

McLaren Vale Regional Water Security Strategy

What We Heard Report



Project Background

Through extensive community and stakeholder engagement, the Department for Environment and Water has coordinated the development of a McLaren Vale Regional Water Security Strategy (the Strategy) which aims to ensure the region has the water needed to support the local economy, communities, amenity, cultural values and healthy ecosystems now and into the future.

Introduction

We invited South Australians, including the broader community, councils, industries, interest and advocacy groups to provide feedback on the draft Strategy. Feedback was accepted between 30 July and 26 September 2025.

The draft Strategy aims to allow new and expanded water supplies to be considered in the context of increasing demand and a changing climate. The draft Strategy also seeks to ensure infrastructure projects and water management policies complement each other and support the region's water security vision.

The shared vision for the McLaren Vale region was developed through the workshop process. This vision was then broken down in four key themes (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The four key themes identified through the development of the draft Strategy

Key goals were then developed for each theme. These goals were considered integral to realising the shared vision for the McLaren Vale region. Actions to achieve the goals and vision, developed through the workshop process, were then assigned into one of the following categories:

- Priority water security actions – these are actions that have a direct and significant impact on supply and/or demand.
- Secondary water security actions – these actions have an indirect or less significant impact on supply and demand.
- Complementary water security actions – these actions may not be directly linked to supply or demand, but they are important to achieve the vision set out for the McLaren Vale region

The YourSAy site hosted a short survey to capture perspectives on key sections of the draft Strategy. Feedback was also received via written submissions direct to the Department for Environment and Water or via submitting comments using an online submission form on the YourSAy website.

To promote our engagement and encourage feedback from a broad audience, we used a range of communication channels including local media, social media and direct contact. Targeted stakeholder engagement was also undertaken with key government agencies and selected industry and community representatives to ensure their insights were captured.

This report provides an overview of the feedback we received, together with a summary of the key themes that emerged during the YourSAy consultation process.

Who We Heard From

A total of 23 stakeholders provided their views and feedback during the 8-week consultation period, either as a written submission (online or via email) or by completing the online survey.

Reach and interest was broad with:

- Over 832 visits to the YourSAy site
- 257 downloads of the draft Strategy document
- 5 written submissions
- 18 online surveys

Survey and written submission were received from a wide variety of stakeholders, including:

- Individual
- Industry or representative body
- Company
- Government agencies and statutory authorities
- Advocacy group
- Local Government

The majority of survey respondents live and/or work within the McLaren Vale region (Figure 2).

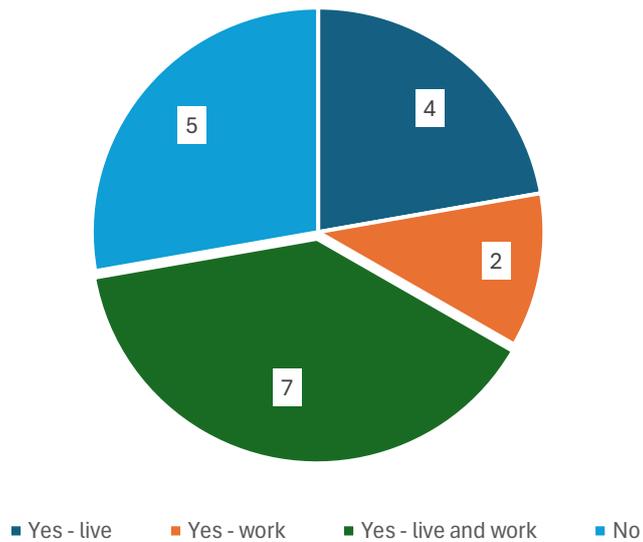


Figure 2: Survey respondents answer to the question "Do you live/work within the boundaries covered in the Strategy?"

What We Heard

We heard broad support for the Strategy across the survey and written submissions. Survey participants were specifically asked to rate their level of support for the Strategy and the distribution of responses is shown below (Figure 3).

