

Victorian Water Industry

# Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019–2023

Annual Performance Report  
February 2023



# 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 and present. 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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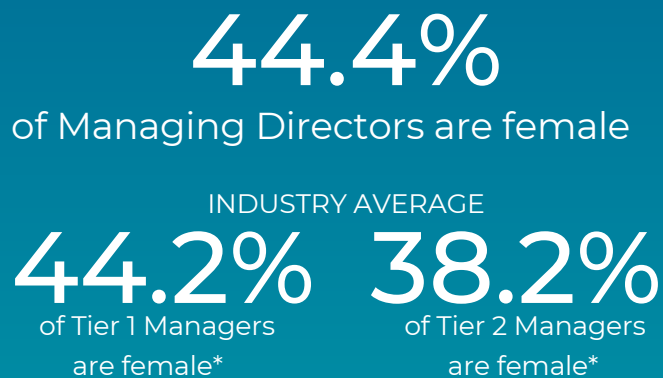
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# Executive summary

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

This report has been prepared by VicWater's Diversity & Inclusion Steering Committee, comprising representatives of all 18 water corporations. It provides an update since the previous report (February 2022) 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 of 30 June 2022) across all participating water corporations.



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  
**6.2%**

of our workforce identify as a person with disability

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

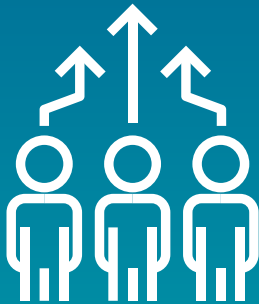


INDUSTRY AVERAGE  
**12.7%**

of our workforce speak a language other than English

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





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

55.9%

of our workforce access flexible working arrangements for caring responsibilities

Target: 35% of our workforce access flexible working arrangements for caring responsibilities



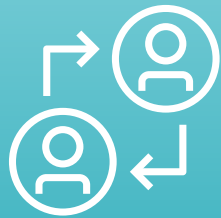
INDUSTRY AVERAGE

3.7%

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

95.4%

of employees have access to 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



INDUSTRY AVERAGE

63.2%

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.

Although we have not met all targets set within the Strategy, this fourth annual performance report shows positive progress across all areas. There has been strong progress in the past year in the areas of gender balance, disability and workers identifying as having caring roles.

Throughout 2022, the industry, along with the broader society, has learned to live with COVID-19. Many have embraced the return to COVID-normal with employees returning to the office, which is seen in the flexible working statistics declining from last year, but the number of people accessing flexible working arrangements is still above the collective target. It is not unreasonable to conclude that while society continues to transition to COVID-normal there will be long-lasting and ongoing impacts of an unsettled and uncertain period. This is seen particularly with increased turnover of staff and workforce shortages impacting water corporations and elevating an operational risk to more of a strategic risk.

This risk means that creating a diverse and inclusive environment will be more important than ever to attract and retain talent in the water sector. The return to near pre-pandemic conditions will allow water corporations to refocus their attention in this last year of the Strategy to 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 & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023 (the Strategy) was developed during 2018-19 to demonstrate the industry's commitment to building a diverse workforce and inclusive culture across the Victorian water sector.

We know that organisations that 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 individual 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 of 30 June 2022. We have also included figures from the February 2022 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. All water corporations, other than two, have provided data as of 30 June 2022.
- 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 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, which tells 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’.

### *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 and to ensure that water corporations cater to all their employees and customers.

Since launching in 2020, WaterAble has had a clear strategy for raising awareness about disability in the industry through all its activities. They aim to be a resource both to people with disability and to the industry, engaging with industry leaders to raise awareness at all levels of organisations.

In the past 12 months WaterAble has undertaken the following activities to showcase and create awareness of disability across the industry:

- Hosting annual International Day of People with Disability event (3 December).
- Engaging with individual water corporations to raise awareness of disability.
- Annual Day of Action Workshop and follow-up support to help initiatives thrive.
- WaterAble Connections Program – this program pairs leaders and a person with a disability together to connect and learn from each other.
- Providing opportunities for people from within the industry to speak about their disability pride.



From L-R: Back Row: Brendan Moore (Pride in Water), Matt Iverson, Dean Barnett,  
Front Row: Donald Hughan, Llewellyn Prain, Tara Daniel

By supporting WaterAble, the industry now has a trusted organisation to call on for advice and assistance on disability inclusion. WaterAble provides a forum for more people across the sector to be open about their lived experiences with disability.

This openness leads to increased confidence around inclusion, and this is supported by the increase in the number of people identifying as having a disability across the sector.

In 2022 Water Able held an industry workshop to prioritise actions for the sector. More details about the workshop and the outcomes and implementation of the agreed actions have been showcased in the section on disability within this report.

# Introduction

## *Pride In Water Network*

The Pride in Water network was formed in 2019 to connect LGBTIQ+ employees and allies in the Victorian water industry. From its 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.

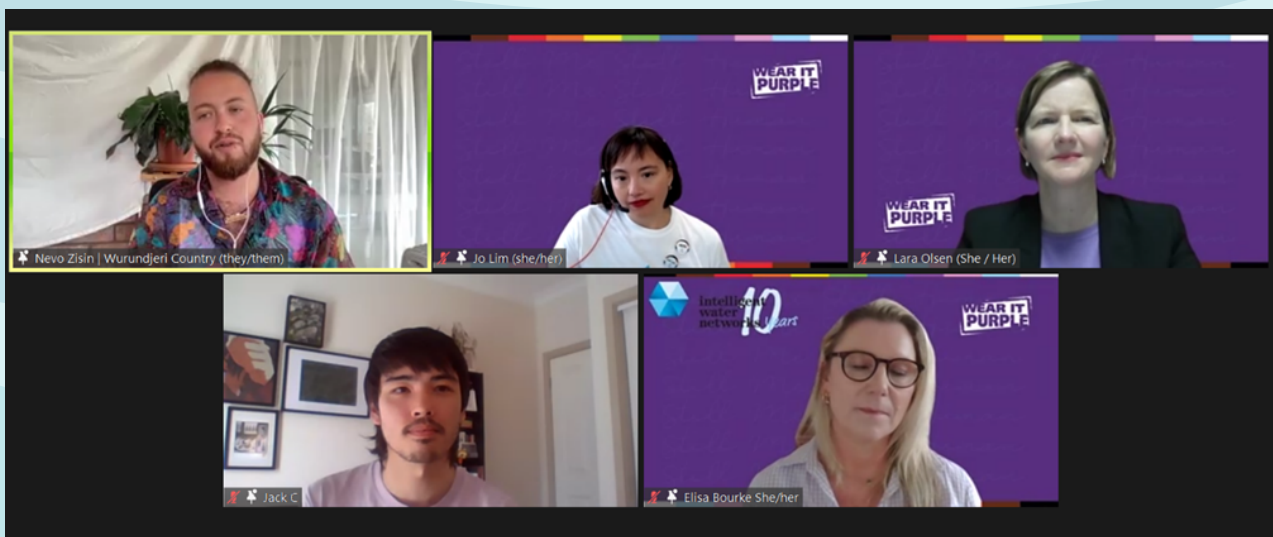
VicWater is an ongoing supporter of Pride in Water.

