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Waterways and Drainage customer values survey

Melbourne Water Price Submission 2026 Social Research

A Marsden Jacob Presentation

ABOUT THIS WORK

As part of Melbourne Water's Price Submission 2026 engagement program, Melbourne Water engaged Marsden Jacob Associates (Marsden Jacob) to conduct quantitative survey research to understand the values and preferences of Melbourne Water's customers and communities, both broadly and specifically on Melbourne Water's prices and service standards.

Melbourne Water engaged Marsden Jacob through a tender process. As a Victorian Government Agency, Melbourne Water is mandated to use certain contracts that have been negotiated by the State of Victoria. Melbourne Water put a Request for Quote to the Professional Advisory Services Panel to which Marsden Jacob responded with their proposal.

This information pack summarises results of one of Marsden Jacob's quantitative customer surveys of customer values and preferences around waterways and drainage services. The pack summarises:

- key insights from the survey
- the survey approach we used
- who we surveyed
- detailed survey results.

Key insights

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WE ASKED CUSTOMERS TO TELL US WHAT WAS IMPORTANT TO THEM:

Melbourne Water's Waterways and Drainage Charge funds services that support Greater Melbourne's drainage networks and healthy rivers and creeks. The charge is determined by Victoria's independent pricing regulator, the Essential Services Commission, and collected by retail water companies on Melbourne Water's behalf.

This survey focused on understanding Melbourne Water customers' values and preferences for services and outcomes Melbourne Water can provide using funding from the Waterways and Drainage Change.

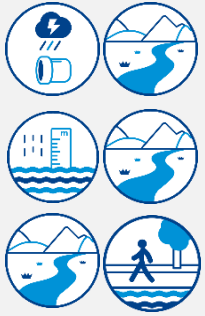
We focussed on six service areas covered by the Waterways and Drainage Charge:

- Stormwater and drainage management: activities that invest in drainage to keep waterways healthy and gardens green.
- Healthy waterways: managing and investing in rivers wetlands and estuaries and the life they support, including by reducing pollution and litter.
- Flood management: preparing for floods and minimising impacts on people, property and the environment.
- Community access, involvement and recreation: including via awareness and education programs.
- Emergency and pollution response: to ensure preparedness to respond to flooding and waterway pollution.
- Urban development: supporting development of resilient, sustainable and liveable communities.

OUR SURVEY SHOWED THAT ALL TOPICS ARE IMPORTANT TO MELBOURNE WATER CUSTOMERS

Overall, respondents told us that all topics we asked about were at least somewhat important to them. We found level of importance differs across the topics and respondents. Overall, the survey results provides clear evidence that the Waterway and Drainage topics Melbourne Water thought were important to their customers, really are important.

Across the total sample several topics were identified as being more important and less important.



Drainage, pollution and litter management were overall the most important issues.

Customers surveyed also placed more importance on flood mitigation and natural wetland management.

Customers placed less importance on issues including RAMSAR protection and Waterway Participation and Education.

Our work shows that Melbourne Water customers have different preferences and values for waterways and drainage services, and that customers form three broad groups. The blue boxes below show the percentage of Melbourne Water's customers in each group.

50%

Essential service focussed customers were focused on the importance of reducing the risk of flooding and pollution via draining and pollution and litter management.

30%

Optimist customers placed high importance on all waterway and drainage services and outcomes Melbourne Water can provide, and highest importance on drainage and flood mitigation services.

20%

Engaged customers also placed high importance on most waterway and drainage services and outcomes Melbourne Water can provide, but less on running of community programs and education than optimists.

