

# Victorian Water Industry **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion**

Annual Performance Report  
February 2021



**VicWater**  
BETTER TOGETHER

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	3
<b>Introduction</b>	6
Water Industry Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023	6
‘Better Together’ – collective Diversity & Inclusion initiatives	6
WaterAble Network	6
Pride in Water Network	7
Women in Water Directors Network	8
Impact of COVID-19	8
<b>Content of this report</b>	9
<b>1 Gender</b>	10
Case Study – Women in Trade	11
<b>2 Disability</b>	13
Case Study – WaterAble Connections and Reflections	14
<b>3 Language other than English</b>	16
Case Study – A Focus on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity at Melbourne Water	17
<b>4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</b>	19
Case Study – Enhancing Aboriginal Employment Outcomes	20
Case Study – Passion for People, Culture and Country	22
<b>5 Carers</b>	24
Case Study – Empowering our New Parents	25
<b>6 LGBTIQ+</b>	27
Case Study – Melbourne Water’s Journey to Becoming a more LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Organisation	28
<b>7 Flexible work</b>	30
Case Study – Future Ways of Flexible Working at Yarra Valley Water	32
<b>Conclusion</b>	34

## Executive Summary

The Water Industry Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023 (the Strategy) was developed during 2018-19 to demonstrate the industry's commitment to build a diverse workforce and inclusive culture across the Victorian water sector.

This report has been prepared by the Water Industry Diversity & Inclusion Steering Committee, comprising representatives of all 19 water corporations and supported by VicWater. It provides an update since the previous report (February 2020) on the Victorian water sector's performance and progress against the collective target areas outlined in the Strategy.

For each of the target areas we have included the industry range (high and low figures) and the industry average figure across all participating water corporations.



**26.3%** of Managing Directors are female  
(5 out of 19 Managing Directors)

□ 2020 result 26.3% 5 out of 19 including one acting MD

INDUSTRY AVERAGE

**46.4%**  
of Tier 1 managers\*  
are female

**37.4%**  
of Tier 2 managers\*  
are female

**Collective Target: Gender balance (50:50) in senior leadership positions**



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

**4.8%**  
(18 out of 19 water corporations)

**of our workforce identify as a person with disability**

**Target: 10% of our workforce identify as a person with disability**



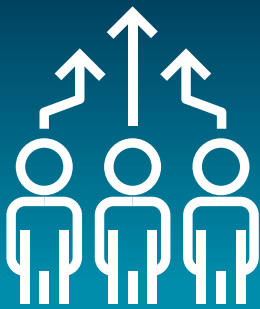
INDUSTRY AVERAGE

**12.1%**  
(18 out of 19 water corporations)

**of our workforce speak a language other than English**

**Target: 20% of our workforce speak a language other than English**

\* In general, Tier 1 managers report to Managing Director, Tier 2 managers are the next level below.



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

1.6%

of our workforce identify as  
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait  
Islander

Target: 3% of our workforce identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

45.4%

(16 out of 19  
water corporations)

of our workforce identify  
as having flexible working  
arrangements to include  
caring responsibilities  
for children, elderly  
family, or a person with  
disability

Target: 35% of our workforce identify as  
having flexible working arrangements  
to include caring responsibilities for  
children, elderly family, or a person  
with disability



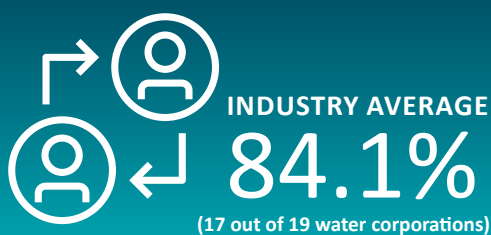
INDUSTRY AVERAGE

3%

(15 out of 19 water  
corporations)

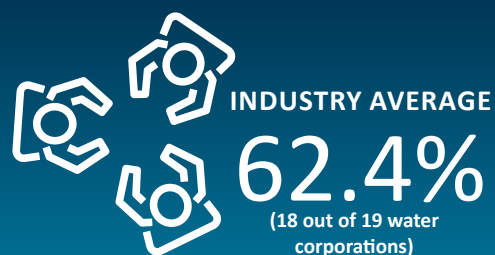
of our workforce identify  
as belonging to the  
LGBTIQ+  
(Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,  
Transgender and Intersex)  
communities

Target: 7% of our workforce identify  
as belonging to the LGBTIQ+  
(Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender  
and Intersex) communities



**of employees have flexible work arrangements unless there is a specific operational constraint**

**Target: Flexible work arrangements are available to all employees unless there is a specific operational constraint**



**of employees work flexibly (through informal and formal working arrangements)**

**Target: 35% of employees work flexibly (through informal and formal working arrangements)**

To provide context to the statistics and tell a more complete story about diversity and inclusion across the sector, we have also included one or more case studies for each of the target areas which highlight the positive outcomes that are being achieved for individual employees and workplace culture within the industry.

