What do people think about stormwater management and how can we build support?

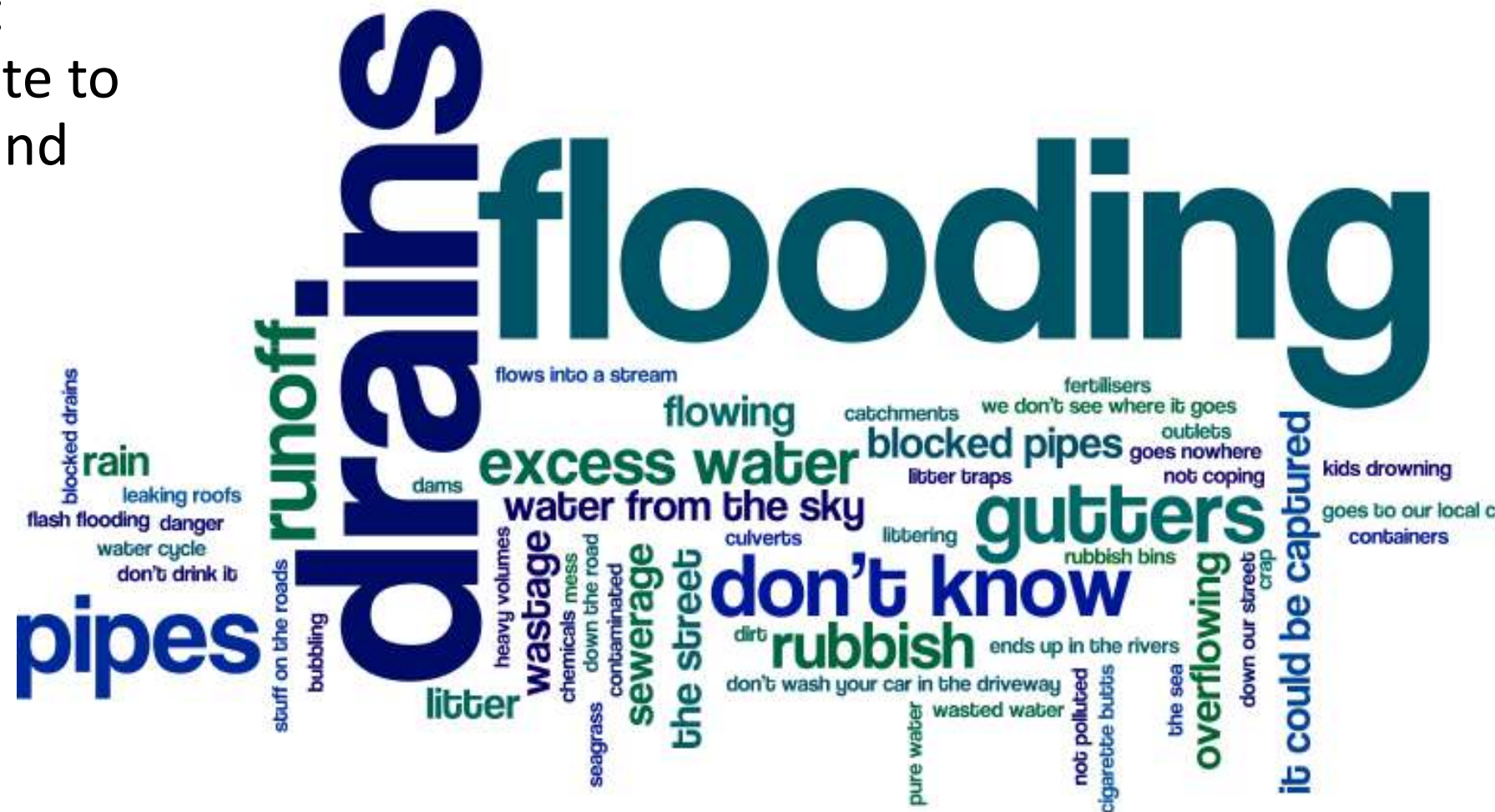|		
Focus groups	National survey	Experimental studies

Focus groups

Aimed to explore perceptions about stormwater & management

- Representative mix of ages, gender & incomes

- 6 locations

- 40 participants in total

Townsville

Brisbane

Geraldton

Perth

Bendigo

Melbourne

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What comes to mind when you see the word 'stormwater'?