Who we surveyed

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OUR SURVEY WAS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MELBOURNE WATER RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER BASE

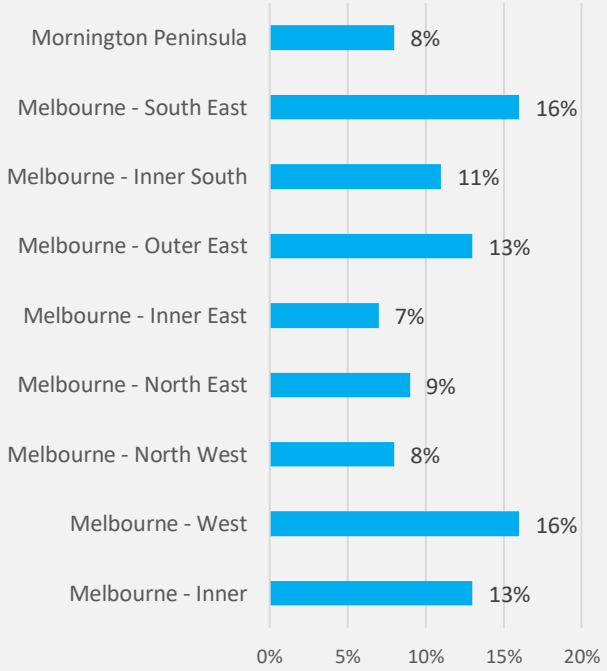
Customer type

812 residential respondents.

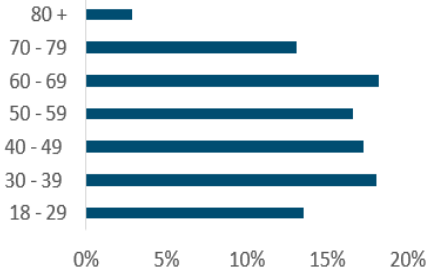
4 commercial respondents.

Gender

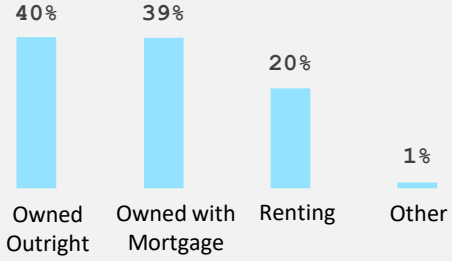
Location



Age



Homeowner



What we found

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Best-Worst and LoS Survey Results

HOW WE MEASURED CUSTOMER VALUES AND PREFERENCES:

We asked customers about their values and preferences for waterway and drainage services Melbourne Water could provide using two complementary approaches:

- **The importance** survey section used an anchored best-worst approach, asking people to choose a statement they agreed with most and least, and to tell us how important the items were to them, allowing us to come up with a clear rank ordering of preferences across respondents (see screen shot to the right for example). Appendix 2 includes a full list of the items asked.
- **The level of service** section of the survey asked customers questions around whether they thought the level of waterway and drainage services should be increased, reduced, or remain the same on a six-point scale that included an 'unsure' option. Appendix 3 includes a full list of the items asked.

Considering only these 4 statements, please select the statement you agree with Most and the statement you agree with Least?

Please note you can hover your mouse over underlined text to see additional information

(1 of 12)

Most	It is important that Melbourne Water.....	Least
○	reduces the risk of flooding to Melbourne's worst impacted communities and critical infrastructure.	○
○	runs flood risk awareness programs with Melbourne communities and in partnership with councils and SES, so households can better prepare for and reduce their impacts from flood.	○
○	ensures Melbourne's drainage network is reliable and can manage current and future flood risk.	○
○	manages and protects natural wetlands across Melbourne to protect the environment, including providing habitat for plants and animals.	○

Considering only the items above...

