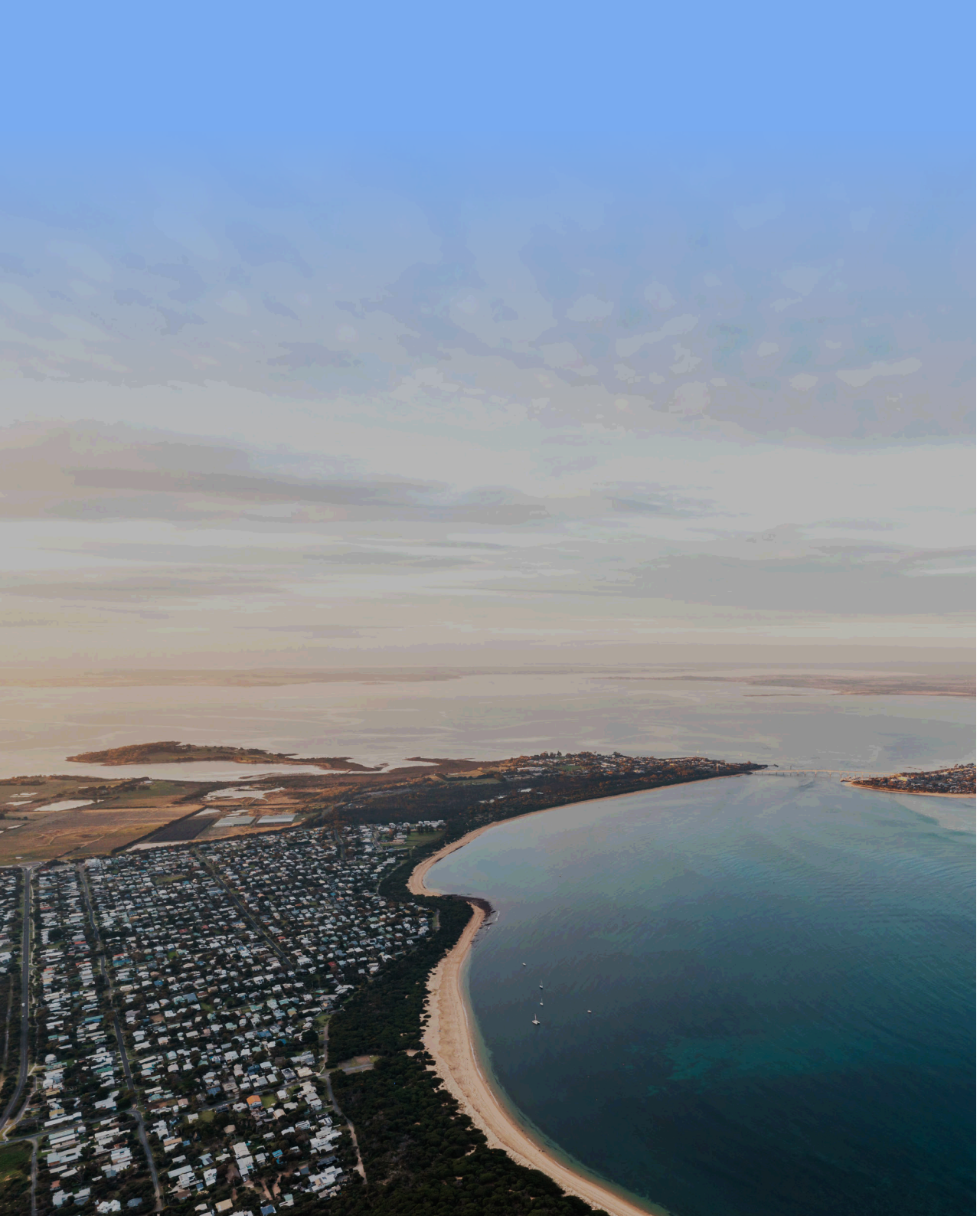


Communications & Engagement Plan 2026-29

WESTERNPORT WATER

What's inside

Background	2
Our service area	3
Strategic alignment	4
Communications – Engagement – Education	5
Our communication and engagement channels	6
Customer and Community Engagement	8
Our programs and plans	10
Capital improvement projects	14

Acknowledgement

Westernport Water acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as First Nations People and that the land, sea and water are of spiritual, cultural and economic importance. We recognise that we provide services on the traditional lands of the Bunurong Peoples of the Kulin Nation. The Bunurong Peoples have managed the resources on Millowl for thousands of years.
We acknowledge them and their continued connection to this place, as we go about managing the water resources today.

