Facebook pages) to share event information and updates.
- Community presence: displayed promotional materials at libraries and community noticeboards in proximity to event locations.
- Leaflet drop at universities distributed over 500 flyers.

b. Who was involved?

Our engagement reached thousands of Aucklanders[8], capturing insights from a wide range of voices across the region to inform our understanding of community priorities and expectations. These interactions ranged from a survey or token drop to long, in-depth conversations in our longer community engagements and our two deliberative workshops[9]. More than two thousand shower timers were taken home by Aucklanders we engaged with.

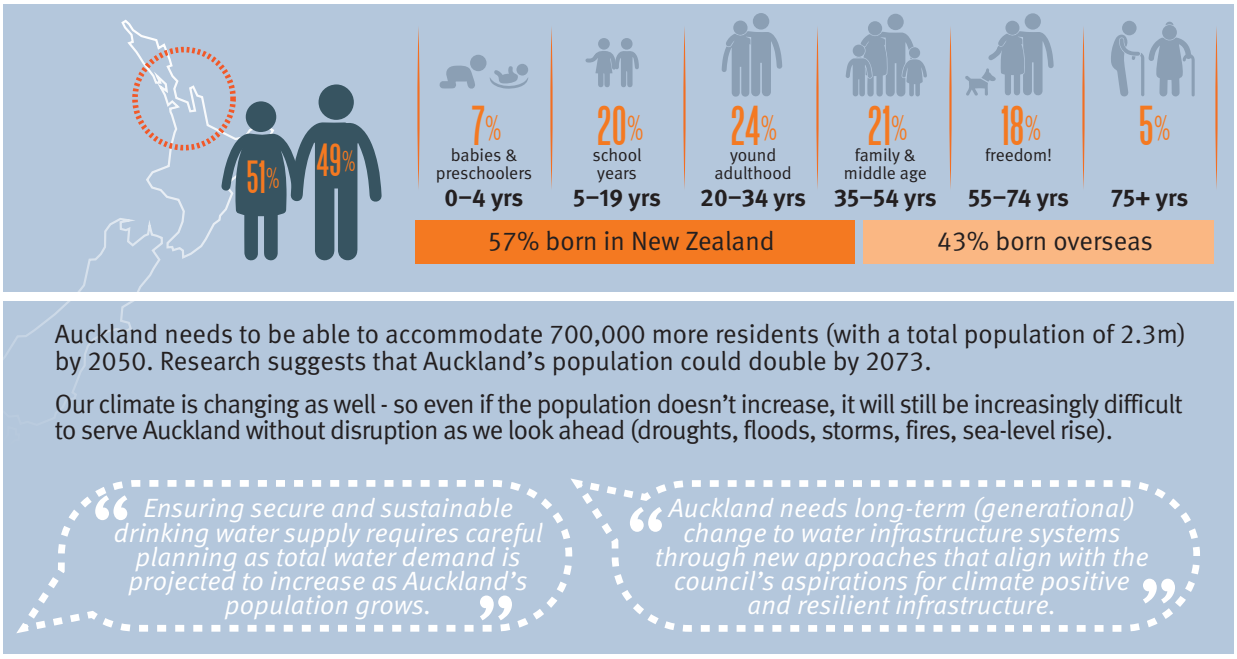


Figure 15: Page from our information booklet: our population is growing and changing.

We captured demographic information from our survey results, including local board area and housing information as follows:

Ethnicity (multi-select)	Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey	Monthly Tracker survey
NZ European	56%	56%
Asian	13%	16%
Other European	8%	8%
NZ Māori	6%	11%
Pacific	5%	8%
Indian	4%	7%
Latin American	1%	1%
African	1%	1%
Other (specify)	6%	4%

Age group	Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey	Monthly Tracker survey
Under 18	2%	0%
18–24	2%	6%
25–34	11%	9%
35–44	17%	19%
45–54	19%	16%
55–64	17%	15%
65–74	11%	11%
75 or older	10%	8%

Living situation	Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey	Monthly Tracker survey
I own the home I'm living in	80%	51%
I rent the home I'm living in	13%	35%
I'm in a different situation	7%	13%

Gender	Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey	Monthly Tracker survey
Male	43%	49%
Female	55%	35%
Gender diverse	2%	0.3%

Figure 16: Demographic information about people who completed our surveys.

[8] We had around 3,500 face-to-face interactions (this is based on the number of tokens that people dropped into our jars). See Appendix A for more details.

[9] These were also referred to as Global Cafés during the engagements. Because we framed the questions, and participants were expected to weigh up the trade-offs and come up with considered recommendations, the term 'deliberative workshops' better explains the experience.

Engagement focus: mana whenua, youth and elected members

Mana whenua

We have an enduring relationship with the 19 mana whenua recognised by the Crown as having links with Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. We strive for an 'always on' approach to engaging with mana whenua, grounded in partnership rather than transactional interactions. This means our relationships require ongoing dialogue, mutual respect, and shared commitment to kaupapa, rather than being about the acquisition of input or approval. We aim for a no surprises approach, ensuring that mana whenua are kept informed and involved throughout our processes. This approach reflects our recognition of mana whenua as enduring partners in shaping outcomes for our communities and environment.

Figure 17: Watercare staff listen to mana whenua perspectives on our future challenges over breakfast in Takanini, November 2024. Our ties with iwi form a valued partnership that continues to evolve.

In late 2024, we extended invitations to all our mana whenua partners to join us for a series of breakfast hui, to introduce our Metropolitan Servicing Strategy kaupapa. While not all were able to attend, those who did expressed a clear interest in being involved in this work. These hui provided a valuable opportunity to connect and reaffirm our commitment to inclusive and transparent engagement. The feedback received helped to shape our approach to public engagement (they recommended we provide easy-to-understand materials, global studies and data, and help to strengthen people's understanding of the water sensitive cities approach to water management, for example).

Through kōrero about our engagement insights, we hope to further understand and elevate the voices of mana whenua, which will provide more depth to our decision-making framework and support the development of our servicing strategy.

Youth

The value that the youth voice (under 25) has brought to our understanding would be difficult to overstate. As students, most are wired for learning and naturally apply a problem-solving mindset to the complex issues we face. They tended to look at every challenge we face as something they might be able to help with, through influencing behaviour change, rethinking our processes or reconsidering how we can apply technology to solve problems. Young people care deeply about their local environment and are looking for positive pathways that could help us get through whatever climate change brings to Auckland. As the people who will live with the consequences of our decisions in the future, once they have the knowledge that they need, youth are well-positioned to provide critical and constructive advice to Watercare.

With this in mind, our engagement programme was designed to empower young Aucklanders to ask for what they want for their city in the future, and to help foster a sense of responsibility in how our water systems are managed. We held two summits, one hackathon and a youth workshop. These were experiential and were designed to grow the young people's knowledge of the water system and the challenges and opportunities we all face in the future.

Figure 18: Buzzly Challenge: H2Go vs H2No video. Watercare graduates provide a critical bridge between the organisation and youth.

Another of the ways we engaged with youth was through the Watercare Buzzly Challenge, inviting young people to explore our water issues. Buzzly is Auckland Council's digital youth engagement platform, designed to gather insights from young people through interactive and incentivised online consultations. We asked '*If Auckland's water future was up to you, how would you keep the taps flowing and the loos flushing?*' We received 88 submissions from young people, a promising indicator of youth interest and engagement. This aligns with Auckland Council's strategic focus on amplifying youth voice through initiatives like the Youth Advisory Panel and the *Thriving Rangatahi* strategy.

When thinking about what Watercare should focus on, the most important things that young Buzzly submitters raised were getting Auckland ready for extreme weather, finding ways to recycle and reuse water (and 'other stuff') and running things more efficiently to ensure that water remains affordable[10].

[10] See Appendix E for more information on our Buzzly Challenge.

Figure 19: Youth summit - fresh ideas in action, 16 April 2025.

During the April school holidays, we hosted a Youth Summit for 14 to 18-year-olds, where participants learned about the challenges facing Auckland's water and wastewater systems and co-designed potential solutions. They heard from Watercare planners and other staff and were challenged to create a future water city that is resilient to climate change. They presented their ideas and recommendations at the end of the day.

Figure 20: Māngere Arts Centre youth event - perspectives on water (10 April 2025) Zhi Lee, The Visual Coach.

In Māngere, we joined a youth-led event organised by Auckland Council, where we listened to the experiences and ideas of young people directly impacted by the 2023 floods. We worked alongside our council partners to support youth engagement in Māngere and to understand what water means to them and how they would like us to plan for the future. This group rated recycling and reusing water and resources highest in their token drop, however many of the comments we heard were concerned with intensification and urban development, and the importance of water and the natural environment to survival and wellbeing: '*Be like the islands. Water is important, it sustains life. Urban lifestyle, no connection to water.*'[11]

There are few cities in the world so surrounded by water. Yet unlike some of our older Aucklanders who recall days spent in and around streams and harbours in a more stable climate, much of the living memory of Auckland's young people has had the backdrop of extreme weather in Auckland. Droughts, floods and storms have made water, and nature, a bit scarier. In addition, our young adults have been raised in a city where more and more people believe that the environment is not a resource to be managed, but a life support system that requires our protection. And, of course, young people are aware of how rapidly technological and social transformation is occurring. As such, youth offer fresh perspectives on what is possible, future-focused thinking, and a clearer sense of the values that will shape Auckland in the years to come.

[11] Post-it note left by a participant at the I AM Māngere youth event, Māngere Arts Centre, 10 April, 2025.

Elected members

Elected members represent and make decisions on behalf of the communities in their areas. They bring local knowledge and connection to the people and organisations in the area, and the connection we share with them is one of mutual benefit when it comes to engagement.

Figure 21: A key Elected Member celebrating a Central Interceptor milestone.

We engage with local boards and elected members through a range of formal and informal channels to ensure alignment, transparency, and shared understanding of water and wastewater issues across Tāmaki Makaurau. We have maintained an ongoing relationship with all 21 local boards throughout the development of our Metropolitan Servicing Strategy, recognising that the metropolitan network touches every local board area. Ongoing engagement with elected members will be essential to ensure that our strategy reflects the diverse needs and priorities across Auckland. Initial engagement began in 2024, ahead of public consultation, with tailored updates provided to each board between July and August. Where appropriate, we incorporated bespoke feedback into the process. Resolved feedback will be carefully considered and reflected in our servicing strategy, ensuring local board voices are meaningfully represented.

3

Ngā whakahoki kōrero, ngā whakamārama me ngā ritenga o i a mātou tōhononga

Feedback, insights and implications for our servicing strategy

❸ Ngā whakahoki kōrero, ngā whakamārama me ngā ritenga o i a mātou tōhononga

Feedback, insights and implications for our servicing strategy

This section explores five key questions that we explored during our engagement process, drawing on what Aucklanders told us during our drop-in and pop-up engagements and the deeper insights we gained through our longer deliberative workshops in Glenfield and Manukau, where participants had the opportunity to reflect, discuss, and build on each other's ideas.

The five themes we understand better as a result of our engagement are:

1. *Severe weather and the impacts of climate change: look for partnership in our approach to droughts, storms and floods, and we can get ahead of this together.*
2. *Pollution and the local environment: get the basics right today, while we keep our eye on the future.*
3. *Building infrastructure that lasts: invest in our city for multi-generational returns.*
4. *Investing in technology and innovation: leave space so we can stay adaptive.*
5. *Resource recovery: recycle our resources for long-term value and resilience.*

Our understanding also includes insights from our two surveys and other channels (such as email submissions) where relevant. Together, these sources provide a rich and nuanced understanding of public perspectives that will inform our servicing strategy.

