



# Price Submission 2026: Public engagement summary report

Summary of all engagement completed for Price Submission 2026

September 2025



## Table of contents

<b>Acknowledgement of Country .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Document purpose .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Engagement objectives .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Our customers and communities .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Engagement approach .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Our engagement journey .....	10
Engagement activities.....	11
Adapting our approach.....	14
<b>Engagement findings .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Water corporation engagement.....	16
Traditional Owner engagement .....	18
End-use customer engagement.....	21
Direct service engagement.....	24
<b>Remaining accountable .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Ensuring representative results.....</b>	<b>27</b>
Accessibility.....	27
Demographics engaged.....	27
Demographic breakdown of our deliberative community panel.....	29
Demographics of our Playback engagement .....	30

## Acknowledgement of Country

Melbourne Water respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which all Australians rely. We pay our respects to Bunurong, Gunaikurnai, Wadawurrung, Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Taungurung peoples, their Elders past, present and future, as Traditional Owners and the custodians of the land and water on which we rely and operate.

We acknowledge and respect the continued cultural, social, economic and spiritual connections of all Aboriginal Victorians. We also acknowledge the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and their connections with lands and waters and recognise and value their inherent responsibility to care for and protect them for thousands of generations.

Melbourne Water acknowledges Aboriginal Victorians as Traditional Owners and, in the spirit of reconciliation, we remain committed to developing partnerships with Traditional Owners to ensure meaningful, ongoing contributions to the future of land and water management.

## Document purpose

This engagement summary report relates to the engagement undertaken for Melbourne Water's 2026 Price Submission.

It outlines:

- customers engaged
- how we engaged
- what was asked
- what we heard
- how we responded.

To read more about our price submission, visit:

[melbournewater.com.au/services/prices-and-charges/price-submission](https://melbournewater.com.au/services/prices-and-charges/price-submission)

# Summary

## Who we are

Melbourne Water is Victoria's largest water corporation with responsibility for providing bulk water, bulk sewerage services, floodplain management and drainage and waterways management services in the Port Phillip and Western Port regions. We ensure that the Greater Melbourne community has access to safe and secure water supplies, that sewage is treated to protect the region's health and environment, and that waterways (rivers, creeks, wetlands and estuaries) and major drainage systems (including floodplains) are well managed.

Most of the land on which Melbourne Water operates is the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, Bunurong and Wadawurrung peoples. Our service region also borders the lands of the Gunaikurnai and Taungurung peoples, with essential catchments and water supply systems located within these areas.

## Our submission

"This process has built out my perspective and understanding of how and where I use water, and my role in the system."

- Deliberative community panel member, closing the loop session (June 2025)

Every five years, Melbourne Water prepares a price submission which details our proposed services in water, sewerage, waterways and drainage. It also outlines our proposed prices, service standards, infrastructure and operational investments.

Customers are at the centre of everything we do at Melbourne Water, and our 2026 Price Submission (PS26) reflects this. We have embedded the expectations, values and requirements of our customers into our proposal.

We began engaging on our 2026 submission in June 2023. Through a six-stage, multi-channel approach, we engaged with more than 8,000 customers, community members and partners.

Figure 1: Melbourne Water's engagement journey



Our engagement process was tailored and targeted to our distinct stakeholder groups. We collected information on community and customer expectations through surveys and assisted with prioritisation and plans via a highly collaborative process involving deliberative forums with key representatives and customer groups. This process built a shared understanding of our performance, the key challenges to meet over coming decades, and the Outcomes our community and customers want us to prioritise. We also engaged on how best to balance competing priorities and associated costs.

Our approach allowed us to reach diverse customer groups and ensured their voices were included in the submission process. It gave us the time needed to listen and understand what was most important, to iterate and extend our engagement approach, and to meaningfully discuss the most significant matters that impact prices and service outcomes for our customers.

## What we heard

Through the process, we identified a series of top-level priorities all customers expect us to deliver:

1. Clean, safe and reliable water services are the top priority.
2. Resilient and sustainable sewerage services and infrastructure.
3. Keeping bills as low as possible but also invest in reliable services for a growing Melbourne.
4. Continue to support and protect waterway health.
5. Ensure resilience and reliability for the whole water cycle, including flood mitigation and drainage management, now and into the future.
6. Equity is important, as is providing hardship support to customers who need it.
7. Active collaboration with partners, including Traditional Owners, local government and delivery partners.