Background

This Plan is designed to make sure that we communicate and engage effectively with our customers, employees, partners, and the wider community. By doing so, we aim to better understand their needs, adapt our services accordingly and ultimately improve customer satisfaction.

As a water corporation, we are responsible for the supply of drinking water, recycled water, and the removal and treatment of sewage and trade waste. Effective communication and engagement are essential for building trust and confidence in Westernport Water and ensuring that customers have access to the information they need when they need it.

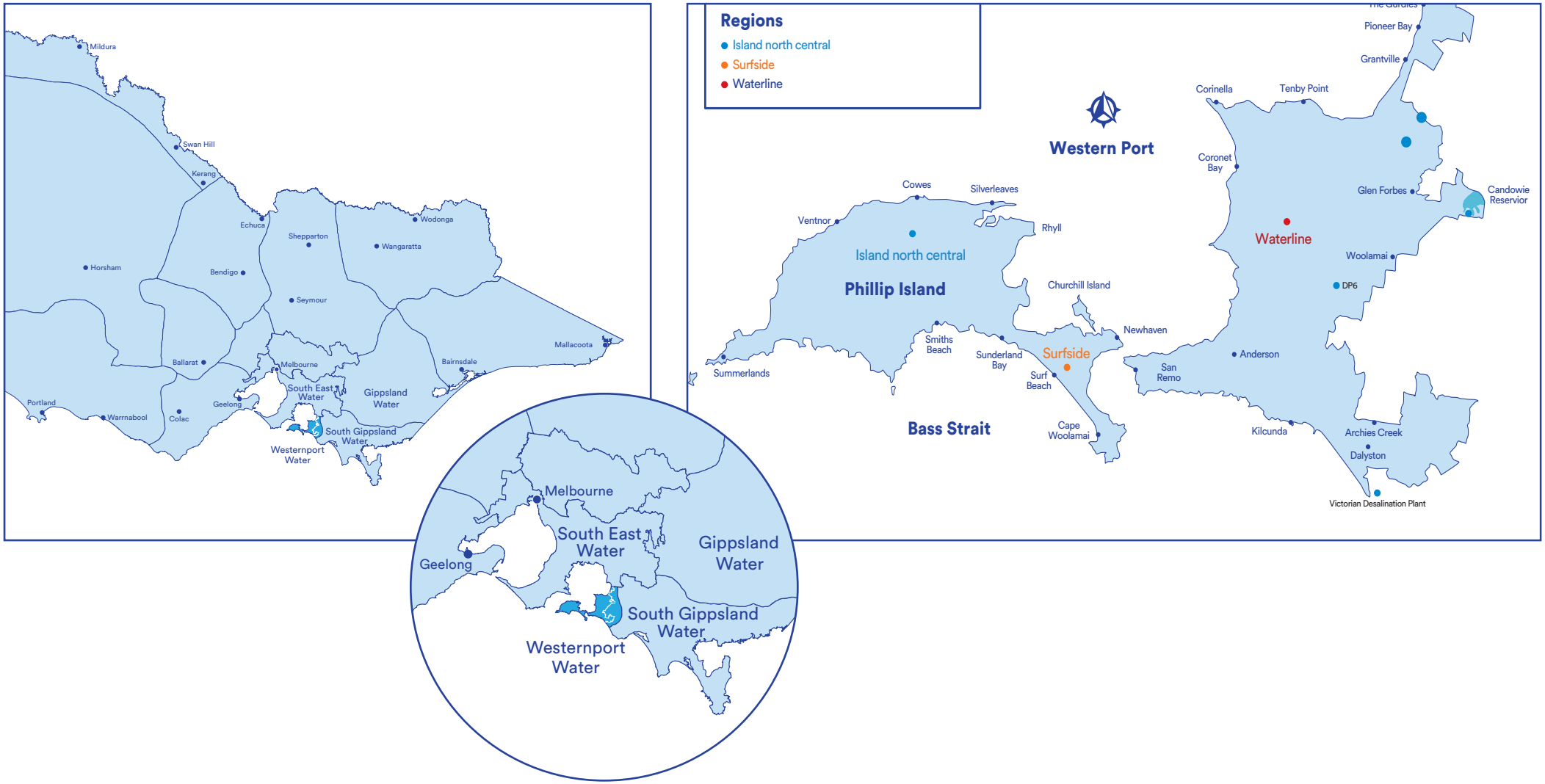
We service over 23,688 customers across an area of 300 square kilometers, including Phillip Island and mainland communities from The Gurdies to Archies Creek on the Bass Coast. Westernport Water is one of 18 water corporations that report to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and the State Government of Victoria.