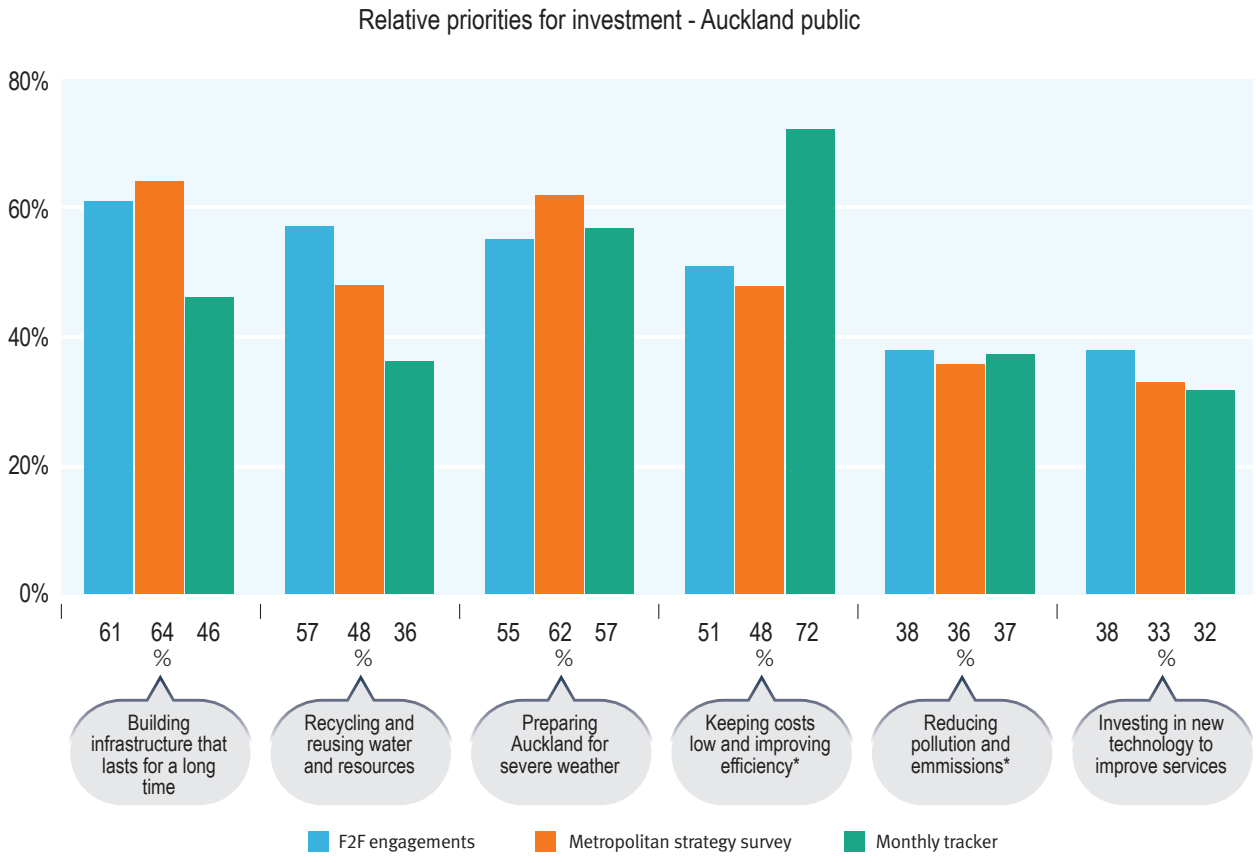


Figure 22: How the tokens fell: people who engaged with us face to face or were presented with images explaining the issues wanted to invest more in our water future than people who were given no context and little information. (See Appendix A for more information).

Each section below explains what we understand about each of the themes as a result of our engagements, and what implications this has for our servicing strategy. When we treat servicing as a shared responsibility between us and the communities we serve, we're more likely to land on solutions that are technically sound, socially supported, and financially sustainable.

3.1. Let's get ahead of the problem!

Aucklanders on severe weather and the impacts of climate change: droughts, storms and floods

'A larger consideration for peoples' perspectives is their exposure to tragedy. Recent Auckland weather tragedies have shifted perspectives significantly.' (deliberative workshop participant)

Summary

Despite experiencing a drought just five years ago, when we talked about climate change, people focused on floods, storms, and sea level rise. Calls for a new water source – especially on the North Shore – were more often driven by concerns about population growth, not the thought of running dry due to drought. Nevertheless, water efficiency remains important to many people as a value (not being wasteful).

In terms of addressing climate change issues, people expect us to work closely with council and central government to manage risks. Population growth and associated urban development were seen as a stress multiplier that make every climate challenge harder to manage.

Figure 23: It's hard to have a decent conversation about drought when people are wet!

What we understand from our engagements (in more detail)

Aucklanders are far more aware of climate risks than they were a decade ago, but their understanding is highly localised and mostly about flooding (e.g. on the North Shore many people preferred to talk about the future of Takapuna golf course rather than what we ought to do at a regional level to manage the impact of droughts, floods, sea level rise). They recognise that weather is becoming more unpredictable and that the future won't be easy: 'Having to recover from natural disasters

will cripple the economy' (deliberative workshop participant). However, few had considered the long-term impacts on water services, primarily because, being underground, they are not very visible. There was little awareness of what a water-sensitive city might look like, but had positive reactions to the climate-readiness of the scenario when it was presented.

Our other research and analysis corroborate this finding. Over half of the 5000 Aucklanders we have been surveying in our monthly tracker don't expect severe drought within the next decade. By contrast, nearly two thirds believe we will have severe floods in the next decade (see Appendix D for more information). In this context, rain tanks and new dams seemed like the obvious solution to many people. In our conversations, we talked about the way that rain tanks support better stormwater outcomes, are useful in emergency situations, and reduce the demand for treated mains water across an average year. We also suggested that tanks in the metropolitan service area would not be a reliable answer to long-term water supply challenges that we jointly face. After we talked through the issues, we found broad support for both rain tanks (for all the benefits they bring) and bringing on a new rain-independent source of water (recycled water or desalination). What emerged was a two-pronged approach to resilience against natural disasters: decentralised storage and well-maintained networks.

Within our discussions, we found that Aucklanders want us to:

- Talk about the role that rain tanks (and households) can play in reducing the impact of severe weather
- Talk about new sources of water and how they work
- Work collaboratively with other organisations to address climate impacts
- Maintain well-functioning networks and fortify or relocate low-lying assets

People saw the potential of water efficiency, with many wanting to focus on innovations that enabled greater control over their personal or household water consumption. As part of our engagement, we distributed 2000 shower timers, which were well received. Participants also expressed enthusiasm for technologies that support water efficiency in the home, such as smart meters and the Watercare app, which were seen as tools that reinforce broadly accepted 'good' behaviours: conserving public resources and reducing household costs[12].

Infrastructure investment and upgrades were seen as urgent in the context of population growth and land development, rather than climate change. With more impermeable surfaces across the city, more strain on the wastewater system and increasing water demand, new developments raised concerns when existing systems appear strained, or we are not seen to be getting the basics right.

Implications:

- Our servicing strategy should clearly show how we're preparing for Auckland's next water source(s).
- Our timelines for a new water source should clearly show points at which the public can see and experience new water sources (e.g. at a demonstration plant) to increase the public's willingness to consume alternative sources of water.
- Awareness and education about the impacts of climate change on water services will help people understand why the cost of servicing the city is going to increase (what they are paying for) and how it makes our water supply more resilient.
- We need to be clear in our servicing strategy about the strategic role that rain tanks could play (i.e. flooding mitigation, decentralised sources of water for emergencies), and what they do not do (i.e. safeguard against droughts)
- We need to be clear in our servicing strategy about the role of water efficiency for the positive impacts that it brings (i.e. offsetting demand as the population grows, lower costs, reduced wastewater flows) and what it does not do (i.e. safeguard against droughts).
- Our servicing strategy needs to test solutions against both droughts and floods.

[12] Youth at the Watercare Hackathon overwhelmingly felt that behaviour change was an opportunity we should pursue to achieve our long-term goals.

3.2. We've got to get better at this.

Aucklanders' views of Watercare's role in safeguarding the local environment

'Watercare needs to think boldly to get ahead of future challenges, recognising the cost of inaction and delaying investment.' – deliberative workshop participant

Summary

There is a strong public desire in Auckland for a future where environmental improvements are both meaningful and measurable, particularly at the local level. People want to see visible progress, such as cleaner beaches and healthier waterways, and to understand how broader environmental goals will be achieved. While there is support for action on emissions, it is the immediate and tangible environmental issues that most people cared about most. Across our conversations, there was a clear call for transparency and communication, and a preference for collaborative, community-focused solutions.

Figure 24: How people told us to balance the tension between saving money and protecting the environment.

What we understand from our engagements in more detail

Feedback indicates that Aucklanders expect us to demonstrate clear and consistent progress towards environmental improvement. Youth told us that the environment is non-negotiable: '*We only have one environment.*' While there is general support for sustainability efforts, people lose confidence when basic environmental standards such as clean beaches and healthy local waterways are perceived to be unmet. Visible, local outcomes are more meaningful to the public than abstract or long-term goals at the regional, national or global level.

People want reassurance that their financial contributions are being used effectively and that we are focusing on the basics, such as fixing leaks, maintaining pipes and reducing overflows. The vulnerability of our harbour to wastewater overflows makes Aucklanders unhappy and they want to see that we are making progress to protect it. There is a call for a shift in the relationship between us and the community, to a model in which communities are more actively involved in shaping and supporting solutions. Some Aucklanders are feeling financially stretched and want to be part of shaping the solution, rather than simply paying more, particularly if they don't see where their money is spent.

There was clear support for preventing environmental damage at its source. Preference was for more knowledge sharing rather than paying more for services. For example,

- Improving community knowledge of what should be flushed down the toilet is better than paying to clean up wastewater overflows;
- helping people to be more water-efficient is better than spending more to take more water from the environment.

Feedback from environmental groups concerned with enhancing the harbour environment near our Māngere Wastewater Treatment Plant ask for faster progress in line with the Water Sensitive Cities framework, as did some others we talked to in our face-to-face engagements and surveys. After robust conversation, a more gradual approach was agreed on during our southern deliberative engagement[13] (this sentiment was also present in our northern workshop). We note as an example of the strength of deliberative engagement methods that groups can 'bring themselves' to very reasonable conclusions without interference from the moderator. This topic (environment vs. cost) was discussed in plenary in Manukau and showed the power of groups to find middle ground that the group could all live with.

People we talked to broadly told us that yes, we need to alter how we do things to provide a better environment for future generations, but we should take it slowly and avoid price shocks: '*Spread more awareness and educate more of the younger generations of the importance of water. We want change - at a pace that works*' (deliberative workshop participant). We also heard that if more of us play our part to help improve our environment, this will reduce the burden on bill payers and on future generations.

Our monthly tracker survey suggests that this is broadly true of the wider Auckland community. More than half of Aucklanders *strongly agree* that everyone has a role to play in protecting the natural environment[14]. This reflects a desire for empowerment from the wider community; most Aucklanders believe everyone *should* help.

Implications:

- We should measure how we are making progress on core local environmental outcomes (e.g. clean beaches, wastewater overflows, water quality) and clearly show how our investments are linked to the local environmental outcomes that communities value.
- Outline how customers can play a part in bringing about tangible improvements.
- Explore community-level partnership that enables local involvement in our shared challenges where it can contribute to improved environmental outcomes (e.g. Are there catchments and communities that could provide an opportunity to progress the Water Sensitive Cities model?).

[13] The conversations started with strong advocacy to leave the local environment in an improved and healthy state for the next generation, but through deliberation about how we pay for that, they added the caveat that any price rises and behaviour changes should be introduced gradually.

[14] See Appendix D for more on this.

