



Phase 1 - Community Partnership Panels: Feedback Report

Maribyrnong River catchment flood mitigation study
August 2025

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Aboriginal Acknowledgement

Melbourne Water respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which all Australians rely.

We pay our respects to Bunurong and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water of the Maribyrnong River. We pay our deepest respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We recognise and respect the continued cultural and spiritual connections that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with the land and water they have cared for and protected for thousands of generations.

We demonstrate our ongoing commitment to reconciliation through our partnerships with Traditional Owners and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as we work together to manage land and water now and into the future, while maintaining and respecting cultural and spiritual connections.

Introduction

In May 2025, Melbourne Water held the first three Community Partnership Panels (Panels) for the Maribyrnong River catchment flood mitigation study (the study). This report provides an overview of the Panels, a summary of the engagement activities employed during the Panels and the key findings that emerged through feedback from members.

In Phase 1 of the study, we asked for feedback from community members and stakeholders about what is important to them, and what they value within their local environments and communities. Feedback collected during Phase 1 will inform the development of an evaluation criteria (as shown in the figure below), which will be used in the assessments of the 'long-list' and 'shortlist' of flood mitigation options, to help make sure they reflect the values of communities across the Maribyrnong River catchment as much as possible.

Together with the community, Melbourne Water is exploring flood mitigation options to help reduce flood risk for the lower Maribyrnong River catchment. The study forms part of the work needed to identify, develop and implement flood mitigation options that will help to reduce flood risk while also reflecting community values as much as possible.