This second year of reporting (2021) enables comparison against the benchmark data set from the previous year (2020) and shows that the sector has made strong progress in the target areas of gender balance and flexible work.

The increased uptake in flexible work can be almost entirely attributed to the global pandemic, but building on and accelerating what was already a positive trend in the industry.

On the other hand, the evidence would suggest that the improvements in gender balance are the fruition of intentional actions to address practical and cultural barriers to female participation in the water sector. There is good reason to believe that these efforts will start to trickle through to lower levels and help to build a pipeline of women in the industry who are ready to move into leadership positions.

While the results in gender and flexible work over the past 12 months are very encouraging, we have yet to see this being replicated in the other target areas of the Strategy – disability, language other than English, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, carers and LGBTIQ+. Looking to the next 12 months, creating and maximising opportunities to make progress in these areas will be a key focus for the industry.

## Introduction

### Water Industry Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023

The Water Industry Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023 (the Strategy) was developed during 2018-19 to demonstrate the industry's commitment to build a diverse workforce and inclusive culture across the Victorian water sector.

We know that organisations which reflect the diversity of the communities they serve are better placed to build trust and gain greater insights into their customers' needs. We also know that creating an inclusive work culture will enable us to attract and retain the talent that our industry needs to keep innovating and improving our performance.

All 19 Victorian water corporations have committed to the industry Strategy, in addition to developing and implementing their own strategies to increase diversity and inclusion within their organisations.

### 'Better Together' – collective Diversity & Inclusion initiatives

Through VicWater, all 19 water corporations are able to participate in collaborative initiatives that help to promote and drive diversity and inclusion across the sector – knowing that we are 'better together'.

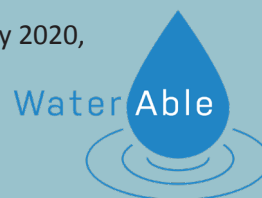
### WaterAble Network

2020 saw the launch of the WaterAble network for people with a disability and their allies in the Victorian water industry. WaterAble encourages people in the industry to consider the full range of disabilities in our community, to ensure that water corporations cater to all their employees and customers. For example: people with physical disabilities; people with low hearing or low vision; people with long-term illness, including mental illness; people with brain injuries or people who are autistic.

The purpose of WaterAble is to:

- bring people with disability in the Victorian water industry together
- improve inclusion and access for employees and customers with disability
- advocate for members
- share good ideas and practices across the industry to support the employment of people with disability
- promote disability pride
- raise awareness about the rights of people with disability
- support people with disability to progress their careers.

More than 80 people attended WaterAble's online launch event on 28 July 2020, which was sponsored by Western Water, City West Water and VicWater and supported by all 19 Victorian water corporations.







## Pride in Water Network

The Pride in Water (PIW) network was formed during 2019 to connect LGBTIQ+ employees and allies in the Victorian water industry. Since its inception, PIW has grown quickly to include members from across Australia and New Zealand.

PIW aims to create a better practice model for LGBTIQ+ inclusion by:

- building a strong culture of respect, inclusion and connection for LGBTIQ+ people both within workplaces and the broader community
- raising awareness of LGBTIQ+ issues through education to promote inclusion
- sharing resources and experiences between organisations for LGBTIQ+ inclusion through training, communications and events
- helping the industry to become a leader in valuing diverse thought.

During 2020 PIW hosted two online events, for IDAHOBIT in May and Wear it Purple Day in August, and organised a series of virtual coffee catch ups and an end of year online trivia quiz. PIW also produced a number of digital resources and established working groups for key focus areas around policy, events and regional connections.



## Women in Water Directors Network

The Women in Water Directors Network (WWDN) was established in 2018 to create a positive and enabling environment so women directors can thrive and be successful in the Victorian water industry. It aims to provide a place and space for women directors of water corporations to network, collaborate, mentor and support each other to ensure the Victorian water industry can achieve a truly diverse and equitable water sector.

In 2020 the WWDN:

- extended its reach to female directors in catchment management authorities in addition to water corporations
- expanded its purpose to include influencing water organisations to improve gender diversity at all levels
- launched an Allies program for male directors who are willing to stand up, positively influence and constructively challenge for gender equity and equality in all levels of our water corporations
- hosted three events featuring panel discussions on organisational culture; Aboriginal women leaders; and learnings from COVID-19.

## Impact of COVID-19

This year's report necessarily reflects the impact of COVID-19 on the Victorian water sector, and we have drawn attention to both direct and indirect effects in particular target areas. Whether these effects will be short-lived or will continue to influence diversity and inclusion in our sector over the longer term remains to be seen.





## Content of this report

This report has been prepared by the Water Industry Diversity & Inclusion Steering Committee, comprising representatives of all 19 water corporations and supported by VicWater.

For each of the target areas we have included the industry range (high and low figures) and the industry average figure across all participating water corporations. We have also included the 2019 figures from the February 2020 annual report for comparison purposes.