3.3. Nothing will be cheaper than it is today.[15]

Building infrastructure that lasts: investing in our city for multi-generational returns

'Start now, implement and invest for...a better future for ALL.' - deliberative workshop submission

'...While I don't accept water-wastage, I think a forward thinking and resilient city will always have ample water supply to its people.' - Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey response

Summary

While localised and mixed-use solutions are appealing, it is clear that most people want to remain connected to robust networks that reliably deliver water and manage wastewater. Aucklanders strongly support our role in delivering long-lasting infrastructure at scale, and are looking for gradual and proactive investment that gets us ahead of population growth and environmental pressures. A forward-thinking and resilient city, in the public's view, must have the right water infrastructure to solve problems for the long term and leave a positive legacy.

Figure 25: Token drop, Go Green Expo, 5-6 April 2025. Throughout our engagements, Aucklanders consistently voted for 'building infrastructure that lasts for a long time ahead of other priorities.

What we understand from our engagements in more detail

As people voted in our token drops across the city, 'building infrastructure that lasts for a long time' emerged as the top priority, ranking above climate preparedness and cost-efficiency[16]. Aucklanders talked about appropriate infrastructure as the best option to solving a wide range of challenges, including droughts, flooding, pollution, and rising costs. Many expressed that delaying investment in large and important infrastructure is short-sighted. Quotes like '*it will never be cheaper than doing it NOW*' and '*Start now... for a better future for ALL*' reflect a conviction that getting on to capital works early is both economically and ethically responsible.

[15] Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey response.

[16] See Appendix A for more details about the priorities Aucklanders voted for during our engagement.

People voting for their preferences on the North Shore, in Parnell and in Māngere.

Our monthly tracker survey data suggests that in the absence of any other information, the majority of Aucklanders prioritise building long-lasting infrastructure behind keeping costs low and improving efficiency, and preparing Auckland for severe weather events (eg. droughts, storms and floods).

Youth were interested in complementary local solutions to our infrastructure issues, wanting us to maintain some space for innovation. They also called for us to collaborate with others to enable better local solutions. For our general public, localised and catchment-based solutions were viewed as complementary to large-scale infrastructure and were particularly valued for their role in enhancing local and household independence to some degree. People appreciated and aspired to the water-sensitive cities model, but recognise that to achieve this degree of collective transformation is a longer-term undertaking.

Balancing the public's desire for immediate, large-scale infrastructure investment with the principles of adaptive planning and cost efficiency presents a strategic challenge. While communities seek visible and decisive action to create a more secure future, we need to emphasise the value of adaptive planning to make sure that we can remain flexible and responsive to changing needs in the face of uncertainty and not create infrastructure that shuts off good options for the future. Ideally, we would start early enough so that we create infrastructure with built-in headroom that allows for upgrades or adjustments over time. This approach would help us avoid overcapitalising while ensuring we're prepared for future challenges with strength and flexibility.

Getting ahead of our immediate challenges is paramount. We heard this loud and clear. We also know that our current sky-to-sea model is going to be increasingly problematic as the impacts of climate change worsen. As we plan for strong, centralised infrastructure that fixes our current issues, we should also ensure that we enable innovation and flexibility where possible at the local level. This dual approach reflects our public's desire for reliable networks, and also some degree of self-sufficiency and adaptability.

Implications:

- Prioritise investment in anchor solutions (the big, centralised solutions) while still allowing the space (headroom) for other smaller or different solutions to be implemented.
- If delaying investment can contribute to long-term adaptability and resilience, the public expects transparency regarding the associated savings and a clear articulation about the strategic intent.
- Support and enable localised and mixed-use solutions where feasible, while maintaining strong network connectivity.
- Acknowledge water-sensitive cities as a long-term goal and build pathways toward that future.

3.4. Keep up with technology, but don't quit your day job

Investing in technology and innovation: fix the basics and leave room for innovation

'[We need] a flexible action plan that acknowledges we live in a changing environment' (Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey respondent)

'When you invest, make sure it's a wise investment and the community can see the benefits.' (Manukau workshop participant)

Summary

Aucklanders support innovation, and most trust in science and technology to deliver practical benefits. This is especially true of the young people we talked to. However, public awareness of water industry innovation is very limited, with the prevailing understanding that innovations in water services are largely to do with pipes. People showed interest in the breadth of innovative ideas, especially those that improve service and long-term financial and environmental outcomes, but when offered the option of putting more resources towards exploring and benefiting from new technology, most people preferred us to focus on investments that have more certain costs and benefits.

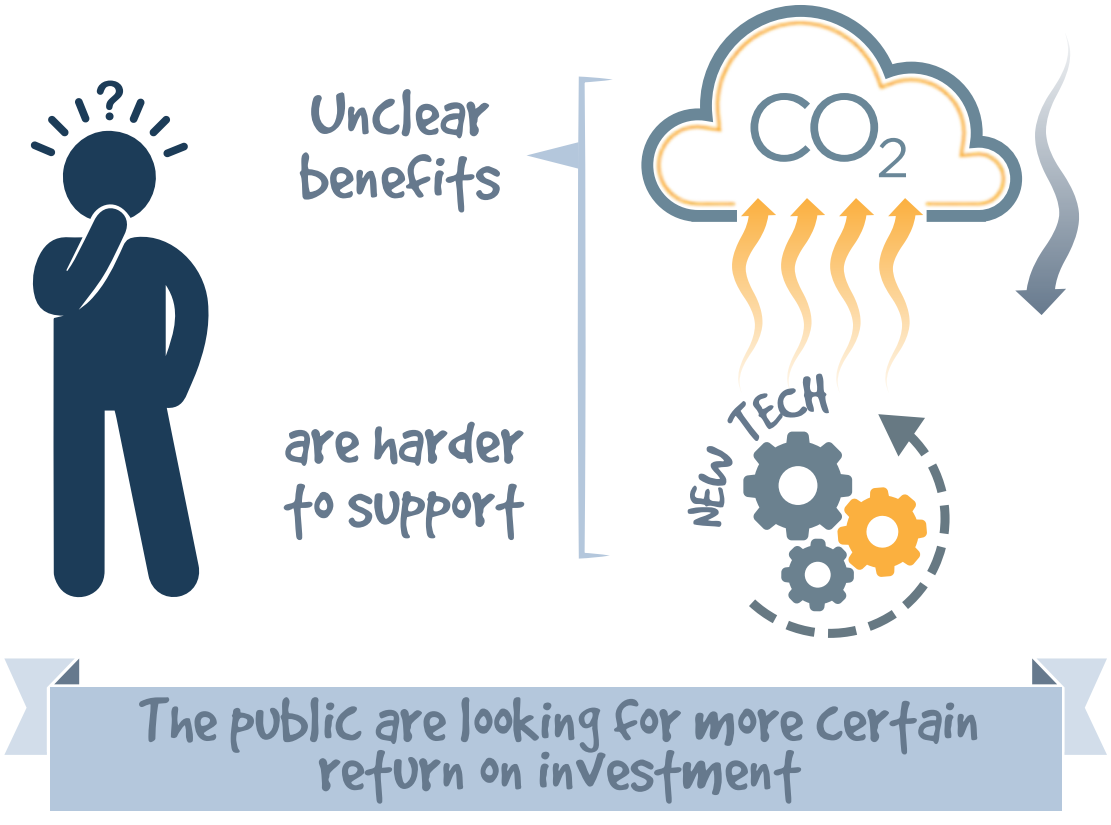


Figure 26: Reducing carbon and investing in new technologies were lower priorities for the public: most would rather see us preparing for extreme weather and investing in built infrastructure that lasts for a long time

What we understand from our engagements in more detail

Innovation was widely welcomed by participants, especially when it offered cost savings or could be introduced incrementally or with low risk. 'Innovation is important. Delivering those innovations is everything.' People recognised the impact of technology and innovation in changing life as we know it, and expect us to maintain a level of innovation rather than 'slipping too far behind.' In our prioritisation activity it was the lowest scoring option (in both the token drops and surveys). It was generally considered very worthy of investment, just not relative to the other options.

With water and wastewater treatment plants in mind, participants expressed interest in how technology could help repurpose waste or get energy from innovating processes, especially the idea of plants evolving into hubs for reclaiming valuable materials. Youth we talked to were keen to see any innovation that diverts waste from landfill: '*Don't leave us your rubbish to clean up!*'[17]

There was enthusiasm for decentralised solutions like greywater systems and rainwater harvesting, and for broader concepts like sponge cities and daylighting streams, which were seen to enhance resilience and amenity. However, a consistent message emerged: we must first 'get the basics right' before we turn our attention to new technology.

Of course, adopting new technology might address the very concerns people raised, allowing us to do more to 'fix the basics' and reduce costs as an organisation over time. This sentiment was mostly absent, perhaps because the people we talked to were new to thinking about the water industry. What we did discern was a nuanced understanding of risk: participants expressed support for innovation when the benefits were measurable and the risks to human health were minimal. Smart metering, in which cost efficiencies are clear and countable, and the risk is billing-related, was seen as a suitable area for innovation. When it came to innovating with biosolids and purified recycled water, people preferred to start with non-edible materials and consider results, before progressing towards food and water, managing risk with the highest degree of concern. Transparency in terms of our approach to risk was strongly encouraged.

Implications:

- We will need to balance the pursuit of innovations we believe will be beneficial in the context of delivering on our core responsibility as a reliable lifeline utility. While Aucklanders are receptive to new technologies, there is some resistance when investment priorities are not seen to focus first on durable infrastructure that meets current needs.
- Innovation was valued. It should be introduced in a staged and practical manner, clearly showing alignment with broader strategic goals such as sustainability, resilience, and long-term value.
- Looking abroad for proven technology is expected.
- Effective communication will be essential to building support for new technologies, highlighting both the problems they solve and their benefits.

[17] Youth Summit participant on why we should find a way to repurpose sludge.

3.5. Let's get more out of waste

Resource recovery: recycle our resources for long-term value generation and resilience

'It makes sense to get full use of all resources rather than throwing them away after one use.' (Metro survey respondent)

'We want to see the change if we are paying for it.' (deliberative workshop participant on recycling)

Summary

There is broad support for resource recovery in principle. The long-term mindset behind the Metropolitan Servicing Strategy resonates in this context, as people envision a future shaped by scarcity, global uncertainty, and climate pressures. People called for us to adopt global best practices and invest in proven technologies that can help us recover useful resources from our treatment processes where there is a market or use for them. People were interested in the costs and potential benefits of resource recovery, wanting us to make sure we are making sound financial decisions as we invest in this space. In discussions, Aucklanders conceded that as the biggest city in the country, it was likely that we would need to be the innovators in this space.