8. Provide more clarity and transparency on how Melbourne Water delivers against its performance targets and spends customer money.

Now, we have come full circle and are reporting back to you on what we have heard through this process, and how we have taken your feedback on board.

Melbourne Water is committed to ongoing engagement with our customers and communities. You can learn more about how we are working with you via Let's Talk.

## Contents

<b>Acknowledgement of Country .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Document purpose .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Who we are .....	4
Our submission .....	4
What we heard .....	5
<b>Engagement objectives .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Our customers and communities.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Engagement approach .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Our engagement journey .....	10
Engagement activities.....	11
Adapting our approach.....	14
<b>Engagement findings and influence on our work.....</b>	<b>16</b>
Water corporation engagement.....	16
Traditional Owner engagement .....	18
End-use customer engagement.....	21
Direct service engagement .....	24
<b>Remaining accountable .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Ensuring representative results.....</b>	<b>27</b>
Accessibility .....	27
Demographics engaged.....	27
Demographic breakdown of our deliberative community panel.....	29
Demographics of our Playback engagement .....	30

## Engagement objectives

In developing our engagement program, we identified five key success measures that would guide our approach and activities:

Figure 2: Melbourne Water's engagement program success measures

The voice of our partners, customers and community is embedded within the price submission process and results, and in turn they feel heard, considered and valued

We have developed a shared understanding and pathway forward to invest in Traditional Owner self-determination

Our submission is aligned with state policy, long-term strategic priorities and the values and preferences of partners, customers and the community

Water Corporations understand and support our submission

Our engagement approach fosters trust and strengthens relationships with our partners, customers and community

In our initial assessment stage of engagement, we reviewed other price submission engagement programs and engagement documentation from the Essential Services Commission ('Getting to Fair' strategy, 'Sensitive and appropriate engagement with consumers experiencing vulnerability' paper). Through this assessment, we identified key principles that directed all our engagement activities and are reflected in the final Price Submission:

- transparency and a 'no surprises' approach
- engaging on the entire value proposition
- playing back what we heard to ensure accuracy
- ensuring accessibility
- focus on equity and providing opportunities for under-represented voices.

## Our customers and communities

Given our role across Greater Melbourne, our customer base is large. We count our customers as anyone who pays us a fee directly or indirectly, including:

- the water corporations who take our bulk water and sewerage services
- land developers
- diversion customers
- direct service and precept customers
- end-use customers who receive water, sewer, waterways and drainage services.

Through the price submission process, we engaged with all our customers.

We also engaged directly with partners and stakeholders, including:

- Traditional Owner corporations
- Developers
- environmental community groups
- community support organisations
- local councils and Victorian Government departments.

## Engagement approach

To ensure our customers and community could see their priorities in our decisions, we ran a six-stage engagement program to understand customer views and values, test and quantify these, co-create Outcomes, play back what we heard, and 'close the loop' on our submission.

Each stage built on the findings of the previous, and followed the development of the Price Submission. Our Stage 2: Values and priorities engagement provided the strategic direction for the submission, while later stages allowed us to focus in on key areas that required direction or decision.

In reviewing the engagement approach from our 2021 Price Submission, we wanted to ensure that we had adequately provided opportunity for feedback on our proposal and that decisions made. Stage 5: Playback provided the broad Greater Melbourne customer group the opportunity to engage with our submission prior to finalisation of decisions.

We heard from our customers that in our 2021 submission, the final stages of engagement did not provide clarity on our final decisions and price submission engagement was not embedded into 'business as usual' during the regulatory period (2021-26). To reflect this, for our 2026 submission we included a specific stage around 'closing the loop' with customers, with the intention of providing clarity on our final decisions and setting up engagement activities for upcoming regulatory period (2026-31).

# Our engagement journey



## Engagement activities

We tailored our engagement approaches to the different customer groups to ensure our engagement was accessible, targeted, relevant in content, and that the engagement form was tailored to facilitate effective discussion.