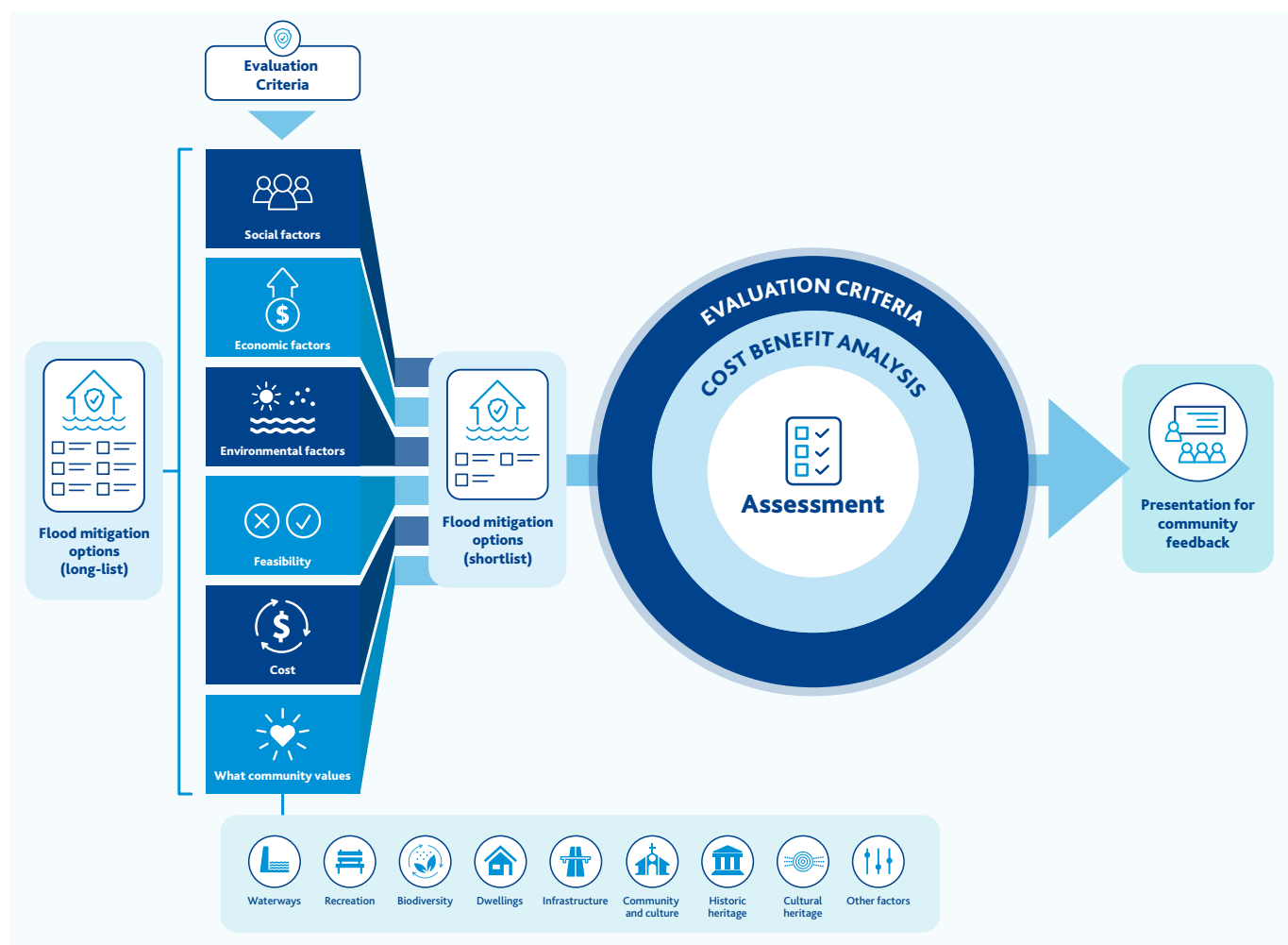


Figure 1: Evaluation criteria and cost benefit analysis.

The primary purpose of the implementation of flood mitigation options will be to support a reduction in flood risk. To be considered in the study, all options must fulfill the fundamental requirement of prioritising the safety and wellbeing of those in our communities across the Maribyrnong River catchment area (the catchment). The evaluation criteria will consider several factors including social, economic and environmental factors, feasibility, cost, and the most valued features in the local community. As such, the collection of feedback in Phase 1 largely centred around seeking to understand more about how the community perceives and prioritises different features of value, including:

- Water assets (for example, the Maribyrnong River, ponds, water quality, dams)
- Recreation (for example, parks, playgrounds, walking and bike riding paths, fishing spots)
- Biodiversity (for example, animals, fish, birds, trees)
- Dwellings (for example, homes, businesses, other properties)
- Infrastructure (for example, roads, public transport, hospitals, bridges)
- Community and culture (for example, community meeting places, places of worship, schools)
- Historic heritage (for example, heritage buildings or other sites of historic significance)
- Cultural heritage (for example, scar trees, sacred sites or other sites of significance for First Peoples or Traditional Owners).

In Phase 1 of the study, we collected feedback in a variety of ways including through our Panels. This report provides an overview of the Panels including the Terms of Reference, our recruitment process and recruitment results. Additionally, this report provides a summary of the engagement activities employed during the Panels, and the key findings that emerged from the discussions and insights of members.

Please note, feedback provided during the Panels will be collated with feedback received at other engagement events and online. A summary of all the feedback collected during Phase 1 of the study is available via letstalk.melbournewater.com.au/maribyrnong-mitigation.

Melbourne Water and Jacobs would like to acknowledge the time, energy and commitment of all members who contributed their feedback, insights and knowledge to the Panels. In particular, we want to acknowledge the generosity of those who shared their personal experiences of the 2022 flood event and the recovery process, and we are thankful to all members for upholding an atmosphere in the sessions where members were comfortable contributing this information.



Members working together during the reverse prioritisation activity.

Overview of the panels

This section of the report provides an overview of the Panels, including the Terms of Reference, our community member recruitment process and recruitment results.

About the panels

A Panel is made up of a consistent group of community members, who will collaborate with Melbourne Water to assess and refine potential flood mitigation options on an ongoing basis over the course of the study. The Panels will meet a minimum of three times over the course of the study in alignment with the different phases of the study and their respective objectives. The Panels aim to foster effective partnerships between Melbourne Water and community members leading to study outcomes which reflect the needs and priorities of the community as much as possible.

The Panels include members of the community who were affected by the 2022 flood event, those who may be at risk of future flooding or those who have strong ties to the Maribyrnong River catchment area. It is important for us to have a diversity of experiences, opinions and objectives in the Panels to lead to more representative decision-making and deeper discussions.