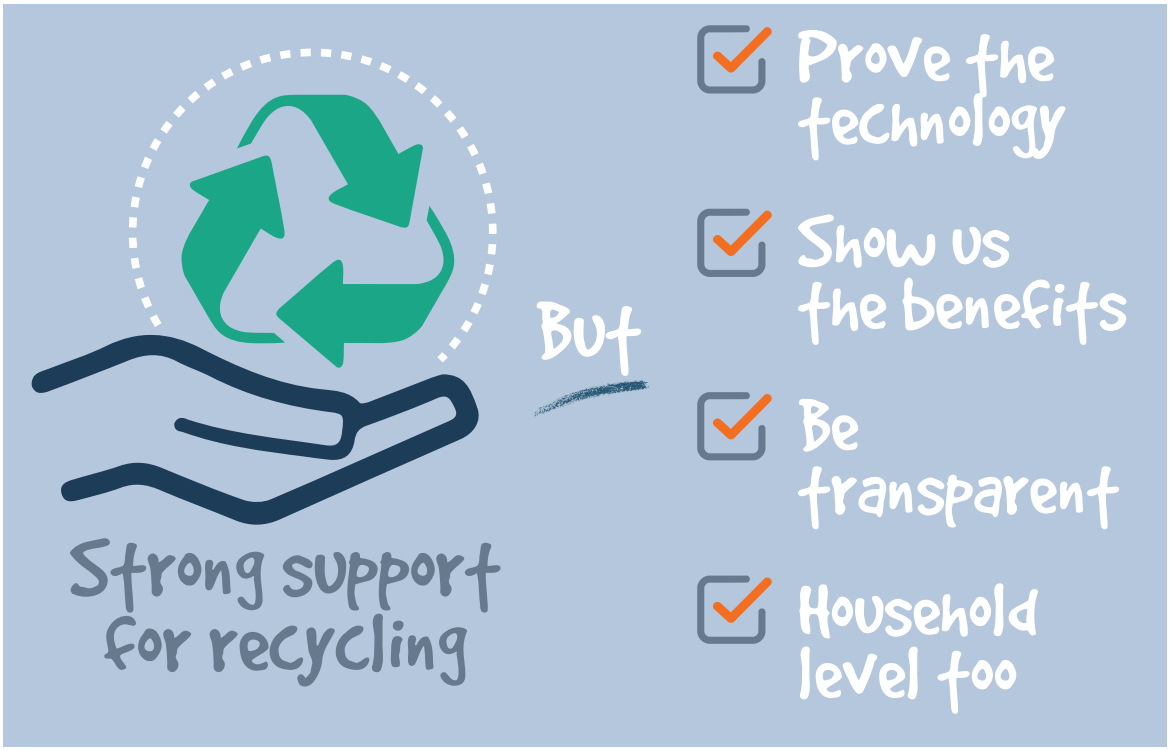


Figure 27: There's strong appetite for resource recovery; people want to know what they can do at home too.

What we understand from our engagements

Many participants saw resource recovery as a practical way to improve self-sufficiency and reduce environmental harm. Capturing rainwater and reusing wastewater (for potable or non-potable use), diverting biosolid waste from landfill, and creating electricity at wastewater treatment plants were all offered as options in pursuit of a more resilient and less polluted future. The idea of maximising use resonated strongly. As one participant noted of recovering value from waste: 'Just do it. The technology is not new, it's proven and already in New Zealand.'

Future security was a part of the reason that our customers were supportive; people considering the 2040s and beyond tended to envisage a more resource-poor global landscape than the one we have today: 'We have limited resources and land. Future mindset matters to us. Smart, innovative investment' (deliberative workshop participant). People were quick to understand that our current water sources could not support the projected future population for Auckland, and that we needed to fill that gap.

Most people are aware of the potential of science and innovation and were keen to understand the costs and benefits better and adopt successful practices from elsewhere. There is a growing appetite for solutions that treat waste as a potential input rather than a problematic by-product. With 76 per cent of respondents to our Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey indicating that it is 'very' or 'extremely' important, we know that resource recovery is a long-term priority for most people[18]. This support is grounded in a desire to deliver long-term economic value and reduce waste streams to the environment.[19]

When we probed deeper into this question during our deliberative workshops, we learned that participants quickly recognised the complexity of resource recovery. They understood that recovering resources requires using up resources, and they are looking for rigorous economic analysis, proven technology, and culturally sensitive approaches to water and biosolids recycling. They wanted to understand how the risks of contamination and other potential issues will be managed, and that our wise investments mean that the benefits are actually realised. In the words of one participant, '*we want to see the change if we are paying for it*.'[20]

While our collateral talked about recovering resources at wastewater treatment plants, people immediately thought of the potential in their own homes and were interested in how we might support household innovations too. The role of rain tanks in the mix of infrastructure was raised frequently as a way of recovering resources at the household level.

Biosolids

Because they are unknown, biosolids need to be explained (usually as the 'waste from the bugs that help break down our wastewater') when we are talking to the public. Yet, with a few pictures explaining our challenge of where our biosolids should go after 2035, people quickly recognised and applied their own resource recovery calculus to the question, asking questions like: 'what do we anticipate the market for fertiliser to be like in 2040? Some were cautious about its application on edible crops, highlighting the need for clarity, education, and regulation to maintain trust.

While most participants were unfamiliar with biosolids specifically, they quickly grasped:

- The value and complexity of recovering value from this by-product
- The importance of safety in reuse
- The trade-offs involved in recovering resources (e.g. energy, cost, emissions)

While our youth were concerned more with reducing waste to landfill, our older participants were interested in the outlook and potential demand for products that we could make from biosolids in the decades to come.

Recycled water

Though it wasn't the focus of our engagements, we had many conversations about recycled water[21]. Younger people tended to promote or support purified recycled water for drinking. Most of our Buzzly submissions and youth participants encouraged us to invest in our wastewater plants in order to get more out of what is currently '*wasted*'[22]. Some of our more mature Aucklanders were interested in how it's possible to make it safe enough to drink. While one Albany Mall shopper offered, '*If you show me how you make it safe, then yep I'll drink it*', another stated flatly: '*You'll never be able to make it safe.*' For context, current acceptance for drinking purified recycled water ('I would drink this water') in Auckland is at 41 per cent[23]. Men are significantly more likely to be happy to drink it than women (49 versus 34 per cent).

[18] n=442. We also asked the following question in our Monthly Tracker survey: How important do you believe it is for our city to invest in sustainable and environmentally friendly biosolids disposal methods, even if it requires additional funding? 58% of Aucklanders responded that it is either 'very' or 'extremely' important, n=3507.

[19] See Appendix D for more information on this question, and the follow up question 'please explain your answer.'

[20] Deliberative workshop (North)

[21] Watercare has already held a citizens' assembly on the next source of water for Auckland in 2022, in which our assembly recommended purified recycled water as the best option for the city, with desalination to remain 'on the table' in case it is needed.

[22] See Appendix E: 'Finding ways to recycle and reuse water and other stuff' 59 mentions (out of 88)

[23] For using water for non-potable purposes ('e.g. watering the garden, showering'), acceptance rises to 65 per cent. See Appendix D, which includes a link to the full data set for Auckland, and by local board area. For desalination, 57 per cent of Aucklanders said that they would be comfortable drinking desalinated water, with 74 per cent happy to use it for non-potable purposes (n=4844). For context, 78 per cent of Aucklanders surveyed agree that the water supplied by Watercare is safe to drink, with most who do not agree saying they 'don't know' if it's safe to drink (18 per cent). See the links to the report in Appendix D.

'People were interested in the cultural and social dimensions of purified recycled water. Respecting tikanga Māori and engaging communities in open, transparent dialogue was seen as essential to building trust: '*Consideration should be given to Māori who may find recycling wastewater tap*u.[24]'

There is a clear appetite for more public education on how wastewater recycling works. Many respondents who were open to or supportive of this source of water encouraged us to learn from international examples and avoid reinventing the wheel. Non-potable options, particularly for irrigation, commercial use, or toilets, were popular as a first step. The success of any of our innovation investments will depend not only on the technology, but on building public trust through transparency and communication.

A couple of respondents to this question in our survey felt that '*there are better things to focus and spend time and money on*,' or that this all sounded like '*an expensive woke idea*'. However, respondents in both surveys overwhelmingly supported us putting more effort into getting more out of the circular economy, with assurance that any kind of recycling solutions were cost-effective, safe, and likely to be beneficial to future generations.

Implications:

- There is strong public mandate for resource recovery long term, with interim steps. We should prioritise infrastructure that supports circular economy principles, designing for scalability and adaptability to manage future resource constraints, paired with robust governance, public engagement, and transparent risk management. We would need monitoring systems, public dashboards, and community engagement platforms.
- There is some appetite for innovation and global best practice. Aucklanders expect Watercare to be proactive nationally in sustainable infrastructure. We should invest in pilot programmes and consider collaborating with universities and global leaders in recycling.
- High receptivity to biosolids beneficial reuse suggests an opportunity to build public support through education and demonstration projects, explore market development for biosolids-based products (e.g. biochar, construction materials), with the suggestion that we start with non-potable or non-edible reuse, building trust over time.
- Aucklanders want us to plan ahead to maximise long-term value, leaving space for innovation, Keeping affordability in mind, we need to consider modular, flexible systems that can evolve depending on need.

[24] We have had conversations with mana whenua about alternative water sources; this is an ongoing dialogue.

4

He kōrerorero

Discussion

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Discussion

> *'The longer we leave it, the more expensive this will be for us and future generations'* – Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey respondent.[25]

Aucklanders told us they want to see a shift away from past underinvestment and reactive fixes towards upfront investments that deliver long-term resilience and cost savings over time. In addition, we found strong public support for reducing waste, be it water, money, or potentially reusable resources. In our token drop exercise, 'keeping costs low and improving efficiency,' was ranked the third highest priority, after building infrastructure that lasts and preparing Auckland for severe weather. For our monthly tracker respondents, keeping costs low was the number one priority across the region.[26]

What we have come to understand is this: Aucklanders want us to prioritise upfront investment where it delivers future resilience and cost efficiencies.

The public is asking us to spend the least possible amount of money needed to secure the most resilient and affordable water future for the generations to come.

It's about decision-making, timing and value

At first glance 'keeping costs low' sounds relatively simple but our conversations revealed a more complex story and it became clear that cutting costs must not come at the cost of service. No one we spoke to accepted having an unreliable water supply and wastewater overflows as an acceptable consequence of keeping costs low. Whether they are talking about saving money now or in the future, people insist that we do our job well:

> *'Stick to the basics and do them well. Keep water rates to the rate of inflation'* (deliberative workshop participant)

> *'Keep to your core business. Do it well and efficiently with no waste and accountability for what is spent.'* (Metropolitan servicing strategy survey respondent)

Most Aucklanders we talked to want to see a water future that avoids big issues later. We heard strong support for a resilient water future, and people generally accepted that this will take effort and resources. However, there is a strong belief that collectively we should be able to do more with what we have, rather than charging people more or reducing our performance.

Many participants acknowledged that their water bills were among the lowest of all household utility expenses, and yes, they could probably use less water and reduce their bills. But that wasn't the end of the conversation. If people are expected to reduce waste at the household level to 'stay afloat', they also want to see Watercare doing the same at the city level. Willingness to pay for a more secure future is strong, if value and accountability are clear. Without this, it doesn't matter how good we make the future sound, people don't want to pay.

Value matters more than price.	Many people are willing to pay more for a secure and sustainable water future, but only if they can see where their money is going and how it delivers real, long-term value.
People want to know what we are doing.	Aucklanders want to understand what the long-term strategy is, and how costs will be managed along the way. We heard a strong desire for transparency around how funds are used, and for any price rises to be incrementally applied (sudden price shocks are a concern), with clear communication.
Efficiency means mutual responsibility.	People talked about using less water at home, and expected Watercare to be doing the same, cutting waste, trimming fat, and demonstrating wise investments at scale.

[25] Response to the question: 'Do you have any other comments to help us shape the water future?' n=442

[26] See appendix D.

Affordability concerns are less about water alone and more about the broader squeeze on household disposable income: rising food prices, rent, mortgage payments, and other utilities. This context doesn't make water pricing irrelevant; it reinforces the need for fair, transparent, and effective pricing structures that support conservation without disproportionately impacting renters, low-income households, or larger families.

Pricing

Different pricing approaches and support mechanisms were suggested as solutions to the need for a new water source:

> *'Increase the price and give discounts for reducing household use for example. Rainwater tanks for new builds to use for grey/black water/gardens.'*

> *'Why not charge water usage based on usage over summer, with winter usage not metered and just charged at a flat rate, credited against the metered summer charge?'*

> *'Make it more expensive to make clear the value and price of water! Sure, I don't want high water bills either but if they stay low it's unrealistic & promotes waste.'* - metropolitan servicing strategy survey responses.

