

# Parramatta River Survey October - November 2016

Prepared for:



Prepared by:



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## Research Objectives

- The Parramatta River Catchment Group (PRCG) are developing the Parramatta River Masterplan to achieve the group's mission of making the river swimmable by 2025.
- As part of this Masterplan, community research is to be carried out meet the following objectives:
  1. Understand current community behaviour (such as swimming, boating and bushwalking) and how this would change with a swimmable Parramatta River
  2. Understand the current barriers stopping the community from swimming in the river
  3. Understand local community preferences for the activation of swimming sites in the river, to help maximise interaction with the river.

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## Overview of Research Stages



- 4 focus groups drawn from 11 LGAs. Broad representations of age and cultural backgrounds.
- Explored attitudes, motivations and barriers to using the Parramatta River
- Also tested reactions to some high level activation concepts
- Informed questionnaire development and developed some initial hypothesis
- Conducted in late September, 2016

- Telephone survey. n=1102 interviews
- Benchmarking types of water activities conducted, attitudes to using the river, barriers to use and overall interest and support in making the river swimmable
- Coverage of 11 LGAs.
- Conducted October & November, 2016

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## Summary of qualitative insights

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### ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY THE COMMUNITY

- There are a wide range of activities residents like to do in and around the water, including:
  - ✓ Swimming
  - ✓ Fishing
  - ✓ Sailing or boating
  - ✓ Paddling (kayaking, canoeing, stand-up paddle etc)
  - ✓ Snorkeling or diving
  - ✓ Surfing
  - ✓ Sunbaking (esp. where there is sand)
  - ✓ Catching ferries
  - ✓ Picnics or BBQs
  - ✓ Walking, hiking or jogging
  - ✓ Bike riding
  - ✓ Going to cafes or restaurants
- The key challenge for PRCG is not convincing the community to do more of these activities, but rather to encourage them to do them in or around the Parramatta River. The majority has never considered this as being a possibility, so it will take time to educate the community that this is possible.

## Summary of qualitative insights (cont.)

### ATTITUDES TO SWIMMING IN RIVERS OR LAKES

- Around one third of the groups have been swimming in a river at some point. Not surprisingly it was more likely for older participants – swimming in rivers is perceived as something previous generations tended to do.
- One participant recalled swimming at Little Coogee! However most had never actually swum in the Parramatta River, nor thought about the possibility. Other rivers that people had swum in included the Hawkesbury and Georges river, but these were one-off experiences, not something people looked to do regularly.
- There appears to be growing awareness and usage of Lake Parramatta. The majority of users were positive about the lake (less so about the parking). In the future, users of the lake can perhaps be targeted for swimming in the river as some of the barriers have already been broken down (e.g. not being able to see the bottom).
- There was (surprisingly) only moderate awareness of the various swimming areas in Sydney Harbour and Parramatta River. For example many were not aware of the Dawn Fraser Baths, despite its age and historical significance. It seems that swimming in these pools/baths is something much of the community has forgotten or never learned, especially for younger people.

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## Summary of qualitative insights (cont.)

### ATTITUDES TO SWIMMING IN THE PARRAMATTA RIVER

- There appears to be some confusion as to what area the Parramatta River covers. While some are aware that it begins from the Lane Cover River estuary, a large number of participants thought it began further west, sometimes from Homebush but even as far as Silverwater.
- Overall when people hear “Parramatta River” they tend to think about the western, not the eastern part of the river.
- The main two barriers to swimming are:
  - Pollution
  - Too murky/not being able to see
- Other barriers are:
 

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Concerns about sharks, eels, or other fish/marine life</li> <li>– Smell/stench</li> <li>– Barriers to access (e.g. mangroves, rocks, slime). No sand.</li> <li>– Ferries/boats</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Drowning (no lifeguards)</li> <li>– Underwater hazards (e.g. glass, trolleys, large rocks, logs)</li> <li>– Currents</li> <li>– River too narrow in parts (further west)</li> </ul> |
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## Summary of qualitative insights (cont.)

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### ATTITUDES TO SWIMMING IN THE PARRAMATTA RIVER (CONT.)

- Generally the further west you go the less comfortable people are with the idea of swimming in the river, particularly because the pollution and smell is perceived to be worse, plus there are more ferries, boats and debris in a narrower part of the river.
- Some are aware of the idea to make the river swimmable. A vast majority are supportive, even if they aren't sure if they would personally swim in the river
- Encouragingly, those who are resistant to swimming are still interested in being close to the river if there were more facilities for picnics, BBQs, walk and play areas for children....and no bad smell!
- If a credible authority (e.g. Sydney water) claimed the river was safe to swim in then this would address a lot of concerns about pollution. However, there is also a strong attitude of 'wait and see what everyone else does first'. Therefore it will be critical to encourage early adopters, as others will then be encouraged to engage with the river and surrounding areas.
- Having activities near the river is critical. Most express a preference to do activities near the water. If there is a place to swim which has a community feel, then people will be drawn to it - even if there is resistance to actually going in the water. Over time barriers will break down if they see others in the river itself.

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## Summary of qualitative insights (cont.)

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### REACTIONS TO CONCEPTS

- Participants were shown the following swimming concepts:
  - Dawn Fraser Baths
  - Lake Parramatta
  - Streets Beach Brisbane
  - Islands Brygge Harbor Bath Copenhagen
  - + Pool, New York
  - Thames Baths
- Those who weren't aware of Parramatta Lake were reasonably impressed and quite a few indicated they would visit it in the future. They like the fact that the water was tested, that there were lifeguards and that there were other activities to do, such a paddling or bushwalking.
- It is 'early days' so the idea of swimming in the river is very foreign to many people. This means they default to the option that is most similar to what is familiar - Streets Beach in Brisbane.

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## Summary of qualitative insights (cont.)

### REACTIONS TO CONCEPTS (CONT.)

- This isn't surprising as it address the key concerns about swimming in a river – no pollution, no murky water, no risk of coming into contact with marine life. Also Australians find white sand very appealing, especially compared to what they think is by the river (i.e. mangroves, rocks and grime). Finally, participants with kids see it as a very safe environment for their children.
- However, most are willing to consider swimming in the Copenhagen Harbor Bath and the +Pool (although some are concerned that + Pool is too far to watch kids, and looks too serious/professional). Currently they prefer the water to be clearer, so education will be required to make people believe that the river pool is safe and pollution free. It may not be as popular initially as Streets Beach but it will get used, and usage will probably increase as the idea of swimming in a river becomes better known and accepted.
- It is critical there are things to do around the swimming area. As one participant pointed out *"I'm not going down there just for a 15 minute swim, there has to be other things to do"*. So areas to walk, picnic etc. are very important to getting the community to engage with the river area.

