

Victorian Water Industry

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019–2023

Annual Performance Report
March 2024



Acknowledgement

VicWater proudly acknowledges the rich culture of Victoria's First Nations people and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We recognise that First Nations people have been caring for Country and managing water resources sustainably for thousands of years.

We value the wisdom, knowledge and resilience of First Nations people and their ongoing contributions to the Victorian community.

VicWater is committed to supporting efforts by the water sector to work in partnership with Traditional Owners towards reconciliation, self-determination and restorative justice.

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Executive summary

The Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019–2023 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 and Inclusion Steering Committee, comprising representatives of 17 water corporations. It provides an update since the previous report (February 2023) on the Victorian water sector’s performance and progress against the collective target areas outlined in the Strategy. This is the final performance report against the 2019–2023 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 2023) across 15 of 18 participating water corporations.

Industry average

38.9%

of Managing Directors are female

Tier 1: Female*
45.3%

Tier 2: Female*
42.7%

Industry range*

71.4%



14.0%

Tier 1: Female

66.7%



18%

Tier 2: Female

Industry target

50%

of senior leadership positions are female

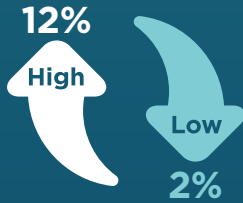
* As a general rule, Tier 1 managers are direct report to MDs, Tier 2 managers are the next level below.

Industry average

6.3%

of our workforce identify as a person with disability

Industry range



Industry target

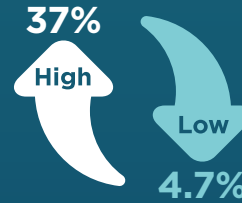
10%

Industry average

14.1%

of our workforce speak a language other than English

Industry range



Industry target

20%

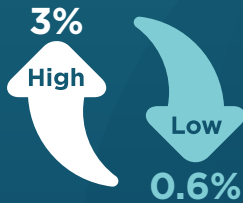
Executive summary

Industry average

1.7%

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

Industry range



Industry target

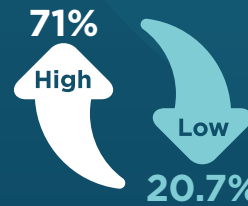
3%

Industry average

48.2%

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

Industry range



Industry target

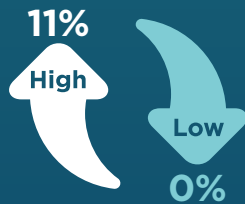
35%

Industry average

5.3%

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

Industry range



Industry target

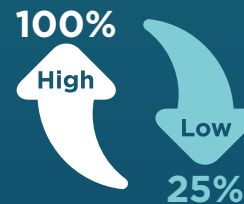
7%

Industry average

93.3%

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

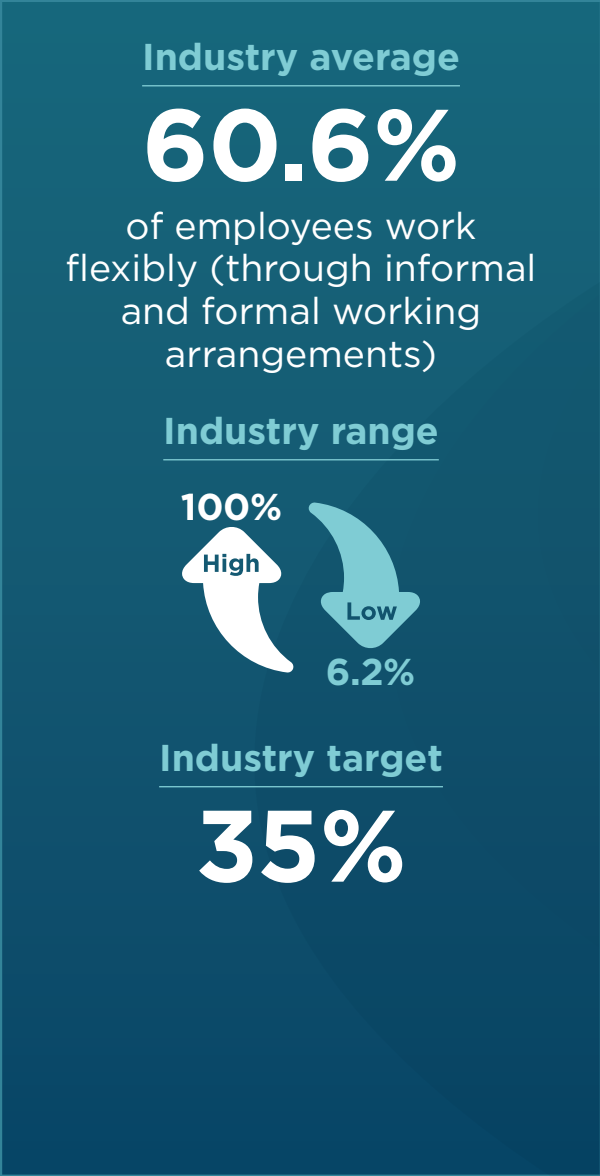
Industry range



Industry target

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

Executive summary



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 year’s data shows a real mix of results, with some areas showing a decline while others have seen a marked increase. However, the true impact of the 2018–2023 data is seen in comparing the year-on-year data from the period.

The data shows the impacts that COVID-19 has had on the workforce with increases in flexible working that were seen in 2020 and 2021 beginning to decline as the sector returns to pre-COVID ways of working.

The strength of the sector is seen in areas where there has been a joint or collective focus across the period. This includes gender balance in Tier 2 senior leadership, disability and LGBTI+ inclusion in the workplace. Year-on-year we have seen these areas trend upwards although not yet meeting the industry targets.

As the last annual report of the 2019–2023 Strategy, we can see the strengths of the sector and also where we can improve by being *Better Together*.