Customer/ partner/ stakeholder group	Activities
Water corporations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Water Corporation Forum</b> – a regular meeting of regulation, strategy, planning and policy representatives from our water corporation partners.</li> <li>• <b>Regulation and Tariff Forum</b> – regular meeting of water corporation regulatory teams to discuss specific matters relating to the regulatory side of the price submission.</li> <li>• <b>One to one meetings</b> with water corporations.</li> <li>• <b>The Accord</b> – The Managing Directors of Melbourne Water, South East Water, Greater Western Water, Yarra Valley Water and Barwon Water have signed an Accord to collectively tackle key challenges facing the sector. Under this Accord, collaboration occurs through a Managing Directors Forum, General Managers Strategic Forum, and a series of working groups progressing water security, augmentation and reform, strategy, policy, regulation, communications and Traditional Owner engagement.</li> </ul>
Traditional Owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led by our Traditional Owner partners, we customised our engagement for each Traditional Owner Corporation.</li> <li>• Working with <b>Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung</b> and <b>Wadawurrung</b>, we held a series of regular meetings and conversations to support relationship building and enable genuine co-design.</li> <li>• The <b>Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation</b> requested that engagement primarily continue to occur at a metropolitan sector level, with all metropolitan water corporations working together as a single collective, rather than as separate organisations. We are actively exploring how best to support this collaborative approach.</li> <li>• Direct conversations occurred with <b>Gunaikurnai</b> around priority areas.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct conversions were held with <b>Taungurung</b> regarding the PS26 process, with focus on current program delivery (cultural awareness training) and potential future work.</li> </ul>
End-use customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deliberative panel</b> - we hosted a community panel (55 participants) that met 13 times from May 2024 to June 2025, with some participants taking a tour of the Western Treatment Plant (WTP).</li> <li>• <b>Prioritisation surveys</b> - two community values and priorities surveys (one surveying our whole service proposal and one focused on waterways and drainage). We received over 2,000 responses for these surveys.</li> <li>• <b>Willingness to pay survey</b> - we tested customers' willingness to pay for the services we heard were most important. We received more than 1,300 respondents.</li> <li>• <b>Waterways and drainage focus groups</b> - we ran seven demographic-based waterways and drainage focus groups to test specific service offerings and programs that are part of our waterways and drainage program (70 attendees).</li> <li>• <b>Waterways and drainage customer forum</b> - in March 2025, we hosted a specific customer forum focusing on waterways and drainage services. Customers provided feedback on investment levels across the waterways and drainage function (35 participants, three sessions).</li> <li>• <b>Playback survey</b> - a community survey on the proposed program of work outlined in our Playback document, which had over 2,000 respondents</li> <li>• <b>Playback focus groups</b> - 13 focus groups were held on the proposed program of work outlined in our Playback period (112 attendees; demographic and water corporation customer-based)</li> <li>• <b>In-person events</b> - three in-person pop-up events were held to promote and discuss proposals outlined in the Playback. These events were held in key shopping areas in the Greater Western Water, South East Water, and Yarra Valley Water service areas (over 600 touchpoints).</li> <li>• <b>Ongoing customer forum</b> - as part of our commitment to ongoing engagement, we are establishing an ongoing end-use customer forum. Made up of 35 customers that are broadly representative of the Greater Melbourne customer base. This group will meet throughout 2026 to 2031 to discuss Melbourne</li> </ul>

	<p>Water’s performance against our commitments and provide community insights into key programs of work.</p>
<p>Direct service customers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Patterson Lakes</b> – For our price submission, we gathered feedback through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– an initial community survey on priorities (November 2024, survey sent to 300 customers – 24 responses received)</li> <li>– a face-to-face community drop-in session for Quiet Lakes residents on bore flushing (June 2025, invitations to 300 customers – 17 attendees)</li> <li>– Quiet Lakes survey on bore flushing (August 2025, survey sent to 300 customers – 28 responses)</li> <li>– Survey to Patterson Lakes customers who have jetties (August 2025, survey sent to 700 customers – 117 responses).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Koo Wee Rup</b> – Initial engagement with Koo Wee Rup customers occurred initially through the ongoing customer advisory committee to understand the key areas and issues for engagement for our price submission. Following this initial engagement, we: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– sent an initial community survey to more than 1,000 residents on key priorities for the region (391 responses)</li> <li>– ran a face-to-face drop-in session for the region on the proposed precept rate (40 attendees).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Licensed Diverters</b> – Melbourne Water has consistent engagement with our licensed diverter customers through advisory committee meetings (Diversion Management Advisory Committee and Keilor Diverters Advisory Group, which was initially utilised to direct our engagement focus. From there, we: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– conducted 20 interviews with diverters</li> <li>– online survey promoted through direct-contact channels, such as SMS reminders, emails and newsletters (57 responses)</li> <li>– provided updates through the <i>StreamNews</i> newsletter, which is received by more than 1,100 diverter customers.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Developers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Urban Planning and Development Strategic Collaboration Group meetings</b> – Melbourne Water runs a working group for the development industry to ensure we are working in partnership to deliver critical infrastructure for a growing</li> </ul>