- ○ None of these are important to me
- ○ Some of these are important to me
- ○ All of these are important to me

HOW TO READ THE RESULTS ON THE NEXT COUPLE OF SLIDES

The level of service survey results:

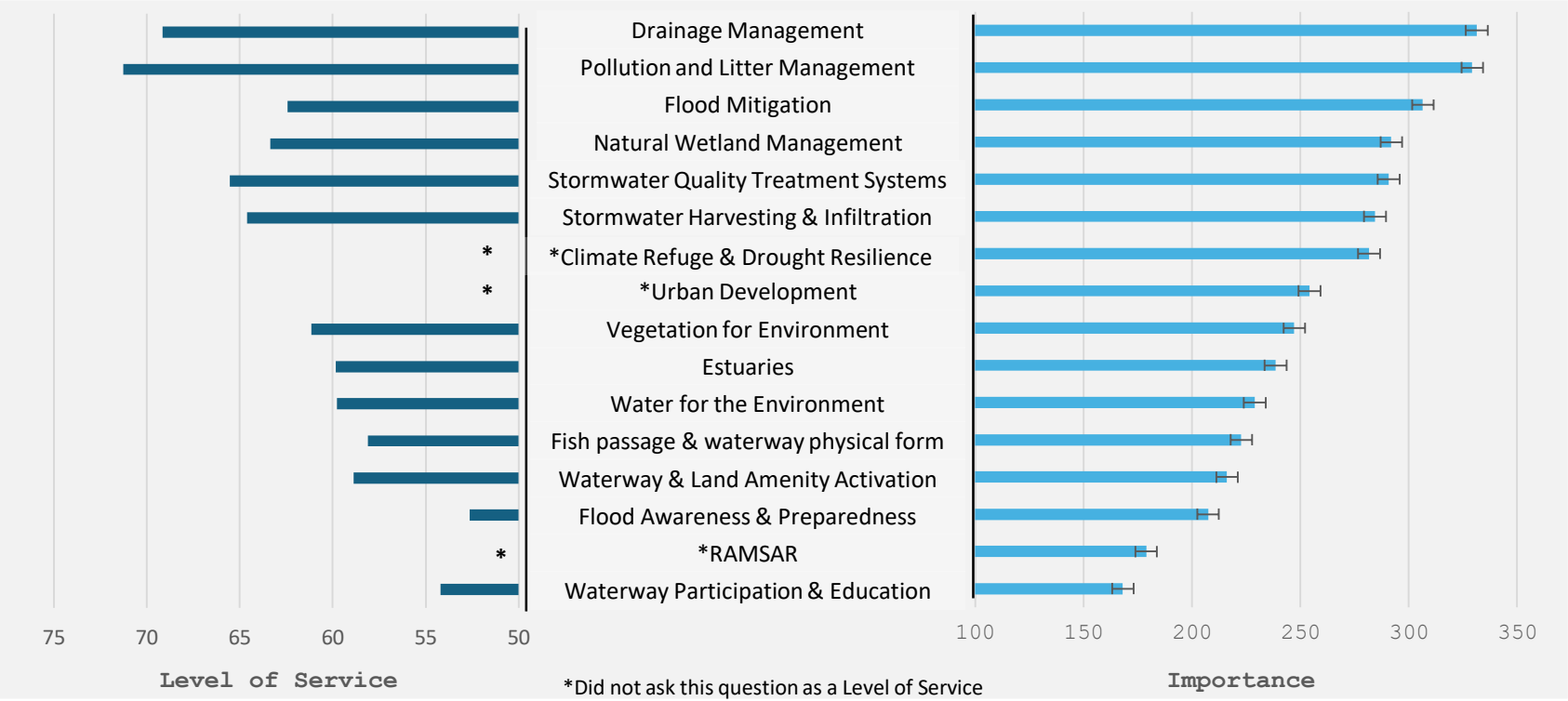
- Are rated from 0 (eliminate the service) to 100 (maximise the level of service).
- A score of 50 means maintain the current level of service.

The importance survey results:

- Have an anchor score of 100.
- A score of 100 means customers are 'indifferent' about the service.
- A score larger than 100 means the topic is important to customers.
- A score below 100 means the topic or service is not important to customers.
- Results are scalar – so a score of 300 is twice as important to a customer than something that has a score of 150.

OVERALL, ALL WATERWAY AND DRAINAGE SERVICES ARE IMPORTANT

And customers said they wanted all services (at least marginally) increased.