Introduction

Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019–2023

The Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (E,D&I) 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 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 (DISC), comprising representatives from 17 water corporations. Of the 18 Victorian water corporations, 15 have provided data for this final report of the strategy.

For each of the target areas, we have included the industry range (high and low figures) and the industry average figure across all participating water corporations as of 30 June 2023. We have also included figures from the previous 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.
- The timing of data collection varies across water corporations. Of the 18 water corporations, 15 have provided data as of 30 June 2023. Where data is publicly available (e.g., Tier 1 Managers) this has been sourced to supplement the data.
- 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 an 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 can 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, 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. In 2023 WaterAble became an official program of VicWater and expanded to include interstate organisations as partners, with SensorClean.AI, Sydney Water and SEQ Water joining to date. By becoming a formal VicWater program, WaterAble now has the resources and reach to make a broader impact beyond Victoria.

WaterAble aims to engage across the sector using the following activities to showcase and create awareness of disability across the industry:

- Hosting annual International Day of People with Disability events (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 Leadership Program to support emerging leaders with a disability.
- Have people from within the industry speak on their disability pride.

The 2023 International Day of People with Disability saw over 100 people come together in person and online to hear from award-winning disability and gender equality activist Akii Ngo about their lived experiences and the importance of advocacy. Attendees also had the opportunity to hear from the Minister for Water, Harriet Shing about her commitment to equality.



WaterAble Committee with Akii Ngo.
L-R: Matt Iverson, Akii Ngo, Tara Daniel Anita McKenzie, Donald Hughan and Llewellyn Prain.



International Women's Day

On 8 March 2023, more than 500 people from Victorian water corporations came together to celebrate International Women's Day and to hear from Carly Findlay OAM.

The event focused on cracking our social, economic and social codes and behaviours that entrench inequality and the importance of International Women's Day being a time to reflect on progress, to call for change and to celebrate the courage and determination of the women who changed history, and those who will advance gender equality into the future. The session was facilitated by Heidi Biggin from Central Highlands Water and organised by a group of emerging female leaders from across the sector.



Heidi Biggin (top) with Carly Findlay OAM

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.

In 2023 the WWDN held a joint workshop with the Insight: Executive Women in Water program alumni on the role of boards in supporting women in leadership. WWDN also hosted a panel discussion on Aboriginal delegates on Victorian water corporation boards, which is showcased in a case study under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander section of this report.

Introduction

Pride in Water Network

The Pride in Water network was formed in 2019 to connect LGBTQ+ 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.

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 and joined the water industry contingent at the Pride March at Midsumma in February 2023.

