



Special Areas Board

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Special Areas Water Supply Project – Next Steps

Report on Public Consultation

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SPECIAL AREAS WATER SUPPLY PROJECT (SAWSP) & NEXT STEPS FOR THE PROJECT - PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS

Formal public feedback included all feedback submitted through the online survey (Survey Monkey), including hard copies submitted during the public consultation period (March 2020). 118 submissions were received in total. In addition, feedback on the project was informally provided at each of the community information sessions in Consort, Hanna, and Oyen (March 5 & 6) as a part of the Q&A period.

1.2 SUMMARY

In general, this public consultation was successful in soliciting feedback from a range of stakeholders from inside and outside the Special Areas. Feedback provided showed clear preferences amongst stakeholder groups, with those most likely to benefit from the project (as identified as having land in the benefiting area) being supportive of continued investment in SAWSP. Stakeholders who are least likely to benefit from SAWSP (e.g. not having land in the project benefiting area) were least likely to support continued investment in the project. In general, these positions were well-defined and directly translated into low rankings for the opposing choice. What that means is if a respondent selected **Option 1** or **Option 3** as their preferred choice, they then selected the opposing course of action as the least preferred choice. **Option 2** was the second choice for most respondents.

Key stakeholder groups provided feedback, including those who would potentially benefit from the project and those located outside the benefiting area. 88% of respondents identified themselves as residents in Special Areas. The average time for respondents to complete the online survey was 3.5 minutes, with most responses provided in the first two weeks of the consultation period.

Based on prior public consultations undertaken by the Special Areas, this consultation had a high rate of engagement. The total reach of this public consultation included individuals who either provided feedback on the project via the survey or attended an information session.

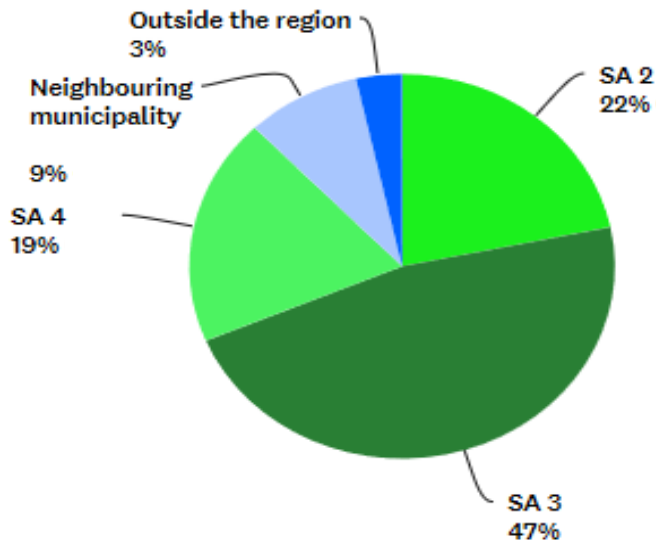
2.0 DETAILED ANALYSIS

2.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

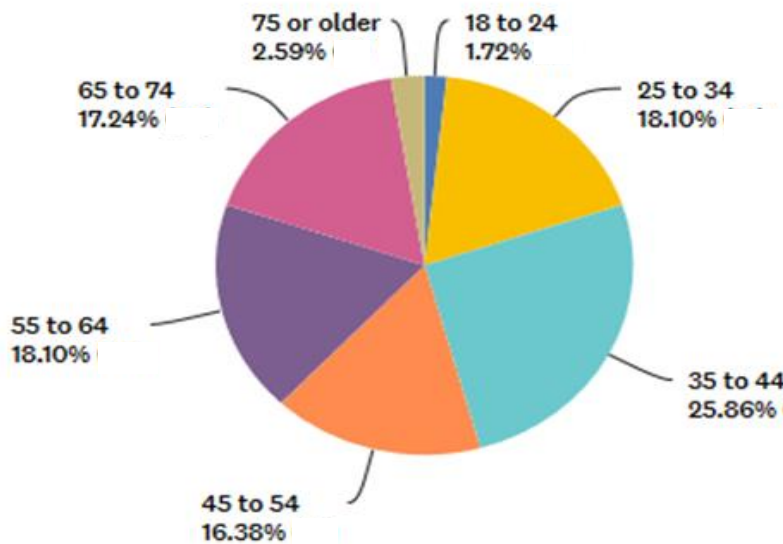
Over the March 2020 consultation period, respondents provided feedback on what the preferred next steps for the Special Areas Water Supply Project should be.

88% of respondents were identified as Special Areas residents, with 22% from in Special Area No. 2, 47% from Special Area No. 3, and 19% from Special Area No. 4.

12% of respondents identified their primary residence as being outside the Special Areas, with 9% from a neighboring municipality and 3% from outside the region.