It is important to note the following qualifiers:

- Not all water corporations currently collect data for each target area. Therefore, for some targets the average percentage figure has been calculated across a smaller number of organisations – this is noted in the report.
- The timing of data collection varies across water corporations, and across target areas. While most water corporations have provided data as at 30 June 2020, some have used alternative dates to align with their internal data collection cycle. Some water corporations have not collected any new data for some target areas since the previous annual report, and so their 2019 figures have been used instead.
- The method of data collection also varies across water corporations, and across target areas. In addition to the People Matter Survey run by the Victorian Public Service Commission, some water corporations use their own internal diversity census, culture survey or other methods of data collection.
- Data collection for most target areas relies on voluntary participation and self-disclosure by employees. There are many reasons why employees may choose not to disclose what they consider to be sensitive personal information about themselves, and water corporations respect the right of employees not to disclose.

For these reasons, the average percentage figure for each target should be regarded as indicative only.

The report also includes one or more case studies for each of the target areas, in order to tell a more complete story about diversity and inclusion across the industry. The case studies provided by water corporations showcase the innovative actions they are taking to improve diversity and inclusion in their workplaces, and the positive impacts on organisational culture and employee wellbeing.

## INDUSTRY PERFORMANCE

### 1. Gender



**26.3%** of Managing Directors are female

(5 out of 19 water corporations)

□ 2020 result 26.3% 5 out of 19 inc. one acting MD

#### INDUSTRY AVERAGE

**46.4%**  
of Tier 1 managers\* are female

↑ 2020 result 38.3%

**37.4%**  
of Tier 2 managers\* are female

↑ 2020 result 33.5%

**Collective Target: Gender balance (50:50) in senior leadership positions**

#### INDUSTRY RANGE:

**Tier 1:** High: 67% female, Low: 20% female **Tier 2:** High: 54.5% female, Low: 18% female

Note: As a general rule Tier 1 managers are direct report to MDs, Tier 2 managers are the next level below.

Gender diversity continues to be a key focus for Victorian water corporations. While the figures for Managing Director (26.3% female) have not changed in the past 12 months, there has been a significant uplift in the industry average number of women at the two levels of management below – a 8.1% increase in female Tier 1 managers and a 3.9% increase in Tier 2 female managers from the previous year.

These results indicate that water corporations' deliberative actions to promote, encourage and support women into senior leadership positions – ranging from addressing the gender pay gap to providing leadership and professional development opportunities – are starting to have the desired effect.

While the progress made at senior levels is encouraging, we know that the story is not

necessarily the same at lower levels. One of the barriers to achieving true gender diversity throughout the entire workforce is entrenched community expectations and stereotypes around roles that are considered to be traditionally male-oriented (e.g. engineering, trades) or female-oriented (e.g. customer service, HR). The case study from Lower Murray Water illustrates how water corporations can use their recruitment processes to challenge these notions and provide opportunities outside accepted workplace norms.

With the recent introduction of the Gender Equality Act 2020 and new regulatory compliance obligations for public sector entities, the next 12 months will see Victorian water corporations looking to further develop their capacity and capability to improve gender equality outcomes across the workforce.

## Case Study – Women in Trade

Workplace diversity and inclusion is not only a strategic focus for Lower Murray Water (LMW) but is something the organisation is passionate about. LMW acknowledges that just focusing on diversity alone will not provide a platform to success – to really harness the benefits that diversity brings to an organisation is through bringing people together with different ideas, education, gender, skills and cultural differences.

LMW is focusing on true cultural change that will promote an environment that is inclusive, where all our employees feel comfortable being themselves at work. Encouraging women into trades and traditionally male-oriented roles brings a new viewpoint to the workplace and can change work cultures for the better. By encouraging more women into these types of roles, it expands the available talent pool in areas where we are seeing skill gaps and increases the job opportunities for women in general. Breaking down stereotypes about trades and gender and increasing awareness around the benefit that a diverse workforce can bring an organisation are just some of the initiatives LMW are using to create cultural change through the organisation.

Caitlyn Petty was hired as a First Year Electrical Apprentice in March 2020 thanks to her outstanding application and interview. She showed initiative and passion for the job before she even started by reaching out to the business to enquire about potential employment opportunities with LMW and had already completed some training in the field which helped her application.

Her supervisors and peers are enthusiastic and believe that Caitlyn is a real asset to LMW by bringing different opinions and a new dynamic to the team. She has a great personality, is very mature, forward thinking and is great at her job and would encourage more women to add trades into their possible career options.



“I’ve always wanted to work in the electrical field, in some type of trade. Working at LMW has been fun and a great way to learn from more experienced electricians and engineers. I have been able to use what I have learnt in many different functions of the business and I am always busy and on the go. My team have been a huge support, and I feel able to voice my views and ask lots of questions. Women should definitely give trades a go – put yourself out there and try your best.”