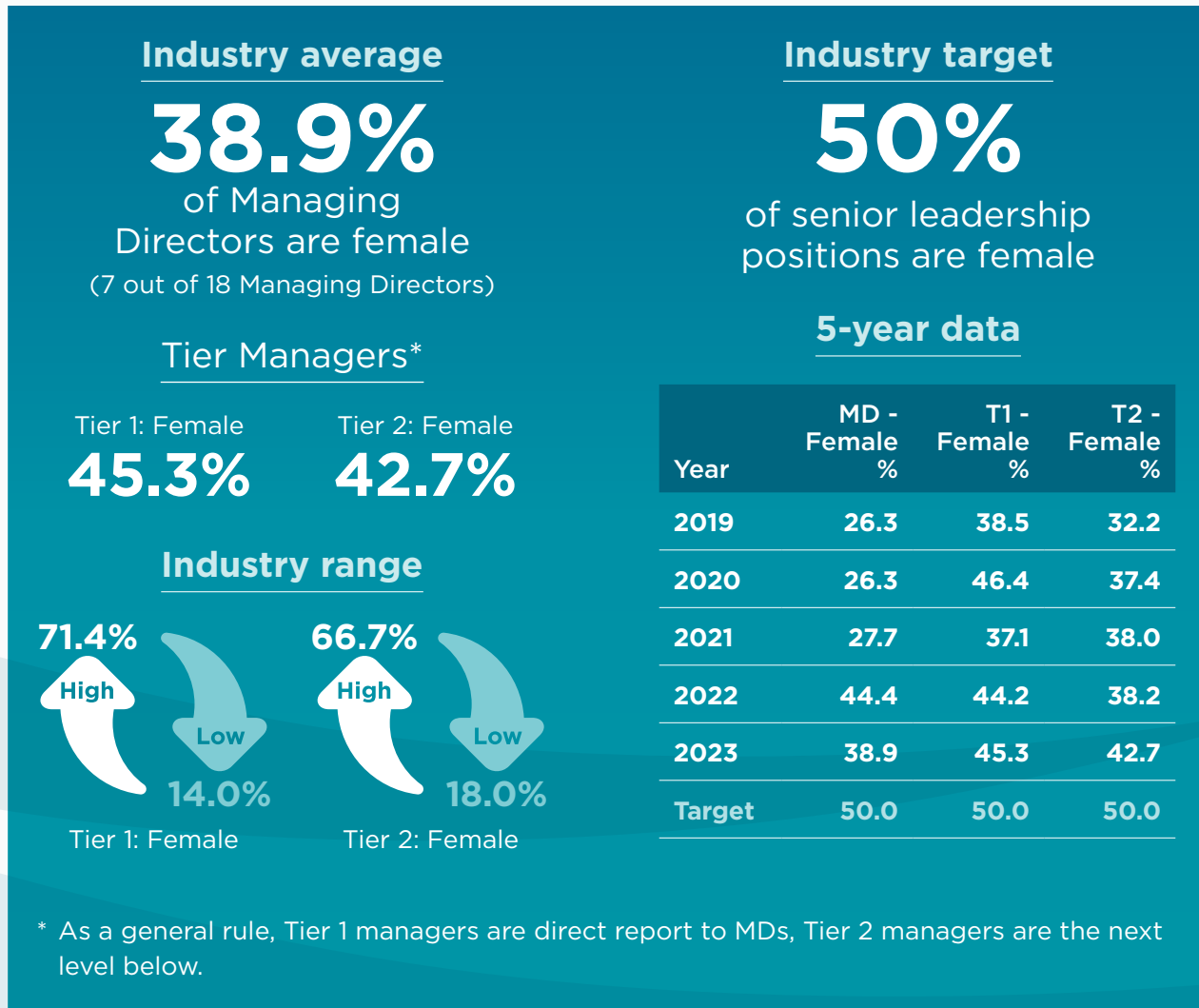


Victorian water corporations at the Pride March, Midsumma February 2023

Industry performance

1. Gender

Water corporations provided figures for three levels of senior management (Managing Director, Tier 1 and Tier 2) to indicate the strength of the female leadership pipeline across the industry.



Industry performance

2023 saw a continued focus on gender diversity in the sector, with water corporations working towards compliance with the *Gender Equality Act 2020* and delivering on their gender equality action plans.

This year's industry figures show that there has been good progress towards the target of a 50:50 gender balance, and the year-on-year data since 2019 shows that there has been an upward trend of females in senior leadership roles within the Victorian water sector.

Tier 1 managers have increased to 45.3% from 38.5% in 2019 and Tier 2 managers have increased to 42.7% from 32.2% in 2019.

It should be noted that executive teams (including the Managing Director and

Tier 1 managers) in water corporations are often relatively small, with only 4–6 members in total, which means that a single change can alter the data disproportionately and this may distort the general perception of gender equality within the sector. This is especially seen in the Managing Director data which shows a decline in 5.6% from 2022, however this is the change of a single person.

Based on the year-on-year data trends, the Victorian water sector is continually advancing gender balance in senior positions. There is now an increasing focus on female participation, and organisations are providing workplaces that encourage women to be successful, as shown in the case studies by Barwon Water and Yarra Valley Water.

CASE STUDY

Barwon Water – Top workplace for women

Barwon Water continues to promote ED&I while also working to ensure all obligations under the *Gender Equity Act 2020* are met, through the delivery of the 'Belonging @ Barwon Water Inclusion Action Plan 2022-25'.

While they continue to internally measure the impact of ED&I initiatives, external assessment and acknowledgement plays a key role in ensuring they are on the right track bringing the organisation together to celebrate results.

Graduate Program

The Barwon Water 2023 Graduate program commenced with two graduates, both women in science and engineering.

One graduate was employed with Barwon Water's subsidiary company, Barwon Asset Solutions, which is their first graduate placement to advance diversity at a professional entry level into the business.

Australian HRD Awards 2023

Barwon Water were finalists in the Australian HRD Awards, Employer of Choice category that recognises the best public sector or not-for-profit organisation to work for in Australia. The nomination was judged on leadership, engagement, communication, and employee benefits.

Recognised in WORK180 Top 101 Workplaces for Women.

In March 2023, Barwon Water were recognised in WORK180's 'Australia's Top 101 Workplaces for Women'. Based on an independent survey, we were measured against ten workplace standards which includes inclusive hiring practices, inclusive culture, shared caring responsibility, pay equity and flexible working arrangements (amongst others).

The announcement by WORK180 coincided with International Women's Day and was shared across social media as well as various print media such as the Herald Sun.

Jobsbank Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Maturity Assessment

Barwon Water undertook the Jobsbank Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Maturity Assessment, which indicated we are on the cusp of a 'Leading' position. This showed that ED&I is recognised as a core business competency.

These achievements are externally recognised by community and industry, which helps to attract candidates from diverse backgrounds to our business.

CASE STUDY

Yarra Valley Water - Gender balance in Distribution Services

In 2021 Distribution Services began conversations across the group on gender diversity, allyship and how to increase the participation of women in the workforce, as Yarra Valley Water had not moved the dial on gender balance except at the General and Divisional Manager levels.

These conversations led to a better understanding of the systemic barriers needed to be broken down in a traditionally male dominated group. All staff were actively involved in conversations about their experiences, structural inequality, and accountability to address inequity at the grass roots, managerial and systems level.

What shifted?

Women in leadership shifted to account for the specialists leading technical work across the group. Quarterly leadership forums included people managers and technical leaders. With more women taking a seat at the leadership table, a greater diversity of experience and perspectives have shown the value that better gender balance brings to the conversations, exploration of ideas and decisions.

This includes but is not limited to:

- Defaulting to internal promotion if we have talent identified with the right capabilities and future potential to fill roles already in the business.
- Assessing roles for flexibility, part time and job share.

Industry performance

- New position descriptions require General Manager approval to ensure they are crafted to engage women and men to apply, reduce the number of task must-haves and focus on core capabilities and transferrable skills not past performance.
- Rubrics of assessment to ensure fair and balanced processes and evidence is captured at interview to ensure the short list of potential hires are ranked and assessed as competent and preferred, to ensure everyone is employed on based on merit.

Trending results

At the group level, over a 3-year period (2021–2023) some positive shifts have occurred:

ASSET AND FIELD SERVICES

improved their gender balance

45.8%

women, up from 28.6% in 2021.

OPERATIONS

increased women

31.6%

up from 27.6% in 2021.

SERVICE RESPONSE

improved their gender balance to

59.5%

women, up from 45.17% in 2021.

ASSET PLANNING

increased women

27.8%

up from 19% in 2022.

What's ahead

General Manager Bridie Fennessy says the future will focus on how to redesign the technical pathways programs to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion is baked into the strategic workforce planning for decades to come.