## *Wear it Purple Day*

Wear it Purple Day is an annual LGBTQIA+ awareness day especially for young people. Each year it is held on 25 August. On 26 August 2022 the Victorian water corporations came together to celebrate Wear It Purple Day with an online event.

Over 300 people from across Victoria attended. The event included a presentation from Nevo Zisin who is a Jewish, queer, non-binary Australian writer and activist. Nevo spoke authentically about their lived experiences as a transgender person. Their presentation had the audience both laughing and crying, but most importantly, it raised the importance of inclusivity.

Nevo's presentation was then followed by a panel session featuring allies and members of the LGBTQIA+ community from the Victorian water sector. The collective ripple effects of these types of collaborative event helps to progress equality and inclusion across the Victorian water sector.



The Wear it Purple day panellists (from Top L to Bottom R) - Nevo Zisin, Jo Lim (VicWater), Lara Olsen (SEW), Elisa Bourke (IWN), Jack C (GWW)



# Introduction

## Women in Water Directors Network

The Women in Water Directors Network (WWDN) was formally established in 2018 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. The WWDN holds industry events and runs a peer and Allies program.

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 2022, the WWDN focussed on encouraging women into senior positions at all levels across the sector and having 'conversations that matter'. WWDN events covered peer mentoring, the Allies program, and how to enable workplaces that encourage women to thrive at the top level.

In 2022 the WWDN appointed two Co-Chairs which demonstrates a commitment to exploring different approaches to supporting women in senior roles and allows a diversity of thought to shape the focus of WWDN in 2023 and beyond.

Female water  
corporation chairs

61%

Female water  
corporation directors

57%

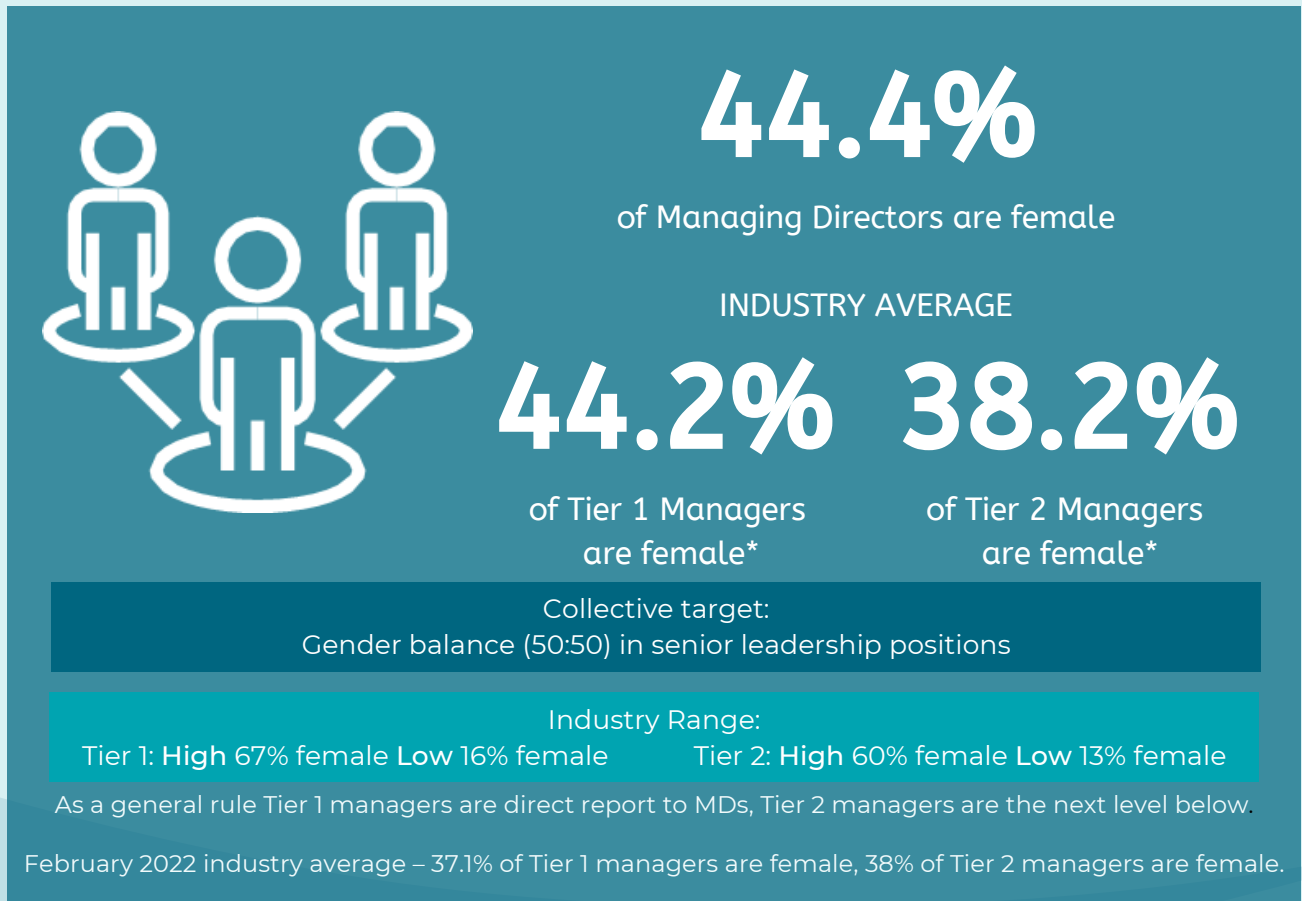


Panellists from the 2022 Director Development Program Allies Panel (from L - R) Tania Fryer, Robyn McLeod, John Bradley and Phil Clark

Photo Credit: Leesa Maree Creative

# Industry performance

## 1. Gender



2022 saw a continued focus on gender diversity in the sector, with new regulatory compliance obligations under the Gender Equality Act 2020 becoming embedded in water corporations' businesses.

Gender equality action plans which include strategies and measures to improve gender equality were submitted in 2022 with all Victorian water corporations assessed by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector as meeting compliance. The implementation of South East Water's Gender Equality Action Plan and the progress that is being made to improve their workplace for women to thrive is shown in one of the case studies. All water corporations have also commenced work on gender impact assessments which help to understand the impacts of policies, programs, and services on the different needs of women, men and gender-diverse people.