Phase 1 of the study involved running the first round of Panels across three in-person sessions in May 2025. The sessions were held during evenings and weekends to maximise participation. The three Panels saw participation from a total of 51 community members, and representatives of community groups and organisations in the catchment area. To protect the privacy of members, all feedback has been de-identified in this report.

Each Panel was attended by representatives from Melbourne Water and Jacobs, including engagement, engineering, project management and hydrology specialists.

Terms of Reference

As a condition of membership, all members were asked to read and agree to the Panel Terms of Reference. The Terms of Reference articulate the aims of the Panels, including their scope and influence, to help make sure all parties involved can work towards a collective objective. Additionally, the Terms of Reference outline the responsibilities of all parties, including expectations that members act with respect, honesty and integrity throughout the entirety of their involvement in the Panels. The Terms of Reference advise that many activities will require decision-making through a consensus approach, that is, general agreement on issues where every member holds equal decision-making influence. According to the Terms of Reference, members were expected to actively discuss key issues raised with their networks, to seek to obtain and represent the views of the broader community, and to allow for a broad range of feedback and perspectives to be expressed, reflecting the diversity of opinions, feelings and experiences in the broader community.

To read the Panel Terms of Reference in full, please visit: letstalk.melbournewater.com.au/maribyrnong-tor

Recruitment of community members

As part of the recruitment process for the Panels, we advertised an Expression of Interest form that captured demographic information from prospective members, including suburb, age, gender and language spoken at home.

This was important in ensuring that the membership of the Panels reflects the diversity of the communities who live and work in the catchment, including a range of perspectives, backgrounds, geographic locations and areas of knowledge.

Using a randomisation tool developed by Jacobs, demographic information was de-identified and analysed against publicly available 2021 Census data for the catchment.

Recruitment results

Through an extensive recruitment campaign, we attracted a diverse and representative range of community members for the Panels. The text below is a summary of the demographic categories we were targeting. A breakdown of how we performed against each category can be found in Table 1.

Category	Demographics of the catchment (as a percentage)	Representation in Panels (as a percentage)
Age		
16-24	14%	0%
25-34	22%	20%
35-44	19%	39%
45-54	17%	15%
55-64	14%	7%
65 and over	14%	19%
Gender		
Male	49.5%	44%
Female	49.5%	48%
Non-binary	1%	2%
Prefer not to say	0%	6%
Location		
Lower catchment	60%	100%
Upper catchment	40%	0%
Language spoken at home		
English	90%	85%
Other	10%*	15%

*This target statistic was based on the top most spoken languages other than English in the Maribyrnong River catchment using Census data, including Vietnamese, Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Italian, Greek, Macedonian, Spanish, Croatian, Turkish and Punjabi.

Table 1: Community Partnership Panel demographic results.

Age

A diversity of ages is represented in the Panels, with age brackets 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 55 and 65 and over, having similar representation to the demographics of the catchment. The age brackets where we have lower or no representation are 55 to 64 year olds, and 16 to 24 year olds, respectively.

Gender

We achieved an almost even split between male and female-identifying members, with a slightly higher representation of female-identifying members in the Panels. Non-binary people represent 2 per cent of members in the Panels.

To respect members’ privacy, we included a ‘Prefer not to say’ option, for which we received six responses. We acknowledge that this may impact the overall results of the panel composition.

Location

Location was determined by the suburb in which members lived or operated a business.

We aimed to achieve a close to even split between people living and working in the lower catchment and upper catchment but ultimately received no applications from the upper catchment. We set this target as, although the aim of the study is to reduce flood risk in the lower catchment, it is likely that mitigation options may be required in the upper catchment to achieve this. As a result, only people living or working in the lower catchment are participating in the Panels.

We will continue to provide engagement opportunities in the upper catchment as the study progresses so we can capture local feedback and insights from these communities.

Language spoken at home

We targeted the most spoken languages (other than English) in the Maribyrnong River catchment using 2021 Census data, including Vietnamese, Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Italian, Greek, Macedonian, Spanish, Croatian, Turkish and Punjabi.

We are pleased to share there is representation in the Panels from members who speak the following languages at home: Vietnamese, Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Bengali and Pashtu.