Gender balance working in the distribution network

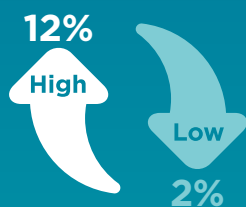
2. Disability

Industry average

6.3%

of our workforce identify as a person with disability

Industry range



Industry target

10%

5-year data

Year	Workforce that identifies as a person with a disability %
2019	4.4
2020	4.8
2021	4.5
2022	6.2
2023	6.3
Target	10.0

There has been a small increase of 0.1% in the number of people identifying as having a disability from the 2022 reporting year. Although the Victorian water sector is not yet reaching its collective target of 10%, programs like WaterAble and VicWater’s Intelligent Water Networks (IWN) Diversity and Inclusion program are raising awareness to improve inclusivity across the sector and offering solutions to improve accessibility for all.

The year-on-year data shows there was a notable uptick in people identifying as having a disability from 2021 to 2022 – equivalent to an increase of roughly 100 people – which has been maintained in 2023.

This result highlights the impact that a dedicated program like WaterAble can have in raising awareness across the sector and focusing attention at the leadership level in particular, to help build a culture of support and inclusion for people with disability in the water sector.

The first case study showcases WaterAble’s Leadership Program which was specifically designed for people with disability in the Australian water industry to help build their leadership potential and support their personal and career growth.

The second case study from Yarra Valley Water highlights their commitment to inclusion in the workplace through a pilot trial that will provide support to hire and retain employees with communication disability and low literacy.

Industry performance

CASE STUDY

Industry wide – WaterAble Leadership Program

The WaterAble Leadership Program was held for the first time in 2023. The program was facilitated by Llewellyn Prain with four participants in this initial cohort. The program aimed to provide people with disability within in the industry with the leadership tools, frameworks and approaches to boost their leadership impact and to support people with disability in their careers.

The program covered different leadership concepts and frameworks, exploring self-values and purpose, the importance of self-care and resilience and leveraging strengths and weaknesses to maximise impact as a leader. Participants were challenged to get out of their comfort zone and show vulnerability through leadership.

As an essential service provider, the water sector needs to reflect the community it serves, and it is important to get more leaders with disability to demonstrate what is possible and to build inclusive workplaces through sharing experiences. The industry wide WaterAble Leadership Program encourages the participants to grow, evolve and have a greater impact on their organisation and the sector more broadly.

One participant summed the experience up as “...a great opportunity and safe space for people with a disability like me to learn the concept of true north and purpose driven leadership, reflect my values and sense of purpose and self-awareness, better understand my strengths and weaknesses, share experience with my peers and networking.”



WaterAble Leadership Participants with Llewellyn Prain.
L-R: Llewellyn Prain, KS Tan, Sylvia Campbell, Jelena Susa.

CASE STUDY

Yarra Valley Water – Improving outcomes for people with disability in the workplace

Yarra Valley Water (YVW) is taking part as a pilot organisation in the Department of Social Services Information Linkages and Capacity Building Program. This 2-year project is led by SCOPE, and independent evaluation will be conducted by the University of NSW. The aim of the project is to improve the economic participation of people with communication disability and low literacy.

Research indicates employers are keen to employ people with disability, but many are unsure how to undertake this task. Employers are more confident in employing people with a physical disability and adapting the physical work environment.

So far, YVW teams have contributed via focus groups and individual

surveys about the ‘how-to’ in relation to hiring, support and retention of people with disabilities.

Across the employment lifecycle there are multiple stakeholders who play a role in influencing positive outcomes for people with disability in the workplace.

It has been a fantastic opportunity to contribute to and learn from the insights of the other project partners, Telstra, Westpac, AMP and Sydney Water.

Co-designing will continue in 2024 to customise and test resources and training materials for use by employers to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence on how to hire, support and retain employees with communication disability and low literacy. Resources will be promoted and shared nationally.

Industry performance

3. 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 (37%) was reported by a metro water corporation, while the lowest figure (7.6%) belongs to a regional water corporation.

Regional Victoria is increasingly becoming more culturally diverse due to an increase in people from overseas settling in regional areas. Water corporations like Lower Murray Water are playing a part in attracting new arrivals to regional areas through programs such as the Preparation for Professional Employment (P4PE) Program Pilot by LaTrobe University. These programs not only support diversity but also support regional development and economic growth.

CASE STUDY

Lower Murray Water – Land of opportunity, from the Middle East to Mildura

Growing up in Iraq, Rabel Marqus' future was uncertain. But even in the face of adversity, he knew there was only one career path he would follow.

“My father was an engineer and I really looked up to him when I was younger. I would tell everyone that when I grew up I wanted to be an engineer,” Rabel recalls.

“I didn't really understand what it would entail, it was more that I wanted to be like my Dad.”

Determined to follow in his father's footsteps, Rabel earned a scholarship through the University of Kurdistan Hewler, the first English medium university in Iraq, where he was offered the choice between petroleum or water engineering.

“Petroleum engineering was a higher degree due to the demand for the skills in the Middle East at the time, but after speaking to one of my professors about the uncertainty around the future of oil, I made the decision to study water engineering.”

Despite his academic achievements, Rabel and his family faced volatile conditions in their war-torn homeland and eventually had no choice but to flee in search of a safer, more secure future – which meant putting the career he had worked towards his whole life on hold.

“About a year after I graduated, I was working as a project engineer and my family had made the decision that it was no longer viable for us to stay in Iraq. We lived as refugees in Jordan for a couple of years before we entered Australia as permanent residents five years ago,” Rabel recalls.

“We chose Australia because my Mum's family had been here for a while after leaving Iraq during the Gulf War. I lost my Dad just before I graduated so coming here was an opportunity for us to reunite with some of our family.”

As he settled in Melbourne with his family, Rabel worked hard to build his new life in Australia, but he struggled to find an opportunity to re-enter the engineering industry.

“I was working in logistics while I was living in Melbourne, but I didn't enjoy it. It wasn't motivating me, and it wasn't what I had studied for – it was just a job,” Rabel recalls.

