



Exploring Public Dialogue on Quantum Technologies

Insights and lessons from a pilot engagement

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Acknowledgement of Country

CSIRO acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands, seas and waters of the area that we live and work on across Australia and pays its respects to Elders past and present. CSIRO recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have made, and will continue to make, extraordinary contributions to Australian life including in cultural, economic, and scientific domains.

Acknowledgement of Project and Delivery Team

The delivery of this pilot public dialogue involved a multidisciplinary team responsible for project design, coordination, delivery, analysis and reporting. The project was led by CSIRO with design and delivery developed in collaboration with Bright Humans Pty Ltd, who provided professional design expertise along with the development of the dialogue structure, materials and participant experience:

- CSIRO: Dr Justine Lacey (Project Lead), Maren Strachan, Tristy Falkenberg
- Bond University: Dr Susan Hawes
- Bright Humans Pty Ltd: Nadine Zrinzo, Rosie Maughan, Lisa Renneisen

We also thank Jessica Hildyard from CSIRO for capturing images of the dialogue to help record and communicate the pilot for internal and external audiences.

Executive Summary

Quantum technologies are advancing rapidly and are expected to shape many aspects of Australian society over the coming decade. While current discourse has focused heavily on technical capability and economic opportunity, there is increasing recognition that public confidence, trust and legitimacy will influence how quantum technologies are developed and deployed in practice. This pilot public dialogue was undertaken to explore the value of dialogue-based engagement as an early mechanism for understanding public expectations and supporting responsible quantum innovation.

The pilot brought together citizens and quantum specialists in a facilitated, in-person dialogue designed to support learning and reflection about quantum technologies whose future applications and societal implications are still evolving. Rather than testing public acceptance or seeking consensus, the dialogue focused on how citizens reason about emerging technologies, the criteria they use to judge public benefit, and the conditions they believe are necessary for trust and support to be sustained over time.

Several headline insights emerged from the dialogue. Participants entered with strong interest in science and technology but limited familiarity with quantum technologies. Despite this, they were able to engage meaningfully without requiring detailed technical understanding. This does not imply that technical expertise is unimportant for the development or governance of quantum technologies; rather it highlights that public reasoning about societal implications, legitimacy and trust operates through different considerations than technical performance alone. Across scenarios, public support for quantum technologies was rarely oppositional; instead, it was consistently conditional. Participants emphasised the importance of strong governance, transparency, accountability, equitable access, and demonstrable public benefit as prerequisites for support. Concerns focused less on technological failure and more on secondary and systemic effects, including data governance, concentration of power, inequality and institutional readiness. Trust was understood as relational and institutional, not purely technical, and as something that must be actively built rather than assumed.

For quantum research and policy audiences, the value of the dialogue lay less in uncovering novel issues and more in making visible how citizens form and negotiate judgements in practice. Dialogue revealed how familiar concerns are prioritised, weighed and connected to questions of legitimacy, governance and stewardship of public interest. These forms of insight are difficult to access through surveys or expert-only consultation, yet are directly relevant to shaping socially responsive research, policy and governance approaches.

As a pilot, the dialogue also tested the suitability of dialogue-based engagement for quantum technologies in Australia. The findings suggest that dialogue can support meaningful engagement even when awareness is low and uncertainty is high, and that confidence to participate can precede technical understanding. While the dialogue focused on quantum technologies, much of the reasoning applied along with the trust considerations and legitimacy criteria articulated by participants, reflect broader public expectations that are likely to arise in other complex areas of science and technology. In this sense, the pilot provides insights that are directly relevant to socially informed quantum innovation while also informing the design of public engagement for emerging technologies characterised by uncertainty, system-level impacts and evolving societal implications.

Key Takeaways

Dialogue adds value beyond awareness or acceptance testing.

The pilot surfaced how citizens reason about quantum technologies in practice, revealing legitimacy criteria, trust expectations and governance conditions that are difficult to capture through surveys or expert-only consultation.

Public support for quantum technologies is conditional, not oppositional.

Participants rarely rejected quantum technologies outright, instead framing support as contingent on strong governance, transparency, accountability, equitable access, and clear public benefit.

Trust is institutional and relational, not purely technical.

Confidence in quantum technologies depended less on technical safeguards alone and more on governance arrangements, decision-making processes, and visible commitment to public interest.

Meaningful engagement does not require technical mastery.

Participants with low baseline familiarity engaged thoughtfully by reasoning through values, lived experience, and everyday relevance, with confidence to engage often preceding technical understanding.

Early engagement is particularly valuable for quantum technologies.

Where impacts are uncertain and applications are still emerging, early-stage dialogue can help shape expectations, identify legitimacy thresholds, and support socially responsive research and policy pathways.

Dialogue is a complement for existing approaches.

Used alongside technical analysis, foresight and policy development, dialogue helps decision-makers understand what public confidence depends on and where attention to governance, communication and inclusion will matter most as quantum technologies mature.

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

This report documents a pilot public dialogue on quantum technologies conducted by CSIRO on Friday 27 March 2026. Quantum technologies, including computing, sensing, and secure communications, are advancing rapidly and are expected to influence industries and everyday life over the next five to ten years. While much current discussion focuses on technical capability and economic opportunity, there is growing recognition the societal implications of quantum technologies warrant early and inclusive public engagement. This pilot was designed to both surface public perspectives on quantum technologies and to test whether a dialogue-based approach can generate insights relevant to researchers, policymakers and others involved in shaping their development.

1.1 Quantum technologies and public engagement

Public dialogue is increasingly used internationally as an approach to engaging communities on complex and uncertain areas of science and technology, particularly where decisions involve ethical, social or long-term considerations. Rather than relying on one-way communication or information provision, dialogue supports two-way exchange by enabling members of the public and specialists to learn from one another, explore different perspectives, understand why individuals hold those views and reflect on how research and policy decisions align with societal values.

Recently, empirical studies have begun to explore public engagement with quantum technologies. In the UK, a project led by the University of Oxford's Responsible Technology Institute and Quantum Computing and Simulation Hub combined a nationally representative survey (n≈1,000) with deliberative workshops with 45 citizens to explore public values, priorities and concerns. Their study found high recognition but low understanding of quantum computing, alongside strong public support for early engagement, regulation and public involvement in shaping quantum research and governance.¹

Complementing this deliberative work, Australian research led by CSIRO has used survey-based methods to examine when, why and how the public is willing to engage with quantum innovation across different stages of development. Drawing on a nationally representative sample, this research shows that Australians are open to engagement despite low awareness, with motivations shifting from risk-focused concerns in early stages to benefit-driven engagement during testing and deployment. This highlights the value of staged, adaptive public engagement approaches for quantum technologies.²

In developing a dialogue on quantum technologies for Australia, this pilot drew on approaches developed through the UK Government's ScienceWise program,³ which has demonstrated how deliberative dialogue can contribute to trust, transparency and more socially responsive science and innovation policy for over two decades. ScienceWise places particular emphasis on engaging the public early, before decisions are fixed, and on treating public perspectives as a form of expertise in their own right. These principles shaped both the structure of this pilot dialogue and the way participants were supported to engage with quantum technologies during the pilot.

