

Victorian Water Industry

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019–2023

Annual Performance Report
February 2022



Acknowledgement

Victorian water corporations and VicWater recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Nations of this country. We proudly acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways on which we work and live, and pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise and value the continuing rich cultures and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the Victorian community.

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Executive summary

The Water Industry Equity, Diversity and 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 VicWater’s Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee, comprising representatives of all 18 water corporations. It provides an update since the previous report (February 2021) 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 (as at 30 June 2021) across all participating water corporations.



28.0%

of Managing Directors are female

INDUSTRY AVERAGE

37.1%

of Tier 1 Managers
are female*

38.0%

of Tier 2 Managers
are female*

Collective industry target: Gender balance (50:50) in senior leadership positions

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



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

4.5%

of our workforce identify
as a person with disability

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

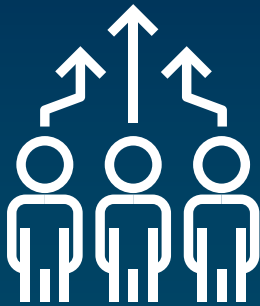


INDUSTRY AVERAGE

11.1%

of our workforce speak a
language other than English

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



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

1.4%

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

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

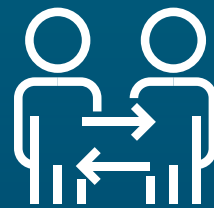


INDUSTRY AVERAGE

50.0%

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



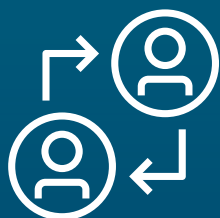
INDUSTRY AVERAGE

3.4%

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

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

Executive summary



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

91.2%

of employees have flexible work arrangements are available to all employees unless there is a specific operational constraint

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



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

66.2%

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 third annual performance report shows a mixed bag of results for the sector.

While there continues to be strong progress in the target areas related to flexible work, there appears to have been some stagnation in other target areas including gender balance, which had previously seen some good advances.

There is no doubt that two years of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the water industry, just as it has on society as a whole. Organisational capacity has been stretched and many executives and their teams have been diverted into pandemic response activities.

It is not unreasonable to conclude that while the pandemic has largely driven the positive results in flexible work related targets, it has also contributed to a lack of progress in other target areas.

As the industry transitions to 'COVID-normal', water corporations will be able to refocus their efforts to move the dial in key target areas, to deliver on their commitment to build a diverse and inclusive workplace culture across the industry.

Introduction

Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019–2023

The Water Industry Equity, Diversity and 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 18 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.

Content of this report

This report has been prepared by VicWater’s Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee, comprising representatives from all 18 water corporations.

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 as at 30 June 2021. We have also included figures from the February 2021 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. While all water corporations have provided data as at 30 June 2021, some have not collected any new data for some target areas since the previous annual report, and so their 2020 figures have been used instead.
- The method of data collection also varies across water corporations. 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.

Introduction

‘Better Together’ – collective diversity and inclusion initiatives

Through VicWater, all 18 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’.

VicWater Connect

VicWater’s Connect conference in May 2021 was attended by over 150 industry delegates, in person and online, and included a Diversity and Inclusion stream which featured keynote speakers and panel sessions on ways we can embrace our First Nations people, disability inclusion in the water sector, enabling cultural and linguistic diversity, and promoting gender balance.

The closing session celebrated International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) with a panel discussion around creating rainbow change in the water sector and a show-stopping performance of ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ by cabaret diva Mama Alto.



Mama Alto

WaterAble Network

WaterAble is a network for people with 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.

Since launching in 2020, WaterAble has been active in running events featuring a range of guest speakers with lived experience of disability, designed to raise awareness and promote disability inclusion in the water industry.

WaterAble also runs a Connections program which matches senior leaders and employees with disability to help them share experiences and insights to improve disability awareness among leaders, create networks across our industry and promote disability inclusion. The first round in 2021 received highly positive feedback from the 12 participants.

“The program was excellent for exposing me to the lived experience of a person with disability. Understanding that lived experience will allow me to be a better leader.”

“It exceeded all my expectations. It has been wonderful to connect with a leader in the water industry and I feel I have made a new friend rather than simply getting to know a colleague.”



WaterAble session at VicWater Connect

Introduction

Pride in Water Network

The Pride in Water network was formed during 2019 to connect LGBTIQ+ employees and allies in the Victorian water industry. From inception, Pride in Water grew quickly to include members from across Australia and New Zealand. To ensure it has a sustainable business model and is accessible to everyone in the industry, Pride in Water became a network group of the Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) in late 2021.

During 2021, Pride in Water ran a workshop at OzWater and hosted events for IDAHOBIT, and a small (but loud!) industry contingent marched at Midsumma Pride March.



Midsumma Pride March 2021

Women in Water Directors Network

The Women in Water Director Network (WWDN) was established in 2018 with the aim 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.



Based on survey feedback, the WWDN has been highly successful in fulfilling its aim through effective networking, building the industry confidence and resilience of women, and developing initiatives to attract and retain talented women in the sector.

In 2021, the WWDN extended its reach to female directors in Victorian catchment management authorities (CMAs), and expanded its purpose to include influencing water organisations to improve gender diversity at all levels. The WWDN also launched peer mentoring and male Allies programs, and presented online events which provided an opportunity to hear from senior leaders about how directors and boards can respond to some of the key challenges facing the industry.

