

Customer and community feedback report 2023

Dated

March 2024

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Contents

Introduction	4
Purpose	4
Context	4
Engagement overview	5
Engagement findings	7
Customer Value Survey	7
Pulse Surveys	7
.....	8
Customer feedback (unsolicited)	8
Community Roadshow	8
National Customer Perceptions Survey – WSAA	9
Discussion and final remarks	9
Next Steps	10

Introduction

Purpose

The customer and community engagement insights presented in this report deliver upon on our 2023-28 customer outcome that *“we’re responsive”* (to customers priorities), and helps us monitor our strategic risk *“Wannon Water is unable to anticipate or respond to changing community expectations”*.

The report presents insights captured from mid-2023 to 30 January 2024 from multiple sources, including:

- Monthly pulse surveys
- Our annual Customer Value Survey
- Annual Wannon Water Engagement Cycle (WVEC) activities
- Unsolicited customer feedback (received through the Customer Services team and media channels)
- The Customer Perception Survey conducted by Water Services Association Australia (WSAA)
- Project engagements¹.

Strategic insights summarised here, and for noting at the March Board meeting, will support customer feedback to be considered in approving the annual Corporate Plan for 2024/25.

Context

The start of the 2023-28 pricing period provided us with an opportunity to take on key learnings from the previous pricing period in the spirit of continuously improving our engagement program.

As we reviewed our engagement approach, we found that it’s well established, with some areas identified for development and maturity. Recommendations were reported to the Executive Committee ([D2023/018263](#)), with key actions to be implemented during the next couple of years.

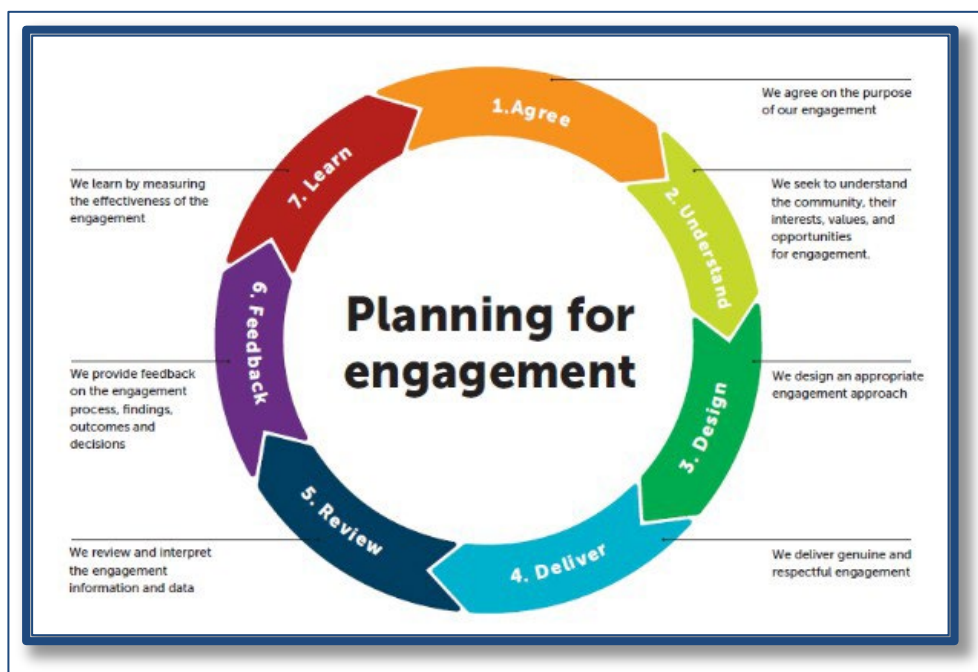
We have since established a new Regional Advisory Forum (RAF), our peak body overseeing our engagement program, with 12 community members from our service region reflecting our customer base. The group will work together to inform our engagement design and provide their insights on feedback received. Further details on the RAF’s purpose and scope are available in the Terms of Reference ([D2023/056774](#)).

Other factors also influenced our engagement activity in 2023/24. We’ve focused on building the capacity of two new members in our engagement team, updating key engagement resources, and finalising and a new contract with Quantum Market Research (QMR) to deliver our annual customer market research program.

Community engagement refers to the many ways in which we connect with our communities in day-to-day interactions and in the developing and implementing policies, programs and services.

We define engagement as, *“A genuine process of working with people to build capacity, strengthen relationships and to inform decisions”*. All of our engagements are guided by our Engagement Framework and its seven-step approach to engagement design and delivery (see below).