This plan lists our key initiatives, projects, and plans for the next two years, which will align with the end of our five year planning period ending 30 June 2028. These have been carefully planned to support the delivery of the corporate plan and foster a culture of engagement with open and transparent communications with customers and the community.



Prep water bottle program 2025.

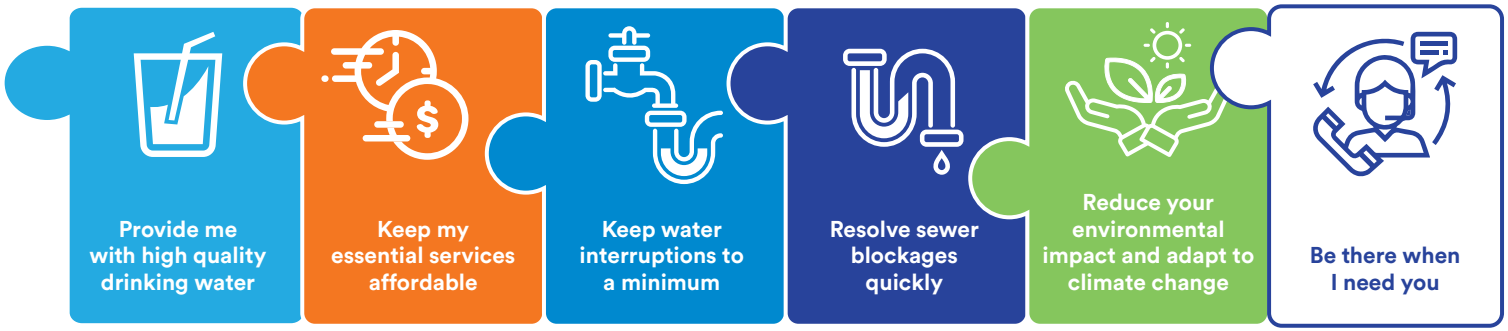
Our service area



Strategic alignment

We are committed to delivering the outcomes that customers sought as part of the 2023-28 price review engagement process.

By implementing this plan, we seek to foster positive relationships with stakeholders, increase awareness of our services, build water literacy, and enhance the overall customer experience.



Our commitment to diversity and inclusion

At Westernport Water, we are dedicated to delivering communication and engagement that is inclusive, accessible, and safe for everyone in our community, including people from diverse backgrounds such as First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) individuals, and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+). We encourage people of all ages, genders and abilities to engage with us.







Communications
Engagement
Education

Communications, engagement, and education are key interrelated activities that enable Westernport Water to disseminate information, create understanding, promote participation, gain insights, and educate customers and the community about our products and services.

Measuring success

Effective communication, engagement and education influences our success and enables us to meet our customer-facing objectives. Our performance is regularly measured through customer satisfaction surveys and community feedback mechanisms, such as the Customer Advisory Panel.



