

Community Engagement Strategy



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Community Engagement Strategy

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Introduction

The expectation to engage with our customers and community in projects and decisions that affect them is ever increasing. At Westernport Water we support community engagement as a process to make better decisions that value community knowledge and wisdom.

It is vital that we look beyond traditional ways of doing business and embrace working with our communities to develop water and wastewater services that meet the current and future needs.

Community engagement helps to promote trust with community and in many circumstances will bring up ideas that we would not have thought of otherwise.

The decisions we make may impact the lives of our people and the communities we serve. We believe that working together we can achieve better outcomes for the people whose lives are impacted and that customers and communities are more likely to support projects and initiatives.

This document provides a clear plan to deliver improved customer and community engagement to ensure the best possible outcomes for all.

Background

The core functions of Westernport Water are to provide drinking water, recycled water and wastewater services to properties and communities throughout its district in accordance with the standards listed in the Westernport Water Customer Charter 2018-23 or by agreement.

It is acknowledged that Westernport Water provides services on the traditional lands of the Bunurong Peoples, who played an important role over thousands of years in managing the natural resources around the waterline areas of Western Port and Mollwyl, otherwise known as Phillip Island. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and work together as we continue to manage the land and water resources today.

Westernport Water is one of 19 water corporations operating and reporting to the State Government of Victoria. Responsible for its own management and performance, servicing over 21,399 customers across an area of 300 square kilometres including Phillip Island and mainland communities from The Gurdies to Archies Creek.

What makes us different

Westernport Water is different to other Victorian water corporations in a number of ways. While our customer-base is the smallest in the water sector, our network is sized to accommodate the peak holiday season, contributing to higher maintenance and renewal costs than similar-sized regional service areas.

The Phillip Island / San Remo area has one of the highest ratios of visitors to residents of any destination in Australia. At peak times during December and January, there are 120 visitors to every resident (Bass Coast Shire Council, Visitor Economy Strategy 2035).

Our Vision

Westernport Water leads through collaboration and innovation to deliver sustainable water and wastewater products and services that improve the health and liveability of our community.

Community engagement in Victoria

Community engagement expectations:

Water Act 1989 - Requirement under section 92 (b) to educate the community about its functions, promote and conduct research into any matter relating to its functions, powers and duties.

Victorian Government's Victorian Water Plan – We will meet the priorities outlined in the Water Plan by engaging with our community to strengthen local relationships and empower our community to make key decisions on the delivery of water and wastewater services.

Minister for Water's Letter of Expectations (LoE) – We will address the Minister's key priorities for the water sector by:

- continuing to build extensive and effective customer and community engagement and partnerships in planning and service delivery
- contributing to healthy communities by supporting, safe, affordable, high quality services and resilient communities
- engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations to recognise and support Aboriginal cultural values and economic inclusion in the water sector

Essential Services Commission (ESC) – We will regularly engage with our customers and community to understand what they value, what they want, and what they're dissatisfied with. This engagement determines our desired outcomes and level of performance and the priority projects that are needed to support it. In turn, this establishes the proposed prices for approval by our economic regulator.



School students learn about their local water.

What is community engagement?

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) defines community and stakeholder engagement as a planned process that aims to work with customers, stakeholders and/or communities to shape decisions and actions in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome (IAP2). Community engagement may also be known as public participation, consultation and stakeholder engagement.

Defining Community

At Westernport Water we believe there to be many communities and community types. Some of which could be described by their shared attributes including heritage, culture, ethnicity, the environment, public infrastructure, place of residence, social interests and networks.