¹ Refer mainly to Roadmap to Zero strategy engagement, and Warrnambool Sewage Treatment Plant Revegetation project. As these engagement results have already been reported to the Board, they are not detailed in this report.



Engagement overview

In the period for this report, we recorded a total of 2,521 engagement instances through the following methods:

Activity	Timeframe	Reach
Customer Value Survey	Annual	1,040
Pulse surveys	Monthly	677 (YTD)
Customer feedback (unsolicited)	Monthly	113 (YTD)
Community Roadshow (face-to-face)	Annual	440
Community Roadshow (online survey)	Annual	103
WSAA online survey	Bi-annual	89
Regional Advisory Forum	Annual	21
Project-specific engagements	As required	38

Customer Value Survey (CVS)

QMR undertakes our annual customer value research program through online and phone surveys. The program helps us track our performance against our customer promises, identify key drivers for satisfaction and monitor trends over time.

Monthly Pulse Surveys

Since 2021, QMR also conducts monthly online pulse surveys with approximately 100 customers, monitoring indicators of value, trust, satisfaction, and community reputation. General verbatim feedback is also captured. Regular feedback assists us with industry benchmarking and comparing with quarterly results from the Essential Services Commission (ESC).

Unsolicited Customer Feedback

Our Customer Services team records customer complaints and compliments on an ongoing basis. We are required to report to the Essential Services Commission on the complaints we receive. Wannon Water also voluntarily captures and reports on compliments received by customers.

WVEC – Community Roadshow

In 2023, we continued to prioritise having a visible physical presence in local communities. Our annual roadshows provide great exposure to our customers and the broader community, allowing for open and structured feedback. This year we covered a larger geographical area, doubling our efforts from the previous year.

The Communications and Engagement branch, supported by employees from other departments, attended key events and pop-ups in:

- Balmoral
- Casterton
- Penshurst
- Macarthur
- Mortlake
- Peterborough
- Port Campbell
- Simpson
- Noorat
- Terang
- Portland
- Warrnambool.

Water Services Association Australia (WSAA)

We are a paid subscriber to the biennial National Customer Perceptions Survey conducted by WSAA, benchmarking our services against other water corporations and utility services. Preliminary results were released in December and shared with the Board through a Director Update.

Project engagements

During the first half of the year, we delivered targeted engagements to support the Roadmap to Net-zero strategy development, and the Warrnambool Sewage Treatment Plant revegetation project.

Media monitoring

We track relevant media content and customer views shared on our social media platforms. This is monitored daily and allows for comparison with complaints data and key performance trends across the year. This is a more recent data set and we're maturing in its collection and analysis.

Engagement findings

Customer Value Survey

The 2023 Customer Value Survey outcomes were presented to the Executive Committee in August.

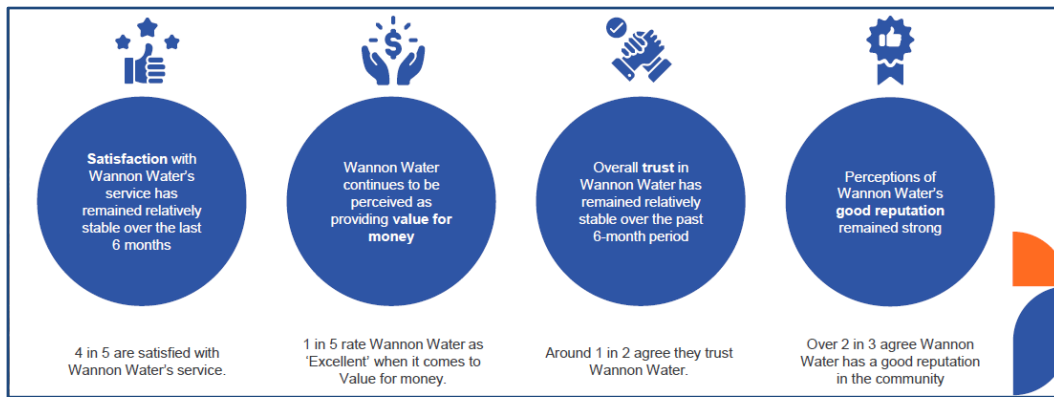
Nine in ten customers who drink our water were satisfied with its quality, with those living in Area 1 (Heywood, Portland, and Port Fairy) being least likely to consume our water due to taste.