Discussions about costs often blurred saving water and saving money, and the ongoing cost of wastewater management was noticeably missing from the suggestions. Many people believe pricing signals could helpfully drive behavioural change, while others stressed the importance of keeping costs down, especially for those already under financial pressure. Throughout the conversations we heard people reiterate that they want to be a part of the solution.[27]

Homeowner-led solutions

Many homeowners promoted this sense of partnership by advocating for household-level interventions such as greywater systems and rainwater tanks. These initiatives were seen as practical, common-sense ways individuals could support broader goals, helping to build water resilience and reduce reliance on central infrastructure. In some cases, they were also viewed as more cost-effective alternatives to large-scale investments:

> *'Why can't every house built have a water tank installed, and a grey water tank? We're happy to let construction companies rip people off for supplies left and right. Why not make things like water tanks compulsory in every build?'* (Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey)

Household solutions such as the one mentioned here would make a positive difference to our city in a number of ways: greywater tanks reduce water demand and wastewater flows, and rainwater tanks also have the potential to help with flooding if they are emptied prior to heavy rainfall. Rain tanks and greywater systems are an important part of the solution to the challenges ahead. However, their effectiveness would vary significantly depending on the site, and when combined with the need to maintain a network connection, the overall costs are likely to be higher than many people anticipate.

Renters

Onsite solutions and improving household water efficiency is more difficult for renters, who make up 41 per cent[28] of Auckland's residents. The reality is that most renters are strapped for cash and don't want to have additional conversations with their landlords about water[29]. Any water efficiency improvements for that large cohort of our community will not be hardware or appliance-based and certainly not large rain tanks or greywater systems. Instead, renters in our survey suggested better public education and community engagement around water literacy:

> *'Give proper education for people about the need of saving water'* (renter – Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey)

> *'More community engagement, transparent progress updates'* (renter – Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey)

> *'Having more workshops, events to inform communities'* (renter – Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey)

Again, the role of public as partner rather than just customer emerged. Renters were no less ambitious for a better future with a thriving environment, but what they suggest we do now at the household level is to increase their knowledge and engagement with the water challenges we have shared with them, rather than invest in hardware. They want to be a part of the solution too, but with capital invested in knowledge and behaviours that can move house with them.

[27] Watercare is legislatively required to keep costs low, so any use of pricing as a demand reduction mechanism (beyond what it already is as a volumetrically charged good) would need to be deemed appropriate by our regulator.

[28] See 2023 Census - https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/home-ownership-increases-and-housing-quality-improves/

[29] 'Please don't make me pay more money, I'm already so poor.' (Renter, Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey).

Trust and transparency

We were reminded often of the importance of the responsible use of funds. Most people we talked to don't have a lot of money to spare and they wanted us to know that as we talked about spending money on their behalf. Our public is looking for wise investments that deliver enduring savings or strengthen community resilience in the face of climate change and population growth.

'We want Watercare to smartly invest in future proofing the water system to make it sustainable and have water for our kids. We don't mind paying a bit extra, but spend wisely!' (deliberative workshop participant)

Public support for infrastructure investment hinges on trust, transparency, and a clear sense of value. People want water services to remain affordable, but not at the expense of resilience or service quality. They see affordability as a call to reduce waste, not to compromise. Our strategy must reflect this by enabling well-planned investment that avoids higher future costs and drives long-term efficiencies. There is strong support for "spending to save," where timely investment delivers future resilience and reduces reactive costs. If investment is delayed, we must clearly communicate why, showing how it contributes to adaptability and long-term savings. Without this clarity, delays risk being perceived as broken promises or mismanagement.

Trimming fat

No matter where we went, we found strong public support for reducing waste, be it water or money. A lot of people expressed frustration when they talked about how public money is wasted, because for them, this represents many lost opportunities for our city. Aucklanders we talked to were looking for us to amend past underinvestment in water infrastructure, and prevent long-term reactive spending. What we came to understand is that prioritising upfront investment where it secures future resilience and cost efficiencies should be our guiding principle: '*the longer we leave it, the more expensive this will be for us and future generations.*[30]'

Concluding remarks

Aucklanders have a strong appetite for decisive action. Across our engagements and our survey, the message was clear: people want us to build wisely for the long-term, solve problems as soon as possible, recover resources, prepare for climate change and avoid making decisions that push costs or disruption into the future. 'Building infrastructure that lasts' was the most selected priority in our token drop and our survey, reflecting a desire for certainty, permanence, and visible progress.

At the same time, there is a parallel and equally strong expectation that we should spend money wisely, leave room for innovation, and be ready to respond to extreme weather with unpredictable results. Participants expressed concern about waste, inefficiency, and the risk of overcommitting to solutions that may not suit future conditions. Our public is aware of climate change, population shifts, technological advances and the huge impact they are having. They want to watch the future unfold alongside us, help us to avoid making mistakes, and help us to keep costs low for as long as possible.

The tension lies in how these two priorities coexist. People want us to act boldly and decisively, but not at the expense of future adaptability or financial prudence. This is a reflection of the complexity of public expectations; they know infrastructure is inherently inflexible and urgently needed in Auckland but there is also a wide acceptance that nobody knows what's coming around the corner. Aucklanders are asking us to be both visionary and careful, to plan for the most likely scenarios while remaining as agile as possible in the face of uncertainty.

The Aucklanders we talked to want us to work with others to protect the city now and in future, and they want us to be strategic about it: spend our scarce resources wisely, so that we have the best mix of infrastructure, debt and flexible options to meet our future challenges, whatever they may be.

Engagement will be key to navigating the way ahead. Aucklanders are not simply asking for less spending or more infrastructure. Many were willing to engage with complexity, asking thoughtful questions about trade-offs and expressing interest in how decisions are made. They're asking for clarity, confidence, and a sense that we are making future-proof decisions with our shared best interests in mind.

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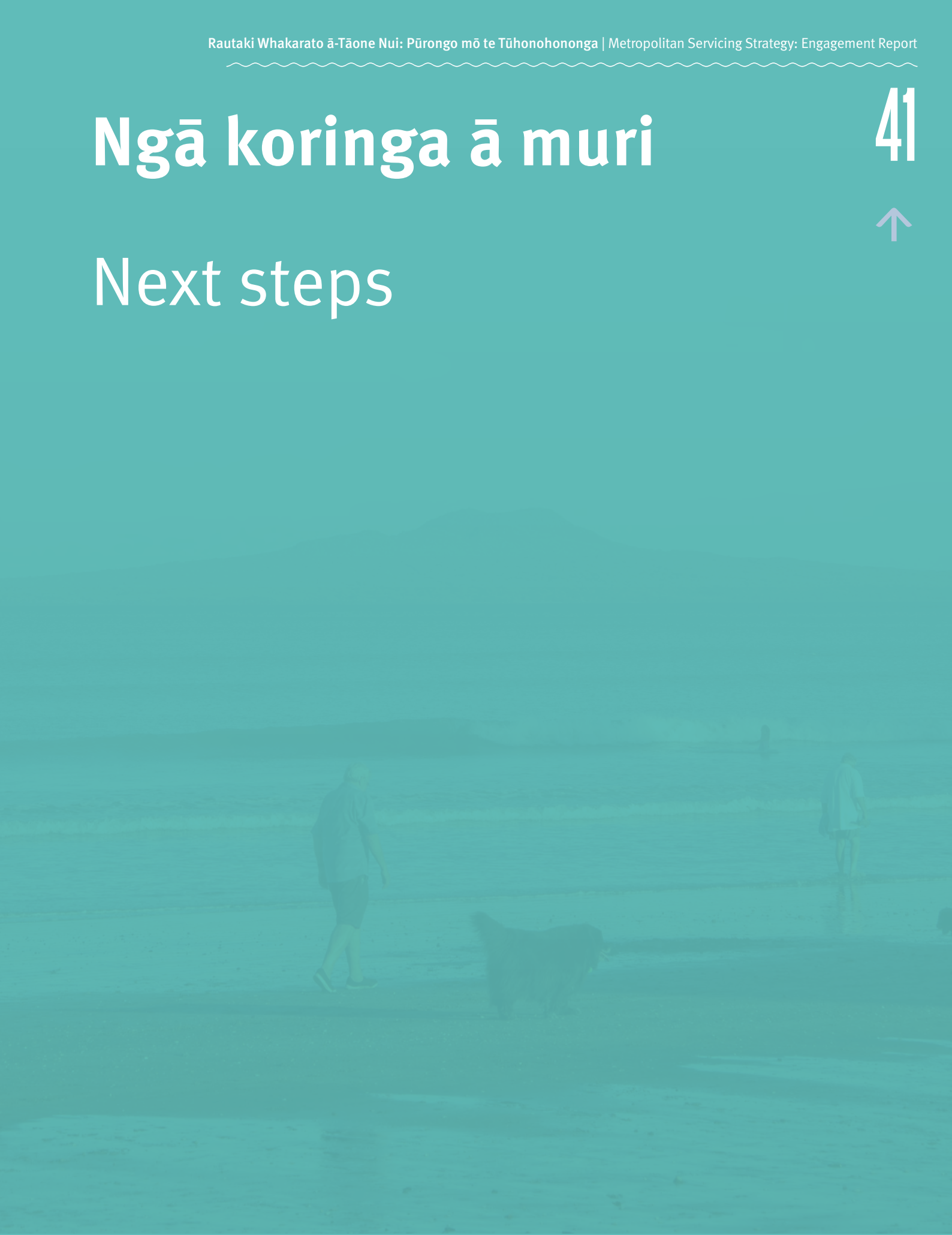
[30] Metropolitan Servicing Strategy respondent to the question: 'Do you have any other comments to help us shape the water future?' n=442.

Ngā koringa ā muri

Next steps



Ngā koringa ā muri

Next steps

The feedback gathered will play a central role in shaping our future planning and decision-making. As a first step, we will return to the community to check our understanding of the feedback we received. This validation process ensures that we accurately reflect the views and priorities expressed by Aucklanders and remain accountable to the people we serve.

Once validated, the insights will be incorporated into our internal planning processes. The feedback will be used to refine our decision-making framework so that it better reflects community values, including environmental stewardship, social equity, and affordability. This will help ensure that future investments and initiatives are aligned with what matters most to Aucklanders.

Building on this foundation, we will develop a dynamic adaptive pathway plan. This approach allows us to respond flexibly to changing conditions while staying true to the public's priorities:

- **Focus on the local environment:** Aucklanders strongly support investment in visible, long-term improvements that go beyond minimum legal requirements, particularly those that reduce pollution, protect people against severe weather and can accommodate a growing population. There is a clear willingness to pay for positive environmental outcomes, provided costs are transparent, phased, effective, and affordable.

- **Enable genuine partnership:** People want to be treated as trusted partners in shaping the future of water services. They value transparency, shared responsibility, and empowerment. As climate pressures increase, working collaboratively with communities is seen as a necessary and cost-effective way to reduce vulnerability and manage risk.

- **Advance circularity and resource recovery:** There is strong public support for smarter use of resources such as biosolids and wastewater. We are expected to create space for future innovations in this area, without compromising core service delivery or financial discipline.

- **Ensure the fundamentals are strong:** In a time of sector change and uncertainty, Aucklanders want confidence that we are focused on proactively addressing today's challenges while preparing for what's ahead.

The feedback we received highlights a community that is receptive, hopeful, and committed to shaping a water future that is enduring. By aligning investment strategies with the outcomes that people told us that they want, and continuing our dialogue, Watercare can build trust and ensure that we leave a legacy of good-decision-making for future generations.