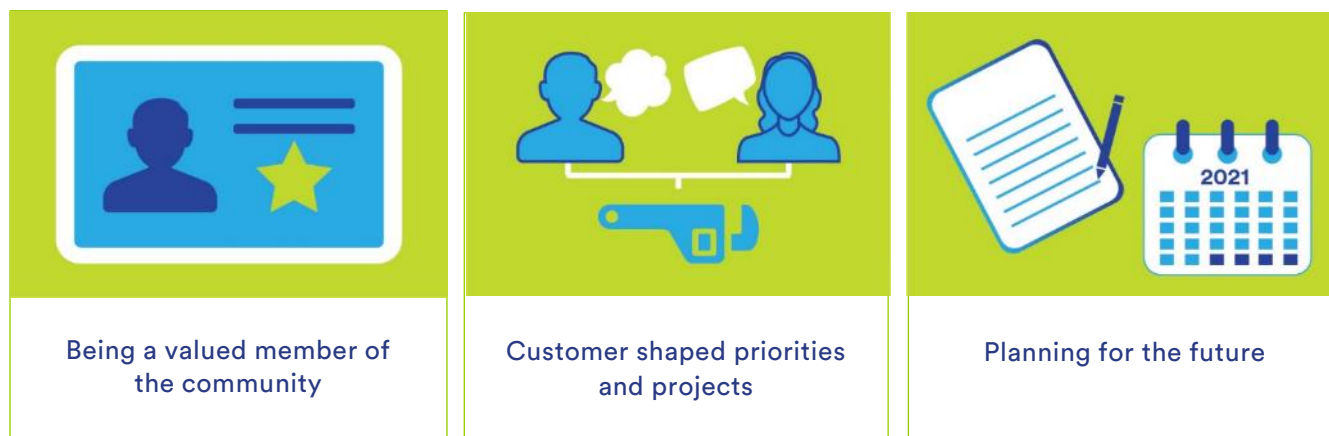
Why is community and stakeholder engagement important?

Decisions required for our work can have both intended and unforeseen impacts on the community, environment and stakeholders. When the people affected by our projects and decisions are engaged effectively, the level of their understanding, acceptance and support for the project can increase. Ultimately, the value and benefits derived from community engagement will also increase.

It's about creating dialogue with our customers and community, to work with, listen to and understand their needs, expectations and aspirations to help make better public decisions and achieve sustainable outcomes.

Our Mission

Westernport Water seeks to deepen a culture of community engagement, one where customer and community knowledge and wisdom helps to shape water and wastewater services for the future. We would like to be known for; being a valued member of the community; customer shaped priorities and planning for the future. Our current performance is detailed below under each outcome.



Performance and targets

Outcome	Current Performance	Target
Be a valued member of the community	Valued member of the community - 55% yes response (Annual regional Customer Satisfaction Survey)	Maintain current performance or deliver above the annual regional average
	Reputation in the community - 6.6/10 (ESC Customer Satisfaction Survey)	Maintain or deliver above the annual sector average for Reputation in the community
Customer shaped priorities and projects	Fast tracked Price Submission 2018-23 (Approved by the ESC)	Fast-tracked next Price Submission 2023-28
Planning for the future	35% of respondents believe we plan for the future, 60% don't know and 5% responded no (Annual regional average Customer Satisfaction Survey)	Planning for the future, target 40% yes response

Our Commitment

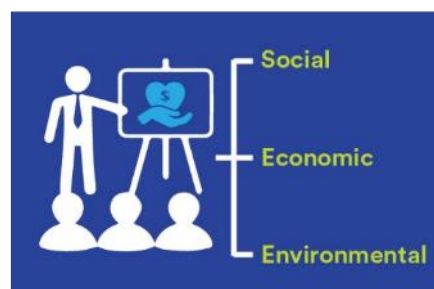
We are committed to meaningful engagement that:



Empowers customers and community to co-design Westernport Water's five year plan – by engaging early on price service trade-offs.



Maximises customer value from capital investments – by engaging on projects directly with the communities that are impacted.



