



Community insights to inform the Swan Canning River System Protection Strategy

Full report
February 2024



Department of **Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions**

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Scope of Engagement

Scope of engagement

The Department of Conservation, Biodiversity and Attractions (DBCA) is in the process of drafting a new Swan Canning River System Protection Strategy (RPS). The RPS will provide clear direction for the management of the river systems over the next ten years to the various stakeholders responsible for their protection.

To guide the development of the RPS, DBCA commissioned Metrix Consulting to conduct research with the Perth community to understand community values and attitudes towards the river system and its management.



The specific research objectives of this engagement were:

1

Understand community and personal connections to the Swan Canning river system.

2

Understand values associated with the Swan Canning river system and relative importance.

3

Determine current satisfaction with and identify gaps in management of the Swan Canning river system.

4

Determine future expectations and priorities for management of the Swan Canning river system.

5

Understand perceptions of river system management responsibility, including the role of the individual.




Methodology

A 12-minute online survey was conducted between 13 December 2023 and 17 January 2024. The survey was distributed two ways, one via representative research panel, the other as an open link promoted by DBCA through its owned channels and partner organisations.

- For the representative panel audience, a final sample of **n=400** Perth metro adult residents was achieved, providing a maximum margin of error of $\pm 4.9\%$ at 95% confidence. The data has been weighted in line with 2021 ABS data to be representative of the WA population.
- For the open link, a final sample of **n=846** Perth metro residents and **n=43** regional WA, interstate and international residents was achieved. The open link sample has **not** been weighted.

Results have been analysed to understand if and how perceptions differ between the general Perth community (representative panel sample), and those who are more engaged with the river system and DBCA (open link sample).

Audience definitions

 Perth Metro - Panel	General Perth metro residents
 Perth Metro – Open Link	Engaged Perth metro residents
 Elsewhere – Open Link	Engaged regional WA, interstate, and international residents

Key Insights

The Swan Canning river system is highly valued and considered a part of Perth's identity

Current river system usage and perceptions

- Perth residents personally value the Swan Canning river system as a place to appreciate the scenic beauty, unwind and connect to nature. The river system is seen as an important part of the Perth landscape, to be protected and shared with future generations.
- Over half the Perth metro community visit the river system at least once every three months, primarily enjoying activities along the river foreshore (visiting restaurants and cafes, having a picnic or BBQ, and generally relaxing along the foreshore). One quarter of visitors participate in water-based activities on the river system itself, most commonly fishing.
- Almost six in ten Perth metro area residents (57%) are satisfied with the management of the Swan Canning river system, mostly because they see the river system as clean, well maintained and accessible. Dissatisfaction largely stems from perceptions of poor river system health.

Management priorities

- Overall, a focus on the *natural environment* is considered most important when it comes to the management of the Swan Canning river system. Protection and preservation of the river system's ecosystem and biodiversity and ensuring a clean and healthy river system that people can enjoy now and into the future are key vision themes.
- When considering the practices that are rated as important but that the community is less satisfied with, those that focus on the *natural environment* (water quality for healthy habitats for animals and plants, water flows for sustaining natural ecosystems and healthy foreshore vegetation and riverbanks) should be key river system management priorities. *Water quality* for the benefit of the community (swimming and the consumption of seafood) is also a potential focus. Development (hospitality and other commercial activities) is considered much less of a priority for the community.
- Infrastructure upgrades (walkways, parking, lighting) were also commonly mentioned as a priority to improve usability of the foreshore.
- Individuals are most likely to take *personal responsibility* for the river system by reducing pollution and waste when they are using the Swan Canning river system. They are less likely to get involved in ways that require more active participation such as seeking and sharing education, custodianship and volunteering.

'I very much appreciate the retention of riverside vegetation and parks for all residents to enjoy. Having the river as a key part of my day-to-day lifestyle is why I live where I live - and why I love living in Perth. To me the Swan-Canning river and its health and wellbeing is the heart of what makes Perth as liveable as it is..'

– Perth Metro – Open link



'Connection to the river, healthy ecosystems that can be enjoyed by Perth.'

– Perth Metro – Panel

The Swan Canning river system is highly valued and considered a part of Perth's identity

Engaged audience

- Not surprisingly, those who are more engaged with the river system and DBCA (open link sample) are more frequent and active users of the river system and its surrounds, with almost half participating in water-based activities, most commonly non-motorised activities such as rowing, kayaking and sailing. They are also more willing to be involved in river system management and take a broader range of personal responsibility. Compared to the broader community, they place slightly more importance on the protection and preservation of the natural environment and are slightly less satisfied overall with the management of the river system. However, similar to the wider community, a focus on *water quality* and *water flows* for the benefit of the ecosystem and biodiversity are still considered key management priorities.



Audience Profiles



Most Perth Metro (panel) residents are occasional or infrequent users of the Swan Canning river system

Almost all Perth metro residents who use the river system (93%) enjoy land-based activities along the foreshore, most commonly visiting restaurants and cafes, having a picnic or BBQ, and generally relaxing along the foreshore. One quarter (27%) participate in water-based activities on the river system itself, most commonly fishing (9%).

Gender



49%
Males



51%
Females

Age



30%
18-34



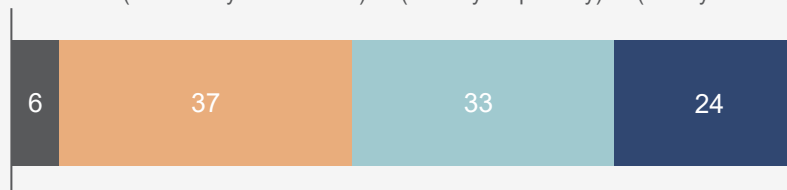
35%
35-54



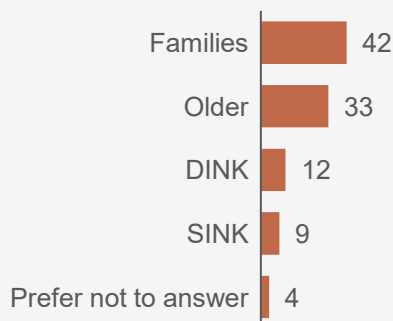
35%
55+

Frequency of Swan Canning river system visitation

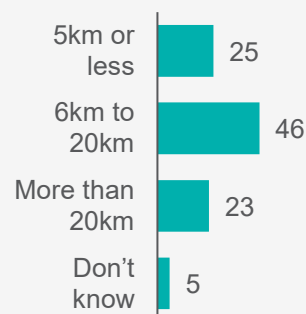
■ Never ■ Infrequent (six monthly or less often) ■ Occasional (monthly to quarterly) ■ Frequently (weekly to fortnightly)



Household composition



Proximity to Swan Canning river system



Uses of Swan Canning river system | Top 5 (% of those who use the river)



n=400

S1: How old are you? | S2: Are you... | S5: Which of these best describes your household?

S7: Approximately how far do you live from the Swan Canning river? | Q1: Approximately how often do you visit the Swan Canning river?

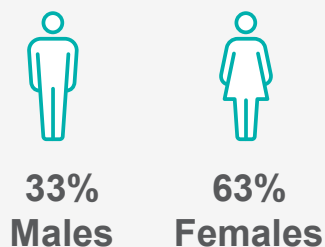
Q2: Which of the following, if any, do you usually do on or around the Swan Canning river?



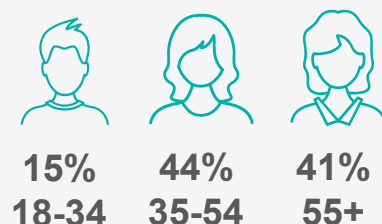
Open link Perth residents are more frequent and active users of the river system and its surrounds

Compared to the broader Perth community, they are also slightly older, more likely to be females and live closer to the river system. Like the general Perth community, social activities such as visiting restaurants and cafes, picnics, BBQs and attending events are common uses of the river system and foreshore (96% of river users participate in land-based activities). However, a higher proportion of this audience are active water-users (47% ▲, compared to 27% of general Perth residents (panel)), especially families (54%).

Gender*



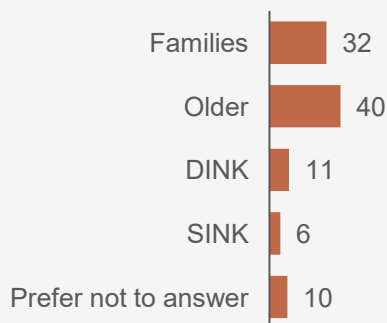
Age



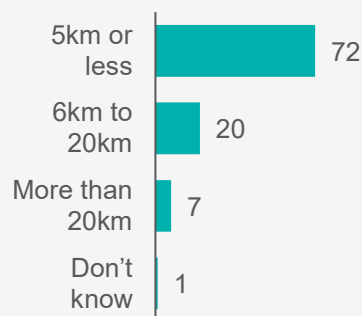
Frequency of Swan Canning river system visitation



Household composition



Proximity to Swan Canning river system



Uses of Swan Canning river system | Top 5 (% of those who use the river)



n=846

S1: How old are you? | S2: Are you... | S5: Which of these best describes your household?