Ngā tāpirihanga

Appendices

Appendix A: Token drops

To gain feedback on community priorities, we encouraged people to 'spend' tokens between the following categories, as a proxy for where they would like the money from their water bill to be directed in order to prepare for the future:

- Reducing pollution and emissions
- Preparing Auckland for severe weather events (e.g. droughts, storms and floods)
- Recycling and reusing water and resources
- Investing in new technology to improve services
- Building infrastructure that lasts for a long time
- Keeping costs low and improving efficiency (not included in all events)

We also put this question into our surveys. The table below summarises how tokens were allocated across the categories:

Priority	F2F engagements Percentage of tokens and rank		Metropolitan strategy survey		Monthly tracker (percentage and rank)	
Building infrastructure that lasts for a long time	**61%**	1st	**64%**	1st	**46%**	3rd
Recycling and reusing water and resources	**57%**	2nd	**48%**	3rd	**36%**	5th
Preparing Auckland for severe weather events (e.g. droughts, storms and floods)	**55%**	3rd	**62%**	2nd	**57%**	2nd
Keeping costs low and improving efficiency*	**51%***	4th*	**48%**	3rd	**72%**	1st
Reducing pollution and emissions	**38%**	5th	**36%**	5th	**37%**	4th
Investing in new technology to improve services	**38%**	6th	**33%**	6th	**32%**	6th
Total	**3469 responses**		**442 responses**		**448 responses**	

*Note: Keeping costs low and improving efficiency was not an option in our Albany Mall pop-up. Response numbers are calculated using the number of tokens dropped (either two per person or three per person).

Appendix B: Engagement activities in detail

During our engagement period, we used the following engagement methods:

i. Drop-ins, pop-ups, and token drops

ii. Youth events and Buzzly online platform

iii. Online and paper surveys

iv. Social media – It's worth getting off the couch for

v. Email campaigns

vi. Deliberative workshops

vii. Ongoing monitoring – representative samples

viii. Newsletter (Tapped In) and targeted leaflet drops

ix. Webinar

The following pages explain the methods in more detail.

i. Drop-ins, pop-ups, and token drops

We held community events in 17 locations in north, south, central, east and west Auckland. These were attended by Watercare staff who provided access to information about the Metropolitan Servicing Strategy or expert advice on a variety of topics. Getting out face-to-face into the community was important because it allowed us to meet people where they are — in familiar, everyday spaces — and have real-time, two-way conversations that built trust, surfaced local insights, and reached those who might not otherwise engage with us.

Figure 28: Poster describing our engagements across the city.

ii. Youth events and Buzzly online platform

See the section on youth in 'Our engagement approach' in the body of this report.

iii. online and paper surveys

A survey (online and paper) was conducted during the engagement period, to ensure that people had the opportunity to provide in-depth feedback on the challenges we face if they were not able to attend the engagements. The survey asked questions about:

- What is currently working well (and not)?
- How much do people know about how the water system works?
- What should we prioritise in our investments for the future?
- Should we invest earlier (more preparation) or later (more ability to adapt to uncertainty) to meet the challenges of climate change?
- How important is it that we invest in innovations that reduce or recycle waste?
- What should we invest in as we adapt to climate change (ie. fortify vs decentralise)
- What is the public's appetite for water efficiency and deferring investment (cheaper) vs. investing earlier to have more water than we need (safer)?

Respondents were encouraged to read the information booklet for context before they submitted their responses. 442 usable survey responses were gathered, from across the region. Our survey data revealed a skew toward homeowners and older people, which risked underrepresenting the perspectives of other key groups. To ensure a more balanced and inclusive understanding, we proactively engaged with additional segments, particularly young people and renters.

Figure 29: example question from our Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey.

To control for 'joiner' skew (where survey responses tended to come from those already highly engaged) we put similar questions into our monthly tracker survey (a representative sample of 400 Aucklanders per month). This valuable data set helps us monitor shifts over time and understand the views of different communities. We also introduced a $100 Prezzy card incentive to broaden participation and reach less engaged audiences. Links to the online survey reports and other insights are found in Appendix D.

iv. Dedicated webpage and social media: Auckland's water future: it's worth getting off the couch for

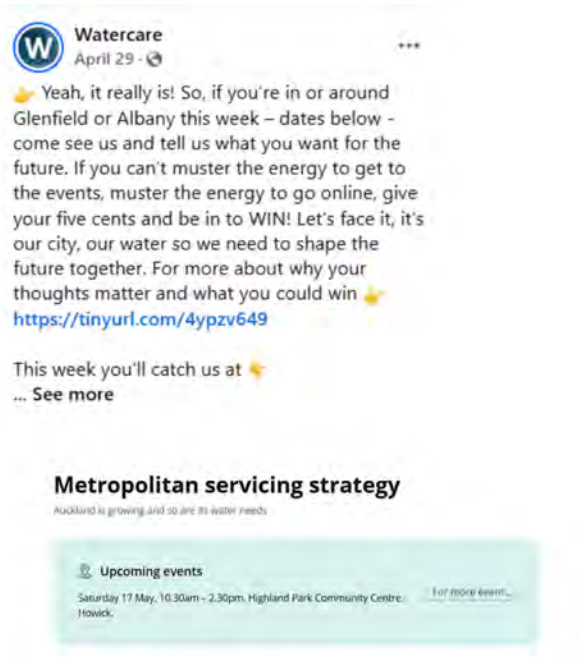


Figure 30: Auckland's water future social media campaign.

v. Email campaigns

As part of our broader engagement strategy, we ran a targeted email campaign to ensure we reached as many Aucklanders as possible—especially those who couldn't attend a face-to-face event. We reached out to bill-payers when we were in the area using targeted address data. For each local engagement we emailed approximately 2,000 households. These were selected using addresses within 1-2 kilometres of our upcoming events. Our email campaign reached 17,758 unique recipients, with an impressive 57 per cent open rate (10,056 people opened the message inviting them to stop by their local market or community centre).

Figure 31: Example email inviting people to come and talk to us at Highland Park community centre.

Email is a cost-effective and efficient way to connect with a large audience, allowing us to invite participation in our survey and boost awareness about the Metropolitan Servicing Strategy. The emails were timed to align with key campaign moments and included clear calls to action. Beyond promoting the survey, the emails served as a gateway to further information. Each message included links to our dedicated webpage and the easy-to-read information booklet, helping recipients explore the strategy in more depth at their own pace.

vi. Deliberative workshops

As part of our engagement, we held two deliberative workshops, one in south Auckland and one on the North Shore, to gain deeper insights into public perspectives on the future of water services. These sessions aimed to involve a diverse and representative cross-section of Aucklanders in meaningful dialogue about the city's water challenges and opportunities.

Recruitment: people who completed our survey were asked whether they were interested in participating in further research, and from this pool of interested respondents, we recruited two groups of around 25 each. Each group had people from 18 to over 80, roughly half male and female, renters and homeowners, and a mix of ethnicities. People in the West, CBD and North Shore were invited to our Glenfield event, and people from east and south Auckland, and south of the CBD were invited to our Manukau event.

Facilitation: the workshops were supported by an independent facilitator, and were designed to uncover community values, priorities, and concerns, by working through the complex trade-offs involved in long-term water infrastructure planning. Through structured activities and inclusive facilitation techniques, participants explored key issues and collaboratively generated ideas to address pressing challenges in Auckland's water system.

By balancing learning with active participation, the workshops created a space for listening, constructive dialogue, and pragmatic problem-solving. Staff were part of the process and had the opportunity to listen to the mixed views of people from all different backgrounds, ages and parts of Auckland.

Figure 32: participants debating costs and benefits of innovation at the Manukau deliberative workshop event, 14 May 2025

During these 2.5-hour events, participants rotated around different work stations, and attempted to find consensus (in groups of four or five) on the following issues (presented as a spectrum):

1. Should Watercare quietly focus on the basics, or lead the way in cutting air, water, and land pollution, even if it costs more?

   Would you rather... *do the bare minimum and stay within the law, or support Watercare to lead efforts to cut land, air and water pollution in Auckland?*

2. Auckland faces yo-yo weather - droughts followed by floods followed by droughts...

   Would you rather... *Watercare invests now to get ahead of climate extremes (even if that means higher bills), or fix problems as they come?*

3. Biosolids and recycled water could be turned into compost, and clean drinking water, but it takes money, effort, and trust.

   Would you rather... *keep doing what we've always done (landfill, flush, waste), or invest in systems that reuse water and waste—even if they take more time, money, and changing perceptions?*

4. Smart technology could transform how we manage water. But not every new tech works.

   Would you rather... *Watercare just sticks to its core business, or try things that are new, even if that means some might fail?*

At the end of the event, the participants wrote one message for Watercare and upvoted the best ones for Watercare to receive as advice. Top messages from our south Auckland event were:

- *To commit to implementing a prioritised and cost-effective plan to proactively improve Auckland's water management processes.*
- *We want Watercare to smartly invest in future proofing the water system to make it sustainable and have water for our kids. We don't mind paying a bit extra, but spend wisely!*
- *Start now and implement and invest for ALL to benefit for a better future for ALL.*

Top voted messages from our North Shore event were:

- *Do the basics right, then it will be easier to get buy-in for innovation. Work smarter, learn from what other countries are doing to use technology.*
- *It will never be cheaper than doing it NOW*

- *Invest in innovation that makes smart use of our resources*

Participants enjoyed the challenge of understanding the trade-offs, finding consensus and talking to people from different walks of life. With enough time to learn about issues more in depth and discuss their views with others, participants sought points of consensus and shared their views on each issue. They were then able to come to a position on the issue that they articulated on paper, or to their table host (or both). Visual facilitation (scribing) helped participants see what others were saying, and that we were listening.

vii. Ongoing representative sampling: monthly tracker

We run an ongoing survey with a representative sample of Aucklanders: the monthly tracker. This survey asks a variety of questions about perspectives, values, water use, water knowledge and more. We were able to use this survey to compare whether our more engaged participants and respondents knew more or felt differently to the above questions than a representative panel, and to understand public sentiment about long-term water and wastewater issues at the regional and demographic level. We are also able to better understand the different sentiment between regions of Auckland. See Appendix D for more information and insights from this survey.

viii. Newsletter: Tapped In

To extend the reach of our consultation, we included a feature in Tapped In, our digital publication with an audience of well over 400,000 households (approximately 320,000 emailed and 120,000 print editions). This (Autumn 2025) issue focused on our business plan, outlining our investment priorities and how we intend to fund and deliver services over the next decade. By embedding our consultation within this broader context, we were able to show how current commitments fit into a longer-term vision—one that still has room for community input and influence. Notably, the email version of this issue had an impressive open rate of 61 per cent, demonstrating strong engagement from our audience.

The article invited readers to engage with the consultation by highlighting that while some investments are already planned, there is flexibility in how we support the city further into the future. This message: "these are our commitments, but tell us what matters to you" helped position the consultation as a meaningful opportunity for residents to have their say about the longer term. Featuring it in Tapped In ensured it reached a large, informed audience already interested in our work, reinforcing transparency and encouraging participation. For the full issue, see https://www.watercare.co.nz/home/about-us/what-we-do/reports-and-publications

Figure 33: Metropolitan Servicing Strategy article in Tapped In, Autumn 2025.

ix) Webinar

We hosted a webinar to explain the key issues, challenges, and our servicing strategy. For those unable to attend our face-to-face engagements, we made the webinar available online to ensure everyone had access to the information (view the webinar via our dedicated webpage).

Figure 34: Metropolitan Servicing Strategy webinar image

The webinar contained the following key messages:

- **Future-focused planning:** The strategy looks 70 years ahead to ensure Auckland's water services remain resilient, adaptable, and sustainable for future generations.
- **Responding to pressure:** Climate change, population growth, and ageing infrastructure mean we need more flexible planning to balance short-term needs with long-term outcomes.
- **Integrated network:** The strategy covers a single interconnected water network and four largely independent wastewater networks servicing broadly the same geographic area from Pukekohe to Whangaparāoa, with most water sourced from outside the Auckland region and most wastewater discharged into the Manukau Harbour.
- **Three major challenges:** By the 2040s, Auckland will need a new water source, a new biosolids disposal solution, and more capacity for treated wastewater, while managing affordability, environmental impact, climate change and population growth.
- **Adaptive planning approach:** The strategy uses trigger points and scenario planning to keep future options open and ensure decisions made today don't limit tomorrow's possibilities.
- **Community engagement is essential:** Watercare is actively involving communities to build awareness, gather feedback, and foster shared responsibility for Auckland's water future.
- **Transparency and influence:** While some decisions are bound by regulation, communities can influence investment priorities, pace of change, and the values that guide future planning.