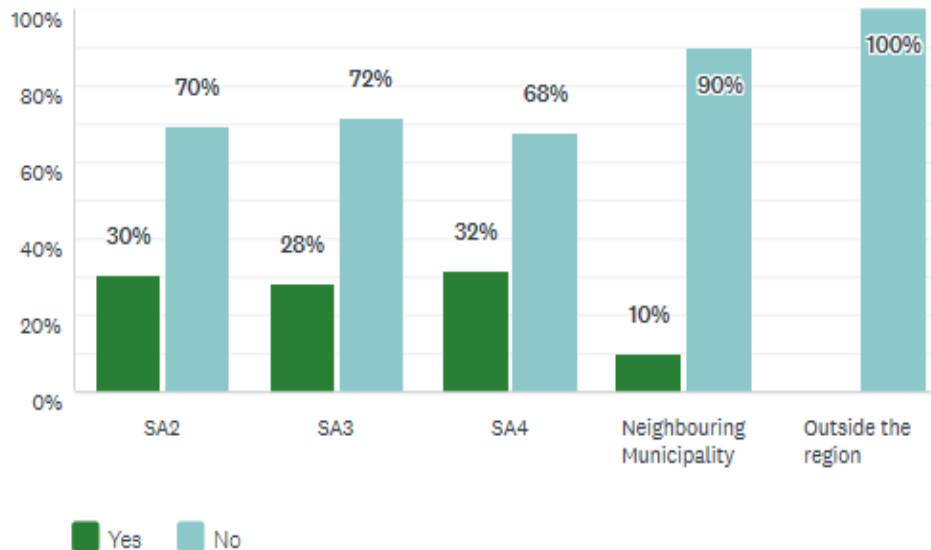
60% of respondents were between 35 and 54 years old. The largest group of respondents was between 35 and 44 years old (26%). The average age of respondents was 49 years old, approximately nine years older than average age of the region based on the 2016 federal census.



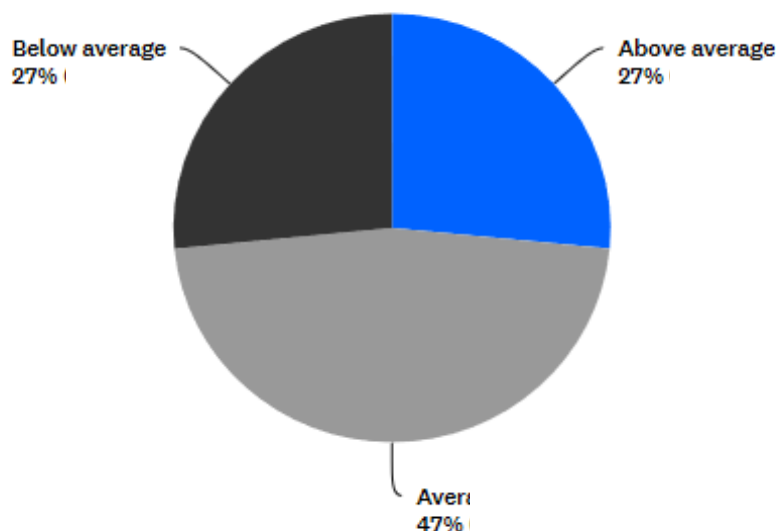
2.2 UNDERSTANDING OF SAWSP

Respondents were asked if they had attended a SAWSP community information session to help determine how many people who attended a session then provided feedback through the online survey. 27% indicated they had attended a session, and 73% indicated they had not attended a session.

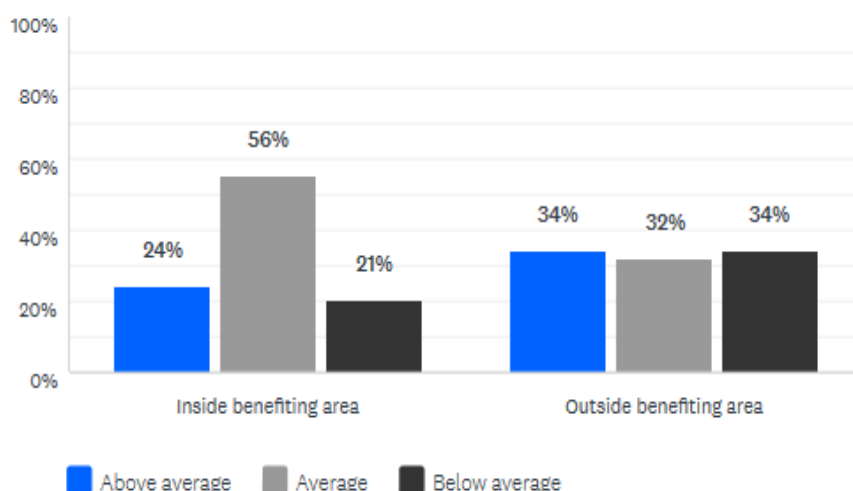
When sorted by primary residence, approximately 30% of respondents from within the Special Areas indicated they had attended a community information session. Only 7% of respondents from outside the region, including those in neighboring municipalities, indicated they attended an information session.



