

NORTHERN WATER SUPPLY

SITE ANALYSIS WORKSHOP – SUMMARY

On 26 October 2022, the Northern Water Supply project hosted a Site Analysis Workshop in Whyalla. The purpose of the workshop was to brief key stakeholders on the project and discuss key issues relating to the three possible sites for a potential desalination plant.

A total of 22 stakeholders attended the workshop, representing 18 different interest groups and organisations that included Traditional Owners, environmental groups, fisheries, community members, landholders, Local Government, State Government and industry.

A project update was provided by representatives of the Northern Water Supply project team, Whyalla City Council, and the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI), followed by a question-and-answer session and three workshop activities. Workshop activities focused on: reviewing the criteria and performance measures used to help select a preferred study site; identifying high priority issues to be considered as part of the project's environmental assessment process; and identifying desired project outcomes.

Outcomes of the workshop will be used to help make a decision about the preferred study site, to set priorities for environmental investigations, and to guide the community and stakeholder engagement process going forward.

WORKSHOP OUTCOMES – PRIORITY CONSIDERATIONS

Following is a summary of the outcomes of the workshop. Full presentations and minutes are provided on the YourSAy page at yoursay.sa.gov.au/northern-water-supply.

The marine environment

The potential impacts of a desalination plant on the marine environment was of prime interest to participants and were mostly associated with the impacts of seawater intake and brine outfall and the importance of selecting a site that would minimise these impacts.

Technical marine environment investigations were seen to be a critical element of the project, particularly in relation to having quality baseline mapping and data. Participants had very high expectations that marine investigations would be conducted early in the process, be subject to peer review and full public scrutiny, conducted openly and transparently, be rigorous and defensible, and be informed by scientific evidence.

Accessibility and communication of the data was also considered essential to public understanding and scrutiny, particularly during the environmental impact assessment process.

Participants expressed low levels of trust based on previous experiences with other proposed desalination projects and were strongly in favour of learning from past experiences.

Commercial and recreational fishing

Participants expressed a strong desire to ensure that any proposed desalination plant would not impact on commercial or recreational fishing operations, particularly given the importance of fishing and aquaculture in the Gulf. Impacts on exclusion zones, impacts on all species not just a select few, understanding of migration paths and their connections, and impacts on future industries were seen to be priority considerations.

There was some concern that not enough is known about some species and habitats compared with others and that investigations needed to be done in the context of wider ecosystem interactions.

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Sustainability and the environment

Realising and guaranteeing project benefits related to climate change, renewable energy, cultural assets and sustainable water use were of major importance to participants, including opportunities to divert brine and reduce outfall to the sea, achieve community greening outcomes within and beyond Whyalla, and reduce reliance on the River Murray and Great Artesian Basin. There was a desire that water savings should be returned to environmental uses.

Participants were also interested in ensuring that environmental impacts should be avoided or otherwise minimised. The need to be able to select a site and pipeline route that considered impacts on cultural heritage, habitat, protected species, and surface water flows was considered a priority. Again, baseline data undertaken during the appropriate season was considered important.

Social sustainability

The potential socio-economic benefits of the project were the main focus of participants' discussions in relation to social sustainability including having a more reliable water supply that facilitates sustainable growth, improving liveability and unlocking tourism and industry opportunities that otherwise would not be available.

Ongoing engagement with stakeholders, particularly indigenous groups and landowners was considered essential as was ensuring that the wider community has a say in what opportunities they would like to see the project prioritise. Amenity impacts were raised as a priority including dust, light, noise and traffic.

Technical

Technical considerations focused primarily on constructability, complexity, operability, and climate resilience as they relate to each site, for both on-shore and off-shore infrastructure. Options to better manage brine – or indeed optimise re-use, reduce whole-of-life costs, and adopt alternative construction methods that reduce impacts, were highlighted as priorities.

WORKSHOP OUTCOMES – PROJECT SUCCESS FACTORS

Participants were asked to discuss success factors and opportunities for the project for the community, the environment, economic prosperity, and the construction process. Key success factors can be summarised as:

- An engaged, heard and understood community
- Enhanced local economy and jobs and careers for locals
- No negative impacts on the marine environment
- Scientific data is shared for wider community benefit
- A greener and more liveable Whyalla
- Water security and reliability for the region
- Water returned to the River Murray and Great Artesian Basin
- No loss in species diversity or significant habitat
- Healthy and resilient seagrass meadows and animal species
- Brine re-use prioritised and maximised
- Long-term commitment to monitoring
- Innovative and world-leading environmental management
- No change to fishing and aquaculture
- Sustainable population growth in Whyalla
- More diverse industry base in Whyalla and more new start-up industries
- Quality construction with minimal impact.