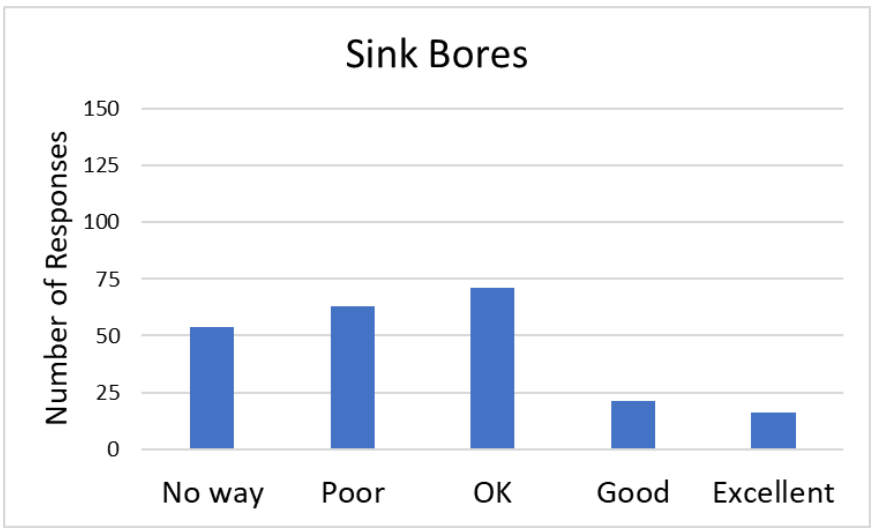
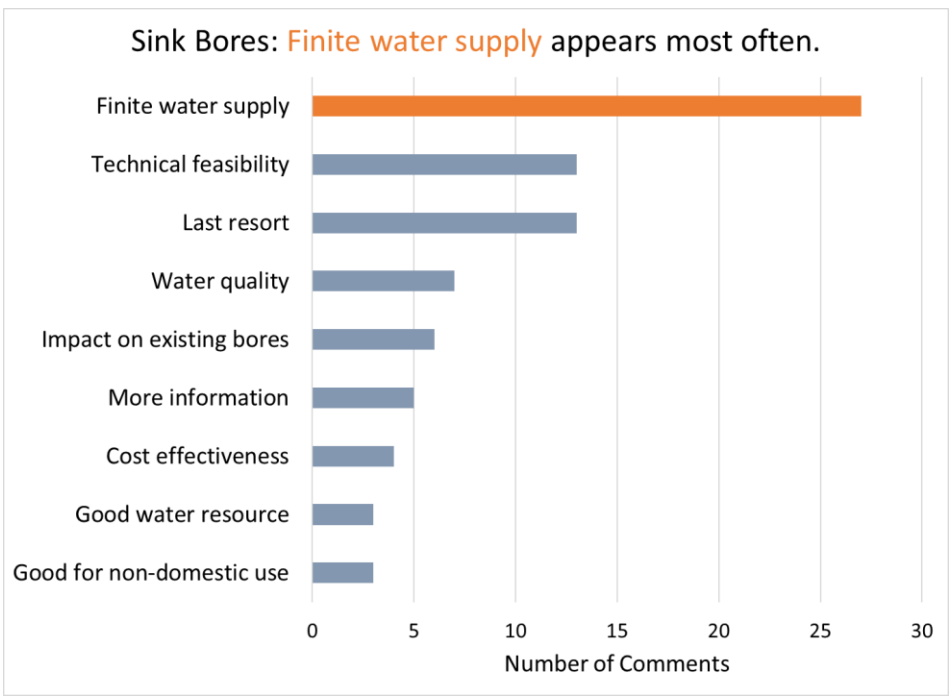
Let's Talk About Water

ZNET recently surveyed Uralla Shire residents on nine options for future water security

This is what people said about sinking bores to supplement the town water supply



People's comments give an insight into their rating for the option and allow common themes to be identified



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Individual comments relating to each theme build a deeper understanding of people's values and opinions

Comment Theme	Type of Comments
Finite water supply	Must be reliable in drought; when it is gone it is gone; will deplete groundwater; sustainability; people waste with lack of regulation; problem for ecosystems; impact on water table; water table underground will dry up; depletion of bores a concern.
Technical feasibility	No large underground water supplies: difficult finding the place to drill; hydrological survey needed; high-capacity bores hard to find; not enough underground water to supplement a town; poor quality water and low volumes; needs evidence; waste of time and money.
Last resort	Contingency only; we shouldn't touch underground water – rainwater first; no way – catch water and use sparingly; dams are better for wildlife and employment; use as last resort; only in drought – not full-time use; increase capacity of dam first.
Water quality	Depends on quality of bore water; use filtering; testing quality regularly; production of brine; how much arsenic are we talking about here? it is not good to drink.
Impact on existing bores	Effect on local landholder supply; can restrict water to farms that depend on bore water.
More information	More information on viability, cost of pumping, impact on ground water supplies, interaction with other options.
Cost effectiveness	Concerns about cost of infrastructure, too expensive for variable supply.
Good water resource	Unused resource; proven technology; I have no knowledge but sounds good.
Good for non-domestic use	Great for town parks and gardens; used for road works.

Our focus group research provides a rich picture of the *values* that informed people's perspectives

Use of groundwater bores to augment town drinking supplies generated sustained community discussion and consideration. In part this is due to the fact that the use of ground water is **familiar** to many people. Participants saw the **value** in bore water whilst also recognising its limitations. One participant commented that "I wouldn't want to be **relying on it**. Hard to say it, again, it's looking for that 10% of extreme use to try and supplement, but it's more about making the most of what you've got then just trying to add a 10% to what you're already doing".

Focus group participants understood the ways in which bores work and expressed concerns for the wider environmental consequences of this approach, that "we can't separate the water issue out of the **other environmental discussions** that we have". One focus group participant captured this concern by asking "Water is **connected**, isn't it? So what we do with water, it's hard to isolate, a borehole here, a dam there. They're **connected and very intricate** in important ways, right?"

Underlying these concerns was a recognition of Uralla's unique position in the broader catchment, that "we are **at the headwater**. …. We are **responsible** for water quality and catchment management", while other participants insisted that the expansion in the extraction of bore water was not sustainable, that "it's all **dipping into the same pool really**, isn't it? There's nothing more under there then we're just sinking more holes to get to it." There are broader environmental consequences – its not just an easy way to top up supplies with no flow on effects. Alongside this, participants expressed a desire for **greater community input** in the siting of new groundwater bores.

If bores are part of the solution, community concerns would be acknowledged and addressed if Council can communicate on the following key issues:

- ✓ an assessment of the sustainable yield of water from bores and how much will this contribute to secure water supplies
- ✓ a technical assessment of the likelihood of finding water before drilling commences
- ✓ information on how bore water use would be integrated into the overall water supply and treated to manage any water quality issues
- ✓ a description of how bores would be sited and installed to ensure minimal impact on existing bores.