COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Funding our Future

Consultation period: 18 November 2024 to 12 January 2025

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OVERVIEW

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) requires councils considering making an application for a Special Variation (SV) to rates, to engage with their communities before the application is finalised and submitted to IPART. The engagement should explain and seek community feedback on the purpose, need for and impact of a proposed SV which may include current and planned service levels. It should also talk about alternatives considered and efficiencies it has found. A key criterion in the application is evidence that the community is aware of the need for, and extent of a rate rise and that the impact on affected ratepayers is reasonable.

A comprehensive community engagement plan was presented to Council at the 12 November 2024 Council meeting outlining a variety of consultation methods and communication tools that would be used to ensure our ratepayers and residents are made aware of the financial problem and the alternative solutions (options) being proposed to address the shortfall and provide financial sustainability to the Council for future years.

Council conducted an 8-week community consultation program planned in accordance with IPART requirements and Council's Community Engagement Policy and Strategy.

A project page was established on Council's Your Say website platform with various information tools including videos, fact sheets, graphics, rates calculator, webinars, and an extensive frequently asked questions (FAQ) section. The project page was the focus of a broad multi-channel communications campaign that aimed at driving visitation to the Your Say project page with particular emphasis on reaching ratepayers and residents.

Feedback was captured through an online survey embedded into the Your Say project page. Other questions were designed to provide qualitative data about community sentiment towards the proposed options and how respondents value the importance of Council services. An open comment box was also provided, and email and written comments were also received. Page and a registration process was set up to gather information about participants to provide insight into the reach and effectiveness of engaging local residents/ ratepayers. Other questions were designed to provide qualitative data about community sentiment towards the proposed options and how participants value the importance of Council services and programs. An open comment box was also provided to capture more feedback. Email and written comments were also received.

The results of the communications campaign show it had extensive reach across multiple channels including social media (posts/ reels), print advertising, earned media, eDMs and direct letter mail. Engagement was high with traffic to the page coming from over 13,290 QR code users, followed by more than 6,070 click throughs from Council eDMs and more than 1,577 clicks via social media.

The metrics show there were more than 36,800 visits (individual browsing sessions) to the Your Say page. The average time spent on the page was 3 minutes and 10 seconds, a higher than average dwell time compared with industry data and other Council project pages. The online rates calculator was used over 13,300 times.

A total of 6,339 responses were received 5,584 survey submissions via Your Say or in hard copy and 804 submissions received via email or written.

The analysis of submissions in this report is qualitative. Whilst the project has received one of the highest responses in terms of the number of submissions in recent years, it is not representative data, rather it provides representation of community sentiment. This report should be viewed along with the statistical data in the Community Satisfaction Survey (August 2024). This survey included questions on support for paying more to maintain and improve services, facilities and infrastructure.

It shows stronger support from the community with over 60% of respondents were at least somewhat supportive.

The approach to completing the analysis involved identifying the issues and points of feedback within each submission, establishing the overarching themes and coding the issues and feedback in accordance with them. The process recognised that one submission could contain several themes. Quality control was employed to further cross check the submissions. The themes are:

1. Desire to improve services and infrastructure
2. Desire to maintain services and infrastructure
3. Desire to reduce services and infrastructure
4. Support for Council to cut costs and seek additional income streams
5. Increase in rates should only be in line with inflation or no increase at all
6. Comments relating to affordability
7. Community engagement on options
8. Concerns over the benefit of amalgamation
9. Don't like any of the options
10. NSW Government influence
11. Concerns about the rating system.

Community sentiment was measured by an opt in survey asking respondents to:

- Rate the level of importance of services and facilities
- Rate the level of support for each option
- Rank the options in order of preference
- Provide free text comments that were themed

The feedback shows the importance placed by the community on Council continuing to deliver services and invest in maintaining and improving the Northern Beaches. In the opt-in survey, 80% of respondents rated maintaining existing services and facilities, improving roads and footpaths and Council investing in risk reduction programs and natural disaster recovery as important.

Looking at the level of support for the options in the opt in survey, it was strongest for Maintain service at 72% followed by Reduce service and to a lesser extent Improve service.

However, in ranking the options the opt in survey shows the community is divided with support balanced between the options on 1st preference. Some 49% are in favour of a special variation to either Maintain, Improve or Increase service and the remainder favour Reduce service.

An independent review of the engagement plan and submission analysis by Micromex Research, concluded, "It would be counterintuitive to suggest that residents who clicked through but did not complete the survey were even more negative towards the SRV than those who participated. It is more likely they were ambivalent or tacitly supportive."

This report provides a breakdown of the findings.

1. ENGAGEMENT

1.1 Objectives

Community and stakeholder engagement aimed to explain and seek community feedback on the purpose, need for and impact of the proposed Special Variation to rates options. It also included information to promote understanding about Council's current financial position, savings and efficiencies already achieved and ongoing.

A key criterion in the application to IPART is evidence that the community is aware of the need for, and extent of a rate rise and that the impact on affected ratepayers is reasonable.

1.2 Approach

The engagement was planned, implemented and reported in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Strategy (2022).

Community and stakeholder engagement for Funding our Future was conducted between Monday 18 November 2024 and Sunday 12 January 2025 and consisted of a series of activities that provided opportunities for community and stakeholders to contribute.

A project page was established on Council's Your Say website platform with information in a range of formats. This included, videos, fact sheets, related reports, graphics and tables, rates calculator, webinars, and an extensive frequently asked questions (FAQ) section that was regularly updated during the public exhibition in response to new questions arising from the community.

The project was promoted through a multi-channel communications campaign to promote visitation to the Your Say project page. Promotion was also done via Council's regular electronic direct mail (EDMs) as well as through a range of other communication channels including print advertising, media, postcards and information stations at key customer contact points. Letters were also mailed directly to ratepayers providing information and inviting them to visit the Your Say page via a QR code.

The use of QR codes was also deployed across collateral at all information stations, printed collateral and print advertising to promote easy access to the project page.

Customer service centres were provided with information to promote first contact resolution for customers and to assist in the efficient management of telephone enquiries. Print copies of the survey were readily available, and assistance provided wherever requested.

Feedback was captured through an online survey embedded into the Have Your Say project page. A registration process was set up that aimed to gather information about participants including postcode data that could provide insight into the reach and effectiveness of the campaign in engaging local residents/ ratepayers. Other questions were designed to provide qualitative data about community sentiment towards the proposed options and how participants value in terms of importance Council services and programs. An open comment box was also provided to capture more feedback. Email and written comments were also received.

A summary of the community engagement activities and communication tools used to support the project, is as follows:

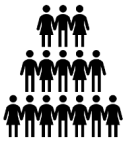
Community Engagement summary	**Communication tools summary**
• Your Say webpage • Rates calculator • Videos • Webinar recording • Fact sheets – Your options explained • Snapshots, graphic tables • Frequently Asked Questions • Support services – including Translation and Accessibility • Contact information for more help • Submission form/survey (with postcode capture) • Document library including: - Draft Addendum Delivery Plan - Draft Long-Term Financial Plan - Preliminary Productivity Journey and Improvement plan - Annual Report 2023-24 - Asset Management Plan 2024-2034 - Links to Council meetings and reports.	• Letter box mailout to all ratepayers • Emails to our community members on subscriber distribution lists • Email project updates to subscribers on the Your Say webpage • Drop-in sessions - two per ward, covering both a weekday and weekend • Media Release and news stories • Media briefing • Print advertising in local media • Outdoor advertising on bus shelters/EV charging stations • Community/ resident association meetings • Local business chamber meetings • Social media posts, reels • Digital advertising on Council website, customer services TV screens and local media social pages • Information stations set up at key Council contact points with the community.

In recognising that over 80% of council staff live in the LGA, a range of resources and communication tools were used to promote the project within the organisation, including:

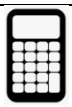
- Internal face to face information sessions
- Team meeting updates/ information sheets
- Staff newsletters
- News stories on the Intranet
- Information stations in key lunchroom areas (pull up and postcards with QR codes).