Caitlyn Petty

## 2. Disability



There has been a slight increase (0.6%) in the industry average figure for disability from the previous year.

The launch of the WaterAble network is an important step forward in making the water industry more inclusive and accessible for people with disability. The 'Connections and Reflections' event hosted by WaterAble to celebrate the International Day of People with Disability in 2020 provided some useful insights into people's experiences and views about the current state of disability inclusion in the Victorian water industry. In the lead up to the event, industry leaders were paired with employees with disability to share their experiences and insights on disability inclusion in the industry. Their reflections were video recorded and shown at the event – some of these are highlighted in the case study. While there was general consensus that the industry is moving in a positive direction, there was also recognition that we can do better when it comes to thinking with 'disability mindfulness'.



## Case Study – WaterAble Connections and Reflections

### Reflections from employees with disability

“When I started at my organisation they didn’t really have anything in terms of accessibility. I’m wheelchair bound and they had no ramps to get into most of their offices and things like that. So all that had to be adapted when they employed me. So I got the opportunity to help them work through that process.

“When people create an environment for me that is conducive to equitable and respectful contribution, I will freely and honestly contribute. And I feel like I bring a very unique perspective. I think differently to most people I know and I think that diversity when harnessed results in really good outcomes. But I often have difficulty in being understood and sometimes even being provided with an opportunity to speak.”

“Work has got to be a safe place for people to be able to say either I’m not alright, or I need help in this, or this is a difficult thing for me to do. And so that’s about inclusion, it’s not necessarily about identifying people’s abilities or disabilities. It’s about making a workplace safe for everybody.”



### Reflections from leaders:

“It did make me reflect on what I did and didn’t know about our organisation ... Is there anything that we’re doing that’s creating barriers that I’m not aware of, or how do we make sure that our staff does reflect the community, including that we attract talent from all across [the community]? Are we doing anything in our advertising or in our recruitment processes that means that we don’t attract someone with a disability to our business? So it did make me reflect on making sure that we’re doing everything possible to have more WaterAble people in our business.”

“I asked ‘what can leaders do to make workplaces more welcoming and inclusive? ... [the response was] many workforces are not equipped with ‘disability mindfulness’. It’s actually thinking about the language that’s used, your body language, the type of engagement and the sort of conversation you have, and seeing the person first. Which sounds so obvious when you say it, but it’s not actually the lived experience.”

“So the challenge is, stop doing what we were doing yesterday, be brave and have the conversations. Be vulnerable. And show your vulnerability to the person that has the disability about what you don’t know, and ask them for their help in you as a collective in making a better environment for inclusion.”



**International Day of  
People with Disability**



### 3. Language other than English



The industry average figure in this target area has decreased slightly from the previous year (12.1% compared with 12.5%).

In this target area in particular, it is important to take into account the differences between metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. While Victoria as a whole is very culturally diverse, 38.2% of people living in metropolitan local government areas speak a language other than English, compared with just 7% of people living in regional local government areas.<sup>1</sup> It follows that metro water corporations are likely to have a more culturally diverse recruitment pool available to them than regional and rural water corporations – although this may be changing as a result of COVID-19, with the increased

availability of remote working arrangements making it possible to recruit people from outside the immediate locale.

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that COVID-19 has also exacerbated the disadvantage and barriers to employment experienced by many people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For this reason, some water corporations are actively planning and implementing initiatives to increase the multicultural composition of their workforce, as shown in the case study from Melbourne Water.

<sup>1</sup> Population Diversity in Victoria: 2016 Census Local Government Areas report

## Case Study – A Focus on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity at Melbourne Water

Victoria is home to one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world, and as dynamic global patterns of migration change, Victoria is becoming more diverse. In 2016, nearly half (49.1 per cent) of Victorians were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas, and 26% of Victorians speak a language other than English at home.<sup>2</sup> Victorians come from more than 200 countries, speak 260 languages other than English at home, and follow some 130 religious faiths.

Yet research tells us that minority groups are more likely to experience unemployment, have less privileged jobs with lower pay, and less favourable working conditions. Although those from non-European and Indigenous backgrounds make up an estimated 24% of the Australian population, people from these backgrounds account for only 5% of senior leaders.<sup>3</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified pre-existing disadvantage, with early research suggesting the impacts of COVID-19 will be hardest felt by groups that already experience disadvantage within the Australian workforce.

Increasingly, organisations have an important role to play in acknowledging and addressing systemic barriers to employment and progression that individuals from many Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities experience.