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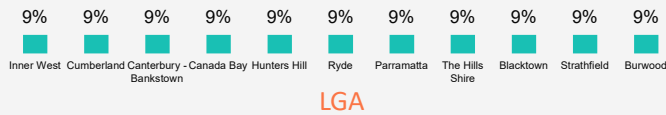
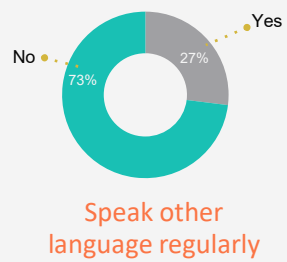
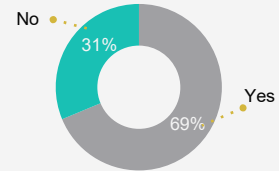
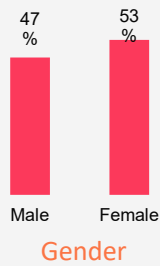
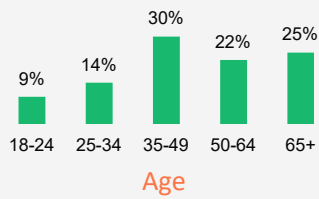


Quantitative stage

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## Methodology

- Telephone survey using both landline and mobile phones among n=1102 people aged 18+
- Conducted 19<sup>th</sup> October – 4<sup>th</sup> November 2016
- Data was weighted so the results reflect the total population across the 11 LGA's



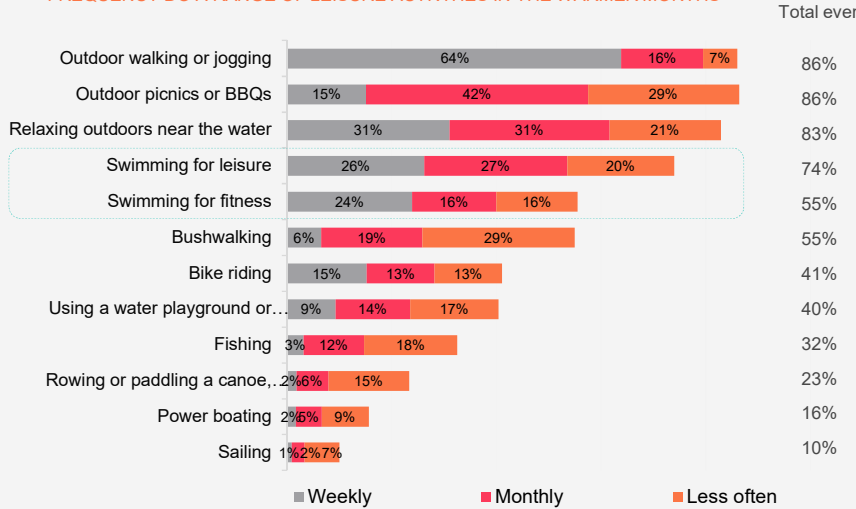
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## The community enjoys taking part in a wide range of activities near water in the warmer months

### FREQUENCY DO A RANGE OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES IN THE WARMER MONTHS



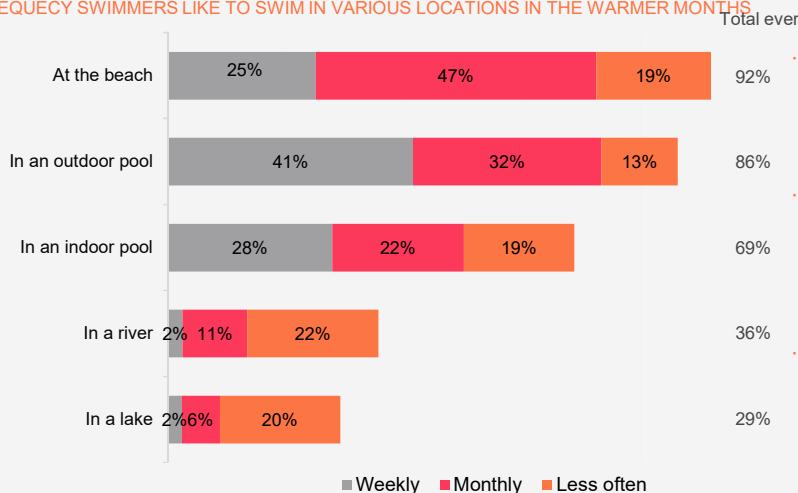
- The most popular activities in the warmer months were outdoor walking or jogging, outdoor picnics or BBQ's and relaxing outdoors near the water, with more than 8 in 10 saying they have ever done each.
- Swimming is also a common activity, with three quarters having done it for leisure and slightly over half for fitness.
- Younger people, people born in Australia and parents were all more likely to say they swim for leisure, while there was little difference among groups in regards to swimming for fitness.
- Other activities listed were ever undertaken by about half or less of all adults.

16 Q. Thinking about activities you can do near the water. For each one, please tell me if in the warmer months you do it in weekly, monthly, less often or never.

All respondents n=1102

## For swimming, main preferences are the beach and both indoor and outdoor pools

### FREQUENCY SWIMMERS LIKE TO SWIM IN VARIOUS LOCATIONS IN THE WARMER MONTHS



- Among those that swim at least monthly, by far the most common location to do so in the warmer months was at the beach, followed by outdoor pools and indoor pools.
- While usage of outdoor pools was more consistent across groups, indoor pools were a little more likely to be used by parents, and people born overseas or who speak another language.
- Only a small minority regularly swim in rivers or lakes. Typically, males and younger people are more likely to do so and are therefore arguably more open to using an activated swimming site on the Parramatta River.

