

Summary of Feedback on the Tiaki Wai Draft Water Services Strategy, Customer Charter and Significance and Engagement Policy

Purpose of this document

This document provides a summary of feedback received by Tiaki Wai on the following documents:

- Draft Water Services Strategy
- Draft Customer Charter
- Draft Significance and Engagement Policy

These documents and supporting information including the Tiaki Wai at a glance document, Q+A, and supporting policies were all available on the Tiaki Wai engagement website haveyoursay.tiakiwai.co.nz. Documents were available at public premises such as councils and libraries.

Overview of engagement and feedback

Engagement was primarily online. Two public community webinars were held, with recordings of these made available online. There were online meetings with key stakeholders – the Wellington Te Hononga o Te Upoko (Wellington Catchment Collective), and there was an event with water sector businesses.

Tiaki Wai also engaged with elected members across all shareholding councils in the lead-up to public engagement.

Public engagement began on 25 March and closed on 24 April 2026 at 12pm. People were able to provide feedback via the online survey, by email (haveyoursay@metrowaterwellington.co.nz) or post.

Engagement statistics

There has been a high-level of engagement demonstrated by:

- 12,017 visits to the Tiaki Wai website between 25 March to 24 April 2026
- 1099 survey responses (including detailed feedback)
- 58 emails.

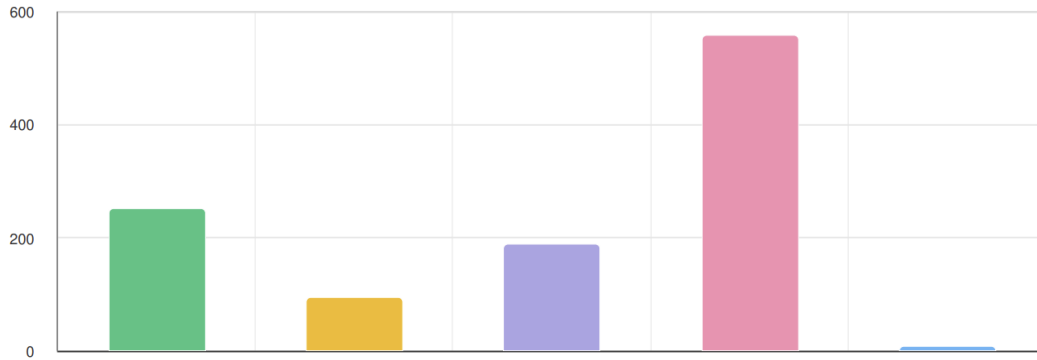
The vast majority of submissions (survey responses and emails) were from individuals, and a very small percentage (approximately 2%), from organisations that included Wellington City Council, residents associations, environmental groups, and businesses.

Survey results

The survey was comprised of 10 questions. Responses to these are summarised below.

Question 1: *Which City Council area do you live in?*

The highest number of respondents were Wellington City residents, followed by Hutt City, Upper Hutt, then Porirua residents with less than 1% of respondents non-residents.

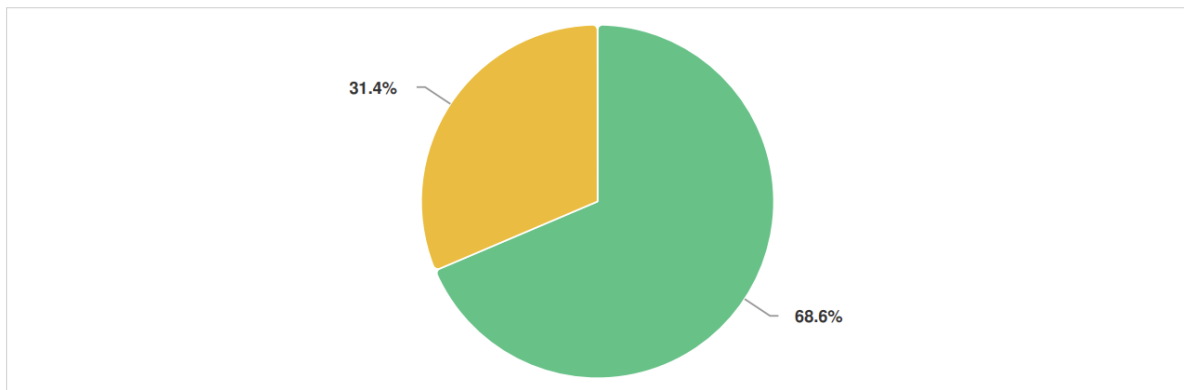


Question options	responses	%
● Hutt City	251	22.8
● Porirua City	94	8.6
● Upper Hutt City	188	17.1
● Wellington City	557	50.7
● I do not live in the area covered by Tiaki Wai	9	0.8

1099 responses - 0 skipped
Question type : Checkbox Question

Question 2: *Have you heard of Tiaki Wai before?*

Nearly 70% of people responded that they had heard of Tiaki Wai as opposed to 31.4% who had not.