Respect@Work Discussion Forum

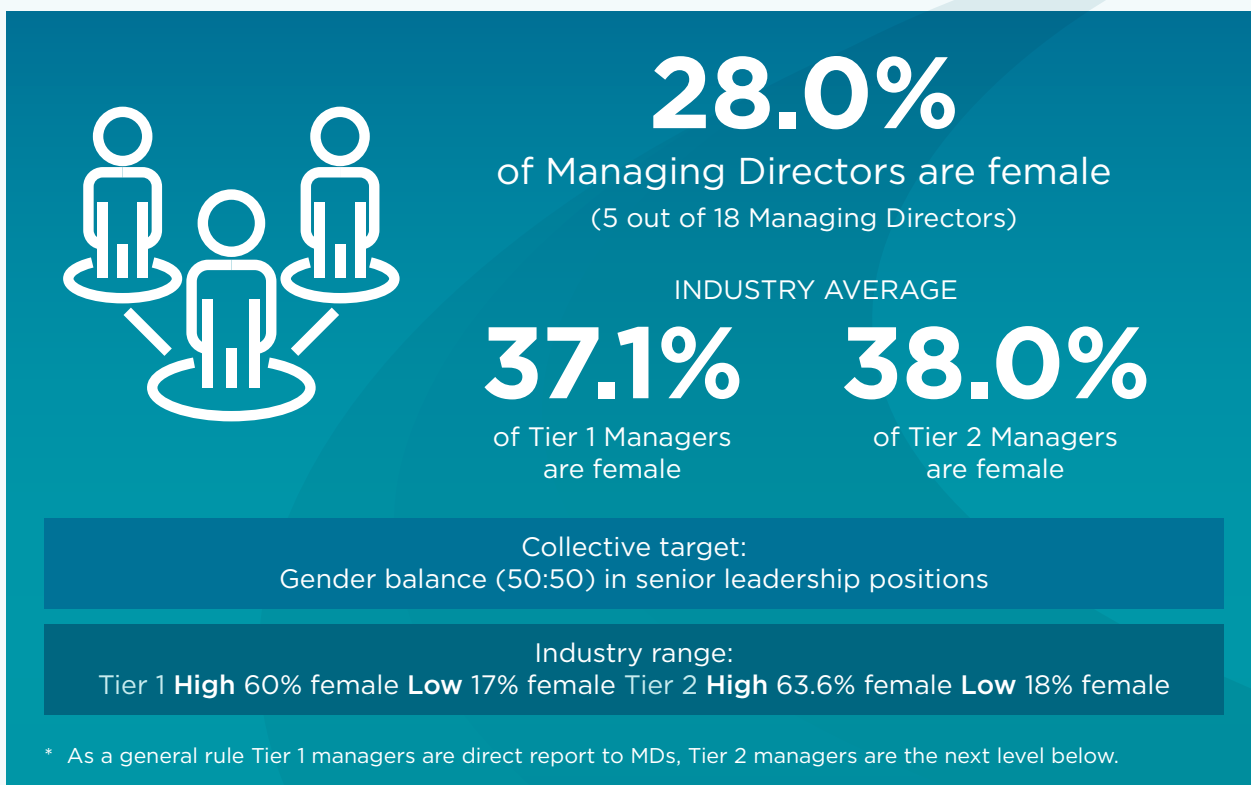
The first few months of 2021 saw a national conversation about the widespread prevalence of sexual harassment in Australian workplaces. In response, VicWater's Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee set up a discussion forum to provide a safe and confidential space for D&I and HR professionals in the Victorian water industry to:

- share experiences, challenges and successes in addressing sexual harassment within their own organisations
- hear and learn from external experts on best practice approaches to preventing/dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace
- explore ideas for industry-wide initiatives or potential collaboration, e.g. staff training, complaint investigation.

The first quarterly forum was held in November 2021 and featured guest speakers from the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office who spoke about the legal framework for sexual harassment complaints handling and lessons from recent cases and reviews.

Industry performance

1. Gender



February 2021 industry average – 46.4% of Tier 1 managers are female, 37.4% of Tier 2 managers are female.

This year's industry figures show that the good progress towards the target of 50:50 gender balance seen in the previous year appears to have stalled in the case of Tier 2 managers (38.0% compared with 37.1%), and actually gone backwards in the case of Tier 1 managers (37.1% compared with 46.4%).

It should be noted that executive (Tier 1) teams in water corporations are often relatively small, which means that one person leaving the organisation can have a disproportionate impact on gender percentages. Another contributing factor, experienced by smaller regional water corporations in particular, is the difficulty in attracting and retaining talented and experienced executives regardless of gender.

To address these challenges, water corporations are continuing to develop and implement new ways to encourage and support women into senior leadership roles, including raising awareness of career pathways, mentoring, secondments and job sharing arrangements, as illustrated in the case studies from Lower Murray Water and Westernport Water.

2021 saw an enhanced focus on gender diversity in the sector, with new regulatory compliance obligations under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* coming into force. Water corporations were required to undertake a workplace gender audit to inform the development of gender equality action plans. In future they will also need to conduct gender impact assessments on new public-facing policies, programs and services.

It is worth mentioning some recent, very positive developments on the gender front. While the number of female Managing Directors had not changed at 30 June 2021 when data was collected for this report, between 1 July and 31 December 2021, three female Managing Directors were appointed (replacing the previous male incumbents). This means that as at 1 January 2022, the figures for Managing Director are now at 44% female, a noteworthy increase from previous years.

Case study - Women at the top

Women are co-leading the way at Lower Murray Water (LMW) with the make up of General Managers (Tier 1) 50 per cent women and 50 per cent men.

Deb Fankhauser is General Manager People and Stakeholders and has more than 20 years' experience in management and human resource management and is a certified practitioner with the Australian Human Resources Institute. Karen Hengsen is General Manager Business Services and Performance, a Certified Practising Accountant with more than 25 years' experience in financial management, business consultancy and corporate business services.

Both have been able to achieve success in a male dominated industry and are now role models for women in and thinking about entering the world of water.

"My whole career the majority of my managers have been male, so I didn't have a lot of female role models. The thing I try to do is model respect, I don't put myself on a pedestal, I treat everyone the same and I'm not into pyramid manager structures," says Karen.

Deb is formally mentoring three women at LMW who are at different stages of their careers.

"It's great that women working in the corporation can see a potential career path and have strong role models and supporters," Deb says.

As with all good leaders, both Deb and Karen are focused on employing and growing good staff.

"My top two achievements at LMW are the team we have built across people, communications and customer and the leadership and talent management framework that we've developed in the last 18 months to help every employee achieve their career goals," says Deb.

"Since I've been able to structure a strong management team and get our business units structured with the right culture and people, I've been able to spend more time within the business transformation strategy which will vastly improve so many aspects of our corporation," says Karen.

Industry performance

It's a focus at LMW with the new Gender Equality Act and associated work aiming to continue to change the culture to attract and retain more women as part of creating a more diverse workforce. The benefits of a more diverse and inclusive workplace are significant, from enhanced team collaboration and performance and increased understanding of customer needs, to being a more attractive workplace for potential candidates from a larger talent pool. Part of this is promoting the water industry and the broad career opportunities within it to women.

"If you get a really broad idea of the whole water industry, there's so many different opportunities so don't pigeonhole yourself early, really learn the whole business and then decide what it is you want to focus on whether it be in the technical space or the corporate space," says Deb.

It's a sentiment Karen echoes.

"Just because you have one core discipline doesn't mean you have to stay in that forever. Our skills are transferable and there's a lot of opportunity to extend our skills and add value to other areas of the business."

And while Deb and Karen are doing all they can to inspire other women, it's not just up to females to support each other.

"It's an important role that I'm really passionate about but it's something that we need both men and women to do, not just women supporting women, we need men to support women to address the bigger issue around gender equality," Deb says.