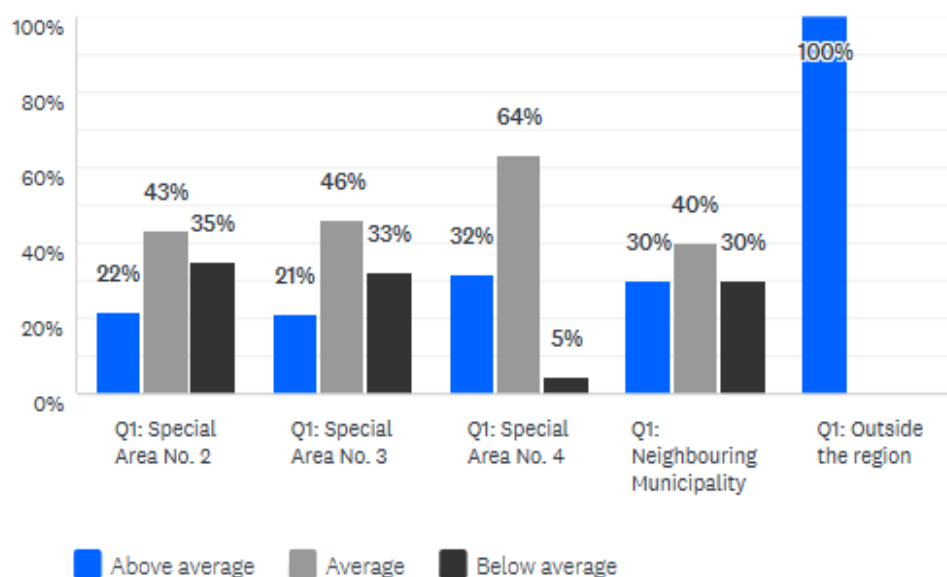
Respondents were asked to describe their understanding of SAWSP. Almost half (47%) responded as having average understanding, with the remainder evenly split between below average (27%) and above average (27%).



Respondents who reported having their residence or land within the potential project benefiting area reported a higher level of average understanding, and a lower level of below average understanding of the project. Respondents who reported not having their residence or land within the potential benefiting area were more evenly distributed in their understanding of the project.



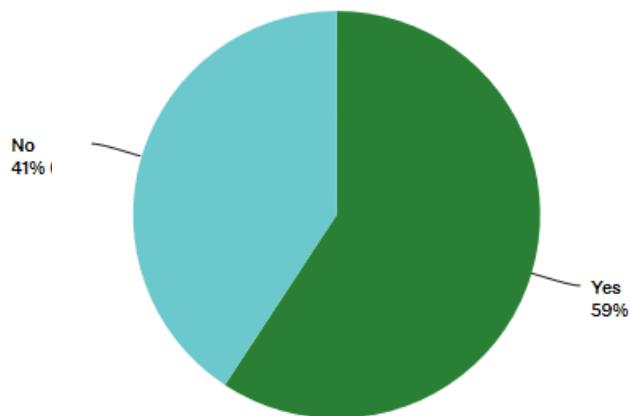
When organized by location of primary residence, residents from Special Area No. 4 reported higher rates of above average understanding, while more residents from Special Area No. 2 and 3 reported average or below average understanding. All respondents from outside the region reported having above average understanding of the project.