¹ Williams, L., Busby, A., McGinial, S., Bradbury, H. 2024. *Public Dialogue on Quantum Computing*. Report by Verian Group UK Limited and University of Oxford's Quantum Computing Simulation Hub and Responsible Technology Institute.

² McCrea, R., Coates, R., Golley, S., Bentley, S.V., Lacey, J. 2026. Shaping Quantum Futures: When, Who and Why Australian Engage with Quantum Innovation. *Digital Society*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44206-026-00251-9>

³ UK Research & Innovation and Department for Science, Innovation & Technology's Science Wise program, <https://sciencewise.org.uk/about-sciencewise/>

1.2 Why a public dialogue on quantum?

In the context of quantum technologies, this need for dialogue is particularly pressing. Quantum technologies are expected to influence many aspects of Australian society, including industry, health, communications, national security and everyday services over the coming decade. While attention has largely focused on research capability, commercialisation and economic opportunity, the broader societal implications of quantum technologies are less well understood.

For many citizens, quantum remains unfamiliar or difficult to relate to everyday experience, even as decisions about future investment, governance and deployment are already being made. The importance of early public engagement is explicitly recognised in Australia's National Quantum Strategy⁴, particularly under *Theme 5: A trusted, ethical and inclusive quantum ecosystem*. This theme emphasises that quantum technologies should not be assumed to be automatically welcomed by the public, and that their development and use must align with Australian values and expectations.

Public dialogue responds to this challenge by creating structured opportunities for citizens and specialists to engage with one another on complex and uncertain issues. Dialogue enables participants to explore questions of benefit, risk, fairness and responsibility, and to articulate the conditions under which emerging technologies may be considered acceptable or desirable. In doing so, it complements technical, regulatory, and standards-based approaches by making public values and concerns visible before pathways become locked in.

For quantum technologies in particular, dialogue is well suited to addressing uncertainty and ethical complexity. Questions of governance, access, security, skills and long-term societal impact do not have purely technical answers, and expert consensus alone is insufficient to secure public trust. Engaging citizens alongside specialists can help surface blind spots, challenge assumptions and support more inclusive and socially responsive approaches to technology development, consistent with the National Quantum Strategy's emphasis on trust, responsibility and inclusion.

1.3 Objectives of this pilot

The primary purpose of this pilot was to explore the value of public dialogue as an approach to engaging Australians on quantum technologies at an early stage of development. The pilot was not intended to assess public acceptance of specific applications, nor to reach consensus or make research or policy recommendations. Instead, it focused on testing whether structured dialogue could generate mutual learning and insights that support more trusted and inclusive approaches to quantum research and innovation.

A further motivation for the pilot was the persistent challenge of engaging the public on quantum technologies. Quantum concepts are widely recognised as abstract and difficult to explain, and traditional science communication approaches often struggle to support meaningful discussion beyond surface-level understanding. This pilot therefore explored whether dialogue-based engagement could support discussion of implications, values and questions, even in the presence of uncertainty and incomplete understanding.

Consistent with international dialogue practice and the National Quantum Strategy, the pilot had three interrelated objectives:

⁴ Australian Government. 2023. National Quantum Strategy, Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources, <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/national-quantum-strategy.pdf>

First, the pilot aimed to support *mutual learning* between citizens and quantum specialists. Through facilitated small-group discussions, citizens were supported to develop confidence in engaging with quantum technologies, while specialists gained insight into public values, questions and concerns that may not surface through expert-led or technical processes alone.

Second, the pilot sought to *test and refine a dialogue-based engagement model* for quantum technologies. As a one-day, in-person event, the dialogue enabled reflection on the suitability of the format, materials and facilitation approach for engaging participants with a complex and unfamiliar topic, and on how different design elements contributed to discussion.

Third, the pilot aimed to generate reflections on the *broader value of public dialogue* in the context of emerging technologies. In this report, value is understood not primarily in terms of changes in opinion or knowledge, but as learning that supports trust, enhances public capability to engage with complex technologies, and helps identify societal considerations relevant to responsible development and governance. These reflections are intended to inform future dialogue design and contribute to ongoing discussion about how public engagement can meaningfully support science and technology decision-making in Australia.

2 Dialogue Design and Methodology

2.1 Overview of dialogue design

The pilot dialogue was designed as a one-day, in-person deliberative process bringing citizens and specialists together to explore the potential societal implications of quantum technologies in Australia. As a pilot, the dialogue aimed to support informed discussion, reflection and mutual learning, rather than consensus-building or decision-making.

The dialogue design was developed by the CSIRO project team in collaboration with an experienced event design partner, Bright Humans Pty Ltd. Drawing on established approaches to public dialogue on science and technology, this collaboration supported the development of a structured and human-centred process that balanced information sharing, facilitated discussion and participant reflection.

The dialogue was delivered as a single, facilitated workshop of just under five and a half hours, including breaks. The in-person format was selected to prioritise depth of engagement and sustained discussion on a complex and emerging topic. The day was structured to gradually build participant confidence and understanding, beginning with orientation and shared context-setting, followed by a series of facilitated small-group discussions and plenary reflections.

The dialogue was organised around six facilitated tables, each initially planned to include six citizen participants, supported by a quantum specialist, a table facilitator and a scribe. This structure was designed to keep citizen perspectives central while providing timely access to expertise and support for inclusive dialogue. Due to strong attendance on the day, some tables included an additional citizen participant, resulting in up to ten participants per table without changes to the overall facilitation model.



Figure 1: Room set up.