Left to right: Deb Fankhauser and Karen Hengsen

Case study - Job sharing at Westernport Water

In early 2021, an existing leadership position became vacant at Westernport Water. A three-month secondment was offered to two female staff in a job share arrangement. This was provided as one of the staff worked part time due to caring responsibilities. The other staff member continued to work part of her week in her substantive position.

This was the first time a job share arrangement at the leadership level had been offered and was developed to provide an opportunity for high performing female staff to move into leadership roles while balancing their family commitments.

The secondment demonstrated to all staff at Westernport Water that our organisation is willing to accommodate flexible work arrangements at all levels of the business. As a result, we have seen several other leadership staff seek a variety of flexible work arrangements and managers more open to considering job share arrangements.



Meg Humphrys and Susan O'Sullivan

Industry performance

2. Disability



February 2021 Industry average – 4.8% of our workforce identify as a person with disability.

There has been a slight decrease (0.3%) in the industry average figures for disability compared with the previous year.

Water corporations have been making efforts to make their workplaces more accessible and inclusive of people with disability. The case study from Melbourne Water demonstrates that small adjustments can make a big difference to an employee's experience, starting with the job interview and continuing right through the employment journey.

The case study from Goulburn-Murray Water shows how they have taken a deliberative and consultative approach to identifying and committing to actions which will make tangible improvements to their workplace for people with disability, whether staff or the visiting public.

These two water corporations are also working together to amplify their disability inclusion initiatives by sharing insights and ideas with a wider audience, as shown in the third case study.

Case study – Supporting staff to bring their whole selves to work

Dr Teresa Mackintosh arrived at Melbourne Water with a Doctorate in Freshwater Ecology and confidence born from a positive interview and recruitment experience. Their confidence was not misplaced, as Teresa found acceptance and support here that had been lacking in their previous workplaces. Eminently qualified and well suited to their role as Water Watch Coordinator (Customer and Strategy), Teresa jumped right into work on projects ranging from a litter action project and the platypus census to water bugs.

Before deciding to go to university as a mature-aged student, Teresa had never studied before. As a teen with dyslexia, they had left school at age 15 with no qualifications. A sudden realisation when they were pursuing a completely different career set them on a new path which was made possible because of Teresa's strong work ethic and their access to appropriate support.

At the time "I was doing furniture making and I thought 'Oh, I really care about the environment, what should I do?' I was actually going to do waste management because I was passionate about recycling, but then I discovered ecology and I really loved it."

"I decided to go to university as a mature-age student and with the right support I did really well. I worked hard for it; I'd start my reports before anybody else and I'd still be handing them in last. But as a mature-age student I had the mental capability to be able to do that."

Prior to joining Melbourne Water, Teresa's workplace experiences were not great. They ranged from the transactional culture of large consulting practices, where it was assumed that anyone saying 'Hello' was looking for a favour, to the open hostility of an organisation refusing to adequately resource or support staff. "In one particular workplace, rather than giving me support they actually got rid of me because they said I couldn't do my job properly."

"I just reached a point where I decided that I have to be open with people; if they're not going to help me, it's not good for me to be in those environments. It was pretty awful."

At Melbourne Water we can tell when a waterway is healthy because it's home to a great diversity of water bugs. We know that when you make the talent pool bigger, you create more options to attract the best possible candidates.

As Teresa discovered, even at their interview, we take our equal opportunity seriously. It's not just lip service or another box to tick; we want to hire great people and support them to do their best work. "It's embedded in everything, and I have felt it since day one. Starting at Melbourne Water, right from the start they wanted to know 'What support do you need? How can we change things? How can we accommodate you? I was asked several times about what can be done to ensure I was the best I could possibly be, and they really listened."

"This was even with the interview process when I asked if I could take notes into the interview and that was pretty helpful to me because when I'm nervous and can't think of

Industry performance

examples, having it laid out in mind maps in front of me is really helpful. Following the interview, it was made clear that my manager would contact the D&I team for further support. From here it became really clear that my disability was being actively addressed with appropriate supports and wasn't just forgotten about."

"When I started and had disclosed that I had dyslexia, right from the start Melbourne Water were willing to provide what I needed to be able to do my job. In my role, I use read and write software, which Melbourne Water supplied to me with no questions asked. I was and still am made to feel like a valued staff member."

Melbourne Water recognises that people with disability make a significant contribution in all areas in the community and within our organisation. In order to best support inclusion, we continue to review and implement organisational change which enables us to be accessible to everyone.

Melbourne Water is deliberate and specific in taking action toward genuine inclusion, moving beyond compliance. Employees like Teresa show us that there are benefits to individuals when inclusion is embedded into processes and practices that make up the employee lifecycle. The changes we have made have resulted in conversations about reasonable adjustments being part of our processes, reducing the burden on people with disability needing to self-advocate. This has benefits, not only for the individual, but for the team and broader organisational culture.

Melbourne Water recognises that a diverse workforce including people with disability contributes to our ability to deliver on our commitments and to better serve the community. By creating a safe and inclusive workplace culture enables Melbourne Water to realise the benefits of a diverse workforce. When asked how Teresa likes working at Melbourne Water, they replied with "it's just the best."



Dr Teresa Mackintosh

Case study – Goulburn-Murray Water ‘All abilities’ network

Five Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW) staff established an All Abilities Employee Network in 2021 as part of GMW’s Diversity and Inclusion Plan.

The aim of the Network is to ensure GMW is an accessible and inclusive employer. This means providing an equal opportunity for the full participation of staff of all abilities at all levels.

In early 2021 the Network undertook an internal awareness campaign. The purpose of the campaign was to raise awareness of disability issues in the workplace and recruit more Network members.

The campaign led to the Network growing to 15 members. This larger Network then developed an All Abilities strategy and action plan for the next three years.

Key achievements of the Network action plan in 2021 include:

- developing and implementing a Communications and Engagement Plan – the Network has raised disability awareness issues in presentations and internal social media
- completing an audit of the accessibility of GMW staff facilities and public facilities – the results of the completed audit are being incorporated into GMW’s expenditure plans
- engaging with WaterAble on whole of industry initiatives – for instance one Network member was part of the WaterAble Connections program
- partnering with GMW’s People and Culture team to build a reasonable adjustment process into our people procedures – this process will ensure that at every career stage GMW considers how the workplace can be adapted for the needs of staff with disability.

The Network is excited about how we can engage the business and deliver on the action plan in 2022!

Industry performance

Case study – Celebrating International Day of People with Disability

To recognise the 2021 International Day of People with Disability, Goulburn Murray Water (GMW) and Melbourne Water (MW) collaborated to host a joint online employee panel during Human Rights Week 2021.

