

Customer views on desalination

Objectives

To explore the extent to which customers agree with the pursuit of alternative water sources, the circumstances under which they believe desalination is appropriate, and the specific concerns customers have about the desalination process.

Format	Pop-up community
Households (number)	33
Non households (number)	
Vulnerable customers	
Future customers	
Retailers	
Stakeholders	
South West Water	✓
Bournemouth Water	✓
Bristol Water	

Impact on our plan and ways of working

The research insights will be used to inform future communication strategies, ensuring effective addressing of customer concerns and fostering informed decision making about sustainable water resource management.

Topics		
Storm overflow	Drinking water quality	✓
Water resources ✓	Net zero/ climate change	✓
Nature ✓	Affordability	✓

Key messages – what matters most

What we did

- A 1-day pop-up community was conducted on the customer board platform.
- Customers were informed how the water cycle works and how water is extracted from rivers and groundwater. They were provided with a brief explanation of what desalination is and why it is used
- Customers’ awareness of water scarcity issues was assessed and then they were asked to review the consequences of abstraction and the desalination process. They were also asked to raise any concerns they have
- Finally, their vote was taken on whether they support desalination for clean water and the circumstances they consider appropriate for its use.

What matters most

- Desalination raises some concerns but overall, customers believe It is a viable means of obtaining water as part of a portfolio.
- The biggest concern about desalination is cost for the customers, who wanted clarity on how this will affect their bills
- Customers also wanted reassurance that desalinated water won’t taste differently to their current drinking water. They opted for desalinated water to be mixed with river water to mitigate the possibility of unpleasant taste
- Some customers wanted more clarity on how desalination would affect sea life and its role alongside alternative means of water collection
- Majority of customers said that while desalination isn’t optimal, it is an important part of a portfolio of sources.

Are there differing views?

While 27 customers support desalination in some form, six oppose it due to cost and energy concerns.

Next steps

This was a small sample but the findings were considered in our forward plans in this and how we have progressed desalination.

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Reference: Customer views on desalination, January 2023