S7: Approximately how far do you live from the Swan Canning river? | Q1: Approximately how often do you visit the Swan Canning river?

Q2: Which of the following, if any, do you usually do on or around the Swan Canning river?

*Missing percentages relate to those who responded 'prefer not to answer' for gender

▲ ▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence



Not surprisingly, open link participants who reside outside the Perth metro area engage with the river system and its surrounds less frequently; mainly for relaxation or socialising

Location



81%
Regional WA



19%
Interstate /
International

Gender*



30%
Males



63%
Females

Age



7%
18-34

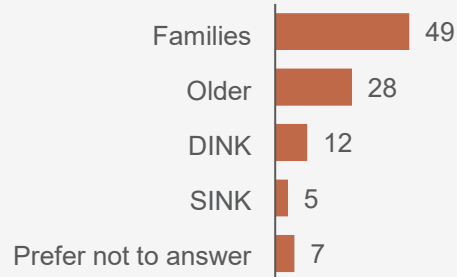


42%
35-54



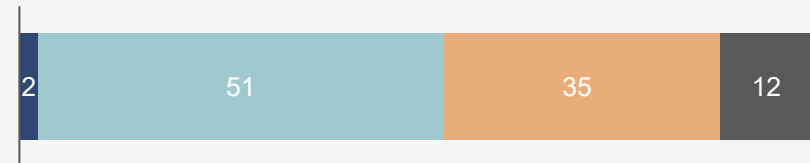
51%
55+

Household composition



Frequency of Swan Canning river system visitation

■ Never ■ Infrequent (six monthly or less often) ■ Occasional (monthly to quarterly) ■ Frequently (weekly to fortnightly)



Uses of Swan Canning river system | Top 5 (% of those who use the river)



n=43*

S1: How old are you? | S2: Are you... | S5: Which of these best describes your household?

S7: Approximately how far do you live from the Swan Canning river? | Q1: Approximately how often do you visit the Swan Canning river?

Q2: Which of the following, if any, do you usually do on or around the Swan Canning river?

*Missing percentages relate to those who responded 'prefer not to answer' for gender

*Caution: results indicative only due to small sample size

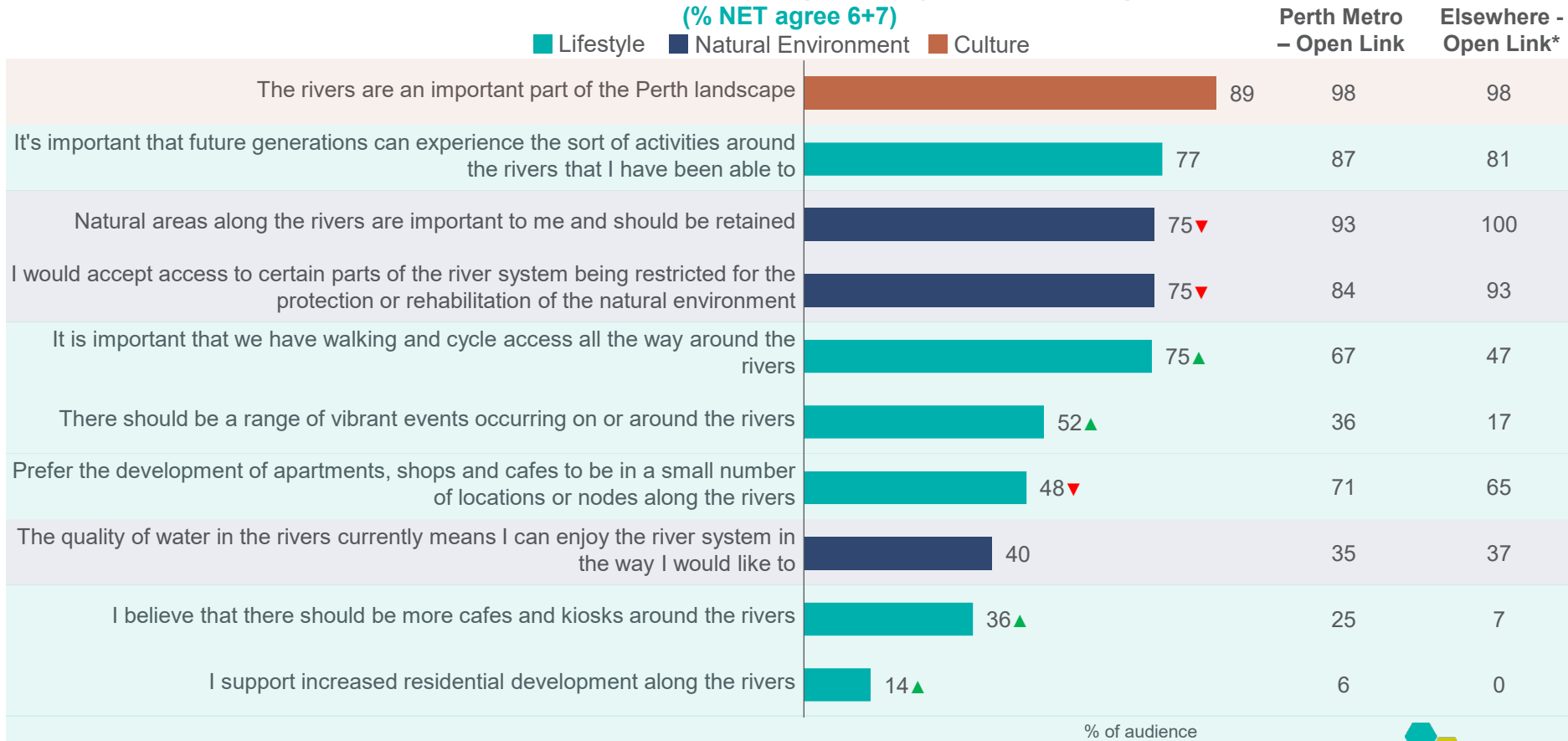


Community Values Associated with the Swan Canning River System

The community acknowledges the importance of the river system and the need to share it with future generations

Engaged users of the river system itself agree more with protecting and retaining the natural environment (even though the broader Perth metro community are also largely supportive of this). General Perth residents are more likely than engaged river system users to support economic development along the river system, although this is still lower in the overall order of priority compared to the protection of the environment.

