



# Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-28

Annual Performance Report  
March 2026

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A more diverse, informed and engaged water sector that embodies a sense of pride and inclusiveness.

**We are better together.**

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## Acknowledgement of Country

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 to advance the objectives of Treaty and truth-telling.

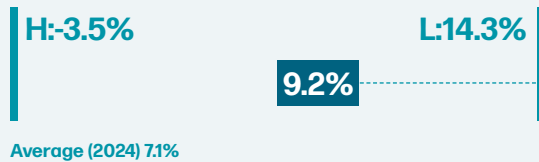
# Summary

The Water Industry Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (E,D&I) Strategy 2024–2028 was developed during 2023 to demonstrate the industry’s commitment to building an equitable, diverse and inclusive workforce. This is the second annual report of the Strategy.

## Summary of E,D&I data (as at 30 June 2025)\*

### Equity

#### GENDER PAY GAP



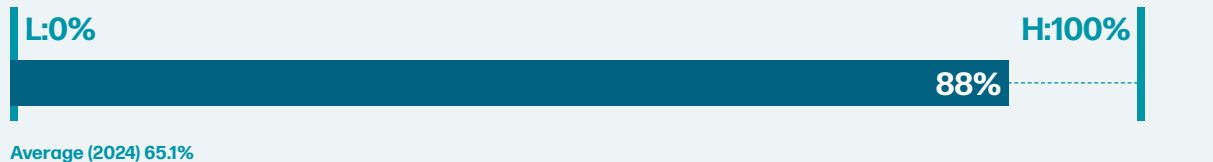
#### AUDITS\*\*

Non-conformances from Gender Equity Audits



#### E,D&I PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)\*\*\*

Leaders (people who manage or lead teams) who have completed at least one E,D&I PD activity this year



Industry low (L) and high (H)    Average

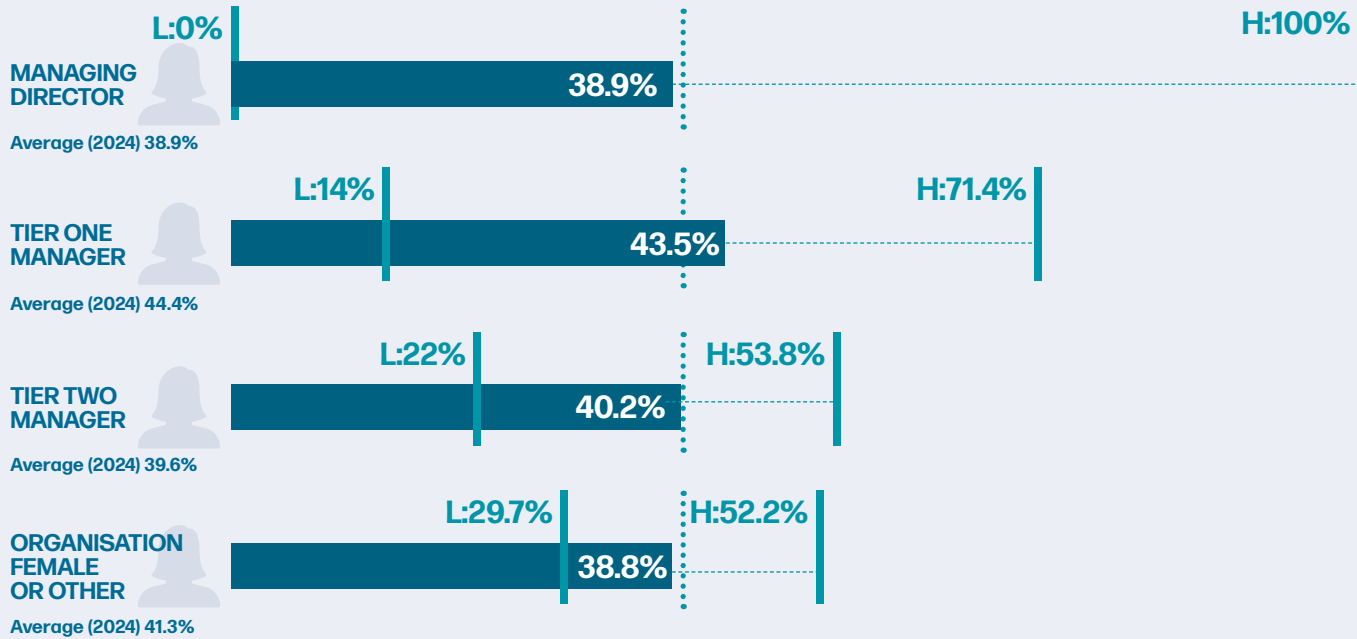
\* For each of the target areas, we have included the industry range (high and low) and the industry average figure (as of 30 June 2025) across participating water corporations.