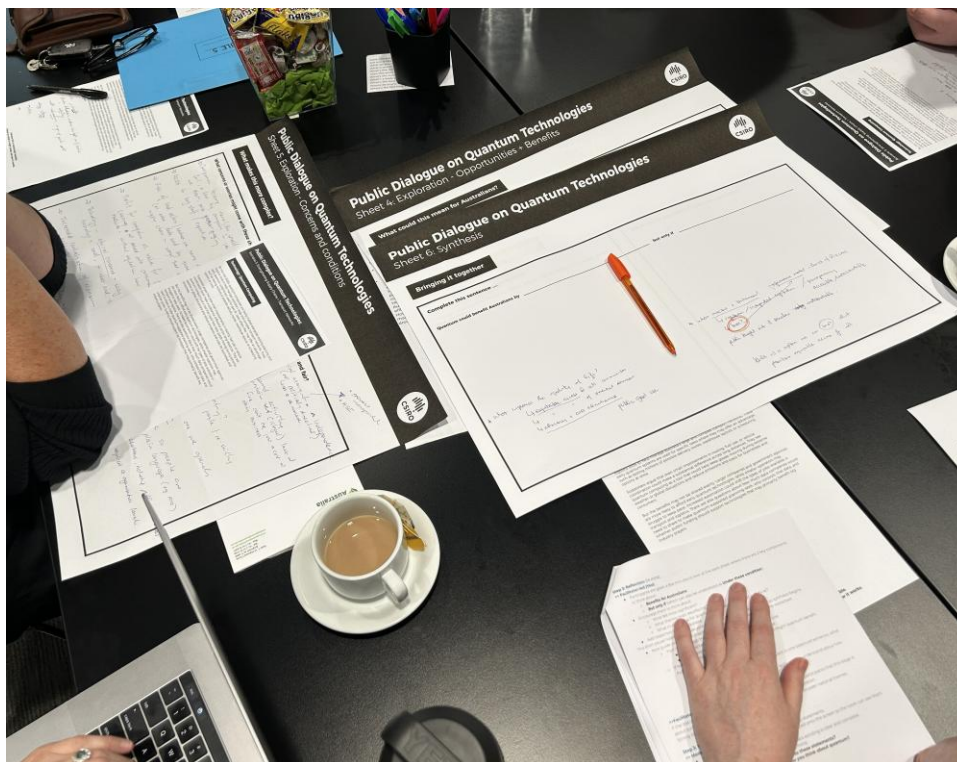


Figure 2: Table materials used in small group discussions

Discussion at each table was anchored around one of three scenario-based prompts, deliberately designed to cover a range of quantum technologies and to present potential applications in accessible, real-world terms. Each table focused on a single scenario, with two tables in the room working on the same scenario to support comparison and shared reflection across groups. The three scenarios were:

- Earlier health checks in regional Australia (quantum sensing)
- Protecting information using the laws of physics (quantum communications)
- Strengthening supply chains and transport networks (quantum computing).

The scenarios were reviewed by quantum researchers in advance of being used at the dialogue and aimed to provide accessible entry points for discussion, enabling participants to explore potential benefits, risks and societal implications of quantum technologies in everyday contexts.

The dialogue was designed with citizens at the centre of deliberation. Specialist participants were integrated to support informed discussion by providing context, responding to questions and contributing expertise where helpful, while ensuring that citizen perspectives remained central throughout the process.

2.2 Participants

The pilot dialogue involved two main participant groups: citizens and specialists, with specialists contributing subject matter expertise in quantum technologies (e.g. research, industry, policy) and expertise in public dialogue, facilitation, and engagement processes.

2.2.1 Citizen participants

A group of 39 citizens took part in the dialogue. Citizen participants were recruited through an independent qualitative research panel provider using initial screening criteria developed by the project team to assess interest and curiosity in science and technology, comfort with group discussion and availability to participate. Recruitment aimed to ensure diversity across age and gender, and to capture a range of

community perspectives rather than achieve statistical representativeness. No additional demographic criteria were applied, given the small sample size.

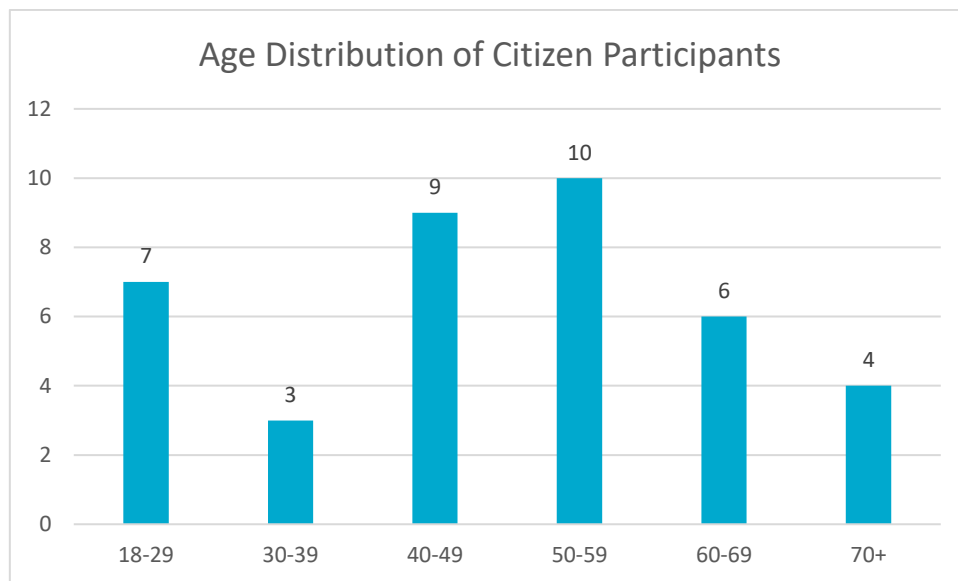


Figure 3: Age distribution of 39 citizen participants

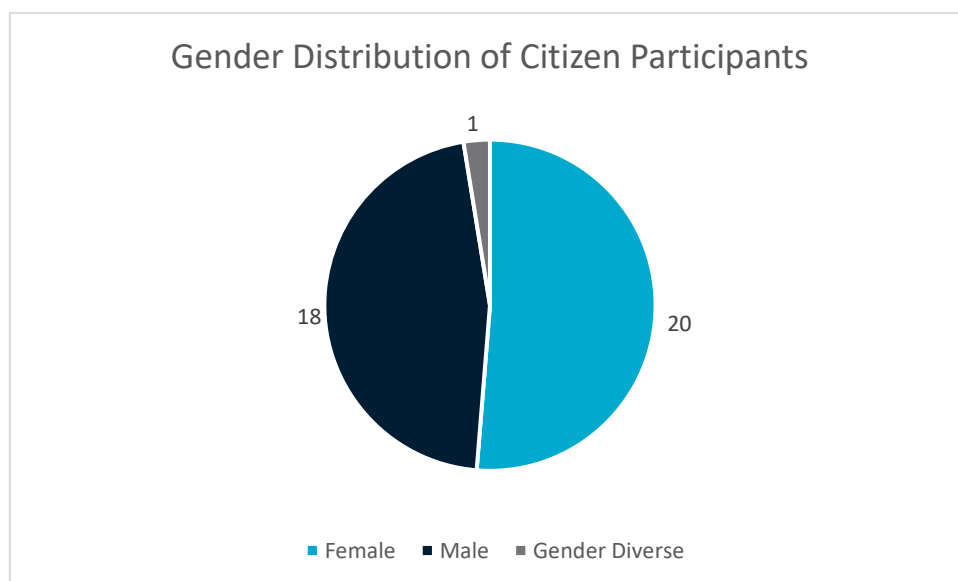


Figure 4: Gender distribution of 39 citizen participants

No prior knowledge of quantum technologies was required. Participants were invited to bring their own values, questions and lived experiences to the discussion and to engage with information and expert views during the dialogue itself.