Topline results for overall satisfaction, value for money, trust and reputation remained stable from the previous year. Water quality and taste, bill cost and water pressure continue to emerge as key concerns from our customers.

Overall Customer satisfaction	• 'Value for money' was the main driver for overall satisfaction, followed by 'customer service' and 'information provided'. • Water quality and taste continue to be the main reasons for lower satisfaction levels, with customers aged 35-59 less likely to be satisfied. • Poor quality and pressure were the main reasons for dissatisfaction with water supply reliability. • There was a slight upward trend in satisfaction among business customers following a significant decline in 2022. • There was an increase in high satisfaction with sewerage service reliability, with cost still the main reason for dissatisfaction. • Satisfaction scores for customer service also remained stable, with some slight declines among males and those in Area 2 (Warrnambool and surrounding areas).
Perceptions of value	• There was a significant increase in customers expressing no concerns in terms of 'value for money' from previous year (36% to 40%). • Bill cost remains the top reason for lower value perceptions among those who rated our services below a score of 9 out of 10, and primarily those aged 35-59.
Net Promoter Score (+13)	• Tracking the proportion of customers who are promoters, passives or detractors assist us in monitoring reputation. • The Net Promoter score increased from +10 to +13 in 2023, but this was not statistically significant

Pulse Surveys

Monthly pulse survey results since July 2023 are positive, with 'value for money' and 'overall satisfaction' being closely monitored due to recent declines in December. The top three issues for dissatisfaction continue to be water quality (taste) at 47%, service charges at 21% and water pressure at 6% of total responses.



Customer feedback (unsolicited)

A total of 113 complaints and 22 compliments were recorded this year, with summary results below:

- The current total number of complaints is slightly lower than the same period last year, and slightly higher for compliments.
- Close to half of the complaints related to water quality issues. This is in line with expected targets, and lower than previous years.
- Most water quality complaints were from customers in Warrnambool (n=11), followed by Heywood (n=6) and Portland (n=5).
- 16% of complaints related to a payment issue from customers living in Portland and Heywood.
- Noticeably, no complaints about water pressure were recorded in our system².
- Most complaints were resolved within the 10-day limit outlined by our Complaints and Dispute Policy (except for three instances, or just under 3% of total complaints).
- Positive feedback received as 'compliments' refer primarily to the Customer Services team. One related to our community education program and another related to the Development Services team.

Community Roadshow

Our face-to-face engagement delivered through a community roadshow has been a positive exercise in exposure and customer reach across our service region. In 2023, we visited more towns and events than previous years, showing our commitment to actively seek feedback from our customers and communities. We spoke to more than 500³ people across 12 locations from October to December through four major events⁴ and our own pop-ups.

Engagement included a Check-in survey, an interactive activity to test our new customer promises for the 2023-28 pricing period, and opportunity to provide open feedback. In terms of participation, feedback was received mainly from older females (50-54 years), owner occupiers, followed by renters and landlords. Rural and business customers made up of 16% of the feedback received, albeit low, it was an increase from the previous year.

Sentiment tracking showed reasonable results, with the following key highlights:

- 78% of participants⁵ agreed the customer outcomes outlined in our price submission to the ESC are on the right track, with the following as the top three priorities:
 1. We're sustainable – ongoing protection of the environment through action and education, prioritising county and communities.

² Water pressure is a known issue shared by customers through other engagements in 2023.

³ 103 responses were recorded through our check-in survey; 440 instances of engagement came during events.

⁴ Warrnambool Show, Casterton Show, Noorat Show and Upwelling Festival.

⁵ Responses to our online survey captured online and face-to-face at engagement events.

- 2. We're reliable – ongoing reliability of water and sewerage services.
- 3. We're supportive – fair and reasonable bills for all.
- 81% rated their customer experience at 4 out of 5, with water quality the main reason for dissatisfaction.
- 66% rated our bill as 'affordable', with 21 out of 103 customers disagreeing with this.
- Overall, we continue to see low awareness of the customer supports we have available.
- We saw reasonable support to our Roadmap to Net-zero strategy, with 40% rating this as 'extremely important' for the region.
- When testing recreational opportunities at our assets, nature-based activities and site tours were the most preferred.