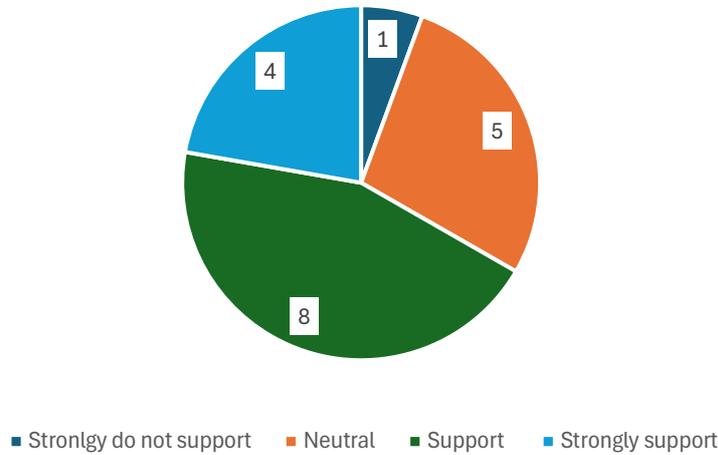


Figure 3: Survey participants level of support for the draft Strategy

Feedback associated with the results shown in Figure 3 are listed in the table below.

Level of support for the Strategy	Examples of associated feedback
Strongly do not support	<i>"We may need more water to maintain current use only. Availability of more water to support further development and population increase is a bad aim. The report should aim at worst case climate change scenario."</i>
Neutral	<i>"Strategy seems to cover the basics. Huge gap in how to effect it."</i> <i>"I agree with many parts of the draft strategy, but I do not agree with the perception and treatment of the groundwater resources as I do not feel they are understood or managed appropriately."</i>
Support	<i>"The Report is comprehensive, and the community consultation appears thorough and meaningful. There is a need to implement quickly, given the climate crisis and the plans for greater urban development in the Basin."</i> <i>"Lots of ideas are sound."</i>
Strongly support	<i>"We support all of the goals and actions in the plan."</i> <i>"This a really important process and a valuable report, I hope the work continues and soon. It would be great if strategies identified could be incorporated in planning the development of housing in Aldinga and Sellicks."</i> <i>"A vibrant agricultural sector requires protection from urban encroachment to maintain agrarian landscapes. For this to happen I believe high diversification water policy is required."</i> <i>"We particularly support the inclusion of issues relating to no wastewater outfall to the sea, recycling of wastewater, the free flow of surface water and the rehabilitation of creeks."</i>

What We Heard

Across all forms of feedback that we received, several key themes of support emerged, as well as suggestions for improvement. A high-level overview of this feedback is outlined in the following section.

Key themes of support included:

- the importance of climate-independent water sources to augment supply and reduce reliance on groundwater and surface water;
- protection of native water sources, coastal ecosystems and ensuring healthy waterways;
- no wastewater outflow to the gulf;
- First Nations involvement in decision-making;
- urban greening and increasing tree canopy cover;
- the desire for all groundwater extraction to be metered.

There were also a number of questions/criticisms/recommendations raised by respondents. An overview of these, and an associated response, is outlined in the table below.