Citizen participants took part in the full one-day dialogue and were invited to complete short pre- and post-dialogue surveys to capture their expectations and reflections on the process. Participants received a gift card incentive in recognition of their time and contribution, consistent with industry standards.

Recruitment generated strong interest. The dialogue was designed for 35 participants, with 5 additional participants placed on standby to account for potential drop-out. With limited drop out, the 39 citizen participants who attended remained engaged for the full day.

The participant group was intended to reflect a range of community perspectives, rather than to statistically represent the Queensland or Australian population. As a result, findings from this pilot provide insight into how citizens engage with complex quantum technology issues, rather than definitive conclusions about population-wide views.

2.2.2 Specialist participants

A group of 18 specialist participants took part in the dialogue, contributing in a range of roles. This group included participants with expertise across quantum research, industry, policy and investment, as well as specialists in public engagement, facilitation and outreach. All specialists were invited based on their expertise, experience and interest in supporting public dialogue on quantum technologies.

Specialists participated in the dialogue as contributors to informed, respectful discussion, rather than as advocates for particular positions. Their involvement was intended to support citizen participants by providing context, responding to questions, and sharing perspectives grounded in professional experience.

Depending on their background and the needs of the dialogue, specialist participants contributed in one or more of the following ways:

- providing short, non-technical explanations or context to support discussion
- being available to respond to questions from citizen participants
- supporting group discussions in roles such as table facilitator or scribe.

Specialists participated alongside citizens in facilitated sessions, with contributions focused on enabling understanding and exchange rather than evaluation or debate. Participation was voluntary, and specialists were free to limit their involvement to areas aligned with their expertise.

2.3 Data collection and analysis

Data were collected to support reflection on both participant perspectives and the functioning of the dialogue process itself. Collection methods were designed to be minimally intrusive and appropriate for an in-person, deliberative dialogue, with a focus on capturing discussion themes rather than individual attribution.

Data were collected through facilitated small-group and plenary discussions supported by facilitator and scribe notes, alongside short pre- and post-dialogue surveys capturing participant expectations, reflections, and experiences of the dialogue process. The dialogue used a set of purpose-designed facilitation materials, including scenario prompts and structured discussion guides, developed specifically for this pilot. These materials are not reproduced in this report.

No audio or video recordings of discussions were made. Photographs were taken with participant consent and in line with approved ethics and privacy arrangements. Participation in surveys was voluntary, and participants were able to decline to answer any question or withdraw their data in accordance with the approved ethics protocol.

All data were de-identified prior to analysis. Qualitative data from dialogue activities and facilitator notes were analysed thematically to identify key perspectives, values and concerns; explore how participants engaged with the scenario-based discussions; and inform reflection on the strengths and limitations of the dialogue design. Survey data were analysed descriptively to complement qualitative insights. Findings are presented in aggregated form throughout this report, and no individual participant is identifiable.

This pilot dialogue was conducted under approval from CSIRO's Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee and in accordance with privacy arrangements approved by CSIRO's Privacy Office, with all personal information handled in line with the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)* and the *Australian Privacy Principles*.

3 What Emerged from the Dialogue

The findings presented below draw on insights from the facilitated dialogue sessions and participant reflections described in Section 2.

3.1 Starting perspectives and expectations (citizen pre-survey)

Prior to the dialogue, all citizen participants completed a short pre-survey to capture their baseline perspectives, expectations and familiarity with quantum technologies. These responses provide context for interpreting the dialogue discussions that follow and help clarify the starting conditions participants brought into the room.

3.1.1 Strong support for public involvement in technology decisions

Before attending the dialogue, most participants expressed strong support for public involvement in decisions about new and emerging technologies. Public input was widely seen as important for ensuring that science and technology reflect public values and deliver societal benefit. Participants also commonly expected that their views would be heard and considered and indicated a willingness to engage with perspectives that might challenge their own. This suggests participants arrived with a clear expectation that the dialogue would be a space for meaningful participation, rather than one-way information provision.

3.1.2 High interest in technology, but limited familiarity with quantum

Participants reported high interest in science, technology and their societal impacts, with many expressing curiosity about how new technologies affect everyday life. However, this general interest did not translate into confidence or familiarity with quantum technologies specifically, which is unsurprising. While most participants indicated they had heard of quantum technologies prior to the dialogue, self-reported familiarity was generally low to moderate, with many describing themselves as “not at all” or “a little” familiar. This gap between interest and understanding highlights the challenge posed by quantum as a topic and underscores the importance of accessible framing and dialogue-based engagement rather than assumption of prior knowledge.

3.1.3 Willingness to engage, with some uncertainty

Most participants indicated they felt reasonably comfortable sharing their views in a group discussion, though comfort levels varied. Some participants reported only moderate comfort, suggesting a degree of uncertainty about speaking on complex or unfamiliar topics in a mixed group setting. At the same time, there was strong expressed interest in hearing from others and in engaging constructively, even where views might differ. This combination of openness and partial uncertainty shaped how participants initially approached discussion and underscores the role of facilitation in supporting inclusive participation.

3.1.4 Early concerns focused on broader technology impacts rather than quantum specifically

When asked about concerns related to new technologies prior to the dialogue, participants frequently raised issues associated with broader technology trends, particularly artificial intelligence. Common concerns included privacy and data security, misuse or lack of regulation, impacts on employment, inequality, misinformation, and the concentration of power among governments or large corporations. Some participants also questioned how publicly funded technology development delivers public benefit in practice, including questions about transparency, accountability and who ultimately benefits from taxpayer

funded innovation. Few participants articulated concerns that were specific to quantum technologies at the outset. Instead, many described more general unease about how emerging technologies are governed, who benefits from them, and whether safeguards are keeping pace with innovation. This suggests participants entered the dialogue with values-based concerns that cut across technologies, rather than well-formed views about quantum itself. Specialist participants who completed the pre-survey (n = 9) similarly did not raise concerns specific to quantum technologies; instead, their concerns were more often articulated in terms of governance, concentration of decision-making power and how emerging technologies are introduced and regulated.

3.1.5 Expectations centred on learning and exchange

Participants' expectations for the dialogue were largely oriented toward learning, understanding real-world implications, and hearing a range of perspectives. Many hoped to better understand what quantum technologies are, how they might be used along with what potential risks and benefits they might bring. Participants also expressed a desire to contribute their own experiences, concerns and values, even where they did not feel technically knowledgeable. Specialist pre-survey responses reflected a similar orientation toward learning and exchange, with expectations focused on understanding public perspectives and societal concerns rather than advancing fixed positions on quantum technologies. Collectively, these responses indicate that citizens arrived at the dialogue motivated by curiosity and public interest, rather than advocacy or fixed positions, and were open to exploring uncertainty through discussion.