National Customer Perceptions Survey – WSAA

Recent results⁶ from this survey, released in December, were extremely positive and saw significant upward trends in value for money, reputation, water quality, satisfaction and trust when compared to the last survey undertaken in 2021. With a sample size of 89 customers⁷ responding to a paid online survey, perception of our services included:

- Improvements recorded across all metrics, with statistically significant increases in overall satisfaction.
- Customers rated us their fourth-best service in terms of value for money, after their bank, phone provider and Australia Post. A similar order was seen for other metrics.
- When compared to 33 other water corporations, we ranked:
 - First for trust, reputation, and overall satisfaction
 - Second for value for money.
- In terms of bill affordability, half of the respondents felt our bill has increased a little and 17% felt it has gone up a lot, with the majority indicating they were able to 'meet basic needs, with little left over for extras.'
- 30% of respondents indicated they had experienced difficulty paying household bills over the last year, with less than under half confirming they contacted us to seek supports in paying their water bill.
- Positive feedback focused on service reliability, customer service, bill accuracy and managing private information well.
- Areas for improvement included support to customers wishing to save water, fair and reasonable pricing, and support for customers in paying their bills.

Discussion and final remarks

Our engagement approach has continued to mature and develop over the last year. We're well-placed to capture the views and priorities of our customers and to feed these back into the business. Our engagement framework and delivery have a proven record of identifying areas for improvement in our business and where to focus our efforts in becoming a customer-driven organisation. Our engagement culture is embedded and supported across the business, with 2023/24 providing a solid baseline for further engagement work that will inform the next price period.

Our engagement reach was higher than in 2022, and on par with previous years, indicating the aggregated total customer feedback is likely to be comparable or higher overall at the end of the 2023-28 pricing period.

Overall, and despite some differences between data sets, customer perception results

⁶ Results were shared with the Executive and Board via a Director Update on 19 January.

⁷ Comparable sample size to our monthly pulse surveys conducted by QMR. Main difference is gender participation, as WSAA data is not weighted, resulted in more responses from females.

remained relatively stable, and Wannon Water is seen as a reliable and affordable organisation, with most customers accessing our services with little or no concerns. We continue to have a strong reputation across the region, and our efforts to lead innovation in sustainability are deemed important and appreciated.

The key area for improvement continues to be water quality, particularly in Port Fairy, Portland and Heywood. The Quality Water for Wannon program is a demonstrable response to this feedback, as we seek to improving satisfaction for these customers over time. Customer and community engagement for the program has already started. This will educate communities and customers on the challenges in providing the equitable water quality and taste across the region, relying on different infrastructure and water sources. It will also capture the community's thoughts on what we need to consider when delivering the program.

In 2023, value for money was again the main driver for overall satisfaction. This is not surprising, considering the economic pressures many of our customers have felt in the past year. This trend is also evident throughout media coverage, with cost of living, bill affordability and housing consistently reported in local media.

A portion of our customers continue to express that our bills feel less affordable. This highlights the importance of investing resources to increase knowledge and provide access to customer supports. Considering less than half of our customers reached out for support when experiencing difficulty paying their water bill, there is more work to do in this area. Our community education and customer experience teams have been making more connections in pursuit of this goal.

Finally, Wannon Water is maturing as an organisation that is not only informed by customer needs but driven by their voice. The 2023-28 Customer Experience Strategy is leading a whole-of-business approach to how we can best service our customers and, in turn, how can we best listen to the feedback we receive.

Next Steps

We will continually improve the way we deliver customer and community engagement, and become better at not only capturing but also deriving insights from the vast amount of customer feedback we receive. Other recommendations from our 2023 Wannon Water Engagement Cycle (WVEC) Review will be implemented in the coming year.

Future work in our engagement program includes:

- Developing a five-year engagement plan to service the 2028-33 Price Submission and the 2027 Urban Water Strategy
- Maturing our First Nations and traditional owners engagement approach
- Considering gender equity in more detail through our engagements
- Supporting the engagement of key capital projects, with Quality Water for Wannon a priority
- Seeking ways to consolidate the vast customer data and feedback we receive through different channels and teams
- Conducting a Stakeholder Perceptions Review (last conducted in 2021), to identify key trends arising from our stakeholders, partner organisations, and leaders in the region.

In 2023, the Essential Service Commission, rated our engagement for the 2023-28 Price Submission as "Leading", the highest possible rating and a first for our business. We were also recognised as a leader in engagement through the IAP2 Core Value Awards, being named both the Australasian and International Organisation of the Year.

These achievements validate the extensive work by Wannon Water to practice genuine and inclusive engagement. They also set our own benchmark and drive to continue building our customer-driven culture in the coming years.