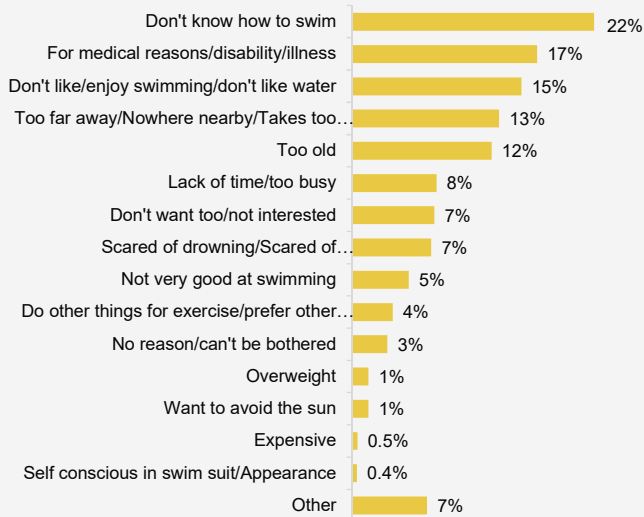
17 Q. For each of the following places, please tell me if in the warmer months you swim in it weekly, monthly, less often or never.

Swim at least monthly n=633



## What are the main reasons non-swimmers don't swim?

STATED REASONS FROM NON-SWIMMERS WHY THEY DON'T SWIM (CODED RESPONSES SHOWN)



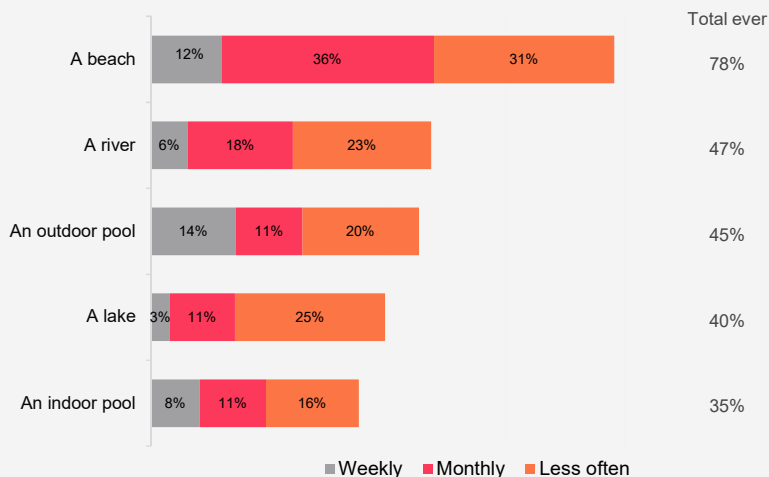
- Among those that say they never swim, almost a quarter say it is because they simply don't know how to swim.
- Other common reasons nominated by one in ten or more were physical related (e.g. medical, disability, age), that they simply don't like it or that there is nowhere nearby.
- Residents born overseas were far more likely to state they don't know how to swim, at just over 4 in 10.

18 Q. For what reasons don't you swim? What other reasons?

Never swim n= 262

## For activities *other* than swimming, the beach is still the most popular location, but some are accessing rivers

FREQUENCY VISIT EACH PLACE FOR REASONS OTHER THAN SWIMMING IN WARMER MONTHS



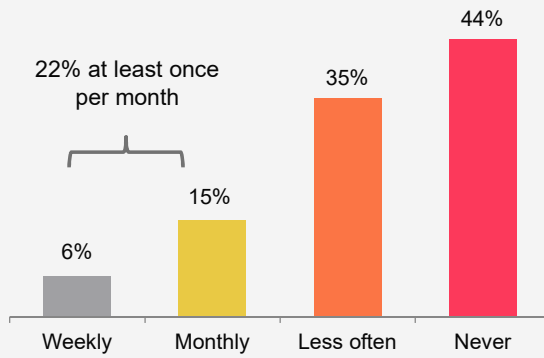
- About 8 in 10 say they ever visit the beach for reasons other than swimming during the warmer months.
- Half or less have ever visited a river, lake or pool for reasons other than swimming.
- Younger people were more likely to have visited these places for other reasons.
- Typically people born overseas or who speak another language at home were more likely to have visited the beach or a pool for reasons other than swimming.

19 Q. For each of the following places, please tell me if you visit there in the warmer months weekly, monthly, less often or never for reasons other than swimming.

All respondents n=1102

## Encouragingly, some non-swimmers still go to swimming sites, with others who are swimming.

FREQUENCY ATTEND SWIMMING SITE WITH SOMEONE WHO DOES SWIM



- Among those that say they never swim, over half claim that they have ever visited a swimming site in the warmer months with someone who does swim.
- There is evidence to suggest that parents and those who are born overseas or speak another language are more likely to attend a swimming site with someone who does swim.
- This highlights that even among non-swimmers, there is the potential for them to utilise and enjoy an activated swimming site on the Parramatta River.

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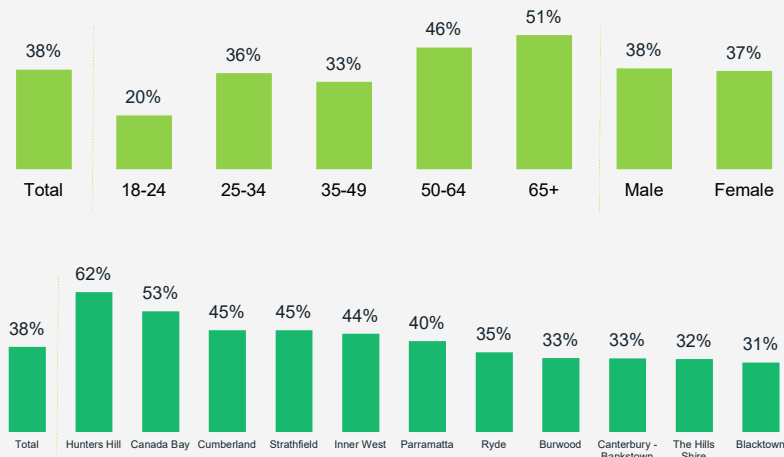
Q. In the warmer months, how often do you ever attend a swimming site, such as a beach, lake or pool with someone who does swim?

Never swim n= 262



## Just under 4 in 10 claim to be aware of the public baths and pools on Parramatta River. Awareness is lowest amongst younger residents

### AWARENESS OF PUBLIC BATHS AND POOLS THAT CURRENTLY EXIST IN THE PARRAMATTA RIVER



- Just under 4 in 10 adults across the areas surveyed were aware that public baths and pools currently exist on the Parramatta River.
- People aged 50 years and over were significantly more likely to be aware.
- Generally, those in the LGA's closest to the existing baths and pools (Hunters Hill and Canada Bay) were more likely to be aware of their existence.