3.2 Dialogue themes across the day

The themes outlined below draw on analysis of discussions across all tables and scenarios over the course of the day. Rather than reflecting the views of individual participants or table groups, these themes capture patterns that consistently emerged as participants collectively explored the implications of quantum technologies through connection, scenario discussion and synthesis activities.

3.2.1 Theme 1: Making sense of quantum through everyday relevance

Participants were able to engage meaningfully with quantum technologies through dialogue not by first developing technical understanding, but by connecting the topic to familiar systems and lived experience. Across tables, discussion consistently began with making a connection between quantum and people's lives, with applications in health, data security, and logistics providing tangible entry points. These connections allowed participants to situate an unfamiliar technology within everyday contexts, creating a practical basis for discussion despite limited prior knowledge.

The dialogue demonstrated that confidence to participate can precede technical understanding. Participants were able to reason about complex science and technology issues through values, lived experience and collective sensemaking, challenging assumptions that technical expertise is a prerequisite for meaningful public engagement. Uncertainty was treated as a shared state rather than an individual deficit, with participants explicitly naming what felt abstract or unclear and recognising this as a legitimate starting point for discussion. This early framing (i.e., locating relevance, acknowledging limits to knowledge and creating permission to ask questions) shaped the nature of the dialogue that followed.

Rather than becoming polarised or focused on resolving technical feasibility, participants were able to engage in richer, more reflective discussion about implications, safeguards, trust and system-level consequences.

3.2.2 Theme 2: Perceived opportunities framed primarily as public system improvements

Across tables, discussion of opportunities and benefits focused less on specific applications and more on how quantum technologies might improve the functioning of public systems. Participants consistently defined benefit in collective terms, emphasising prevention rather than treatment, improved efficiency in systems such as healthcare, logistics and emergency response, and better use of scarce resources including specialist expertise, time and infrastructure. Across scenarios, particular attention was given to the potential for quantum technologies to support more equitable outcomes across geography, especially for regional, rural and remote communities that currently experience uneven access to services.

Notably, participants placed less emphasis on individual convenience, consumer novelty or speculative economic growth. Opportunities were viewed positively only where they were clearly linked to demonstrable public value, such as reducing pressure on healthcare systems, improving allocation of limited resources or enabling earlier intervention to prevent more costly downstream impacts. This framing distinguishes citizen reasoning from technology-led or commercial narratives, which more commonly emphasise innovation as a source of economic value, competitive advantage and application potential. It also helps explain why optimisation, automation and early detection were assessed cautiously and welcomed only when aligned with broader social benefit, foreshadowing the importance later placed on equity, governance and conditions for public support.

3.2.3 Theme 3: Concerns cluster around secondary effects, not the technology itself

Across the dialogue, participants' concerns focused less on whether quantum technologies would work as intended, and more on the secondary social, institutional and distributional effects that might follow successful deployment. Participants did not express anxiety about technical failure; instead, concerns centred on issues such as over-diagnosis and heightened anxiety in the health context, misuse of data and surveillance, potential discrimination in areas such as insurance or employment, job displacement and concentration of expertise, monopolisation of capability, and the pace at which technological change might outstrip social readiness.

Across tables and scenarios, these concerns were repeatedly framed through a forward-looking question: what happens once the technology works, and for who? Participants consistently evaluated risks in terms of how benefits and burdens might be distributed, how power and control could become concentrated, and whether existing social and governance arrangements would be able to keep pace with technological change. In this sense, concerns functioned as anticipatory and systemic, rather than oppositional. They provided the context within which participants later articulated conditions for public support, grounding those conditions in questions of governance, equity, and accountability rather than technical performance alone.

3.2.4 Theme 4: Public support is conditional, not oppositional

Across the dialogue, participants rarely rejected quantum technologies outright. Instead, support was consistently framed in qualified and conditional terms. Rather than voicing generalised resistance or concern, participants focused on articulating the conditions under which quantum technologies could be considered acceptable and socially beneficial.

Across all tables, participants were asked to distil their discussions into a final statement describing how quantum technologies could benefit Australians, and under what conditions. Although each table group had focused on a different scenario, the resulting statements showed striking consistency. In almost all cases, potential benefits were framed as conditional and contingent on strong governance, equitable access, public understanding and demonstrable public benefit, rather than technological capability alone.

Two of the synthesis statements produced at the pilot public dialogue

- Quantum could benefit Australians by streamlining medical diagnosis and treatment but only if ethics, data protection and regulation are front and centre.
- Quantum could benefit Australians by improving quality of life through increasing equitable access to essential services and industries but only if it is built within a system we can trust and applied thoughtfully to public interest.

The conditions most frequently raised included the need for strong and enforceable regulation, clear accountability and independent oversight, and transparent decision-making processes. Participants also emphasised safeguards to prevent monopolisation, ensure equitable access across geography and sectors, and protect against the concentration of power among a small number of actors. Concerns about data use and control led many groups to stress the importance of public stewardship or ownership of sensitive data, alongside investment in education and capacity-building prior to widespread deployment. Overall, these discussions indicate that participants were not evaluating quantum technologies in terms of abstract promise or risk, but actively prioritising questions of legitimacy as the basis for judgement. Support was shaped less by optimism about innovation as is common among specialist stakeholders and more by judgments about fairness, governance and whether public interests would be protected as technologies move from research into use.

During the dialogue, one participant observed the conditions articulated through the dialogue could apply to many emerging technologies, not just quantum. Rather than indicating a lack of specificity, this observation in fact highlights how participants engaged at the level of shared social expectations. Through discussion of quantum-enabled scenarios, participants articulated broader principles about governance, accountability, equity, transparency and public benefit that they saw as essential for any powerful technology with wide societal impact. In this sense, the dialogue did not dilute discussion of quantum technologies; it revealed the underlying criteria through which citizens assess the legitimacy of emerging technologies more generally.

This framing is significant because it aligns closely with the emphasis in Australia's National Quantum Strategy on trust, ethics and inclusion. It also provides a clear bridge from dialogue to research and policy relevance. Participants were not expressing preferences for or against quantum technologies but articulating the threshold criteria they believe must be met for public support to be warranted.

3.2.5 Theme 5: Trust is relational and institutional, not technical

Building on the conditions articulated by participants for public support, trust emerged as a central factor shaping how those conditions were understood. Participants consistently framed trust not as a function of technical performance alone, but as something rooted in institutions, governance arrangements and decision-making processes. Across the different scenarios, participants emphasised that even where quantum technologies offered clear potential benefits, trust would depend on who controls the technology, how decisions are made, and whether public interests remain central over time. Technical safeguards were seen as necessary but insufficient in the absence of transparent governance, clear accountability and independent oversight, particularly in relation to data use, equity of access and concentration of power.