In 2022 the Commission released its baseline report based on workplace audit data that was submitted in 2021. The report provides an overview of the current state and nature of gender inequality across the Victorian public sector and shows that the water sector is performing well compared to other defined entities within the Victorian Public Sector. The baseline report can be found [here](#).

This year's industry figures show that there has been good progress towards the target of a 50:50 gender balance in senior leadership positions. With the appointment of three female managing directors in the first half of the 2021-22 financial year the gender balance of MDs is now at 44.4% female. Tier 1 managers have increased to 44.2% from 37.1% in 2022 and Tier 2 managers have increased to 38.2% from 37.8% in 2022.

Although the Victorian water sector is yet to reach its targets for gender balance, there is steady progress and an increasing focus on female participation in management positions. This is shown in the featured case studies where South Gippsland Water has appointed their first female General Manager – Service Delivery in what is a traditionally male dominated field.

## Case Study - Making the workplace fairer for all

South East Water has developed and delivered its first Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) in compliance with the Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020. To achieve this, they conducted a workplace gender audit analysis which led to a series of workplace consultation workshops with employees.

Through these workshops, South East Water's people helped determine the key objectives of the GEAP and several actions including:

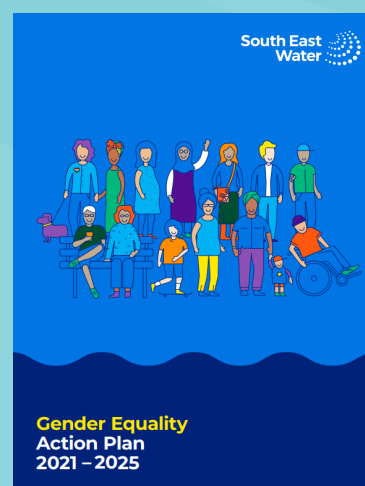
- equal workplace composition, learning and development to support careers
- understanding flexible ways of working
- transparency in recruitment and selection
- building confidence to report experiences of sexual harassment.

Through this process, a vision for gender equality at South East Water was also crafted – *“to ensure we're a safe, progressive equal opportunity employer where our people are valued and respected for who they are, and where their rights, talents and expertise are embraced, celebrated and rewarded without discrimination, prejudice or unconscious bias”*.

South East Water has already made progress towards its GEAP, with changes to the parental leave policy – which gives 14 weeks of paid parental leave for all parents and carers at the birth or adoption of a child.

South East Water's stance on flexibility, one of the philosophies behind its GEAP, has helped to attract and retain top performers to and within the organisation and supported them to thrive. South East Water enabled an employee to have the flexibility to be truly effective working full-time while looking after her family. They also partnered with Work180 as an endorsed employer that is genuinely committed to driving equality.

As a member of Diversity Council Australia, they are committed to the #IStandForRespect pledge to make our workplaces respectful and safe for all, by standing against gendered harassment and violence in all its forms.



South East Water's Gender Equality Action Plan



## Case Study - Women in Operations at South Gippsland Water

Clare Gibson was recently appointed as General Manager – Service Delivery at South Gippsland Water. This is the first time a female has been appointed to this role. This role covers Water Quality and Treatment, Environment, Wastewater Treatment, Network Maintenance and Faults and Dispatch.

Clare brings significant diversity in thinking to the role having not only worked in engineering and asset management roles but also her lived experiences and past roles in organisational development and safety. Along with her strong technical knowledge, she brings a passion for developing people, and having inclusive diverse workplaces. When asked why it is important to have women in these senior technical roles Clare said:

*“The operations team that I lead at SGW are passionate about what we do protect the health of our people and the environment in our communities. I am a natural problem solver but the strengths that I bring which I attribute to being a woman, are my intuition, my ability to ask the right questions with compassion and an open mind, my ability to keep calm under pressure, listen, communicate and genuinely care. As the water industry continues to evolve to face our current and emerging challenges, we must lean in to these skills, genuinely listen, connect and enable our people and our communities to work together to thrive”.*

Rob Murphy, Managing Director at South Gippsland Water was asked the same question and his response was:

*“Having a woman in charge of our male-dominated operational and maintenance teams is very different and a real advantage for our business. Clare provides insights and perspectives that we just wouldn't get if a male were in the role. Importantly, our people have a leader who genuinely cares about them as people first. I am very excited about the future that Clare is leading our operational teams towards.”*

Having a female in a senior service delivery role has huge benefits across the sector where these positions are traditionally male, it shows the sector is maturing.



From L - R: Peter Houston, Anita Deisner, Rod Murray and Clare Gibson

# Industry performance

## 2. Disability



There has been a large increase (1.7%) in the number of people identifying with a disability, now at 6.2% compared with 4.5% in the 2022 reporting year. Although the Victorian water sector is not yet reaching its collective target of 10%, programs like WaterAble and the Intelligent Water Network's Diversity and Inclusion program are shining a spotlight on what needs to be done to improve disability inclusivity across the sector and sharing solutions to improve accessibility for all.

WaterAble held an industry-first workshop in September 2022 which is showcased in the first case study. This event aimed to develop tangible actions for implementation in the lead up to the International Day of People with Disability in December, which was celebrated across the sector with an online event featuring disability advocate Dinesh Palipana.

Victorian water corporations are adapting their workplaces and identifying how best to incorporate a person's needs into the workplace. A past Barwon Water trainee eloquently talks through her experiences with profound hearing loss in the workplace in the second case study.

# Industry performance

## Case Study - WaterAble industry workshop and report

On 9 September 2022, 45 people across the Victorian water industry participated in an industry workshop that aimed to:

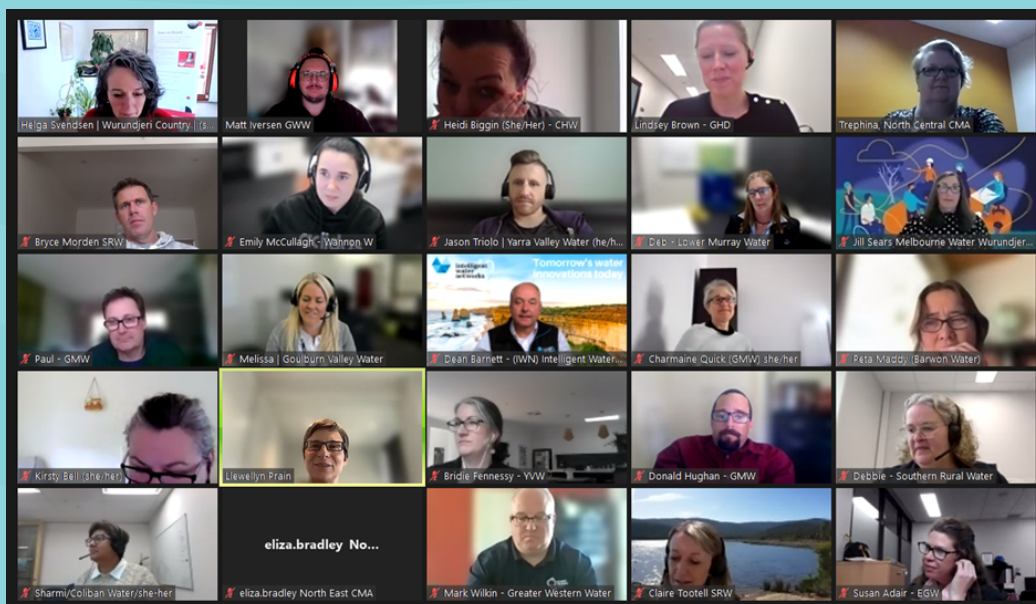
- bring our industry together to share disability inclusion successes and failures.
- learn from each other and build momentum for change.
- agree on some simple actions the industry can take to improve disability inclusion.
- challenge the industry to implement these actions by the International Day of People with Disability – 3 December 2022.