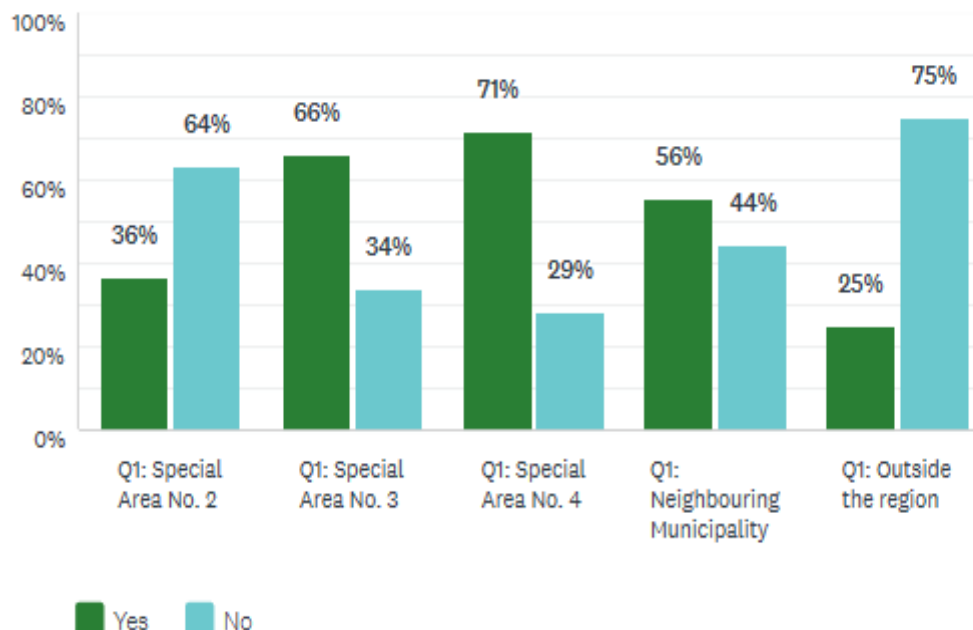
2.3 POTENTIAL TO BENEFIT FROM SAWSP

Respondents provided information on whether they had a primary residence or land (deeded or leased) located within the project's potential benefiting area identified in the EIA report. A copy of the map was supplied to better inform respondent's answers.

Of the total responses, 58% of respondents indicated they had land or a residence in the green benefiting area. 42% of respondents indicated they did not.



When broken down into primary residence locations (geographic stakeholder groups), significantly more respondents from Special Area No. 3 and 4 indicated they had a residence or land within the green area. Only 36% of respondents from Special Area No. 2 indicated they had a residence or land within the green area. This is likely due to the overall design of SAWSP, considering most of the potential benefiting area lies in Special Area No. 3 and 4. Of the respondents with primary residences outside the Special Areas, just under half reported owning or leasing land in the green area. This information helps indicate there are stakeholders to this project are located outside the boundaries of the Special Areas.

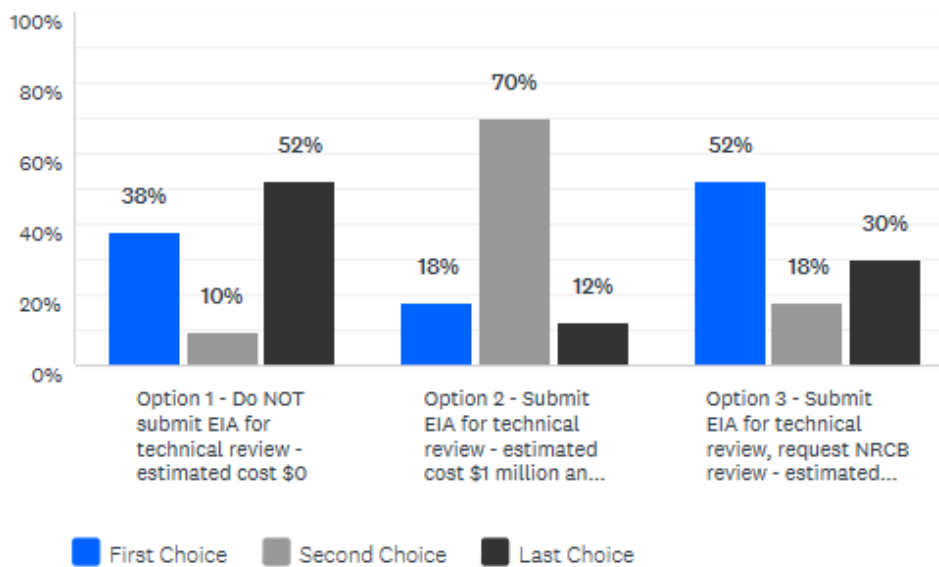


2.4 PREFERRED OPTIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT – SAWSP

Respondents were presented with three potential options for the project moving forward and asked to rank them to indicate their preferred next steps for the project. The three options presented were:

- **Option 1** - Do not submit the EIA for technical review (estimated cost \$0)
- **Option 2** - Submit the EIA for technical review (estimated cost \$1M and up)
- **Option 3** - Submit the EIA for technical review and request NRCB review (estimated cost \$2M to \$10M).