2. KEY OUTCOMES

2.1 How we engaged

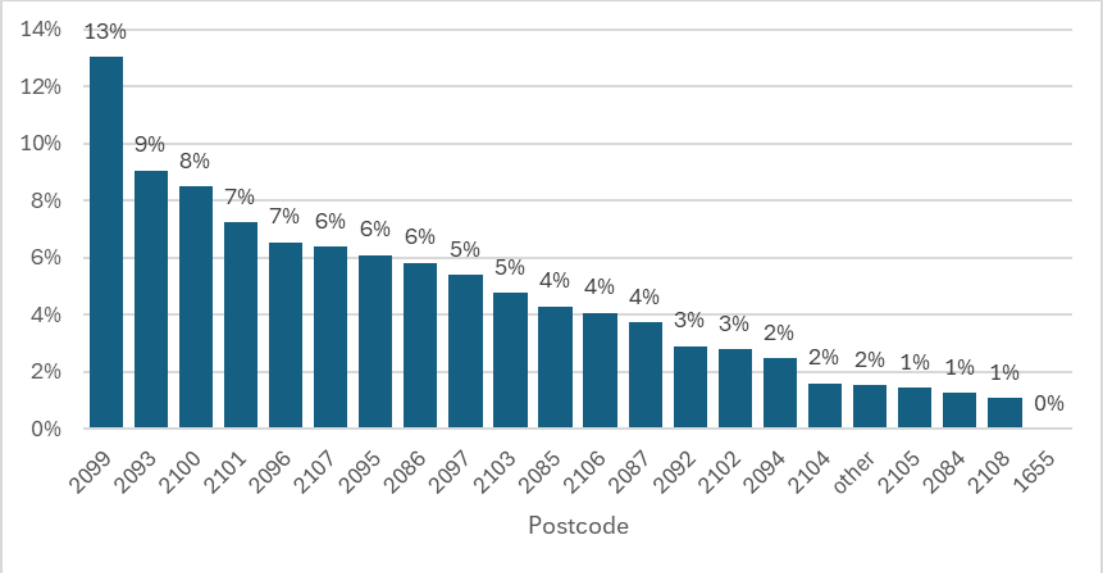
 Total unique responses	6,389		
 How responses were received	Submission form survey – online Submission form survey - hardcopy Written responses (email/letter)		Completions: 5,538 No. received 46 No. received: 805
 Have Your Say: visitation stats	Page views (total): 45,419	Visits (individual browsing sessions): 36,875 Visitors (single browsing session): 26,469	Average time on page: 3 min 109ec 5,538 Contributions 5,514 Contributors 2,969 followers on project page
 Council website	Homepage carousel		1,482 clicks from ~1,034 users
	News stories x 2		Views: 2,805 Sessions: 2,681
	Engagement card on homepage		902 clicks
 Social media	Organic post/reel (video 1 animation): (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram)		5,840 views 5,261 reach 383 clicks
	Organic post/reel (video 2 explainer): (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram)		12,680 views 8,651 reach 545 clicks
	2 x paid ads (Facebook, Instagram)		525,221 impressions 311,802 reach 539 link clicks 649 engagement
	Video explainer - YouTube Animation - Your Tube		Views:1,416 Views: 518

Videos		
 Print collateral	Direct letter poster to all ratepayers	Distribution: 96,156
	QR code utilisation	13,294
	Postcards	Print run: 2,000
	Brochure	Print run: 1,200
	Collateral available at information stations (Libraries, Customer Service Centres and Aquatic Centres)	Number of sites: 12
 Media	Media briefing	Attendance: 3
	Media release Editorial media coverage (print, digital, broadcast)	23 news items, reaching 261,000 audience
	Pittwater Life print ad - Dec 24 and Jan 25	Distribution: 32,000 x 2
	Peninsula Living (south) print ad - Dec 24 & Jan 25	Distribution: 30,000 x 2
	Peninsula Living (south) print ad - Dec 24 & Jan 25	Distribution: 57,000
	Tawny Frogmouth print ad (back cover)	Distribution: 50,000
	Digital ads Manly Observer	135,000 impressions, 62 clicks
	Northern Beaches Advocate	121,000 views, 89 clicks
 Electronic direct mail (eDM)	All eDM direct click through to Your Say	6,078
	Community Engagement (fortnightly) x 2	Distribution: 21,900
	Council (weekly) e-news: x 8 editions	Distribution: 58,100
	Stakeholder email: 3	Distribution: 705

 Face-to-face sessions	Webinar Information session: 2 Pop up / Drop-in sessions: 10	Attendance: 37 Attendance: 1,641
 Key stakeholder engagement	Resident associations Group notification Group discussion (in-person meetings) Online information session for local business chambers	Distribution: 52 Meetings: 7 Attendance: 10
 Rates calculator utilisation	Rates calculator utilisation	13,388
 Outdoor advertising	Outdoor advertising Bus shelters and EV charging stations	Bus shelters: 6 locations in Dee Why x 2, Belrose, Collaroy, Manly, Forestville EV charging stations: 3 locations in Narrabeen, Collaroy and Dee Why
Other advertising	Digital advertising on customer screens	Location: All Customer Service Centres and Libraries
 Telephone survey	Telephone survey 20-27 August 2024	Participants: 606

2.2 Who responded[1]

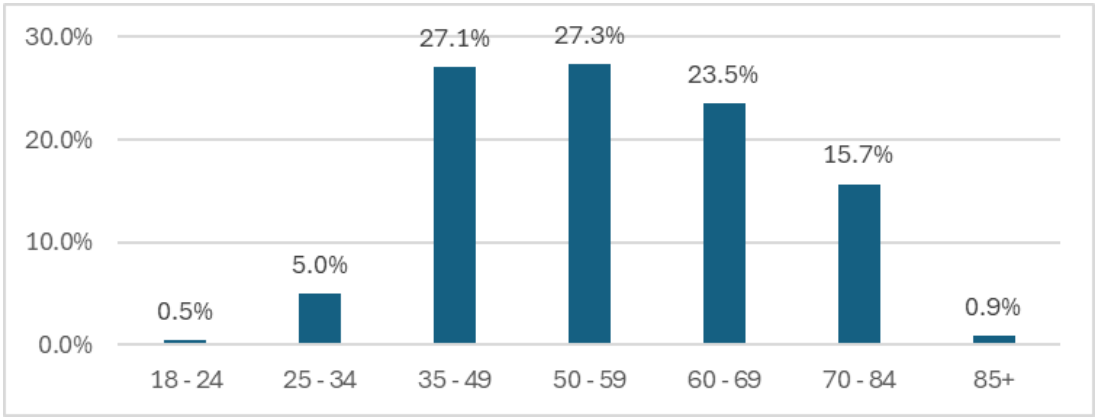
Postcodes



Total responses = 5,584

Respondents self-selected suburbs and there was an opportunity for error – nominated suburb – suburbs on the northern beaches but selected a different postcode

