

East Gippsland Water

Community Engagement
Strategy
&
Action Plan
2021/22

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.

- Keeping Connected an internal e-newsletter distributed to all staff fortnightly, including important messages from the MD and Executive Management Team as appropriate
- 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
- our commitment to engagement to determine customer/community/EGW priorities for the Price Submission 2023-2028
- 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 for 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 more than 27,250 water customers and 23,100 wastewater customers within a service area spanning 21,000 square kilometres. It is notable that more 'seachangers' 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 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, and for community engagement such as customer/wider community input for the Price Submission and other EGW strategies
- maintain a LinkedIn company page
- utilise Instagram as appropriate
- regularly update our website and use this where appropriate to target stakeholders, to provide customers with easy to access information about the corporation and its services and to facilitate community feedback – as a platform for surveys for example.

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 full time

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 followup calls)
- the quality and quantity of media coverage
- the popularity of social media tools (indicated through likes, followers, shares, 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 2021/22

Tool	Comments	2021/22 Action	Outcome	Deadline
Price Submission engagement	Community/stakehold er engagement will form a key component of the Price Submission process	Implement extensive community engagement based around IAP2 principles to capture and shape the 2023-2028 Price Submission – engaging externally and internally, utilising a variety of methods as appropriate.	Extensive engagement carried out over the financial year, involving more than 800 people and EGW's Customer Committee. Engagement methods included questionnaires (hard copy and online), community events, focus groups, face to face with stakeholders, a deliberative forum and Customer Committee workshops. Preparations made for final, closing the loop engagement to be conducted in Aug 2022.	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 26 media releases issued during the reporting period. Jul to Dec 2021 – 13 Jan to Jun 2022 – 13 Topics included: Treated wastewater discharges Annual customer satisfaction survey Price Submission engagement Removal of Kalimna water tower Environmental grants Zero net greenhouse gas emissions target brought forward Water and sewer main works.	Jun 2022

Tool	Comments	2021/22 Action	Outcome	Deadline
News sheets/ Advertorials	On Tap news sheet.	Aim for four issues/year.	Four issues produced – Jul, Oct, Jan and Apr. Focus on publicising opportunities for Price Submission engagement, reminding customers not to rely on their mains water supply in a bushfire, the provision of assistance for customers in financial hardship and water situation updates.	Jun 2022
	In the Flow advertorial. (both 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.	In the Flow published monthly in the Bairnsdale Advertiser, Lakes Post and Snowy River Mail. Particular focus given to the Price Submission and progress with community engagement, and clarifying the necessity for controlled, treated wastewater discharges due to excessive rainfall.	Jun 2022
Keeping Connected e-newsletter	To assist with maintaining/boosting staff wellbeing, and to communicate key EGW messages.	Aim to issue fortnightly and more regularly where appropriate	Issued fortnightly to staff, including a video message from the MD & Exec where appropriate.	Ongoing

Tool	Comments	2021/22 Action	Outcome	Deadline
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, the Native Vegetation & Habitat Creation Grants, 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 schools and neighbourhood/community houses. Also used to publicise the National Water Week poster competition to schools. An email sent to more than 7,000 customers/stakeholders, inviting them to register for the Price Submission deliberative forum.	Ongoing
Brochures / information sheets	There is a brochure/information sheet range covering various customer services, environmental and corporate infrastructure topics. These also assist with tours/presentations.	Continue to review/update the material as appropriate. DOC/18/4786 – table of the documents for updates as required.	Work has been ongoing to update information sheets as appropriate.	Ongoing
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 2020/21 produced and published on the EGW <i>In the Flow</i> page in Aug 2021 and on the EGW website	Oct/Nov 2021
		Publicly report the value of the average annual residential customer bill.	Reported in the EGW Performance Scorecard and in EGW 2020/21 Annual Report.	Oct/Nov 2021

