**Fears over water supplies as drought continue**

**11 September 2019**

Most people in NSW expect the continuing drought will result in water not being available for anything other than essential use such as drinking, a new survey reveals.

And this will lead to no water being available for our gardens, trees, parks and public spaces, with regional and rural residents fearing this the most.

A UNSW Sydney community attitudes survey found that people want better water security planning through a range of initiatives including new dams, the recycling of waste water for drinking, expanding capacity at the Sydney desalination plant and at existing dams, and new water restrictions for homes and businesses.

The findings come amid growing public policy debate in NSW and other states about how to best secure water supply as many stored and natural water supplies continue to drop and various water restrictions have been or are being introduced in both metropolitan and regional areas.

UNSW Global Water Institute Director, Professor Greg Leslie, said a third of the NSW survey respondents said they felt stressed about domestic water supplies.

“Equality to the access to clean water for domestic use is in jeopardy, and this fact is essentially lost in the debate about water capacity including around raising the height of the Warragamba Dam wall,” he said. “These results show that people are worried about their water supplies and want action.”

“Sydney is growing rapidly but our aging water infrastructure won’t meet projected demand, let alone reliably cope with our geographical and climactic characteristics. If we don’t act soon with involvement from relevant research and knowledge agencies, as well as input from the community, we will be end up with the wrong solutions.”

Professor Leslie said a multidisciplinary approach to water supply and management is needed to rethink the management of Sydney’s current and future drinking water supply which could well run out if multiple projects and initiatives are not put in place to increase water capacity and access.

**Key findings**

One third (34%) of NSW residents are stressed about their fresh water supplies. This includes 10% who strongly agree with this statement. Sydney residents are equally likely to ‘agree’ (35%) as regional NSW residents (33%).

Two in three (65%) of NSW residents agree that governments have not made adequate plans to ensure ongoing water security (61% in Sydney agree, 71% in regional NSW). Overall, 31% strongly agree.

Across NSW, the steps that residents most want taken to better prepare for climate change in coastal cities are:

* Implementing a water saving/conservation plan for business (56% say this, and equally so across Sydney at 56% and regional NSW 57%.
* Recycling of waste water, including for drinking (51% - 50% Sydney, 54% in regional NSW).
* Increasing water supply by increasing the capacity of the Sydney desalination plant (49% overall - 51% Sydney, 47% regional NSW).
* Increasing the water supply through the desalination plant and recycling waste water (68%)
* Expanding existing dams (47% overall - 42% Sydney and 56% regional NSW)
* Building new dams (46% overall - 42% Sydney, 55% regional NSW).
* Expanding and building more dams (60% overall).

Across NSW, the steps that residents most want taken to better prepare for climate change in inland towns are:

* Implementing a water saving/conservation plan for business (55% overall - Sydney 54% and regional NSW 57%).
* Recycling of waste water, including for drinking (55% Sydney, 56% in regional NSW).
* Expanding existing dams (52% overall - 48% Sydney and 61% regional NSW)
* Building new dams (48% overall - 44% Sydney, 56% regional NSW).
* Expanding and building more dams (63% overall - 59% Sydney, 71% Regional NSW).

**Media contact**

Stuart Snell, UNSW External Communications, 0416 650 906 s.snell@unsw.edu.au.