Melbourne Water's new Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2020-2025) expands Melbourne Water's existing focus areas to include a focus on people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Socially Disadvantaged communities, an increased focus on intersectionality,

and on embedding diversity and inclusion principles when planning and delivering essential services. An important element of this external lens is understanding the Cultural and Linguistic Diversity of the communities we serve, communicating and consulting in appropriate ways and seeking to address their needs.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 Census

<sup>3</sup> Leading the Change (2018) report



## Melbourne Water's Pathways Program

While Melbourne Water has only recently developed our first formal Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Inclusion Plan, the organisation has partnered with Jesuit Social Services for the past two years to create opportunities for qualified migrants through the Pathways Program. 47% of highly qualified migrants remain unemployed in the first two years of migration (compared with 23% of similarly qualified workers born in Australia). After 5 years, 40% of qualified migrants are still working in lower-skilled jobs. The Pathways Program provides qualified and skilled migrants with up to 3 years of paid work experience within their field of expertise, including the opportunity to work with our partners.

The 2019 cohort included 10 participants from countries including Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Egypt and Uganda. Following their first 12 months with Melbourne Water, 4 participants have gone on to their first rotation with Melbourne Water service providers (Stantec, Jacobs, Aqua Metro Services and Downer), 2 found external employment in their chosen field, 2 were retained as full time permanent employees with Melbourne

Water and 2 received short term contract extensions at Melbourne Water. In 2020, Melbourne Water launched our second round of the program, with a group of participants who come from countries including Pakistan, Zimbabwe, India and Iran.

## Developing the new Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Inclusion Plan

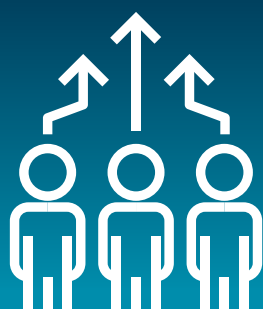
Melbourne Water serves an increasingly diverse and multicultural community. Growing the cultural diversity of our workforce will enable us to respond to the diverse needs of our community, and innovate in a rapidly changing social and physical landscape.

The draft plan has been developed through extensive consultations with external stakeholders including peak bodies and community groups, and internal consultations with staff, along with research on evidence-based and leading practice in this space.

We look forward to sharing our first Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Inclusion Plan in 2021.



## 4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

1.6%

of our workforce identify as  
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait  
Islander

□ 2020 result 1.6%

**Collective Target: 3% of our workforce identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**

**INDUSTRY RANGE:** High: 7% Low: 0%

The industry average figures for this year are the same as the previous year (1.6%).

Although the industry average figures have not changed in the past 12 months, a number of water corporations have introduced new (or continued their existing) initiatives to provide employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal people. Some water corporations are supporting Aboriginal water officers through direct or indirect means, while others are running internship or traineeship programs either on their own or in partnership with Traditional Owner organisations. The case studies from South East Water and Lower Murray Water highlight the benefits that these programs can have for both the employees and their organisations.

## Case Study – Enhancing Aboriginal Employment Outcomes

In 2019, South East Water worked with the Victorian Public Sector Commission to foster the capabilities and careers of First Nations students through the Barring Djinang summer internship program.

In partnership with CareerTrackers, Barring Djinang (a Taungurung phrase meaning ‘pathway of the feet’) is part of a five year Victorian government strategy to enhance Aboriginal employment outcomes across the public sector.

We were fortunate to have three First Nations internship students join us as part of the program, with two securing ongoing positions with our organisation. Our talented interns left a big impact through their work with our Customer and Community Engagement and Resource Recovery teams.

We’re proud to be part of a program that has offered over 5,000 internships, helping students complete more than 1,000 degrees. We thank our students for their hard work, and look forward to supporting them to become leaders of the future.

Samantha (Sam) Beaumont, a Communications Design student from Monash University broadened her User Experience (UX) skills by playing an integral role in shaping the customer experience as part of our major website upgrade.

“It’s been really interesting to see how the work we do at university fits into the business world. It’s been an invaluable experience working with the team on the new website, making wireframes and building webpages,” said Sam.



“I love that my work in User Experience is so people-centred, to ultimately use design to help make people’s lives easier.”

A Ngarrindjeri woman from South Australia, Sam also won Young Person of the Year at the 2020 Frankston/ Mornington Peninsula NAIDOC Awards, demonstrating the respect she earned both within our organisation and her community, and the importance that our organisation places on building meaningful relationships with our Aboriginal communities.

Sam was also part of our Reconciliation Action Plan working group and has educated her teammates and colleagues on Aboriginal culture.



Japheth Langerak's indigenous family originates from Tasmania (known as Palawa), tracing back to Ben Lomond (NE Tasmania).

After completing his Mechanical Engineering Degree at Monash University Japheth worked as intern with our Resource Recovery team. Following the completion of his internship, Japheth was offered a position in our graduate program, working on the upgrade of our Boneo Treatment Plant.

"My internship timing was perfect as it gave me exposure to the major construction phase of the Boneo Treatment Plant Upgrade. I learnt a tremendous amount on the field, and in the office. There are so many dynamic pieces in a large scale project, so learning how my role integrates with the wider team was an invaluable learning that could only be taught through direct experience," said Japheth.

"The internship gave me the opportunity I was looking for to strengthen my professional and technical skills for future employment, but thankfully resulted in a full time position in the graduate program at South East Water."