Workshop attendees included senior leaders, people with disability, WaterAble members, and other people from within our industry keen to attend. WaterAble was particularly pleased that around 15% of participants identified as people with disability. Workshop participants were tasked with coming up with ideas to improve disability inclusion in our industry. The aim was to come up with ideas that were reasonably easy to implement over a few months. The criteria for the actions were do-ability and impact.

The workshop was structured around three themes; accessibility, recruitment and retention, and attitudes. Participants were encouraged to have fun, make connections, learn from each other and past failures, and get immersed in how we make our industry more disability inclusive. The workshop commenced with three case studies to help workshop participants think about how inclusion within the water sector is broad and can be far-reaching.

The case studies were:

- Central Highlands Water's accessible design story.
- IWN – Recruiting people with disability into different roles and providing environments for them to thrive and grow.
- Yarra Valley Water's inclusivity in their citizen's jury.



Screenshot from the WaterAble Day of Action workshop held 9 September 2022

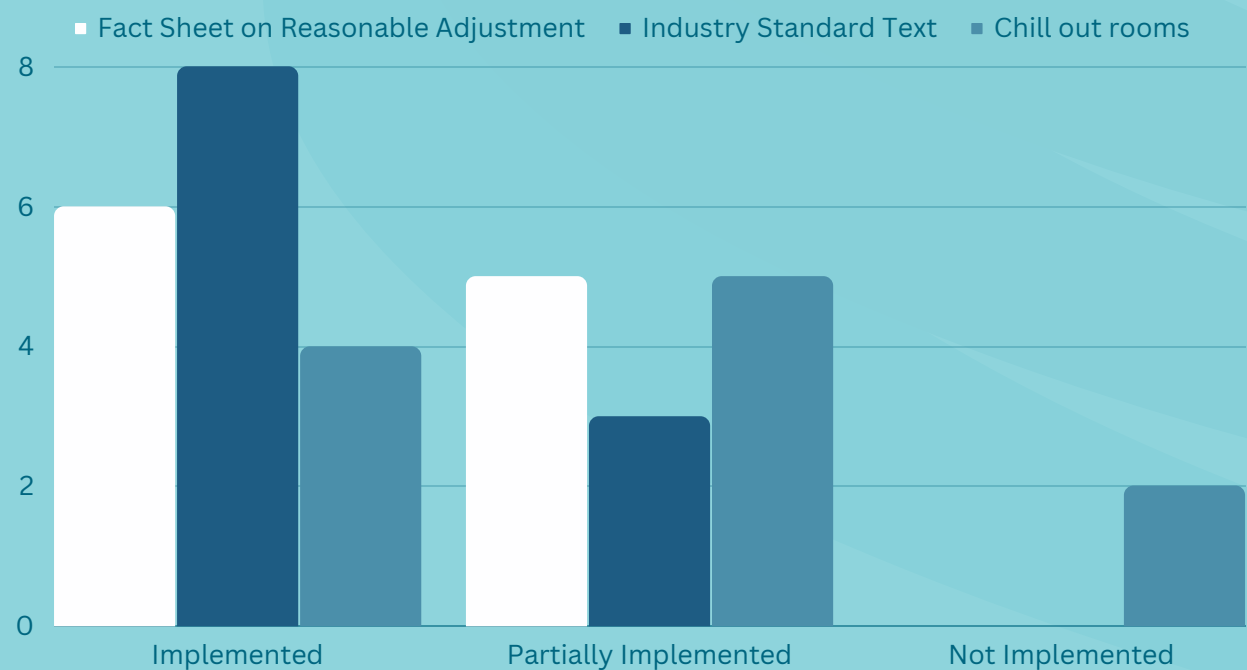
# Industry performance

Following the case studies, workshop participants were moved into breakout rooms to develop some ideas to be implemented by the sector. There were many conversations before the workshop voted on the top three ideas:

- Develop fact sheets on reasonable adjustments.
- Create an industry standard text for job advertisements that encourage people with disability to apply and include assistance for people with disability who may need it to apply.
- Create quiet or chill-out rooms for neurodiverse employees.

WaterAble provided all workshop participants with a short kit to support this work. A full report of the workshop is available [here](#).

Prior to the International Day of People with Disability, WaterAble surveyed all Victorian water corporations to find out how implementing the three workshop actions went. Eleven water corporations responded to the survey. Overwhelmingly they had either fully or partially implemented the actions, with progress planned on actions not implemented by 3 December 2022.



# Industry performance

## Case Study - Barwon Water spotlight on hearing impaired Trainee - Kaitlyn Kesson

*Hearing loss is Australia's second most common disability. Currently, one in six people will suffer hearing loss in their lives.*

Kaitlyn is a former trainee at Barwon Water who has severe/profound hearing loss. Without hearing aids, Kaitlyn is deaf. Kaitlyn's story shines the light on how important it is for us to look beyond the difference or the (dis)ability to a person's capabilities and how organisations like Barwon Water can adapt.

Kaitlyn shared a presentation with Barwon Water, so that they were able to create an even more inclusive workplace environment. Simple things like meeting face-to-face, making eye contact, writing down notes, and being patient all go a long way to helping Kaitlyn feel valued and included at work. The following is Kaitlyn's reflections of the traineeship, in her own words.

### Why I chose Certificate III Technical Engineering Traineeship

I chose this course as I had been searching for a new career move and I have an interest in the processes of engineering as it quite logical and the structure of how things work has always been fascinating. I really enjoy the technical aspects and I was also looking for a challenge that would give me the chance to continue to learn and improve myself. Engineering is the perfect option for me as it offers both "hands on" and the mental stimulation that was missing in previous roles.