Community groups and organisations

Recognising the active and engaged community groups and organisations relating to the Maribyrnong River and flood recovery, a minimum of five spaces across the Panels were reserved for representatives of community groups and organisations. The community groups and organisations who nominated a representative to join the Panels included:

- Maribyrnong City Council Community Recovery Committee
- Moonee Valley City Council Community Recovery Committee
- Maribyrnong Rivers and Waterways Association
- Maribyrnong Community Recovery Association
- Rivervue Residents Committee
- Kensington Association.



Presentation from a facilitator during Panel 3.

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Figure 2: Summary of the key words and phrases heard during the icebreaker activity.

Presentation – Subject matter expert

Before starting the next activity, Jacobs' hydrologist presented about the study, the evaluation criteria and the cost-benefit analysis. This was then followed by a question and answer session.

We heard that members wanted to learn more about the evaluation criteria and the cost-benefit analysis, and how exactly their feedback will influence the criteria. All feedback collected during Phase 1 of the study will be analysed and used to inform the development of the evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria will consider several factors including, social, economic and environmental factors, feasibility, cost, and the most valued features in the local community. We will demonstrate how feedback has been used to inform the evaluation criteria in Phase 2 of the study.

Dotmocracy – Community values

After the presentation, members engaged in an activity called 'dotmocracy' which focused on gathering individual feedback on the features of value that were outlined in the introduction of this report. The activity was designed to allow for members to share their personal priorities and to gain an understanding of the priorities of others in a simple and visual way.

Members were provided with six dot stickers and were asked to place them according to two different prompts:

- 'Place three dot stickers on the three different features of value which you consider to be of the most importance'
- 'Place three dot stickers on the maps of the Maribyrnong River catchment to indicate a location or feature of significance to you, if you wish, you can write a comment about your selection using a sticky note'.

Members were asked to self-direct where they placed their stickers and corresponding comments, and were free to discuss their choices and observe the selections of others if they wished to.

Key themes and feedback

In order of rank from receiving the most to the least dots, collating responses from all the Panels, the results are summarised in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Results of the dotmocracy activity across all Panels.

Members marked multiple locations and features of significance across both the upper and lower catchment areas, with most contributions related to the lower catchment area.

Many members indicated their homes as the place or feature of the most significance to them. Many members also indicated places of recreation and sport, and the natural environment, as highly important to them.

Comment snapshot



Figure 4: Provides an example of some of the feedback provided by members during this activity.

Reverse Prioritisation – Exploring trade-offs

Following the dotmocracy activity, members engaged in a 'reverse prioritisation' activity that focused on trade-offs. As the study progresses and we start to assess potential flood mitigation options, we will begin to understand the level of impact of each. It is highly unlikely that any flood mitigation option will be without some sort of impact. As a hypothetical example, we may need to make changes to recreation spaces, remove trees or disturb a historical site to implement an option.

This activity was designed to start discussions about compromise and help members to think collectively in groups about the features of value that matter most to them. To achieve this, we asked the groups to separate features of

value into two columns: 'Willing to compromise' and 'Not willing to compromise'. Following this, they were asked to select two from each category and explain why they were most willing, or least willing, to compromise on each.

Decisions needed to be made by a consensus-approach, meaning all group members on a whole needed to agree on how features of value were categorised. This activity was intentionally challenging and led to deeper discussions, resulting in similarities and differences across the groups within each Panel.



Members participating in the dotmocracy activity.

