



East Gippsland Water

Community Engagement Strategy & Action Plan

2020/21

Background

The Board is committed to maintaining effective connections with the community and other key stakeholders as a primary consideration in delivering exceptional water, wastewater and related services.

Engagement provides an opportunity for us to assess the needs, expectations, preferences and priorities of our customers (internal and external) and stakeholders and to build water literacy throughout the community.

Community engagement is also actively promoted by the Victorian Government in the decision making process of its agencies.

An effective community engagement strategy is therefore an essential contributor to business success.

We have statutory obligations under the Water Act 1989 and related instruments such as the Statement of Obligations, as well as economic, environmental and water quality legislative frameworks that mandate actively engaging with the community.

In developing strategies for future service provision we need to have a clear understanding of customer and community preferences, the external environment and changing policy framework.

This Community Engagement Strategy & Action Plan aims to develop and nurture collaborative relationships with key stakeholders and actively engage with customers. It enables us to build community literacy to encourage informed feedback and to better understand customer preferences and willingness to pay for the range of our services.

The aim is also to foster within our customers and stakeholders a greater understanding of East Gippsland Water's roles, responsibilities and commitments. This will help ensure that we operate effectively at all times, particularly during emergencies, with the support and cooperation of the broader community.

Glossary of terms/tools covered in this strategy

- **IAP2** - International Association for Public Participation – encompasses principles for community engagement and effective participation, which are actively promoted by the Victorian Government for use by government departments and agencies like us.
- **Media releases** – provide East Gippsland Water with 'free' third party credibility for achievements/actions.
- **On Tap** – an A4 news sheet or html link (for email billing customers) sent to all account holders with their water bill.
- **In the Flow** – a full page, monthly advertorial in the East Gippsland News, published in response to customer requests for more information (as highlighted in the East Gippsland Water annual customer satisfaction survey. The East Gippsland News circulates to the entire district as opposed to other media which circulates to selected towns.

- **What's Happening** – the Managing Directors blog. This blog is sent out via email to all staff and is used to publicise important news and staff announcements and other relevant details.
- **Keeping Connected** - an internal e-newsletter distributed to all staff fortnightly.
- **Stakeholder Map** – used to identify and engage with different classes and levels of stakeholders, including customers and non-customers.

Objectives of engagement

This strategy is designed to address our priority objectives for engagement, reflecting:

- our vision, mission and objectives
- key priorities identified for the Price Submission 2018-2023, also known as Our Business Plan 2018-2023
- Corporate Plan objectives
- key targets identified for public information and community engagement
- key priorities identified by staff during consultation
- Victorian Government priorities, commitments and public policies for the delivery of water and wastewater services
- key priorities identified in Water for Victoria
- requirements identified within the Minister for Water's Letter of Expectations.

The overall aim remains to further raise our positive profile and reputation, ensuring we meet our 'Mission' and 'Objectives' and achieve our 'Vision'.

Vision

Sustainability and resilience through leading and innovative water solutions.

Role

Providing quality water and wastewater services to sustain and enhance our community.

Objectives

- To deliver safe and sustainable water and wastewater services to our community
- To meet the expectations of our customers and stakeholders
- To enhance the liveability, development and resilience of our region
- To maximise the performance and potential of our people
- To innovate and achieve whole of business sustainability

In particular, the Community Engagement Strategy & Action Plan aims to:

- raise our profile and enhance our reputation as a responsible, responsive, cost-effective organisation providing quality and value-for-money water and wastewater services
- foster within our stakeholders a greater understanding of East Gippsland Water's roles, responsibilities and commitments and to educate on water management and the efficient use of water
- ensure our identity remains strong, clearly differentiated from East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and other water corporations, particularly the neighbouring Gippsland Water
- reinforce our position as a key community member that is a leader in the efficient use of water as a finite resource, sanitation and related environmental outcomes and engages with the broader community
- raise our profile as an environmental leader in the region through the implementation of the Native Vegetation and Habitat Creation Grants Program
- develop and nurture collaborative relationships with key stakeholders to facilitate efficient and effective business operations and the timely, cost effective provision of services
- provide advice to Government and, where appropriate, influence policy for the benefit of our community and the wider water industry policy frameworks
- employ appropriate engagement channels, ensuring a wide reach to the community and communications to stakeholders are consistent
- engage with the wider East Gippsland community to foster improved community outcomes that are indirectly beneficial to our customers
- raise awareness of our programs targeted at customers experiencing genuine financial difficulty, to assist them where possible
- keep our staff informed of key East Gippsland Water external/internal messages and developments during emergency/extraordinary situations (such as bushfires and the coronavirus (COVID-19 pandemic), as well as assisting the organisation with maintaining, advancing and monitoring their wellbeing.