Communications

We will provide customers and the community with consistent, reliable and quality information about our programs, products and services. We will create and execute communications strategies to engage and inform our audiences (internal and external) using various communications channels and platforms to make sure that information is accessible to all. Communications will be considered successful if:

- information provided is clear and easy to grasp, with no complex terms, ambiguity or confusion
- the audience can find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information
- communications are tailored for the intended audience, taking into account their level of interest, expertise and knowledge
- information is provided through the most appropriate communications channel at the best possible time.



Engagement

Customer and community engagement. We will foster a culture of community engagement by creating dialogue with our customers and community, to work with, listen to, and understand their needs, expectations and aspirations, so that we may develop customer-shaped priorities and make better decisions that value community knowledge and wisdom. Engagement will be considered successful if people:

- understand what it is we do, and the impacts and cost of delivering essential services
- affected by a project or decision are actively involved and engaged
- can influence outcomes by being informed and engaged in the project
- share their thoughts, and opinions and have confidence that their concerns are acknowledged and addressed
- trust us to be transparent and accessible in our approach.



Education

We will educate the local community and visitors to our region about our products and services to improve water and wastewater literacy. Education involves the transfer of knowledge and skills, and it is necessary for promoting understanding and awareness. All our education campaigns and programs sit within two streams – Water Literacy and School Education. Community and school education will be considered successful if:

- awareness of local water and wastewater products and services are improved
- awareness of flexible payment and other support options available to customers requiring financial support
- people can access resources and programs to support water literacy
- we are considered a trusted source of information about water and wastewater
- relationships with schools are maintained or strengthened and we achieve a minimum of 20 educational engagements or activities.

Our communication and engagement channels

We've developed a range of communication and engagement channels that are designed to connect with our target audiences and foster meaningful conversations. We're committed to open and transparent communication and engagement and invite everyone to explore our range of communications channels.

Channel	Our promise to customers, we will:
Bill inserts	provide practical information about our products and services to existing customers
Community outreach	attend community events to engage in conversations with both customers and the local community, discussing our services and projects with the goal of enhancing customer experiences. Active community involvement is a way to foster connections, gain insights into customer needs and expectations, and share information
Customer forums	provide a platform for customer engagement to gather valuable customer insights, both in person and online
Customer panel	establish a customer panel to review our performance annually and report back to customers via the Annual Watermark
Customer service counter	provide the personal touch, and welcome customers to visit in person for advice, information, applications, or bill support
Customer surveys	undertake an annual survey to gather feedback and opinions and measure performance to provide a better customer experience
Electronic mail (push)	increase email communication with customers to better inform them of our products and services
Email (2-way)	support two-way communications with customers through email and direct marketing campaigns
Incursions/excursions	our experienced education officer can come to your school or community group, or you can visit one of our treatment facilities
Local print media	improve public communications and demonstrate our commitment to the local community by advertising in the local paper
Message on hold	provide customers bite-size messages when on hold to keep them engaged and informed
Online resources	provide online resources in an easy and convenient online format
Publications	inform our customers of our performance by publishing strategies, policies and reports on our website
SMS	use SMS notifications to provide timely and relevant information to our customers, particularly for outages and interruptions
Social media	create and share accurate and informative content on our social media channels
Website	update our website with accurate and up-to-date information that is easily accessible from any device



Photo: Newhaven College - 2026 Props with their new water bottles

Customer and Community Engagement

We believe meaningful, inclusive, and transparent engagement informs our decision-making to better deliver outcomes that reflect what customers value, need, and want.

Community engagement supports better decision-making, strengthens trust, and mitigates risk. By engaging with well represented customers on our products, services, and projects, we build stronger relationships and improve performance by ensuring services reflect community needs and expectations.

Engagement activities are guided by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, with the level of participation tailored to the degree of community interest and impact. We value engagement and our staff have the skills and resources to engage with people, effectively. Our systems make use of data, information and insights from engagement to inform decision-making.