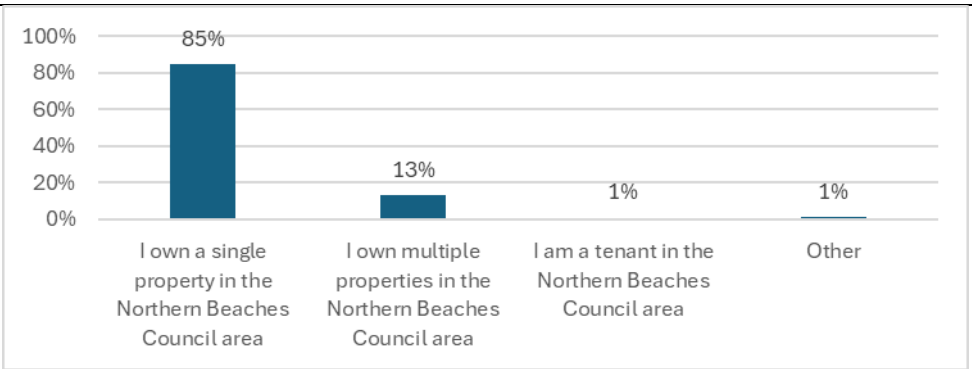
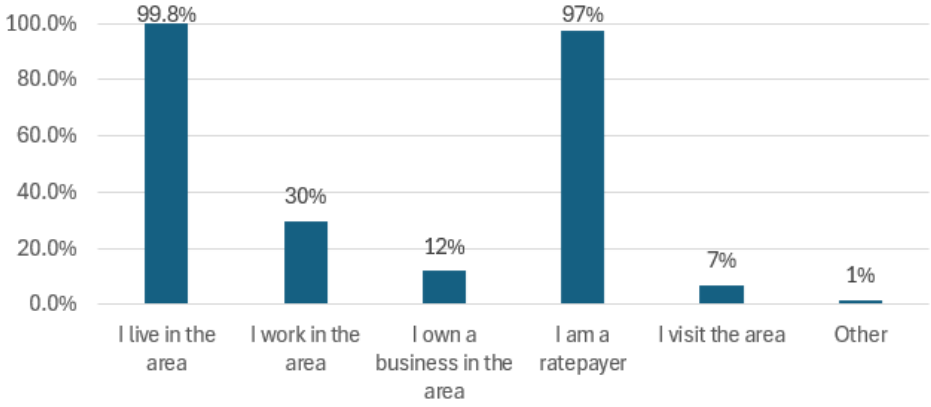
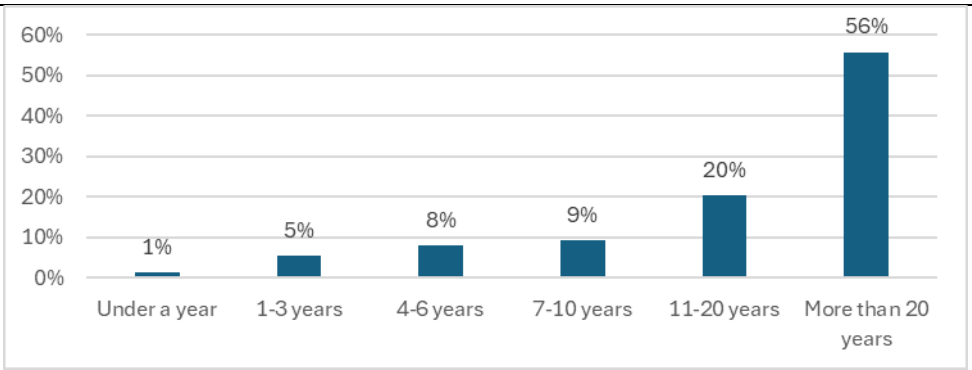
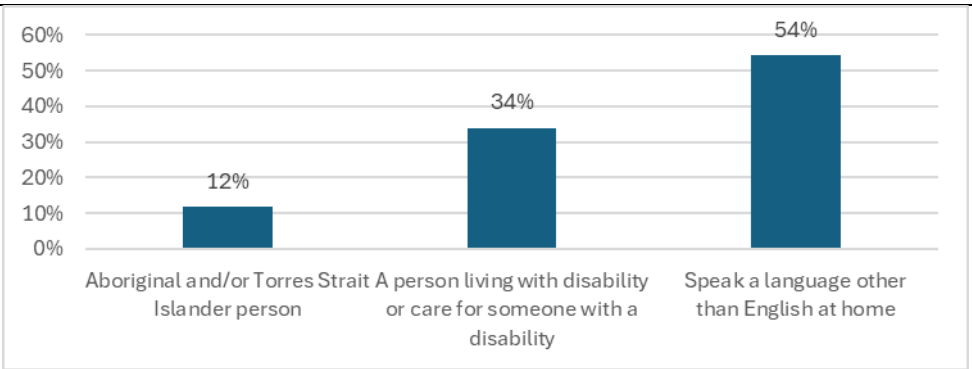
Age groups



Total responses = 5,376

Participation among the younger age groups is low. This is standard in an opt in survey. However, those aged 35-59 are very likely to have children living at home and would be thinking of them as part of their response.

[1] Demographic data represented is from the survey form (online and hardcopy) where respondents supplied the information.

Ratepayer v Non ratepayer	 Total responses = 5,580
Connection to Northern Beaches	 Total responses = 4,506 More than one option could be nominated by respondents
Time living in the Northern Beaches	 Total responses = 5,582
Priority populations	 Total responses = 707

3. REACH AND ENGAGEMENT

A comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise was completed to identify and ensure the tactics developed in the engagement and communications plan would achieve broad community awareness and an understanding of the opportunity to provide feedback.

It was determined for this project that it was particularly important to hear from Northern Beaches ratepayers, residents, resident associations, business operators. Recognising that participation would be voluntary, direct communications were also sent through key community representatives including community and religious leaders, youth and disability networks.

Council delivered a series of pop-up events (2 per Ward, 10 in total) that had a total of 1,641 interactions. The purpose of these was to drive awareness and encourage participation.

Social media hosted several posts and reels including two videos and two paid adverts. The latter demonstrated a high level of impressions (this is the number of times the content was displayed to users). Thus, indicating the likelihood, the content was served to people on the feed and created a level of awareness. This number does not equate to the number of times users engaged with the content.

In terms of engagement on social media, the paid advertising proved effective in terms of reach (over 311,000) and moderate engagement of 649. The click through rate was consistent across paid and organic content. This is solid level of engagement for this type of content.

An extensive print advertising program was deployed across all local print/ digital media agencies. This was complemented with broad editorial coverage (earned media). The paid advertising included several double page layouts. Whilst the publications report a high distribution across the region, it is difficult to measure reach or engagement. Of the digital adverts placed, the data shows there were just over 150 click throughs (engagement). This was less than half of the click through rate on Council's own social media channels.

Council's electronic direct mail (eDM) platform continues to demonstrate effectiveness in terms of reach and engagement. With a total distribution of some 80,000 subscribers the data shows there an engagement rate of 48 - 49% across the Community Engagement eDMs. There was also a CTR (click through rate) of 6,078. This represents a higher than industry average rate which is estimated to be around 3 - 4%.

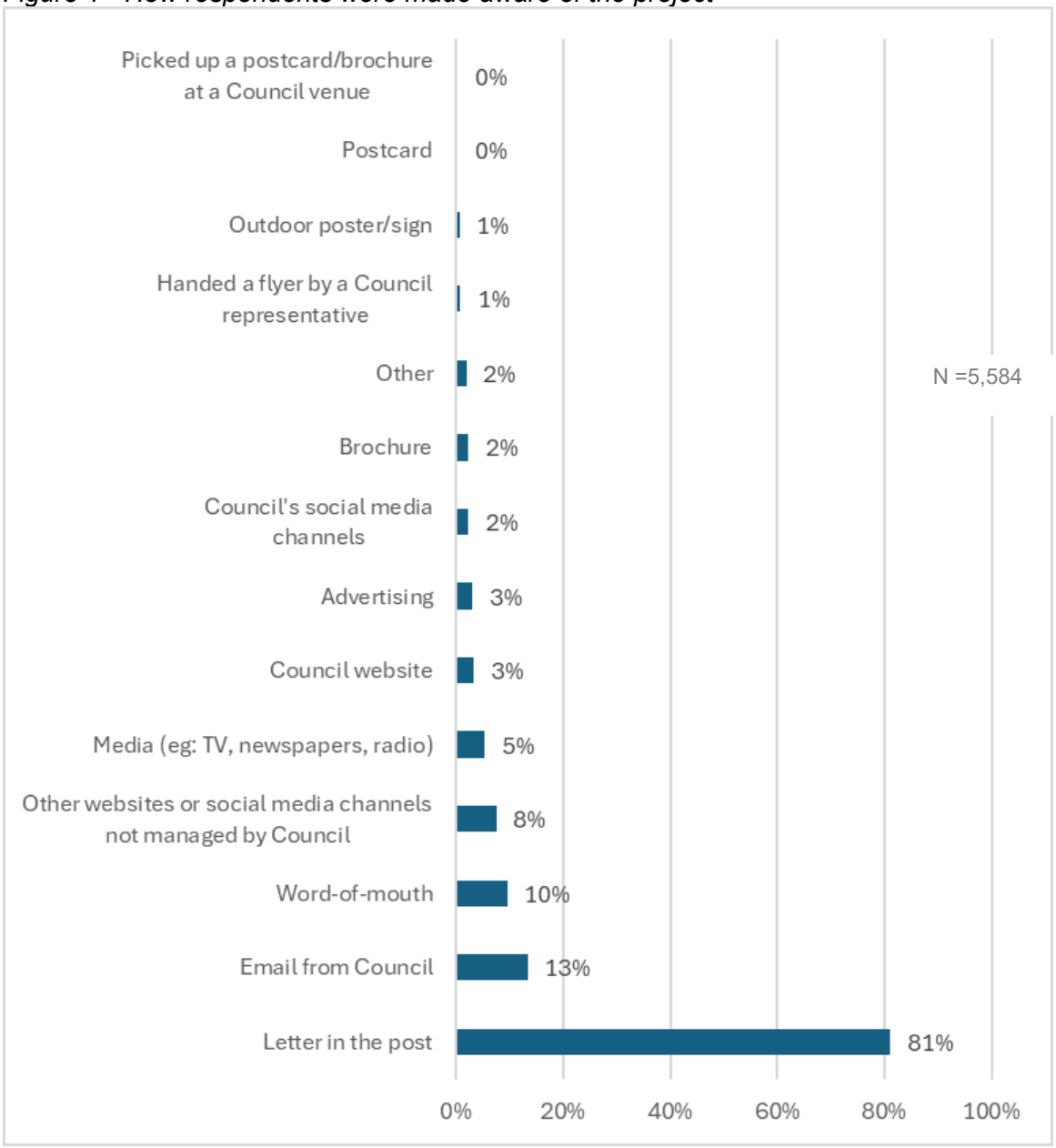
QR codes were deployed across all print, advertising and embedded in the direct mailout letters to all 96,156 ratepayers. Data shows the use of QR codes was higher than average, used over 13,290 times to access the Your Say project page directly. The metrics indicate that people were using the code to get to the page from a poster, sign and/ or letter and then coming back to it later to interact