“I had decided maybe I needed to start over and consider studying again because my degree was from overseas, and literally that week my sister sent me a link about a La Trobe University program for overseas-trained engineers and I thought, I have to do this!

Industry performance

“I completed the program which ended with a networking event. I reached out to the program coordinator for a list of the organisations who would be attending so I could do some research. I went through a list of about 30 names one by one; some were looking for chemical engineers, some electrical engineers, then I finally landed on Lower Murray Water (LMW).

“I circled LMW on the list and the only negative I put was that it was six hours away.”

Rabel met with senior managers from LMW at the event, and even though he had no idea what to expect from living

in Mildura, it wasn't long before he found himself interviewing for a Civil Engineer position in their Land Development team.

“They asked me when I could start and I said ‘Yesterday!’” Rabel recalls.

“The role is challenging, dynamic and everything I had envisioned, but I have found the place also has so much to offer.

“The sense of community, the friendly people and the weather; there are so many opportunities to build a life and it's missed out on by so many people who don't venture from the major cities.”

It was the opportunity to continue his engineering career which brought



Rabel Marqus

Rabel to Mildura, but he says the opportunities for personal and professional development he's been offered since are what make it hard for him to imagine ever returning to Melbourne.

"I've been with LMW for two years and I've already had opportunities to act in various management roles in my department. Some people may never get that chance, but career development is actively encouraged here and it's a huge reason for staying.

"I'm also a participant in the Northern Mallee Leaders Program this year which has been a great way for me to meet new people and better understand the surrounding areas of the region."

While Rabel is a long way from his home in Iraq, his new life and successful career in Mildura have kept the connection to his Dad stronger than he could have imagined.

"A strong memory I have from growing up was hearing stories about my Dad and how he used to drive 200 or 300 kilometres to different sites for work in a Mitsubishi Pajero - I'd never seen the car, but it always stuck with me," Rabel recalls.

"When I first started at LMW, I took any opportunity to go out on site. I had booked a pool car for my first trip on my own, and I couldn't believe when I picked up the vehicle, it was a Mitsubishi Pajero.

"It's personal but it made me feel like I was exactly where I was supposed to be, and to get that feeling from the work you do - what more can you ask for?"

Industry performance

4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



The industry average figure for this target area has increased slightly from the previous year (by 0.1%). However, year-on-year data shows there has been very little shift in this area, indicating the water sector still has work to do in attracting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

While these figures suggest that the industry is not making substantive progress towards increasing the workforce participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 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. This is shown in the case study by Barwon Water.

One important aspect of water management is at the board level and increasing Aboriginal participation at this level has been a challenge in the past. Our case study looks at the independent Aboriginal board delegate program introduced by North East Water and Central Highlands Water which aims to build skills required of water sector boards in local Aboriginal people.

CASE STUDY

Barwon Water – Aboriginal employment and retention

In 2022 Barwon Water won a national water industry award for our Aboriginal Employment and Retention Strategy. At the heart of it is understanding and embedding Aboriginal Cultural Values and the holistic wellbeing of Aboriginal Peoples. It provides the foundations for creating and delivering culturally appropriate, respectful, and meaningful outcomes for our Aboriginal employees too. Two new initiatives under this strategy are the First Nations Cadetship and Justice System Pathways.

First Nations Cadetship

The First Nations Cadetship was developed as an early career pathway that aims to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who are not studying at university but have completed a traineeship. The Cadetship, of which the Barwon Water traineeship program is the initial pathway, is a 2-year leadership development program, and aims to be a further pathway into a permanent position at Barwon Water.

Justice System Pathways

Another pathway to remove barriers to employment for First Nations People is through justice programs such as the Wadamba Prison to Work Program managed through Wan-Yaari Aboriginal Consultancy Services.

The program is a supported pathway for Aboriginal women and men aged 18–25 who are on remand. The program provides access to employment services, career guidance and cultural support in custody as well as post release and is an early intervention directing young people away from offending into meaningful employment.

While Barwon Water have continued to work closely with partners towards a successful ongoing placement, challenges haven't seen this eventuate to date. While an ongoing placement hasn't yet been successful, they have received consistent positive feedback during the collaboration from Wadamba and Wan-Yaari, regarding the support Barwon Water provided. Barwon Water will continue this partnership to support future participants.

Geelong Aboriginal Taskforce Summit – Cultural Workplace Safety

The committee of Geelong Aboriginal Employment Taskforce was created to work with local industry and community to increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal People, and is represented by Christine Couzens, MP Member for Geelong, Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples, Marsha Uppill, Director Arranyinha, and Ricky Kildea, Director Wan-Yaari Aboriginal Consultancy Services.

Industry performance

Approximately ninety people from across the Geelong region representing industry, Aboriginal community groups and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners attended the summit, with Prof. Richard J Frankland as the keynote speaker, who shared his experience of cultural safety and the layers that impact First Nations people, through storytelling.

Barwon Water was invited as panellists on one of three separate conversational breakout sessions that explored practical examples of organisations on various stages of the cultural safety journey.

This session facilitated by Wan-Yaari reflected on our journey, exploring practical examples such as the traineeship program, Reconciliation Action Plan, and holistic approach of Aboriginal Cultural values and safety through the Barwon Water Aboriginal Employment and Retention Strategy.

CASE STUDY

Central Highlands Water and North East Water – Independent Aboriginal board delegates

North East Water and Central Highlands Water each appointed an Aboriginal delegate to their board of directors in 2022. These roles were dual purposed, to help the delegate develop skills to become a full director within the Victorian water sector, and also for the delegate to provide cultural insights to the water corporation around water management.