\*\* Only measured once every two years. Not measured this year.

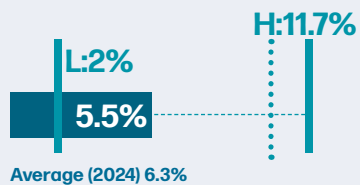
\*\*\* Eight corporations provided data this year.

# Diversity

## GENDER (FEMALE)^



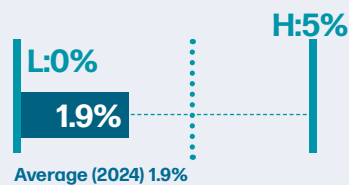
## DISABILITY



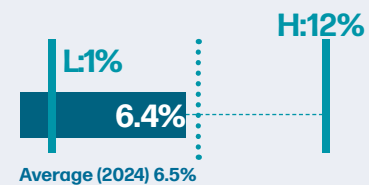
## CULTURAL DIVERSITY



## ATSI\*



## LGBTQI



| Industry low (L) and high (H) 
 ■ Average 
 ⋯ Target

^ Gender balance (40:40:20) 40% women, 40% men with the remaining 20% flexible (can be any gender, including non-binary individuals, or additional representation of men or women).

\* Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

# Inclusion



## EQUAL

'I have an equal chance of promotion'

L:43%

H:62%

50%

Average (2024) 51.1%

## SPEAK

'I feel comfortable to speak up in my organisation'

L:70%

H:88%

77%

Average (2024) 77%

## LISTEN

'My manager listens to what I have to say'

L:77%

H:92%

86%

Average (2024) 84.9%

## CULTURALLY SAFE

'I feel culturally safe at work'

L:78%

H:92%

85%

Average (2024) 85.1%

Industry low (L) and high (H) Average

# Introduction

## Water Industry E,D&I Strategy 2024-2028

Water Industry E,D&I Strategy 2024-2028 was developed during 2023 to demonstrate the industry's commitment to building an equitable, inclusive and diverse workforce.

Victorian water corporations recognise it is through the achievement of an inclusive workplace culture that we will provide a safe and inclusive environment for those that have historically experienced, and currently experience, a lack of equity. This in turn will also allow us to maximise the benefits of our diverse workforce. We recognise that some groups experience greater barriers to employment and advancement compared with others, and we strive to create equity within our systems and organisations to ensure all people have an opportunity to reach their full potential. We know that when teams orient members to learn from their differences and experiences, work can be reimaged, and the full benefit of diversity realised.

All 18 Victorian water corporations have committed to supporting initiatives that enable a diverse, informed and engaged water sector that embodies a sense of pride and inclusiveness.

Since the first Victorian water sector E,D&I strategy was developed the sector has made progress against the targets that were set, with our progress summarised in previous [annual reports](#). This is the second report against the 2024 - 28 Strategy and where applicable, progress against previous targets has been included.



## Content of this report

This report has been prepared by collating information provided to VicWater by the Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC) and Practitioners Network. Both groups have representatives covering 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 2025. Where applicable, data from previous annual reports has been included 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. Where data is publicly available (e.g., People Matter Survey data or *Gender Equality Act 2020* Audit data) 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 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.