Stakeholders

East Gippsland Water serves a diverse region geographically and demographically, with some 27,000 water customers and 22,800 wastewater customers within a service area spanning 21,000 square kilometres. It is notable that more 'sea-changers' and 'tree-changers' are taking up residence in the area and that East Gippsland's population is ageing.

We also operate within a complex external environment with a number of key local partners, such as the East Gippsland Shire Council and East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and more broadly, at State and Federal level, governments, agencies, industry and professional associations and other water corporations.

It is essential that we identify and engage at an appropriate level with all of these stakeholders.

Tools for engagement

IAP2 Plans

IAP2 seeks to help identify appropriate levels of involvement for stakeholder and community groups in a given decision, taking into account the nature of the decision and likely level of impact on them. As part of our community engagement strategy, we are committed to implementing IAP2 methodology to underpin our engagement processes.

The IAP2 framework provides tools and guidance to identify and gauge stakeholder interest and influence, tailor engagement strategies and select appropriate engagement methods. These could range from general media releases to face-to-face engagement and innovative “simulation games” and encompassing a range of survey methods and consensus building techniques.

Customer Committee

The Customer Committee has representation from different sections of the East Gippsland Water service region. The committee provides a primary engagement link between us and our customers, particularly in the development and renewal of strategies that collectively underpin future price submissions and corporate plans.

Membership is restricted to our customers and the charter (Policy 061) is reviewed by the Committee and subsequently the Board annually.

Non-residential engagement

Non-residential customer engagement by its nature needs to be tailored differently to residential customer engagement. In relation to the wider non-residential customer base, a number of broader engagement themes need to be employed, such as:

- engaging through industry associations as required; for example, working with the Food & Fibre Gippsland on opportunities to convert solid waste to energy
- actively engaging with the Gippsland Regional Water Alliance; namely, Gippsland Water, South Gippsland Water, Westernport Water, Southern Rural Water and other MOU partners including the East Gippsland Shire Council, East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC)
- engaging with individuals on specific issues.

Opportunistic engagement

From time to time exciting, one-off, community-focused, partnership projects arise that represent an invaluable, opportunistic means of engaging with the local community. We will continue to consider such opportunities on their merits and progress those with the best engagement potential.

Large scale communication

We recognise our responsibility to communicate key messages to all segments of the community, appreciating that customers are spread across a vast geographic area with a relatively high non-resident population.

Tools to utilise include:

- media releases, advertisements and articles published in local newspapers, on our website, linked to social media (see below) and broadcast on local TV and radio - often inviting public feedback
- public information messages on local and community radio
- SMS
- on-line engagement
- the 'On Tap' news sheet
- the 'In the Flow' advertorial in the East Gippsland News
- information brochures covering a wide range of topics
- facility tours and presentations with a focus on education
- community support through financial, merchandise and in-kind assistance to local organisations, community groups and events – this includes provision of the water trailer and Meet Pat (portable) units
- facilitation of the Native Vegetation and Habitat Creation Grants program
- installation of water refill fountains
- customer follow up calls.

Social Media

We are committed to implementing a range of social media initiatives and to evaluating the take up by stakeholders over time. We continue to:

- maintain a twitter presence – primarily for urgent/emergency messaging
- maintain a Facebook presence – for quirky, fun, general interest and emergency messaging
- maintain a LinkedIn company page
- utilise Instagram as appropriate
- regularly update our website and use this where appropriate to target stakeholders and to provide customers with easy to access information about the corporation and its services.

Each of these channels target different segments of the community and require tailored messages.

Resources

Current resources to implement the strategy and action plan amount to one full time and one part time member of staff, comprising:

- a Communications & Community Engagement Manager – full time
- a Community Engagement Officer – part time (covering for the Community Engagement Coordinator, who will be on parental leave until early 2020/21)

These resources are also supplemented through collaborative initiatives with other local agencies and their engagement teams.

Measures of performance

The main indicators of how well the strategy and action plan perform include:

- quarterly updates in a Stakeholder Map by Executive Managers', which tracks our interaction with key external stakeholders
- additional stakeholder feedback, such as from community events, customer follow-up calls and engagement activities
- the results of our annual customer satisfaction and other surveys
- identified trends in relation to customer contact with the corporation, including billing and service enquiries and complaints (as identified by customer follow-up calls)
- the quality and quantity of media coverage
- the popularity of social media tools (indicated through likes, follows, shares, followers etc)
- the effectiveness and feedback of the Customer Committee (reported to the Board quarterly).

Review

This strategy will be reviewed annually.