Key themes and feedback

Feature of value (in order of importance to members overall)	Discussion
 Dwellings (for example, homes, businesses, other properties)	We heard overwhelmingly that members were not willing to compromise on dwellings and wanted flood mitigation options that prioritised the protection of homes during flood events. Members spoke about the deep emotional and financial connections they have to their homes, providing them with a sense of place and identity. During this activity, many spoke about their experience during the 2022 flood event and the lasting impact it has had on them, their families, and the broader community. Many also spoke about the financial impacts of this event, including insurance. We would like to reiterate our thanks to those who shared their personal stories and acknowledge the difficult nature of these discussions. A small number of members indicated they might be willing to compromise on dwellings under specific circumstances but explained that any compromise would likely be heavily situational, or that it would extend largely to the modifying of homes for the purposes of improving flood resilience. We also heard a desire for government-funded 'flood-resilient homes' programs and better flood preparedness infrastructure, including flood warning systems.
 Recreation (for example, parks, playgrounds, walking and bike riding paths, fishing spots)	As we saw in the dotmocracy activity, members have a deep and shared connection to recreation in the Maribyrnong River catchment. All groups had constructive discussions about recreation, with some being willing to compromise on this if it meant protecting dwellings, infrastructure, and community and culture. The rationale for many was that recreation facilities recover from floods and can be modified to be more flood-resilient or flood-resistant. Almost all discussions where groups were willing to compromise were focused on tolerance for a temporary impact to recreation, not a permanent disturbance or removal of these assets.
 Infrastructure (for example, roads, public transport, hospitals, bridges)	Most groups across the Panels were not willing to compromise on infrastructure, highlighting its importance to access and safety during a flood event for communities and emergency services. Many spoke about infrastructure, such as roads or bridges, as being important for people attempting to leave flood impacted areas. There was a lot of nuanced discussion about what this means in the context of flood mitigation options. Many of those who were willing to compromise on infrastructure explained that this meant they supported upgrades or modifications to make infrastructure more flood-resilient or flood-resistant, not its sacrifice during a flood event or in the implementation of flood mitigation options.
 Biodiversity (for example, animals, fish, birds, trees)	Biodiversity was mostly categorised as 'not willing to compromise', with groups expressing the importance of maintaining a diverse and healthy ecosystem in the Maribyrnong River catchment. Sentiments about the enduring nature of biodiversity and societies' obligation to protect it for future generations were common. One table was willing to compromise on biodiversity, highlighting the State and Federal statutory processes that projects must comply with when developing new infrastructure. They felt that this will protect biodiversity enough that they were willing to compromise on it to protect other features of value.

Table 2: Reverse prioritisation key themes and feedback.

Key themes and feedback (continued)

Feature of value (in order of importance to members overall)	Discussion
 Community and culture (for example, community meeting places, places of worship, schools)	Members' interpretations of this value varied between the Panels, leading to different outcomes. We heard that community and culture is extremely important to some groups' sense of place and belonging, with many not willing to compromise on this feature of value. This was especially apparent during the 2022 flood event, with some members recounting stories of the support they received from community organisations that took them in when they fled their home. For these reasons, some groups were not willing to compromise on this feature of value. We also heard that community and culture is reliant on people, and not location, and therefore it can exist anywhere. This led some groups to be willing to compromise by relocating community features, where possible, or ensuring better flood resilience for community and culture assets, such as schools or places of worship. It was clear throughout these discussions that members feel a deep sense of connection to their communities and want flood mitigation options that protect this.
 Water assets (for example, the Maribyrnong River, ponds, water quality, dams)	This feature of value was another that was interpreted differently by members, leading to deeper discussion about connections to the Maribyrnong River and how it is closely linked to other features of value such as community and culture, biodiversity and recreation. Many discussed the improvements to the water quality of the river over time and how they wouldn't want to see water quality decrease as part of the implementation of flood mitigation options. Most groups were willing to compromise on water assets, citing other features of value as more important to them in the context of the study.
 Cultural heritage (for example, scar trees, sacred sites or other sites of significance for First Peoples or Traditional Owners)	Cultural heritage was almost evenly split between 'willing to compromise' and 'not willing to compromise'. Most groups acknowledged the importance of protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage and the fact that it is irreplaceable once it is disturbed or removed. Some cited the State and Federal statutory processes that are in place to protect cultural heritage as their rationale for being willing to compromise on this feature of value. Others noted that the Maribyrnong River has a long-recorded history of flood events and any remaining cultural heritage sites would likely be flood-resistant or resilient. Some groups explained that they did not feel able to comment on this feature of value and felt that it was important for Traditional Owners and First Peoples to speak on these topics. Melbourne Water is engaging with Registered Aboriginal Parties in Victoria as we develop the study.
 Historic heritage (for example, heritage buildings or other sites of historic significance)	Most groups were willing to compromise on historic heritage, noting that these assets are often disturbed by projects and can be relocated or restored as part of the implementation of flood mitigation options. Some groups expressed that they do not feel a strong connection to historic heritage and could not think of significant places in the Maribyrnong River catchment that are worth prioritising over other features of value.