- Some of the metrics are not collected annually. Where this is the case, it has been noted.
- The Equity and Inclusion metrics do not have a target, instead a positive shift in the metric is the desired outcome.

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

The report also includes case studies which showcase the innovative actions water corporations are taking to improve equity, diversity and inclusion in their workplaces. These case studies have been written to enable water corporations to replicate them within their organisation and showcase the collaborative and innovative nature of the Victorian water sector.

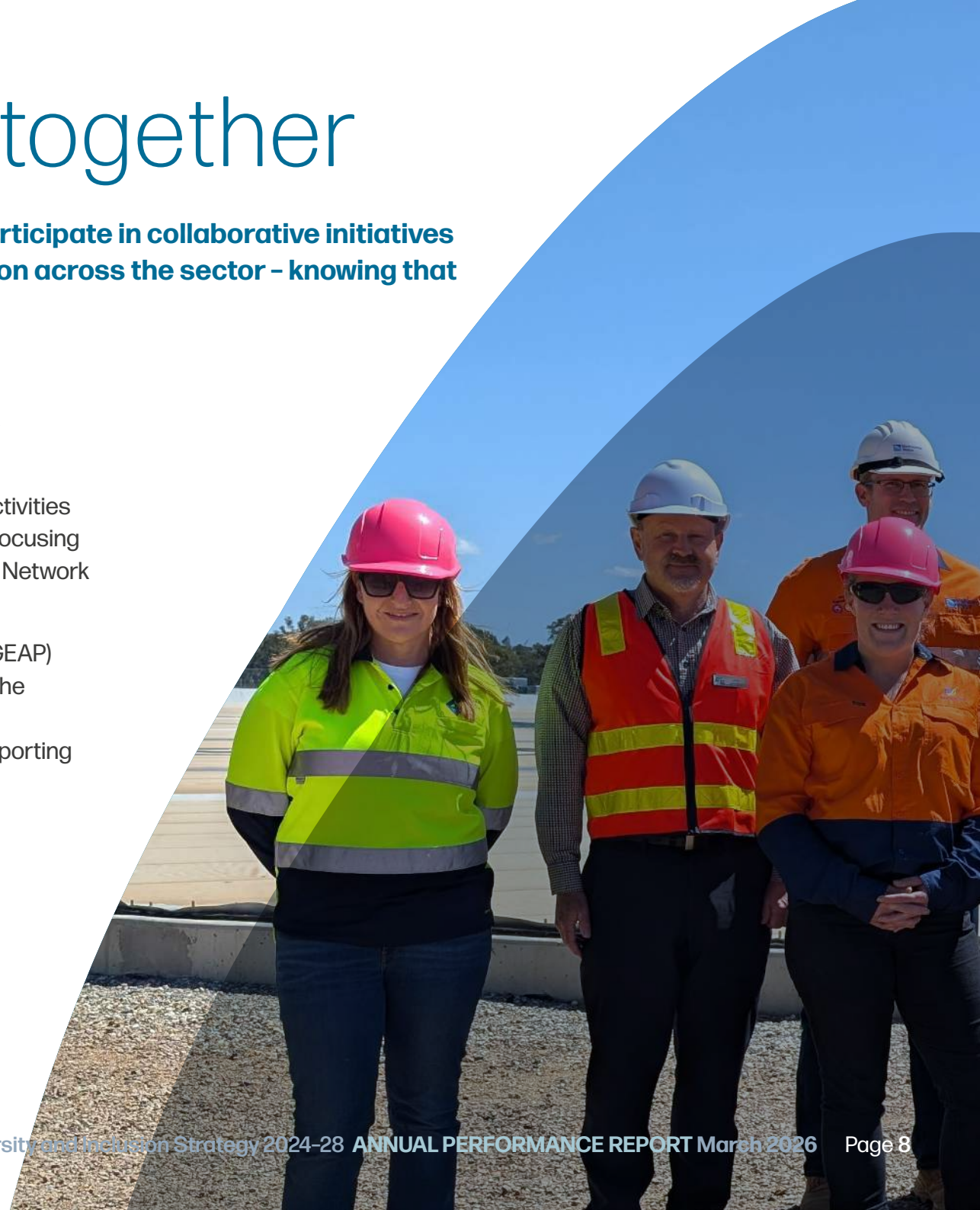
# We are better together

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’.

## Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee and Practitioners Network

VicWater convenes two groups which focus on collective E,D&I activities across the sector. Both groups have a clear focus, with the DISC focusing on monitoring and driving the Strategy, whereas the Practitioners Network focuses on the delivery of actions under the Strategy.

The case study below outlines joint Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) initiatives for Victorian water corporations, focusing on reducing the gender pay gap, strengthening responses to sexual harassment, improving equitable recruitment, promoting flexible work, and supporting women in operational roles.



## CASE STUDY

### VicWater joint GEAP actions

The Practitioners Network meets every six weeks and has been developing joint actions for the 2026 Gender Equality Action Plans. These actions are designed to be undertaken collaboratively to support a shift in equity across the Victorian water sector. The actions that have been identified by the Practitioners Network are:

#### **Gender Pay Gap**

Build ongoing knowledge of people leaders to understand the impacts, drivers and ways to mitigate the gender pay gap, and build general awareness for all employees.

#### **Sexual Harassment**

Develop additional resources and training for leaders to enable them to deliver on their responsibilities to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and everyday sexism in the workplace and embed into key leadership programs

#### **Recruitment and Promotion**

Create an Employee Value Proposition resource in collaboration with all water corporations that outlines the commitment and benefits for gender equality in the water sector.

#### **Leave and Flexible working**

Promote flexible work options through annual campaigns and communication, including parental leave and part time options for men, to reduce the stigma of men accessing flexibility.

#### **Occupational Segregation**

Women in Operations: establish or partner with existing women in operations networks, listening to inclusivity challenges; build professional development; and build insights to action with clear accountability. Establish programs tailored to support women in operations' career development and advancement.

These actions will be incorporated into the next iteration of water corporation GEAPs.

## WaterAble Network

WaterAble is a network for people with disability and their allies in the Victorian water industry. Operating as a program of VicWater, 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.

Each year WaterAble engages with the sector to showcase and create awareness of disability across the industry. Across the 2024/25 financial year WaterAble undertook the following activities:

- An annual celebration for International Day for People with Disability.
- An Industry Project to progress initiatives for disability inclusion in the sector.
- The WaterAble Leadership Program which supports emerging leaders with a disability thrive and progress their careers.
- Hearing people from within the industry speak on their disability pride.



In 2025, WaterAble celebrated its fifth anniversary with a hybrid event recognising Llewellyn Prain for her leadership and foundational role in establishing WaterAble. The WaterAble committee partnered with PrainInclusion and Hays to deliver a series of leadership and career-development webinars for employees with disability across partner organisations. As part of the International Day of People with Disability celebrations, we heard from leadership program participants about their lived experience.

## 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.

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.

## 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 network holds an annual event that focuses on gender equality as part of the VicWater Annual Conference. The 2025 conference discussed *Breaking Boundaries: Women in Operations* which focused on systemic changes needed to achieve gender equality in the operations and maintenance.

## Insight: Executive Leadership for Women in Water

The Insight Program is a transformative, year-long leadership experience designed around how women want to work, building authentic leadership, confidence, and influence through real-world challenges and reflective practice. It culminates in a connected, sector-wide community of women and allies driving meaningful change.

In May, the third cohort graduated, coming together with senior leaders from across the sector to celebrate shared learnings and growth.



# Equity\*

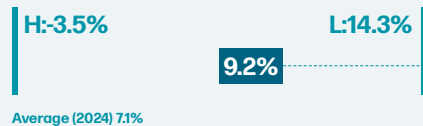


**We provide an Equitable workplace.**

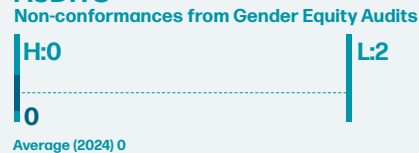
**We enable all employees to have the opportunities that are tailored to them.**

Equity in the water sector demands more than aspirational statements – it requires concrete actions and sustained commitment from all water corporations. This year is the second year of collecting data to measure equity within our sector and the baseline data is shown below.