## Case Study – Passion for People, Culture and Country

Recognising the benefits of having a diverse and inclusive workforce, Lower Murray Water (LMW) identified that an indigenous traineeship within their People & Culture Team would further enhance our business by providing different views, experiences and insights that would filter through to the rest of the organisation.

Lower Murray Water started the recruitment process with the expectation that the successful candidate would be proud of their Aboriginal heritage and well connected to their identity and Country. The idea was to strengthen the organisation's diversity and knowledge held by Aboriginal People across the region and support the LMW Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), therefore someone with a deep passion for their culture was required.

Stephanie Sloane was employed as the People & Safety Trainee in May 2020 and fit the bill perfectly. Stephanie is a proud Ngiyampaa Woman and has a strong connection to her culture, history and the land. She has brought not only her experience and passion for people to this role but also a commitment to inspire and mentor others wishing to pursue a career at LMW. Stephanie has lived in the Mildura region for almost 25 years and brings with her a wealth of local cultural knowledge of the region.

"Working for LMW has been a really rewarding experience. I have commenced my Certificate IV in Work Health and Safety and I am learning so much about human resources and health and safety in the workplace with my team. They have been really supportive and helpful,

especially during the pandemic and me having to work from home, which has helped me to learn and grow."

Stephanie has made many contributions to the organisation in the short time that she has been working with LMW, such as writing the Acknowledgement of Country for LMW's Corporate Induction and 2019-20 Corporate Plan and sourcing local Aboriginal artwork to feature throughout LMW Annual and Corporate Reports. She has been involved in the revision and implementation of new policies and procedures, organised diversity and inclusion training for the organisation and compiled a list of significant dates to be recognised and celebrated by LMW through a consultation process with the workers.



“Being an Indigenous woman, I recognise the importance of creating career pathways for Aboriginal people.

LMW has provided me with that opportunity and through my involvement in the People & Culture Team, I hope to be able to support other Aboriginal people who are wanting to progress their careers in the water industry”.



## 5. Carers



The industry average for this year (45.4%) is roughly the same as last year (44%) – noting that more water corporations (16 out of 19) are now collecting this data than in the previous year (10 out of 19).

While the data does not include a gender breakdown, anecdotal evidence suggests that during COVID-19 there has been an increase in the number of men making use of flexible work arrangements to include caring responsibilities, with extended

periods of remote schooling and childcare closures requiring water corporations to recognise and accommodate carer responsibilities across their entire workforce.

Regardless of COVID-19, a number of water corporations have also been making intentional efforts to promote gender equity when it comes to caring responsibilities – as demonstrated in the case study from South East Water.

## Case Study – Empowering our New Parents

South East Water is committed to equality, supporting and providing an environment where all employees can enjoy the same opportunities with the birth or adoption of a child.

That is why we made significant enhancements to our paid parental leave policy, empowering all our employees to play an active role in the first year of their child's life, regardless of gender. We removed primary and secondary carer labels, and now offer 14 weeks paid parental leave to both parents and carers. This may be taken at any time in the first 12 months of their baby's life. We also chose to pay superannuation on unpaid periods of parental leave for up to 52 weeks, making sure our employees have ongoing financial security and investment in their careers during time away from the workforce.

Our aim is to help families share caring and home tasks equally and empower both parents to take an active role in the first year of their child's life. We think families should be able to make their own choices about how they care for their family, based on what works for them. We hope that by encouraging both parents to be active at home, they can both be active at work.

Returning to work following an addition to your family can be a nerve-racking and beautiful time for family and career. That is why we offer transition coaching, keeping in touch days and flexible working options for parents returning to work as part of our broader Keeping in Touch program to ensure this stage of life does not impact on their career.

By empowering our new parents we ensure they feel engaged and connected to our organisation, enabling them to make their own choices about how they care for their family, based on what works for them.

Customer Experience Lead, Amy Miles and her partner Senior Credit Officer Chris D'Cruz embraced the support of our enhanced parental leave policy when they chose to start a family.



“Chris (my partner) and I were very excited when we heard about these changes coming into effect. We both started within a year of each other and have had similar journeys at South East Water until it came time to look at our parental leave options,” said Amy.

“The new changes mean that I am not disadvantaged with my super for having a child, and I now have more of a choice if I wish to return to work earlier without feeling guilty. This change means that Chris can be the primary carer and have an equal experience when I return to work so I can continue to shape a career that I have worked hard at building before going on leave.”

## 6. LGBTIQ+



The industry average figure for employees who identify as LGBTIQ+ has remained the same (3%).

Over the past 12 months the Pride in Water network (referred to in the Introduction) has been successful in raising collective awareness and championing LGBTIQ+ inclusion across the industry.