	<p>Melbourne. Following feedback from developers, we agreed to engage directly through this already established working group to ensure the submission is embedded in ongoing engagement.</p>
<p>Community sector organisations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>One-to-one meetings</b> –held regularly with the Victorian Council of Social Service, Thriving Communities Australia and Consumer Action Law Centre on our proposed hardship program and our PS26 engagement.</li> <li>• <b>Community sector forum</b> – to support delivery of our hardship proposal, we established a forum with representatives from Financial Counselling Victoria, Uniting Vic.Tas., Thriving Communities Australia and the Victorian Council of Social Service. These organisations provided us with insights into current lived experience of end-use customers.</li> </ul>
<p>Environmental community groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We work with community environmental groups to deliver vital support for waterways. A survey of community groups was run in April 2025 (73 respondents). Further direct engagement will occur as we develop the Waterways and Drainage Implementation Plan (WDIP).</li> </ul>

## Adapting our approach

We adapted our engagement program based on feedback and analysis of gaps. We wanted to ensure we provided adequate time and opportunities for customers and communities to inform our decisions. We did this by:

- extending the program of work to continue into 2025 (originally planned to end in December 2024)
- increasing the number of Water Corporation Forum meetings to ensure regular touchpoints with water corporations throughout the Price Submission develop
- re-focusing our bulk tariff working group with the water corporations (meeting regularly since 2022) as the Regulatory and Tariff Forum to discuss key regulatory issues associated with the development of PS26
- adding additional waterways and drainage-specific engagement activities, including a Waterways and Drainage Customer Forum to enable appropriate ‘deep dives’ into topics customers could have material impact on
- working to ensure our submission reflects the voices of our customers, partners and interested stakeholders and running concurrent engagement programs for

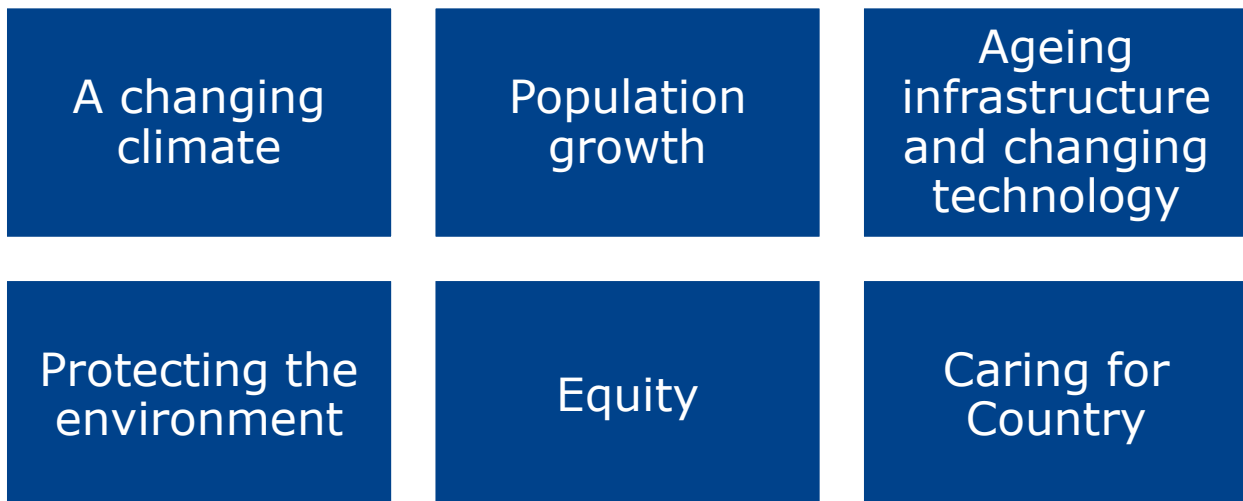
our partners and direct service customers that targeted key areas outside the broader engagement program.

## What we asked

Our engagement covered our entire submission, but for each customer group we engaged on the topics that were of interest and that customer group had the most influence over.

