

Greater Western Water

Price Submission

Panel Report

May 2023

Remit

How do we keep providing affordable services for all our customers, while preparing for the future?

Introduction

This panel of 44 Greater Western Water customers was selected to best represent the demographics of GWW's service area (age, gender, residential status (renter/homeowner), region, business/residential and education level). The remit of the panel was to provide recommendations on how GWW can keep providing affordable services for its customers, while preparing for the future. Over four and half sessions, the panel deliberated on key concerns and priorities presented around four categories - unplanned disruptions, service levels, getting water from other sources, and waterway health. The panel came up with recommendations in each of these areas, along with the corresponding spend, to best deliver the remit. The panel also acknowledged the importance of communication to address each of these categories, and this was added as a fifth category.

TOPIC 1: Unplanned disruptions

Spend	<p>What range of spend do you recommend for this focus area?</p> <p>Our suggested range as a group:</p> <p>\$0 - \$15M</p>	<p>In one sentence, please describe why you chose this spend range.</p> <p>Prioritise spending on improving customer communication as this seemed to be the most important recommendation.</p> <p>Leftover funds would be used to replace ageing, high risk assets</p>
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Recommendation 1.1

Heading	Unplanned disruptions have been addressed in a proactive and timely manner.
Description	To continue to anticipate issues to do with potential future disruptions and address them before the projected failure time. To continue regular maintenance of all infrastructure assets.
Reasoning	<p>Customers value an uninterrupted supply of clean, fresh, water however we recognise that occasionally unplanned interruptions are unavoidable.</p> <p>We acknowledge that GWW will continue to provide quality infrastructure when dealing with unplanned disruptions whilst anticipating potential future disruptions and addressing them prior to their projected failure time.</p>

Recommendation 1.2

Heading	GWW to change average based KPI to percentile based KPI. For example, 95% of disruptions are addressed within x amount of time.
Description	<p>GWW to change average based KPI to percentile based KPI. For example, 95% of disruptions are addressed within x amount of time.</p> <p>GWW provides KPIs based on the arrangement or classification into different comparable groups. For example, metro vs rural, severity of disruptions (level 1 vs level 3) etc.</p>
Reasoning	<p>Unplanned disruptions need to be measured correctly before they can be managed appropriately.</p> <p>Currently GWW are using broad averages to inform management action, when refined methods could be put in place to improve the measurement of KPIs.</p>

TOPIC 2: Service levels

Spend

What range of spend do you recommend for this focus area?

Our suggested range as a group:

\$7 - \$10M

In one sentence, please describe why you chose this spend range.

This will have an improvement in services within the timeframe of this price submission, especially in outer regions

Recommendation 2.1

Heading	Improve infrastructure to support drought resilience across the GWW network.
Description	<p>Invest in improving network interconnectivity to move water through GWW's network to areas that require the water in times of drought and more substantial local storage facilities. Educating GWW customers on sustainable water usage and increased usage of alternative water sources as well as improving local water usage and conservation (engagement, education & awareness).</p> <p>Put tips on saving water on each Bill on how to save and conserve water. The incentive is a cheaper water bill.</p>
Reasoning	We consider this a priority in terms of investment planning, in order to educate and support GWW customers through the challenge of climate change.

Recommendation 2.2

Heading

Highest standard of water quality, taste and smell for everyone.

Description

Regardless of geographic location, quality should be consistent. We recommend using the highest level of water quality that people currently have, and bringing everyone else up to that same high level.

Reasoning

Increased spending on water quality should be applied. This recommendation is important for our livelihood. Drinking water is a human right and imperative for our wellbeing. Proactive monitoring and maintenance of water taste and quality without using too many chemicals rather than reactive support. Chemical usage could be capped on a scale for consistency.

Recommendation 2.3

Heading

A short term and long-term plan for upgrading infrastructure for future.

Description

First addressing the highest risk areas (Keeping Current Situation whilst still including some improvements).

Infrastructure (pipes) connecting main water supplies to growth area (preparing for the future). GWW should create and publish a 5 to 10 year plan or possibly longer in order to help further development in rural areas.

GWW to record the process of the money being spent.

Reasoning

Because the outer areas are growing rapidly with the population always increasing.

Regional network infrastructure to keep up with development / growth progress. Proactively investing more in long lasting infrastructure is worthwhile as opposed to using short term or reactive infrastructure.