The idea for a joint panel was born over a coffee between WaterAble's Connections program participants, Donald Hughan and Rob Considine, and made all the easier because of the already close relationship between the two organisations.

Through an interview style format hosted by GMW's Glenda Smith, office and field based employees shared their own stories of the strengths and improvement opportunities for disability inclusion in the water sector.

Opened by GMW Managing Director, Charmaine Quick, the event was also attended by executives from GMW and MW. An audience Q&A session with employees had significant audience participation, facilitated by MW's Paula Jeffs.

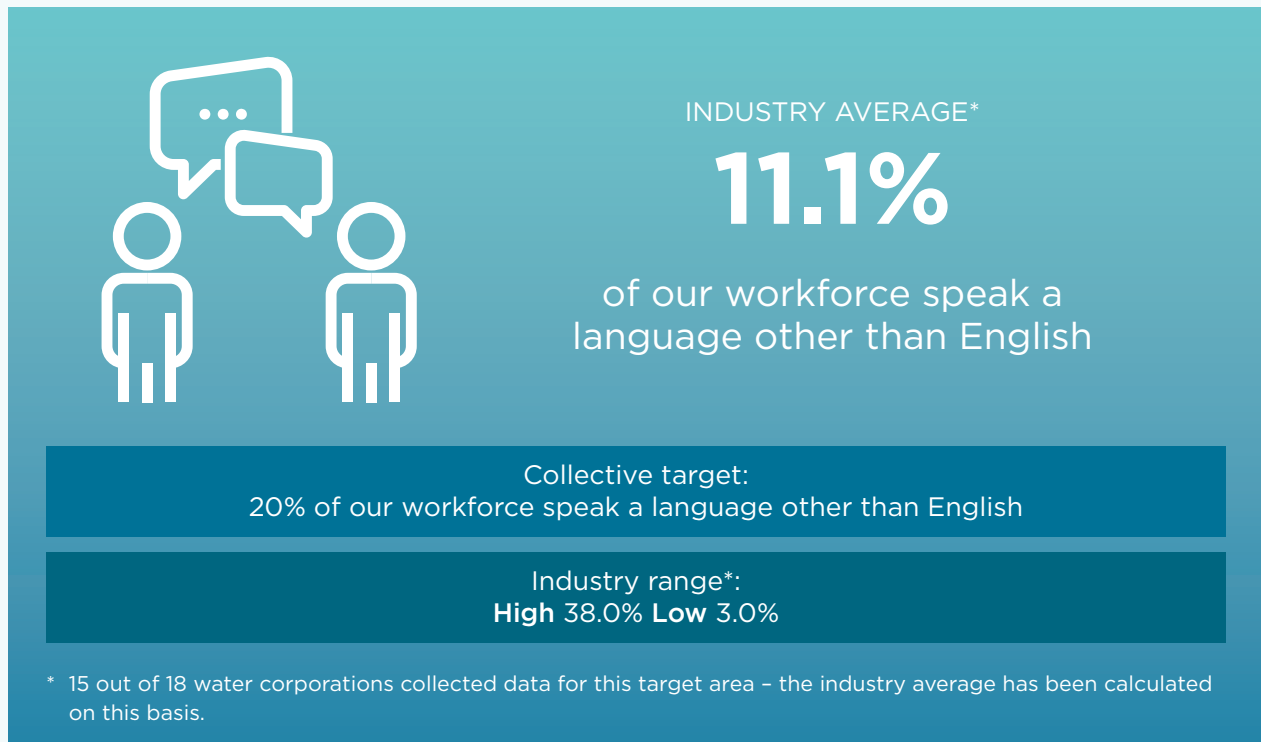
Through their attendance, inputs and active listening, colleagues and management demonstrated an action oriented approach to the ongoing improvement of accessible employment.

Accessibility in the water sector clearly struck a chord – with around 315 employees from both organisations attending.



Snapshot from the joint panel

3. Language other than English



February 2021 Industry average – 12.1% of our workforce speak a language other than English.

The industry average figure in this target area has declined by 1% since the previous year.

The statistics for cultural diversity across the water industry continue to reflect the demographic variations between metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. It follows that highest industry figure of 38% was reported by a metro water corporation, while the lowest figure (3%) belongs to a regional water corporation.

Awareness and outreach activities such as the one shown in the case study from Melbourne Water, offer an opportunity for water corporations to create connections with culturally diverse communities, helping to overcome the barriers that might prevent people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds from seeking employment in the water industry.

Industry performance

Case study – Ramadan home Iftar dinners

Melbourne Water values the diverse experiences and perspectives and of our communities. We strive to ensure that our workplace culture contributes to creating social cohesion and harmony and respects and values its people. Building our collective understanding of the unique and varied challenges of our diverse communities and the simple adjustments we can make to be more accommodating and inclusive in our day to day practice enables us to identify and remove barriers to a more inclusive workplace culture.

One initiative that has assisted in building a deeper understanding, appreciation and respect for Australian Muslims has been the joint celebration of the Iftar Dinner, the meal that marks the end of the fasting during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. All practising Muslims are required to observe fasting, abstaining from food and drink, for one whole month every year during the Islamic lunar month of Ramadan from first light until sundown. Ramadan in Australia commences in April and ends in May.

Australian Intercultural Society has continued its tradition of arranging Iftar dinners in the homes of Muslim families in Melbourne. They provide a great opportunity for individuals to engage in first-hand cultural exchange and dialogue by inviting members of the community to join them while they celebrate the end of the day's fast.

Melbourne Water employees have participated in the Home Iftar Dinner program since 2019, offering the opportunity to join a Muslim family in their home during the month of Ramadan to share a meal. The Iftar dinner is a wonderful opportunity for non-Muslims to form collegial relationships and forge harmonious relationships with their Muslim counterparts while also gaining an appreciation for the practice of fasting in Islam.

“This evening Jill Sears and I had the amazing privilege to join a young Muslim family for their Iftar dinner on the final day of Ramadan. This is such a special initiative run by the Australian Intercultural Society aimed at creating connections between Muslims and non-Muslims. Such a special experience and so powerful”. Craig Dixon, General Manager Infrastructure Operations Melbourne Water



Melbourne Water employees at Home Iftar dinner

4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



February 2021 Industry average – 1.6% of our workforce identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

The industry average figure for this year has declined slightly (0.2%) from the previous year.

While these figures suggest that the industry is not making substantive progress towards increasing the workforce participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is important to recognise that all water corporations are working to build strong and meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owners that will produce economic and social benefits for the community over the long term.