The topics we engaged on reflect the key challenges facing the water sector in Victoria:

Figure 3: The challenges facing the water sector



For the water corporations in our service region, we engaged on:

- engagement topics for communities (including developing the 'challenges' to directly be addressed in our submission) and the community Playback
- customer Outcomes and potential for alignment between performance commitments between Melbourne Water and the water corporations, such as Guaranteed Service Levels (GSL) for water quality and support programs for vulnerable customers
- capital planning and prioritisation based on an understanding of the water corporations' needs
- managing deliverability and uncertainty in investment programs and sharing risk
- asset ownership and Bulk Supply Agreement modernisation
- our approach to PREMO ratings.

Topics taken to end-use customers include:

- our 2026-31 performance Outcomes
- the program of work to support customers experiencing vulnerability or hardship
- the level of investment we should consider against each of our performance Outcomes
- price paths
- waterways and drainage programs of work.

## Engagement findings and influence on our work

### Water corporation engagement

We heard	Influence on our work
<p>PS26 customer Outcomes and commitments that are simpler and clearly linked to service offering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our Outcomes were developed with the water corporations.</li> <li>• Early in our engagement, we worked with the corporations to understand their 2023 and 2024 commitments to help us align our Outcomes direction. We then tested Outcome themes, wording, measures and commitments, how Melbourne Water will measure success, and Guaranteed Service Levels (GSLs).</li> </ul>
<p>Water corporations want a deep and early understanding of Melbourne Water’s proposed capital plan and investment decisions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our capital plan was developed in consultation with the water corporations.</li> <li>• The program was taken through staged reviews from June 2024 to finalisation of the submission (September 2025). In doing this, water corporations could influence our plans throughout their development, including expenditure priorities. For example, our approach to delivering new water supply infrastructure to Melbourne’s west and collaborative planning on the Darebin Intercepting Sewer in Yarra Valley Water’s service area. We received feedback and this was incorporated into the prioritisation process. Whenever we proposed updates to our capital program, we tested it individually and collectively with each corporation.</li> </ul>

<p>Providing a better understanding/deep dive into PS21 performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water corporations were provided the opportunity to review and provide feedback on our Outcome performance reports for 2023-24 and 2024-25, including discussing whether we were self-rating appropriately considering the Outcomes they receive.</li> <li>Co-design of customer satisfaction scores for 2021-26 performance measures that will continue into PS26.</li> </ul>
<p>Risk and Melbourne Water's risk appetite</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We consulted with water corporations on the amount of risk Melbourne Water should take on through this submission.</li> </ul>
<p>Bulk Supply Agreements (BSA), collaborative planning and asset transfers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During early engagement through Water Corporation Forums and BSA planning forums, we identified that the BSA modernisation work program is a priority for the corporations.</li> <li>In mid-2025 we established a dedicated project to deliver on this priority in parallel to the development of PS26 and in time for the water corporations' 2028 Price Submissions.</li> </ul>
<p>Melbourne Water's proposed approach to supporting customers experiencing vulnerability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial direction for this work program was set by water corporations.</li> <li>Re-testing and final decisions on programs were made through water corporation forums.</li> <li>Implementation of the program is being developed in collaboration with water corporations' customer care teams.</li> </ul>
<p>Melbourne Water's approach to engagement for PS26</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback, direction and ideas fed into materials presented to deliberative panel and social research as part of our Values and Priorities engagement stage, which in turn directed all subsequent phases.</li> <li>Content shared publicly in the Playback period, as well as the Playback engagement program, was discussed with corporations and where possible, changes were made to both documents and engagement programs to reflect corporation expectations and requirements.</li> </ul>

## Traditional Owner engagement

We heard	Influence on our work
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing stable and sustainable funding sources.</li> <li>Embedding cultural landscape planning and management approaches.</li> <li>Contributing to the development of water policy and strategic planning.</li> <li>Supporting and participating in Water on Country activities and research.</li> <li>Ensuring Traditional Owner organisations are adequately resourced to provide input into Melbourne Water's plans and strategies, such as the <i>Healthy Water Strategy</i>, <i>Recycled Water Strategy</i> and <i>Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo</i> (previously, Yarra Strategic Plan).</li> <li>Supporting succession planning through initiatives such as traineeship and capacity-building programs.</li> </ul>	<p>In partnership with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, we have developed a program of work that reflects these interests, including proposed resourcing and contributing funding to support Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation's pursuit of its self-determined interest.</p>
Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Securing funding to support the commitments established in the 2022 Partnership Agreement between Melbourne Water and GLaWAC, noting that a formal funding model was not defined at the time.</li> <li>Advancing restorative water justice initiatives.</li> <li>Supporting research, focused on eels, through funding.</li> </ul>	<p>As per our co-developed Partnership Agreement with GLaWAC, we are proposing to continue to contribute funding to support key self-determined interests.</p>