Most frequent responses relate to excess water and flooding

Only 15% made some reference to pollution

Responding to information

We then provided information about stormwater

Discussion about definition and management options

Despite prompting, the conversation kept returning to 'visible' issues like litter

Concepts not difficult – people response well to information

Poor community understanding

"I didn't realise that stormwater washed all the rubbish out to sea, I thought it just cleaned everything up... not that it did any harm"

Poor issue visibility

"We don't see, to a large extent, where our stormwater goes"

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Discussing personal actions

Prompted

"Oh, that's common sense"

"good advice"

Unprompted

Limited capacity to identify management options

Most responses ~ **physical litter** or **water saving**

Barriers?

Not thinking soil is a pollutant

"I wouldn't think of planting trees... that wouldn't spring to mind"

Personal relevance

"For me, that's a bit tricky to relate to because I live in a small apartment"

Discussing water sensitive urban design

Unprompted

Very limited capacity to identify any management practices

Assumed local govts would be investing in expensive filtration technology

Prompted

Curiosity: effectiveness

Relevance: will it affect my property or rates?

Positive: aesthetics

Raingardens in parks ab...
water and filter out
pollutants

Barriers?

Poor Awareness

"It sounds great, but we don't know what it is"

"Does it really have a benefit? **It seems too simple"**

Poor Visibility

"you can see the things we want councils to do, ... **this has got nothing, no function you can see"**

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Need to *show* impact

Nature of the problem

*"**show people** how much rubbish builds up..."*

*"**I would be interested to see the stats**, what chemicals are going into the environment... to explain what's happening..."*

Individual action

*"**Show us** the difference we can make"*

*"explain why you're asking me to do this... **we want to know the impact**"*

Impact of WSUD

*"I don't think it would hurt to have some **signage, saying this is what we're doing and this is what it does**"*

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Are some people more likely to support WSUD than others?

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Study 1 – National Survey

What characteristics are linked to greater **support for raingardens?**

Online survey - representative sample of 5194 Australian adults

Support for Raingarden in yard:
- How willing would you be to install a raingarden on your property?

Support for Raingarden in street:
- How willing would you be to have a raingarden installed in your street?

Participant characteristics:
- Demographics
- Household & psychosocial characteristics
- Life experience
- Water-related knowledge, information

Support for raingardens on your property

37% willing to install raingarden on their property

Support for raingardens on your property

greater opportunity & interest
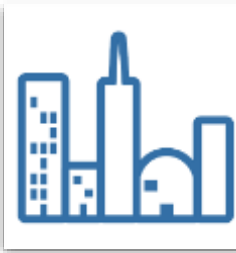
Social capital ~ greater policy support

Relevance

Women

Higher income

Bigger households & bigger gardens

Greater participation rates

Greater waterway use

Greater water knowledge & information

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Greater support for raingardens in your street

56% willing to install raingarden on their street

Urban residents

Renters

FOR RENT

Smaller gardens

Not boaters

Greater knowledge and information about water

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Greater support for raingardens in your street

Urban residents

Renters

Smaller gardens

Those with limited access to private greenspace

Not boaters

- parking?

Greater knowledge and information about water

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Does information build support for stormwater management?

Are we preaching to the converted?

How to target a broader range of the community?

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Message framing

How we frame a message influences its effectiveness

NEWater – Singapore

- Framed as a positive issue of national security and independence

- Compare Toowoomba – framed as health risk and 'drinking sewage'

Climate deniers

- Value economic and technological innovation

- Framing climate messages in these terms increased support for climate action

- (*Bain et al*)

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Message framing

Focus groups

What motivates people to reduce waterway pollution?