Table 2: Reverse prioritisation key themes and feedback.

Comment snapshot

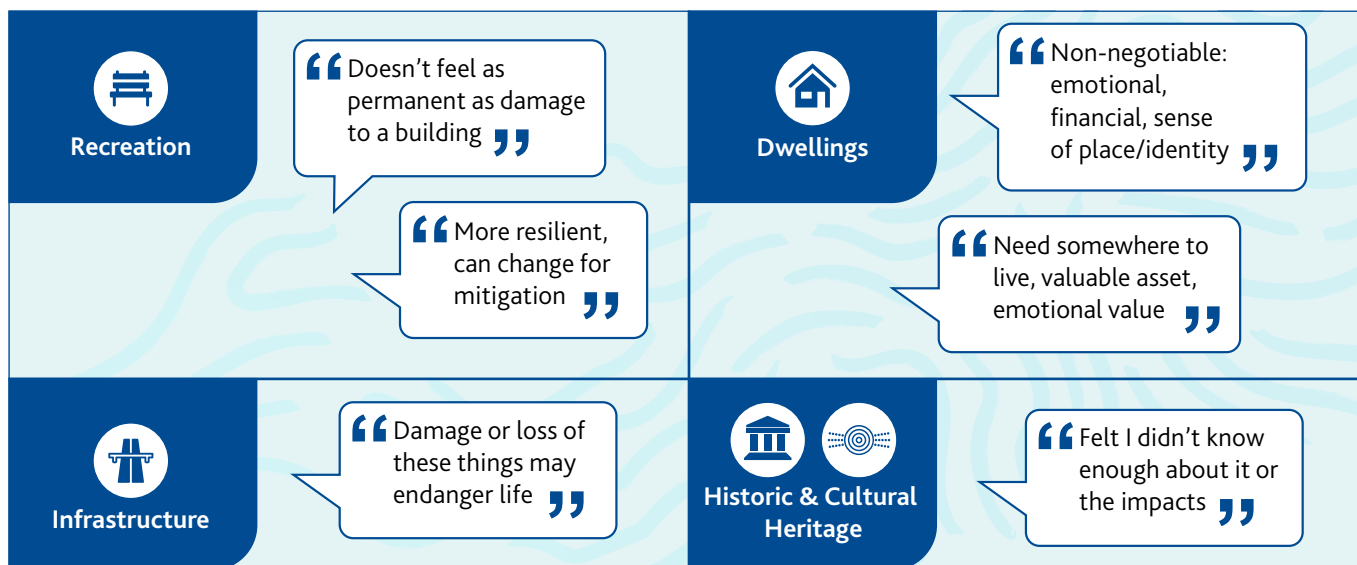


Figure 5: Provides an example of some of the feedback provided by members during this activity.

Other themes and feedback

We heard a lot of feedback relating to the absence of ‘health and wellbeing’ as a feature of value. The primary purpose of the study and the implementation of flood mitigation options will be to support a reduction in flood risk. To be considered in the study, all options must fulfill the fundamental requirement of prioritising the safety and wellbeing of those in our communities across the catchment area.

Some members provided feedback about the activity, expressing difficulty in understanding the features of value, describing them as being too broad and conceptual. A small number of groups chose not to complete the activity and requested more information or real-world scenarios to influence their prioritisation. Some members expressed dissatisfaction with the binary nature of the features of value and stated that they wanted less constraints when discussing what is important to them in their communities.

The project team acknowledges this feedback and wants to highlight that the merit of this activity was in the nuanced discussions that took place relating to features of value and trade-offs. These discussions showed the deep connections that members have to the Maribyrnong River catchment and their communities. The activity highlighted the similarities and differences in the features that members value in the context of flood mitigation options. Conversations among members also served to highlight the different ways in which members interpreted and understood each of the features of value as they relate to their own experiences and communities. The project team will use this feedback as we design the next phase of engagement and appreciate members’ willingness to engage in the activities, even when they found them difficult.