NOT ALL CUSTOMERS ARE THE SAME. CUSTOMER FORM GROUPS WITH DIFFERENT PRIORITIES

Statistical analysis of the best-worst responses shows that there are three distinct groups of Melbourne Water customers. Each group placed different importance on things they were asked about.

Group	Customer base %	Most important topics (in order)	Customers in this group are more likely to be
Essential service focussed customers were focused on the importance of reducing the risk of flooding and pollution via draining and pollution and litter management.	50%	Only flooding and pollution were important, with scores between 200-250. All other topics scored less than 100. Top topics were: • Drainage Management • Pollution & Litter Management • Flood Mitigation	Male
Optimist customers placed high importance on all waterway and drainage services and outcomes Melbourne Water can provide, and highest importance on drainage and flood mitigation services.	30%	All topics highly important, with scores on all topics greater than 340. Top topics were: • Drainage Management • Flood Mitigation • Pollution & Litter Management • Stormwater Quality Treatment Systems • Stormwater Harvesting & Infiltration	Female
Engaged customers also placed high importance on most waterway and drainage services and outcomes Melbourne Water can provide, but less on running of community programs and education than optimists.	20%	Most topics were important, with scores greater than 250. Top topics were: • Natural Wetland Management • Climate Refuge & Drought Resilience • Pollution & Litter management • Vegetation for Environment • Estuaries	Female

LET'S TALK MORE

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Established in 1996, Marsden Jacob Associates has grown to be Australia's leading natural resource economics consultancy. We are a values-based practice, employing talented people who specialise in solving practical and real-world problems relating to water, energy, environment, agriculture, biodiversity, public policy and transport.

Appendices

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Best-Worst and LoS Survey Results

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Appendix 1

Customer profiles

SAMPLE BREAKDOWN

Gender	Total respondents	Residential sample	Greater Melbourne
Male	387	48%	49%
Female	421	52%	51%
Prefer not to say	4	~1%	
Self-described	0	0.0%	

Household structure	Total respondents	Residential sample	Greater Melbourne
Owned outright	325	38%	30%
Mortgage	317	39%	37%
Renting	160	22%	30%
Other	10	1%	3%

Age	Total respondents	Residential sample	Greater Melbourne
Between 18 and 29 years	110	14%	19%
Between 30 and 39 years	145	18%	20%
Between 40 and 49 years	141	17%	16%
Between 50 and 59 years	134	17%	15%
Between 60 and 69 years	151	19%	12%
Between 70 to 79	108	13%	8%
80 years and over	23	3%	5%

Location	Total respondents	Residential sample	Greater Melbourne
Melbourne - Inner	106	13%	13%
Melbourne - West	129	16%	17%
Melbourne - North West	66	8%	9%
Melbourne - North East	72	9%	11%
Melbourne - Inner East	56	7%	8%
Melbourne - Outer East	103	13%	10%
Melbourne - Inner South	88	11%	9%
Melbourne - South East	129	16%	18%
Mornington Peninsula	63	8%	6%