The webinar didn't provide an avenue for feedback but participants were advised at the end of the recording, how they could provide feedback.

Appendix C: Seeking consensus to understand community views on the role of water efficiency in our strategic planning

Our Metropolitan Servicing Strategy survey asked respondents to consider the role of water efficiency in long-term water management by asking if they would rather delay investment in a new source by pursuing more water efficient behaviours and investments or use more water and pay earlier.

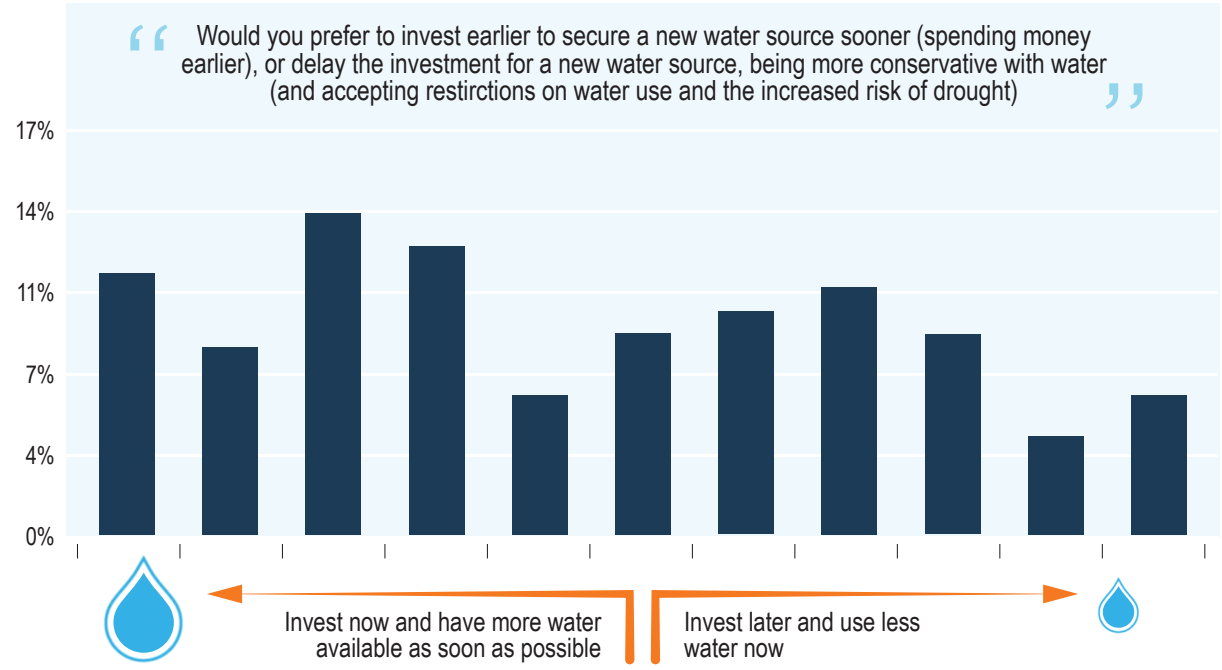


Figure 35: Spread of responses regarding whether we save and delay or build to get ahead

The question was intended to bring out two different tensions:

- Should we pay it forward for the next generation, vs. keep costs low by deferring investment and see what happens?

AND

- Do we believe our community could collectively be more conservative with water vs. do we prefer a system where we don't rely so much on water efficient behaviour and individuals use and pay for as much water as they want to use?

In our face-to-face discussions we were able to tease out the tensions here. Our discussions revealed that Aucklanders hold a complex and varied understanding of how to treat water, viewing it as a shared taonga and a consumer good at the same time. They also highlighted significant differences in how communities perceive drought risk.

Our 'water-saving heroes' tended to accept that climate change would produce more severe droughts without question. In discussion, when they judged that water tanks – which can run dry at the height of summer – were useful for stormwater management but not as a supply of water during drought, they were resigned to advocating for large-scale infrastructure solutions to enable the health of our future environment. As one young person we talked to put it: '*I never considered how much water we need to make recycling work.*' Conversely, those with more conservative or market-oriented views found themselves conflicted. While they did not believe that we could rely on individual conservation efforts (human nature) and so need to get a new source of water available earlier, they were in no way inclined to increase financial contributions to a monopoly provider. They ended up advocating for more water earlier too.

Almost all respondents ended up agreeing that we need to prepare a new water source sooner rather than later, but their starting points and how they got there were quite different.

Appendix D: Survey insights

The following charts are selected from online reports displaying survey results from two main surveys mentioned in this document, our monthly tracker survey (representative public) and our bespoke survey for the metropolitan servicing strategy.

Aucklanders' perceptions of the likelihood of droughts and floods in the next decades:

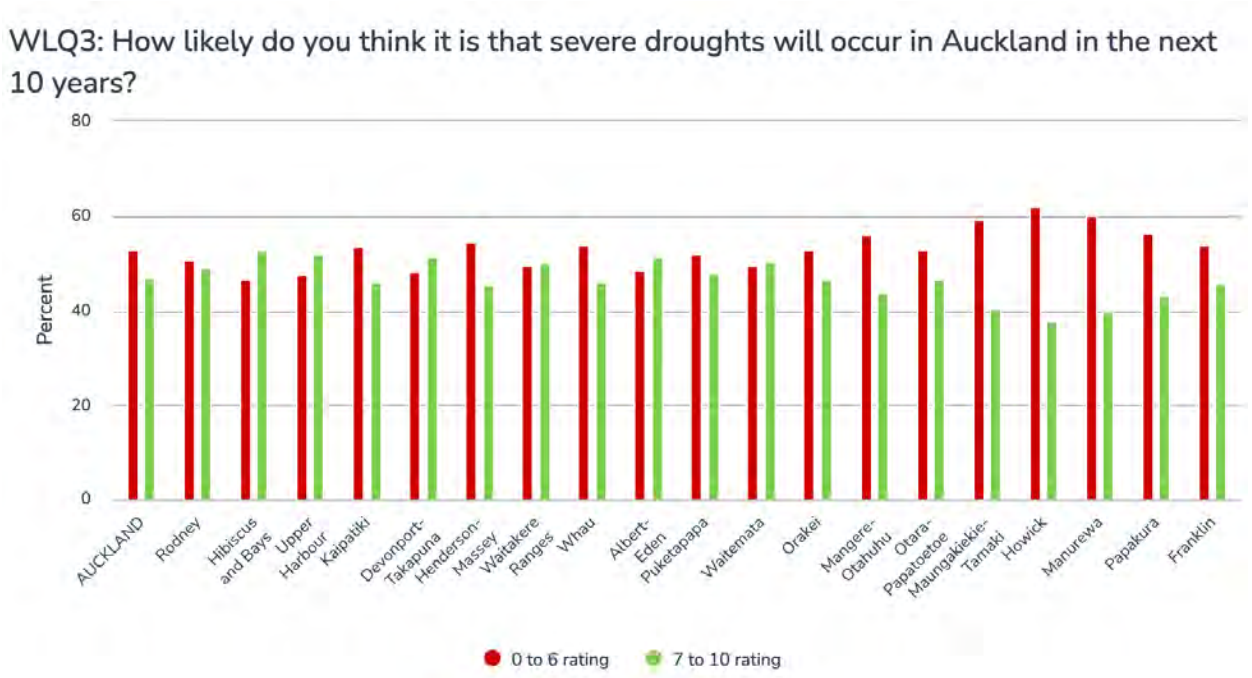


Figure 36: Monthly tracker survey data from 2024/5 showing people's perception of upcoming droughts (n=5,257).

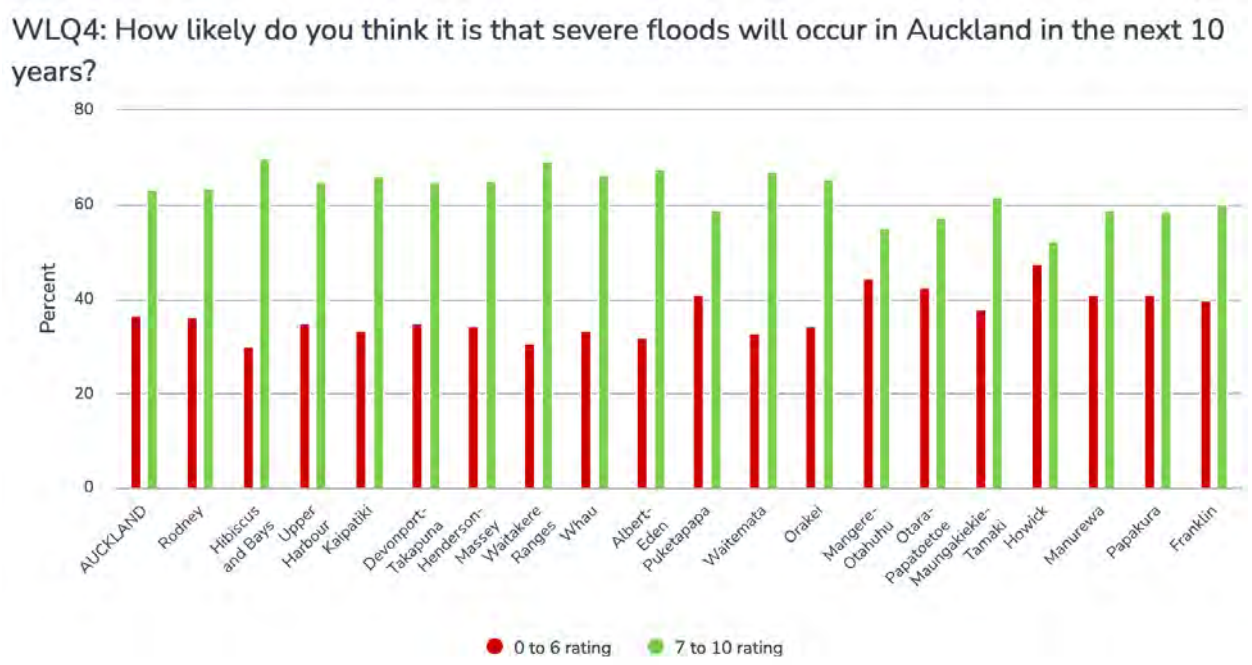


Figure 37: Monthly tracker survey data from 2024/5 showing people's perception of upcoming floods (n=5,257).

The following information is about what people want to hear from Watercare from the same database(Monthly Tracker, n=5081):

Segment	Value	Percent	% of Total	Responses	
AUCKLAND	Q16r1: How Watercare protects the environment		43.6%	21.8%	2,217
	Q16r2: How Watercare is planning for the future of Auckland		64.4%	32.2%	3,274
	Q16r4: Watercare projects in your area		49.1%	24.6%	2,497
	Q16r5: How we can reduce the amount of water at home		42.3%	21.2%	2,149
	Q16r6: Where your water comes from and how it is treated		51%	25.5%	2,590
	Q16r7: What Watercare does to keep costs down		53.9%	27%	2,738
	Q16r98: Other (specify)		1.8%	0.9%	89
	Q16r99: None of these		8.5%	4.2%	431
		Total Responses		157.4%	5,081

Figure 38: What do people want to hear about? Monthly tracker survey data 2024/5.