The total number of page views was 45,877. This represents people who have viewed the page a number of times. There were 36,875 visits (individual browsing sessions) and this figure may include one person if they returned multiple times. There were 26,469 visitors which records IP addresses, however, if multiple people use the same IP it records them only once. These metrics when considered together show that this project page had a very high level of engagement as these numbers are well above Council project page averages. Despite the high visitation, only 11% of visitors to the page have subscribed for project updates.

Visitors spent an above average dwell time on the page of 3 minutes and 10 seconds. This is higher than the industry average dwell time (between 30 seconds – 2 minutes).

Council received 5,538 submissions via Your Say project page. This represents around 15% of visits to the page resulting in a submission, thus 85% of visits to the page did not engage further. The insights into how respondents were aware of the project show that the direct mail out letter to ratepayers was highly effective, followed by Council eDMs, word of mouth and other websites or social media channels not Council. Some respondents nominated more than one source of information. See table below:

*Figure 1 - How respondents were made aware of the project**



*Respondents to the survey could choose multiple options

4. MICROMEX RESEARCH INDEPENDENT REVIEW: NORTHERN BEACHES COUNCIL'S SV CONSULTATION

Micromex Research were engaged to review the methodology applied to the assessment of submissions and also comment on the engagement results. The comment is below:

Micromex has extensive experience in assisting State and Local Government organisations in undertaking effective attitudinal, behavioural and satisfaction market research covering a range of topics including community satisfaction, asset management/service levels, special rate variations, concept evaluation, branding, CX and social wellbeing.

In an average year Micromex conducts community research for around 40 or more NSW LGAs. Micromex has conducted around 50 SRV consultations since 2010. Most frequently, we undertake statistically valid and representative measurements of community response. We most frequently do this via telephone surveys, using a managed random sample of mobile phone numbers and landlines.

- *Conducting a representative survey allows for extrapolation of a confidence limit. In the recently conducted Northern Beaches community satisfaction survey, we sampled 600 residents. A sample size of 600 has a confidence limit of +/-4%. This means that 19 times out of 20, the same research would achieve the same result within +/-4%.*

For this consultation, Northern Beaches Council used an opt-in online survey and submission form, so these results do not reflect the views of the entire community. They represent the views of those who completed the survey.

We have observed that other SRV self-select surveys (i.e., online/postal) often show a higher proportion of people supporting a rate peg only option. This proportion is invariably higher than what representative phone surveys reveal because those against a rate rise are more likely to voice objections compared to those who accept or support it, provided that services are maintained or improved.

- *Across the last six consultations where we collected both opt-in online responses and representative polls, over 60% of online respondents generally chose a rate peg or lower option. Thus, the 51%/49% balance observed in the Northern Beaches Council consultation indicates a relatively higher support for a rate variation compared to opt-in SRV consultations conducted by other NSW LGAs.*

Council's communication strategy as outlined on page 5-7 demonstrates that they have made every effort to inform the community of this consultation, and have encouraged the community to take part in the decision process. The media mix covers virtually every possible contact point with the exception of physically door knocking the entire LGA. The data analytics on the homepage recorded 45,000 page views, and 27,000 single browsing session.

In terms of volume, optional online SRV surveys rarely see significant community participation. Usually, we get no more than 100 responses to our offered opt-in SRV surveys. However, in this consultation over 5,500 residents registered and voted in the survey, while another 800 sent in a submission.

- *It would be counterintuitive to suggest that residents who clicked through but did not complete the survey were even more negative towards the SRV than those who participated. It is more likely they were ambivalent or tacitly supportive.*
- *In summary, while the results are not representative of the Northern Beaches community, they meaningfully reflect the views of the significant number of residents who interacted or participated in the survey component of the consultation.*

Stuart Reeve – Director of Micromex Research

5. METHODOLOGY FOR ASSESSING SUBMISSIONS

Submissions are accepted if they are in writing and received either via the online form on the Your Say project page, hardcopy online form, letter or email addressed to Council or Councillors. Anonymous submissions by mail and email are accepted as a submission. (A total of 8 submissions were received by email or letter where the individual could not be identified for registration as customer in Council's document management system).

5.1 Submissions via email/letter

Submissions received via email and mail are registered in Council's record management system and recorded in the Submission Register. An initial check is performed to establish if the writer/ respondent has already made a submission. All submissions are read, and the sentiment coded against themes in the Submission Register. An acknowledgement is sent to the customer and the action closed in Council's document management system.

5.2 Submissions via the online form

The information from the hardcopy submission is extracted and recorded. All submissions are read, and the sentiment coded against themes in the register. An automated acknowledgement is sent when the writer/respondent submits the form.

5.3 Duplicate submissions

An individual can only make one submission. Any additional comments are added to the sentiment in their original submission. A secondary review is undertaken to capture new/additional sentiment.

Online form

Customers had to create a Social Pinpoint account on the Your Say project page providing personal information (including name, date of birth and email address) to make a submission. The system does not limit the account holder to one submission. Submissions were deemed to be duplicate where:

1. Member details on social pinpoint platform were identical; and
2. Email contact details supplied separately by the customer to be kept informed of the project was the same as the duplicate submission; and
3. The name of the individual is the same, this includes where initials were used for the Christian name and then written in full.

Note - where only 1 and 2 above is satisfied and the individuals name is different this is treated as a submission.

Emails

Where there was more than one submission from the same account was received and the sign off on the email was either the same, unsigned, one was signed and the other unsigned, or for the Christian name initials were used and then written in full it was considered a duplicate submission.

Submissions from different legal entities (Company + an individual) using the same email and signed were treated as individual submissions.

Letters

Letters were also treated as the same and a similar process undertaken in cross checking and eliminating duplicates from the letters/email register and online form register.

5.4 Quality checking of coding themes

The qualitative comments in submissions are coded against themes and initials of the reviewer recorded against the submission. A secondary review of the coding of comments against themes was completed, including those flagged as having additional submissions added and initials of the reviewer recorded against the submission. All submissions were read to ensure the sentiment coded against each theme is reflective of the writers expressed intent.

6. ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK

A total of 6,389 submissions were received during the public exhibition. Submissions received by Council up until close of business Wednesday 15 January 2025 have been included in this report. Of these, 5,538 respondents made submissions via Council's Have Your Say page and 851 were received directly via email or letter (including 46 hard copy survey forms). Submissions were also received from organisations, including:

- IRIS Capital and their clients
- Scentre Group for Westfield Warringah Mall
- Vicinity Centres for Warriewood Square
- Manly Business Chamber/ Manly Property Owners Group
- Athas Group (commercial property owners in Manly CBD, Manly & Brookvale)
- Hardware and General Supplies
- Aspiring Properties (property owners in manly)
- Perpetual Trustee Company Limited
- Queensland Investment Corporation
- Duffy's Forest Residents Association
- Newport Residents association
- Palm Beach and Whale Beach Association
- Protect Pittwater

Late submissions were received after Tuesday 15 January. While they have not been incorporated in the report, each were read. It is noted that the sentiment in the late submissions is already captured in the report.