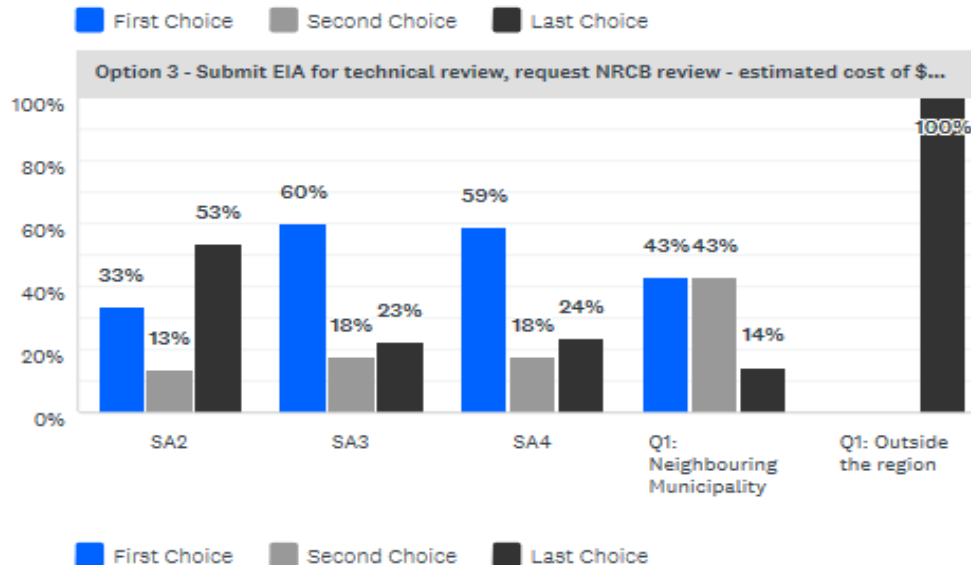
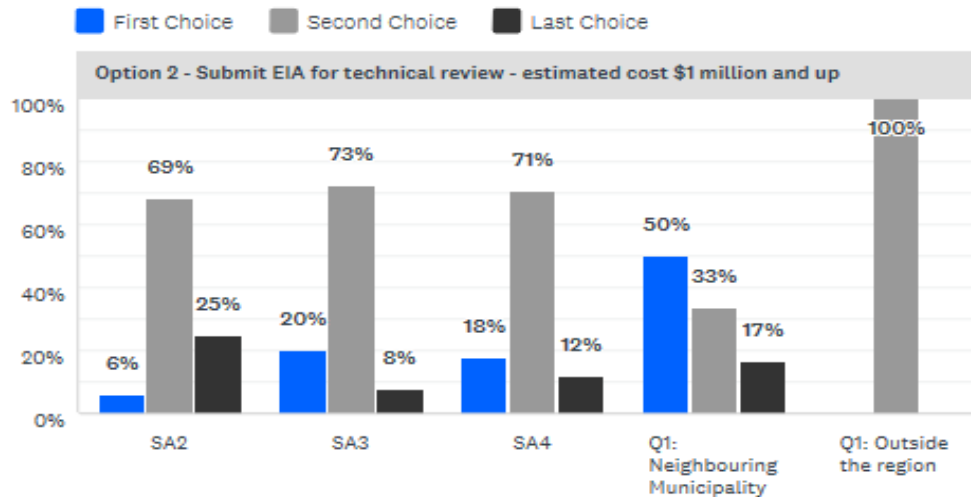
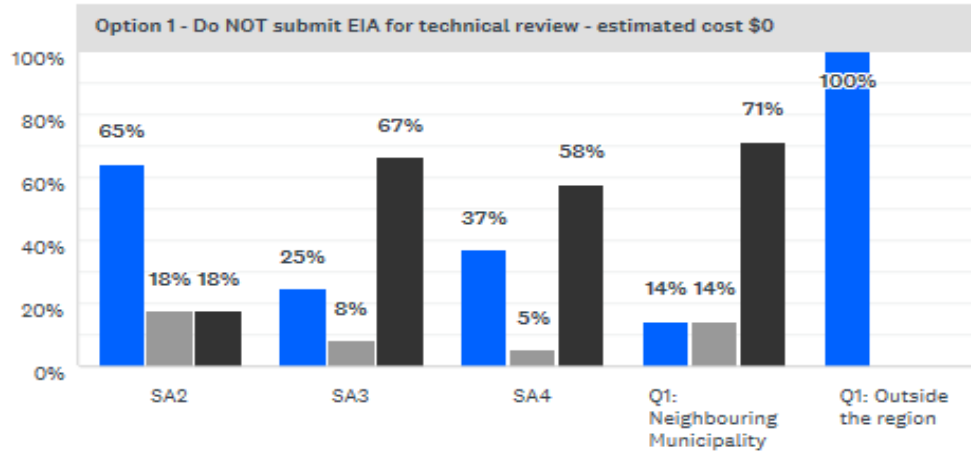
In general, respondents were divided on what the best (i.e. most preferred) next step for the project should be. Responses were divided between **Option 1** (38%) and **Option 3** (52%) as the best next step for SAWSP. Feedback indicates respondents either preferred full commitment to proceeding with the project (at \$2M to \$10M cost) or stopping work on it completely. **Option 2** was the second choice for most respondents (70%), although it was not preferred by any group as the first choice for the project moving forward.