North East Water appointed Duduroa and Yorta Yorta man Johnny Murray as an independent Aboriginal delegate in 2022. Central Highlands Water appointed Adnyamathanha Yuru man, Shu Brown as an independent Aboriginal delegate in 2023. Both appointments were for a period of 12 months.

All parties involved agreed that this program was highly worthwhile. The participating water corporations gained a better understanding of issues and concerns faced by Aboriginal people

in their regions, and Johnny and Shu were appointed to North East Water and Central Highlands Water respectively as a full directors in 2023, which is a testament to the skills they learned through this program. This program was featured at the VicWater Annual Conference in 2023 with the Chairs of North East Water (Cath Botta) and Central Highlands Water (Angeleen Jenkins) sharing their experiences alongside Johnny and Shu.

In the 2023 round of board appointments the number of Aboriginal board members increased from 11 to 21, and it is hoped that expanding the board delegate program to all water corporations will help to grow the pipeline and provide more opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in water management in Victoria at the highest governance levels.



Independent delegate panel at the VicWater conference 2023.

L-R: Leanne Mulcahy, Johnny Murray, Cath Botta, Shu Brown, Angeleen Jenkins.

Industry performance

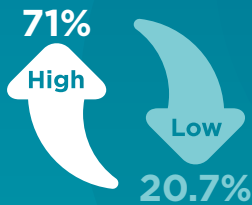
5. Carers

Industry average

48.2%

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

Industry range



Industry target

35%

5-year data

Year	Flexible working arrangement %
2019	44.0
2020	45.4
2021	50.0
2022	55.1
2023	48.2
Target	35.0

The industry average in this target area has declined from 2022 by 6.8%. This is likely due to the shift back to pre-COVID working arrangements. The trend for people having flexible working arrangements to include caring responsibilities has really followed the patterns seen during COVID, with the peak appearing in the 2021 and 2022 data.

Many water corporations are still exploring what type of flexible working arrangements are suitable for each employee and how this may apply within field-based environments. The case studies from Central Highlands Water and Wannon Water demonstrate the different flexible working opportunities available to support people with caring responsibilities.

CASE STUDY

Central Highlands Water – Promoting flexible working arrangements to support families

As part of Central Highlands Water’s (CHW) commitment to inclusion, gender equality, diversity and attracting and retaining the best possible talent, we have continued to support our team members to manage the relationship between work and other elements of their lives.

We recognise that priorities differ for individuals at different times, and we offer a range of options to support our people to: care for family members, contribute to the community, maintain health and wellbeing, study, transition to retirement, and/or participate in leisure activities.

Our current Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) and recently updated Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) have a strong focus on ensuring that all employees, regardless of their role or gender, have access to flexibility in their work. We want to ensure that 100% of our people have access to flexible options and that no request will be unreasonably refused.

There are a variety of options that come under the umbrella of hybrid working arrangements, relating to where, when and how work is done by employees.

Some of the options most accessed by CHW employees include but are not limited to:

- change to hours or days of work
- compressed working week
- purchased leave
- job share
- allocated day off
- annualised salary.

The People, Culture and Safety team, together with leaders from our maintenance department, have a focus on highlighting the available flexibility options. The maintenance department currently employs a high percentage of male employees, and recent information sessions were designed to further promote flexibility options and help team members understand how they can support family and caring responsibilities by working flexibly, leaving early or working part time.

Through discussions and negotiations between team members and leaders, three male employees accessed a formal flexible work agreement to gain better work/family life balance.

Industry performance

CASE STUDY

Wannon Water – Supporting flexibility for caring

Kristyn McCaskill

Everybody has an individual family set-up. Kristyn McCaskill's is unique with her husband Drew, who works shift work on a rotating roster and two children who attend school and kinder. Drew works weekends, starts early and finishes late which makes it hard to have a set routine – pick-ups and drop-offs for school and kinder can be a juggle. Kristyn uses her rostered day off hours flexibly when she needs to.

She said this flexibility feels like a privilege and a responsibility – it allows her to be the best work self and home self. She has also been able to take

opportunities that some of her friends with children of a similar age may not be able to take, like full-time work, because without this arrangement, it's hard to take on opportunities in leadership and management. Her priority is always her family and she doesn't want her kids to miss out. This way she can give more to her role without compromising them.

“I work really hard to make sure it doesn't impact on my team, work responsibilities and my family. I don't ever want my son left standing at the school gate because I dropped the ball. Having time blocked in my calendar gives a clear separation. I am very upfront with the team, so they know where I am and my availability.”



Kristyn McCaskill and family

Brad O'Connor

Brad's main motivation for using flexibility was his partner's work and study. Being able to change start and end times provided flexibility that meant his partner could condense four days into three. This gave her time for study and allows the whole family to better coordinate time and places.

Working from home has had the greatest impact for Brad. He can be around for his kids when they get home from school and hear about their day. "Normally by the time I'd get home the 'what happened at school today?' would be met with 'not much.' Being there and available for them means I can have a better connection and be involved with things that I would miss if I was in the office."

Brad said his team probably uses more 'ad-hoc' flexibility rather than set agreements, apart from working from home arrangements, which allow them to manage their lives more easily and be happier when they are at work. His team has been adaptable to technology and willing to adjust with any significant changes. They aim to meet when the majority are in the office and are looking to alternate weeks, so in-person or online meetings rotate, depending on the day.

Industry performance

6. LGBTI+

Industry average

5.3%

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

Industry range

11% **High**
0% **Low**

Industry target

7%

5-year data

Year	Workforce identifies as belonging to LGBTI+ communities %
2019	3.0
2020	3.0
2021	3.4
2022	3.7
2023	5.3
Target	7.0

There has been a significant increase (1.6%) in the industry average figure for employees who identify as LGBTI+ since 2022. Year-on-year there has been steady growth which may be attributed industry-wide and employee-led networks like Pride in Water, and individual water corporations' Pride networks.