We heard	Influence on our work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural Values Assessment and interpretation.</li> </ul>	
<p>Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate and equitable resourcing for Wadawurrung people to participate in their obligation of care and management of Country.</li> <li>Resourcing at the program level to support capacity building, self-determined participation, decision making and shared outcomes.</li> <li>Ensuring Wadawurrung input and interest is reflected in policy, strategy and planning.</li> <li>Enabling Wadawurrung access to water rights and entitlements including storm/recycled water.</li> <li>Response and readiness for Treaty and truth telling.</li> <li>Sharing and building whole of system water knowledge through research and forums.</li> <li>Cultural Values Assessments and management programs for priority landscapes.</li> <li>Providing strategic and cultural guidance in urban planning and development processes.</li> <li>Access and involvement in Major Project Development planning cycles.</li> <li>Co-designed natural resource management planning and implementation across landscapes.</li> <li>Promoting the use and revitalisation of cultural fire practices.</li> <li>Supporting Healthy Country Planning initiatives, such as monitoring programs</li> </ul>	<p>Through implementation of our <i>Wunggurrwil Ngitj</i> (strong together) partnership, we continue to strengthen our partnership and contribute funding to support Wadawurrung Traditional Owner Aboriginal Corporation’s pursuit of its self-determined interest.</p>

We heard	Influence on our work
<p>that incorporate cultural knowledge and indicators.</p>	
<p>Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the Bunurong – Water Justice Fund through a water corporation Accord-level funding model.</li> <li>• Enabling Bunurong to support Indigenous community organisations operating on Bunurong Country.</li> <li>• Assisting BLCAC’s Strong Country team in responding to Melbourne Water project work on Bunurong Country.</li> <li>• Supporting the development of BLCAC’s Strong Country ranger program on the western side of Bunurong Country (near Altona).</li> </ul>	<p>We have contributed to a commitment to develop a partnership and identify Bunurong’s preferred model of engaging and funding self-determined interests.</p>
<p>Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Melbourne Water has been liaising with Taungurung regarding the PS26 process, and they have expressed interest in discussing water justice issues and are interested in Natural Resource Management (NRM) works and potential future employment through our projects.</li> <li>• Taungurung are continuing to deliver cultural awareness training to Melbourne Water staff working on Taungurung Country or involved in water management.</li> </ul>	<p>We will continue to engage in partnership with Taungurung Land and Waters Council but will be directed by the Council on the way and focus of doing so.</p>

## End-use customer engagement

We heard	Influence on our work
<p>Providing clean, safe and reliable water services is Melbourne Water’s number one job.</p> <p>Continue to provide resilient and sustainable sewerage services and infrastructure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These priorities were clearly reflected in our 2026-31 Customer Outcomes.</li> <li>• Water services were the most prioritised by end-use customers. However, customers prioritised sewerage services differently depending on their knowledge of Victoria’s water system.</li> <li>• To further reflect the significant priority placed on water services, we developed a water quality Guaranteed Service Level in consultation with the water corporations.</li> </ul>
<p>Continue to support and protect waterway health for nature and biodiversity, and with additional benefit of maintaining community health and wellbeing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End-use customers had a higher level of influence over our waterways and drainage program.</li> <li>• The priority given to waterway health by customers is directly reflected in Outcome 3.</li> <li>• Willingness to pay surveys indicated a preference for a modest increase in service levels. Waterways and drainage specific engagement and social research supported this.</li> <li>• To reflect customer priorities for waterway health, we are proposing to continue the programs we uplifted in PS21 in vegetation, waterway condition monitoring and delivering water for the environment, which are reflected in our PS26 base year expenditure. We are also providing increased capital investment for projects removing fish barriers and constructing fish passageways.</li> <li>• We will continue to support customer’s priority for more natural waterways to enjoy and use safely through our ongoing programs for riparian vegetation management and maintenance, managing land near waterways, pollution and litter management. We will significantly invest in three waterway projects to remove concrete and make waterways more natural in communities and locations that need it and have the partners willing to work with us for delivery and shared benefits.</li> <li>• Feedback on large-scale projects that provide community access to waterways for recreation was mixed. Results of our willingness-to-pay survey indicated preference for a</li> </ul>