Overall perceptions of Swan Canning river system values | Perth Metro

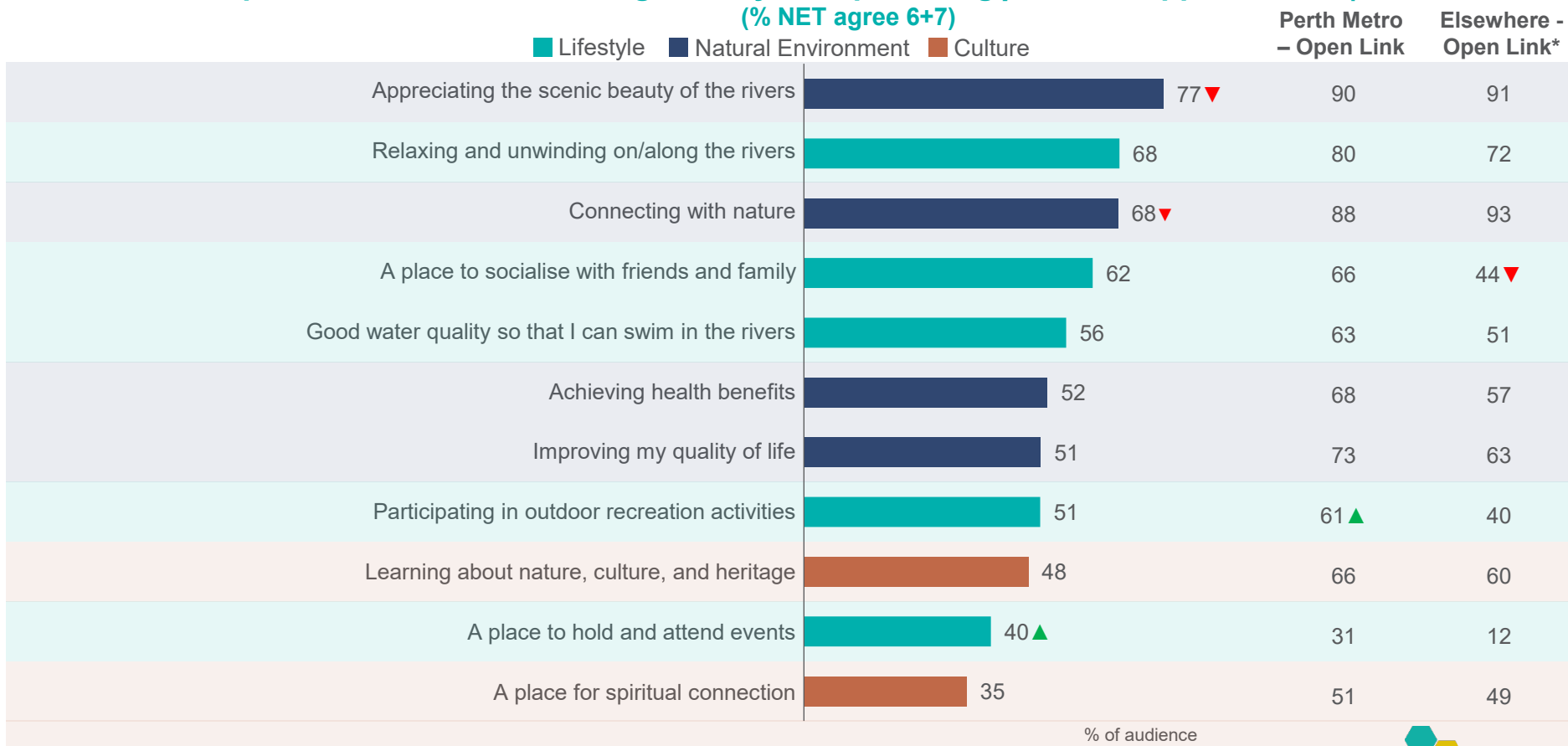


Perth Metro – Panel n=335 | Perth Metro – Open Link n=764 | Elsewhere – Open link n=38
Q5. Below are some statements people have said about the Swan Canning river. Please select to what extent you personally agree or disagree with each statement.
Note: Don't know responses have been removed
▲▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence
*Caution: results indicative only due to small sample size

Regardless of their level of engagement, people place strong *personal* value on experiencing the river system's scenic beauty

A high proportion of all audiences *personally* value the Swan Canning river system as a place to appreciate the scenic beauty, unwind and connect to nature. Not surprisingly, those who are more engaged (open link Perth residents) place more personal value on the river system's ability to provide water-based opportunities such as outdoor recreation activities. However, this is still secondary to other natural environment and lifestyle aspects of their engagement with the river system.

Perceptions of the Swan Canning river system providing *personal* opportunities | Perth Metro

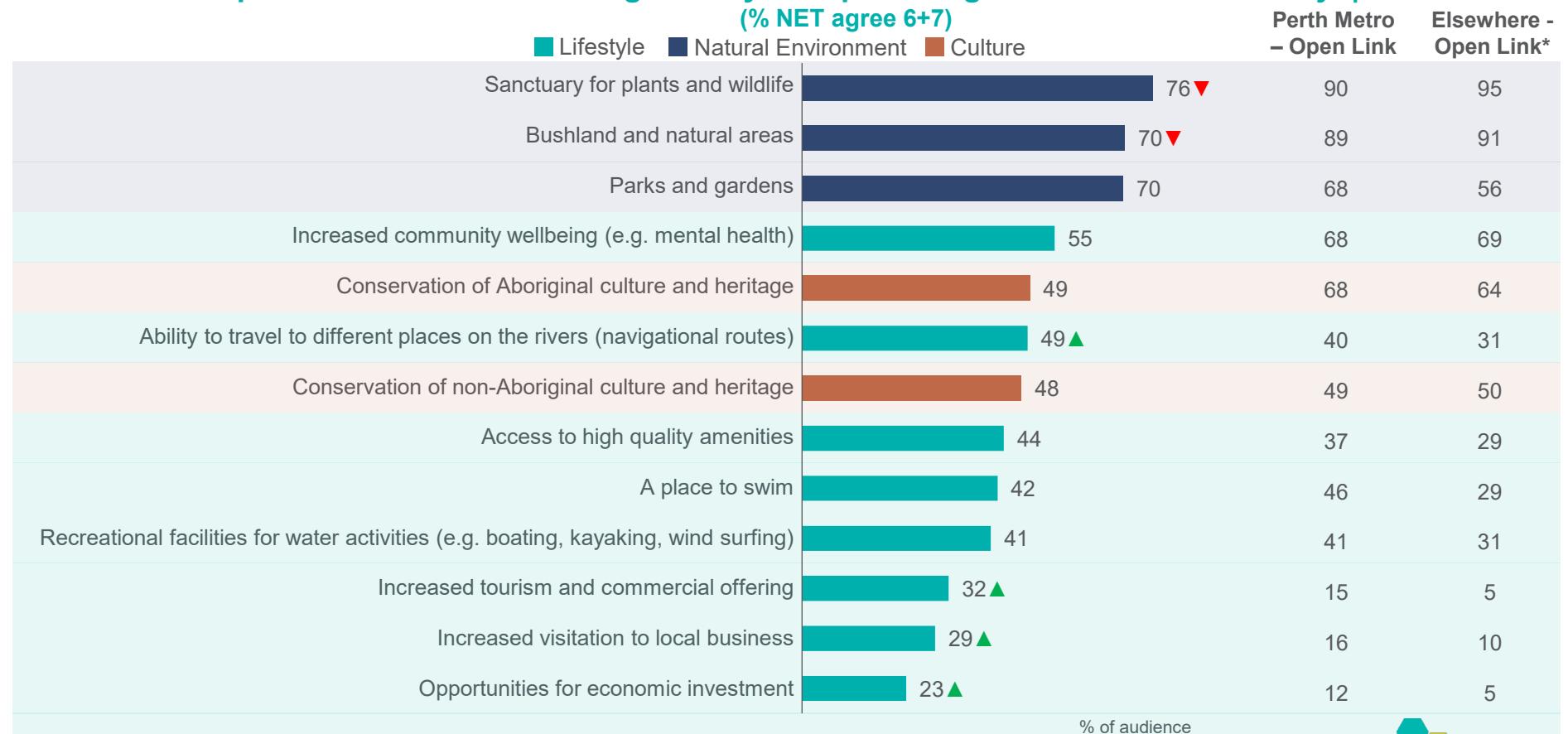


Perth Metro – Panel n=365 | Perth Metro – Open Link n=802 | Elsewhere – Open link n=41
Q6. Please indicate on the scale below your level of agreement with each of the following statements. The Swan Canning river should provide me with the following opportunities...
Note: Don't know responses have been removed
▲ ▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence
*Caution: results indicative only due to small sample size

Community values associated with the river system centre around the natural environment – plants, wildlife, and bushland

While the relative order of what values the river system brings to the **Perth community** is largely consistent between the audiences, those who are more actively engaged with the river system are more passionate about the natural environment and lifestyle benefits, than those values related to development. While still lowest in terms of overall priority, general Perth residents are more likely to agree that the river system should bring economic benefits and opportunities to the community.

Perceptions of the Swan Canning river system providing value to the community | Perth Metro



Perth Metro – Panel n=348 | Perth Metro - Open Link n=789 | Elsewhere – Open link n=36

Q7. Please indicate on the scale below your level of agreement with each of the following statements. The Swan Canning river should provide the community with the following...