Trust was widely understood as something that must be actively built, rather than assumed or added after deployment. Participants highlighted the importance of early engagement, openness about uncertainty and trade-offs, and visible commitment to public benefit over narrow commercial or strategic interests. Opportunities for public understanding and participation were seen as integral to sustaining confidence in

both the process and its outcomes. In this way, trust functioned as an enabling condition: shaping how participants evaluated risks and benefits, and influencing whether quantum technologies could be seen as legitimate and socially beneficial in practice.

3.3 Points of convergence or divergence

While participants shared many concerns and framing assumptions, the dialogue also surfaced important points of tension and difference. These differences did not reflect simple disagreement, but rather contrasting priorities, values and interpretations of how quantum technologies might be developed and governed.

3.3.1 Areas of convergence

Across the dialogue, participants demonstrated a strong degree of convergence in how they framed the implications of quantum technologies. While perspectives varied by scenario, there was broad agreement that quantum technologies should be assessed primarily in terms of public benefit, rather than novelty or technical capability alone. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of governance, equity, transparency and accountability, and shared the view that public support would depend on how these considerations were addressed in practice. This convergence did not reflect unanimity of opinion, but a shared set of underlying values that shaped how opportunities and risks were evaluated across tables.

Within this shared framing, specialist participants entered the dialogue with higher levels of familiarity with quantum technologies and were generally motivated by interest in better understanding public perspectives. This contrasted with citizen participants, who expressed greater uncertainty about quantum technologies but strong interest in understanding real-world implications and societal impacts.

3.3.2 Areas of divergence

While participants shared common values and framing assumptions, the dialogue also revealed important areas of divergence in how risks and benefits were weighed. For example, participants differed in the emphasis placed on optimisation versus system resilience. Some prioritised efficiency gains, early detection and increased access to services as clear public benefits, while others cautioned that highly optimised systems could exacerbate anxiety, or reduce space for human judgement and care. Divergence also emerged around the appropriate balance between government leadership and private sector involvement, with participants expressing different views on where responsibility should sit to protect public interest while enabling innovation. These differences reflected contrasting priorities and interpretations rather than opposition and highlighted the trade-offs participants considered when reasoning about how quantum technologies might be developed and governed.

Further divergence emerged in how participants weighed equity against feasibility and cost. While many participants strongly prioritised equitable access, especially for regional and rural communities, others expressed uncertainty about how far equity could realistically be achieved given cost, infrastructure constraints and workforce capacity. Some participants emphasised the need to make difficult prioritisation decisions about where and for whom quantum-enabled services should be deployed first, while others were more cautious of strategies that could reinforce existing inequalities or leave groups behind. These differences reflected varied assessments of fairness and practicality, rather than disagreement about the importance of equity itself.

3.4 Changes in confidence, understanding and perceived value (citizen post-survey)

Evidence of how the dialogue shaped participants' understanding, confidence and perceptions was captured through the citizen post-survey completed within three days of the dialogue. Several questions were intentionally designed to mirror elements of the pre-survey, allowing reflection on how participants' perspectives evolved through participation in the dialogue.

3.4.1 Increased understanding of quantum technologies and their societal implications

Following the dialogue, 35 of 39 participants (~90%) indicated that their understanding of quantum technologies had increased, along with their understanding of potential societal implications. This is a notable shift given that 29 of 39 participants (~74%) entered the dialogue with limited familiarity with quantum technologies, despite strong general interest in science and technology.

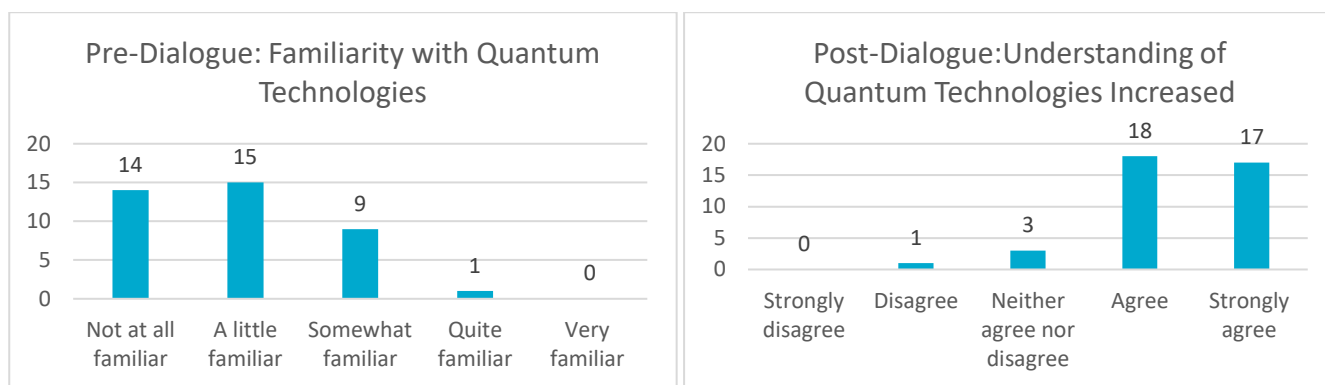


Figure 5: Pre-dialogue familiarity with quantum technologies and post-dialogue perceived increase in understanding

Participants commonly reported that practical examples, scenario-based discussions and opportunities to ask questions of specialists helped make quantum technologies more tangible and easier to relate to everyday contexts. The dialogue appeared to support movement from abstract awareness toward more grounded reflection on potential applications, risks, and benefits.

3.4.2 Greater confidence in discussing societal implications

Post-survey responses suggest a clear increase in confidence discussing the societal implications of quantum technologies, with around 90% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt more confident following the dialogue. Pre-survey responses indicated varying levels of comfort with group discussion, particularly on unfamiliar topics, while post-survey feedback showed that most participants felt comfortable sharing their views during the dialogue and more confident engaging in discussion by its conclusion.

This increase in confidence reflects both the design of the dialogue and the facilitation of supportive discussion environments. Many participants emphasised that hearing others voice similar uncertainties or concerns helped normalise partial understanding and reduced perceived barriers to participation.

3.4.3 Strong perceptions of inclusion and respect

Participants reported very high levels of perceived inclusion, respect and meaningful participation. Most felt their views were heard and treated with respect, and that they were able to contribute meaningfully to the discussion. These responses align with pre-survey expectations that the dialogue would be a space for genuine engagement rather than one-way communication. The consistency between expectations prior to

the dialogue and experiences reported afterwards suggests that, for most participants, the dialogue met or exceeded what they had hoped for in terms of process and inclusion.