Key engagement activities and initiatives. We will:

Engagement activity	Why	What	Who	When
Urban Water Strategy & Drought Preparedness Plan	We are required to develop an Urban Water Strategy and Drought Preparedness Plan in partnership with Traditional Owners, and in consultation with stakeholders, customers and community.	Partner with Traditional Owners on the development of the Strategy and Plan, with the nature of this partnership self-determined by Traditional Owners. Engage on level of service and options for supply and demand measures.	Traditional Owners, customers, stakeholders,	2026-27
PS28 Program of Engagement	Water price submissions set out the service levels water businesses propose to deliver and the prices they propose to charge. Water businesses must engage with customers to understand what they value and prepare proposals that reflect this. Westernport Water must demonstrate to the regulator that its proposed prices and service commitments are informed by customer preferences and community expectations.	Moving beyond simple consultation, the program focuses on co-designing outcomes through deep-dive workshops, deliberative forums, and targeted surveys that explore the trade-off between service levels and bill affordability. More info in the following section.	Customers and community online	2026-28
Maintain a customer panel to review our performance	We committed to establishing a customer panel to review our performance and provide commentary on our performance annually against a new set of outcome commitments. Results and commentary will be published in our Annual Watermark and on our website.	Customers will be empowered to review performance and assess whether targets are met each year. Where targets are missed, Westernport Water will provide a corrective action plan outlining how performance will improve and return funds to the community where applicable.	8-16 customers	Engaged annually
Continue to undertake annual customer satisfaction survey	To gather customer insights on how well we meet needs and expectations, the survey measures satisfaction with the quality of water and wastewater products, services, and support.	Conduct an annual survey in collaboration with other Victorian water corporations to gather customer feedback, measure performance, and benchmark against similar providers.	400 customers	2026-28

Customer and Community Engagement (continued)

Engagement activity	Why	What	Who	When
Produce Annual Reports	To communicate our financial and operational performance and other important information to customers and stakeholders, providing transparency and accountability.	This involves the preparation of information about Westernport Water's activities and performance for the previous year and other relevant information. This may include water quality reports, environmental performance, Annual Watermark and Annual Report	Customers, stakeholders, government	Annually
Water for Recreation, partner with the Phillip Island Community Orchard	The community orchard is a flagship demonstration site showcasing the safe and efficient use of Class A recycled water for local food production. It also supports recreation and helps build community skills and capacity in horticulture and food production.	Partner with Phillip Island Community Orchard Inc. under the Community Licence, providing governance support to ensure delivery of its Annual Plan, and supporting their annual Harvest Festival.	Members, gardeners, and community	In accordance with Community Licence
Attend community events and annual days of significance	Being present, visible and accessible in the community provides opportunities for customers to engage with us and enables us to share important information to improve awareness of products and services.	Westernport Water supports many social and cultural days of significance through events and public promotion.	General public and customers	Ongoing
Water Cafés	To pro actively gather customer feedback and insights to inform projects, strategies and enhance the overall customer experience. Build reputation and trust.	Attend local community events to talk with customers, support community events and be present in the community to build trust and brand awareness.	Customers and community	Ongoing

Key reconciliation activities and initiatives. We will:

Implement Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Engagement Plan	To help create and strengthen lasting mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, community leaders and organisations and create a more equitable and inclusive community.	The Aboriginal Engagement Plan is designed to empower and support First Nations communities and individuals in their pursuit of self-determination. It will include initiatives to increase participation, employment, as well as improved economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes.	Westernport Water, BCRN and the RAP Working Group	2026-28
Maintain a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Working Group	The Working Group provides a platform to enable two-way communication and engagement between the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and Westernport Water.	The RAP working group is a team of individuals who are responsible for developing and implementing Westernport Water's RAP. We will maintain a Working Group inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, staff and customers to ensure good governance of the group that oversees progress against commitments.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	2026-28
Maintain active membership of the Bass Coast Reconciliation Network (BCRN)	Through the BCRN we will champion reconciliation and recognition within our sphere of influence and support one another to achieve the actions and initiatives detailed within member's respective Reconciliation Action Plans.	The BCRN is a group of organisations that work with the community to promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians in the Bass Coast region.	Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community	Ongoing

Our programs and plans

We are committed to supporting the local community through a range of community programs and plans designed to improve water literacy, support the health and well-being of the local community, promote environmental sustainability, and encourage water conservation.