A goal for the next 12 months will be to leverage this high level, industry-wide activity to inspire and influence change within individual workplaces. The case study from Melbourne Water shows the actions that organisations can take to encourage and support LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

## Case Study – Melbourne Water’s Journey to Becoming a more LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Organisation

Melbourne Water launched our first LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Plan in 2016, with our Refract network (comprised of employees who identify as members of the LGBTIQ+ community and allies), formally launching in 2017 with the goal of:

- Creating a workplace where our people are healthy and can flourish. By supporting a culture where our employees are embraced and connected, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, we know that we will enable our LGBTIQ+ employees to feel safe from prejudice and stereotypes.
- We recognise that LGBTIQ+ inclusion extends beyond the walls of Melbourne Water. Through demonstrating our leadership on LGBTIQ+ issues within the water industry, we will make it a better place for our own LGBTIQ+ employees and contribute to building an inclusive culture within the water industry.

What started as a small group of employees supported by Melbourne Water’s Diversity and Inclusion team, has grown to an employee network of over 160 employees, supporting an active and driven Refract working group. Key contributors to our success include:

- Providing the opportunity and support for the Refract network to truly make a difference through their work. The network is supported by the Diversity and Inclusion team and a Senior Sponsor, who champions initiatives at a leadership level and communicates key messages and events to Melbourne Water employees.
- Reviewing and amending policies and processes to ensure they are explicitly inclusive of LGBTIQ+ employees.
- Celebrating key dates and using these as opportunities to increase understanding and support. In 2020, we celebrated Wear it Purple Day through a series of online quizzes across the month, with questions on LGBTIQ+ history and culture providing the opportunity for participants to increase their knowledge and connect with colleagues during lockdown.
- Increasing employees’ understanding of LGBTIQ+ history and skills to be active allies through regular LGBTIQ+ awareness sessions.
- Showing our support externally; since 2016, Refract members have marched in the annual Midsumma Pride March, to demonstrate Melbourne Water’s



support for Melbourne's LGBTIQ+ community. In 2020 for the first time, Refract members marched with Pride in Water, a network created for LGBTIQ+ people and allies that work in the water industry throughout Australia (of which Melbourne Water is a member). Melbourne Water has also played an active role in supporting the creation and growth of the Pride in Water network.

- Visible indicators of inclusion; for several years, Melbourne Water employees have worn Refract rainbow lanyards to visibly demonstrate their support for LGBTIQ+ employees and the broader community.

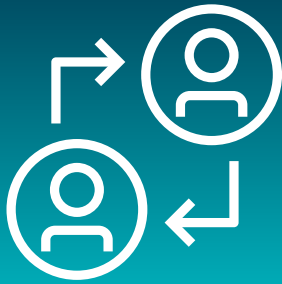
Ultimately, the success of the Refract network has been driven by empowering truly passionate people with the support to truly make a difference.



In 2018 I joined Melbourne Water's Refract (LGBTIQ+) Working group, becoming Chair in 2020. I am so proud to be a part of this volunteer group of passionate LGBTIQ+ people and ally members. As a group, we acknowledge and drive forward the importance of creating an environment where all employees feel safe to bring their whole selves to work through awareness, engagement and inclusion at the heart of all we do.

Elisa Bourke,  
Chair of Refract and Systems Integration  
Manager in the Safety, Health, Environment  
and Quality team at Melbourne Water

## 7. Flexible work



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

**84.1%**

(17 out of 19 water corporations)

**of employees have flexible work arrangements unless there is a specific operational constraint**

↑ 2020 result 83.9%

Target: Flexible work arrangements are available to all employees unless there is a specific operational constraint

INDUSTRY RANGE: High: 100% Low: 19%



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

**62.4%**

(18 out of 19 water corporations)

**of employees work flexibly (through informal and formal working arrangements)**

↑ 2020 result 47.5%

Target: 35% of employees work flexibly (through informal and formal working arrangements)

INDUSTRY RANGE: High: 100% Low: 20%

It is fair to say that COVID-19 has been a game changer for flexible work across almost all sectors, not least the water sector in Victoria. During the first Australia-wide lockdown in March-May 2020, water corporations moved quickly to institute remote working arrangements for all employees where possible, and the second lockdown experienced in Victoria in July-October 2020 helped to further embed new and flexible ways of working.

This is reflected in the increased industry average figures for both these target areas – 84.1% of roles able to be worked flexibly (compared with 83.9% in the previous year) and 62.4% of employees working flexibly (compared with 49.4% in the previous year).

Staff surveys conducted by water corporations during COVID-19 indicate that many employees would prefer not to return to the office on a full-time basis, and there is an expectation that remote working and other flexible working arrangements will become the ‘new normal’ (or ‘COVID-normal’). The case study from Yarra Valley Water illustrates how water corporations are developing principles and strategies to support future ways of flexible working.

While the upsides of flexible work have been well researched and documented in past years, COVID-19 has brought to light the potential negative impacts on employee health, safety and wellbeing and organisational culture, and this will be a focus for water corporations over the next 12 months.