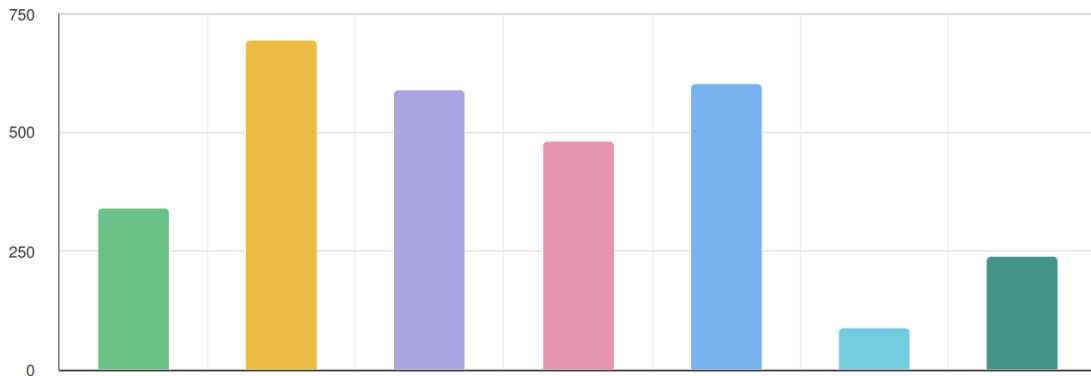
Water service priorities

Question 3: *What matters most to you when it comes to your household or business? Please select the three that are most important to you.*

The top three issues of most importance were:

- Quality of drinking water
- Clear and consistent pricing and billing
- Infrastructure maintenance

The lowest ranking issue was excellent customer service.



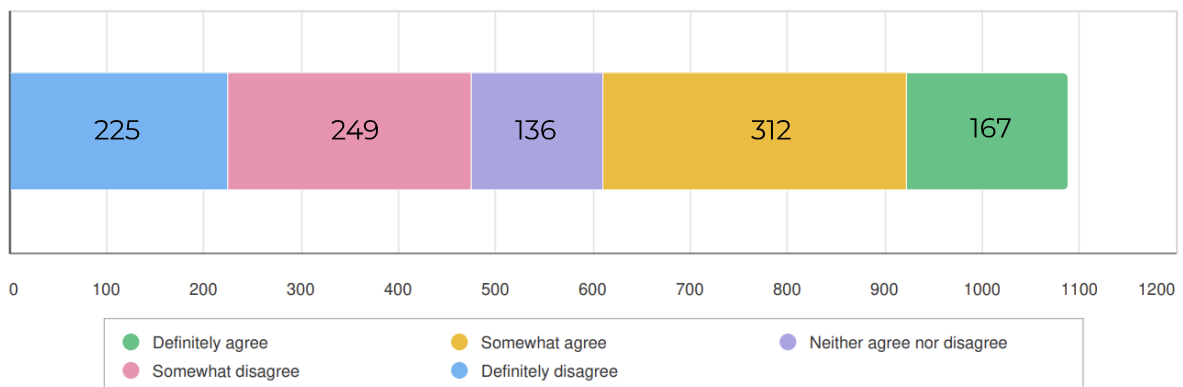
Question options	responses	%
Reliability of supply (eg, there is enough water at all times with no restrictions in dry periods, water always comes out when I turn on a tap).	341	31.7
Quality of drinking water (safe to drink, taste, odour, colour).	693	64.4
Infrastructure maintenance (well-maintained pipes and systems to prevent leaks, reduce flooding, and other problems).	590	54.8
Safe and effective wastewater management (treating and safely disposing of your sewage/waste from your sinks and toilets, while protecting the environment).	480	44.6
Clear and consistent pricing and billing (eg, transparent pricing, clear and accurate bills, flexible payment options, no hidden fees).	601	55.9
Excellent customer service (eg, accessibility, responsiveness, proactivity).	87	8.1
Sustainability and environmental responsibility (eg, reducing contamination of waterways, water conservation programmes, and encouraging efficient usage).	240	22.3

Optional question · 1076 responses · 23 skipped
 Question type : Checkbox Question