## GENDER PAY GAP

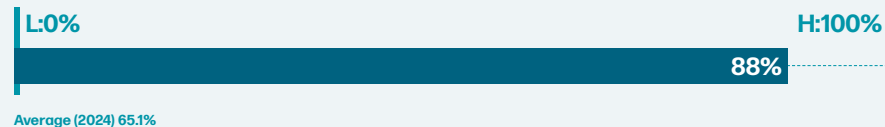


## AUDITS\*\*



## E,D&I PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)\*\*\*

Leaders (people who manage or lead teams) who have completed at least one E,D&I PD activity this year



Industry low (L) and high (H) Average

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\*\*\* Eight corporations provided data this year

## Our measures

Our measures for equity are decreasing the gender pay gap, ensuring that we work towards zero non-conformances in our Gender Equity Audits, and ensuring our people leaders are undertaking professional development to improve their understanding of E,D&I.

Together, these three metrics (refer left) create a comprehensive approach to highlighting current inequities and building capacity for sustained improvement. In 2025 there was an increase in people leaders attending E,D&I professional development courses which are essential as it equips them with the awareness, skills, and behaviours needed to build respectful, high-performing teams and create a workplace where everyone feels valued and able to contribute.

In 2025 we saw a slight increase in the gender pay gap (from 7.1% to 9.2%), although the reasons for this are not fully clear. Across the sector the number of employees has increased yet the overall percentage of women has decreased, likely contributing to the gender pay gap results. Fully understanding the root cause of this will form part of the DISC priorities for 2026.

# Diversity\*

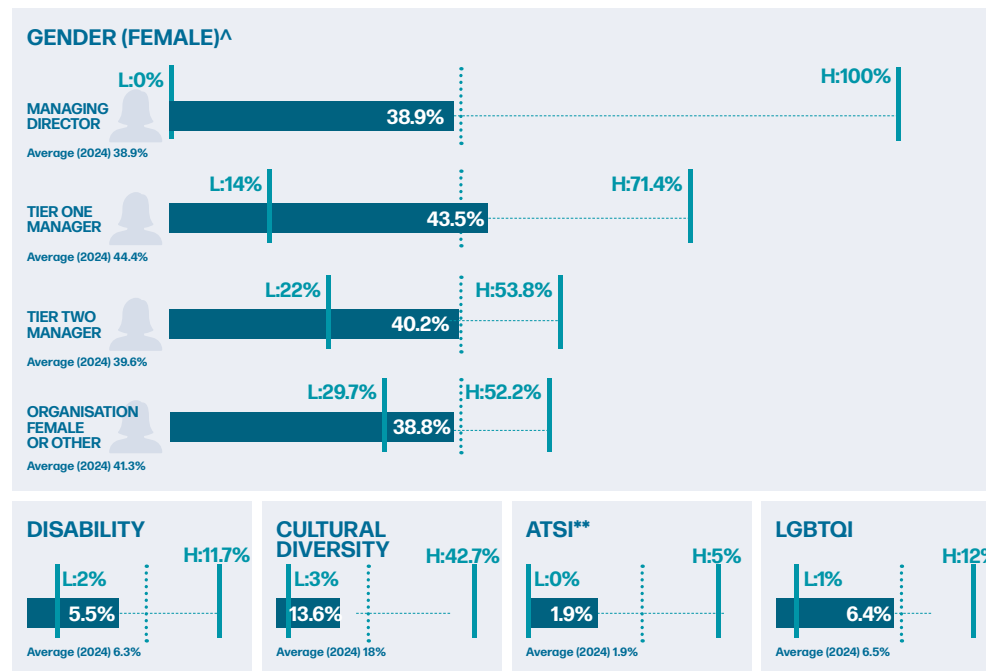


**We are a diverse workforce.**  
**We reflect the community that we serve.**

Across Victoria, water corporations employ more than 7,500 people (as at 30 June 2025) and are often one of the main employers within a region. Therefore, it is important that we continue to focus on improving diversity and increasing representation of the diverse communities that we serve.