	<p>slight increase in service, something that was reflected in the forum and some focus groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will continue to partner with community groups to monitor and improve waterway health across the region, for example the frog census. This will see a continuation of the current program. We understand community partners can help us mature our vegetation establishment and other programs.</li> </ul>
<p>Keeping bills as low as possible but also invest in reliable services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affordability remains a core focus of our submission – continuing the theme from our PS21 Outcomes.</li> <li>All customers, including the community sector, stated the best thing we can do to assist customers is manage our costs effectively.</li> <li>Re-testing and re-prioritising work done with the Waterways and Drainage Customer Forum and the deliberative community panel to understand where customers see opportunities to re-prioritise spend.</li> <li>Early feedback from our Values and Priorities Stage found that affordability was ranked slightly lower than reliable water and sewerage services and healthy waterways. However, affordability was prioritised more strongly through Playback. This shift was expected, with customers seeing the ‘cost’ of the overall proposal (rather than the more general ‘values’), and the increased cost-of-living pressures that occurred over the year. In response, we reviewed our program of work, continuing to refine programs (including our proposed hardship program) to limit the bill increase experienced by customers.</li> </ul>
<p>Supporting customers who experience vulnerability is important, but this needs to be done fairly and the financial burden on the broader customer group must be limited.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following direction from the water corporations, Melbourne Water’s work in supporting customers was tested with our deliberative community panel and re-tested with the panel and the broader community through our playback engagement.</li> <li>In response to this, we reviewed the program, bringing the overall cost of the program down. However, in consultation with water corporations and community sector organisations, this change is limited as for Melbourne Water to have the intended impact as</li> </ul>

	<p>supported by customers an expenditure of \$6.9 million is proposed.</p>
<p>Provide more clarity and transparency on how Melbourne Water delivers against its performance targets, spends customer money and provides value.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our Playback engagement period and documentation publicly promoted our planned investments and decisions and asked for broad community feedback on the level of investment.</li> <li>• To reflect this, we are committing to more regular reporting against our Customer Outcomes and will be taking our annual performance report to the water corporations and our ongoing customer forum for feedback prior to submission to the ESC.</li> <li>• We have provided customer-friendly, non-technical documents with the release of our Price Submission that outlines how our submission supports the water services of metropolitan water corporations, regional water corporations, and provides services for our direct service customers.</li> </ul>
<p>After a first year of 0 per cent real increase (rather than a step increase price path), end-use customer preference is for smooth bill increases and for Melbourne Water to consider of their local metropolitan water corporation future price paths when setting our own.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We proposed a 0 per cent real bill increase in Year 1 of the next period, acknowledging cost-of-living pressures.</li> <li>• Reflecting end-use customer and water corporation feedback, we are proposing to profile our bill increases to account for water corporations’ 2028 Price Submission bill impacts. This has the practical effect of increasing bills in 2027-28, more than in subsequent years of the period but allows for a smoother price path for end-use customers. We heard clearly through our deliberative panel that customers want us to work with the water corporations to prevent bill shock and keep prices smooth over different regulatory periods.</li> </ul>
<p>Proactive investment where possible is preferred to avoid delays and increased future costs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are proactively investing in our water and sewerage systems to meet growing demand and address ageing infrastructure.</li> <li>• We face several challenges that impact infrastructure needs over coming decades, including a growing population and more variable climate.</li> <li>• However, we will ensure that our expenditure proposal only includes the cost of projects and programs that we are confident can be delivered in the regulatory period.</li> </ul>

	<p>This allows us to proactively invest to meet changing needs, while ensuring customers do not wear the costs of more uncertain projects.</p>
<p>Collaboration with community and partners is important to deliver services that are of value for all customers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting both Traditional Owner and end-use customer feedback, we are increasing our funding of our partnerships to support Traditional Owner corporations' self-determined programs and projects.</li> <li>• We will continue with a range of co-delivery programs with local community and partners in council, State and Federal Governments.</li> <li>• We will continue to work with community environmental groups to support waterway health.</li> </ul>