When sorted by geographical area, respondents from:

- Special Area No. 2 were split between **Option 1** (65%) and **Option 3** (33%) as the best (most preferred) option for the project moving forward
 - o 53% indicated **Option 3** was the least preferred course of action.
 - o **Option 2** was second ranked choice (69%).
- Special Area No. 3 clearly preferred **Option 3** (60%) as the best (most preferred) option for the project moving forward, with the rest split between **Option 1** (25%) and **Option 2** (20%).
 - o 67% indicated **Option 1** was least preferred course of action.
 - o **Option 2** was second ranked choice (73%).
- Special Area No. 4 clearly preferred **Option 3** (59%) as the best (most preferred) option for the project moving forward, with the second choice for **Option 1** (37%)
 - o 58% indicated **Option 1** was least preferred course of action
 - o **Option 2** was second ranked choice (71%)
- Neighboring municipalities were split between **Option 2** (50%) and **Option 3** (43%) as the best (most preferred) option for the project moving forward.
 - o 71% indicated **Option 1** was least preferred course of action

- Outside the region clearly preferred **Option 1** (100%) as the best (most preferred) option and **Option 3** as the worst (least preferred) option for the project moving forward,



2.5 OTHER FEEDBACK ON SAWSP – SURVEY RESPONSES

40% of respondents provided additional feedback on the project at the end of the survey. These comments included direction on the project, additional areas of study or work to consider besides the three options presented, and general comments on irrigation and economic development. These comments have been included for reference below.

#	RESPONSES
1	Please continue with all speed on this most important project. Get it going, then add more to it later. Water is key to Brooks and area - what a difference it would make in the proposed area!
2	Special Areas. Great place to raise a family. Think of future generations carry on with (SAWSP)
3	We live in the Town of Oyen. This project would have a tremendous impact on this community. Without water you don't have a damn thing. Go for it. It won't happen in our lifetime.
4	Wondering if this project would increase the possibility of weather pattern changes i.e. increase precipitation in the area
5	I believe moving forward to increase food supply is essential. The project would add vibrancy to a dying region.
6	I would like to see project go because it is hard to turn down water in the Special Areas. But economic study shows you get 12.8 cents of benefit for each dollar spent. Not a good use of money.
7	This project was first proposed back in the 40's. If it had been done then it would still be benefiting the area today.
8	Scrap it
9	This proposal should not proceed further. Project costs exceed benefits to Albertans by over \$700 million and subsidize a small number of properties. [REDACTED] is concerned that the SAWSP project could decrease the ecological integrity of the landscape. Potential effects include: the loss of sensitive or endangered native habitat such as native grasslands, riparian areas and natural wetlands, displacement of native species from their natural ranges by means of habitat fragmentation and/or loss, and further population declines for regional species at risk such as burrowing owls, piping plover and loggerhead shrike. This project also has the potential to negatively impact aquatic communities and water quality, as the Red Deer River watershed is already over allocated from an environmental in-stream flow perspective. [REDACTED] believes that water withdrawals and pipeline construction should be reserved for providing water for human consumption, rather than crop and/ or cattle production.
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11	Project needs to make financial sense, this project doesn't.
12	There are many social economic and recreational bonuses of this project to the Special Areas that you can't put a price on
13	I would like to see project go back to original design with potential for 20000 irrigated acres. The palliser triangle (the driest part of the western provinces) is just barely touched by this project as it doesn't come far enough south. A large portion of special areas 2 and 3 is not even affected by this current project.
14	Not sure how valid my opinion is but if it benefits the farmers and the community let's do everything we can to make it happen!
15	economic outlook would look better if higher value crops were used, sharp pencils in support of project could make it look more feasible, need more support for this forgotten area that most outsiders do not think should be inhabited. We put a lot of food on people's tables and with this project we could greatly increase value and amount of products
16	[REDACTED] Sullivan lake. the project years ago was a canal that would go [REDACTED] and go out to the east why didn't the pipe line go the same way. it's a lot shorter?