- Recreational spaces
- Megafauna
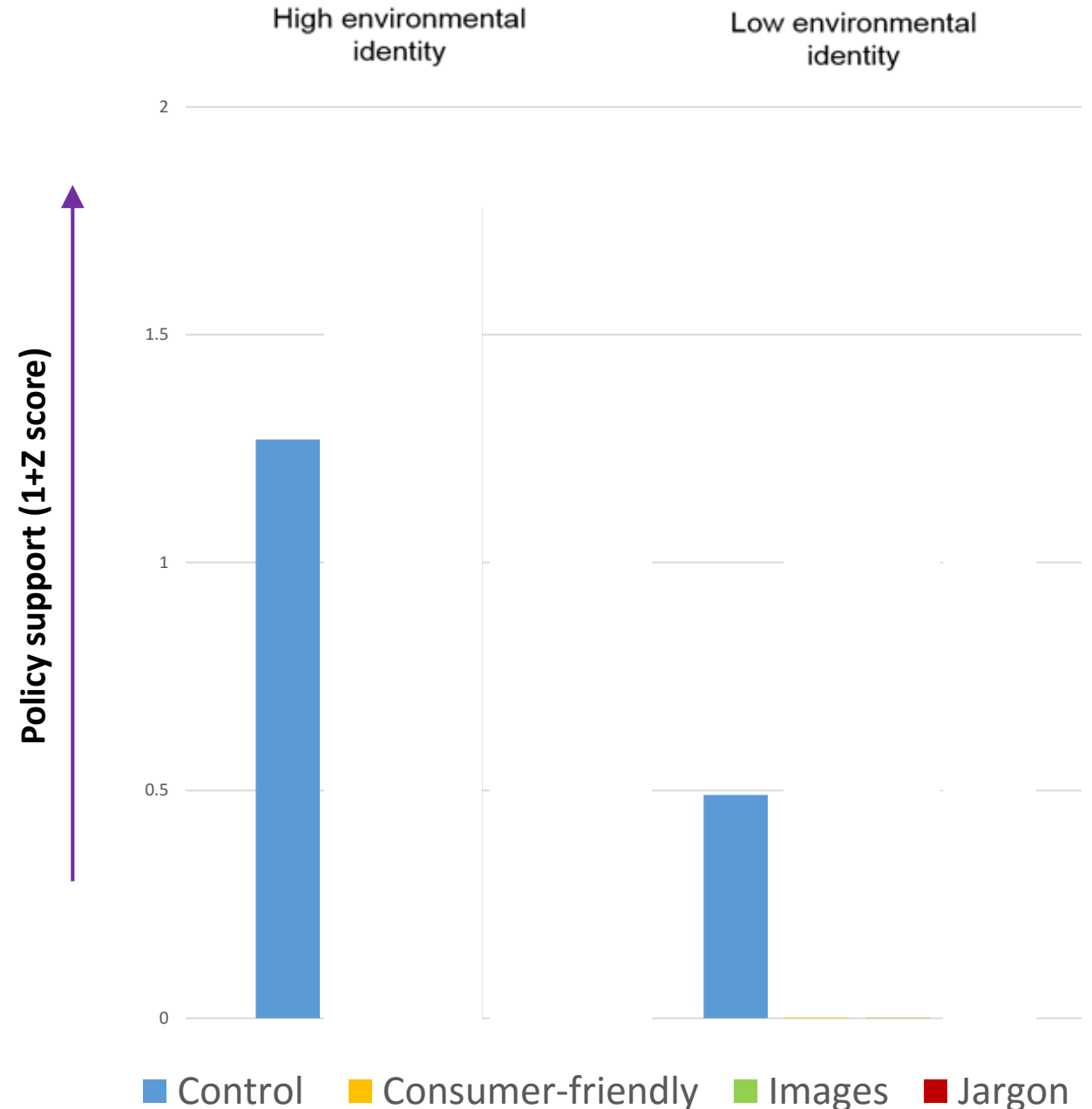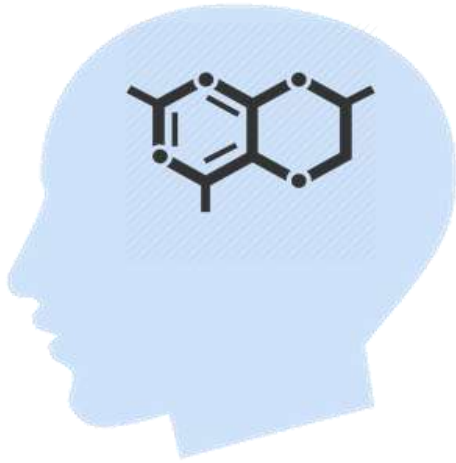
Language influences support for water sensitive urban design

- **Why?**
- **Use clear language**
- **Easy to read info:**
  - **More persuasive**
  - **Better recall**

Policy support (1+Z score)

High environmental identity | Low environmental identity

Control   Consumer-friendly   Images   Jargon

Tips for engaging communities

When people think about stormwater, pollution is not top of mind.

We need to be explicit about discussing pollution

People focus on pollution they can see.

We need to build visibility of the issue *and* effective responses

Stormwater perceived as not relevant.
Motivating factors:
-Safety
-Recreation
- Pleasant local spaces
- Iconic megafauna

Effective communication can build support for water sensitive policies

Effective communication is important

The type of information matters!

→

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place"

George Bernard Shaw

→

Consider target group

Emphasise audience values

Use clear concepts, words & images

CRC for **Water Sensitive Cities**

Thankyou!
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