Council also commissioned Micromex Research to conduct a representative telephone of residents living in the Northern Beaches. The survey was undertaken from 20-27 August 2024 with a sample size of 606 residents

The survey explored community priorities, levels of resident satisfaction with Council services and facilities and their sense of connection to the area. Participants were also asked a question on their level of supportive to pay more to support improved level of services, facilities, and infrastructure in your local area.

This report provides a summary of the response to this question. The Micromex Research report is available at www.northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au.

6.1 Theming - survey form, letters and emails

The approach to completing the analysis involved identifying the issues within each and every submission, including establishing overarching themes and coding the issues and feedback in accordance with the themes.

Some people made more than one submission, and it should be noted that one submission could contain several themes.

A quality control process was also implemented so that submissions could be further cross checked.

All submissions received were reviewed, coded, and categorised within the following 11 overarching themes. However, themes 1 – 3 were only used in relation to the analysis of submissions received through the Your Say survey as this formed part of the survey structure and the feedback is captured on that data set.

1. Desire to improve services and infrastructure
2. Desire to maintain services and infrastructure
3. Desire to reduce services and infrastructure
4. Support for Council to cut costs and seek additional income streams
5. Increase in rates should only be in line with inflation or no increase at all
6. Comments relating to affordability
7. Community engagement on options
8. Concerns over the benefit of amalgamation
9. Don't like any of the options
10. NSW Government influence
11. Concerns about the rating system

6.2 Qualitative analysis – Limitations and restrictions

The analysis of submissions in this report is qualitative. Whilst the project has received one of the highest responses in terms of the number of submissions in recent years, it is not representative data, rather it provides some representation of community sentiment.

Feedback was captured through several channels including an online survey form where respondents were invited to include comments. Feedback was also received via email and letter, and directly from organisations. Some submissions provided extensive and detailed information specific to many aspects of the project.

One of the challenges in analysing this type of feedback is in identifying the key issues whilst mitigating bias. Therefore, the comments and issues within each submission were analysed in accordance with 11 high level themes that emerged from the data. This was ascertained through a process of sampling and testing and a quality control review.

A further limitation to the data analysis was the Have Your Say survey design. Whilst the survey was developed to gain insights into option preferences, it was also built to get a wholistic picture, to understand what services the community value in terms of importance. This data should be read together with the thematic analysis and the results of the Community Satisfaction Survey.

In considering the views expressed in the engagement results it is important to note they are not representative, as they represent less than 6% of all ratepayers, less than half of the people who used the online rates calculator and just 15% of individual who engaged and browsed the project page.

7. FINDINGS

7.1 Overview

As a precursor to the formal Special Variation engagement process, a representative survey was conducted with the community in August 2024. The survey included questions on support for paying more to maintain and improve services, facilities and infrastructure.

The formal engagement on the Special Variation commenced on 18 November 2024 and closed on 12 January 2025. Community sentiment was measured by responses to an opt in survey as well as emails and letters where respondents could:

- Rate the level of importance of services and facilities
- Rate the level of support for each option
- Rank the options in order of preference
- Provide free text comments that were themed

The feedback in the opt in survey shows the importance the community places on Council continuing to deliver services and invest in maintaining and improving the Northern Beaches. 80% of respondents rated maintaining existing services and facilities, improving roads and footpaths and Council investing in risk reduction programs and natural disaster recovery as important.

Looking at the level of support for each option, it was strongest for Maintain service at 72% in the opt in survey, followed by Reduce service at 57% and to a lesser extent Improve service.

The ranking of options shows the community is divided on 1st preference in the opt in survey. Some 49% of respondent's 1st preference was a special variation to either Maintain, Improve or Increase service with the remainder favouring Reduce service. (Total responses 5,584).

The 1st preference option of those responding by email and letter was clearer. They favoured Reduce service at 64%, over the combined special variation options at 36%. (Total responses 467).

The survey in August 2024 of a representative sample of the community shows stronger support at that time for an increase. Over 60% of respondents were at least somewhat supportive of a rate increase to maintain and/or improve services.

A breakdown of the findings is below.

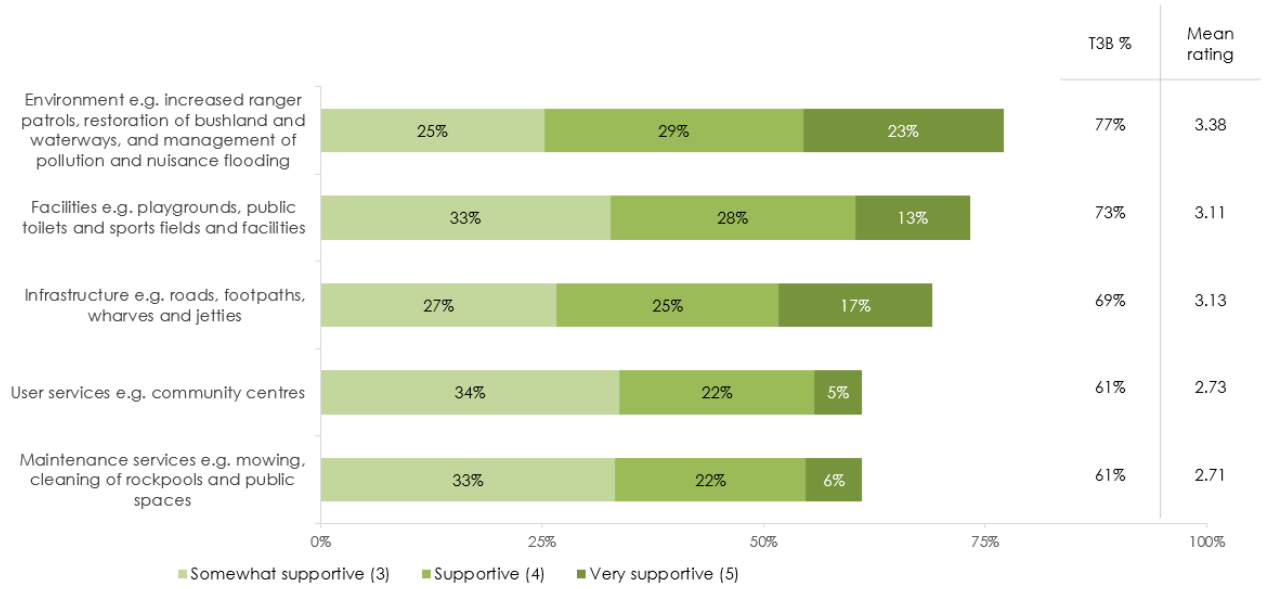
7.2 Representative survey - support to pay more

Micromex Research conducted a representative telephone of 606 residents from 20-27 August 2024. The survey was weighted to reflect Northern Beaches' age and gender population profile (among residents aged 18 or over).

A total sample size of 606 residents provides a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 4.0% at 95% confidence. This means that if the survey was replicated with a new universe of 606 residents, 19 times out of 20 the same results would be expected.

Residents were asked on their level of supportive to pay more to support improved level of services, facilities, and infrastructure in their local area. The survey found over 60% of residents are at least somewhat supportive of paying more for services, facilities and infrastructure.

Figure 2 - Level of support to pay more for improvement for services, facilities and infrastructure – representative survey



Base: N = 606

The survey also found males and younger residents (18-34) are significantly more likely to support paying more for environmental improvements, while older residents (65+) are significantly more likely to support paying more for improvements in user services.