Since the previous strategy, the gender targets have shifted from a 50:50 gender split to a 40:40:20 approach, meaning 40% women, 40% men with the remaining 20% flexible (can be any gender, including non-binary individuals, or additional representation of men or women). This means that we still have clear minimum targets for gender representation while avoiding rigid 50/50 quotas and allowing for fluctuations in work force composition, which is particularly important at senior levels where a single change in the team may significantly alter the gender balance.

There has been no change in the percentage of employees who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. However, we have seen a decrease in the percentage of people identifying as having a disability, culturally diverse people and people identifying as LGBTQI+. This may be linked to national and global trends influencing the visibility and support for E,D&I initiatives. As with the Equity measures above, one of the DISC's priorities for 2026 will be to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons for these results.



■ Industry low (L) and high (H)   ■ Average   ··· Target

^ Gender balance (40:40:20) 40% women, 40% men with the remaining 20% flexible (can be any gender, including non-binary individuals, or additional representation of men or women).

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\*\* Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

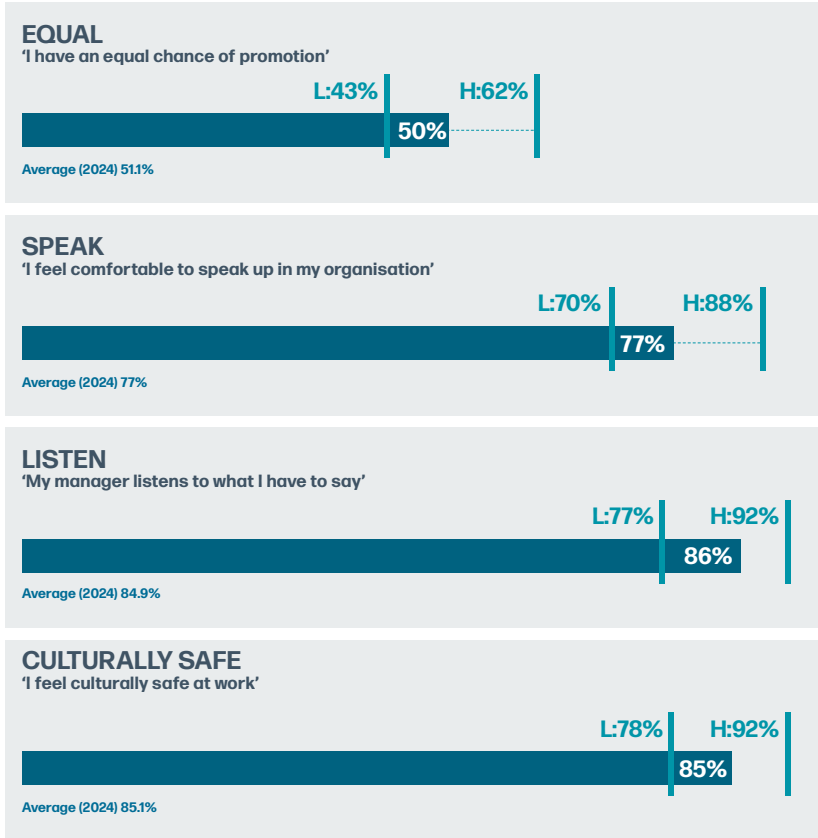
# Inclusion\*



**We are an inclusive sector –  
We provide a workplace that is safe and enables all employees to thrive.**

As a sector, we believe that to be inclusive we need to ensure that each employee feels valued, heard, and empowered. Our commitment to this is measured in our inclusion metrics below which have been taken from the Victorian Public Sector Commission’s People Matter Survey (PMS) or equivalent culture survey.