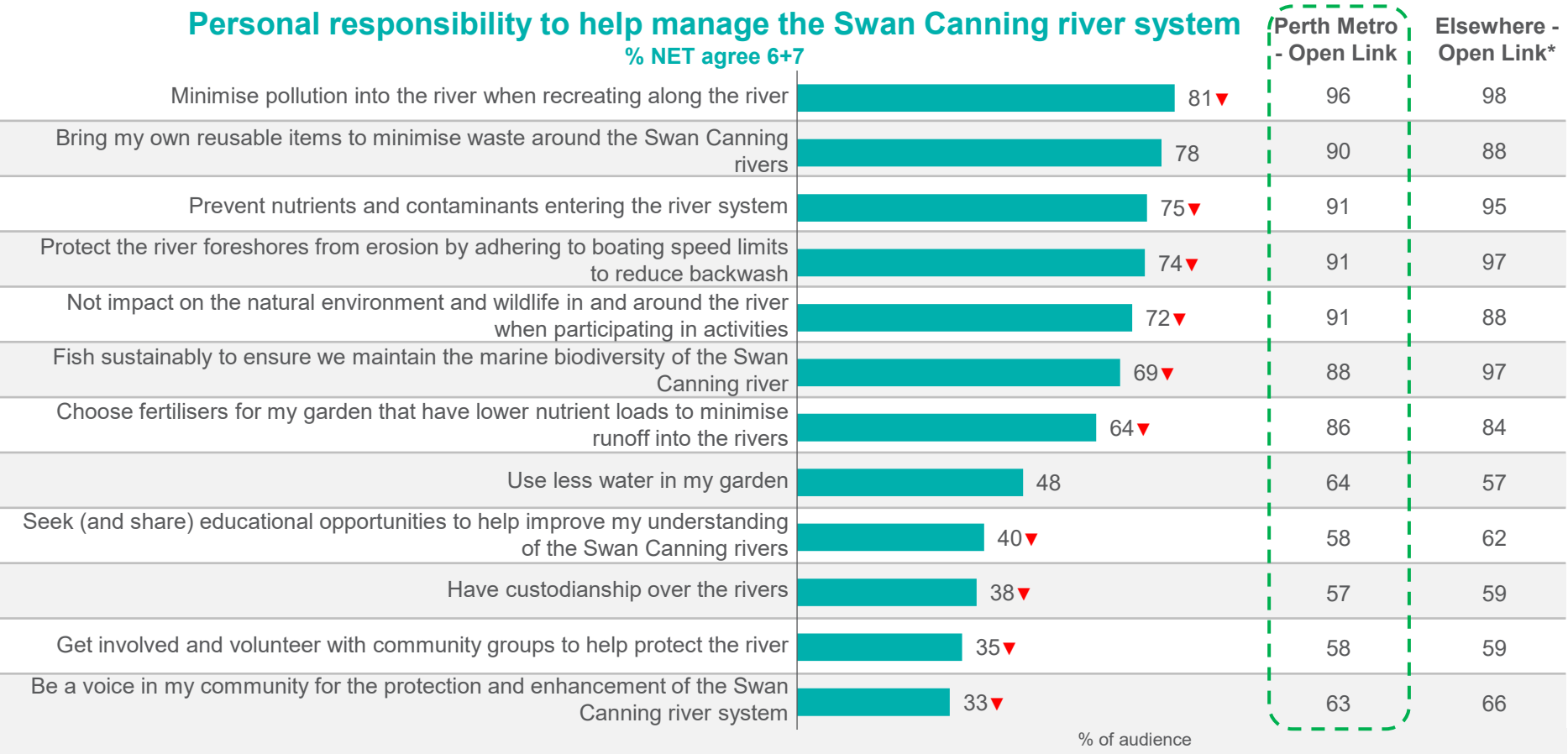
Note: Don't know responses have been removed

▲ ▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence

*Caution: results indicative only due to small sample size


The community is most likely to take *personal responsibility* for the river system by reducing pollution and waste when using the Swan Canning river system

Open link Perth residents, who are more engaged with the river system, are more likely to take a broader range of personal responsibility. Across all audiences, people are less likely to take responsibility if it requires more active participation such as seeking and sharing education, custodianship and volunteering.



Perth Metro – Panel n=348 | Perth Metro – Open Link n=789 | Elsewhere – Open link n=36
Q13. To what extent do you agree that you should personally do the following to help protect the Swan Canning river?
Note: Don't know and Not Applicable responses have been removed

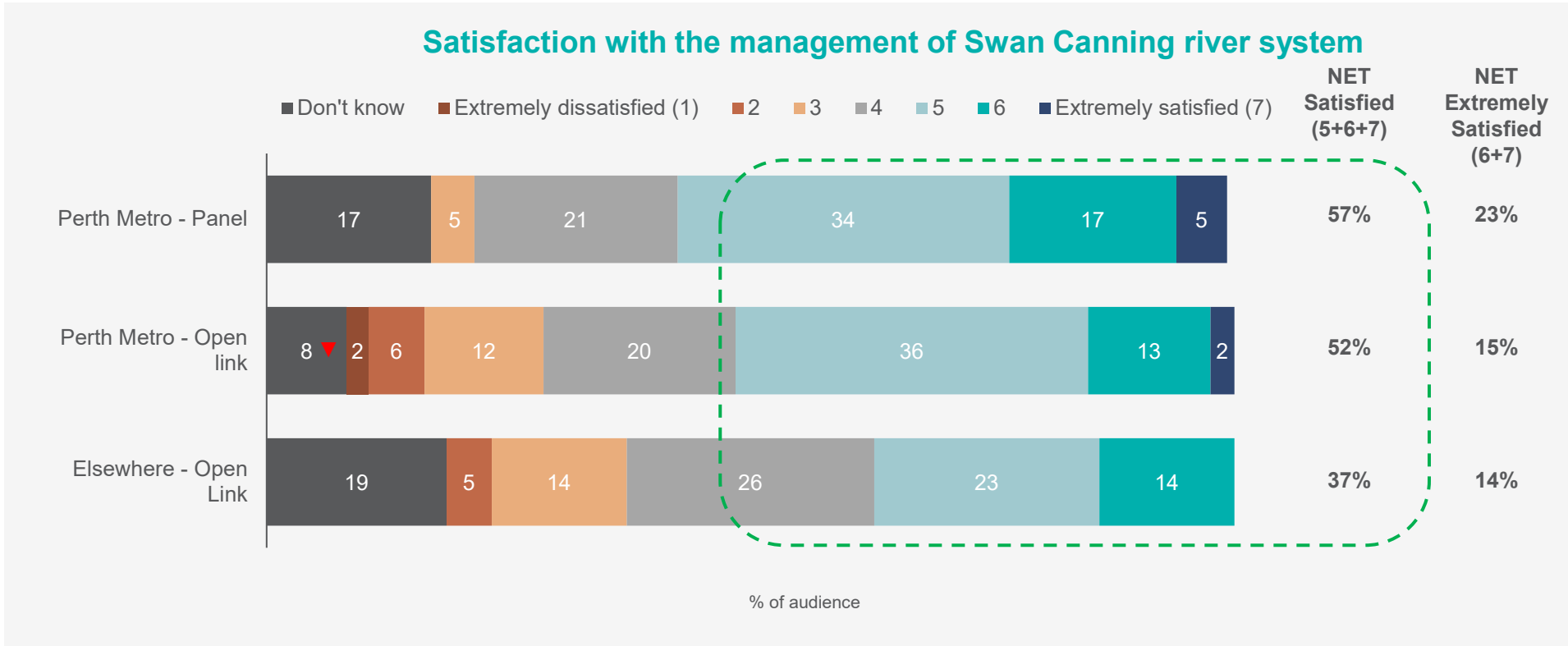
▲ ▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence
*Caution: results indicative only due to small sample size

A photograph of a person wearing a blue jacket, a hat, and sunglasses, operating a water sampling device on a boat. The person is holding a rope connected to a metal frame. The background shows a river and trees. A large teal triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Overall Perceptions of Swan Canning River System Management

Over half the Perth metro area is satisfied with the management of the Swan Canning river system

Satisfaction levels are slightly lower among those who are more engaged and more likely to have a view on the river system's management (Perth open link) than the broader general Perth population (8% *don't know* ratings v 17% of Perth panel sample).



Perth Metro – Panel n=400 | Perth Metro – Open Link n=846 | Elsewhere – Open link n=43
Q8. Thinking about the Swan Canning river, or any of the smaller rivers, in general, how satisfied are you with the overall management of the rivers?
▲ ▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence

People are mainly satisfied with the management of the river system because it is clean and well maintained

Open link participants were more specific in their feedback, citing accessibility, good water quality, river system health and the protection of nature as reasons why they are satisfied.