Progress against the action plan will be reported to the Board every six months.

Community Engagement Action Plan 2020/21

Tool	Comments	2020/21 Action	Outcome	Deadline
Price Submission engagement	Community/stakeholder engagement will form a key component of the Price Submission process	Implement extensive community engagement based around IAP2 principles to capture and shape the 2023-28 Price Submission – engaging externally and internally, utilising a variety of methods as appropriate.	The first stage of community engagement (the exploration phase) was commenced and completed. 241 questionnaires were completed, seven focus group sessions held and major stakeholders interviewed face-to-face. (Vegco, Patties, EGSC, LEAHA, GLCH, Gudges Plumbing, Friths etc. Total of 12 majors)	Final to ESC Sep 2022
Media releases	Careful timing and placement of releases has helped to maximise appropriate broadcast/print media coverage.	Aim for at least two media releases/month. Focus on increasing customer awareness of water and wastewater services, liveability, environmental sustainability, the financial hardship program, maintenance of services during extraordinary events (such as bushfires and COVID) and publicity surrounding the Price Submission.	Total of 19 media releases issued during the reporting period. (in part due to directions from DELWP to limit non-essential media releases during COVID-19 pandemic. Greater use also being made of social media). Jul – Dec 2020 – 7 Jan – Jun 2021 – 12 Topics covered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual customer satisfaction survey • National Water Week • Environmental grants • Mallacoota bushfire recovery works • Reopening of office front counter • Removal of Kalimna water tower • Price Submission engagement • Keeping water bills down. 	Jun 2021
News sheets/ Advertorials	<i>On Tap</i> news sheet.	Aim for four issues/year.	Four issues produced – Jul, Oct, Jan and Apr. Focus on EGW deferring water tariffs to assist customers financially, reminding customers not to rely on their mains water supply in a bushfire and publicising Price Submission engagement.	Jun 2021

Tool	Comments	2020/21 Action	Progress	Deadline
News sheets/ Advertorials (cont)	<i>In the Flow</i> advertorial. (both <i>On Tap</i> and <i>In the Flow</i> are particularly useful for publicising Target Your Water use water efficiency measures and Water for Victoria, as well as for providing updates in relation to EGW and extraordinary events such as COVID and bushfires).	Aim for 12 advertorials/year.	<i>In the Flow</i> published monthly in the Bairnsdale Advertiser.	Jun 2021
Keeping Connected e-newsletter	To assist with maintaining/boosting staff wellbeing, and to communicate key EGW messages	Aim to issue at least monthly, and fortnightly where appropriate	Issued fortnightly to staff, including a video message from the MD & Exec where appropriate.	Jun 2021
Mail outs /Email	Mail outs and emails are used to inform customers of issues, upcoming project work and community engagement opportunities including the National Water Week poster competition and other initiatives as appropriate.	Continue to use as appropriate.	Mail outs ongoing to inform customers of infrastructure projects impacting them. Email used to publicise Native Vegetation and Habitat Creation Grants to school and neighbourhood/community houses. Also used to publicise the National Water Week poster competition to schools.	Ongoing
Brochures / information sheets	There is a brochure range covering various customer services, environmental and corporate infrastructure topics. These also assist with tours/presentations.	Continue to review/update the material as appropriate.	Work in progress to update leaflets on behalf of Customer Service	Ongoing
Tool	Comments	2020/21 Action	Progress	Deadline

Scorecards	Public scorecards are a requirement of the Price Submission and will be published annually.	Develop and publish an annual scorecard which shows our performance against all measures and targets outlined in section 4 of the Price Submission and as per ESC requirements	EGW Performance Scorecard for 2019/20 produced and published on the EGW <i>In the Flow</i> page in Sep 2020, in the Spring/Summer <i>On Tap</i> newsletter and on the EGW website	Oct/Nov 2020
		Publically report the value of the average annual residential customer bill.	Reported in the EGW Performance Scorecard and in the EGW 2019/20 Annual Report. 2020/21 annual increase in water tariffs deferred by six months from July 2020 to January 2021 - Regularly publicised through <i>In the Flow</i> page and <i>On Tap</i> newsletter that will be an inflation-only increase.	Oct/Nov 2020
		Native Vegetation and Habitat Creations Grants - Report on funds spent per year and any unspent funds being safe guarded - \$90,000 per year.	Reported in the EGW Performance Scorecard for 2019/20.	Oct/Nov 2020
		Outdoor community run not-for-profit recreation groups – Report on the total number and aggregate value of bill rebates per annum provided to not-for-profit recreation groups.	Reported in the EGW Performance Scorecard for 2019/20.	Oct/Nov 2020
Website and social media	The current East Gippsland Water website was revamped in 2015/16 and continues to grow as a source of information for the local community and as a recruitment tool. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram are being increasingly utilised to promote East Gippsland Water and our services.	Maintain, regularly monitor and update as appropriate.	Website regularly updated	Ongoing
		Regularly monitor and update as appropriate. Aim to increase the number of page likes.	Facebook: 30/6/20 - 920 Likes, 942 Followers 1/1/21 - 988 Likes, 1,008 Followers 30/6/21 - 1,256 Likes, 1,302 Followers	Ongoing
Tool	Comments	2020/21 Action	Progress	Deadline