Recommendation 2.4

Heading	Support staff to upskill and hire more apprentices as opposed to hiring external contractors.
Description	Adopt a recruitment process that considers staff and apprentices for positions in preference to external contractors. Provide job opportunities to young people starting in their career and help to integrate people in the local community.
Reasoning	<p>We should be hiring people based on their skill, knowledge and experience to achieve greater efficiencies for Greater Western Water.</p> <p>At the same time, we should support our local community, thereby retaining investment in Victoria. To help people build more connections and network into the local community.</p>

Recommendation 2.5

Heading	Prioritising the delivery & maintenance of harmonised pricing & service levels between regional-urban and urban areas.
Description	<p>Proactively improving the quality of water services provided to regional urban areas to be at a more consistent level with service delivered in urban areas.</p> <p>Ensuring that service levels are unified across the entire GWW region. Completing this at a faster pace than planned, with deeper investment in this area.</p> <p>Potentially this could include having more service personnel working on the ground level. It could also mean GWW needs to make improvements to service levels on a risk basis, for example prioritising areas at high risk or being prone to drought, or focusing on improving areas with ageing assets as a preventative measure.</p>
Reasoning	It is important for service levels to be distributed in a unified manner across different customer groups in urban and regional urban areas. This is crucial to keep up with the increasing population. It is also important so that the strict water restrictions placed upon people in regional urban communities can be alleviated. Further benefits of prioritising the harmonisation between regional urban and urban areas in the near future include improved infrastructure, less harm caused by droughts and overall equity across the GWW region.

TOPIC 3: Getting water from other sources

Spend

What range of spend do you recommend for this focus area?

Our suggested range as a group:

\$10 - \$14M

In one sentence, please describe why you chose this spend range.

\$11M in previous survey was enough to increase level of investment in up to 15 schemes.

Extra funds can go towards collaborating with councils and increasing community engagement to improve awareness and practice.

Recommendation 3.1

Heading	Collaborate with councils for high value projects that can maximise the use of alternative water sources. (large parks/gardens/ recreation)
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Consult with councils to bring alternative water sources to places that don't have them in place- Identify priority areas that have high water usage- Work with councils in terms of regulating new buildings by adding more alternative water uses (above the current building regulation)- Review development plans through IWM (Integrated Water Management) schemes and councils to result in broader uptake of alternative water
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Councils would be the best local stakeholders to advise use of alternative water to be used for parks and gardens in their local areas of government. Through collaboration they can best target high value projects to maximise the water used.<ul style="list-style-type: none">● There may be areas identified by council that would have better use of the recycled / alternate water than GWW.● Capture future council projects that can then be given consideration to using alternative water sources

Recommendation 3.2

Heading

Increasing the amount of alternative water (stormwater and recycled) facilities for more access to homes that don't have them

Description

Encouraging people to install water tanks so as to save water, as well as providing more stormwater and recycled water to local parks and gardens. Encourage the use of recycled water if they already have access. More access to recycled and stormwater should allow water bills to go down as recycled and stormwater doesn't have to be treated to the level of tap water.

Reasoning

Reduce water consumption to only drinking, showering and laundry. This will save a considerable amount of water that can be accessed via rainfall.

Recommendation 3.3

Heading	Investment and advocacy in alternative water sources e.g. recycled water and stormwater for things such as watering parks and gardens, or for livestock to drink (not for human consumption)
Description	<p>GWW should lead community engagement and awareness sessions to increase the acceptance and consequently adoption of manufactured water across different avenues.</p> <p>GWW working together collaboratively with Melbourne Water and local councils in identifying potential areas where manufactured water can be used</p> <p>GWW along with other water bodies suggesting best practices/recommendations/inputs to government plans of building additional infrastructure for manufactured water.</p> <p>Look at advancement in technologies around the world to reduce the cost of manufactured water in future.</p>
Reasoning	<p>This is important considering the changes in climate, population growth and decreased rainfall to help meet the ever growing demand for pure water through things such as education to the community and especially future generations. .</p> <p>As this is not completely under GWW's remit, the need to collaborate and lobby between other water corporations, government and wider community is critical</p>

TOPIC 4: Waterway Health

Spend

What range of spend do you recommend for this focus area?

Our suggested range as a group:

\$11.2 - \$25M

In one sentence, please describe why you chose this spend range.

This range is indicative of consensus from our group and opinions of previous survey respondents.