The case studies from Coliban Water and Barwon Water both demonstrate how organisations are taking a considered and holistic approach towards Traditional Owner engagement, with Aboriginal employment and training initiatives being just one aspect of their broader corporate strategies.

Industry performance

Case study – Sustainable Victorian social enterprise and Aboriginal business sectors, and opportunities for Victorian Aboriginal people

Dja Dja Wurrung (Djandak) is a diversity employer with a skilled local work crew and qualified technical experts in Environmental Sciences, Conservation Management and Cultural Heritage. Djandak's mission is to provide a platform for the development of the Dja Dja Wurrung people and their lands and for the knowledge and culture of the Dja Dja Wurrung People to be recognised and incorporated into the management of the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks (DDW Parks).

Coliban Water seeks to provide opportunities to assist Djandak to achieve their vision. Dja Dja Wurrung has been involved with Coliban Water's Rural Services team for a number of years and the relationship continues to strengthen. In 2020/21 we have utilised their services in a revised capacity due to the restrictions we were facing operationally during the pandemic, resulting in:

- The secondment of two people from Dja Dja Wurrung who were trained during October 2020, not only to assist in the usual pre-season channel cleaning, but trained to run the channel system, open and close outlets and input the outlet reads into the computer system. Due to this training they were able to cover resourcing gaps in the lead up to Christmas, with one role continuing through to March 2021. This experience was very positive for both parties.
- Dja Dja Wurrung undertaking channel decommissioning works on some of our closed channel systems, with the majority of works being undertaken in the Harcourt area. Other special 2020/21 engagements with Dja Dja Wurrung included:
- The construction of a boat ramp at our Upper Coliban Reservoir.
- The construction of a new shelter ('Mayam'), seating, paths and surrounding landscaping at our Upper Coliban Reservoir. The design incorporates the history and geography of the site including a Dja Dja Wurrung Tachylite mine that was submerged as part of the construction of the reservoir. The area has been designed for passive use to provide an interesting perspective on aspects of Aboriginal culture.

The engagement of Dja Dja Wurrung for channel management and Access Employment Enterprises for our catering needs are examples of how Coliban Water have identified existing suppliers and matched them to procurement opportunities, while prioritising diversity and inclusion.

In addition to this work with Dja Dja Wurrung, Coliban Water participated in the employment of Aboriginal School Based Apprenticeships / Traineeships (SBAT) program by being the host employer for a student in this program. The SBAT trainee will be with the People and Capability team until 2023 completing a certificate III in Business studies.

Coliban Water also frequently interacts with local Victorian Aboriginal Businesses under both our RAP and the RSA to discuss requirements and opportunities. We continued to implement two service agreements with Dja Dja Wurrung, including Land Management Services and Pest Plant Management. The works focus on revegetation, fencing, pest plant and animal management and fire hazard reduction. We also engage Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation to conduct site investigations and develop Cultural Heritage Management Plans (CHMPs) to protect identified sites of significance. Other services are provided where opportunities arise.



Mayam at Upper Coliban Reservoir

Industry performance

Case study – Barwon Water Traineeship program

The Barwon Water Traineeship commenced in 2016 with the first intake of five trainees. Over the years, the program has continued to improve and grow, and now supports at least 12 trainees annually across the Barwon Water Group. The program has seen 52 people successfully complete traineeships since 2016.

Through ongoing collaboration and partnership with Wan-Yaari Aboriginal Consultancy Services and Gforce Employment Solutions, Barwon Water offers a 12-month traineeship program that provides access as an early career pathway from target communities, through appropriate education, work training and support, and achievement of a nationally recognised qualification.

The traineeship program is an excellent way to contribute to the community by offering valuable work experience and upskilling trainees, while also providing Barwon Water with a talent pipeline by identifying strong performers who can be retained when roles and opportunities are available.

At the completion of the program, the objective is for trainees to have developed their skills and gained valuable work experience, to become ‘the best candidates’ for future employers, which in turn leads to further employment opportunities and a choice of career pathways.

Barwon Water aims to create an environment that embeds cultural perspectives in all dimensions of the organisation, which is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people working with us. Our specific objectives within this area include:

- Create cultural learning opportunities for staff including connecting with Country
- Embed cultural safety as part of our organisation

Our Aboriginal Employment and Retention Strategy integrates with core work to achieve our overarching Strategy 2030, with a key focus on our vision to ‘create a prosperous region’. The Aboriginal Employment and Retention Strategy contributes to this through enhancing employment, development and inclusion opportunities for our Aboriginal Community in our region.

A key objective within the recruitment strategy is to develop a traineeship program with pathways to full time employment – that may or may not be with Barwon Water Group. Our focus of this program is to create opportunities for people facing employment barriers and those with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and help them secure a traineeship by supporting them and removing employment barriers.

The program not only supports diversity across cultural and socio economic demographics, and supports Barwon Water’s Strategy 2030, it has served to increase females participation in traditionally male-dominated roles, specifically in operations and construction.

The program strongly supports our Belonging @ Barwon Water Inclusion Action Plan.

In addition to the practical real work experience and course work completed, Barwon Water has designed the traineeship program to include a blend of tailored development focussed on individual development needs. This includes partnering trainees with buddies and mentoring so that they are supported and can learn from and with each other. The program delivers life-changing outcomes that are already being realised. For example, some of the benefits our Aboriginal trainees have identified from participating in the program include:

"Being an Aboriginal employee, I have found that I have been extremely lucky to have such an understanding support network where everyone is extremely respectful." Trainee 2019

"I believe programs, like this traineeship partnerships with Gforce are the social fabric between everyone. Real life changing jobs and opportunities" Trainee 2020

In 2019, a Barwon Water trainee was awarded Aboriginal Trainee of the Year through the Gforce Apprentice and Trainees Award program.

More recently, of the nine 2021 Barwon Water trainees, four have been nominated as finalist across four categories for the AEN Awards:

Trainee of the Year: Rodney Sutherland

Indigenous Student: Erin Charles and Rodney Sutherland

Women in Trades: Olivia Martin

Disability Achievement: Kaitlyn Kesson



Rodney Sutherland

Industry performance

5. Carers



INDUSTRY AVERAGE*

50.0%

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

Collective 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 range*:

High 81.0% Low 35.0%

* 15 out of 18 water corporations collected data for this target area – the industry average has been calculated on this basis.

February 2021 Industry average – 45.4% of our workforce identify as having flexible working arrangements to include their caring responsibilities.

The industry continues to exceed its collective target in this area, with the average figure increasing by nearly 5% from the previous year. For the first time, even the industry low figure is now meeting the collective target of 35%.