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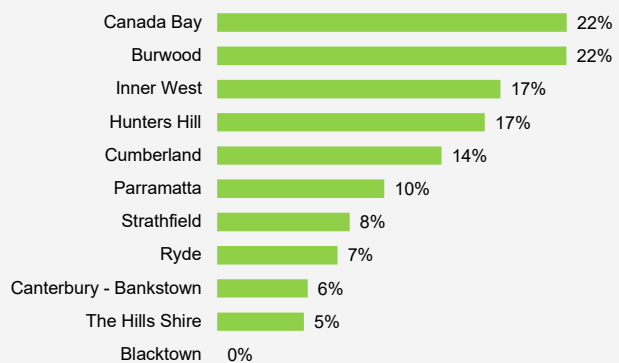
Q. Before today, were you aware of not aware that a number of public baths and pools currently exist in the Parramatta River?

All respondents n=1102

## Amongst swimmers, just under 1 in 10 claim to have used pools or baths in the Parramatta River in the last 12 months

### REPORTED INCIDENCE OF SWIMMING THE PARRAMATTA RIVER OR POOLS OR BATHS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

**9%** of swimmers claim to have swum in the Parramatta river or river pools in the last 12 months



- Among swimmers, one in ten claim to have swum in the Parramatta River in the past 12 months, either directly or in a river pool or bath.
- This was significantly higher in the LGA's of Canada Bay and Burwood.
- Inner West, Hunters Hill, and Cumberland also recorded results higher than the average.
- There were no significant differences by gender or age.

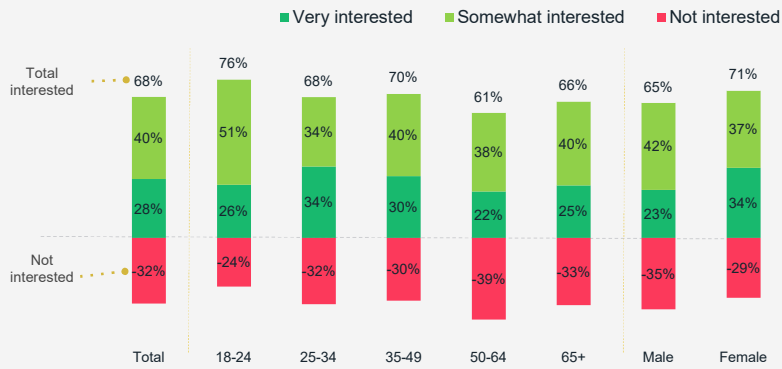
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Q. In the last 12 months, have you swum in the Parramatta River, whether it be directly in the river or in any river pools or baths, such as Dawn Fraser Pool or Chiswick Baths?

Swim at least monthly n=633

## Almost 3 in 10 swimmers are *very interested* and 4 in 10 are *somewhat interested* in accessing a safe, designated area in the Parramatta river

### INTEREST IN SWIMMING IN A DESIGNATED AREA IN PARRAMATTA RIVER



- Among those who are regular swimmers, there is a high level of interest in swimming in a designated area of the Parramatta River with almost 3 in 10 very interested and 4 in 10 somewhat interested.
- While not quite statistically significant, there is evidence to suggest that younger people and females exhibit slightly higher levels of interest.

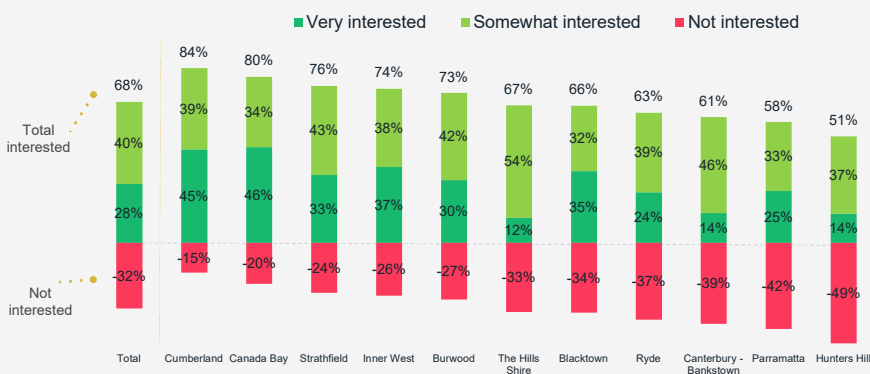
Q. Thinking now about Parramatta River, which runs all the way from North Parramatta through to Sydney Harbour. Imagine a designated area was created for swimming in the Parramatta River, with safe water quality and no hazards in the water, within reasonable distance from you. How interested would you be in swimming in there? Would you be...?

24

Swim at least monthly n=633

## Interest in accessing a designated area in the Parramatta river is highest in Cumberland and Canada Bay

### INTEREST IN SWIMMING IN A DESIGNATED AREA IN PARRAMATTA RIVER



- Interest in swimming in a designated area on the Parramatta River is highest in Cumberland and Canada Bay, and at its lowest in Hunters Hill.

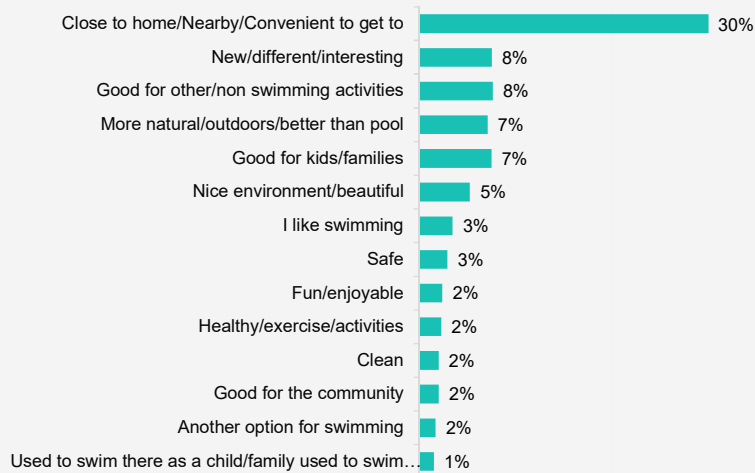
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25

Swim at least monthly n=633

## Unprompted, the main reason for being interested in swimming in designated areas in the Parramatta River is *convenience*

STATED REASONS INTERESTED IN SWIMMING IN A DESIGNATED AREA IN PARRAMATTA RIVER (CODED RESPONSES SHOWN)