Finding the balance

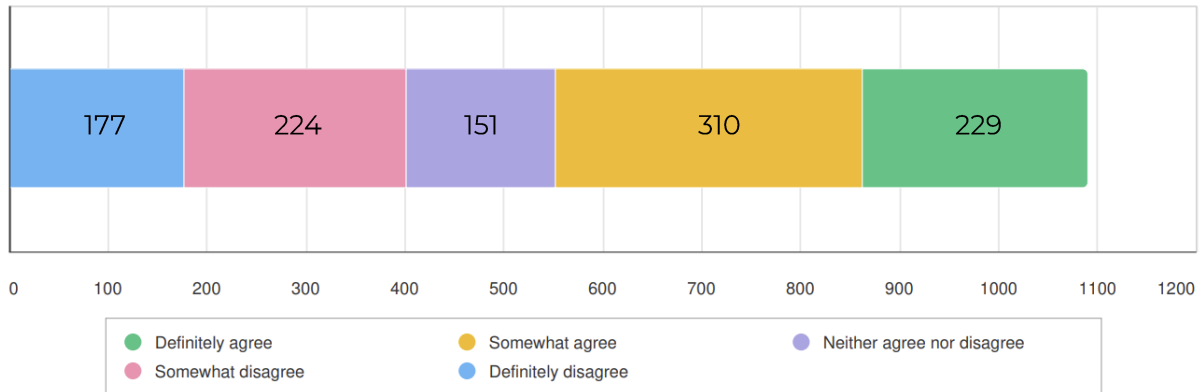
Question 4: Water Services: Please indicate your level of agreement: is it important to get on with network improvements that will deliver better services for our children and grandchildren, even if it means paying more through water services charges?

Respondents were split on this question, and 44% (479 people) definitely agreed or somewhat agreed to this statement; 12.5% (136) were neutral; and 43.5% (474 people) somewhat or definitely disagreed. 11 people skipped this question.



Question 5: Environment: Please indicate your level of agreement with this statement: it is important to reduce contamination of our waterways from wastewater and stormwater, even if it means paying more through water services charges.

Almost half (49.4%) of people definitely agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement; 13.8% were neutral; and 36.7% somewhat or definitely disagreed.



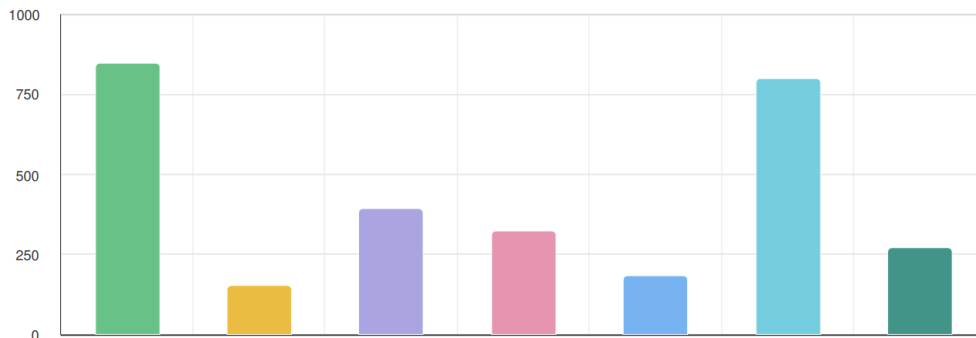
Caring for our customers

Question 6: Which of these commitments in the **Customer Charter** are most important to you? Select your top three.

The top three commitments selected as most important were:

1. Safety and quality of drinking water supply, wastewater and stormwater
2. Fair and transparent pricing with clear and accurate bills
3. Responsive services

The commitment that was selected the least was respect and integrity in our dealings with you.



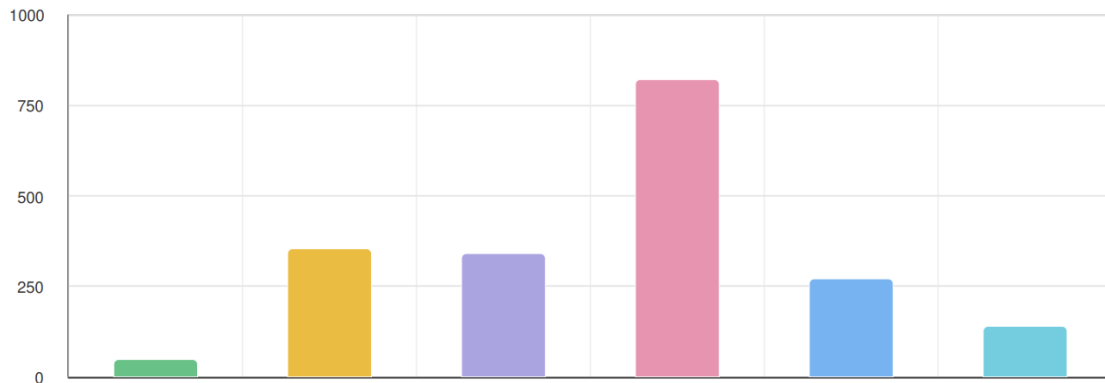
Question options	responses	%
● Safety and quality across drinking water supply, wastewater and stormwater.	847	78.4
● Respect and integrity in our dealings with you.	152	14.1
● Responsive services - we're easy to contact, we respond promptly and communicate clearly if circumstances change.	392	36.3
● Environmental protection.	325	30.1
● Engagement and partnership - we involve customers and mana whenua in shaping our services.	182	16.8
● Fair and transparent pricing with clear and accurate bills.	800	74.0
● Support for vulnerable or disadvantaged customers.	269	24.9

Optional question - 1081 responses - 18 skipped
Question type : Checkbox Question

Question 7: The decisions Tiaki Wai makes will affect residents, businesses and communities in different ways. Our **Significance and Engagement Policy** sets out how we plan to engage with you on significant documents, projects or proposals. How would you like to hear from Tiaki Wai?