Table 1 - Level of support to pay more for improvement for services, facilities and infrastructure by different participant type – representative survey

T3B% (At least somewhat supportive)	Overall	Male	Female	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Ratepayer	Non-ratepayer
Environment	77%	82%	73%	93%	74%	71%	70%	73%	77%	77%
Facilities	73%	77%	70%	75%	83%	73%	65%	71%	74%	71%
Infrastructure	69%	72%	66%	75%	75%	62%	64%	68%	70%	67%
User services	61%	61%	61%	56%	65%	56%	56%	72%	62%	58%
Maintenance services	61%	63%	59%	64%	64%	55%	53%	66%	61%	63%
Base	606	292	314	144	105	119	96	142	487	119

Scale: 1 = not at all supportive, 5 = very supportive
A significantly higher/lower percentage (by group)

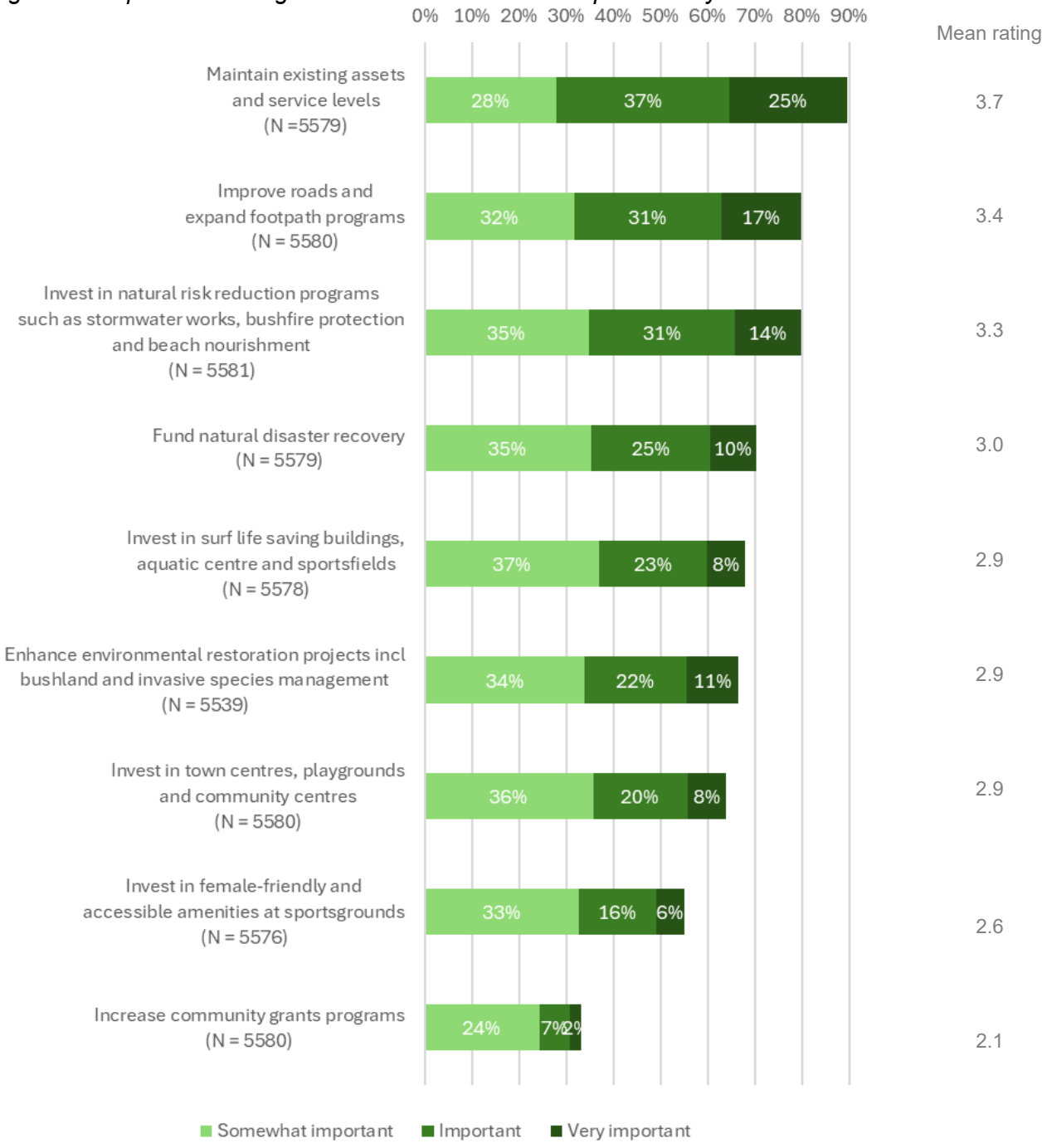
7.3 Opt in survey – Rate the level of importance of services and facilities

Respondents to the opt in survey were asked to rate the importance of Council services and facilities on a 5-point scale of Not Important At All to Very Important.

Of the 9 services and facilities surveyed, over 60% of respondents rated 7 of the services and facilities as least somewhat important. The support was stronger for maintain existing services and facilities, improving roads and expand footpath programs, and investment in natural risk reduction programs with 80% or above rating these initiatives as somewhat to very important.

Figure 1 presents the summary of this data.

Figure 3 - Importance rating of services and facilities – opt in survey

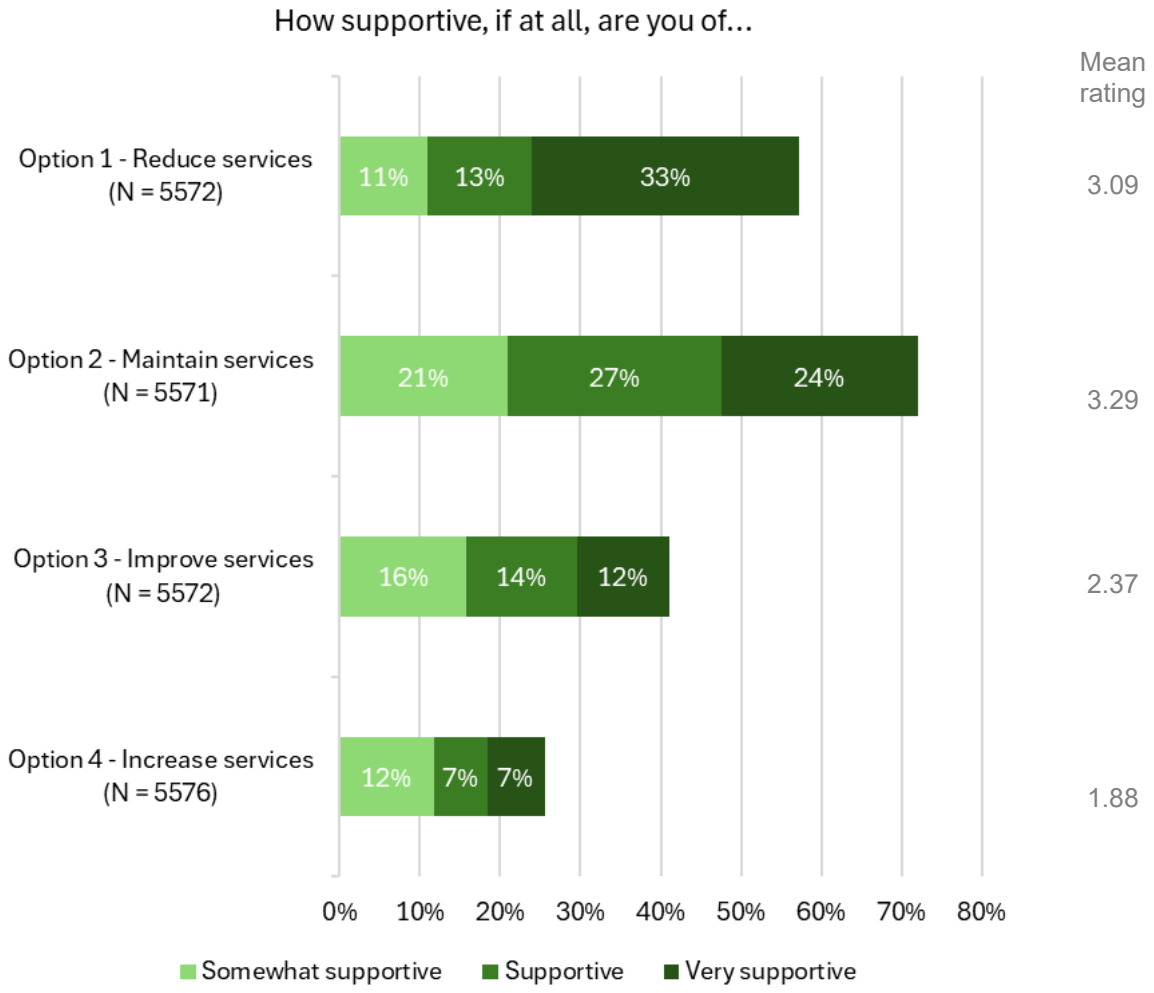


7.4 Opt in survey – Rate the level of support for each option

The SV option rating question in the opt in survey allowed participants to rate their levels of support for each option, without being required to rank all options. Respondents selected 1 of 5 sentiment ratings (from Very Supportive to Not At All Supportive) for each option.