IAP2 Framework	We are committed to implementing IAP2 methodology to underpin our engagement processes.	Ensure implementation of IAP2 engagement processes as part of project management plans.	Ongoing and has been integral to community engagement for the 2023-28 Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy during 2020/21.	Ongoing
Internal communications	<i>What's Happening – MD's Blog</i>	Ongoing publication of <i>What's Happening</i> only as required – as an alternative to utilising the <i>Keeping Connected</i> e-newsletter This is prepared in conjunction with the Executive Manager Organisational Development and HR.	<i>Keeping Connected</i> e-news utilised to communicate with staff fortnightly. <i>What's Happening</i> no longer utilised. The e-news often includes an MD's & Exec video message. MD also emails staff with important announcements as appropriate.	Ongoing
Annual customer satisfaction survey	<i>Used to gauge how well the corporation is performing with services/engagement and assists planning for the future.</i>	Undertake a comparative annual survey as part of the Gippsland Regional Water Alliance to help gauge levels of customer satisfaction.	Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey conducted September/October 2020. 400 EGW customers surveyed. Results reported to February 2021 Board meeting.	By end 2020
Customer follow up calls	<i>Used to gauge how well the corporation is performing in addressing water and wastewater incidents reported by customers.</i>	Undertake follow up calls with at least 10% of customers who have contacted us each month, to determine if they are satisfied or not with the service we are providing.	Completed for February and August Board meetings	Ongoing Update to Board Feb and Aug annually
Community Support (general)	Financial, merchandise and in-kind support is provided to a number of local organisations, community groups and schools.	Provide support to a variety of local organisations, community groups and schools. Note – Requests are considered against strict criteria.	Financial sponsorship included to support: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mallacoota Soccer Tournament • RACV Energy Breakthrough team from Bairnsdale Secondary College • Wonthaggi Human Powered Vehicle Teams from Nagle College • East Gippsland Water Dragons 	Ongoing
Tool	Comments	2020/21 Action	Progress	Deadline

Tours / presentations	These are organised at the request of customers, including community groups and schools. They enable us to highlight our achievements and initiatives, whilst also increasing community awareness of the corporation's challenges and responsibilities.	Aim for at least 20 tours/presentations per year (dependent on the ongoing situation with COVID) and explore the potential of going online as an alternative	Two tours (for Nagle College and the Customer Committee) and one presentation (for Wild Cherry School, Bairnsdale) conducted due to COVID limitations. Water education resources provided to schools on request to assist with classroom teaching. Situation under regular review.	Jun 2021
Events / Openings	Community events including field days, markets, careers fairs and National Water Week.	Aim to attend 4 events per year (one per quarter and spread across the region) to educate the community about relevant programs and opportunities (dependent on the ongoing situation with COVID).	Visited Cann River P-12 College to present National Water Week poster prize. No further prize presentations due to COVID. Engaged with the community at the East Gippsland Field Days and at markets in Bairnsdale (Howitt Park), Orbost, Lakes Entrance, Metung, Paynesville and Nowa Nowa, as part of preparations for our 2023-2028 Prize Submission.	Jun 2021
	Potential Opportunities for Minister / Local MPs / Government Reps to attend.	Seek out opportunistic initiatives such as open days, where appropriate, and official openings of new infrastructure (dependent on the ongoing situation with COVID).	Progress restricted due to COVID. Situation under regular review.	Jun 2021
Hardship Program	Development of an education and awareness program to support vulnerable customers.	Implement the Hardship IAP2 plan (DOC/18/37059) which includes attendance at events, advertisement of programs available, website updates, information sessions for key stakeholders, updated leaflets.	Financial hardship assistance regularly promoted in the <i>On Tap</i> newsletter to all account holders and via the monthly <i>In the Flow</i> page. Also promoted on Facebook.	Ongoing
Tool	Comments	2020/21 Action	Progress	Deadline
Joint Programs	Where possible implement collaborative messaging	Implement programs such as Stop it, Don't Block it, and Choose Tap	Worked with the Gippsland Regional Water Alliance on the Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey.	Ongoing