Supports our community – by engaging on social, economic and environmental issues. (i.e. reconciliation, education, climate change, sustainability and water for recreation)

Our approach to community engagement

Westernport Water is a customer and community-focused water corporation and takes great pride in its long history of customer engagement. With a total customer-base of approximately 21,000, we are able to reach a large proportion of our customers through our engagement activities and regularly consult with members of the community we serve through face to face interactions and online activities.

Westernport Water has been undertaking annual customer satisfaction surveys over the past 15 years and maintained and supported a customer representative committee for the majority of this period.

Through the development of our Price Submission 1 (five year plan) for the period 2018-23, we engaged with customers through a variety of means including deliberative forums, workshops, information session and customer surveys to understand what is important. This information was then used to inform future services and prices.

Over the past three years we have worked closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and Traditional Custodians on a journey of reconciliation to understand, learn and contribute to a better future and create positive social change that supports the national reconciliation movement.

Lessons learned and data collected over the years has been used to inform and focus community engagement initiatives and encourage the local community to have a say in decisions that impact them.

Annual goals and objectives



Community and Stakeholder Engagement will be successful if the following outcomes are achieved:

- customers affected by a project or decision are engaged effectively about what and why
- increased acceptance of decisions resulting in reduced resistance
- project risks are identified early by uncovering different perspectives, ideas and concerns ensuring that responses can be incorporated into project planning customer concerns are proactively anticipated, heard and addressed by Westernport Water
- negative media coverage and publicity are effectively managed
- trust with community is maintained
- relationships are strengthened to better understand, manage and meet stakeholder expectations.

Community benefits

Community and Stakeholder Engagement will be successful if customers and communities can:

- learn about what is happening, and provide information to support understanding of issues
- better understand the need for our work and relevant issues,
- understand their role and level of influence in the engagement process
- have a voice and influence outcomes
- have a platform to share their thoughts, opinions, and ensure their concerns are proactively anticipated, heard and addressed by Westernport Water
- provide advice and recommendations through the engagement process.



Community engagement at the 2020 Clean-up Australia Day event held at Cowes.

Westernport Water's Community Stakeholders

In planning for community engagement at Westernport Water, we have a responsibility to ensure the community and stakeholders affected by, or who can influence our work, are identified and engaged with appropriately (depending on their needs and the objectives of our projects).

Through the Corporate Planning process, the team will annually review and identify the top community stakeholders thought to require targeted engagement. Effective community engagement has the power to increase Westernport Water's community profile and ensure the corporation manages the risk of failure to meet or manage community stakeholder needs and expectations or loss of community support (Risk 1685)(Risk 4057).



Stakeholder categories

This strategy defines community stakeholders using the following categories and definitions.

Category	Definition
Committees	Committees of management representing a community
Community	Non-user with an interest in the project
Community Group	Registered community group or non-profit organisations – e.g. schools, sports teams, clubs, community organisations, community groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
Consultant	External expert who provides advice
Contractor	External expert who delivers project tasks
Customers / Users	A person or organisation that uses Westernport Water's services
Education	School or education provider
Media	Traditional or new media publisher
NRM	Natural Resource Managers / Environment Stakeholders
Partner	Project partner in the delivery of projects or initiatives
Project team	Employee of the performing organisation delivering project tasks
Reference group	Member of an advisory group supporting the project
Regulator	Government or industry agency with legal authority over aspects of project
Sponsor	Person in the corporation the project manager is accountable to
Supplier	Supplier of project inputs not performing project tasks
Traditional Owner	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples that descend from the region and may or may not be customers of Westernport Water



Commemoration of Tunnerminerwait and Maulboyheener, engaging the community through the Bass Coast Reconciliation Network.

IAP2's levels of engagement

At Westernport Water, our projects are likely to interest or impact the community and stakeholders in some way. As the level of impact from or interest in our work increases, so should the level to which we engage those affected.

Community and stakeholder engagement comprises a range of engagement levels. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed an engagement spectrum which outlines five levels of increasing community and stakeholder engagement.

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any community engagement program. The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, and most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level.