The data from 2025 indicates that employee sentiment has remained broadly stable. There was a slight increase in people agreeing that their manager listens to them (86.0% up from 84.9% in 2024), and 85% feel culturally safe at work; both metrics indicate a positive and healthy workplace culture. There was no change from 2024 around employees’ comfort speaking up. An area that will require continued focus is equity in promotion opportunities, where just 50% of employees believe they have an equal chance of advancement. This metric sits notably below other measures.



Industry low (L) and high (H) Average

\* For each of the target areas, we have included the industry range (high and low) and the industry average figure (as of 30 June 2025) across participating water corporations.

# Belonging

**The aim of the 2024–28 E,D&I strategy is to create a sector that embodies a sense of belonging for the people who work here. Building a culture of belonging requires progress across our identified metrics in equity, diversity and inclusion simultaneously.**

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Although our data reflects that we are moving in the right direction in some areas, we need to remain open that there is still a lot of work to be done. Our results reflect a positive position on equity, a mixed picture on diversity, and an inclusion culture that has clear room for improvement. Without supporting the growth of these three areas, the sector will not reach its goal to create an environment where every person feels they belong, are valued, and have the opportunity to thrive.

However, metrics on their own don't tell the story of how the sector is driving change through practical initiatives. In the following two case studies, we see innovations that demonstrate Belonging at the core of what we do. Barwon Water used its Social Procurement Framework to drive gender equity and increase workforce participation for under-represented groups, and Melbourne Water's Intersectional Site Audit Assessment Tool evaluated accessibility, inclusion, and cultural safety. These examples show that changing how we think about procurement and evaluation can change how people feel in their workplace, creating benefits beyond the metrics.

## CASE STUDY

# Barwon Water – Advancing gender equity through inclusive procurement and workforce participation

### Context

Barwon Water has committed to using social procurement as a strategic lever to deliver meaningful social outcomes across the G21 region. Guided by its Social Procurement Framework, the organisation prioritises inclusive employment and workforce participation for groups that have historically faced barriers to entering infrastructure and construction industries, including women and First Nations people.

Barwon Water's MGP Booster Pump Stations Upgrade project presented a practical opportunity to translate these commitments into place based action.

### The challenge

Women and First Nations people continue to experience structural and cultural barriers to employment in male dominated sectors such as construction, infrastructure and technical services. These barriers include limited access to training pathways and fewer opportunities to enter trade and technical roles. Addressing these challenges required a deliberate departure from business as usual project delivery, with intentional procurement and workforce design.

### The approach

Barwon Water embedded gender equity objectives into the project's social impact employment requirements, creating accessible and job ready pathways into employment with a strong focus on traineeships.

As part of the procurement process, contractors tendering for the project committed to employing a trainee to commence a Certificate III in Civil Operations. Barwon Water partnered with Gforce Employment Solutions to identify suitable candidates through Gforce's Job Induction Program.

Under this model, the contractor would be responsible for supporting the trainee for the duration of the construction contract. At the conclusion of the contract, the trainees would be transitioned to Barwon Asset Solutions to complete their traineeship.

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## Outcomes

The project delivered tangible gender equity outcomes by increasing opportunities for women to enter and progress within the infrastructure workforce.

Two traineeships were created through the partnership with Gforce Employment Solutions. The two women trainees were employed by two separate Barwon Water subcontractors while undertaking a Certificate III in Civil Maintenance. Following completion of the subcontractor works, both trainees successfully transitioned to Barwon Asset Solutions, where they continue their traineeships with a pathway to ongoing employment across Barwon Water's projects and operations teams.

This outcome demonstrates how inclusive procurement can create supported, sustainable employment pathways for women in traditionally male dominated roles.

## Social impact and legacy

The outcomes of the project were strengthened through collaboration with place based initiatives such as G21 Opportunities for Work (GROW), alongside social enterprises and Aboriginal businesses. These partnerships helped address barriers related to access, job readiness and local workforce pathways, ensuring employment opportunities were responsive to regional needs.