	<p>including through the Gippsland Regional Water Alliance.</p> <p>East Gippsland Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021.</p> <p>Relevant action is section 4 – Community has greater access to water in public places.</p>	<p>on a regional or state wide basis.</p> <p>Participation in the Healthy Eating and Active Living partnership – facilitated by the East Gippsland Primary Care Partnership.</p> <p>EGW to provide input into a Prevention Report for East Gippsland (co-ordinated by East Gippsland Primary Care Partnership) in relation to fountain locations in East Gippsland.</p>	<p>EGW is also a member of the statewide Choose Tap coalition, involving a number of Victorian water corporations. This has an ongoing program to promote tap water as the healthy choice.</p> <p>Continuing to work with Primary Care Partnership on a strategy and action plan.</p> <p>Completed.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Aug 2020</p>
Customer Committee	<p>The committee provides the primary engagement link between us and customers, particularly in the development and renewal of strategies that will form the building blocks of future corporate plans and price submissions.</p>	<p>Actively involve the committee in discussions / decisions including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preferences in relation to liveable communities, recreation and integrated water management • Native Vegetation and Habitat Creation Grants. 	<p>The committee continued to play an instrumental role in the corporation's community engagement process, specifically in relation to: the Native Vegetation and Habitat Creation Grants Program; monitoring the Guaranteed Service Levels and associated reporting requirements; and, seeking and assessing customer views and expectations in preparation for the Price Submission.</p> <p>It is also being engaged in a series of forums to help determine the direction of the corporation's Urban Water Strategy.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
Tool	Comments	2020/21 Action	Progress	Deadline

Annual Report	A useful tool for stakeholders, particularly Government and opinion leaders, it is also a regulatory requirement.	Ensure Annual Report meets all regulatory compliance requirements including Ministerial Reporting Directions.	Completed	Nov/Dec 2020
		Sign-off and tabling of the 2019/20 report in Parliament.	Completed	Nov/Dec 2020
		Start preparations for the 2020/21 Annual Report to meet regulatory requirements. This will be completed and tabled in parliament in the first half of 2020/21.	Commenced and draft completed (Aug 2021)	May 2021
Stakeholder Map	<i>The focus of the stakeholder map is on customers and non-customers and East Gippsland Water's interaction with them.</i>	Managers carry out monthly updates ensuring appropriate targeted engagement is undertaken.	Ongoing	Ongoing
		Regarding: Chair/MD engagement with key stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to maintain connections with government • Continue fostering relationships with MoU partners • Meetings with large customers/stakeholders • Meetings with local Aboriginal Groups 	Ongoing	Ongoing
Community Support (Fountains)	3 drinking water fountains are installed/yr to expand our regional network of drinking fountains – to meet community need.	Aim to install 3 fountains across the region as per community requests in partnership with East Gippsland Shire Council.	3 fountains installed – at Nowa Nowa, Orbost and Mallacoota	June 2021.
Tool	Comments	2020/21 Action	Progress	Deadline
Community	The Native Vegetation and	Implement the Native Vegetation	Round 5 and 6 of grants concluded.	Ongoing

Support (Grants)	Habitat Creation Grants Program is open to all educational and community groups across the region.	and Habitat Creation Grants program. Customer Committee and Community Engagement Team to review applications received. Report to public at least annually on the progress of projects.	Applications have been assessed and suitable applications approved. Reported on EGW website, including as part of the EGW Performance Scorecard for 2019/20.	Ongoing Oct/Nov 2020
Community Support (Other)	The water trailer and Meet Pat portable water refill stations create a highly visible and positive image for the corporation at community events across the region.	Aim for at least 30 community bookings per year which help to promote Choose Tap messaging (dependent on the ongoing situation with COVID)	Any bookings postponed/cancelled due to the impact of COVID. Situation under regular review.	Jun 2021
Climate change	Actively work towards emissions reduction targets. Updates are to be reported to the community on a six monthly basis.	Two report cards are to be produced yearly. The first card will focus on projects undertaken within the year while the second will also include a graph tracking our progress against the emissions target. Report card templates – DOC/18/19652 If the report is not published on a six monthly basis a written public apology must be produced.	Yearly report published December 2020 as part of EGW's <i>In the Flow</i> page. Also included on the EGW website and as part of EGW's 2019/20 Annual Report, tabled in Parliament. Mid-year report published April via <i>In the Flow</i> page and website. Yearly report published as soon as possible after tabling of annual report in November 2020 (later than usual). Public apology not required as this was beyond EGW's control.	Reports roughly – March and October (after tabling of Annual report)