Respondents could select as many options as they wished.

76% of respondents indicated they would like to hear from Tiaki Wai by email, with nearly a third indicating they would like to hear from Tiaki Wai through its website, or social media; 25% via a letter or flyer in the mailbox; and nearly 13% via an app.



Question options	responses	%
Other (please specify)	46	4.2
Tiaki Wai website	352	32.5
Social media	340	31.4
Email	821	75.8
Letter or flyer in your mailbox	270	24.9
Via an app	138	12.7

Optional question - 1083 responses - 16 skipped
Question type : Checkbox Question

Written feedback received from survey comments and by email

The next section of the survey offered respondees a chance to provide any other feedback they would like to offer in relation to the Water Services Strategy, the Customer Charter and the Significance and Engagement Policy (Questions 8, 9, and 10 respectively).

The number of respondents that commented on each document was as follows:

- 781 people provided feedback on the draft Water Services Strategy (Q8)
- 423 people provided feedback on the draft Customer Charter (Q9), although a proportion of this was additional comment on the draft Water Services Strategy
- 368 people provided feedback on the Significance and Engagement Policy (Q10), although again this contained comment on the draft Water Services Strategy Strategy.

Some of the survey responses ranged from very brief responses to more extensive feedback. The written feedback received via the survey has been considered alongside that raised by email in the sections that follow.

Feedback on the draft Water Services Strategy

Overview

The majority of respondents commented on the unaffordability of water service charges, expressing concern about the costs, the risk of causing hardship and that they may consider leaving the region. People also commented on the need for equitable charging, including for lower use households and support for pensioners, beneficiaries and low-income householders.

In relation to delivery, support was expressed both for water meters (as it can help enable volumetric charging); and against (due to the cost). Many submitters commented on the importance of 'doing the basics' such as maintenance and renewals.

Accountability and transparency was another key theme – both in terms of accountability of past Councils, but also support for Commerce Commission oversight of Tiaki Wai moving forward.

People submitted on the importance of a taking a 'whole-of-catchment' approach to delivering water supply, wastewater, and stormwater services and improving water quality.

In summary, while there is a general agreement that the infrastructure is in crisis and must be fixed, significant concern was expressed with the current proposed approach to charging and the ability to deliver value for money.

The key themes are :

- Water service charges
- Accountability and transparency
- Water services delivery
- Environmental, catchment management, and stormwater
- Iwi/Māori and Te Mana o te Wai
- Growth
- Need for reform
- Feedback on the engagement process

Each of these themes is discussed in more detail below.

Water service costs and charges

The majority of feedback commented on water service costs and charges, primarily on the affordability and equity of the proposed 2026/27 charges and projected charges over the ten year period (from an average of \$2,100 to \$6,800 by 2036). This was variously described as unaffordable and excessive.

People commented on the interface with rates, queried how non-serviced properties would be treated, and commented or asked questions on billing. A desire for central government investment, rather than ratepayers shouldering the cost was another key theme. The feedback is discussed in more detail below.

Affordability: the majority of people commented that the proposed charges, particularly over the ten-year period would be unaffordable for them, particularly when considered alongside cost-of-living increases (eg, inflation, rising mortgage rates, insurance increases and higher energy prices), and combined with rates rises. People expressed that this would create cumulative hardship for them, cause stress, and force them into debt and/or to consider leaving the region.

Significant concern was raised by and for pensioners, beneficiaries, and those on low incomes and/or facing job insecurity. Grey Power feedback emphasised the extreme stress on seniors on fixed incomes. It stated that it required more time and information to adopt a firm view. It was noted that

a \$6,800 bill (the projected 2036/37 average inflated charge) would consume nearly 24% of a standard [current] pension (although this is comparing inflated costs, with a pension as it is today). Those with average incomes also noted meeting the charges would be a challenge.

People sought more information about available concessions, or further information about hardship assistance or means-testing.

Feedback from businesses/industry expressed concern with the costs. For example, the Kilbirnie, Rongotai and Lyall Bay Business Improvement District submitted that the proposed approach “shifts substantial cost onto businesses without sufficient recognition of their current ever-increasing financial pressures, nor adequate mechanism to mitigate economic harm from infrastructure failure or investment decisions”.

Equity: Feedback about perceived inequitable distribution of costs was received in relation to high vs lower-usage customers, different housing types, size of household, and urban or rural properties that are unserved (or partially unserved eg for stormwater or wastewater).

On capital value (CV) vs usage, many argued that linking water charges to property value is unfair, as CV does not reflect actual water consumption. For example, a single person in a high-value home may pay more than a large family in a lower-value home.