3.4.4 Value of hearing diverse perspectives

Hearing other participants' perspectives was widely described as valuable, and many participants reported encountering new or unexpected viewpoints. For some, this influenced or shifted how they thought about quantum technologies; for others, it reinforced existing concerns while adding nuance or complexity. Importantly, changes in perspective were not limited to becoming more positive or optimistic. Some participants reported that discussion surfaced new questions or highlighted risks they had not previously considered, particularly around governance, equity and societal readiness. This suggests the dialogue supported deepening of thinking, rather than simple persuasion.

3.4.5 Reinforced support for public involvement and trust-building

Post-survey responses indicate that participation in the dialogue either reinforced or strengthened participants' views that public involvement is important in decisions about emerging technologies. Many agreed that processes like this can help ensure science and technology reflect public values and contribute to building trust between the public and researchers. Sample quotes provided by citizens after the dialogue included:

"Thank you for conducting this dialogue as I feel it is important before introducing new technology to the public, getting to know what people's views on it."

"I learned something new and felt I could contribute. These sorts of sessions are a fantastic start for public engagement."

"I felt part of a community with a voice."

Participants also generally felt the dialogue generated insights that could inform research, policy and investment decisions, and the dialogue design itself was valuable and could be adapted for broader use. These responses suggest citizens not only valued the experience personally but also perceived it as having relevance beyond the day itself.

Overall satisfaction with the dialogue experience was high. Participants frequently cited learning something new, meeting people with different perspectives, and having space to share their own views as key benefits. Where challenges were noted, such as room acoustics or time constraints, these tended to relate to practical aspects of delivery rather than the purpose or legitimacy of the dialogue itself.

In summary, the post-survey results suggest the dialogue supported increased understanding, confidence and trust, while maintaining space for uncertainty and critical reflection. Rather than resolving views or producing consensus, the process helped participants engage more thoughtfully with the societal dimensions of quantum technologies.

4 Reflections on the Value of the Dialogue

Having described the key themes that emerged from the dialogue, this section reflects on the value of the process itself. It considers how participants experienced the dialogue, what types of insight it generated for quantum research and policy audiences, and what methodological lessons can be drawn from this pilot for future public engagement on emerging technologies.

4.1 Value for Participants

Participants reported clear value from taking part in the dialogue, particularly through learning and sense-making, increased confidence to engage with an unfamiliar topic, and experiences of being heard and respected within the process.

4.1.1 Learning and sense-making

Many participants described the dialogue as helping them make sense of quantum technologies by connecting abstract concepts to everyday contexts. Learning was commonly framed in terms of practical relevance rather than technical detail, particularly through discussion of healthcare, data security, and public services. As one citizen participant reflected, *“It’s opened my eyes to the practical applications. Being able to see the practical longer-term benefits is very exciting.”*

4.1.2 Confidence to engage

Participation also supported confidence to discuss quantum technologies and their societal implications, even where uncertainty remained. Several participants noted they entered the dialogue with little or no prior knowledge yet felt able to contribute meaningfully through shared discussion. One citizen participant captured this experience, saying, *“As somebody that came in knowing nothing, today has developed lots of excitement about what could happen. Also some worry, but overall, it’s been really positive.”* This reflects the role of dialogue in normalising uncertainty and reinforcing technical expertise is not a prerequisite for engagement.

4.1.3 Feeling heard and respected

Participants consistently highlighted the importance of feeling heard and respected throughout the dialogue. Reflections pointed to the value of clear structure, facilitation, and accessible expert input in creating an inclusive environment for discussion. As one citizen participant noted when reflecting on what should be retained in future dialogues, *“I love the way of taking us through what is quantum, high level, into how it’s used in daily life.”* Together, these experiences suggest the dialogue created value by strengthening participants’ capacity to reflect and reason about complex technologies in a respectful and supportive setting.

4.2 Value for Quantum Research and Policy Audiences

While many of the issues raised through the dialogue will be familiar to quantum researchers and policymakers, the value of the dialogue lay in making visible *how* citizens reason about these issues in practice. For research and policy audiences, the dialogue generated value by surfacing forms of insight that are difficult to access through surveys or expert-only consultations, particularly how expectations of trust, governance and public benefit are formed and negotiated through discussion rather than assumed in advance.

4.2.1 Types of insight generated

The dialogue provided insight not simply into attitudes toward quantum technologies, but into the reasoning processes participants used to evaluate potential benefits and risks. Participants consistently moved beyond application-specific reactions to articulate broader expectations around public benefit, equity, accountability and governance. These insights revealed how citizens interpret emerging technologies through social and institutional lenses, offering a richer understanding of public priorities than headline measures of support or concern alone.

4.2.2 Insights distinct from research surveys or expert-only processes

Unlike survey-based engagement, which typically captures individual opinions at a fixed point in time, the dialogue enabled participants to reflect, question and revise their thinking through discussion with others. This made it possible to observe how views were formed and refined, rather than simply what those views were. Compared with expert-only consultations, the dialogue surfaced considerations that may be under-represented in technical or policy settings, particularly around trust, fairness and the social consequences of implementation.

Specialist participants also reported gaining value from hearing how citizens framed issues of legitimacy, trust and everyday relevance. Several experts reflected the dialogue highlighted gaps between how technologies are discussed within research or industry contexts and how members of the public assess whether technologies are acceptable or trustworthy in practice.

For some specialist participants, this prompted reflection on how research priorities, assumptions and communication practices are formed within professional settings. Hearing citizens reason through governance, accountability and public benefit rather than technical performance alone, highlighted the importance of engaging with broader social and institutional considerations earlier in the research process. While the dialogue did not aim to change research directions, it created space for specialists to consider how public reasoning might inform choices about framing, engagement and the conditions under which emerging technologies are developed and discussed.

4.2.3 Actionability and relevance of insights

The insights generated through the dialogue were actionable not as recommendations, but as clear criteria that participants believed should guide the development and governance of quantum technologies. These included conditions related to transparency, accountability, equity of access and demonstrable public benefit. For example, in discussing what public benefit and accountability should mean in practice, participants raised questions about stewardship of public resources, including how publicly funded research and infrastructure are governed, who ultimately benefits, and how transparency around funding and benefit-sharing contributes to institutional trust.

For research and policy audiences, these criteria provide a nuanced understanding of what underpins public confidence and where attention may be needed to support responsible development, consistent with broader strategic goals around trust, ethics and inclusion. Overall, the dialogue demonstrated how structured public engagement can complement technical and policy processes by making visible the values, trade-offs and conditions that shape public support; insights that may not emerge through other engagement methods.

4.3 Methodological Reflections

This section reflects briefly on aspects of the dialogue design that shaped how insights emerged, and on design considerations relevant to future public engagement on quantum technologies. As a pilot, the dialogue prioritised mutual learning and exchange over tightly bounded deliberation or decision-testing.