To inform Westernport Water's strategy an analysis of community stakeholders was undertaken using a Community Engagement Stakeholder Analysis Tool which enabled us to identify the required level of engagement for identified stakeholders. Below is the levels of engagement and their definitions.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Our engagement focus

Drinking Water Awareness - 2020-21 and beyond

Develop and deliver an education plan to raise community awareness of the water treatment process and water quality results through targeted communications to improve water literacy and address public perceptions.

Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

Through our Innovate RAP we are committed to building resilient, liveable and healthy communities that recognise and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements. By focusing on creating opportunities and strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and stakeholders in our community we will further reconciliation and recognition. One project will be to work with Traditional Custodians to identify cultural values in Tennent Creek to inform Westernport Water on how to better manage the timing of environmental flows.

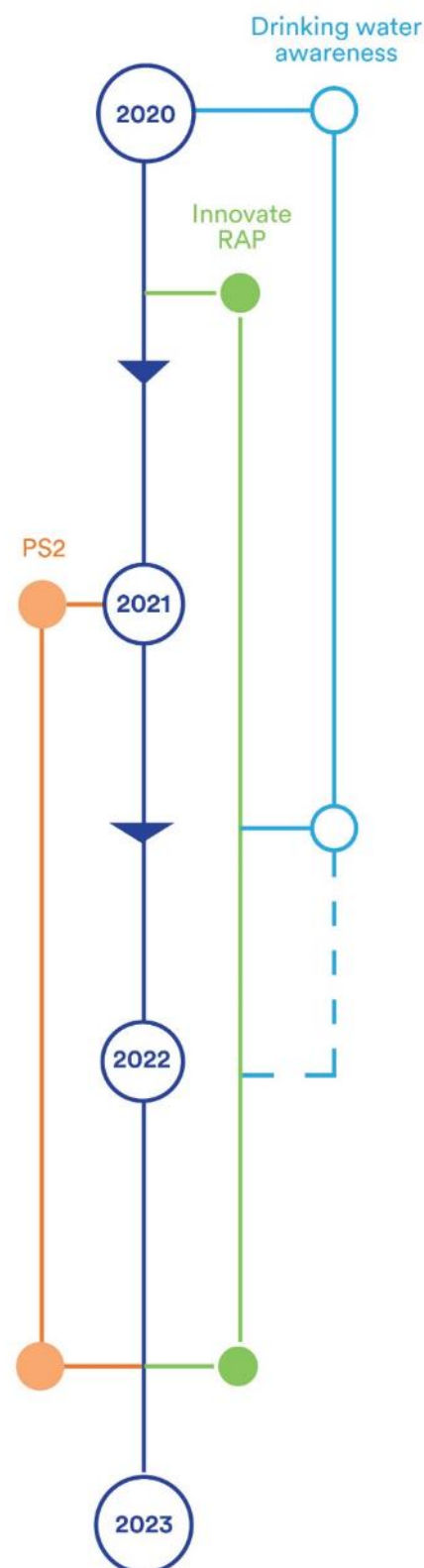
Price Submission 2

Engagement for Price Submission 2 will follow the IAP2 public participating spectrum to ensure customers are given a fair and reasonable opportunity to participate in the engagement process. The focus of engagement will be to provide customers information so that they can be empowered to shape decisions about water and wastewater services and consider price service trade-offs to customise the services for the future. Engagement and feedback is being collected all the time, however a focused effort will be made from 2021 to best inform the Price Submission for the period 2023-2028.

Capital projects and community awareness

Engagement is not limited to above, Westernport Water will continue to focus on informing and engaging with customers and community of the delivery of Corporate Plan initiatives, in particular:

- Climate change
- Capital projects
- Customer support and affordability
- Corporate Social Responsibility



Our Communications and Engagement Team

The Communications and Engagement Team (CET) sits within the Customer and Community Division. The CET supports the Corporation to deliver effective engagement while improving the capability of the broader organisation.