### How it changed or impacted me

Since I began the course, my self-confidence has increased dramatically. This has inspired me to continue to push myself, keep learning and build the confidence to create and seek new opportunities. One example of this is my continually growing capability and confidence to undertake site inspections independently. I am no longer as fearful to speak up or to try things that are out of my comfort zone. I realise that I'm capable of achieving so much more than I had previously thought.

### What I have gained from completing this course

What I've gained so far has changed me and is difficult to put in a few words. This course has helped me interpret engineering drawings and understand different aspects of my job. It's opened my eyes on how important safety and personal well-being truly is. Also having a supportive team behind me to validate opinions and answer queries both large and small, makes me feel valued as a person and as an employee.



# Industry performance

## What I have brought to my workplace

Honestly, I feel I have received so much more than what I have brought to the workplace. What I have definitely brought with me to the workplace is a considerable amount of enthusiasm and good humour and ever-growing independence. I have a willingness to challenge norms and processes and I believe my engagement has shone a light on the organisations diversity and disability goals. I have also brought a willingness to learn and a lot of questions that my team is always happy to answer!



Kaitlyn Kesson (Barwon Water Trainee 2021)

## Challenges that I have had to address that have impacted my training

Of course, COVID and isolation at home has been the standout through the majority of my training so far. Having to wear a mask has affected my ability to lip read, although there is an exemption and I am allowed to ask people to remove their mask when needed. I do attempt to grasp what they say before I do so. Not always having someone there to answer questions immediately, whereas in the office I am able to turn to the person next to me and get an instant answer.

I also put an insane amount of pressure on myself to know as much as possible and I like to do everything right the first time! It does take time to learn and as a trainee I realise I am not expected to know how everything works or how to do something. I need to remind myself that making a mistake can help me learn to improve and do things better the next time.

My hearing impairment does add another level of challenge but everyone is willing to help find solutions for any communication barriers. When I have difficulties with clarity my team remain patient and understanding, even when I have to ask them to repeat themselves seven times before I understand. In the workplace I'm not made to feel less - I am equal and that is so refreshing to feel.

# Industry performance

I have always felt like I was on the outside, but my team and workplace have been so inclusive and welcoming that I feel less isolated and fully involved.

My hearing impairment has probably been the biggest challenge with training as well as the way I process information in written format.

Although my hearing is a constant challenge, I always try to find a way to overcome and manage them. One of the biggest issues is the echo in meeting rooms and we are working together with IT to implement a system that allows sound to travel directly to my ears. In group meetings I also need to clearly see each person speaking to aid with my comprehension and clarity and as this is not always possible, notes are provided to me beforehand.

With written content, it is important that I follow up with the author to clarify the information given to me. This is done via email, but if it remains unclear to me, I can consult others for their interpretation or do a zoom call to get a verbal explanation. Some things I have found that have helped me, as someone who has a disability, are:

- Being forward from the beginning about things that I need to succeed eg. Face to face, clear visual to allow lip reading.
- Adding a signature on my emails that clearly states my preferred communication to be via written format. This helps other people know my situation and helps aid them with communication with me.
- If something does not suit my needs, it is important to bring this up with my supervisor to find a workable solution.
- Onsite learning in a group, more hands-on activities, and site excursions.

# Industry performance

## 3. Language Other than English



# 12.7%

of our workforce speak a language other than English

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

Industry Range:  
High: 40.0% Low: 3.0%

February 2022 industry average – 11.1% of our workforce speak a language other than English.

The industry average figure in this target area has increased by 1.6 % 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 the highest industry figure of 40% was reported by a metro water corporation, while the lowest figure (3%) belongs to a regional water corporation.

From the 2021 census 30% of Victorians were born overseas which is above the national average of 27.6% (data from <https://www.vic.gov.au/discover-victorias-diverse-population>). In order to recognise this increasing diversity in their communities, Melbourne Water has been working to develop an inclusive language communication guide as shown in the case study below. This will ensure all Melburnians have access to the right information and are able to participate in engagement activities.

### Case Study - Melbourne Water's guide to inclusive communications and engagement

At Melbourne Water, we know the diversity of our customers and communities is growing. We also know all members of our community have the right to access the same information and opportunities to be involved in our engagement activities.

A key objective of Melbourne Water's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is to better 'understand the diverse needs of our community and create inclusive and accessible methods of communication and consultation'.



# Industry performance

To support this objective we're evolving the way we deliver best practice communications and engagement to better meet the growing needs of Melbourne's diverse communities.

Embracing diversity leads to a better understanding of - and engagement with - the communities in which we work. Essentially this is what doing our job well looks like. As an organisation, we have some well-established and accessible communications and engagement practices embedded in our day to day work. For example how we deliver digital communications and run our events. However, as we are becoming more aware of the needs of our diverse communities, we know our communications and engagement practitioners can be overwhelmed with all the things they think they need to know and do to increase inclusion. There are lots of resources available but when busy and already juggling multiple stakeholders, channels, and engagement activities, it can be difficult to know the right suite of targeted approaches to foster participation from diverse communities.

To address this identified need, Melbourne Water has developed 'The Melbourne Water Guide to Inclusive Communications and Engagement'. A guide to better equip our communications and engagement practitioners with resources to deliver activities that foster participation that is more representative of our diverse communities.

Key sections within the guide include:

- overarching principles for inclusive communications and engagement
- minimum requirements for all communications and engagement
- best practice tips and approaches to choose from depending on the target audience
- summary of inclusive language terms staff should be using
- shortlist of key internal and external resources to refer to for further guidance
- a curated playlist of additional training available to staff
- key legislation we need to be aware of

This guide will help practitioners to rethink how to plan and deliver communications and engagement, as well as taking assumptions out of the mix, understanding the community better, in turning embedding inclusion as standard practice, and offering targeted approaches depending on the community members we are trying to reach.

The guide will support and inspire our staff to consistently respect the breadth of diversity of our customers and community and embed practice that legitimately engages all.

A copy of Melbourne Water's Guide to Inclusive Communications and Engagement can be made available on request.

# Industry performance

## 4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



# 1.6 %

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

Collective target:  
3.0% of our workforce identify as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander

Industry Range:  
High: 6.0% Low: 0.0%

February 2022 industry average – 1.4% of our workforce identify as Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander.

The industry average figure for this year has increased slightly from the previous year (+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.

Those meaningful relationships are two-way with water corporations learning and embodying the appreciation of land and waterways from Indigenous employees. This is shown in the case study from Lower Murray Water where water treatment plant operator, Steph, mixes her cultural values into her day job which has influenced the culture of Lower Murray Water as a whole.

### Case Study - Embracing cultural heritage through a diverse workforce.

The river is an important part of First Nations culture and has been for generations. The river and related waterways serve as a meeting place for peoples of all backgrounds.

Lower Murray Water (LMW) understands the significance of water. They aim to learn and embody the same appreciation for the river as the First Nations peoples. Part of this understanding stems from welcoming people of all backgrounds into the organisation.