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Appendix 2

Importance questions used in best-worst section

Rank	It is important that Melbourne Water	Topic	Score
1	ensures Melbourne's drainage network is reliable and can manage current and future flood risk	Drainage Management	331
2	reduces pollution and litter entering waterways for healthy waterways and bays	Pollution & litter management	329
3	reduces the risk of flooding to Melbourne's worst impacted communities and critical infrastructure	Flood Mitigation	306
4	manages and protects natural wetlands across Melbourne to protect the environment, including providing habitat for plants and animals	Natural Wetland Management	292
5	treats stormwater to remove pollutants and protect Port Phillip and Westernport Bays	Stormwater Quality Treatment Systems	291
6	reduces how much stormwater reaches waterways, through stormwater collection and infiltration to protect waterway health	Stormwater Harvesting & Infiltration	284
7	manages waterways across Melbourne to help fish, platypus and other animal populations to survive drought, bushfires, severe storms.	Climate refuge & Drought resilience	282
8	supports planning for small-scale residential developments, and urban renewal and growth areas to help shape improvements in flood protection, water quality, waterway health and liveability	Urban development	254
9	manages native vegetation along our rivers and creeks in Melbourne to support native plants and animals	Vegetation for Environment	247
10	manages and protects estuaries across Melbourne to support habitat for plants and animals	Estuaries	239
11	produces and introduces more water into waterways to aid platypus and fish, and their habitat	Water for the environment	229
12	adds structures such as fishways and large wood to waterways and creeks across Melbourne to provide habitat for fish, platypus and other native animals	Fish passage and waterway physical form	223
13	manages, improves and transforms our waterways and land to provide amenity, recreation and wellbeing	Waterway and land amenity and activation	216
14	runs flood risk awareness programs with Melbourne communities and in partnership with councils and SES, so households can better prepare for and reduce their impacts from flood	Flood awareness & preparedness	207
15	manages and protects Ramsar sites across Melbourne to maintain biodiversity	Ramsar	179
16	runs programs to educate the community on the importance of waterways and enable participation in activities to keep waterways healthy	Waterway Participation and Education	168

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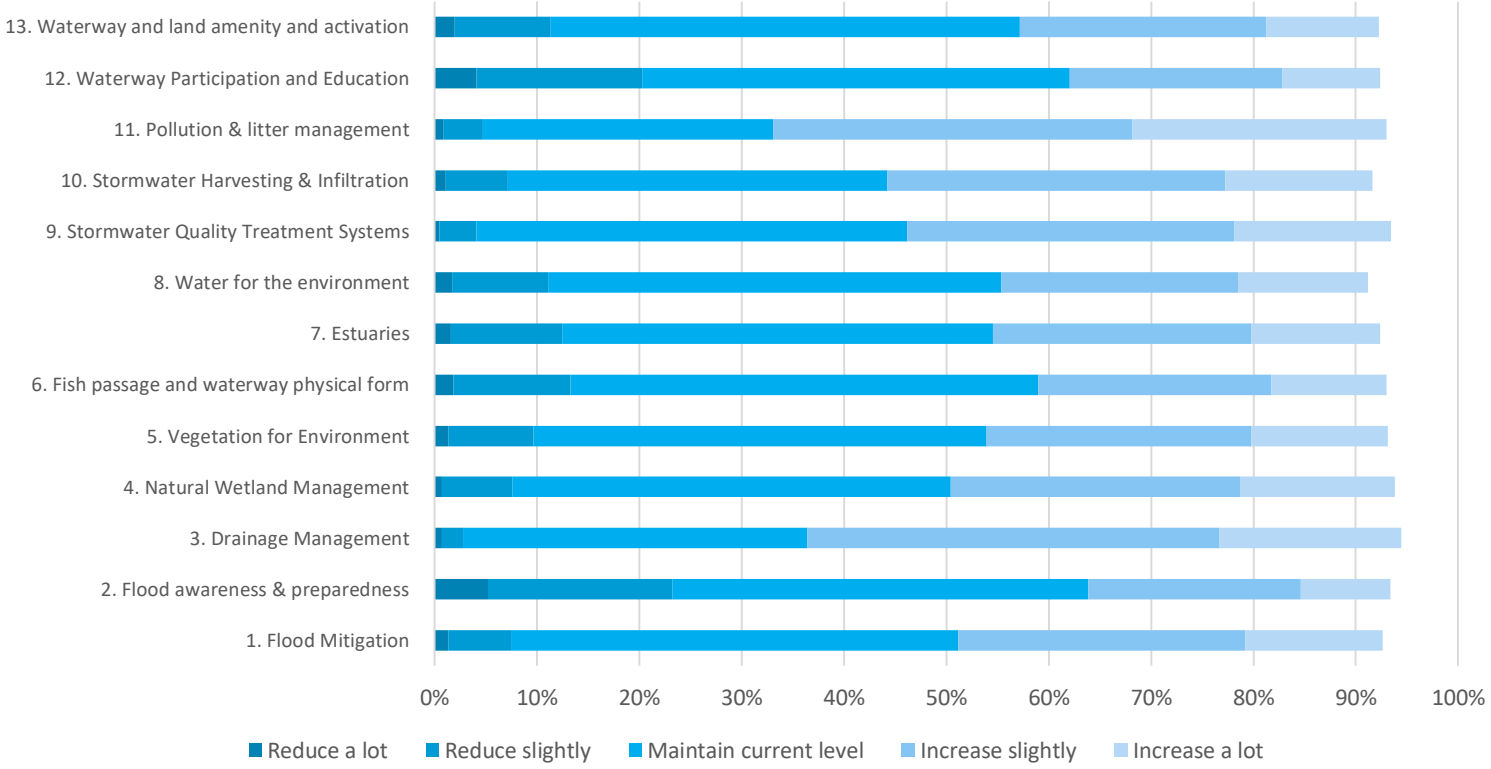
Appendix 3