4.3.1 Enabling participation and learning under uncertainty

A core feature of the dialogue was its orientation toward learning when future applications and societal implications of quantum technologies remain uncertain. Rather than seeking to resolve uncertainty before discussion, the dialogue treated uncertainty as an expected and shared starting point. This enabled participants to engage confidently without requiring technical mastery, and to reason about implications, values and trade-offs despite limits to their quantum-specific knowledge. In practice, this supported reflective discussion focused on governance, trust and legitimacy rather than debate about technical feasibility. As a methodological approach, this reinforces the value of dialogue for early-stage technologies, where engaging with uncertainty may be more productive than seeking to reduce it prematurely through information provision alone.

4.3.2 Scenario framing and scope of discussion

While discussion at tables did not always remain narrowly focused on the assigned scenarios, this reflected participants' tendency to generalise from specific examples toward broader considerations of governance, trust and public benefit. Insights in this report are therefore interpreted primarily at the level of room-wide discussion rather than as discrete outputs from individual tables. This pattern did not indicate confusion or disengagement; instead, scenarios functioned as entry points for articulating shared expectations that extended beyond individual applications. As one specialist participant observed, *"Most people don't want to know the nitty gritty about tech. They want to know if it's trustworthy."*

In a pilot context, this generalisation revealed strong common expectations around legitimacy and governance across different quantum applications. At the same time, it highlights a design trade-off for public dialogues: more structured scaffolding may be appropriate where the objective is to test views on specific use cases or implementation pathways, while flexibility better supports values-based and system-level reasoning at earlier stages.

4.3.3 Roles of specialists

Specialists participated in the pilot primarily as contributors to informed discussion, supporting understanding of an unfamiliar topic and responding to questions as they arose, rather than directing deliberation. For most participants, the presence of scientists at tables was experienced as enabling engagement, particularly given low baseline familiarity with quantum technologies. Access to expertise helped anchor discussion in real-world contexts and supported confidence to participate without requiring technical knowledge.

One table explored whether time without scientists might have allowed greater independence in developing views. This reflects a recognised design choice between different dialogue configurations. In this pilot, interaction between citizens and specialists was central to a learning-oriented exchange. For dialogues addressing more contested or polarised issues, different configurations, including professional facilitation at the table level, would be a non-negotiable consideration.

4.3.4 Practical design considerations for future dialogues

Participant feedback highlighted a small number of practical factors that shaped discussion quality, including room acoustics, group size, and time allocation. While these did not undermine the objectives of the pilot, they influenced ease of participation and interaction. A small number of participants also noted the potential value of preparatory materials. In this pilot, pre-work beyond the expectations survey was intentionally not required, reflecting both practical experience that required pre-reading is often unevenly completed and a design choice to prioritise inclusive participation. Participants were able to engage meaningfully without advance preparation, with confidence and understanding developing through shared discussion, scenario-based exploration, and access to expertise.

5 Lessons for Future Dialogues on Quantum Technologies

Building on the findings and reflections presented above, this section draws out what this pilot suggests for engaging the public on quantum technologies and for supporting their responsible development in Australia. Rather than restating detailed findings, it focuses on the implications of the dialogue for quantum research, policy and future public engagement practice as quantum technologies move closer to deployment.

5.1 What this dialogue reveals about public engagement with quantum?

The dialogue shows citizens are able to engage meaningfully with quantum technologies despite low baseline familiarity. Engagement did not depend on detailed technical understanding; instead, participants focused on how quantum technologies might be used and how those uses could affect everyday systems and public services. This systems-level orientation reflects the enabling nature of quantum technologies and suggests effective public engagement for quantum is less about technical explanation and more about creating space to explore societal implications and uses in context. This does not diminish the importance of technical expertise in the development and governance of quantum technologies but highlights that public engagement with societal implications draws on different forms of reasoning.

5.2 Public support for quantum is conditional and legitimacy-based

A central conclusion of the dialogue is that public support for quantum technologies is conditional rather than automatic. Participants articulated shared criteria they believed should guide development as technologies move toward deployment, including strong governance arrangements, transparency in decision-making, equitable access and demonstrable public benefit. These criteria were expressed consistently across different quantum scenarios, suggesting public confidence will depend less on individual applications and more on the credibility of institutional stewardship as the field develops.

5.3 Value of dialogue for quantum policymaking and strategy

This pilot demonstrated the value of dialogue for engaging publics on quantum technologies, where uncertainty is inherent and definitive impacts are still emerging. Unlike surveys or information-based consultation such as public information sessions, the dialogue made visible how people reason in the face of uncertain outcomes: how they weigh benefits against risks, how they generalise across applications, and how trust is built through process rather than technical assurance.

For quantum decision-makers, these insights are actionable not as endorsements or objections, but as guidance about what public confidence depends on. Dialogue complements technical foresight and expert analysis by highlighting the social and institutional dimensions that shape acceptance, and by identifying where attention to governance, communication and inclusion is likely to be most important as quantum technologies mature.

5.4 Implications for future public dialogue on quantum

The findings of this pilot have implications for how future public engagement on quantum technologies is designed. Early-stage dialogue appears particularly valuable for quantum, where public expectations are

still forming and confidence can be shaped through inclusive discussion rather than reactive response. Engagement approaches that prioritise learning, mutual exchange, and scenario-based exploration can support meaningful participation without requiring technical pre-knowledge.

At the same time, future dialogues may require different design choices depending on maturity, application specificity, and degree of contestation. As quantum technologies move closer to deployment, more focused deliberation on particular use cases, regulatory options, or implementation pathways may be appropriate. This pilot provides a foundation for that work by clarifying the broader expectations and values through which quantum technologies are likely to be judged.



Figure 6: Citizens and quantum specialists in discussion during the pilot dialogue.

5.5 Closing reflections

In summary, this pilot dialogue shows that citizens are willing and able to engage thoughtfully with quantum technologies, even in the face of uncertainty about their future applications and societal implications. Rather than seeking certainty or simple answers, participants demonstrated capacity to reason about long-term implications and to articulate conditions for responsible development.

For quantum technologies, whose impacts may be systemic rather than immediately visible, dialogue offers a valuable way to build shared understanding, surface legitimacy criteria, and support trust as the field continues to evolve. At the same time, the reasoning approaches and expectations articulated through this dialogue, especially around trust, accountability and stewardship of public interest, are not unique to quantum. They reflect broader public ways of engaging with complex and emerging scientific and technological developments.

In this sense, while grounded in the specific context of quantum technologies, this pilot provides insight into how dialogue-based engagement can contribute to more socially responsive and informed research and policy more generally, with a view to supporting decision-making in areas where uncertainty is high, impacts are wide-ranging and public confidence cannot be assumed.

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Contact us

1300 363 400
+61 3 9545 2176
csiro.au/contact
csiro.au

For further information

Science Connect

Tristy Falkenberg
Deputy Director
+61 3 9545 2893
Tristy.Falkenberg@csiro.au