# Industry performance

LMW recognises that having a diverse and inclusive workplace is an integral part of organisational growth. Having a diverse range of backgrounds in the same working group ensures diverse perspectives and creates a positive environment. It allows for the sharing of insights and experiences to foster growth and unity. When Steph, a proud Latji Latji woman commenced with LMW, they welcomed her with open arms. Steph was able to bring her unique experiences into a field that is predominantly occupied by males.

Steph joined LMW on 1 December 2021 as a Treatment Plant Operator. Steph has brought not only her experience and pride to this role but also a commitment as an Indigenous woman to improve herself in her position.



Steph - Lower Murray Water Employee

Steph has shown a willingness to further her knowledge in commencing her Certificate III in Water Treatment. Steph's cultural values flow through her work and performance at multiple local treatment plants within LMW. Her insights and involvements also help to formulate the culture of the organisation as a whole. This has helped contribute to LMW's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), and how the organisation can improve its understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and what actions can be taken to help.



Steph - Lower Murray Water Employee

As a woman, Steph also helps break down the gender stereotypes associated with operations-based positions. Steph's pride and love for her work helps create a positive atmosphere and serves as a great example for young women who may be discouraged from entering the water treatment field.

This supports LMW's aim of increasing the number of women working within non-gender-typical roles as highlighted in their Gender Equity Action Plan (GEAP).

# Industry performance

## 5. Carers



# 55.1 %

of our workforce identify as having flexible working arrangements to include caring responsibilities

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: 67.5%

Low: 40.0%

February 2022 industry average – 50.0% of our workforce identify as having flexible working arrangements for caring responsibilities

The industry continues to exceed its collective target in this area, with the average figure increasing by just over 5% from the previous year. The industry-high figure has decreased from 81% to 67.5% which is likely due to 2022 seeing a return to normal schooling and most workplaces returning in some form to offices following the COVID- 19 Pandemic.

The industry-low figure still exceeds the collective target by 5% which indicates a permanent shift within the sector towards supporting flexibility for employees that have caring responsibilities.

With water corporations settling into flexible and hybrid working arrangements as part of COVID normal, the 'everyday' caring responsibilities are being embedded more easily into the normal working day, including school drop offs and pick ups or looking after sick children. The increased flexibility around things like this are one of the benefits that has come from COVID.

Many workplaces are acknowledging that caring responsibilities are shared and that secondary carers are playing a more significant role in households than ever before. This is shown in a case study from South Gippsland Water where they recently expanded their secondary carer provisions which help support primary carers returning to work.

The second case study features Melbourne Water who have identified the importance of keeping in touch with employees on parental leave to help alleviate any anxieties that may arise from them whilst away from work.

# Industry performance

## Case Study - South Gippsland Waters extension of parental leave.



South Gippsland Water recently expanded paid parental leave provisions for the secondary carer from two to six weeks and increased the flexibility for timing and time blocks of leave. This was in recognition that primary carers are predominantly women and having greater support from secondary carers reduces barriers to returning to the workforce.

One of South Gippsland Water's maintenance team leaders, Todd Lomax, recently took the additional four weeks' leave which was offered for this exact purpose, this has supported his female partner returning to work.

Todd Lomax and Family



# Industry performance

## Case Study - Melbourne Water's parental leave support

### Challenges

For many employees taking parental leave there are a number of anxieties that can arise from taking this time off work; how will they manage the childcare juggle, the perception that their head may not be in the game and changes that take place while they're away from work? Perhaps there's also the worry that the job they return to may not be the job they've left. That's quite apart from the common feelings of loneliness, being out of touch and loss of self-belief. Melbourne Water's goal is to support parents and retain their skills and confidence to return to the workplace.

### How we acted

Melbourne Water regularly consults with employees in a variety of ways that include surveys and feedback in 'Keep in Touch' business updates. In 2019 they surveyed employees who had accessed long term leave including employees that had taken parental leave. The feedback provided by employees was then used to expand their offering.

Since then, Melbourne Water has prioritised and implemented actions which supports parents to return to meaningful and flexible work whilst raising their family.

Melbourne Water employees are eligible for the same entitlements regardless of gender or family status. For example, parental leave is available to same-sex families, single parents/carers, married and de-facto parents/carers.



Melbourne Water employee Marlon Rodrigo with his daughter

# Industry performance

Melbourne Water are providing employees with a range of resources to support them as they prepare for parental leave, during parental leave, and when they transition back into the workplace to support parents/carers through what we hope is a very positive experience. Some key facets of Melbourne Water's parental leave policy that are making a difference for employees are:

- All Melbourne Water employees eligible for the same entitlements regardless of family status (same-sex families, single parents/carers, married and de-facto parents/carers)
- Parents are eligible to take parental leave concurrently with partners who are on parental leave to provide the family support, allowing employees the flexibility to access leave that suits their individual circumstances
- 10 paid Keep in Touch Days
- Keep in Touch Business Update events
- Employee experience platform that offers expertly designed programs and self-directed learning tools and resources
- Parents Network
- Access to up to 6 hours of tailored coaching sessions that they can use at any stage of their journey
- Ability to create a transition plan with their Manager to gradually return to work, and access to a variety of flexible working arrangements.



## Staying Connected

Melbourne Water recognises that every employee is different in terms of how they would like to engage with the organisation while they are on parental leave.

Twice a year we run Keeping In Touch Business Update events for employees on parental leave. The initiative is designed to keep employees on parental leave up-to-date on the business and the support available for employees. Importantly the events provide the opportunity to hear from and network with senior leaders and their peers.

The update presentation, delivered by the Managing Director, provides information about the business and provides employees with the opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion. These events are also an opportunity for leaders to hear from employees about their experience and ideas.

These conversations have led us to understand these employee's need and make simple changes that have improved the employee experience.

# Industry performance

As Joanne Thom recalls of her experience: *“Often when you’re caring for a baby and small children you can lose confidence and feel isolated and out of touch with your colleagues and workplace.”*

Keeping in Touch events and programs contribute to ensuring parents have a positive experience and lead to increased retention post leave.

As Joanne says, *“I was invited to face to face briefings from Senior Leaders at Keeping in Touch events for parents. At those events it was fantastic to have my baby in the childcare on site, in the room next door, whilst I took the time to have catch-up meetings with my managers.”*

*I could retain my mobile phone which meant I could choose to access my work emails and keep up to date on things going on. My managers invited me to attend meetings to be updated on changes in the workplace and I could access up to 10 paid keeping in touch days to cover these activities.”*

## Parental Leave Coaching

While all Melbourne Water can access online training tools through Grace Papers, professional coaching is also available to help employees develop a plan that best fits their individual goals, home life and managers’ expectations.

For Joanne Thom, this coaching gave her the perspective on her skills and career goals that allowed her to transition to a new role.