17	This plan is reckless, expensive and environmentally ignorant. Critically deficient, the plan ignores all of the Red Deer River Watershed upstream of the project and our ongoing commitments to the people and their environment in Alberta. There are NO provisions that protect the habitat and riparian areas. There are NO provisions that protect the water from being traded to other industries such as fracking that permanently TAKES the water out of the water cycle.
18	The longer this project is on the books the greater the potential for a "No" from the review boards due to increasing pressure from other, non-related interest groups. Even the city of Red Deer may be unwilling for this project to advance from what I understand. Their concern is of course the quantity of water diverted from the river (regardless of Special Areas allotted reserve). It is discouraging to hear some southern Alberta water users speak of the opinion that diverted water is their "right". It is a strange understanding given that their economy is enhanced by the availability of the water paid for by all Albertans. Yet, here in central Alberta there are objections and slowdowns to achieving some similar water enhancement project in this area. We don't perceive it as a right, but we understand how beneficial it can be to our area's economy. The amount of water available to southern Alberta is astounding! We hear of some limits put on them during drier periods, but in total the limits are insignificant. By comparison this area of the province regularly experiences droughts - often back to back. The water this area is planning for, by comparison to s. Alberta, is small. It's time the government recognize this area's need by actually doing something such as approval and financial assistance rather than continuing to put everything off while more studies are conducted. This project needs to go ahead ASAP or cancel it altogether and save spending any more dollars on further studies.
19	No
20	Make it happen.
21	my taxes go up ,and they benefit
22	Without water this whole god forsaken area will be and continue to be a dustbowl. If anyone has any questions about economic viability ask yourselves how many times McCain or Cavendish built a potato plant in Stanmore? How many times did Rogers Sugar build a value added process facility in Scapa ? Incase there was any confusion as to the answer -its zero. I don't really care if 34 or 3 families benefit. It's a stable income for 34 or 3 families. The exact thing SAB lacks and the reason everyone out here moves ahead 3 steps and back 5 the next dry year. Please don't sit on your hands with this one. This is a rare opportunity to move ahead with a project that will have real and widespread economic benefits for a large swath of Pallisers triangle. With increasing water demand and scrutiny of large projects - this is a noon shot. If it doesn't happen now , it won't happen. [REDACTED]
23	Project appears to have more benefits than drawbacks
24	Reevaluate the numbers for other crops that could be grown on irrigation. Look at increasing the scope of the project to get more irrigated acres. I think the economic assessment underestimated the value that this would bring to the special areas.
25	Irrigation would stabilize the agricultural industry in the area. This would bring larger growth options, allowing for larger crop diversification.
26	Sounding creek bottom is very salty and will not be good for any irrigation. But I think you knew that
27	get it done
28	So much of the land along the creek is native pasture which there is very little left of in the province overall so it would be tragic to lose that native grass to irrigation. I also fear that this would create a lot of competition in the area for land and would open it up to more Hutterites moving in because they'll be the only ones that could afford it. Also, I'm wondering if, theoretically speaking, if a cattle guy in the irrigation zone that has no interest in buying a pivot and only wants to graze the land would have his land expropriated so that someone who would utilize irrigation could move in?
29	I think the project cost outweighs benefits. I'd sooner see SA throw its support behind economic initiatives that provide significant employment opportunities within SA, and broadly benefit and enhance opportunities for significant numbers of SA residents and entrepreneurs. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

30	As urban growth is moving at a rapid rate in this province agriculture land is being devoured for urban development. The time is now to start developing alternative more productive food supply areas. Also with an irrigation project comes water storage areas which have huge recreational values plus local business revenues. This project would benefit most of southern Alberta
31	not at this time
32	This project has been talked about and researched for years , it's time to take action and get this project underway !
33	Other areas outside of the current project scope should also be considered for irrigation as well.
34	With lack of real and accurate results in dollars that tax payers would be having to assume, on a project that would be depleting the river communities down stream depend on, I firmly believe that this would be a severe economic drain of our taxpayers and an environmental disaster in the making
35	The rest of Albertans should have to subsidize Special Area projects when inputs to grain and livestock production are not cost effective as area that have naturally high production. Evaporation losses are also a concern with instream flow needs further downstream not being met many years. Degrading water quality is a product of more fertilizer and animal waste into the Lower Red Deer River.
36	No
37	Based on what we heard at the meeting this project is a non-starter due to cost/benefit estimates and the minimal amount of irrigation it would provide.
38	The mapped 'benefitting areas' are hugely over exaggerated -- unless I am missing something. I'm not sure how to get water from the creek any further than a couple miles away for cattle watering. Subsequently the socio-economic study is inaccurate, overestimating the economic gain from the project. I wish it was cost effective and as beneficial as the map makes it look.
39	I think it's a poor use of tax dollars, is unprofitable, and is essentially using government money to support some farms. We are farming in a desert, if you don't like that, farm somewhere else.
40	The map is of such poor quality, that I really can't be sure if I have land in the green zone or not. If I do, it is only on the very edge. Quite frankly, this project did not make sense when it was first proposed and makes even less sense now. Given the anticipated costs to complete and the fact that it will realistically benefit very select few landowners, it is an unreasonable cost to the rest of the taxpayers who will be funding it, particularly since it will be operating at a loss. There is no point in throwing good money after bad. It is clearly time to walk away.
41	it is about time. This project has been around since the 1970's
42	No
43	This is a necessary progressive development . It needs to be approved and completed . The pipeline needs to be built to hold excessive volumes compared to the predicted use. We also own land in another district that is irritated and have large insight on this . If we are certain the project will move forward start selling the irrigation rights now to offset construction costs .
44	Tell economists to sharpen their pens
45	This project would be greatly beneficial for the area. Please find a way to get it done!
46	While cost:benefit ratio is .112-.128, the project has more merit in revitalizing Sp. Areas than does investing in Province of Ontario (see Special Areas Trust Fund Account Schedule of Investments). The project should be modified: postpone 141 km on Berry Creek, reduce annual operating expenses by the use of solar power pumping (federal gov't grant carbon reduction?) since peak sunlight coincides during proposed pumping period April to October. Distributes irrigation already present in Sp. Area: currently along Berry Creek and along South Saskatchewan River. However, need to support Meridian Dam to support water in SE part of Sp. Areas. I liked [REDACTED] suggestion of using corn rather than wheat in the benefit calculation. [REDACTED]
47	I recognize that this project would affect more than just my opportunities. Water draws water and would also affect neighboring lands