Our programs and plans include the following:

1



Sponsorship: Community Support Program: this is a key initiative that provides funding for a range of community initiatives, including environmental sustainability, water conservation, water literacy, access to drinking water, education and training, health and wellbeing, and community events. Each year we will work with community groups and not-for-profit organisations to identify areas of need and invest $50,000 towards community-based causes.

2



Urban Water Strategy & Drought Preparedness Plan: to be delivered in 2027, outlines a 50-year approach to securing a reliable and sustainable water supply to 2075. It identifies the optimal mix of supply and demand measures to meet future needs, while ensuring wastewater systems can support population growth. Drought preparedness is embedded through proactive planning and demand management to maintain water security during dry periods.

Engagement with Traditional Owners and community will be central to shaping the strategy, with a dedicated program delivered throughout 2026-27.

3



Education Program
Stream A - Improving Water Literacy: promotes sustainable water use, helps to protect water resources, and build trust. Helping customers understand the investment and effort required to produce quality drinking water locally, and to collect, treat and dispose of wastewater increases their appreciation and trust in our services and perceived value for money. More informed customers are also more likely to support decisions on water security, alternative water sources, performance improvements and future investment.

This will be achieved in 2026–28 by:
- upgrading our website
- expanding the use of social media
- delivering genuine community engagement
- promoting state-wide campaigns including: Make every drop count, Victoria's Permanent Water Saving Rules, Choose Tap and the School Water Efficiency Program.



Education Program: Stream B – School's program: In 2026-28 we will partner with local schools and educators to deliver educational programs, initiatives and resources that improve water literacy from Kinder to Year 12. These include classroom incursions for early years, educational site tours for middle and senior school, and hands-on learning activities. Resources will focus on water conservation and sustainability, local water supplies, the water cycle, water quality, wastewater and recycled water. The annual National Water Week Poster Competition will focus on water conservation via a state-wide collaborative online competition.

Our programs and plans (continued)

4



PS28 Program of Engagement: will be designed as a multi-phased, "customer-first" strategy that ensures community values directly influence future service priorities. Moving beyond simple consultation, the program focuses on co-designing outcomes through deep-dive workshops, deliberative forums, and targeted surveys that explore the trade-off's between service levels and bill affordability. Through this process we will prove that proposed investments are directly linked to the verified preferences and long-term interests of customers to deliver a "best offer" that is both transparent and socially responsible.

5



Reconciliation Action Plan: Westernport Water's commitment to reconciliation and recognition. Through 2026-27 we will seek to develop and commence our third Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). We will continue to advance reconciliation within our sphere of influence and focus on strengthening relationships, cultural learning and drive improved employment outcomes. Internally, we will drive reconciliation through business activities, services and programs, embedding processes and systems at all levels of the business. Westernport Water is committed to reconciliation with Australia's First Nations people and is committed to building respectful and collaborative relationships with the Traditional Owners of the land, the Bunurong people, and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living and connected to the region.

6



The Choose Tap Program: is a sustainability initiative that encourages people to choose tap water as a sustainable and cost-effective alternative to bottled water and sugary drinks. The Choose Tap program has been running for over 10 years and includes initiatives to promote the consumption of tap water as a sustainable and healthy alternative to bottled water. This includes public education campaigns, the prep water bottle initiative, portable water fountains for events, the installation of public refill stations, partnerships with local businesses and events to provide and promote tap water to reduce the use of single-use plastic water bottles.



Walk for Reconciliation, Bridge Walk 2022.