Maintain service had the highest level of support with 72% of respondents at least Somewhat Supportive followed by Reduce service at 57% and Improve service at 42%.

Figure 4 - Level of support for each option opt-in survey

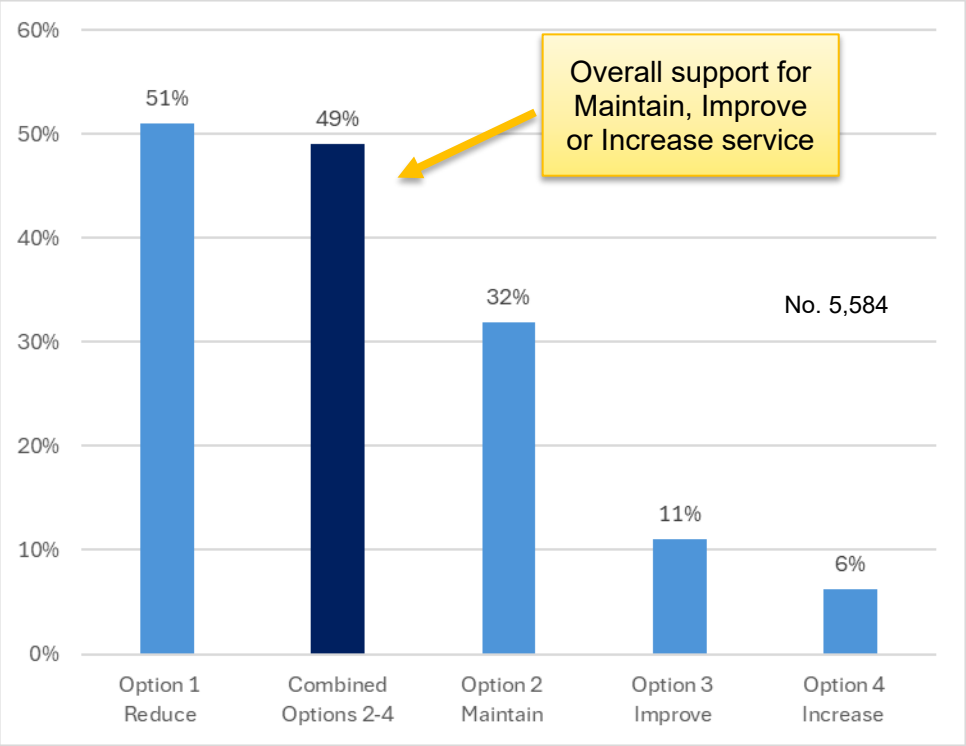


7.5 Opt in survey - Rank the options in order of preference

The preference ranking question on the feedback form online and in hard copy allowed respondents to choose each of the 4 options in order of preference, with 1 the most preferred and 4 the least preferred. Respondent were not required to rank all options.

A total of 5,584 respondents nominated a first preference and 4,811 respondents ranked all options. The graph below shows 1st preference of respondents. Support for the combined options of Maintain, Improve and Increase service is at 49% balanced against support for Reduce service.

Figure 5 - 1st preference in opt-in survey - survey



Respondents that choose Maintain, Improve and Increase service as 1st preference continued to support options which at a minimum Maintain service. The table below shows the movement in ranking from 1st to 2nd preference between the options. Some 58% of respondents with a 1st preference of Maintain choose either Improve or Increase for their 2nd preference.

Table 2 - Ranking pattern from 1st to 2nd preference - survey

		1st preference rank			
		Reduce	**Maintain**	**Improve**	**Increase**
2nd preference distribution	**No. 2nd preferences***	2,380	1,595	581	327
	Reduce		41.8%	0.5%	0.3%
	Maintain	97.9%		60.8%	1.8%
	Improve	2.0%	57.6%		97.9%
	Increase	0.1%	0.6%	38.7%	

** 701 respondents only provided a 1st preference*

7.6 Opt in survey - Rank the options in order of preference – breakdown by participant types

This section compares the overall ranking result in section 6.3 above with different participant types based on 1st preference. Individuals self-selected these categories in completing the survey.

Looking at 1st preference ranking amongst different participant by age groups, there is some variation compared to the overall result. Those in younger age groups, under 50 years are more supportive of Reduce service, while those over 60 years are slightly more supportive of Maintain or Improve service and less so of Reduce service.

Table 3 - 1st preference by age profile - survey

		Age profile				
1st Preference	**Overall**	**18-34**	**35-49**	**50-59**	**60-69**	**70+**
Option 1 Reduce service	51%	58%	56%	53%	46%	41%
Combined Options 2-4	49%	42%	44%	47%	54%	59%
Option 2 Maintain service	32%	27%	27%	30%	36%	41%
Option 3 Improve service	11%	7%	10%	10%	13%	13%
Option 4 Increase service	6%	8%	7%	7%	5%	5%
Max No. responses	5584	294	1456	1470	1264	890

** 210 respondents did not nominate an age category*

Compared to the overall result there is no significant variation been respondents in terms of years resided on the Northern Beaches, resident v non resident or ratepayer v non ratepayer.

Table 4 - 1st preference by years resided on the Northern Beaches - survey

		Years resided in LGA		
1st Preference	**Overall**	**Up to 10yrs**	**11-20yrs**	**20yrs+**
Option 1 Reduce service	51%	50%	52%	51%
Combined Options 2-4	49%	50%	48%	49%
Option 2 Maintain service	32%	29%	31%	33%
Option 3 Improve service	11%	13%	11%	10%
Option 4 Increase service	6%	9%	7%	5%
Max No. responses	5584	1333	1136	3115

Table 5 - 1st preference by ratepayer v non ratepayer - survey

		Ratepayer v Non Ratepayer	
1st Preference	**Overall**	**Ratepayer**	**Non-ratepayer**
Option 1 Reduce service	51%	51%	50%
Combined Options 2-4	49%	49%	22%
Option 2 Maintain service	32%	32%	29%
Option 3 Improve service	11%	11%	11%
Option 4 Increase service	6%	6%	10%
Max No. responses	5584	5469	115

Table 6 - 1st preference by resident v non resident - survey

		Residents v Non Residents	
1st Preference	**Overall**	**Resident**	**Non-resident**
Option 1 Reduce service	51%	51%	50%
Combined Options 2-4	49%	49%	50%
Option 2 Maintain service	32%	32%	33%
Option 3 Improve service	11%	11%	11%
Option 4 Increase service	6%	6%	7%
Max No. responses	5584	5504	76

** 4 respondents did not nominate a postcode*

7.7 Preferred option – letters and emails

Submissions by letter or email were also reviewed to identify the preferred option. Respondents either specifically nominated an option or expressed a preference in their sentiment. In assessing sentiment, it was not possible to distinguish between Increase and Improve service options and they have been combined.

Some 467 respondents expressed a preferred option. The support for Reduce service is stronger at 64% compared to support for Combined Options 2-4 which is 36%.

Table 7 - 1st Preferred option – letters and emails

	Option 1 Reduce	**Combined Options 2-4**	**Option 2 Maintain**	**Options 3/4 Improve & Increase**
%	64%	36%	23%	13%
No. respondents	297	170	108	62

7.8 Themes from comments – Opt in survey, letters and emails

The online survey provided an open-ended question for respondents to comment on issues that influenced their preference ranking. Respondents by email and letter also provided feedback on issues influencing their preference. The themes are below with verbatim comments or curated statements that summarise similar sentiment. The percentage of submissions raising the issue is also included.

