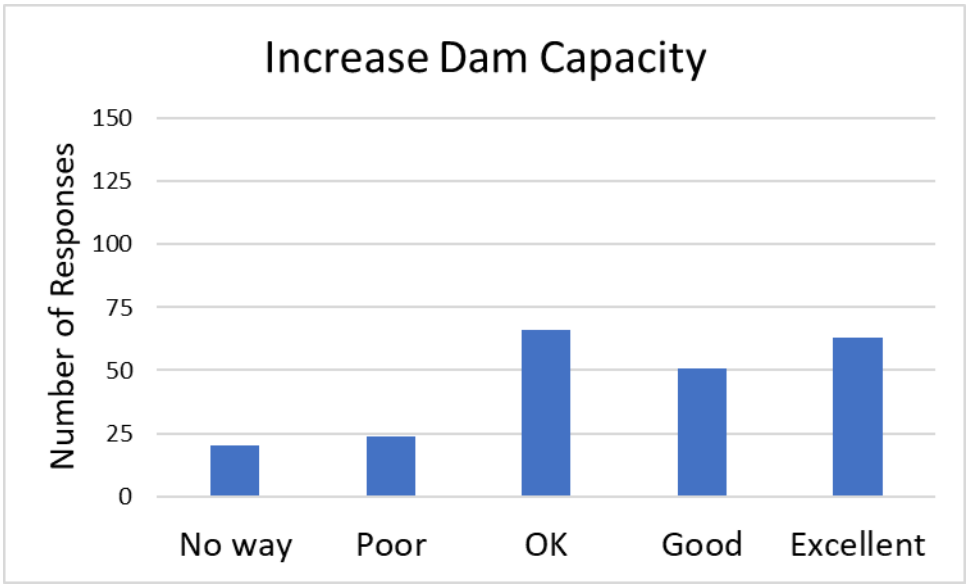
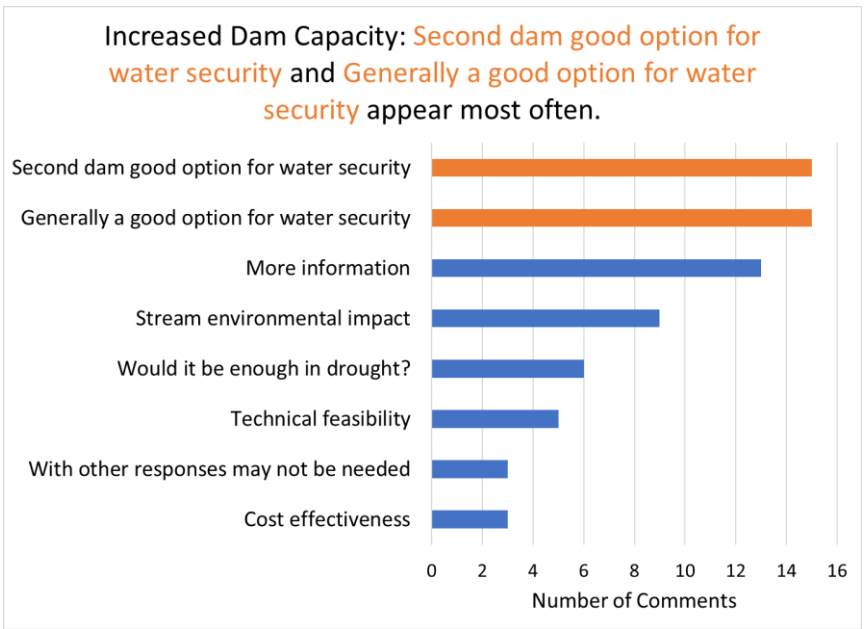
Let's Talk About Water

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

This is what people said about increasing dam capacity 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



Proudly funded by the NSW Government Increasing Resilience to Climate Change community grant in association with Z-NET Uralla and University of NSW

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

Comment Theme	Type of Comments
Second dam good option	Value for money? Second dam may be better; supplementary dam excellent idea; topography would suggest downstream of existing dam, to capture significant overflows of current dam in 'normal' seasons; build below Smith's Crossing; a second site may have greater value as old dam is in a shallow topography.
Generally, a good option	Need water security for future generations; should have wall raised and another dam lower down; do that before bores; the answer to the problem; stores more water; should be prioritised; research to get the best value; enlarge dam area open to wildlife; increase wall height – increase capacity!
More information	If it extracts more water from the catchment does that mean someone 'misses out' or is it usually 'wasted' water? What land would go under? What about impact downstream? Would it fill with higher wall, is catchment large enough? Will deeper mean less evaporation? Catchment analysis needed; Is dam big enough for growth of population in Uralla?
Stream environmental impact	Could be destructive to downstream habitats; riparian areas to go under rising waters; ecosystems downstream need the drought breaking flow it would trap; effects on landholders; impact to river system/ecosystem; we are taking water from other areas and those down river; environmental assessment of occasional overflow that now happens.
Would it be enough in drought?	May still run out in future drought; small, covered reservoirs may be better; larger water area means more evaporation, not sure much would be gained; Uralla and all other towns are growing; depends on environmental impacts and if it rains less in future - may not help in droughts.
Technical feasibility	Geological and engineering constraints; too many logistical problems – excessive evaporation and inundation of land; silt levels may keep rising; evaporation would be only winner – water would not be deep enough.
With other options may not be needed	Only after dam maintenance with silt removed; short term answer but only one little bit of bigger response needed; if earlier suggestions implemented and more education on water usage may not be required.
Cost effectiveness	If population is expected to grow, could be an option – cost would be high; high cost – may require additional catchment area.

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

Increasing dam capacity – either through raising the dam wall, or through the construction of a second dam generated significant discussion. It was striking to note the community's **familiarity** with the dam and catchment. Discussion of **histories of the dam construction,** and the impact of raising of the dam wall in the 1980s were commonplace for all groups. Participants of the catchment landholder group articulated a **planning horizon** of 50-100 years is needed for water security.

Participants expressed a strong desire to **understand** the implications of raising the dam wall asking, for example, whether this proposal would mean "all you're going to do is just get **very, very shallow** water that spreads out **over flat land**" and whether constructing new storage facilities would yield more sustainable supplies of water.

A key concern was for the **ecological value** of water retained in dams, that "Building more dams or bigger dams or whatever is only **holding water back** from **something else**". Participants remarked on the often-rapid movement of water through the catchment, and the experiences of the dam regularly exceeding capacity. Experience and knowledge of catchment processes led some to express that the challenge facing Uralla is a "storage problem" – "it's not so much lack of catchment, but **lack of storage**". Participants felt there was "the potential to catch more. There's potential to retain more ….., whether it's the same dam, another dam, or whatever".

Importantly, participants emphasised that any increase in water storage needs to be accompanied by **catchment management** and **acknowledgment of landholder's priorities** - "the best solutions are when people can actually sit around together, as we're doing, identify the problem, and design the solution, and design the management that then goes with it", "solving it [water security] isn't just a matter of putting a bore, or putting a dam, or whatever. It's about **integrated catchment management**", another participant commented. "You are impacting on people's livelihoods. So, there's a **real balancing act"**

If increasing dam capacity is part of the solution, community concerns would be acknowledged and addressed if Council can communicate on the following key issues:

- ✓ study of the dam catchment and adjoining catchments to identify the best option for additional dam capacity – covering land loss, evaporation, extra volume stored and engineering constraints
- ✓ environmental flows needed downstream from Kentucky Creek Dam to preserve ecosystems
- ✓ catchment water yield to determine if additional dam capacity in the catchment will reliably fill
- ✓ proactive catchment management to reduce silt from soil erosion