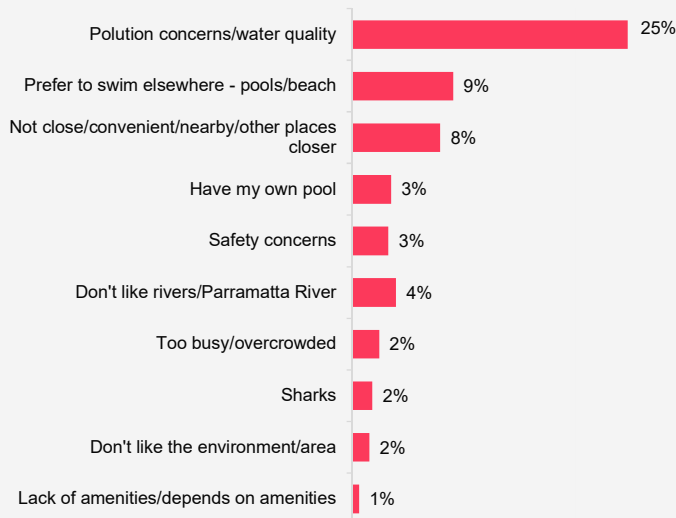
- The main unprompted reason for being interested in swimming in the river is convenience.
- This is followed by it being new/different, that provides opportunities other than swimming, that it is more natural than a pool and that it is good for families.

26 Q. For what reasons are you very/somewhat/not interested?

Swim at least monthly n=633

## Unprompted the main reason for not being interested in swimming in a designated area in the Parramatta River is *pollution/water quality*

STATED REASONS INTERESTED IN SWIMMING IN A DESIGNATED AREA IN PARRAMATTA RIVER (CODED RESPONSES SHOWN)



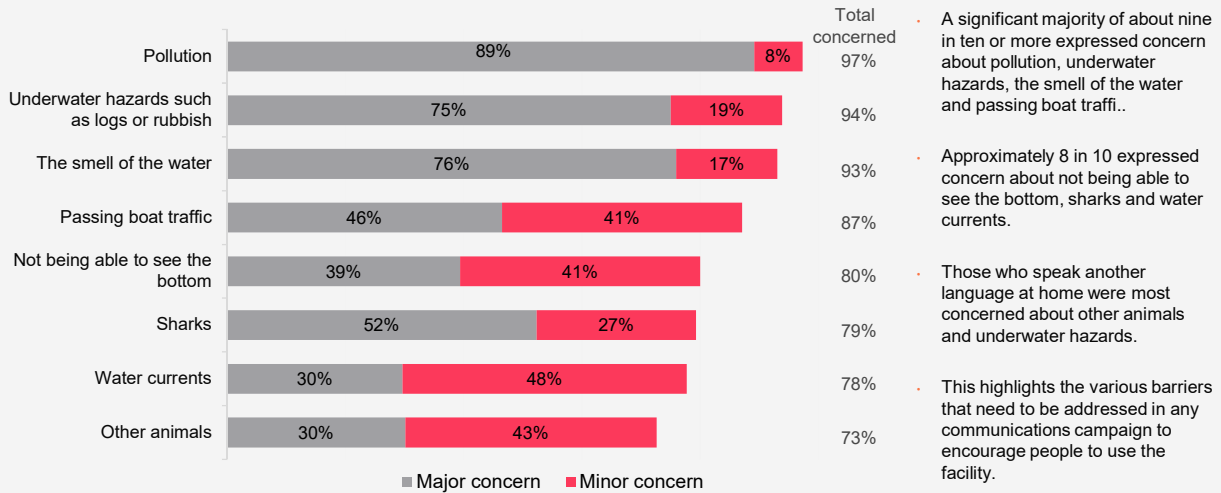
- The main unprompted reason for not being interested in swimming in the river is pollution/water quality concerns.
- This is followed preferring to swim elsewhere and it not being close/convenient enough for some residents

27 Q. For what reasons are you very/somewhat/not interested?

Swim at least monthly n=633

## When prompted, the key concerns about swimming in the river are *pollution, underwater hazards and smell*

MAJOR & MINOR CONCERNS ABOUT SWIMMING IN THE PARRAMATTA RIVER WHEN PROMPTED

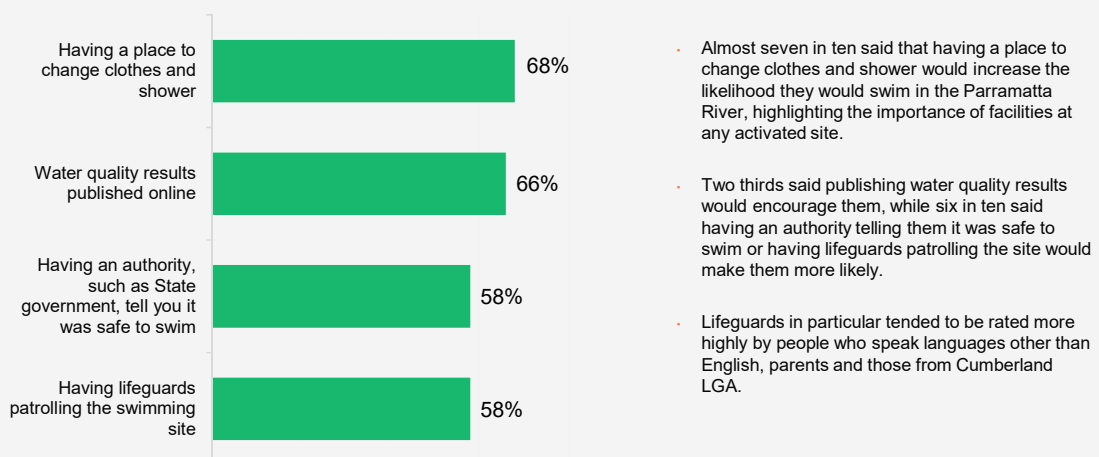


- A significant majority of about nine in ten or more expressed concern about pollution, underwater hazards, the smell of the water and passing boat traffi..
- Approximately 8 in 10 expressed concern about not being able to see the bottom, sharks and water currents.
- Those who speak another language at home were most concerned about other animals and underwater hazards.
- This highlights the various barriers that need to be addressed in any communications campaign to encourage people to use the facility.