## Case Study – Future Ways of Flexible Working at Yarra Valley Water

Yarra Valley Water's (YVW) approach to COVID-19 was a phased approach that focussed on the overall wellbeing of our people. YVW leveraged existing platforms and developed new programs and competencies to adjust to the prevailing circumstance to ensure we maintained the core focus of our People Strategy; that YVW employees were "Better for Being Here".

It was acknowledged at the beginning of COVID-19 that the pandemic could accelerate core principles of flexible working. The pandemic demonstrated that people adjusted to working at home and the associated challenges of home schooling, caring responsibilities and generating social connections electronically, without any impact to the overall productivity of the organisation.

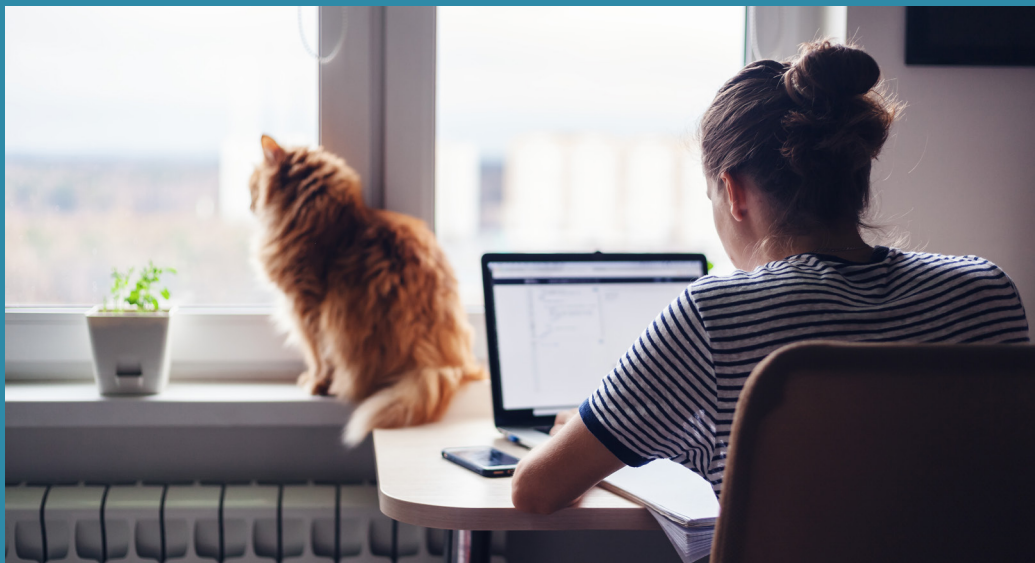
The shift to working from home throughout COVID-19 saw YVW adopt an approach to support its people and customers with a people-centric lens that ensured the:

- protection and support of the wellbeing of our staff as the majority moved to working from home arrangements
- ongoing support for those who were unable or experienced difficulty to perform their work from home
- maintained confidence and supply of YVW's essential water and sanitation services to our community
- support of our customers.

Leveraging the above and the possibility of what the future of work may look like, ensured the key experiences and learnings arising from the pandemic were leveraged for the future.

Guiding principles were established to ensure that the YVW culture and values drove decisions regarding future ways of flexible working and that the needs of our people were considered as we sought to future-proof the way we work. By leveraging our engagement survey platform and through the Continuous Listening Strategy with leaders and team members, our people expressed a strong preference for a mix of remote and onsite working in 2021.

Being guided by YVW's values, transition principles and high engagement and productivity by team members during remote working, YVW set up a hybrid working group to lead the thinking regarding the transition to a hybrid workplace and flexibility in the approach to work.



This has included the development of clear guiding principles to outline how team members at YVW will approach the new hybrid working environment. These guiding principles are anchored in the new YVW values of People First; One Team; Be Brave; Deliver What Matters and Positive Impact. This anchoring is critical as the way we work at YVW is an expression of our values and how we bring our culture to life.

This program of work is currently underway to embed hybrid working and includes a series of workshops for leaders, teams and team member discussions along with supporting artefacts and communication.

This is an exciting journey for the organisation as we continue to strength flexible ways of working and diversity and inclusion at Yarra Valley Water.



## Conclusion

This second annual performance report against the Water Industry Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023 shows that the sector has made strong progress in the target areas of gender balance and flexible work.

The increased uptake in flexible work can be almost entirely attributed to the global pandemic, but building on and accelerating what was already a positive trend in the industry.

On the other the hand, the evidence would suggest that the improvements in gender balance are the fruition of intentional actions to address practical and cultural barriers to female participation in the water sector. There is good reason to believe that these efforts will start to trickle through to lower levels and help to build a pipeline of women in the industry who are ready to move into leadership positions.

While the results in gender and flexible work over the past 12 months are very encouraging, we have yet to see this being replicated in the other target areas of the Strategy – disability, language other than English, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, carers and LGBTIQ+. Looking to the next 12 months, creating and maximising opportunities to make progress in these areas will be a key focus for the industry.





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