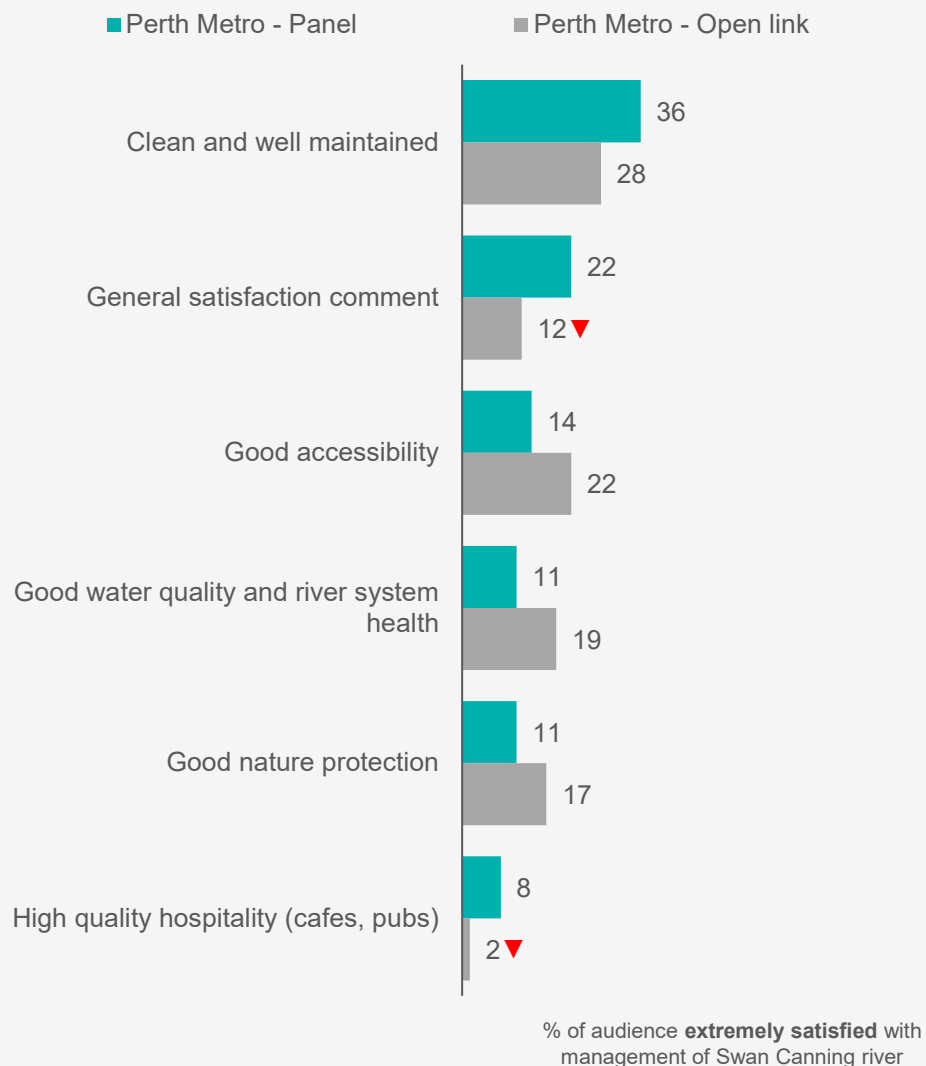
'The rivers all seem clean, and the surrounding areas are well maintained.' – Perth Metro – Panel

'Where I have been in the river, the water quality is very good. I also see ongoing water management happening in places.' – Perth Metro - Panel

'Parks surrounding river are well maintained, as are paths and cycle ways. Great to see our community gather along the banks of the Swan.' – Perth Metro – Open Link

'Water quality in the Canning seems to have improved over the last few years. I have noticed a lot more marine life in recent years too.' – Perth Metro – Open Link

Drivers of satisfaction with river system management



Perth Metro – Panel satisfied with management of Swan Canning river n=90 | Perth Metro – Open link satisfied with management of Swan Canning river n=126

Q8a. Why do you give a rating of 6 or 7 for your overall satisfaction with the management of the rivers?

*Note: Sample size for Elsewhere – Open Link is too small to report (n=6)

▲ ▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence

Dissatisfaction largely stems from perceptions of poor river system health

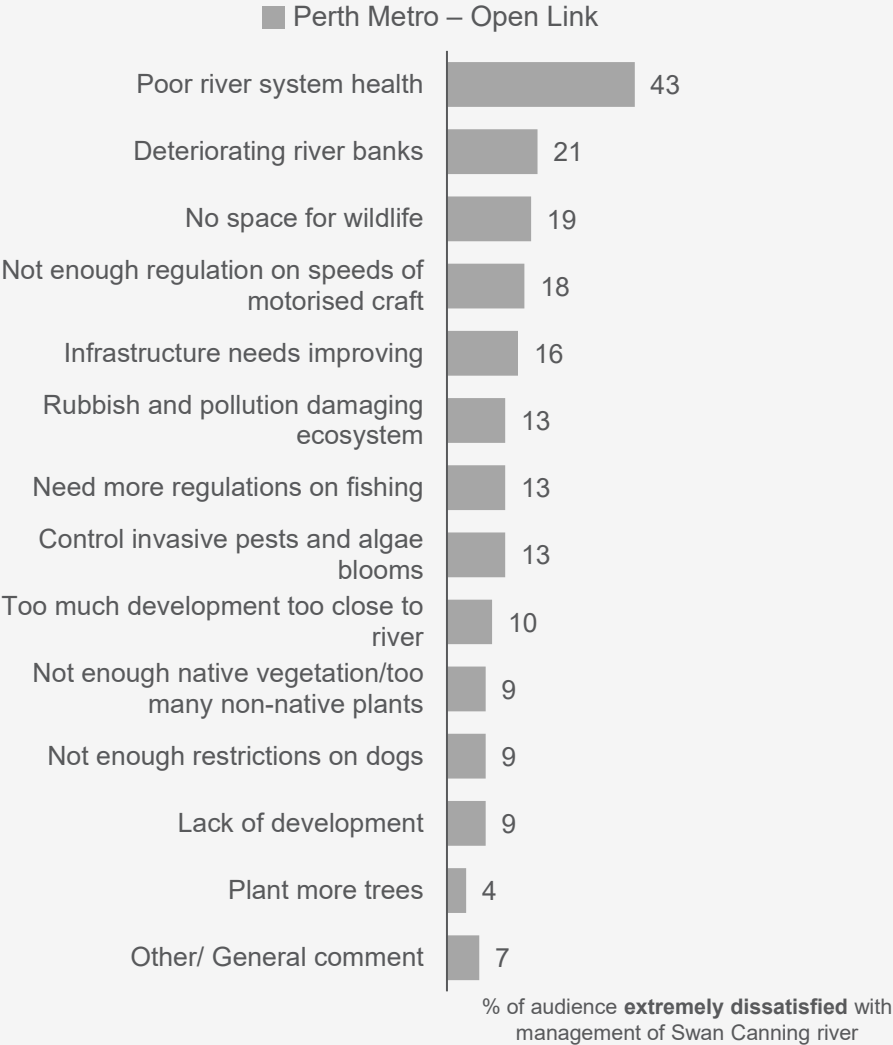
The reasons for dissatisfaction are mostly concerns or issues relating to the natural environment, mentioned by eight-in-ten (79%) open link Perth residents who are dissatisfied with the river system’s management.


‘The rivers are disgusting. The volume of pollutants that enter upstream mean the rivers are heavily loaded with sediments and prone to eutrophication. Almost all the banks that are accessible are heavily altered/man-made with barely any refuges for wildlife. Improve the water quality, that will likely improve the corresponding flora and fauna that inhabit it.’
– Perth Metro – Open link

‘Overall water quality needs to be improved. Sanctuaries for wildlife need to be increased. More trees, more vegetation. Dogs should be restricted to areas away from the water and wildlife.’
– Perth Metro – Open link

Perth Metro – Open Link dissatisfied with management of Swan Canning river n=73
Q8a. Why do you give a rating of 1 or 2 for your overall satisfaction with the management of the rivers?
Note: Sample size for Perth Metro – Panel (n=3) and Open Link – Elsewhere (n=2*) is too small to report

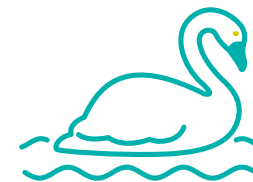
Drivers of dissatisfaction with river system management



An aerial photograph of a wide river, likely the Swan Canning River, with a city skyline visible in the distance. In the foreground, there is a large marina filled with many small boats. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting sunset or sunrise. A large teal diagonal shape covers the left side of the image, containing the title text.

Future Management of Swan Canning River System

Overall, a focus on the *natural environment* is considered most important when it comes to the management of the Swan Canning river system