28 Q. For each of the following, please tell me if it would be a major concern, a minor concern or not a concern to you personally if you were to swim in the Parramatta River. Swim at least monthly n=633

## To increase the likelihood swimmers would use the river the some important initiatives are *having a place to change and shower and having water quality results published*

ACTIONS THAT WOULD INCREASE SWIMMERS LIKELIHOOD OF SWIMMING THE PARRAMATTA RIVER

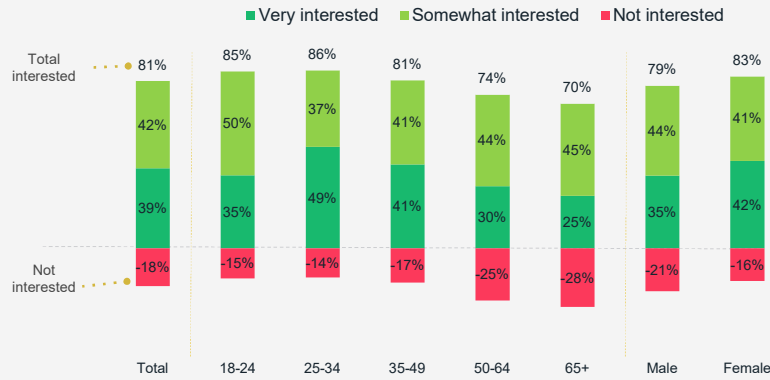


- Almost seven in ten said that having a place to change clothes and shower would increase the likelihood they would swim in the Parramatta River, highlighting the importance of facilities at any activated site.
- Two thirds said publishing water quality results would encourage them, while six in ten said having an authority telling them it was safe to swim or having lifeguards patrolling the site would make them more likely.
- Lifeguards in particular tended to be rated more highly by people who speak languages other than English, parents and those from Cumberland LGA.

29 Q. For each of the following things, would it make you more likely to swim in the Parramatta River, or would it make no difference? Swim at least monthly n=633

## Interest amongst swimmers is even higher for accessing a clean, filtered pool within or next to Parramatta River

INTEREST IN SWIMMING IN A FILTERED, CLEAN POOL WITHIN OR NEXT TO THE PARRAMATTA RIVER



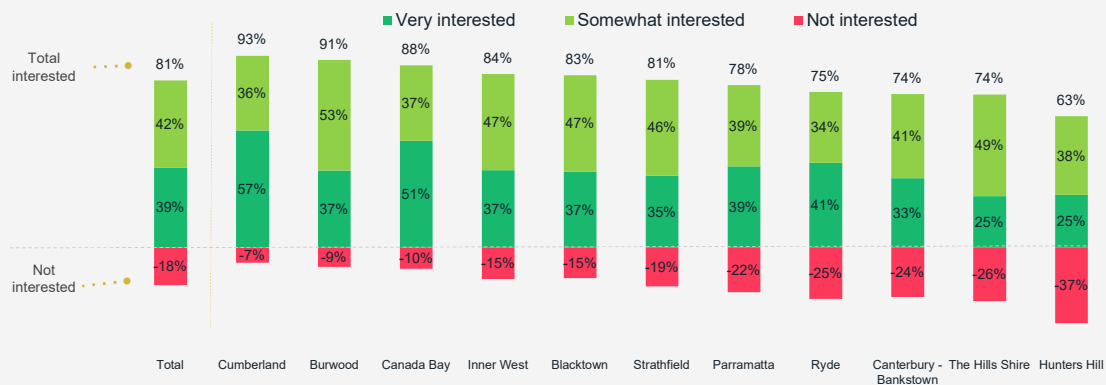
- The level of interest among regular swimmers in a clean, filtered pool within or next to the Parramatta River is higher than swimming in a designated area, at eight in ten.
- Interest is highest among people aged 18 to 34, but little different between males and females.
- People who speak a language other than English at home also had a slightly higher level of interest.

30 Q. Now imagine that a pool or swimming area was built within or next to the Parramatta River that used filtered, cleaned water from the river. If it was within reasonable distance from you, how interested would you be in swimming in there? Would you be...?

Swim at least monthly n=633

## Interest is highest in Cumberland and Burwood for accessing a filtered pool within or next to Parramatta River

INTEREST IN SWIMMING IN A FILTERED, CLEAN POOL WITHIN OR NEXT TO THE PARRAMATTA RIVER



- The LGA's with the highest level of interest in the concept were Cumberland, Burwood and Canada Bay at around 9 in 10.
- The lowest level of support was in Hunters Hill at 6 in 10.

31 Q. Now imagine that a pool or swimming area was built within or next to the Parramatta River that used filtered, cleaned water from the river. If it was within reasonable distance from you, how interested would you be in swimming in there? Would you be...?

Swim at least monthly n=633

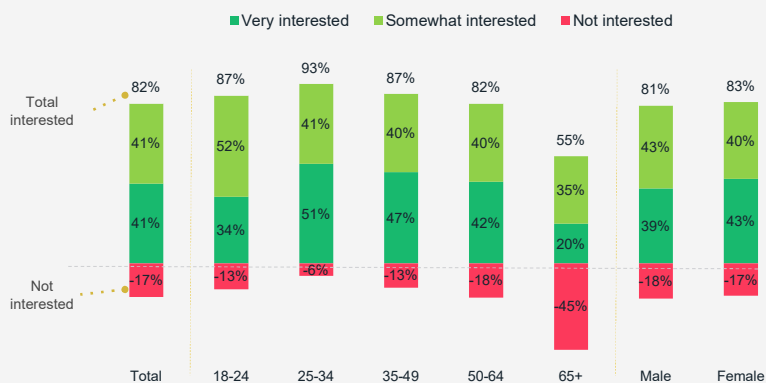


# Interest in recreational facilities near the proposed swimming area

32

Around 4 in 10 are *very interested* and 4 in 10 are *somewhat interested* in accessing facilities *near* the proposed swimming area

INTEREST VISITING SWIMMING AREA/RECREATIONAL FACILITIES NEXT TO THE PARRAMATTA RIVER



- Overall interest in visiting a swimming area with recreational facilities for reasons other than swimming is also high at 8 in 10.
- Interest is significantly higher among those aged under 65 years.
- People with children and those that speak another language at home also had a significantly higher level of interest.

Q. Now imagine that a pool or swimming area was developed on the Parramatta River, which also included other recreational facilities near the water. These could include a BBQ or picnic area, and walking or cycling tracks. How interested would you be to visit the area for reasons other than swimming? Would you be...?