*“I found that having a specialist career coach provided by Melbourne Water whilst on parental leave, helped me to identify what are my values and my priorities for returning to work. It helped to boost my confidence and has helped me return to a role that works for my family and for my career,”* she said.

Joanne says she has been well supported to return to the career she loves and is thriving in her management role at Melbourne Water. Communication was key.

*“Whilst I was on leave Melbourne Water instigated consistent, positive communication, coaching and planning to support me.”*

*My career goal prior to taking leave was to move into a different position at Melbourne Water. Whilst on leave, changes in the workplace resulted in an opportunity for my career goals to be met.*

*I have transitioned to a new role which allows me to use the skills and experience I have developed over my 18-year career at Melbourne Water.”*



# Industry performance

## 6. LGBTI +



# 3.7 %

of our workforce identify as belonging to the LGBTI+ communities.

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

Industry Range:  
High: 8.5% Low: 0.0%

February 2022 industry average – 3.4 % of our workforce identify as belonging to the LGBTI+ community

There has been a slight increase (0.3%) in the industry average figure for employees who identify as LGBTI+.

Industry-wide and employee-led networks like Pride in Water, and Yarra Valley Water's Pride network are important for the sector to support our LGBTI + colleagues. Small things such as the correct use of pronouns are an easy way to show respect for someone and using gender-neutral pronouns is also an easy way to refer to someone whose gender you're unsure of.

Yarra Valley Water has included pronouns as part of their email signatures to show support for trans and gender-diverse people within their communities.

HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM  
HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM  
HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM  
HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM  
HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM  
HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM  
HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM HE HIM HER SHE THEY THEM

# Industry performance

## Case Study - Yarra Valley Water supporting pronouns on email signatures

Yarra Valley Water stands for a fair and equitable society. They embrace diversity and inclusion in everything they do as they strive to reflect the community that they serve. As part of the ongoing commitment to creating an inclusive culture, Yarra Valley Water introduced gender pronouns to email signatures. The inclusion of pronouns into email signatures is optional for Yarra Valley Water employees and 22% have added pronouns to their email signatures.

The idea to introduce gender pronouns in signatures was initially raised by the YVW Pride network. Limitations with the existing IT Service Management system meant that people were able to manually add pronouns to their email signatures but when automatic updates were applied, they would not carry over. An upgrade to the system meant that this process could now be automated for employees. The project was a joint effort between People, Performance and Culture and Service Futures (IT) to bring it to life.

Including pronouns within work email signatures shows how you identify yourself and how you would like to be referred to in the third person when not using your name. These can include he/him, she/her, they/them or other pronouns.

As an organisation, Yarra Valley Water believe that it is a great opportunity to be an ally for the LGBTIQ+ community. They hope that creating opportunities to share our pronouns, we will create a safer space for our trans and gender diverse colleagues to also share their pronouns.

For our transgender and gender diverse colleagues, using pronouns in our email signatures is an easy way to communicate the pronouns they use, but it goes beyond trans and non-binary equality. Those who are cisgender (gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth), can play an important role by including your pronouns and normalising the discussions about gender and inclusion. Knowing and using a person's correct pronouns fosters inclusion, makes people feel respected, valued, and safe.



*"I believe the use of pronouns are important because they empower a person to be their authentic self and belong to an inclusive environment,"*

*says Project Manager and member of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, Dillon Van Heer.*

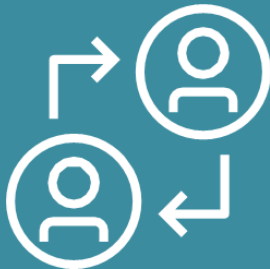
*"I'm really pleased to see that we'll have pronouns as an option for our email signatures. This is another step that YVW is taking for staff to be allies to our trans and gender diverse colleagues,"*

*says Senior Graphic Designer and Co-Chair of Pride in Water Jacquie Moon.*



# Industry performance

## 7. Flexible Work



# 95.1 %

of our roles are able to be worked flexibly

Collective target:

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

Industry Range:

High: 100.0%

Low: 26.7%

February 2022 industry average – 91.2% of roles are able to be worked flexibly



# 63.2 %

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

Collective target:

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

Industry Range:

High: 100.0%

Low: 26.7%

February 2022 industry average – 66.2 % of employees work flexibly (through informal and formal working arrangements)

With the COVID-19 pandemic moving to COVID-normal, the industry has seen a greater return to office work. However, the lessons from the pandemic have carried into normal working conditions with nearly all roles across the sector affording some form of flexibility (95.1% compared to 91.2% in 2022). The number of employees working flexibly has declined slightly to 63.2% which is likely as a result of people foregoing flexible working arrangements to return to more traditional office working.

There are no case studies that showcase flexible working. This shows that collectively as a sector, flexible working has become business as usual.

# Industry performance

## Diversity and Inclusion beyond the Workplace

As the sector matures its approach to diversity and inclusion, it is proud to showcase itself as an attractive career option. This is shown in the below case study in which educational resources were developed for students to showcase an inclusive and diverse water sector.

Many organisations are looking at inclusion beyond the workplace. This external view of diversity and inclusion supports the community beyond water and wastewater services and enhances liveability for all Victorians.

This is shown in the case study from South Gippsland Water who have supported the Bass Coast Disabled Surfing Association and the installation of mobi matting which improves access to the water for the summer period.

The final case study is from Melbourne Water who have included a community focussed diversity and inclusion lens within their most recent strategy and is aiming to equip their people with the skills to include 'the golden thread of inclusion' through everything that they do.

### Case Study - Encouraging water industry careers

VicWater partnered with Melbourne Water and the Australian Centre of Careers Education (ACCE) to produce resources for secondary school students and teachers aimed at promoting career pathways into the Victorian water industry.

These resources showcased the diversity across the water sector and used case studies from nine water corporations to demonstrate the broad range of roles available for students to start thinking about a career in water. The case studies featured water sector employees that represent the broad diversity of our communities and the inclusive nature of the industry. The resources are available on the ACCE website.



Skye Boyd - Gurny - Natural Resource Crew Member, Melbourne Water





Greta Pullen, Water Supply Operator, Melbourne Water



Water sector employees at work

## Case Study - South Gippsland Water supporting Disabled Surfing Association Bass Coast

Funds were available as part of South Gippsland's Inverloch Community Resilience Grant which was open to not for profit and community groups. The grants were to go towards community resilience or helping those experiencing vulnerability or hardship within the community.

A total of \$8417 was funded to the Disabled Surfing Association Bass Coast (DSABC) to install one length of mobi matting and also to partially fund the purchase of a sand cruiser beach wheelchair.