While Pride networks are important for the sector to support LGBTI+ employees, there is also a need to think more broadly about people's sense of belonging when they come to work, as shown in the two case studies featuring Melbourne Water and Yarra Valley Water. Both examples promote equity and improve psychosocial wellbeing in the workplace.

CASE STUDY

Melbourne Water – All-gender bathrooms

Melbourne Water recognised the need for all-gender bathrooms to address psychological and physical safety risks for trans and gender diverse individuals. As part of the New Normal Ways of Working initiative and Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Melbourne Water aimed to provide a safe and inclusive environment at the Docklands office.

The preparation of the all-gender bathroom proposal involved a collaborative and transparent approach, ensuring communication and consultation with relevant stakeholders. Extensive research, including interviews with organisations like Monash University, provided valuable insights into best practices, emphasising the importance of lived experiences in shaping the proposal.

To address potential risks, Melbourne Water engaged in regular consultations with internal stakeholders, conducted a company-wide survey, and submitted a well-informed proposal to the Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee. Working with external consultants and engaging key internal groups, including the LGBTIQ+ employee working group, ensured a comprehensive review of the all-gender bathroom design. The success of the proposal highlighted the importance of strong stakeholder engagement, formal consultation, and tying the initiative to the organisational commitment to Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging.

The accepted proposal is complete with the all-gender bathrooms constructed and open for use at the Docklands office, marking a significant positive step towards creating a more inclusive environment at

Melbourne Water. The project serves as a guiding example for future initiatives, emphasising the need to consider the safety of all employees and providing options for a diverse community. The success of this endeavour showcases the effectiveness of early and consistent stakeholder engagement, collaboration with existing initiatives, and the integration of Diversity and Inclusion goals into organisational projects.

“All gender bathrooms play a crucial role in fostering LGBTIQ+ inclusion by providing a safe and supportive environment for individuals of diverse gender identities. They contribute to breaking down traditional gender norms, promoting equity, and ensuring everyone feels respected and accepted. Creating inclusive facilities is a step towards building psychological safety in the workplace,” says Damien Kook, Chief Safety Officer.



Industry performance

CASE STUDY

Yarra Valley Water – Gender affirmation leave

Yarra Valley Water (YVW) introduced gender affirmation leave as part of its Enterprise Agreement (EA) in 2021. To grow awareness of and access to this new leave entitlement, a guide was developed by YVW's Diversity and Inclusion committee in collaboration with their People team, Pride at YVW and Pride in Diversity (ACON). The guide aims to grow our understanding and support for YVW's people to live a life that's true to themselves.

The guidelines are informed by research and good practice principles, providing

information on gender affirmation and the actions we can all take to support colleagues through their transition.

This includes advice on how to have respectful conversations, confidentiality, accessing gender affirmation leave entitlements, developing a work plan, updating personal details, and accessing further support. Importantly, the guide recognises that gender affirmation is a unique and personal journey involving a range of actions and possibilities to live, survive, and thrive as an authentic gendered self.

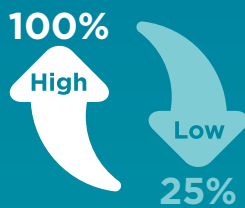
7. Flexible work

Industry average

93.3%

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

Industry range



Industry target

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

5-year data

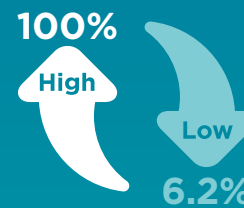
Year	Flexible work %
2019	81.8
2020	84.1
2021	91.2
2022	95.4
2023	93.3
Target	100.0

Industry average

60.6%

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

Industry range



Industry target

35%

5-year data

Year	Work flexibly %
2019	47.6
2020	62.4
2021	66.2
2022	63.2
2023	60.6
Target	35.0

Industry performance

In 2023 water corporations moved towards a more structured approach to flexible working with many seeing a large return to pre-COVID working patterns. This is reflected in the decline in both of the targets relating to flexible working, with the number of roles able to be worked flexibly decreasing by 2.1% and the number of people working flexibly decreasing by 5.6%.

All water corporations have exceeded the industry target for people who work flexibly, reflecting the impact that COVID-19 had on the entire workforce. Post-COVID, people are continuing to work flexibly for a variety of reasons, as shown in the Wannon Water case study.

CASE STUDIES

Wannon Water – Benefits of flexible working

Siobhan Barlow

Siobhan Barlow jokes that she’s used most flexibility options, except transition to retirement. Her current arrangement allows her to get the balance right at home. She can pick up and drop off children to school, kinder and daycare, watch after-school sports or take them to the beach.

Flexibility allows her to be there for her family and not miss out on anything.

“When deciding on a flexibility option, it really depends on what you are trying to achieve outside of work – earlier finish time or more leave. The flexibility to alter my hours whenever we have a change at home is fantastic, especially in transition years.”

Flexibility options make employees happier which has a great impact on teams!

Steven Kearns

Steve Kearns starts work 30 minutes earlier each day to be able to finish work at lunchtime on Thursdays. Using this flexibility allows him to spend dedicated time with his mates playing golf so he doesn’t take up family time.

This exercise benefits his physical health, the decompression time helps his mental health, and he is able to maintain his social connections to others which is really important in a post-COVID world.

Being a branch manager of more than 25 people, Steve hopes that this example of flexibility will make his team members feel more comfortable to explore possible options themselves. Sometimes leaving at lunchtime can be quite busy, making it a bit awkward to leave, but Steve reminds himself that he has already worked these hours elsewhere and doesn’t need to make apologies for using this workplace flexibility.

Steve Waterhouse

Steven Waterhouse uses purchased leave to carry out duties as Chair of South West TAFE and Committee Member of the Warrnambool Racing Club. For Steve it's important not to blur the lines between work and these roles, so taking leave when carrying out other duties provides clear segregation. Plus, he can then use annual leave with family or recreationally, taking a break to be his best version for everyone who depends on him.