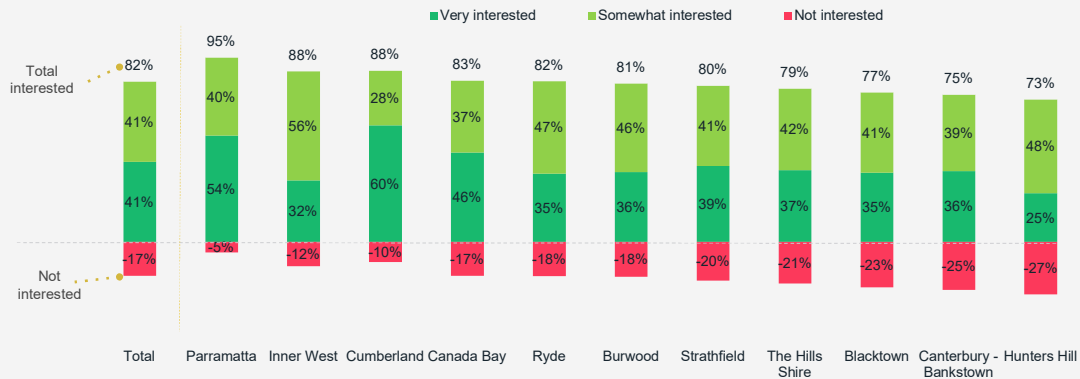
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All respondents n=1102



## Interest in accessing recreational facilities *near* the proposed swimming area is highest in Parramatta

INTEREST VISITING SWIMMING AREA/RECREATIONAL FACILITIES NEXT TO THE PARRAMATTA RIVER



- Parramatta LGA had the highest level of interest at 95%, with other LGA's ranging from about 75% to 90%.

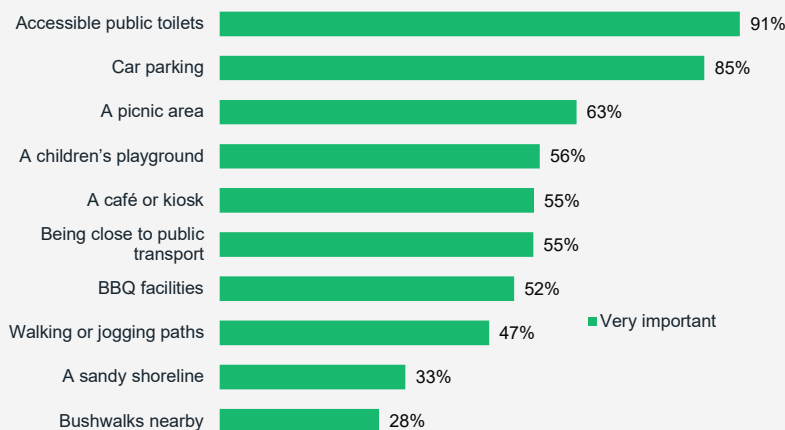
Q. Now imagine that a pool or swimming area was developed on the Parramatta River, which also included other recreational facilities near the water. These could include a BBQ or picnic area, and walking or cycling tracks. How interested would you be to visit the area for reasons other than swimming? Would you be...?

34

All respondents n=1102

## What does the community want as part of any recreational facility near the Parramatta River?

FEATURES AS PART OF A RECREATIONAL FACILITY NEAR PARRAMATTA RIVER RATED AS VERY IMPORTANT



- Among those interested in such a recreational facility a large majority nominated accessible toilets and car parking as *very important*.

- This was followed by a picnic area, children's playground, café/kiosk and being close to public transport.

- There were few differences across major demographic groups or LGA's, although as one would expect parents placed more importance on a children's playground. Interestingly, those from overseas or speaking another language at home placed more importance on walking or jogging tracks.

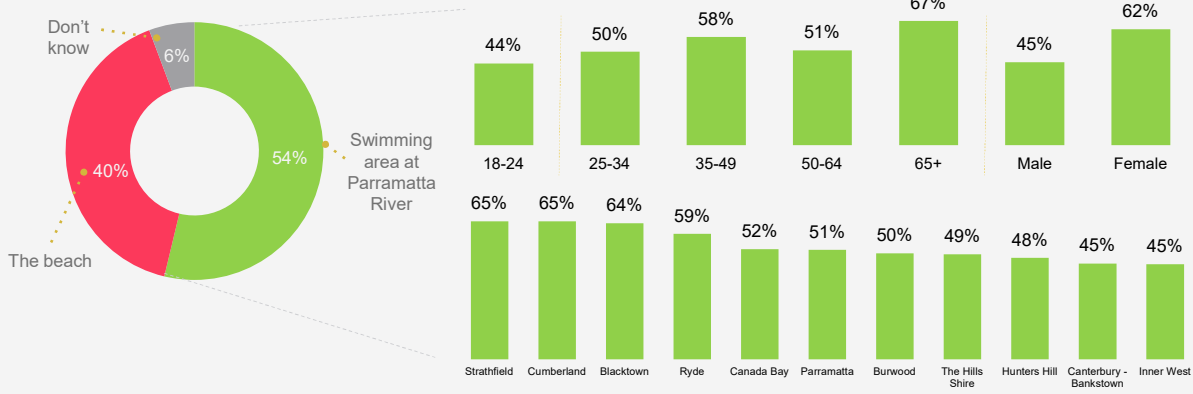
Q. For each of the following, please tell me if it would be very important, somewhat important or not important to you as part of a such a recreational facility near the water.

35

Interested in swimming / recreational area n=908

### If the proposed swimming areas and recreational facilities took half as long to get to as the beach, over half would prefer the Parramatta river

PREFERENCE FOR SWIMMING AREA BY PARRAMATTA RIVER VS BEACH IF TRAVEL TIME TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

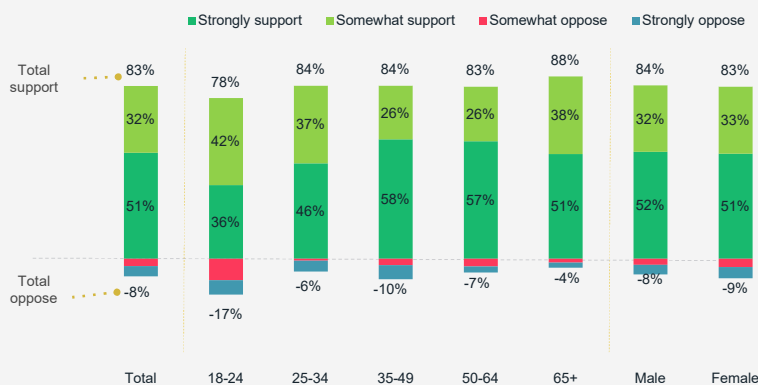


- Among those interested in a swimming and recreational facility, slightly over half would prefer the facility if it took half the time to get there compared to the beach (a realistic time frame given the location of these LGA's).
- The facility is also most preferred by those aged 65 years and over, despite them having the lowest levels of interest in the concept. Females also have a much higher preference for the facility than males.
- Strathfield, Cumberland and Blacktown LGA's had the highest preference for the concept, no doubt due to their location.