Intergenerational inequity attracted lots of feedback with current residents feeling they are being unfairly responsible for paying for decades of under-investment by previous councils.

Comments on usage were also often tied to comments on the use of water meters (discussed below under the 'water services delivery' theme).

Differences across Council areas was another area of feedback. Many people questioned why they should have to subsidise those in another Council area. Residents in areas such as Upper Hutt and Porirua expressed concern that they are required to subsidise infrastructure repairs for “the more neglected” Wellington City network. Some submitters requested clear, transparent reporting showing how much revenue from Upper Hutt is being reinvested into the local network versus being diverted to regional hotspots (such as Wellington CBD).

Those on tank water and septic wastewater systems expressed concern that they will be charged for services they do not receive. People sought clear, transparent mapping of which properties are classified as served or unserved and the charges that apply or where these are exempt.

Comment was also received from community groups. The Island Bay Natural Heritage Charitable Trust highlighted the unfairness of being charged “sludge levies” and water rates on a nature reserve with no toilets or water infrastructure.

Price path: More specific comments from submitters on the price path included comment that the price path is a financial-engineering driven price path, not a service-driven one. Some submitters noted the draft Strategy was not clear in stating that renewal activity is a capital investment.

Some submitters raised concern with the need for revenue to be set so Tiaki Wai can meet a 9% FFO-to-debt covenant. The main issue raised with this element of the financial strategy was the perceived front-loading of costs onto today's households and treating a 50-100 year rebuild like a short-term operating expense. Comment was made that a genuine intergenerational approach would align repayment with asset life and deliver a more stable, affordable price path.

Interface with rates:

People provided feedback that there need for greater transparency of how separate water charges would reduce Council rate bills, and an expectation for this to occur in a 'cost-neutral' manner.

Billing queries: People sought clear, itemised bills with plain-language explanation of the charges, concessions and how to get help. They also commented on the need for predictable billing schedules.

Responsibility for paying the bill – and whether it should sit with the landlord or tenant was another area that people provided feedback on.

Many people commented on the Debtors' Management and Hardship Policy, including that the hardship provisions do not apply to landlords or the fixed-charge component of the bill.

A few people simply noted they wouldn't pay the charges; others sought stronger consumer protection on billing disputes.

Central government investment: The need for central government investment, rather than just costs being met by ratepayers, was another key theme that came through alongside commentary on the costs and charges.

Key changes sought in relation to costs and charges included:

- Reduce charges by spreading the cost: use long-term borrowing (20-30 years) to spread the financial burden across generations.
- Reduce rates: confirm that council rates will decrease by the same amount now being charged separately for water.
- Establish hardship protections: establish a 'gold card' discount or a hard cap on water charges as a percentage of household income or if a water bill exceeds the percentage of disposal income, offer relief proactively.
- Incorporate economic impact considerations into the Strategy and introduce financial mitigation measures for businesses impacted by both cost increases and infrastructure failures.
- Unserviced properties: some people who maintain their own septic/tank systems are seeking a "no service, no pay" guarantee and/or financial incentives in the form of rebates for households that install rainwater harvesting systems or stormwater detention tanks to reduce the overall load on the public system.

Accountability and transparency

Feedback indicated there is scepticism regarding the transition from Wellington Water to Tiaki Wai. Many view it as a "rebranding" of a suboptimal organisation with the same staff but with higher salaries.

Numerous respondees called for Commerce Commission oversight to monitor price-setting, efficiency and capital expenditure, and ensure Tiaki Wai is subject to comprehensive regulation like electricity lines companies and not operating as an "unregulated monopoly".

One submitter requested the establishment of an independent "Consumer Review Board" or advocacy group to monitor decision-making from the perspective of the ratepayer and advocate for transparency.

Transparency of charges was a key theme with some people seeking water costs as a percentage of median disposable household income to be monitored and reported on, with a strategy review process when the threshold is breached.

People also requested that there be public monitoring and comparison of Tiaki Wai's performance and costs against other regional entities (such as Watercare) to ensure that Wellingtonians are not overpaying for equivalent services.

Some people feel the new entity was forced upon them without a public vote or a clear democratic mandate. Some also called for Councils/Councillors to be held accountable for the higher costs of delivery now.

Key changes sought in relation to accountability and transparency included:

- Demand for Tiaki Wai to have oversight from the Commerce Commission (note: this is already provided for under the Local Government Water Services Act).

- Establish an independent “Consumer Review Board” or advocacy group to monitor decision-making from the perspective of the ratepayer and advocate for transparency (note: this is already an expectation in the Statement of Expectations).

Water services delivery

Some submitters commented on the importance of forward planning and visioning. Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne on behalf of Kia Mouriora Te Kaiwharawhara encourages Tiaki Wai to establish a long-term vision to support intergenerational thinking and help the community to imagine the future the organisation is striving to create.