Feedback overview	Response
<p>A regional groundwater model needs to be developed to understand and manage the groundwater resources.</p> <p><i>"Where is the detail on the groundwater modelling? Without an appropriate groundwater model, this strategy is ineffective and misleading."</i></p>	<p>Text has been added to multiple sections in the Strategy to highlight that the understanding and management of the groundwater resources would benefit from the development of a regional groundwater model.</p> <p>It is anticipated that <i>Action 8.1 (Seek funding to undertake a pilot project to investigate the feasibility of managed aquifer recharge (MAR) with a range of water sources)</i> would require the development of a groundwater model. Furthermore, it was envisaged that advocating for the development of a groundwater model for the region could occur under <i>Action 10 (Water Allocation Plan amendment process)</i>.</p>
<p>Willunga Basin Water Company (WBWC) should be publicly owned because of their pricing structure</p>	<p>This was outside the scope of the Strategy. The comment has been passed on to WBWC.</p>
<p><i>"There should be a mention of the relative costs of the different sources of water resources."</i></p>	<p>Provision of this information was challenging due to the limited availability of regional data for water supply options. The importance of this information was highlighted in the Strategy, with specific actions included to help to obtain this data, including:</p> <p><i>Action 2: Determine region-specific capital expenditure, operational expenditure, and yield (in ML) for additional supply options.</i></p> <p><i>Action 3: Undertake economic and financial modelling for selected water infrastructure concepts to develop a prioritised list of options, particularly the exploration of options to increase the use of recycled wastewater.</i></p>
<p>The strategy does not seem to see urban encroachment on the McLaren Value as an important issue.</p>	<p>The community saw urban encroachment as a critical issue. This is highlighted in Strategy with specific goals and actions (outlined below) to help achieve the collective vision for the region.</p> <p><i>Goal G: Preservation of the rural character of the region is prioritised in the planning of new development and population growth.</i></p> <p><i>Goal H: Green spaces are an integral component of the region that provide cool and liveable streets.</i></p> <p><i>Goal I: Fertile land has been protected for agriculture.</i></p> <p><i>Action 22. Ensure that policies and planning legislation support:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 22.1. the retention of rural character - 22.2. maintaining the Character Preservation Zone to protect agricultural land from development.

Feedback overview	Response
<p><i>"What is an ideal sector-based land usage by percentage (2070 outlook). I believe that priority should be given to food production agriculture."</i></p> <p><i>" We may need more water to maintain current use only. Availability of more water to support further development and population increase is a bad aim."</i></p>	<p>The Strategy was not intended to dictate or promote a specific land-use split. The purpose of providing multiple future scenarios was to illustrate how potential changes in land-use may impact water supply and demand. The goals and actions are intended to help the community realise the collective vision for the region in any future scenario.</p>
<p>There should be a specific goal related to the Washpool protection, rehabilitation and water requirements.</p>	<p>The community saw this an important aspect of the Strategy but wanted the goals and actions to reference water-dependent ecosystems in the region (not just one specific location). This was expressed through the goal and actions outlined below:</p> <p><u>Goal N: Environmental flows support healthy water-dependent ecosystems</u></p> <p><u>Action 19: Develop an environmental watering plan that:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 19.1. is informed by a stocktake of the health of waterways and an assessment of the key areas requiring environmental flows. - 19.2. sets out options to deliver environmental flows and flow regimes.
<p><i>"There should be an action to support growers transitioning to lower water intensity crops rather than high water use horticulture."</i></p>	<p>Promotion of water use efficiency was seen as an important aspect of the Strategy, highlighted through the following actions:</p> <p><u>Action 15: Explore opportunities to further improve and promote water use efficiency, including through new technology, crop selection and irrigation practices.</u></p> <p><u>Action 16: Increase community understanding of water security and promote water efficiency across the region through education, rewards and incentives.</u></p>
<p><i>"Drought resilience needs to be considered and actions relating to this should be included in the Strategy."</i></p>	<p>A strategic foresight and resilience-based planning approach was used to develop the strategy. This means that if the goals and actions are achieved, and the vision developed by the community met, then resilience (to drought and other system shocks) should be achieved.</p>
<p><i>"There should be a specific section about enabling environmental tree plantings to help achieve net emissions reduction targets."</i></p>	<p>This would need to be explored through the review and amendment of water allocation plans in the region. This recommendation has been forwarded to the Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board for their consideration.</p>
<p>A brief overview of the process used to develop the strategy, including engagement activities and technical analysis should be included.</p>	<p>Text outlining the workshop process has been added to the Strategy.</p>
<p>The Strategy would benefit from more detail and guidance relating to the development of an implementation plan.</p>	<p>A key recommendation in the Strategy is to develop governance arrangements to progress initial priorities set out in the Strategy, particularly in relation to investigating potential pathways for the viable expansion of recycled wastewater in the McLaren Vale region.</p> <p>As a priority action outlined in the Strategy, the state government is helping to progress investigations and a funding proposal related to maximising the use of recycled wastewater in the region.</p>

Next Steps

Following the public consultation process, the Strategy was updated and has now been released.

The Strategy can be accessed at: [Department for Environment and Water - McLaren Vale Regional Water...](#)