Tool	Comments	2021/22 Action	Outcome	Deadline
		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 2020/21 and EGW 2020/21 Annual Report.	Oct/Nov 2021
		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 2020/21 and EGW 2020/21 Annual Report.	Oct/Nov 2021
Website and social media	The current East Gippsland Water website had its last major revamp in 2015/16 and continues to develop as a major information source for the local community and as a recruitment tool.	Maintain, regularly monitor and update as appropriate. Also commence investigations to upgrade to a new website as soon as practical.	Website regularly updated. Progress being made with investigations to upgrade to a new website as a priority.	Ongoing
	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram are being increasingly utilised to promote East Gippsland Water and our services.	Regularly monitor and update as appropriate. Aim to increase Facebook engagement by 25%.	Facebook: 30/6/22 - 1,373 Likes 1,680 Followers 1/1/22 - 1,317 Likes 1,370 Followers 30/6/21 - 1,256 Likes 1,302 Followers	Jun 2022

Tool	Comments	2021/22 Action	Outcome	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.	Ongoing
Annual customer satisfaction survey	Used to gauge how well the corporation is performing with services/engagement and assists planning for the future.	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/November 2021. 400 EGW customers surveyed. Results reported to February 2022 Board meeting (the next available meeting).	By end 2021
Customer follow up calls	Used to gauge how well the corporation is performing in addressing water and wastewater incidents reported by customers.	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 and reported to 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. Ref 2018 tracking sheet DOC/18/4757.	Financial support included to: - East Gippsland Water Dragons Swimming Club - East Gippsland Business Awards - Arthur Grassby Kokoda Scholarship In kind/merchandise support included: - Installation of 3 drinking fountains jointly with East Gippsland Shire Council and community groups - Assistance to East Gippsland Rail Trail with fountain installations - Provision of EGW branded merchandise to various community groups/events.	Ongoing

Tool	Comments	2021/22 Action	Outcome	Deadline
Tours / presentations	These are organised at the request of customers, including community groups and schools. They enable us to highlight our achievements and	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	Number of tours/presentations limited by COVID/physical distancing requirements. In spite of this 1 tour was conducted of Bairnsdale Wastewater Treatment Plant (a further 2 were cancelled due to COVID). 23 presentations were conducted in kindergartens and schools.	Jun 2022
	initiatives, whilst also increasing community awareness of the corporation's challenges and responsibilities.		In addition, water education resources provided to schools on request to assist with classroom teaching. Situation under regular review.	
Events / Openings	Community events including field days, markets, careers fairs and National Water Week.	Aim to attend at least 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).	EGW attended 2 Howitt Park markets in Bairnsdale, a market and a bushfire awareness event in Mallacoota, a careers event, the Orbost Agricultural Show and the East Gippsland Field Days.	Jun 2022
	Potential Opportunities for Minister / Local MPs / Government Reps to attend.	Seek out opportunistic initiatives such as open days, where appropriate, and the official openings of new infrastructure (dependent on the ongoing situation with COVID).	May 2022 - EGW hosted a visit by Ms Harriet Shing MP, Parl Sec for Water (now Minister for Water) for the official opening of a new water storage at Wy Yung and a fact-finding tour of the Woodglen water treatment facility. June – Paynesville wastewater treatment facility open day.	Jun 2022
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	2021/22 Action	Outcome	Deadline
Joint Programs	Where possible implement collaborative messaging including through the Gippsland Regional Water Alliance.	Implement programs such as Stop it, Don't Block it, and Choose Tap on a regional or state-wide basis.	Worked with the Gippsland Regional Water Alliance on the Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey.	Ongoing
	To promote healthy eating/drinking in the workplace	Participation in the Healthy Eating and Active Living partnership – facilitated by the East Gippsland Primary Care Partnership.	EGW is involved with the Healthy Eating and Active Living Partnership's 'Eat to Play' online campaign – aimed at East Gippsland's 15-17 year olds engaged in sport. This is progressing towards a launch by the end of 2022.	Ongoing
	Giving the community greater access to water in public places – in relation to drinking fountain locations in East Gippsland	EGW to provide input into a Prevention Report for East Gippsland (co-ordinated by East Gippsland Primary Care Partnership)	Working jointly with East Gippsland Shire Council and community groups 3 new drinking water fountains were installed – in Eastwood, Bairnsdale and Sarsfield. EGW also assisted the East Gippsland Rail Trail with drinking fountain installations.	Aug 2022
	Participate in the development of a new municipal health and wellbeing plan for 2021-25	Participation in the East Gippsland Health and Wellbeing Partnership – facilitated by East Gippsland Shire Council	Participated in an East Gippsland Shire Council-led engagement event to help finalise the plan.	Oct 2021
Customer Committee	The committee provides the primary engagement link between us and customers, particularly in the development and	Actively involve the committee in discussions / decisions including: • preferences in relation to liveable communities, recreation and integrated water management. • Native Vegetation and Habitat Creation Grants.	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; helping to determine the engagement process for the 2023-	Ongoing