3.0 PUBLIC CONSULTATION IN THE SPECIAL AREAS - GENERAL

The Special Areas recognizes meaningful public consultation is a critical part of the municipal decision-making process and is committed to creating opportunities for public participation in municipal decisions which directly impact ratepayers.

The key principles of engagement which frame public consultation in the Special Areas include:

Clarity	what is and what is not a part of the consultation process will be clearly outlined for the public to help them understand their role in the decision process.
Accountability	information gathered as a part of public consultation will be used by the Special Areas to guide their decision-making process, including any potential amendments or changes.
Transparency	information gathered as a part of public consultation will be documented, reviewed and shared with the public when appropriate. Relevant information will be publicly available through the Special Areas website.
Respectful	public consultation will be respectful of all participant's comments, inputs, questions and concerns. The Special Areas will moderate and monitor any public forums related to the public consultation to support respectful interactions and communications by all participants.
Responsive	Special Areas is committed to being accessible and responsive to stakeholder concerns, whether expressed in-person, through email, or phone.

4.0 PUBLIC CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES SUMMARY

Special Areas engaged in public consultation related to the next steps for the Special Areas Water Supply Project in March 2020. This engagement included a series of community information sessions held in Consort, Hanna and Oyen on March 5 & 6. Beyond these community information sessions, a project information page was created on www.specialareas.ab.ca, media content related to the project and the consultation was published in local print publications, and a public awareness campaign was completed. An online survey was developed for stakeholders to provide feedback on the project, specifically what the next step should be. This survey was made available online from March 5 through April 1, with hard copies of the survey available at community information sessions and at District Offices.

Posts on the Special Areas social media platforms were developed to drive awareness of the public engagement opportunity throughout the online period. In addition, physical information packages were made available at local District Offices

The type of feedback which would be considered for this report was clearly identified in the online phase through post content (narrative and infographic) and in all Special Areas social media responses. Feedback on next steps for SAWSP was directed to the online survey.

APPENDIX 1

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION PLAN & TOOLS

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS (PUBLIC CONSULTATION PLAN)

The Special Areas public consultation plan included:

- A social media campaign via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram channels highlighting:
 - Who is potentially impacted (residents of SAB),
 - What public consultation opportunities are available, and
 - The current next steps for the Special Areas Water Supply Project.
 - *A weekly post ran from February 20 to April 1, 2020.*
- The public consultation webpage on the Special Areas was updated with information related to the next steps for the Special Areas Water Supply Project review, including:
 - Information on the project (project fact sheet, EIA report), and
 - Information on how to provide feedback (online survey link).
- A physical information package was posted at the District Offices public counters. A display was posted at community information sessions, including:
 - Poster of the project profile information,
 - Copies of the EIA report (Vol 1-4),
 - Copies of presentations from SAB and consultants, and
 - a “how to share your thoughts” postcard which outlines the online survey for individuals can provide feedback.

Online Survey

An online survey was created to collect feedback on the next steps for the Special Areas Water Supply Project during the consultation period. This survey collected some demographic information to assist with the analysis of the feedback provided. The survey presented the information shared at the community information sessions and asked for participants to rank their preferred choices for the three options for SAWSP.

Community Information Sessions – Consort/Oyen/Hanna – March 5 & 6 2020

Information was presented about the history of the project, what the EIA report found, and potential next steps for the project Advisory Council and the Board are considering. These information sessions were held in Consort, Oyen and Hanna over 2 days and had experts from the EIA consulting work on hand to present their findings and answer questions.