## Direct service engagement

Area of interest	Influence on our work
<p><b>Licensed diverter customers</b></p>	
<p>Diverter customers pay an annual licence fee and a usage fee for the volume of water they take directly from local water sources. These customers value accurate meter reads and information, and the service provided by our dedicated officers.</p>	<p>Feedback gathered through the program identified that diverter customers preferred the proposal known as the 'Standard Package'. This would see prices increase by CPI + 0.2 per cent and would involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continuation of current service levels to meet our Customer Charter commitments, including an increased communications focus</li> <li>• meter installation to comply with the Victorian Government's Non-urban Metering Policy and associated renewals</li> <li>• continuous improvement to embrace new technologies and digital platforms</li> <li>• an increase in operating expenditure of \$0.3 million for diversion customers as a result of increased maintenance to maintain the system.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have put forward this package as part of our submission.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Koo Wee Rup customers</b></p>	
<p>Customers in the district pay a 'Melbourne Water special precept rate', which funds the higher level of drainage services the district receives. As the area is a former swampland and is prone to flooding, customers value a service that helps minimise the risk of flooding in the area, while also balancing the cost of this service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In response to customer feedback, a dedicated resource will be located to manage and maintain the Koo Wee Rup-Longwarry Flood Protection District, increasing responsiveness and consistency of communication.</li> <li>A 10 per cent uplift in spend is proposed to enable the customer supported uplift in service for the district.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Patterson Lakes customers</b></p>	
<p>Customers who own properties on the Quiet Lakes pay a bore flushing fee. This fee covers bore flushing services we currently provide to Lake Legana and Lake Illawong, this service improves the water quality of these lakes for customer use. The third Quiet Lake – Lake Carramar – currently does not receive a bore flushing service and is a main focus of community engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bore flushing will be provided at Lake Carramar with the cost shared equally across customers at all three Lakes. This enables the lake network to be managed as a complete system rather than separate entities.</li> <li>We are proposing a \$0.3 million increase in our opex for Quiet Lakes bore flushing.</li> </ul>
<p>Tidal waterways customers pay a jetty maintenance fee. This fee covers the ongoing maintenance, repairs and replacement of the jetties on customers' properties that are used to gain access to the tidal waterways for recreational activities.</p>	<p>Customers with timber jetties told us they prefer smooth price structures. We have implemented this pricing structure.</p>

## Remaining accountable

We are committing to ongoing engagement throughout the 2026-31 period and beyond.

Through the PS26 process, we identified some key topics for water corporations that could not be fully addressed through Price Submission engagement alone (such as collaborative planning, Bulk Supply Agreement (BSA) modernisation). These areas not finalised ahead of submission will be addressed through the regulatory period. In Appendix A (Water corporation summaries), we have outlined these key areas to be addressed during the period.

We are also committed to engaging in an ongoing manner on our performance to understand how we meet customer expectations during the period. We will do this through engagement activities for water corporations (such as forums), and through an ongoing customer forum, made up of end-use customers.

## Appendix 1: Ensuring representative results

We worked to ensure our engagement methodology was inclusive and representative of the Greater Melbourne population. We did this through accessible engagement and representative recruitment.

### Accessibility

Barriers to participation are varied, and impact people differently. To help alleviate some of these barriers, we provided extra support and information for customers, including:

- providing financial incentives for customers completing surveys (through survey profile tools) to ensure time given by customers was compensated for and encourage a broader representation of our community
- payment for participation in forums and focus groups
- support for customers who are not comfortable with online tools
- supporting panel and forum members who had caring responsibilities
- Plain English documentation and summary versions of technical documents
- use of videos and full video transcripts for our surveys to provide complex information in the simplest manner – video transcripts also provided translation services
- translation of our summary Playback summary and Price Submission summary documents
- providing interpretation services and a call number for customers who preferred to speak directly to the team.
- providing a variety of ways to engage, including: online, over the phone and face to-face to suit a range of access needs and preferences
- conducting in-person engagement activities in different parts of our service region
- recruiting specific groups that may normally be underrepresented in focus groups and panels.

### Demographics engaged

Overall, we heard from more than 6,000 end-use customers through surveys, focus groups, forums/panels and community pop-ups.

For our panel, forum and focus groups to be impartial, our facilitators (RPS, Max Hardy, Insync) managed the recruitment process.

Participants were chosen from to proportionally represent the population of our service region as much as possible, with key demographics including:

- Water corporation

- Homeowner/renter
- Age
- Gender
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander
- Identifying as living with a disability
- Business owner
- Culturally and linguistically diverse background
- Experiencing or had experienced financial difficulties.

## Demographic breakdown of our deliberative community panel

The information below demonstrates the demographic overview of all 55 randomly selected community panel participants.



### Demographics of our Playback engagement