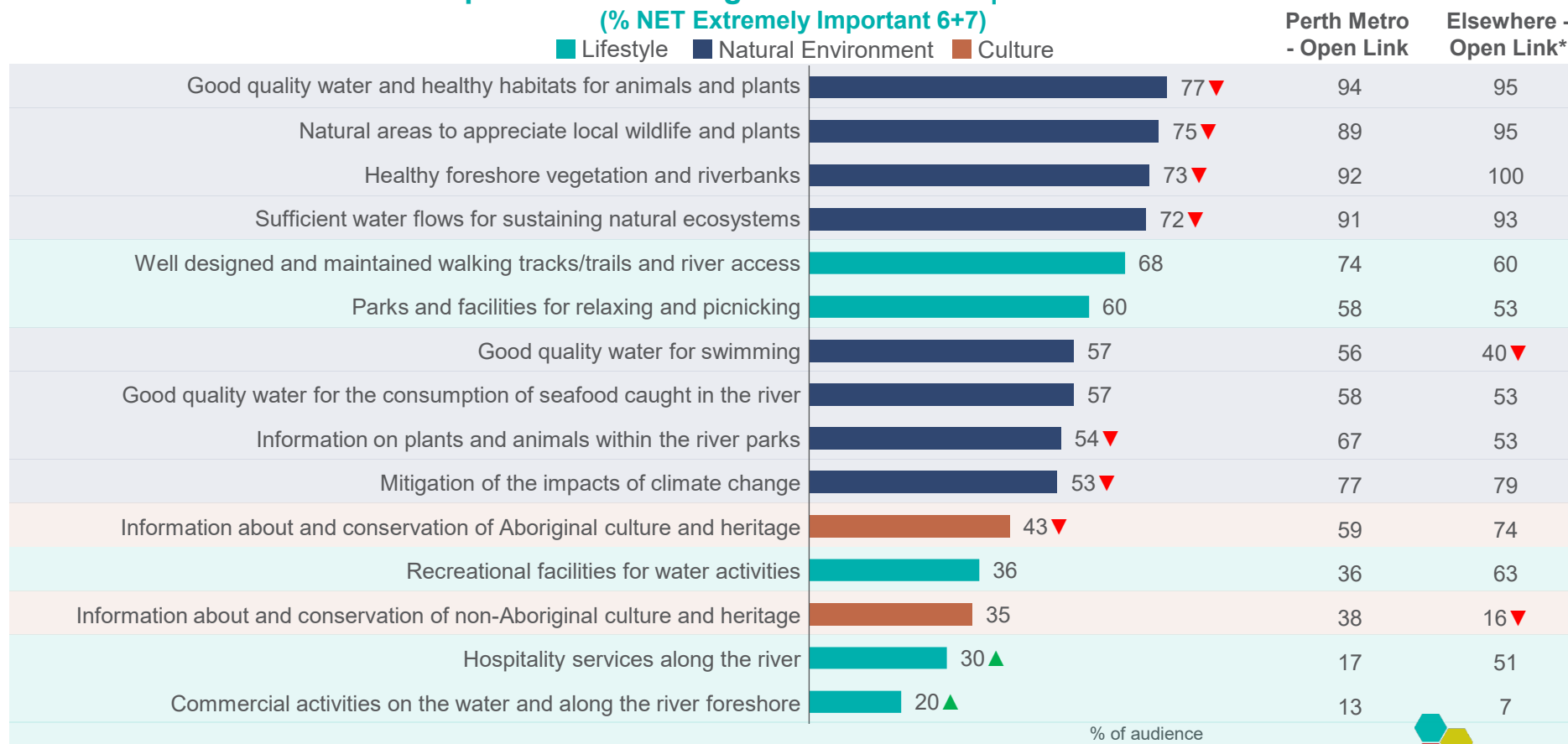


While there are some differences in the degree of importance, the relative order of importance is largely consistent across each audience. The general Perth community places more importance on development than those who are more engaged although this is still lowest overall.

Overall Importance of Management Practices | Perth Metro Panel

(% NET Extremely Important 6+7)

■ Lifestyle ■ Natural Environment ■ Culture



Perth Metro – Panel n=400 | Perth Metro – Open Link n=846 | Elsewhere – Open link n=43

Q9. Many parties are responsible for the management of the Swan Canning river. When managing the rivers, how important do you think it is that the following is provided...

▲ ▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence

*Caution: results indicative only due to small sample size

The community is generally more satisfied with *natural environment* and *lifestyle-based* practices that matter most, however there is room to increase satisfaction levels

Perth metro open link participants are generally less satisfied than the broader Perth community across most aspects of river system management, particularly those relating to the natural environment.

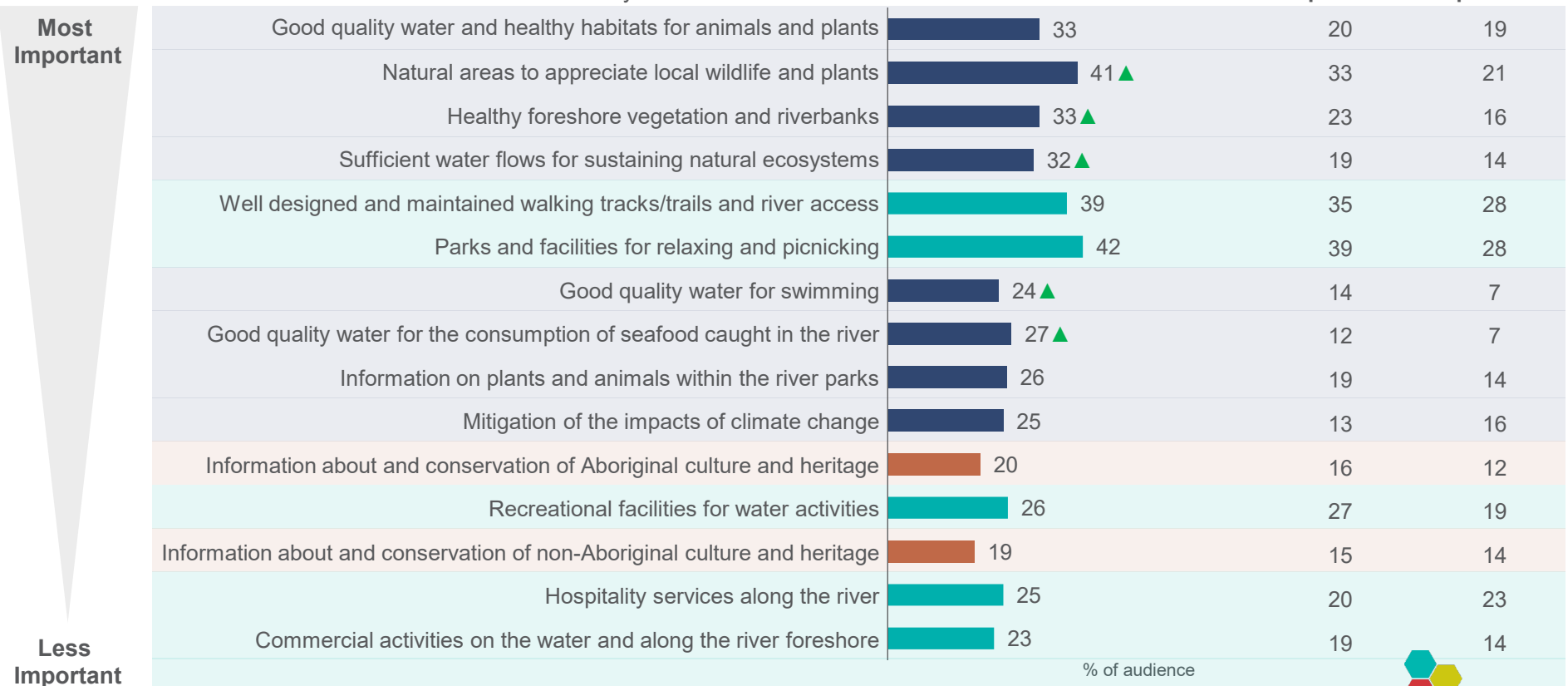
Overall Satisfaction with Management Practices | Perth Metro Panel

(% NET Extremely Satisfied 6+7)