36 Q. If the swimming area and recreational facility at the Parramatta River took half as long to get to compared to the beach, which would you prefer to go to? Interested in swimming / recreational area n=908

### Overall, there is high community support for a pool and recreational facility being developed on the Parramatta River

OVERALL SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION FOR A POOL AND RECREATIONAL FACILITY BEING DEVELOPED ON THE PARRAMATTA RIVER



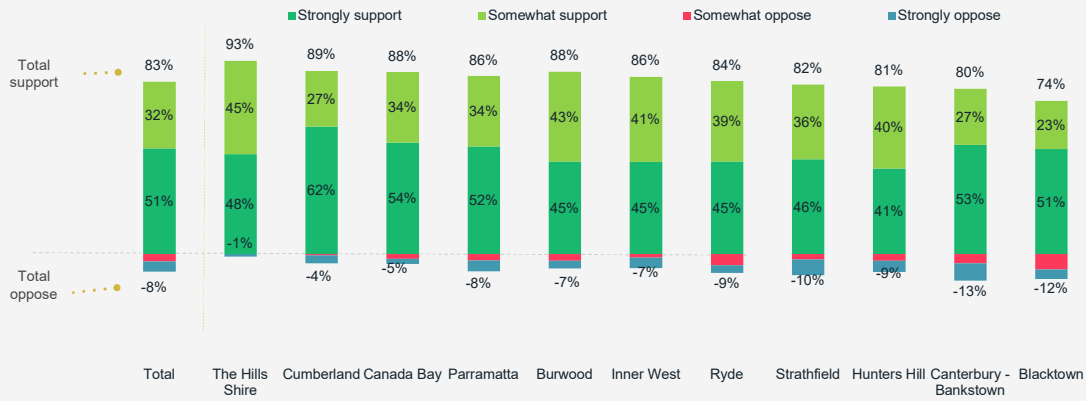
- A similarly large majority support the development of a pool and recreational facility on the Parramatta River.
- Less than one in ten oppose the development. While not quite statistically significant, there is evidence to suggest 18-24 year olds are the most likely group to oppose the idea.

37 Q. And would you support or oppose such a pool and recreational facility being developed on the Parramatta River?

All respondents n=1102

## Support is generally high across all LGAs, but highest in Hills Shire, Cumberland, Canada Bay and Parramatta

OVERALL SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION FOR A POOL AND RECREATIONAL FACILITY BEING DEVELOPED ON THE PARRAMATTA RIVER



- Looking at LGA's, The Hills Shire recorded the highest level of support for the concept. All other LGA's recorded levels of support of between about 80% to 90%, while only three quarters of adults in Blacktown LGA supported it.



## Summary & Conclusions

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### ACTIVITIES THE COMMUNITY CURRENTLY DOES

- As suggested by the qualitative research, residents across the 11 LGAs partake in a wide range of water related activities, particularly walking or jogging, picnics or BBQs, relaxing near the water and swimming for leisure or fitness.
- For swimmers, preferences are currently the beach or indoor and outdoor pools. 13% of swimmers claim to swim in a river once a month or more often in the warmer months.
- Interestingly, there are more residents who have visited rivers for reasons other than swimming. Overall one in four claim to do this at least once a month in the warmer months. This confirms the importance of future sites having facilities for visitors who prefer not to swim.

### INTEREST IN SWIMMING IN THE PARRAMATTA RIVER

- Just under 4 in 10 are aware of the public baths and pools in the Parramatta River. Awareness is lowest amongst younger residents. Not surprisingly, residents in the LGA's closest to the existing baths and pools (e.g. Hunters Hill and Canada Bay) are more likely to be aware of their existence.
- Just under 1 in 10 swimmers report accessing a public bath or pool in the last 12 months.

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## Summary & Conclusions (cont.)

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### INTEREST IN SWIMMING IN THE PARRAMATTA RIVER (CONT.)

- Amongst swimmers, interest in swimming in a designated area in the Parramatta River with safe water quality is reasonably high. Seven in 10 are interested overall, with 4 in 10 very interested. Interest rises to 8 in 10 overall for access to a clean, filtered pool.
- The main stated reason for interest is convenience, followed by it being seen to be new and interesting and that it would be good for other non-swimming activities.
- The main stated reason for disinterest is pollution/water quality, followed by preferring to swim elsewhere. When prompted the top 3 barriers to swimming in the river are pollution, underwater hazards and smell.
- To increase the likelihood that swimmers would use the river the most important initiatives are having a place to change and shower and having water quality results published

### INTEREST IN ACCESSING RECREATIONAL FACILITIES NEAR THE PARRAMATTA RIVER

- There is very high interest in accessing recreational facilities near the river. Over 8 in 10 are interested with 4 in 10 very interested. Interest is highest amongst 25-34 year olds and those with children at home.

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## Summary & Conclusions (cont.)

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### INTEREST IN ACCESSING RECREATIONAL FACILITIES NEAR THE PARRAMATTA RIVER (CONT.)

- Among those interested in accessing recreational facilities the majority nominated accessible toilets and car parking as most important. This was followed by a picnic area, children's playground, café/kiosk and being close to public transport.

### ACCESSING THE PARRAMATTA RIVER, RATHER THAN THE BEACH

- Among those interested in a swimming and recreational facilities on the river, just over half would use the facility if it took half as much time to get there compared to the beach.
- Strathfield, Cumberland and Blacktown LGA's had the highest preference for accessing the river, no doubt due to their location
- Overall, the quantitative stage supports general findings in the qualitative stage. It confirms that community support for developing a pool and recreational facility on the Parramatta River is reasonably high. If key barriers can be overcome, especially pollution we expect many residents across the LGAs survey would make greater use of the river.