GWW says that this spend corresponds with recommendations

Recommendation 4.1

Heading	Education, community engagement and awareness are vital for the future of waterway health.
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Awareness programs at schools- Ensure to reach CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities (information will need to be translated into relevant languages)- Larger community education to increase participation (simple example, to take their own rubbish)- GWW can support grassroots groups (through education) that will help further- Bring the council along with this work
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Water is life and must be preserved and kept healthy (it will also affect our flora and fauna)- Future generations will bear the consequences of our actions today - such as an awareness program at schools. Change is generational.- Our existence depends on healthy waterways and clean water

- NOTE - We understand other organisations are also involved in this component and this responsibility might need to be shared with them

Recommendation 4.2

Heading	GWW investing in water treatment plants is necessary to protect our overall waterway health and environment.
Description	GWW needs to invest as much as possible into treatment plants so that local environments are sustainable and healthy. Increased filtration for purer water going through waterways is a high priority. GWW should invest in more storm water captures and prioritise what we already have locally.
Reasoning	<p>Investing in treatment plants to restore waterways is crucial for the younger generations to have a sustainable environment for themselves and their future families. GWW should do their best to maintain and care for healthy waterways to sustain a clean environment for the whole GWW region.</p> <p>Using water that we already have is cheaper than desal plants and local water is better for the environment.</p>

Recommendation 4.3

Heading	Improve the quality of recycled water returning to waterways.
Description	<p>Directing funding into meeting current regulatory requirements across all infrastructure. Investing funds to concentrate on the areas of the sewer network prone to falling and spilling into waterways during heavy rain.</p> <p>GWW should advocate for cleanups of Waterways and keep any water returning to waterways in a good condition</p>
Reasoning	Good quality water entering the waterways helps to heal them. GWW has to keep meeting regulatory requirements as a minimum. Cleaning waterways will make them healthy and safe.

Recommendation 4.4

Heading	Invest in technology that makes the creation and supply of manufactured water/alternate water for irrigation and industry affordable
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reduce use of drinking water for certain functions with the help of government and community engagement- e.g. Recycle grey water, onsite water catchments- Invest in Research & Development to find more efficient long-term solutions- Learn from other water corporations and governments across the world for best practices in this area- Develop a partnership between GWW and industry to limit polluted water entering WW
Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Industry is essential yet it is a great polluter so it must be able to continue its function but limit its negative impact on the environment- A lot of drinking water is wasted here so finding ways to reduce this is crucial, especially if we are to face another drought

TOPIC 5: Other

Recommendation 5.1

Heading

Notify and communicate with customers in a more proactive and customised way to ensure greater accessibility for everyone.

Description

Customers would like clarity on any changes or updates to their service through proactive and customised communication.

This may include things such as: issues or changes that may arise due to service disruptions, items that are included in water bills; breakdown of how revenues are used, changes in usage etc.

GWW's new customer communication management system should offer many different communication options that are preference based for customers. There should be options including: sms, landline phone calls, email, mail, website updates & perhaps a hotline for people to call. The website and online information needs to be consistently updated. (for example, the GWW website often has outdated or old updates that are no longer relevant so we recommend this is improved and GWW prioritise making sure their information is up to date..)

Mail should only be used for planned disruptions (when time allows for postage). Mail may not be suitable for unplanned disruptions as these are unexpected and there may not be enough time for mail to reach people.

It is important that all community members have a choice of their preferred communication strategy, as not everyone will have the same access to a mobile phone or internet. The communication management system should offer an opt-in / opt-out option for all customer base to input their communication preferences to ensure optimal accessibility.

We recommend GWW should implement a policy that guides the frequency and expected timeframe for communicating planned & unplanned disruptions and resolutions to the customer base.

It is important to include a summary in notifications of disruptions that includes an interpreting service for CALD people (culturally & linguistically diverse). This is to remove potential barriers to communication.

Reasoning

In case of any changes to water services or disruptions, we require sufficient notice and clarification to plan around, and mitigate its impacts. For planned disruptions, notification should occur well before the event. For unplanned disruptions, notification should be issued as soon as it occurs or as soon as possible.

Customers should be able to nominate their preferred notification channel (eg. SMS/mail) and frequency for different sorts of communications. The reasoning for incorporating the additional preferences & opt-in/opt-out options is acknowledging the fact that not everybody has the same access to the internet or a mobile phone.

It is imperative to ensure all customers have the same access to information despite barriers to communication such as lack of mobile phone or internet.