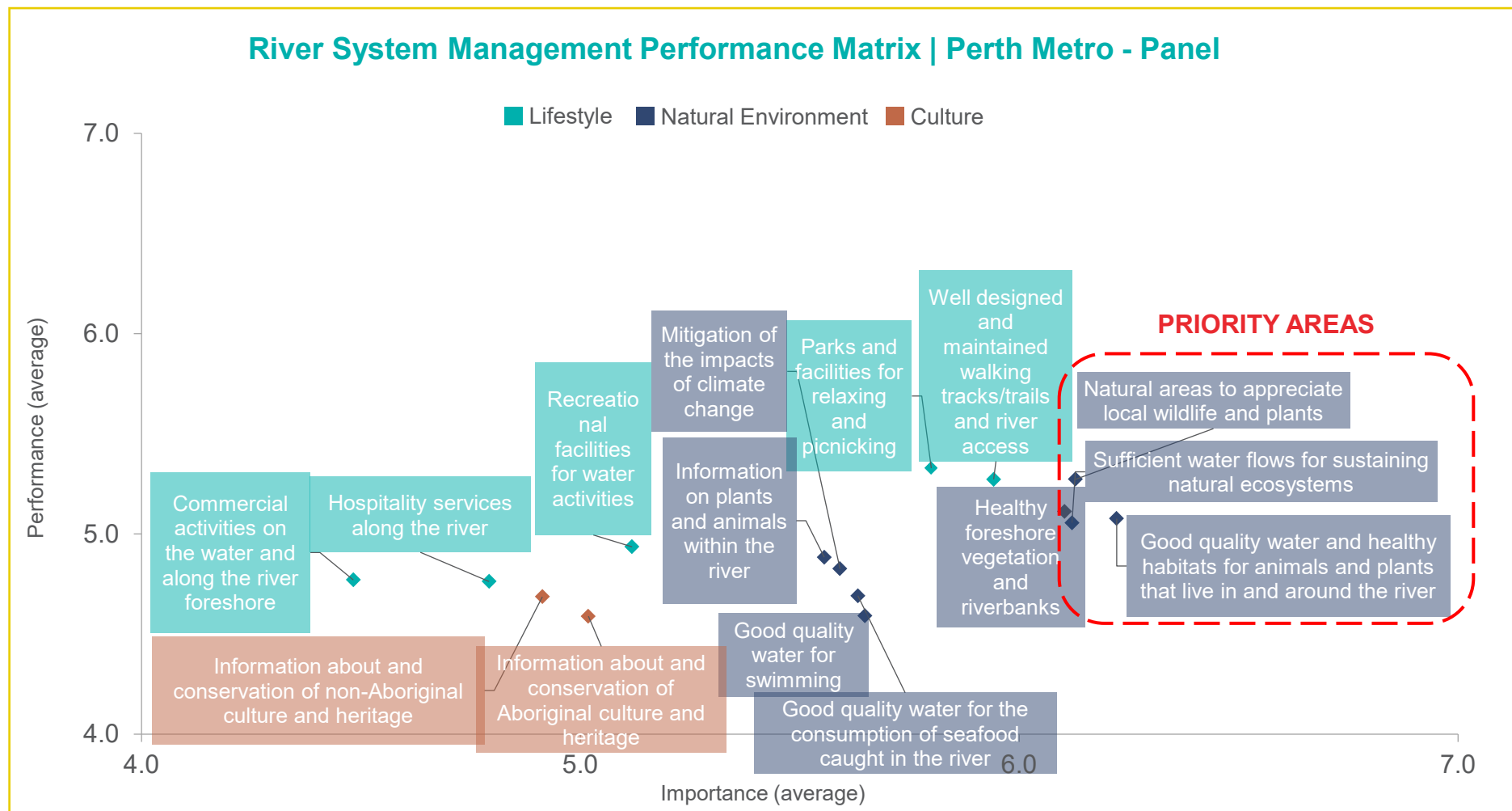
■ Lifestyle ■ Natural Environment ■ Culture

Perth Metro
- Open Link

Elsewhere -
Open Link*

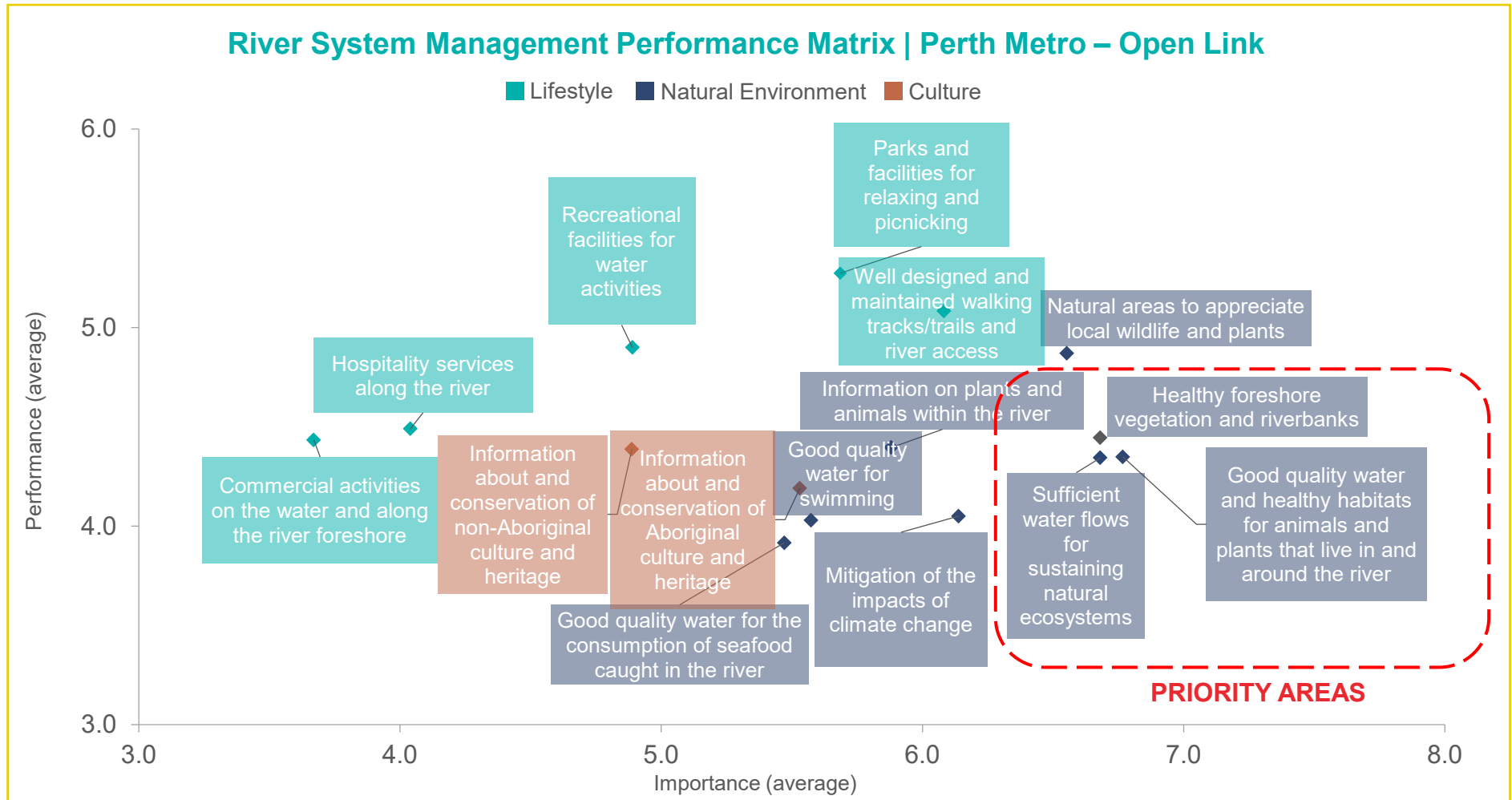


Practices that focus on *water quality* and *water flows* for the benefit of the natural environment should be river system management priorities





Water quality should also be a priority based on the views of those who are more engaged, particularly for the benefit of the plants and animals that live in and around the river system



Good water quality and healthy habitats for flora and fauna is considered the highest priority across all audiences

The broader Perth community (panel sample) is more likely to prioritise parks and facilities for relaxing and picnicking, good quality water for swimming and hospitality services, although these are still less of a priority than practices supporting good water quality for plants and animals and natural ecosystems.

Prioritisation of Management Practices | Perth Metro Panel (% NET Important 6+7)

■ Lifestyle ■ Natural Environment ■ Culture

Perth Metro
- Open Link

Elsewhere -
Open Link*

Good quality water and healthy habitats for animals and plants	52 ▼	71	81
Sufficient water flows for sustaining natural ecosystems	34	40	44
Healthy foreshore vegetation and riverbanks	31 ▼	48	53
Parks and facilities for relaxing and picnicking	31 ▲	12	14
Well designed and maintained walking tracks/trails and river access	30	27	19
Natural areas to appreciate local wildlife and plants	28	28	37
Good quality water for swimming	21 ▲	12	2 ▼
Hospitality services along the river	16 ▲	8	0 ▼
Good quality water for the consumption of seafood caught in the river	16	6	14
Mitigation of the impacts of climate change	11	19	19
Recreational facilities for water activities	10	12	0 ▼
Information about and conservation of Aboriginal culture and heritage	7	8	12
Commercial activities on the water and along the river foreshore	6	4	0
Information on plants and animals within the river parks	5	4	5
Information about and conservation of non-Aboriginal culture and heritage	1	1	0

% of audience

The community commonly cited protection of the river system, ecosystem and biodiversity as key priorities

Infrastructure upgrades were also commonly mentioned as a priority across all audiences.

'Foreshore reserves & wetland areas should be expanded, as refuge habitat areas for water life.'

– Perth Metro – Panel

'Quality paths for river access and continuous shared-path access alongside the rivers or set back from the river where necessary to protect environmental values including biodiversity corridors.'