“These roles provide me with insight into other industries, and exposure to information, conversations and people that broaden my horizon. They are challenging, and I have developed my governance knowledge and experience by being involved. I feel a greater sense of contribution to the region, in particular by advocating for improved skills and training outcomes in the South West.”

Steve would like to think that there hasn't been a negative impact on his team. Proactive management of his calendar and being as efficient as possible with his time helps. It is very clear to him and his manager, that his job comes first, so prioritising conflicts is easy. His direct reports, and possibly a lot more people, are aware of his outside roles which also helps the arrangement succeed.



Steve Waterhouse in his role as Chair of South West TAFE

Other E,D&I initiatives in the water sector

Beyond our diversity targets, the water sector is working to develop and celebrate a diverse and inclusive working environment. This is seen in the next two case studies featuring Lower Murray Water encouraging the next generation into the organisation and Yarra Valley Water embedding ED&I into its governance structure.

CASE STUDY

Lower Murray Water – Inspiring the next generation

As a Victorian public sector organisation that is all about supporting our community with clean water and working waste services, we also have a unique position where we can offer a great career to the next generation without having to move away to a larger city. This has been and continues to be a focus for Lower Murray Water (LMW) to nurture local students who may choose to study away in metro areas but find their way back to assist their community in ways they are yet to discover.

With the Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) in full swing and the newly launched People Strategy, LMW has been looking at new ways to inspire the next generation about what different doors can open from an experience in the water industry. With a focus on building relationships with universities and TAFE to identify students seeking work placement to embed their learnings, LMW met Tyler Rose.

Tyler was racing to the finish line to complete his Bachelor of International Business majoring in advanced leadership. He wondered what his next step would

be and wanted to put his knowledge and learnings from his studies into practice by completing a four-week work integrated learning placement.

The effects of the pandemic had Tyler studying remotely from his family home in Mildura. He found himself wanting to pursue an opportunity locally and LMW was delighted to be able to provide this opportunity.

From working in retail over his teenage years to jumping straight into the corporate world, Tyler embraced the everyday life of working in the public sector. Over the four-week placement Tyler not only gained a great understanding of the diversity of career opportunities in the water industry but a better understanding of his personal growth, abilities and ambitions.

“Throughout my time working at LMW, I’ve learnt that I’m a lot more capable and confident than I gave myself credit for before and during university” Tyler said.

Once the four weeks were up, Tyler jumped at the opportunity to stay, applying for a position with

the Business Transformation Program as an administration officer. Fast forward ten months and Tyler became an asset to his team and was mentored by those around him.

“There is just so much more to a water corporation than getting a bill every three months and turning on the tap. Gaining an understanding of all the intricate details and moving parts that go into making sure that your toilet can flush, and sewage can be disposed of, and the longer I’m in the industry the more I understand and appreciate the work the organisation does as a whole.”

Tyler has received an incredible opportunity to continue to develop his knowledge within the water industry in Melbourne after being selected for the Greater Western Water graduate program for 2024. When asked the question, where do you see yourself in five years, Tyler responded “I am hopeful that I’ll still be working within the water industry and someday return to Lower Murray Water with a whole new breadth of skills.”

LMW is proud to have been part of Tyler’s career journey and that he has

built the confidence to pursue a career within our sector and return to Melbourne for his next phase. This case study demonstrates the importance of the water sector connecting and sharing resources to support career pathways for our employees across the sector and not just organisation by organisation.



Tyler Rose

Other E,D&I initiatives in the water sector

CASE STUDY

Yarra Valley Water – Governance and leadership 2023

The Yarra Valley Water (YVW) Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policy was developed in collaboration with the Strategy and Community team and the People team. The DEI Policy was endorsed by the Board in 2023.

YVW has a long-held commitment to reflect the communities we serve, and attest that a fair, inclusive workplace improves organisational performance and means that YVW can serve our customers and community better.

YVW have always developed policies where there are clear compliance obligations and stakeholder expectations. Our strategies and plans have allowed us to flex our approach in ways that support the organisation to develop strong DEI practice over many years. YVW felt it important to formalise the guiding principles for this into a holistic and modern policy statement that unifies and reflects the accountability to our communities and people.

One of the most important elements of the DEI policy is its ability to initiate constructive change.

Delivering on this policy is the organisation's responsibility, but there are certain accountabilities held by key

stakeholders within YVW which is set out under roles and responsibilities.

Whilst changes might not be at once obvious, as programs and services are reviewed or started, monitoring and evaluation for holistic DEI begins to reshape the approach. For example, YVW's People team embedded DEI into its People Strategy 2030, to better apply this lens across all aspects of the group's work. When each team knows beforehand what they will be accountable for, the DEI team can better serve the divisions and group by supporting continuous improvement in all processes and procedures rather than working in a silo.

Public accountability matters too. By sharing this policy on the YVW website, we are communicating the intended benefits of both our services and what differentiates YVW from similar employers or stakeholders.

Community expectations are shifting, and people expect organisations and public entities like YVW to work in much more cooperative and collaborative way than before.

In response, the DEI policy promotes the guiding principles for collaboration, partnerships, and shared visions.

Conclusion

This final annual performance report against the Water Industry ED&I 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 target areas. Although we have made inroads to meet the targets that were set, there is still work to be done to create a truly diverse water sector that represents the communities that it services.

The significant outcome of this Strategy is the realisation that where the sector works collectively on a target area, significant impacts and increases are seen through the data. This has been taken into consideration as part of the development of the 2024–2028 ED&I Strategy. As we move forward to the next iteration of the Strategy, as a sector we will focus on being *Better Together* to create an inclusive sector, a diverse workforce and an equitable workplace to create a sense of belonging for all employees to thrive.

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