

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**National Water Survey shows Australians  
concerned about water shortages but interested  
in new solutions**

**7 October 2015:** Authorities and other agencies increasingly understand that to best manage our water resources and deliver improved customer experience they need to hear what customers know, don't know and what their concerns are.

To support that, the Australian Water Association and Arup today released the 2015 Water Consumer Outlook, the results of a nation-wide survey to understand consumers' views about water in Australia.

"The report is based on a survey of consumers, both urban and rural, and shows there is always more the water industry can do to hear from and engage with customers" said Jonathan McKeown, Chief Executive of the Australian Water Association.

People right across Australia are concerned about water shortages, but concern was higher in rural and regional areas. That is reinforced by a finding that rural and regional survey respondents were more strongly in favour of building more dams in the north and south of Australia.

While there was some concern about the approach being taken to ensure our ongoing water security, an extremely positive finding is strong support for alternative water sources, with 90% agreeing that water recycling was a sustainable non-drinking source.

Water providers got the customer tick of approval with 58% of respondents happy with the time it took to act on faults and generally rated their supplier as good and environmentally responsible.

"At today's National Water Policy Summit we are discussing opportunities for the industry to discuss ways the water sector can shape a wider community campaign to value water as a major economic driver, as well as a national asset to be managed sustainably." Mr McKeown said.

Daniel Lambert, Arup's Australasia Water and Urban Renewal Leader supports an increased customer focus, "The water industry in Australia has recognised the importance of continuing to shift from a compliance focus to a customer focus. This commitment has been reflected in the utilities statements of obligation which acknowledge the importance of their customers."

Highlights of the report include:

- Over three quarters of respondents (77%) were concerned or very concerned for water shortage in the whole of Australia
- 62% of respondents were concerned or very concerned about water shortages in their state or territory. Concern was higher in rural and regional areas than in urban areas.
- Less than a third of respondents (31%) were confident there will be enough water in the future and only 34% thought the authorities were taking firm action on longer term water availability.
- The top three perceived impacts on water were drought, climate change and population growth.

- The most positively rated activities by water providers were responding quickly to faults (58% rated their water provider good or very good) and being environmentally responsible (56%).
- Almost one third of respondents (32%) were undecided about more private sector involvement in the water sector, while 36% were against or strongly against it and 23% supported or strongly supported it. The key factors when considering private sector involvement are quality, price, reliable service and environmental responsibility.
- Thirty-eight per cent of respondents considered the price of water about right. Over half of the respondents (54%) thought that changes in water prices were not explained enough.
- There was strong support for alternative water sources with 90% agreeing water recycling was a sustainable non-drinking source and 82% supporting stormwater re-use. Alternative water sources were widely accepted for drinking, led by desalinated water (82% agreeing or strongly agreeing), recycled water (69%) and stormwater (56%).
- Rural and regional water consumers were stronger supporters of more dams in the north and south of Australia than urban water consumers with 57% of rural consumers supporting more dams in the north and 45% for the south, greater than the 44% of urban respondents supporting more dams in the north and 30% for the south.

Mr McKeown highlights that “Although the majority of consumers felt the price for water was about right or too low, they were united in thinking that the costs could be better explained. The Survey also gave us the opportunity to hear what Australians understand about our water security and supply, so as an industry we can better engage with consumers so that their priorities and views are heard.”

“In order to maintain and enhance a customer focus, it is critical for the water industry to understand their customers. The 2015 Water Consumer Outlook provides the results of a nation-wide survey. This report provides a valuable insight into customer’s views on important issues facing the water sector.” Daniel Lambert concluded.

According to Mr McKeown, the water industry is continually trying to balance price and affordability for consumers against the need to maintain a safe and secure water supply – which comes at a cost.

“As the driest inhabited continent on earth, we need to be strategic in our investment in water infrastructure and ensure price signals actually encourage efficient use of this resource. And in order to do this ALL consumers of water need to have an opinion; and industry and government need to engage the community in the water debate.”

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### **About the Australian Water Association**

The Australian Water Association is Australia's leading membership association for water professionals and organisations. The Association is independent and not for profit. It plays an essential role in supporting the Australian water sector in the delivery of effective and sustainable water management practices. Our mission is to foster knowledge, understanding and advancement in sustainable water management – its science, practice and policy – through advocacy, collaboration and professional development.

We operate across all Australian States and Territories through an active branch network as well as maintaining extensive international links, including with the International Water Association. The Australian Water Association provides a comprehensive program of conferences, workshops, publications, industry programs, training courses, networking and B2B opportunities. The Australian Water Association's Annual Conference and Exhibition, Ozwater, is Australia's largest water industry event.

### **About Arup**

Arup is the creative force at the heart of many of the world's most prominent projects in the built environment and across industry. From 90 offices in 38 countries our 11,000 planners, designers, engineers and consultants deliver innovative projects across the world with creativity and passion.

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