Mobi-matting in use at Inverloch - photo supplied by South Gippsland Water

DSABC have an agreement with Inverloch Surf Lifesaving Club to store and put out the mobility matting during the summer patrol period, which means that there will be improved beach access throughout summer, not just on scheduled event days run by DSABC.

# Diversity and Inclusion beyond the Workplace

## Case Study - Developing Melbourne Water's community focussed diversity and inclusion lens

### Background

Melbourne Water's first Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Strategy (2016-2020) focussed inwardly on building a diverse workforce and an inclusive workplace culture with the understanding that embracing diversity leads to a better appreciation of, and engagement with, the people we work with and the communities in which we work.

In 2020 we developed our second generation D&I Strategy with a vision, goals and measures of success established for Melbourne Water from 2021 to 2025. One of the key aspects of the new strategy is a shift from an internal focus for diversity and inclusion, to a dual internal and external focus.

The new D&I Strategy has created an enabling environment for Melbourne Water to make substantial progress in a range of areas including a greater focus on intersectionality and expanding our focus to apply a D&I lens to both internal and external aspects of our work. The latter we now refer to as applying a community focussed diversity and inclusion (CD&I) lens.

Conversations with others across the organisation focussed on shifting Diversity & Inclusion from an internal focus, to a dual internal and external focus told us two things:

- That others recognised that there was merit in expanding the notion of diversity and inclusion, offering benefits beyond the organisation itself to the larger systems that make up our environment
- Weaving the golden thread of inclusion through everything requires some knowledge and skill. We needed to provide our people with resources to enable them to consider and embed diversity and inclusion into projects.

The work Melbourne Water does has the potential to contribute enormously to delivering inclusive community outcomes.

In January 2020, the Land & Collaborative Planning team approached the D&I team to initiate discussion, share ideas and explore options of how Melbourne Water's diversity and inclusion principles and values could be applied to our customers and community, through the liveability work the team leads. This and other conversations across the organisation surfaced several important opportunities that could be realised through Melbourne Water's shift from an internal diversity and inclusion focus to a dual internal and external focus.



Melbourne Water's Guide to Community Diversity and Inclusion

# Diversity and Inclusion beyond the Workplace

It followed that, for this to be achieved, we needed to equip our people with skills, tools and resources to enable early and seamless consideration of CD&I considerations into projects and strategies in a way that drive and deliver multiple benefits, liveability outcomes and experiences that can be valued by everyone.

In December 2020 the D&I and Land & Collaborative Planning teams collaboratively developed and delivered a workshop titled 'Learn. Think. Do: Applying a diversity and Inclusion Lens' which was attended by 36 participants from a broad representation of teams and roles across Melbourne Water.

The workshop was designed to achieve a range of outcomes including

- to raise awareness and build participants confidence to apply a diversity and inclusion lens
- demonstrate the connection of community diversity and inclusion themes to the work we do in enhancing life and liveability
- to promote thinking about how to apply a community diversity and inclusion lens in our everyday work.

Embracing our Learning Organisation mindsets we achieved these outcomes by bringing the outside in, but also recognising our own internal expertise, achievements and learnings. Participants were provided with pre-workshop resources including a sort of 'human library' that consisted of short video presentations from a range of experts and thought leaders. The workshop included presentations from several academic and industry leaders with expertise in areas including gender, multiculturalism, social disadvantage and accessibility.

Participants also heard from Melbourne Water's Traditional Owner Relationships Manager before taking these learnings and working through two internal Melbourne Water case studies (which were presented by staff in the planning and major program delivery teams). Survey evaluation findings from the workshop demonstrated that Melbourne Water achieved increased confidence levels around awareness and understanding of accessibility inclusion, increased understanding of fundamental legislation, increased understanding of the steps individuals can take to integrate diversity and inclusion considerations into key projects and increased knowledge on who to ask support from in this space. However the workshop results indicated that in other areas including in relation to gender participants felt less confident following the workshop.

Melbourne Water's Land & Collaborative Planning team together with the D&I team, sought to work with Monash University in a partnership arrangement to undertake a research project to broaden our understanding and capacity to consider and apply an external, community focussed diversity and inclusion lens to Melbourne Water's work in enhancing life and liveability.

# Diversity and Inclusion beyond the Workplace

## Developing Melbourne Water's Community Focussed Diversity & Inclusion (CD&I) Lens

The research project with Monash University was undertaken in the context of Melbourne Water's role with influencing, planning, designing and delivering outcomes for enhanced community enjoyment of nature, recreation health and wellbeing benefit derived from experiencing our land and waterways.

The project explored the areas of disability, culture, social disadvantage and gender as means to enhance accessibility, wellbeing and community enjoyment of nature and recreation in and around our land and waterways and in a specific Melbourne Water context.

The interdisciplinary research team comprised members from Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash Faculty of Law, BehaviourWorks Australia and the Monash University Accident Research Centre. Together with Melbourne Water, a Principles of Practice report was developed that sought to establish a concept and principles for a CD&I approach (arguably the first of its kind in published literature), understand the organisational systems and practice change requirements to support implementation of such an approach in current and future work.

The report was a product of a series of workshops and meetings with a broad range of Melbourne Water staff and is a foundational piece of work in that it includes a:

- rapid evidence and practice review of national and international case studies to look at what works to promote community diversity and inclusion within land and waterway management practice
- explains the concept of a CD&I lens
- explains why it is important (through a review of the current legislative and regulatory landscape and other obligations and responsibilities)
- establishes principles of practice and describes what CD&I "looks like" through highlighting Melbourne Water specific case studies, and
- how we can go about applying these CD&I principles of practice, through embracing a joined-up (Or 'systems-') thinking approach.

By setting a foundation for Melbourne Water's understanding of the need and value of embracing different perspectives at the earliest stages of project initiation and as an extension of building on our maturing diverse and inclusive culture, the outcomes of the CD&I research project will be pivotal in enabling Melbourne Water to successfully and effectively embed community diversity and inclusion thinking into business as usual as part of our work to enhance life and liveability.



# Conclusion

This fourth annual performance report against the Water Industry Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023 shows progress in most areas of the strategy, with the other areas remaining steady. There have been no significant decreases in any of the key strategic areas.

Although progress has been made in nearly all areas, as a collective we are still not meeting the targets in most areas which demonstrates the need for an ongoing conversation and action around diversity and inclusion.

A return to pre-pandemic working has seen many employees returning to the office environment, which is shown in the flexible working statistics. However, hybrid working is now the new normal, which enables the industry to come together more frequently for collaborative events such as 'Wear it Purple' and the WaterAble industry workshop. This increased connection across the sector will help us to continue raising awareness about the ongoing need to support greater diversity and inclusion in the water industry.

As we move into the final year of this Strategy it provides an opportunity to reflect on how far the sector has come since 2019, and where we need to focus our efforts in future to deliver on the commitment to build a diverse and inclusive workplace culture across the industry.

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