Table 8 - Themes

% of submissions	**Themes**
N/A – see Preference rating section 6.5 of the report	**Desire to improve services and infrastructure** Submissions expressed a desire to improve services on a proactive basis. This also included submissions where the preference was Reduce service. Sentiment expressed included: • If we want a better society, increased and improved roads and services we must pay for it • It's important to keep moving forward, improving, and investing in our community's future - that requires money • The increased cost is affordable. Council should provide as many services as possible to our community

% of submissions	Themes
	• Investing in improvement will enhance our overall lifestyle and community well-being • Great services provided by the Council to everyone, regardless of their wealth • Maintaining or improving these services is essential to keeping the community vibrant and connected. • I am happy to pay more to ensure we continue to improve and maintain what we have • All councils must continue to improve services to match increasing residents' numbers and visitors to the area • Increasing services gives us the best outcome for our quality of life on the Northern Beaches • We live in a wonderful community and dearly appreciate the established infrastructure, essential services and community care we must never take for granted. We must not only readily maintain and improve what we have but be able to carefully and sensibly develop new and innovative projects to make our shire the best • The work the council has done on maintaining and adding community facilities like playgrounds, pools, sports fields, toilet blocks to such an high standard, and managing our beaches, parks and bush land I value. I'd like to see this go a step further. Eg the park on our street is mown one a month. Also, we don't have footpaths. I'd love to see this change for us and other NB residents.
N/A – see Preference rating section 6.5 of the report	**Desire to maintain services and infrastructure** Submissions expressed a desire to at a minimum, maintain services at the current levels. Sentiment expressed included: • Preserving the area is critically important, we can't go backwards • If we fall behind on general maintenance, then we are just mortgaging the future as we lose both current amenity and the costs will be higher when council is forced to repair later • Happy to pay a premium to ensure quality of life in the northern Beaches remain pristine • Better roads, natural disaster emergency funds and councillors continuing to receive adequate pay in line with cost of living • Feel it is important to maintain the current level of service and build up a fund for response to natural disasters • Would not want existing Council services to suffer due to lack of funding • If you allow amenities to degrade it costs more to rehabilitate down the track • Feel it is important to maintain the current level of service and build up a fund for response to natural disasters
N/A – see Preference rating section	**Desire to reduce services and infrastructure**

% of submissions	Themes
6.5 of the report	Submissions expressed a desire to reduce services and infrastructure. Many of the issues raised in these submissions is covered under the other separate themes relating to cutting costs and no increase in rates. Sentiment included: • Rate payers do not want council to do more-but rather stick to lawns, footpaths, parks, beaches and rubbish services and the absolute essentials. • Council needs to budget or reduce services. Option 1 - Reduce services at least until things get better. • The council's budget should allow for essential services and maintenance only. • When there are budget constraints we all have to find ways to reduce our operating costs and put off projects we cannot afford. • I ask that the rates increase be kept to an absolute minimum and if that means reduced services so be it. • Instead of raising rates look at all the budgeted items to determine which are necessary and important and in accordance with the community's priorities • We do not ask our our employers for more money if we cannot balance our budget. Governments should do the same and spend within their means. • Council needs to budget to provide all essential services within allowable rate peg set by IPART. It should be possible to do this without a reduction in services. • I do not support any further increases in rates. CPI increase only and no service reductions. More detail on issues raised is included in the themes below.
57%	**Support for Council to cut costs and/or seek other income streams** Submissions that expressed a desire for Council to implement cost cutting and income generating measures also included suggestion on where and how to cut costs and perceived inefficiencies. Sentiment expressed included: • Reduce excessive payments to the CEO, Directors and Executive Managers • Freeze on staff salary increases until Council's financial position improves • Comprehensive organisational review to reduce staff numbers including management (bureaucracy) layers • Improved financial management and controls to prevent this happening again • Review discretionary services and focus on core business - roads, rubbish and maintenance of opens spaces etc • Reduce expenditure on non-core services – events, grants, arts, culture, libraries, marketing, consultants etc • Too many niche services are provided which are subsidises by others • Inflation will come down and Council will recover costs • Stop 'pet' projects which only serve a few people

% of submissions	Themes
	• Manage a project to a scope and budget • The State Government shelves projects due to costs, so should Council • Streamline processes and procedures to ensure the Council is lean and efficient • Uncommitted funds to be reallocated from restricted asset accounts • Use innovative mechanisms and cost savings to funding facilities upgrades and services • It is said that council has looked at cost cutting and budgeting but I feel that more could be done. • Demand more from developers to service growth needs • Greater use of voluntary planning agreements and higher zonings in Town Centres to support faster development as well as increase rates and contributions • Increasing development, population and land values means more rates income • Review fees and charges as they are arcane and inflexible • Establish fees targeted at visitors/non-residents to support extra services to high visitation locations such as Manly Corso • Increase fees for sporting groups to cover maintenance and facility upgrades • Use Council's property portfolio to generate income • Charge businesses more for the use of open space • Leverage assets (eg surf clubs, pools, lease Manly Town Hall) for revenue opportunities (eg. Cafes, bars, restaurants, facility hire, etc). • Review lease arrangements with surf clubs who are venue managers • Coastal erosion user pays • Divest assets that are not generating a return • Focus on projects that will generate income for sustainability • Adopt a zero-tolerance approach to public safety, dogs off leash etc to increase revenue • Cancel, reduce or defer capital works projects • Get the best value from contractors, stop/use less contractors • Use surpluses to reduce debt and unforeseen events • Before I pay more, I want to see better management of services and projects
44%	**Increase in rates to only be in line with inflation or no increase at all** Submissions expressed views that an increase in rates is unreasonable with sentiment including: • Not prepared to pay more than the rate peg • Rates should reduce • Increasing rates by more than the peg is unreasonable • Rates are increasing by more than inflation and this increase is higher than my wage increase • CPI increase only and no service reductions • Increasing rates will only add to inflation • Rates harmonisation resulted in my rates increasing by over 20%

% of submissions	Themes
32%	**Affordability** Affordability was cited as a reason for ranking of options. This included negative and positive sentiment and spanned all four options. Sentiment included. • Economic climate and cost of living is already an unaffordable burden • Struggling with inflation • Pensioners and self-funded retirees cannot afford extra rates • Consider low-income families and ensure a rate increase does not drive low-income families out of the area • Council is out of touch with the community • People are doing it tough and cutting on expenses. Council should do the same. • The increased cost is affordable for me • Increased services or infrastructure is important and affordable
11%	**Community engagement on options** Submissions made statements regarding the community engagement process and/or materials including the feedback mechanisms. Sentiment expressed included: • Perception of fear mongering, scare campaign marketing • On-line registration, contact details, response and survey too hard • Survey design is biased for a pre-determined outcome for Council (preference ranking) • This was a closed (not open) survey • The survey doesn't really allow for detailed submissions • Forced ranking seems coercive if in disagreement with Options 2, 3 and 4 • Option 1 feels like a threat • Need more information on what services would be cut under Option 1 Reduce • Need more information on infrastructure to be Improved or Increased under Options 3 and 4 • Poor timing over Christmas and the School holiday period • Better communication on future budgets and big spending projects
7%	**Concerns over the benefits of amalgamation** Submissions referenced amalgamation and their perception of its relative success. Sentiment included: • Amalgamation was supposed to provide cost savings • Residents were assured that rates would reduce • Requests for an audit and a demerger • Not satisfied that Council has implemented its claimed efficiencies • Further savings resulting from the amalgamation need to be achieved • Services were much better pre-amalgamation • The amalgamation has been a failure • Better off to have remained as former Councils • Too big to be sustainable, but not too big to fail

% of submissions	Themes
	• Promised economies of scale have not materialised
7%	**Don't like any of the options** Dissatisfaction with the options available was expressed. The sentiment included: • None of the options are acceptable • Broader community discussion is required to establish the options to be consulted on • Insufficient detail to make an informed decision on the options • Suggestion for an Option 1A increase between 3.5% and 10% • Suggestion for Option '5' to reduce rate increase and reduce services • Suggestion for Option '5' to reduce costs while maintaining services • Suggestion for Option '5' to re-instate the former Councils • Support a rate increase for a specific purpose/asset only • Premature to consider an increase until the NSW Government Standing Committee recommendations have been considered.
2%	**NSW Government influence** A small proportion of responses acknowledged cost shifting by other levels of government and felt Council should take a stronger stance. Sentiment included: • Push back on NSW Government shifting costs without matching funding • Stop doing projects and programs that NSW or Federal government should be responsible for • Ask the NSW Government for increased funding before rate payers
2%	**Concerns about the rating system** Submissions referred to the methodology for calculating rates including suggestions for changes. Sentiment included: • Increases in rates on my property have been well above inflation as a result in changes in land value and rates harmonisation • The method of rate determination (while set by State government) is archaic and not equitable. • The Council "double dips" with IPART rate increases plus increases in land values • Rates should be charged on the level of services consumed or the number of occupants per property • Means test rates based on salary and net worth • Remove the Special Levy for the Manly CBD • Business rates are too high

Document administration	
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Status	Final
Related Projects	
Notes	Community and stakeholder views contained in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Northern Beaches Council or indicate a commitment to a particular course of action.