Members working together during the reverse prioritisation activity.

Key takeaways

The first round of Panels demonstrated both similarities and differences in the backgrounds and perspectives of members, as well as their objectives for the study. We would like to assure community members that above and beyond all values, safety remains paramount. This section of the report summarises some of our key takeaways.

- **Homes are extremely important:** Whether members were affected by the 2022 flood event or may be at risk of being affected by a future flood event, there is a deep, shared connection to homes and a strong desire to protect them above all else
- **Temporary loss of recreation may be tolerable:** We heard a lot of feedback that despite strong ties to recreation, in the event of a flood, members may be willing to temporarily sacrifice recreation spaces to protect their homes or important infrastructure
- **The importance of infrastructure:** There is a need for reliable and resilient infrastructure during flood events and members would like to see flood mitigation options that improve or protect important assets
- **More emphasis on the health and wellbeing of communities:** Members want to see the health and wellbeing of communities feature more prominently in future communications and messaging
- **A desire to embrace the complexity:** We heard feedback that members had a desire for more technical information and pre-reading before the next round of Panels. This would allow them to be more prepared and ready to dive into discussions
- **Strong ties to the Maribyrnong River:** Throughout all the activities we heard stories about members' connection to the river and its importance as a place of belonging and wellbeing
- **A desire to see the long-list of flood mitigation options:** Many members expressed they would like to see the long-list of flood mitigation options and we have since agreed to share the list publicly
- **A culture of respect and openness:** Melbourne Water thanks members for their respect and willingness to participate during the Panels, considering the challenging personal experiences faced because of previous flood events.



Overview of the Panels: subject matter expert presentation.

Feedback surveys

At the end of each Panel, we asked members to complete a survey, to gather their feedback on the engagement process itself, to help inform how we run the Panels and communicate with members in future. According to our engagement feedback surveys:

- **80%** of Panel members rated communication materials as easy or very easy to understand
- **82%** of Panel members said sessions were easy or very easy to attend and access
- **84%** of Panel members said it was easy or very easy to participate in the activities at the events
- **82%** of Panel members rated their overall experience at the events as good or excellent.

In the feedback surveys, many members highlighted the value of the subject matter expert presentation from Jacobs' hydrologist and the opportunity to ask them questions at the beginning of the session. Further, many members expressed a desire to delve further into the technical aspects of the study, including the mitigation options, the evaluation criteria and the cost-benefit analysis.

Feedback from members about the dotmocracy activity was mixed; some members appreciated the visual nature of the activity, and some members expressed confusion and dissatisfaction with its simplicity.

Many members highlighted the value of the reverse prioritisation activity, stating it was interesting to hear the diverse perspectives of others in the community and that despite the challenging nature of the subject matter, it was important to open up conversations about compromise. We also heard feedback that for some, this activity was too conceptual and they found it hard to participate.

We heard that some members had difficulty with parking nearby to attend the sessions. We will take this on board for next time.

Overall, the feedback surveys demonstrated that most members valued the opportunity to participate in the Panels and appreciated the opportunity to hear from others in their community, even when their opinions differed from their own. All the feedback received from members will be used to inform how we design the next round of Community Partnership Panels as part of Phase 2 of the study.



Members participating in the dotmocracy activity.

Next steps

■ This section of the report summarises the next steps for the study and the next round of Panels.

In late 2025, we will commence Phase 2 of the study, this will involve:

- Commencing the next phase of community engagement
- Sharing the evaluation criteria, cost-benefit analysis and long-list of potential flood mitigation options
- Collecting feedback on the long-list of flood mitigation options.

Visit the Let's Talk website at letstalk.melbournewater.com.au/maribyrnong-mitigation and select the 'follow' button at the top of the page to keep up to date with the study.

Summary of Phase 1 feedback

A summary of Phase 1 feedback is now available via letstalk.melbournewater.com.au/maribyrnong-mitigation.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our sincere thanks to all those who gave their time, energy and commitment to participate in the Panels.

Speak to the team

To speak with the team, please call 131 722 or email enquiry@melbournewater.com.au