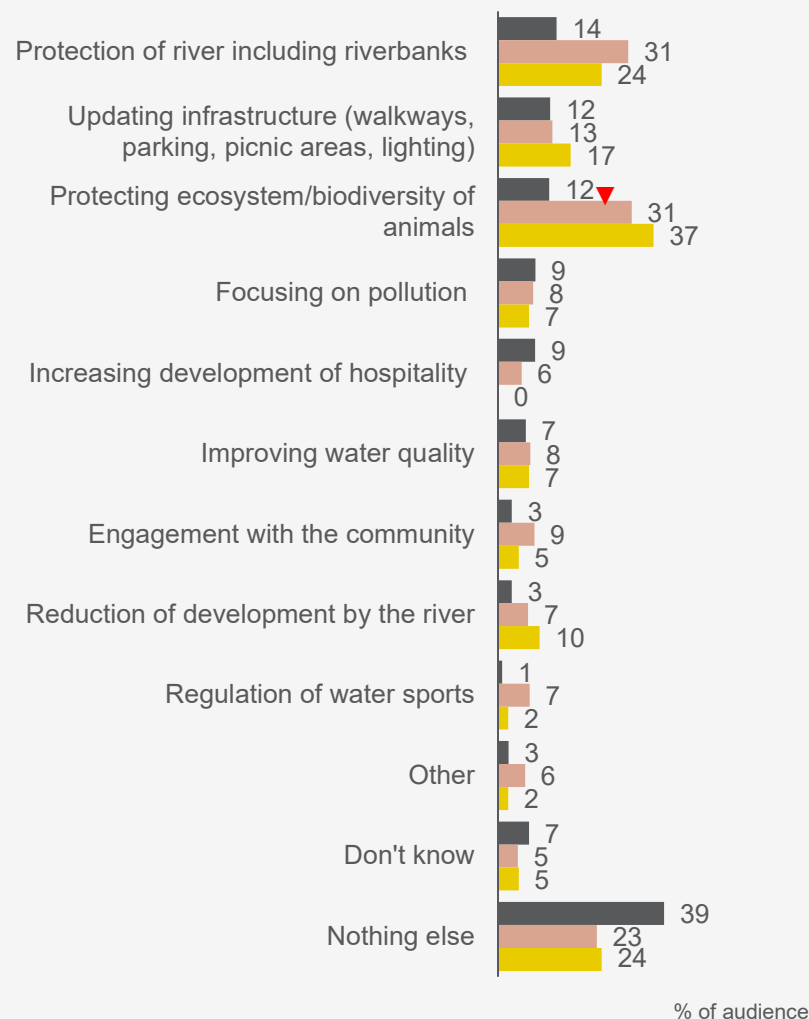
– Perth Metro – Open link

'Making people and the public aware of what is being done and required to keep the river system well and cared for.'

– Perth Metro – Panel

Other suggested priorities (unprompted)

■ Perth Metro - Panel ■ Perth Metro - Open link ■ Elsewhere - Open link*



Perth Metro – Panel n=399 | Perth Metro – Open link n=830 | Elsewhere – Open link n=41*

Q12. Is there anything else you believe should be prioritised when it comes to the management of the Swan Canning river?

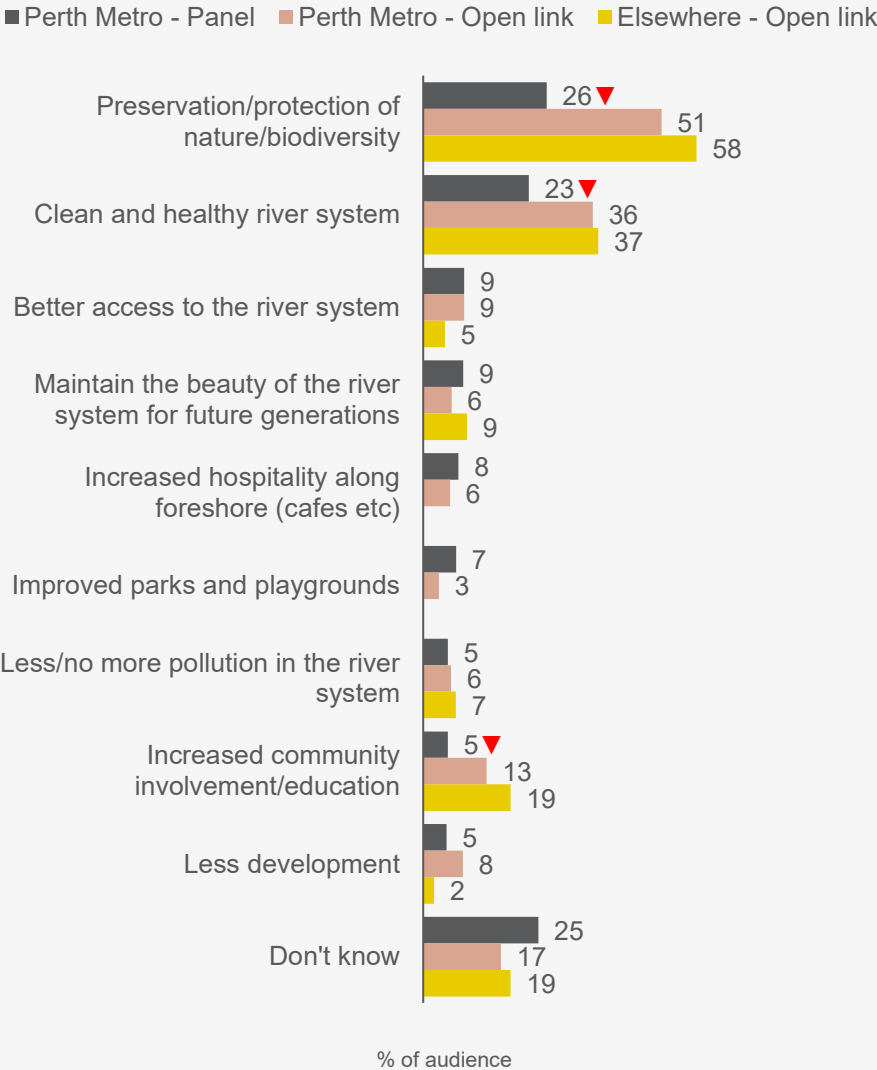
▲ ▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence

Protection and preservation of the natural environment are key vision themes raised by the community

The Perth community also wants to see a clean and health river system that people can enjoy now and into the future.

Reflective of them being more engaged than the broader community, the open link audience were more likely to aspire for increased community involvement and education.

Vision themes for the Swan Canning river system



Perth Metro – Panel n=400 | Perth Metro – Open link n=840 | Elsewhere – Open link n=43*
Q14. And finally, a vision is a goal or aspiration for how you want something to be in the future. Thinking about this and the Swan Canning river, what would be your vision for the rivers in the future?
▲ ▼ Significant difference to other audiences at 95% confidence
*Note: Responses under 5% for Perth Metro – Panel have not been charted

In their own words...

Preservation/protection of nature/biodiversity



'The Swan Canning River is a thriving ecosystem, coexisting with urban development and recreation. The water quality is pristine, supporting diverse aquatic life and providing a safe and enjoyable environment for both residents and visitors, and it will be in the future.'

– Perth Metro – Panel

'Healthy rivers in terms of water quality, riparian vegetation and biodiversity with community activities resulting in lesser impact on the river's ecosystem.'

– Perth Metro – Open link

'More and greater size natural foreshore areas, not necessarily for human access but as fauna refuges.'

– Elsewhere – Open link

'Healthy systems that support the biodiversity that brings rivers into balance providing a peaceful and vibrant environment for reflection, connection to country, passive recreation and conservation.'

– Elsewhere – Open link

'My vision for the Perth rivers is to see it abundant with flora and fauna and people enjoying the river without impacting on its health.'

– Perth Metro – Open link

'To be a healthy ecosystem for all marine animals and be able to reap the rewards plentifully from maintaining their habitat.'

– Perth Metro – Panel



'A healthy river with environmental flows. Increased areas of natural vegetation that link to environmental corridors throughout the suburbs. The promotion of nature and its importance on a healthy environment, starting with the retention of invertebrates, rather than their removal. The removal of feral fauna, in particular rainbow lorikeets, kookaburras, rats, foxes and feral bees. Strict cat control.'



In their own words...

Clean and healthy river system

'To have rivers returned to the healthy state they were in the past and a lot more natural areas.'

– Perth Metro – Panel

'Clear clean water for future generations to enjoy what has been the sustainable source of food water and shelter for millions of years. To maintain the reason the city of Perth was established.'

– Perth Metro – Panel

'A river system that is clean, not polluted with access to the river for all. A river with limited power vessels access. A river with no housing or commercial development close by. A river where trees on foreshore are a priority to provide shaded areas and prevent erosion wetlands are maintained to protect bird life and the ecosystem.'

– Perth Metro – Open link



'The water quality so pure that you can drink straight from the river.'

– Perth Metro – Open link

'A healthy, functioning waterway that was a strong safe haven for wildlife. A general public that appreciate and value this space.'

Perth Metro – Open link

'The water quality improved for the health of the animals and so that people can safely swim, dive and recreate in the river and eat seafood again (crabs, fish, etc.) without health being compromised. Foreshore areas revegetated to increase natural buffer.'

– Elsewhere – Open link

'To have a healthy sustainable river system that can be enjoyed by all now and for future generations.'

– Elsewhere – Open link