The following Monthly Tracker question shows that most Aucklanders strongly agree that everyone should play their role in protecting the environment:

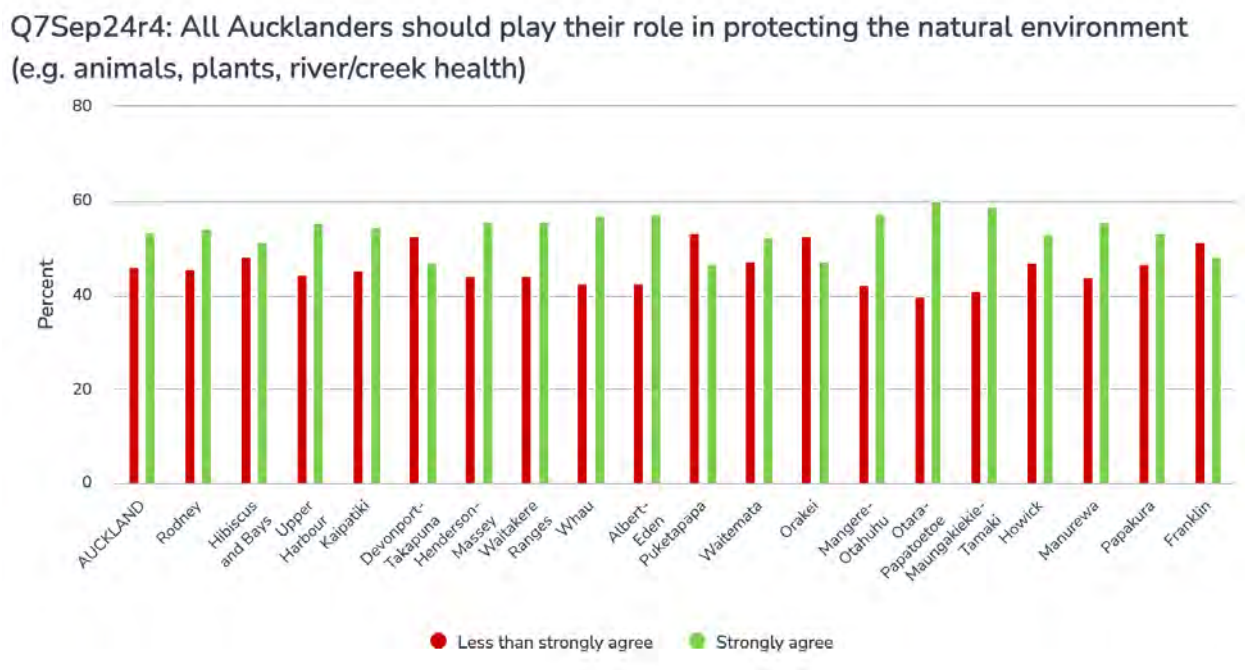


Figure 39: Whose job it is to look after the natural environment? Monthly tracker survey data 2024/5, n=5,257

Below are the priorities of Auckland from our Monthly Tracker (n=448):

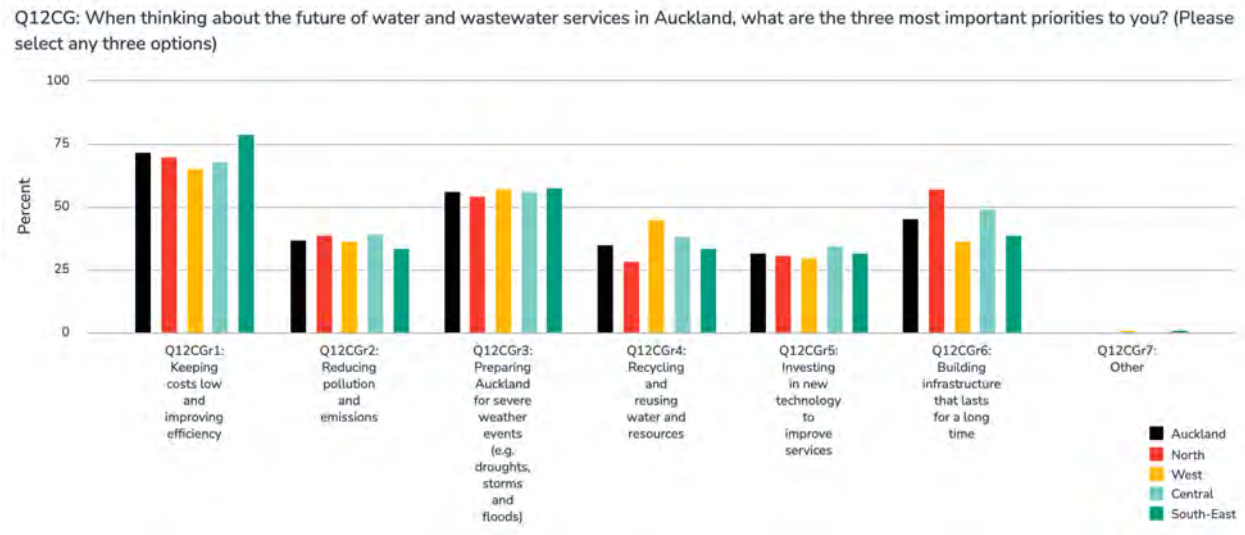


Figure 40: Auckland considers the trade-offs - you can't have it all (Respondents could select up to three, n=448).

Appendix E: Buzzly Watercare Challenge: Summary of insights

Buzzly's 'H2O FLOW, NOT H2O NO' challenge aimed to gather ideas and understand youth perspectives on critical water issues. The challenge contained survey questions and a written (and/or image) submission. The questions in the survey were:

1. What does water mean to you, and how would you like to use it in the future? (open ender)
2. If you could change one thing about how water or wastewater is managed, what would it be? (open ender)
3. What are the most important things that Watercare should focus on for Auckland's water future (tick box plus open ender)

In answering this third question, the top three priorities highlighted by youth were a strong concern for climate resilience, resource efficiency, and financial sustainability:

- Getting Auckland ready for big weather like droughts, storms, and floods: 63mentions. This indicates a high level of awareness regarding climate change impacts and the need for robust infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events.
- Finding ways to recycle and reuse water and other stuff: 59 mentions.

This reflects a strong desire for a circular economy approach to water, emphasizing conservation and resourcefulness.

- Keeping it affordable and running things smarter: 56 mentions. This shows that participants are not only concerned with environmental and infrastructural aspects but also with the economic implications and efficient management of water services.

Other significant priorities included: cutting down pollution and emissions (43 mentions), building durable infrastructure (41 mentions), leveraging new technology (41 mentions).

The Buzzly Challenge responses – the longer form essay responses – show good engagement with the future of water in Auckland. Their ideas reflect a thoughtful, systems-aware, and sustainability-driven mindset. Key takeaways:

- Participation rates and detailed submissions show that young people are not only concerned about water issues but are actively thinking about solutions.
- Youth demonstrated a comprehensive view of water management, connecting environmental stewardship, infrastructure, and wastewater systems.
- There's a clear desire for water systems that are sustainable, resilient to climate change, and efficient in resource use, including strong support for water recycling and reuse.
- Many participants emphasised the need for public education and the use of smart technologies (e.g. sensors, AI, smart infrastructure) to improve water conservation and management.

Winning entry:

From buckets to breakthroughs: how my journey from the Philippines to Singapore inspires my vision for Auckland's water future.

Water means a lot to me, not just as something I use every day, but as something that shaped my early experiences. Growing up in the Philippines, I remember times when the taps wouldn't run at all. We'd have to store water in large buckets whenever the taps worked, and that limited supply had to last the whole day for my family. It was stressful, and it made me realise something so basic; clean, running water isn't guaranteed for everyone.

Later, when I moved to Singapore, I saw how water could be managed in an entirely different way. Singapore didn't have many natural water sources, but they treated water as something valuable, something to take care of. Even as kids, our schools taught us about water management, and how we all play a role in using it wisely. Seeing those two sides,

scarcity and smart management, made me appreciate just how important it is to treat water as a precious resource, not something we take for granted.

In the future, I want to use water more consciously. I want to live in a place where we know exactly where our water comes from, how it's treated, and what we can do to protect it. That's something I think New Zealand can absolutely achieve, especially if we start taking action now.

If I could change one thing, it would be how seriously we take water waste, and how clearly we talk about it. In New Zealand, a lot of people assume we have endless water because we see green hills and lots of rain. But behind that image, there are huge losses from old pipes, untreated wastewater, and poor infrastructure in some communities. It's a problem that not enough people know in depth. We talk about water issues at a surface level, but we're not always taught where the problems really are or how they affect us.

I think we need to treat water more like how Singapore does: with strong policies, smart technology, and public education. We need to be honest about the leaks, the outdated infrastructure, and the systems that aren't working. And then we need to fix them, not just patch them up. This includes upgrading pipes, using smart meters to detect leaks, investing in wastewater recycling, and building better catchment systems to store rainwater. It's not just about big cities either, smaller or rural areas deserve the same level of care and investment.

Fifty years from now, I want Auckland to be a place where every drop of water is valued and reused smartly. A bold idea I believe in is creating a full circle water system, where wastewater is cleaned, recycled, and reused, like Singapore's NEWater system. This could include treating greywater for things like irrigation and toilets and even blending ultra-clean recycled water into our drinking supply. At the same time, we should expand rainwater collection systems across Auckland homes, schools, and public spaces so that we're not relying on a single source.

But all this can't happen unless people actually understand the need for it. So education has to be a big part of the plan. We need to teach young people how the water system works, why it's under pressure, and what we can do to fix it. Because before we can solve problems, we need to know why they exist in the first place.

If we combine real education with real action, I truly believe Auckland can be water-secure, not just for the next 50 years, but for generations beyond.

Appendix F: Local Board feedback

As part of developing the Metropolitan Servicing Strategy, Watercare engaged with all the local boards to inform them on the strategy and to offer them the opportunity to give us their feedback on their community values, aspirations, and priorities. Alongside our public engagement, this feedback informs the next phase of strategy development.

Nine of the local boards provided feedback. While each Local Board area has unique circumstances and this feedback summary is not exhaustive, we did discern several themes that cut across most of the feedback received. For detailed feedback from the nine Local Boards that responded*, please access this **webpage** to read all the Local board feedback on the Metropolitan Servicing Strategy.

The broad themes show support for sustainable, resilient, and inclusive water and wastewater services. Local boards, in general, supported the long-term approach Watercare is taking and emphasised the importance of education and protection of their local environments. Concerns were also raised about ageing infrastructure and the need for proactive planning.

General themes identified from Local Board feedback

1. Support for sustainability and innovation

- Interest in exploring further drinking water solutions such as water recycling, desalination, and alternative water sources (e.g., purified recycled water, rainwater collection)
- Interest in decentralised options such as rain tanks and greywater systems

2. Infrastructure resilience and maintenance

- Concerns about ageing infrastructure
- Requests for proactive asset renewal, especially in high-density and ecologically sensitive areas

3. Community education and engagement

- Strong support for public education on water conservation, wastewater etiquette, and leak detection
- Targeted education for migrants, seniors, and youth, including material in different languages and inclusive engagement

4. Environmental protection and climate preparedness

- Eliminating wastewater overflows and protecting waterways should be the priority
- Consideration of climate change impacts on water sources and infrastructure is encouraged
- Interest in biosolids reuse and sustainable wastewater management

5. Equity concerns

- Requests for acknowledgement of inequitable wastewater outcomes from some Local Boards on the Manukau Harbour
- Emphasis on intergenerational equity and water as a taonga

6. Governance and transparency

- Desire for regular updates and community input into the strategy
- Some support for Watercare to strengthen engagement with Māori and mana whenua

**Local Boards that provided feedback include, Devonport-Takapuna, Henderson-Massey, Kaipātiki, Māngere-Ōtāhuhu, Puketāpapa, Waitākere Ranges, Waitematā, Whau, Upper Harbour.*

Watercare