It is reasonable to conclude that the increase in this target area is attributable to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, with extended periods of remote schooling for the second year in a row requiring employees who are parents to factor in childcare and supervision during their working day.

However, it is also apparent that the pandemic has caused a step-change shift in attitudes towards flexible work more generally, and this has benefits for all employees who have carer responsibilities, including those in senior leadership positions who may have previously felt that flexible work arrangements were not available to them – as demonstrated in the case study from Southern Rural Water.

Case study – A flexible Southern Rural Water

‘Every position is flexible’ – Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director.

In a short space of time, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the way we lived and worked. For many staff at Southern Rural Water (SRW) the experience of working flexibly has been a positive one but for some it’s been more challenging.

SRW has always provided a flexible workplace. However, COVID-19 has taught us to be even more agile and more flexible. In 2021 we actively embraced flexibility as a new way of working at SRW. Whether employees decide to ‘flex’ or not is totally up to them.

This has given all our employees the opportunity to achieve greater work-life balance and determine how we can provide great value to our customers and community. It also facilitates a more inclusive culture, enabling us to employ a more diverse and geographically dispersed workforce.

Jo Giannini, General Manager People Safety and Culture embraced a flexible working style to care for her husband who experienced significant vision impairment in 2021. Through conversations with her Managing Director Cameron FitzGerald, Jo was able to provide daily support to her husband, such as taking him to hospital and specialist appointments, and general, personal care and support. The flexibility came in the form of time – being able to attend appointments and work at an alternative time, but also being able to work regularly from home to be available to support her husband adjust to his vision loss.

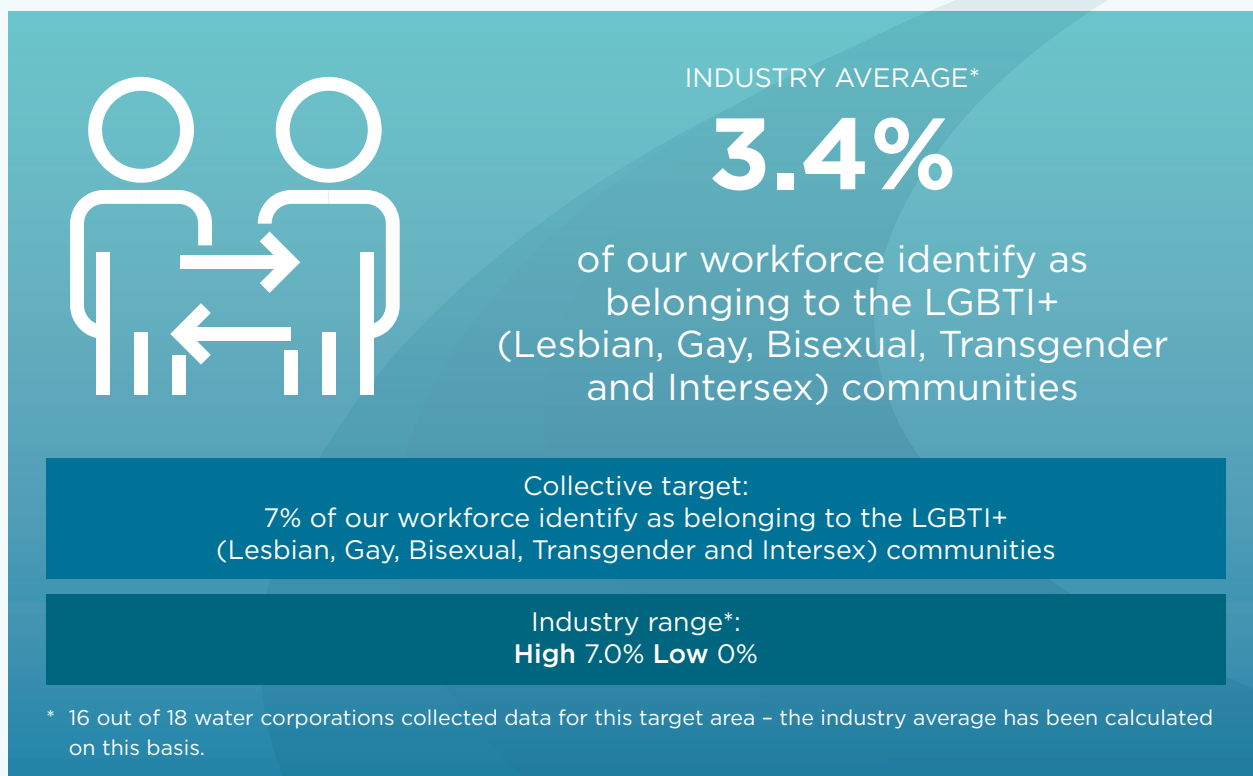
The most important part of accessing a flexible arrangement for Jo has been the non-judgemental, open and supportive conversations with Cameron, her peers and team. Both Jo and her husband are incredibly thankful for SRW’s support during such a challenging time.



Jo with her husband

Industry performance

6. LGBTI+



February 2021 Industry average – 3% of our workforce identify as belonging to LGBTI+ communities.

There has been a slight increase (0.4%) in the industry average figure for employees who identify as LGBTI+.

The Pride in Water network, which started in Victoria and now operates nationally, has provided a focal point for sector-wide activities that promote and celebrate LGBTI+ inclusion. While these collective efforts are significant and valuable, it is equally important that organisations ensure their own workplaces are safe and inclusive for all employees regardless of their gender, sex characteristics or sexuality.

The case study from Melbourne Water highlights the vital role that employee-led initiatives can play in creating a culture that allows people to bring their authentic self to work. However, employers must also ensure that they put in place underpinning policies and procedures that recognise and respect the individual needs and experiences of LGBTI+ employees and help to support their health and wellbeing. As the case study from Yarra Valley Water shows, it is possible to embed this approach into formal instruments like Enterprise Agreements to provide certainty and send a strong signal about the organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Case study – Strong employee leadership

Our employee networks play a critical role in the progress we are making in delivering Melbourne Water's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and action plans.

Strong employee leadership, engagement and involvement in D&I at Melbourne Water is reflected in our employee networks including Refract, our LGBTIQ+ employee led network made up of LGBTIQ+ people and ally members. Together with the D&I Team, the Refract network is responsible for the development and implementation of Melbourne Water's LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Plan.

Refract was established in 2016 and launched in early 2017, in response to an increasing number of Melbourne Water employees seeking to contribute to achieve a more diverse workforce and inclusive workplace culture.