Level of service questions

Topic	Thinking of the services Melbourne Water currently provide, please let us know your thoughts on our level of service for the following areas: *Please note that Melbourne Water has limited funding. As a result, if we increase services in one area we will need to reduce services in other areas.*
Flood Mitigation	Monitor the drainage network, completion of flood studies and assessments and delivering infrastructure upgrades and solutions for 3 major drains and flood levies.
Flood awareness & preparedness	Social media campaigns, website content and reactive engagement in areas impacted by flood, but not targeting of highest risk areas based on newest flood modelling or personalised engagement to drive the adoption of preparedness actions.
Drainage Management	Maintenance of drainage network (e.g. removal of blockages) to manage current and future flood risk. Deliver 6 large scale drain upgrades, deliver additional minor drain upgrades and renewals, and undertake major inspections for underground drains.
Natural Wetland Management	Manage all 20 priority natural wetlands which includes works in and around the wetlands including pest control and weed removal. This level of investment will likely protect some of the wetlands that are being removed to create space for new housing developments, but not all.
Vegetation for Environment	Establish 2864 hectares and maintain 4915 hectares of vegetation along rivers and creeks over the next five years. This will likely slow down but not prevent the overall decline in the condition of our rivers and creeks.
Fish passage and waterway physical form	Carry out work to remove 8 of 35 priority fish barriers within waterways and maintain existing habitat structures within waterways.
Estuaries	Roll out of priority weed management and revegetation projects for all 17 high priority estuaries. Invest in climate change adaptation management plans, fencing of priority habitats and land holder engagement activities for climate change adaptation.
Water for the environment	No introduction of additional desalinated water for urban supply, to enable water to be left in rivers and creeks for environmental benefit, that would otherwise be extracted for urban water supply.
Stormwater Quality Treatment Systems	Maintain the current condition of all constructed wetlands. Improve the performance of constructed wetlands by 6.5% over 5 years to reduce of pollutants in stormwater entering waterways and the bays.
Stormwater Harvesting & Infiltration	Develop business cases for 4 large-scale stormwater harvesting and infiltration schemes and for constructing a 1.2 km pipeline to collect and treat additional stormwater flows from approximately 90 hectares of new hard surfaces, through parentship and research program. Undertake investigations for stormwater harvesting opportunities, industry capacity building activities and fund grants and incentives for delivery of small-scale stormwater harvesting and infiltration schemes.
Pollution & litter management	Proactive removal of litter at least monthly from 11% of waterways. This will slow down but not prevent the increase of litter in waterways across the region.
Waterway Participation and Education	Engage 6500 community members in waterways volunteering, education and citizen science programs.
Waterway and land amenity and activation	Deliver 8 largescale projects to improve vegetation management, access and naturalness within urban waterways and flood retarding basins.
Water for the environment	No introduction of additional desalinated water for urban supply, to enable water to be left in rivers and creeks for environmental benefit, that would otherwise be extracted for urban water supply.

Should the level of service provided by MW be increased or reduced?