Feedback on the delivery of water services commented that Wellington Water had relied too much on the larger contractors who had overcharged for services. Some submitters commented on the need for competitive tendering to ensure better value for money. People also expressed support for the use of smaller, local civil contractors to build regional capacity. There was a strong call to end outsourcing of critical facilities (like the Moa Point Treatment Plant) to foreign companies. The Kilbirne, Rongotai and Lyall Bay Business Improvement District submitted that the Moa Point Treatment Plant fail highlighted the “system risk from public infrastructure failure” resulting in significant economic impacts (ie, reduced visitors and revenue).

In relation to water meters, a number of respondents asked that water meters be implemented more quickly than planned in order to enable a ‘user-pays’ model to ensure both fairness and to encourage water conservation.

Conversely, there was also opposition to water meters, with some arguing that the \$500-590 million estimated cost for meters should instead be spent on fixing leaking pipes, referring to the fact that approximately 40% of treated water is currently lost to leaks.

Submitters urged priority be given to “getting the basics right” – fixing leaks and maintaining core pipes, before funding “nice-to-have” projects or vanity council initiatives (with comparisons made to cycleways).

Key changes sought in relation to delivery included:

- Develop a long-term vision to support inter-generational thinking and understanding of the future state Tiaki Wai aims to achieve.
- Procurement: end reliance on the ‘Alliance’ model with Tier 1 contractors and competitively tender physical work and consulting contracts with priority for local contractors to build regional capacity and reduce costs.
- “Dig-once”: coordinate with Councils for roading, and telecommunications companies to ensure a road is dug once and underground work is undertaken simultaneously.

Environmental, catchment management and stormwater

Some submitters provided feedback that the principles of Te Mana o te Wai are central to the Strategy and that water should be considered a tāonga (treasure) to be protected.

People expressed support for a ‘whole-of-catchment’ approach reflecting Ki Uta Ki Tai (from mountains to the sea) and managing all urban awa from their headwaters to the ocean. Comments emphasised the need to consider the water system as a whole, including the potential for nature-based solutions and better stormwater management to mitigate flooding.

Wellington City Council requests that Tiaki Wai review the stormwater levels of service proposed for 2026/27 in light of the 20 April flooding event and comparable recent weather events. It also requests that Tiaki Wai bring forward the development and delivery of the stormwater network risk management plan to be delivered earlier than the three-year timeframe prescribed by the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025 and prioritise areas adversely affected in the recent events such as the southern communities of Wellington City.

People sought that Tiaki Wai fosters meaningful relationships with active urban restoration groups (eg, Kumutoto Restoration Project and Kia Mouriora Te Kaiwharawhara) to utilise local knowledge, expertise and volunteer efforts in catchment care; and develop clear mechanisms for ongoing community input.

Kumutoto Restoration Project submitted that the Strategy should be amended to include mention of more streams that are designated as sites of significance for mana whenua in the Wellington District Plan.

People noted the lack of specific metrics for water quality improvement and the omission of “odour complaints” and “sewerage overflows into streams” as tracked Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Your Bay Your Say (from Porirua) advocates for safe water recreation and improved reporting on overflow non-compliance at PS35 in Porirua.

Key changes sought in relation to the environment included:

- Review the proposed levels of service for 2026/27 and bring forward the development of the stormwater network risk management plans and prioritise investment in Wellington City areas adversely affected by the April 2026 flooding event and comparable events.
- Include reference to additional streams in section 10 of the Strategy as these are designated as sites of significance to mana whenua in the Wellington District Plan.
- Add KPIs for odour complaints and wastewater overflows into streams
- Encourage or mandate the installation of greywater systems in new builds for non-potable uses like toilet flushing and garden irrigation to reduce demand for water supply.

Iwi/Māori and Te Mana o te Wai

As noted above, people commented that the principles of Te Mana o te Wai are central to the Strategy. People provided feedback that it was important to ensure that mana whenua are involved in decision-making regarding freshwater outcomes, particularly for sites designated as significant in district plans.

One submitter commented that the need for a regional model must reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi in both structure and outcomes, including recognising that relationships with mana whenua are place-based, and that decision-making should remain connected to local communities rather than being overly centralised: “A regional approach should not dilute local voices or responsibilities but instead strengthen them”.

Growth

Growth-related feedback was limited but consistent in its focus on fair cost allocation rather than growth itself. Submitters generally supported the principle that growth should pay for growth, expressing concern that existing households may otherwise bear an unfair share of infrastructure costs. Several submitters also commented that central government should contribute to the pressure put on infrastructure by the mandated intensification of housing.

There was a clear expectation that the Strategy should strengthen how growth is funded and provide more concrete detail on how costs will be allocated over time, including a timetable for improvements. Overall, the concern is less about accommodating growth, and more about ensuring that the financial burden of growth-related infrastructure is distributed more equitably between new development and existing customers.