For over five years, Refract has led Melbourne Water's participation in the annual Midsumma Pride March, celebrating the diversity of our employees, the diversity of our community, and the great achievements the LGBTIQ+ community. Attendance from Melbourne Water LGBTIQ+ and ally employees has increased year on year. Participation is part of our commitment to create a space where all employees feel safe to be their authentic selves and feel empowered, regardless of how they identify, not having to self-edit a part of their identity.

For our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer identifying (LGBTIQ+) employees, we recognise that includes creating a workplace environment where it is safe to be out.

Refract has played an important role in maintaining connection for our people throughout the pandemic. In conjunction with Pride In Water and Melbourne Water's D&I Team, Refract's online engagement activities offered opportunities for Melbourne Water's geographically dispersed workforce to connect with each other. Engagement and activities have included participation in Pride In Water's online coffee roulette, online training, 'Lunch & Learn' sessions and annual events for the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) and Wear It Purple Day. These activities were well attended with great representation from across the business, including crew and operators dialling in from the field and operational sites.

"We're proud to have hosted events that showcased the brilliance of LGBTIQ+ culture, clarified and normalised LGBTIQ+ inclusive terminology, and opened discussion to improve understanding for allies," says Lachie Glascodine, Refract Chair.

Industry performance

Importantly, Refract's membership has remained stable throughout the pandemic, buoyed by a combination of internal recruitment campaigns and our D&I Manager's direct encouragement. Our members are engaged, positive and active, demonstrating our network's commitment to promoting LGBTIQ+ equality and recognition throughout Melbourne Water. This is particularly commendable in a period which has demanded so much more of our employees, parents, and colleagues.



Refract at Midsumma Pride March

Case study - LGBTQ+ inclusion in our enterprise agreement

Yarra Valley Water (YVW) has a strong focus on continuing to build and foster an inclusive culture. Our vision within our D&I Strategy is to reflect the community we serve. As such, we are always looking for ways to ensure our people policies are inclusive and supportive for our current and future workforce.

The organisation introduced gender affirmation leave as part of our latest Enterprise Agreement (EA) that came into effect in 2021. The new leave entitlement provides four weeks of paid leave and up to 48 weeks of unpaid leave for employees affirming their gender and can be used for reasons including:

- medical or psychological appointments
- hormonal appointments
- surgery and associated appointments
- appointments to alter the employee's legal status, or amend documentation relating to gender
- any other similar necessary appointments or procedures to give effect to the employee's transition as agreed with YVW.

YVW encourages a culture that is supportive of transgender and gender diverse employees and recognises the importance of providing a safe environment for employees undertaking gender transition. This addition to the EA also contributes to lessening the financial impact of those transitioning gender, who are often required to use annual leave or significant amounts of unpaid leave.

Whilst negotiating the new EA, we also took the opportunity to remove language relating to binary genders, replacing it with gender neutral language and introduced more inclusive language such as chest feeding in addition to breast feeding. These changes were encouraged and welcomed by all parties within the negotiations.

Industry performance

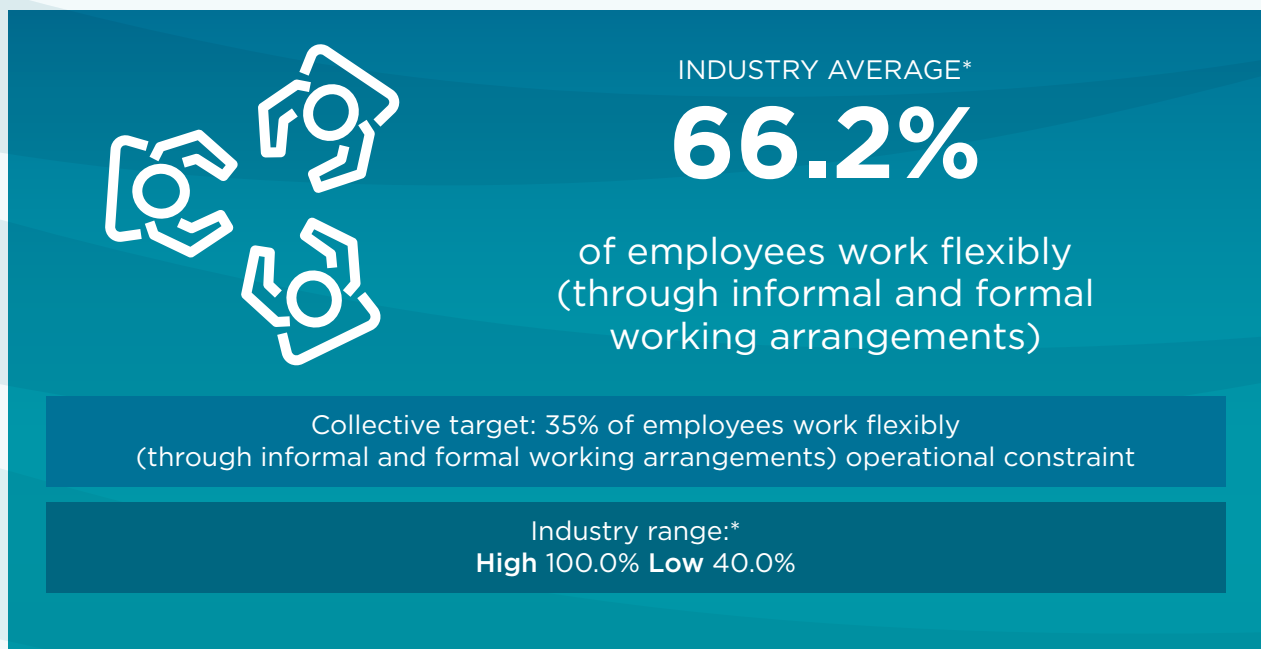
These changes have been promoted to staff and leaders as part of the roadshows and communications relating to the new benefits of the EA. YVW is proud of the changes we have introduced to better support all current and future trans and gender diverse employees to feel safe and valued and believe these new benefits are an important step on that journey.



7. Flexible work



February 2021 Industry average – 84.1% of roles are able to be worked flexibly.



February 2021 Industry average – 62.4% of employees work flexibly (through informal and formal working arrangements).

Industry performance

With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the industry has seen a further increase in roles able to be worked flexibly (91.2% compared with 84.1% in 2020) and employees working flexibly (66.2% compared with 62.4% in 2020).

Water corporations have continued to adapt and evolve their flexible work policies and practices in response to the changing needs and expectations of their employees, largely driven by two years of pandemic. As the industry transitions to 'COVID-normal', it has become clear that flexible work arrangements are now central to supporting employee health and wellbeing, attracting and retaining talent, and promoting greater diversity and inclusion. Adopting a flexible work approach delivers benefits to both the employee and the employer, as illustrated in the case studies from Lower Murray Water and Melbourne Water.