Tool	Comments	2021/22 Action	Outcome	Deadline
	renewal of strategies that will form the building blocks of future corporate plans and price submissions.	 Development of Price Submission 2023-2028 Development of Urban Water Strategy 2022 	2028 Price Submission; and, assessing customer feedback from the Price Submission engagement to decide suitable GSLs. It was also engaged in a forum to help determine the direction of the corporation's Urban Water Strategy.	
Annual Report	A useful tool for stakeholders, particularly Government and opinion leaders, it is	Ensure Annual Report meets all regulatory compliance requirements including Ministerial Reporting Directions.	Completed.	Sep 2021
	also a regulatory requirement.	Sign-off and tabling of the 2020/21 report in Parliament.	Completed.	Oct 2021
		Start preparations for the 2021/22 Annual Report to meet regulatory requirements. This will be completed and tabled in parliament in the first half of 2022/23.	Preparations to commence Mar/Apr 2022.	May 2022
Stakeholder Map	The focus of the stakeholder map is on customers and non-	Managers carry out monthly updates ensuring appropriate targeted engagement is undertaken.	Ongoing	Ongoing Ongoing
	customers and East Gippsland Water's interaction with them.	Regarding: Chair/MD engagement with key stakeholders: Continue to maintain connections with government Continue fostering relationships with MoU partners Meetings with large customers/stakeholders Meetings with local Aboriginal Groups	Ongoing. NB/ A comprehensive review of the stakeholder map has been undertaken by EGW's Principal Facilitator Regional Partnerships to improve the rigour of the process - taking into account engagement requirements for the Price Submission.	

Tool	Comments	2021/22 Action	Outcome	Deadline
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.	Working jointly with East Gippsland Shire Council and community groups 3 new drinking water fountains were installed – in Eastwood, Bairnsdale and Sarsfield. EGW also assisted the East Gippsland Rail Trail with drinking fountain installations.	June 2022
Community Support (Grants)	The Native Vegetation and Habitat Creation	Implement the Native Vegetation and Habitat Creation Grants program.	Round 7 and 8 of grants concluded.	Ongoing
	Grants Program is open to all educational and	Customer Committee and Community Engagement Team to review applications received	Applications assessed and suitable applications approved for Round 7. No suitable applications received for Round 8.	Ongoing
	community groups across the region.	Report to public at least annually on the progress of projects	Reported on EGW website, including as part of the EGW Performance Scorecard for 2020/21.	Oct/Nov 2021
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)	No bookings accepted due to the impact of COVID. Situation under regular review.	Jun 2022
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 sixmonthly basis a written public apology must be produced.	Yearly report published as part of EGW Performance Scorecard for 2020/21 in Aug <i>In the Flow</i> page and again in more depth in the Nov <i>In the Flow</i> page. Also included on the website and <i>On Tap</i> newsletter and as part of EGW's 2020/21 Annual Report, tabled in Parliament. Half-yearly report published in the April 2022 <i>In the Flow</i> page and on the EGW website.	Reports roughly – April and October (after tabling of Annual report)