Feedback was also provided supporting the establishment of a formal framework between Tiaki Wai, Councils, Waka Kotahi and other regional authorities to coordinate land-use and development decisions to prevent runoff from overwhelming the water services networks.

Need for reform

Some submitters commented that the situation illustrates the need for more than incremental adjustments – “it requires structural reform” to amongst other reasons ensure that the financial burden is shared fairly across generations rather than falling on today’s households.

Feedback on the engagement process

People commented via the survey and submissions on the engagement process. A number of survey respondents commented on flaws with the survey, including with the ability to submit the survey. Some noted that survey questions were loaded requiring trade-offs between core services. The Churton Park Community Association (CPCA) criticised the robustness of the modelling and the adequacy of public engagement.

Customer Charter

Approximately 110 people provided specific comment on the Customer Charter.

Public feedback on the draft Customer Charter showed strong interest in ensuring the Charter is a practical and meaningful accountability document, rather than a high-level statement of intent.

Overall, public feedback supports the idea of a Customer Charter, but many submitters felt the current draft needs to move beyond high-level commitments and become a more practical, specific, and accountable document. The strongest expectations were for:

- affordability protections
- measurable service standards
- transparent pricing and billing
- stronger customer service commitments
- clearer accountability and enforceable outcomes

As costs increase and water charging becomes more visible to households, many respondents expect the level of transparency, responsiveness, and accountability to increase significantly as well.

Affordability and financial hardship

Affordability was the strongest and most consistent issue raised across public feedback.

Many submitters considered that the draft Charter does not adequately address the affordability of future water charges. There was strong concern about the impact on low-income households, with some submitters noting that hardship policies alone would not be sufficient if baseline charges become unaffordable.

Many respondents wanted affordability to be treated as a core customer commitment rather than a secondary consideration. Suggestions included:

- an explicit “affordability” commitment within the Charter
- stronger wording that customers have a right to affordable water services
- commitments to keep annual price increases within defined limits (for example inflation plus 2%)
- annual consultation on proposed charges
- clear information on hardship support, rebates, abatements, or income-linked assistance.

There was also strong interest in ensuring Tiaki Wai demonstrates value for money, prudent financial management, and a clear focus on controlling costs.

Need for enforceable commitments and accountability

Many submitters felt the Charter is too aspirational and lacks practical accountability.

Feedback commonly described the Charter a document that reflects intentions rather than enforceable commitments. Submitters noted that most commitments restate legislative obligations or general customer service expectations without providing meaningful consequences if standards are not met.

Many respondents sought:

- measurable service standards customers can rely on
- enforceable commitments rather than broad aspirations
- service credits, compensation, financial remedies, or restitution where standards are not met
- stronger accountability mechanisms appropriate to a monopoly service environment

There was concern that without clear consequences, customer service standards may deteriorate over time.

Clearer service levels and measurable standards

A strong theme was the need for specific, practical service commitments.

Submitters wanted clearer information about:

- how service performance will be measured and reported
- expected response times for outages, leaks, faults, and complaints
- what customers can expect during service disruptions
- how complaints and disputes will be managed and resolved
- how performance will be monitored and made visible to the public.

Many respondents felt the Charter should move beyond general principles and provide standards that are specific, measurable, and capable of being monitored.

Pricing transparency and billing clarity

There was strong demand for clearer information about pricing and billing.

Submitters wanted better explanation of:

- how water charges are set
- how pricing decisions are made
- what customers are paying for
- how costs are justified
- how the transition from rates-based funding to direct water charging will work
- how metering and billing arrangements will apply in practice.

There was particular concern that increasing costs must be matched by stronger transparency, accurate billing, and clearer communication so customers can understand and challenge charges where needed.

Human contact and accessible customer service

Many submitters emphasised the importance of accessible and responsive customer service.

People wanted:

- phone hotlines for urgent issues
- actual phone numbers and contact details
- local offices or in-person service options
- paper bills as well as digital options
- the ability to speak with real people rather than chatbots or automated systems
- clear continuity of existing reporting systems where useful.

Public ownership, governance, and accountability

Submitters wanted stronger recognition of public ownership and clearer accountability to communities.

There was interest in:

- stronger commitments that water remains publicly owned
- reassurance against privatisation or profit-driven decision-making
- clearer explanation of how Tiaki Wai is accountable to councils and communities
- stronger democratic accountability through councils and shareholder relationships
- visibility of how major pricing and investment decisions are made

Some respondents emphasised that residents see themselves as owners rather than customers and expect stronger governance transparency as a result.

Support for vulnerable customers

Many respondents supported the principle that no household should be denied access to essential water services due to financial hardship.

However, they wanted clearer practical detail about:

- eligibility for hardship support
- payment plans and flexible payment arrangements
- income-sensitive billing options
- support for medically dependent and otherwise vulnerable customers
- how rates rebates and future water charges will work together

There was a strong expectation that support should be clear, accessible, and practical rather than stated only in principle.