Case study – Flexibility to promote diversity

Lower Murray Water (LMW) has embraced flexible work arrangements and is reaping the benefits through staff retention and attraction.

The flexibility is referenced in LMW job advertisements, on every staff member's email signature and is becoming embedded in the LMW culture.

For Jason Cass, Senior Manager Operations, it has meant being able to continue in the industry he enjoys while relocating for his wife to advance her career. Jason and his family moved to Ararat and technology, flexible arrangements and a supportive work environment have seen him continue to lead his team remotely for the majority.

"When my wife was offered the opportunity and I told my General Manager, he asked what does success look like and we worked through the flexible work arrangement process. I've had overwhelming support," Jason says.

The flexibility has meant Jason can continue his career in the water industry and isn't something he takes lightly.

"Because there's no water corporations where we have moved to, it was either walk away from the industry or flexibility. I've probably got the most flexible work arrangements across LMW and that comes with a responsibility to make it work so that other people can have the opportunity as well," Jason says.

Flexible work in Fiona Newbery's case has meant she can increase her hours. Fiona was working part time hours in the office to be able to be home for her children. Now that she can work from home and work when it suits her and her family, Fiona has increased her hours and is still there for her family when they need her.

“For me that means being able to do school pick up and drop off and still work after the school pick up. It’s been great for my family. I’ve been able to go school assemblies when the kids are presenting, and it makes a difference. LMW have been fantastic with that,” Fiona says.

The flexibility has helped attract staff as well. The mention in the job ad sparked Carly Gange’s interest in working for the corporation. Juggling a young family and work commitments can be tricky but for Carly, the supportive environment and conditions mean she can do both. A flexible arrangement was negotiated before she joined LMW. Carly works flexible hours across the week which means she can take her son to his basketball games or attend his school concert easily.

“The flexibility means I can be there for my boys as well as pursue my career, but it’s more than that, at LMW there is a culture that supports and embraces flexible work arrangements – it’s not just a policy, it’s lived and breathed across the organisation,” Carly says.



Left to right: Jason with his wife and Carly with her son

Industry performance

For LMW, supporting flexible work arrangements reaps significant rewards. “We have been able to retain and attract amazing staff who add to the depth and diversity of our workforce. Without the flexibility, these staff may have left or not applied in the first place, which would have been our loss,” Managing Director, Anthony Couroupis says.



Fiona

Case study – Water operations, benefits beyond balance

Tasked with the management and protection of our city’s major water storage reservoirs, resources and supplies, Melbourne Water’s Operational workforce has traditionally been occupied by men. Our Operational Teams out in the field typically work a full-time week and are also rostered to be available after hours to respond to operational items, treatment plant faults and incident response.

The Operational leadership teams at Melbourne Water are continuing to look for ways to improve their operations, including identifying new and emerging talent, providing career development opportunities to build our knowledge and practice, and support flexibility to improve the employee experience. This allows us to meet the highest standard and requirements of the role. However, with our changing employment landscape post COVID, there has been a demand for greater flexibility.

We know that organisations who have more diversity in their teams, see greater creativity, innovation and efficiency gains from the increased variety of perspectives and approaches to problem solving leading to better decision-making. Team Leader Infrastructure Operations in the Northern Region, Nick Stuart, has recently put this into practice and uncovered a wealth of skilled and reliable talent.

Currently, there are 20 full time water operators in the Northern Operation Water Supply Team. When one operator went on extended long service leave and another operator was seconded for a development opportunity in another team for two days a week, Nick took the opportunity to reflect on how to hire two new candidates, while being fully aware of talent scarcity and skill shortage for the role.

Applications for previous recruitment campaigns to fill vacant Water Supply Operator roles were received from people who had great experience and skills, but not full time availability. Applicants included individuals undertaking studying in relevant fields, as well as candidates with water industry experience wishing to return to the workforce after a career break, as well as a greater proportion of women.

Planning for the recruitment campaign, Nick took the opportunity to explore options and alternatives to one person performing the role full time and ways in which the role could either be undertaken by two people as a job-share or as two part time roles, essentially doubling the skills and experience.

The recruitment campaign once again attracted a diversity of applicants seeking flexible work arrangements. The position was offered to two applicants who were both available on a part-time basis. The new hires, both women, were fully qualified and bring different skills, experiences, versatility and flexibility, which in turn has enabled some efficiencies across the team and their work was calibrated in a way that enabled increased effectiveness.

The workplace has evolved. The employment sector continues to change with organisations needing to look at how to invest in people to build more inclusive and productive workplaces. At Melbourne Water we are looking at where to prioritise our resources to be most effective and look for efficiencies.

Building flexibility into the job design, including altered start and finish times, has provided the team with the opportunity to balance work and other commitments. Having two part time team members has had the added benefit of these team members being able to work additional days/shifts to cover resources gaps. This proved invaluable during a recent increased rate of COVID exposures resulting in other members needing to isolate.

Industry performance

It makes sense, that by providing visibility of the range of flexible work arrangements available during the recruitment process, Melbourne Water's access to the pool of talent has widened.

Flexible work arrangements allow people who either choose to work flexibly, for a number of reasons, and/or manage work-life responsibilities or commitments to gain employment. It may also work well for employees wanting to make a gradual transition to retirement, forging new careers, transitioning to and from parental leave or tapering down to part-time hours of work.

Our aim is to continue to grow this part time initiative based on its success. We anticipate it will enable Melbourne Water to retain employees' expertise and continue sharing their knowledge, as well as support employees to work in a way that is mutually beneficial to both them and Melbourne Water.

The addition of the two new team members has contributed to increasing the diversity in our Operational teams. Sometimes the smallest action or decision, or change to a practice, can result in a positive outcome for the organisation and our people. And that's inclusion in action.



Melbourne Water employees

Conclusion

This third annual performance report against the Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019–2023 shows a mixed bag of results for the sector.

While there continues to be strong progress in the target areas related to flexible work, there has been some stagnation in other target areas including gender balance, which had previously seen some good advances.

There is no doubt that two years of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the water industry, just as it has on society as a whole. Organisational capacity has been stretched and many executives and their teams have been diverted into pandemic response activities.

It is not unreasonable to conclude that the pandemic has largely driven the positive results in flexible work related targets, while also contributing to the lack of progress in other target areas.

As the industry transitions to 'COVID-normal', water corporations will be able to refocus their efforts to move the dial in key target areas, to deliver on their commitment to build a diverse and inclusive workplace culture across the industry.

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