By embedding gender equity into procurement and workforce delivery, Barwon Water has demonstrated how infrastructure projects can be used to remove barriers to workforce participation. The approach delivers immediate employment and skills outcomes while contributing to longer term cultural change.

Melbourne Water's Intersectional Site Audit Assessment Tool evaluated accessibility, inclusion, and cultural safety across 15 office sites, creating its first baseline dataset. The findings informed the 2026-2030 Belonging Action Plan, which guides the accessibility standards, upgrades, and project planning. The results also support the development of an intranet facilities map to improve employee access to amenities and ensure consistent, inclusive workplace experiences.

## CASE STUDY

### Melbourne Water's Intersectional Site Audit Assessment Tool

In 2025, Melbourne Water implemented its first organisation wide Intersectional Site Audit Assessment Tool, designed to capture a comprehensive, intersectional picture of accessibility, inclusion, representation, and belonging across our built environments. The tool was created to ensure our workplaces enable every employee, across identities, abilities, gender, culture, faith, and neurodiversity, to feel safe, respected, and supported.

The assessment tool is structured around four key sections:

#### 1. General Information

Capturing who is auditing and which site they represent.

#### 2. Facilities and Accessible Design

Assessing physical accessibility from arrival through to internal navigation. This includes car parking, public transport access, End of Trip amenities, mobility inclusive features such as lifts and automated doors, bathroom accessibility and maintenance standards, the availability of wellbeing spaces, workstation flexibility, and low sensory work environments.

#### 3. Resources and Tools

Reviewing practical provisions that support health, comfort, safety, and equity, such as sanitary products, expressing facilities, immunological protection supplies, sensory aids, and wellbeing room equipment.

#### 4. Community and Representation

Evaluating cultural safety and inclusion, including Acknowledgement of Country signs, yarning circles, multifaith etiquette signage, LGBTIQ+ visibility, Respect@Work resources, and representation in artwork and décor.

Across 2025, Melbourne Water conducted the audit at 15 office sites across Greater Melbourne, producing our first baseline dataset of intersectional workplace inclusion. This data revealed valuable insights into where facilities, resources, and cultural markers are well established, and where uplift is required to ensure consistency of employee experience, regardless of where people work.

These insights have been instrumental in shaping the development of our 2026–2030 Belonging Action Plan. The audit results directly informed several new commitments, including minimum expectations for accessible design, uplift actions for gender affirming and low sensory facilities, clearer guidance regarding wellbeing room purpose and standards, and improved access to intersectional representation resources.

The tool has also supported more immediate, practical outcomes. The 2025 findings have now been embedded as a baseline expectation in all future office upgrades and refurbishment planning where reasonably possible, ensuring that accessibility and inclusion are not add ons but built in considerations for every project. Property and project teams now have access to the tool as a checklist to ensure environments support diverse needs before designs are finalised.



Additionally, the results will underpin the development of a new internal intranet facilities map, enabling employees to quickly locate key amenities, such as accessible bathrooms, end of trip facilities, spaces for prayer, expressing rooms, sensory and wellbeing needs across all Melbourne Water sites. This will help normalise equitable access and reduce barriers for employees.

By developing and deploying this tool, Melbourne Water has taken an important step toward creating workplaces where every employee knows they belong. The comprehensive, intersectional lens of the audit ensures our future planning, investment and cultural initiatives are informed, targeted, and aligned to our values



# Conclusion

This year's report indicates an overall decline in E,D&I performance across the sector compared with the previous year.

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As a sector it is important that we remain committed to strengthening our foundations in E,D&I and focused on integrating E,D&I principles into our ongoing work. By benchmarking industry performance and fostering meaningful collaboration we can make informed strategic decisions to focus on E,D&I initiatives to address identified gaps. By using data, we are enabled to make transformative change that fosters a truly inclusive, equitable and diverse workforce which represents the communities we serve. This approach to advancing E,D&I promotes a safe and supportive sector, ensures all employees have tailored career opportunities, and enables everyone to thrive.