Environmental responsibility and responsible water use

Some submitters supported stronger commitments around efficient and responsible water use. Suggestions included:

- better public education about water use and conservation
- household comparisons to encourage efficient usage
- practical advice to reduce waste
- early supportive engagement where high or unusual usage is identified
- ensuring environmental protection commitments are reflected in operational decisions, not only in principles

Overall sentiment

Overall, public feedback supports the idea of a Customer Charter, but many submitters felt the current draft needs to move beyond high-level commitments and become a more practical, specific, and accountable document.

The strongest expectations were for:

- affordability protections
- measurable service standards
- transparent pricing and billing
- stronger customer service commitments
- clearer accountability and enforceable outcomes

As costs increase and water charging becomes more visible to households, many respondents expect the level of transparency, responsiveness, and accountability to increase significantly as well.

Proposed response to feedback on the Customer Charter

Much of the feedback on the Customer Charter reflected a desire for greater detail about service performance, responses to service failures and disruptions, how complaints and disputes will be resolved, and how charges are set and explained.

The Charter is intended to act as a gateway to more detailed operational information on these topics. However, as Tiaki Wai is still an establishing organisation and the website that will host this supporting information is not yet live, the links in the draft Charter were not available at the time of consultation. This created frustration for some submitters, who expected immediate access to the detailed service information sitting behind the Charter commitments. The final Charter will include active links to this supporting information, which is expected to address much of this feedback and provide greater clarity and confidence for customers.

Significance and engagement policy

271 people provided feedback on the draft Significance and Engagement Policy through the survey.

Public feedback on the draft Significance and Engagement Policy emphasised that it must be practical, transparent, and focused on meaningful public involvement rather than adding another layer of bureaucracy. There was also strong emphasis on genuine engagement rather than token consultation.

Overall, the feedback suggests the Policy should prioritise:

- simple and accessible communication
- early, ongoing, and genuine engagement
- strong financial transparency
- visible accountability in governance and decision-making
- avoiding unnecessary duplication of policy documents/administrative cost.

Simple and accessible communication

There is a clear expectation for simple and accessible communication, with regular updates provided in plain language so communities can easily understand decisions, infrastructure investment, pricing changes, and service impacts. Respondents sought clearer explanations and more consistent communication to reduce confusion and improve trust.

Early, ongoing and genuine engagement

There was a strong emphasis on the importance of early, ongoing, and genuine consultation. Engagement should happen before decisions are made, not after perceived predetermined outcomes. Communities, households, and businesses want meaningful opportunities to influence decisions, particularly where costs, services, or account structures are affected.

Some felt excluded by the consultation process itself, including frustration with registration requirements and limited opportunities to discuss pricing impacts. Feedback called for more inclusive and responsive engagement, including improved access to information and opportunities for ongoing input. Suggestions include creating accessible platforms to track projects, submit community feedback, and evaluate engagement practices.

There is also a large emphasis on ensuring meaningful involvement of communities and iwi, particularly in defining what is significant and in shaping decisions early in the process.

Strong financial transparency

The feedback expresses strong concern about the rising cost of water infrastructure and rates in Wellington, and questions who should bear responsibility for past underinvestment. There is a view

that central government should contribute more funding, rather than the full burden falling on current ratepayers.

A major concern across feedback was the need for strong financial transparency. Many respondents linked significance directly to the affordability of water services, rates, and household charges. People want clearer explanations of where money is going, how decisions are made, and stronger assurance that spending is controlled and justified.

There is strong demand for clear reporting on spending, value for money, and assurance that funds are being directed toward essential infrastructure rather than unnecessary overheads.

Visible accountability in governance and decision-making

There's a consistent push for stronger, more visible accountability across governance, finances, and operations. Respondents want far greater transparency around contracts, costs, executive pay, and how funds are used, alongside clearer, more frequent reporting and benchmarking of performance.

A key concern is that too much discretion sits with the organisation in defining "significant" decisions. Submitters argue that areas like pricing, major contracts, infrastructure investment, and financial risk should automatically require early and meaningful public consultation, rather than being decided internally first.

Another dominant theme is the imbalance between who pays and who decides. While ratepayers fund the system, they currently lack real governance power. Many propose giving ratepayers formal representation—such as shareholder status, voting rights on major decisions, and regular community meetings—to better align accountability with those bearing the costs.

Operationally, there are calls for fairer and more competitive procurement practices, stronger oversight of contractors, and safeguards such as Living Wage requirements. More broadly, respondents express frustration with perceived inefficiency and bureaucracy, and want simpler, more practical governance that focuses on delivering tangible outcomes rather than administrative process.

Avoiding unnecessary duplication of policy documents and administrative cost

Respondents stressed the importance of avoiding unnecessary duplication of policy documents and administrative cost. Many viewed additional policies and consultation processes as costly if they do not lead to better outcomes. There is a strong preference for streamlined processes that focus resources on service delivery and infrastructure improvements rather than bureaucracy.