The Team provides the Corporation with different levels of service depending on a project's associated risks and level of impact.

The CET supports community engagement efforts and may:

- provide engagement support on major strategies and projects
- represent and advocate for the voice of the community and stakeholders
- facilitate discussions, present differing perspectives and influence the outcomes relating to Westernport Water projects
- build capacity, awareness and appreciation for the need to engage the community and stakeholders in our work which affects them
- assist coordinate the interface between Westernport Water and the impact our work has on our community and stakeholders
- protect Westernport Water's reputation through the early identification and proactive management of issues and risks
- show empathy for issues raised by the community and our stakeholders, and open mindedness in our approach to problem solving.

Constraints

We are the smallest water corporation in the state – our C&E Team is two people, equivalent to (1.8 FTE). Therefore we need to be smart in terms of how we deploy and use our resources to engage. Our strength is that we have a community presence, our subject matter experts live and work in the service area, and our voice is often from people with status in the community. We are a customer focused organisation and engagement occurs with the community at various levels from across the business.

Risks and potential issues

To understand and mitigate potential risks, a stakeholder analysis tool has been used to review, classify and assess stakeholder potential involvement in relation to the delivery of the Corporate Plan. Community engagement is then tracked and recorded for reporting purposes.

Key risk of failing to engage people affected by our work include:

- financial and reputational damage in the community
- inconsistent communications or misinformation leading to rumours in the community, potentially disappointing stakeholders
- alienating sections of the community through poorly informed and implemented decisions
- making decisions not reflective of stakeholder needs and values
- receiving little or no community support for projects resulting in delays and financial implications.

The tools and methods

The tools available to the Corporation largely dictate the effectiveness of community engagement.

We need to ensure that opportunities for engagement are accessible and support participation of the entire community, including permanent and non-permanent customers, youth, ageing population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with a disability and culturally or linguistically diverse communities.

To encourage participation, we need to address barriers that may prevent participation and consider engagement tools and techniques that encourage maximum participation, particularly with the impacts associated with our ability to engage through traditional face to face methods.

Our engagement tools

Westernport Water has been successful with past community engagement using a combination of tools and techniques to engage with our customers and communities.

Our current combination of tools is:

- website content, social media, bill inserts, Annual WaterMark (informing)
- annual customer telephone survey, Survey Monkey online surveys (consulting)
- public events e.g. pop up stalls and education trailer, (informing – consulting- involving)
- workshops through face-to-face engagement, Microsoft Teams: video conferencing (collaborating).

To enable the successful delivery of this strategy there are a number of online tools that would strengthen our approach and enable our employees, including:

- a dedicated online engagement platform to listen, inform, measure, build and leverage community engagement (allowing participants to learn, engage and give honest feedback when and where it's convenient for them)
- Google docs/Google sheets online engagement tools that allow synchronous editing (multiple people can work in and edit the same document at the same time).

We will build on existing community engagement by:

- working with industry and local stakeholders to learn from others' experiences
- joining forces with other water corporations to undertake customer surveys
- partnering with like-minded organisations
- attending community events and meetings
- representing on local community and stakeholder committees
- maximising the use of online engagement tools.

The engagement approach outlined in this strategy presents a number of short term challenges, including:

- reduced ability for incidental engagement (e.g. a pop-up stall at a market could attract people that may not otherwise seek out participation in related activities)
- technological barriers (e.g. appropriate and dedicated engagement software)
- reduced ability to humanise the conversation and connections through face-to-face contact
- resources and funds available to deliver on all identified projects requiring customer/community engagement.

Resourcing

This strategy assumes that each individual project considers a fit for purpose budget for the required level of resourcing to deliver community engagement activities and achieve the desired outcomes.

Measurement

Westernport Water will continue to measure the success of its engagement program and adapt its approach based on the findings of the Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey and ESC Customer Satisfaction Results.