Our programs and plans (continued)

7



Water for recreation opportunities
Consistent with the Victorian Government's water planning framework, which recognises that waterways, wetlands and storages should deliver community, environmental and recreational benefits. Westernport Water's King Road Recycled Water Wetland Storage Project presents an opportunity to create lasting value beyond core water services. It's a 168-hectare working farm, home to a wide range of wildlife, and a place of strong Bunurong cultural significance. Through a site concept plan future opportunities for limited public access for recreational and educational purposes are also being explored, recognising the positive benefits of connection to nature for community health and wellbeing.

8



Water Smart Program is a Victorian government-funded program supporting non-residential customers to become more water efficient by facilitating the monitoring of water services at participating sites. Supporting businesses and councils to promptly address incidents that arise. This proactive approach will contribute to improved water security and affordability. The program has been extended to 30 June 2027, over this period we will focus on Stream 3, looking at Sporting Ground Audits, Upgrades and Retrofits to reduce potable water use. In partnership with the local council we will conduct comprehensive water audits, identifying opportunities to reduce potable water use, and implementing small-scale retrofits.

9



Permanent Water Refill Station Program: A partnership initiative that improves community access to drinking water in public spaces. The program supports sustainable behaviours, promotes the benefits of tap water, and contributes to healthier, more liveable communities. Between 2026-28, we will encourage community groups and schools to apply for funding to purchase water refill stations via the Community Support Program, as allocated funding was exhausted during 2023-26 installing six new fountains. In 2026, a refurbished fountain is scheduled to be installed in Coronet Bay at Fred Grashin Reserve. We will continue to work in partnership with the local Council and Nature Park to maintain existing fountains.



Capital improvement projects

Our $47.67M capital improvements program for the current pricing period will address customer priorities for reliable water and wastewater services and environmentally responsible operations.

Projects that require extensive communication and engagement include:

Engagement activity	What	Why	Who	When
Climate Change Strategy/Net Zero Emissions Transition Plan	Sets out a plan of action, and detail projects and activities required to get to Net Zero by 2035. Projects related to meeting targets, including the Renewable Energy Generation and Electric Vehicle Fleet Transition projects.	Meet customer expectations while aligning with the Victorian Government's climate policy, emissions reduction pledge, and water sector targets.	Engage customers and community on Climate Change initiatives	2023-35
King Road Recycled Water Wetlands Project, King Road Wastewater Treatment Plant	Construction of an integrated recycled water wetland and storage system, a concept plan for protecting Bunurong cultural values and long-term, low-impact public access and educational/recreational improvements.	Meet housing, economic, and peak demand needs while managing wet weather events; expand recycled water for productive use; and enhance wetland habitats to support biodiversity and absorb carbon, reducing greenhouse gas emissions.	Traditional Owners, stakeholders, customers and community	2023-24
Sustainable Reuse and Afforestation	Expand recycled water reuse at Cowes and King Road wastewater treatment plants; investigate irrigation and afforestation for carbon offsets; and explore Class-B recycled water markets for agricultural and industrial use.	To deliver benefits of enhanced biodiversity, habitat for threatened and endangered species, and carbon offsets. This project will also support our Recycled Water Strategy and targets.	Customers, community, agricultural and industrial property owners.	2024-25
Recycled Water Improvement program	Expansion of Class A recycled water though the Wastewater Futures project and network extensions at Seagrove Estate.	To meet increased customer demand for recycled water, to reach our recycled water commitment and contribute to reduction in ocean outflow.	Customers and community, including new and existing recycled water customers	2024-28
Replace Permanent Water Saving Rules Signs	Upgrade, repair and replace signs to remind people that permanent water saving rules are in place on a permanent and ongoing basis, and include an update Road Sign Style Guide.	Renewing signs aims to raise awareness and promote the efficient and sensible use of water without significantly restricting customer choice and flexibility.	Community, customers and visitors to the region.	2025-27
Next Generation Upgrade project, Cowes Wastewater Treatment Plant	Major mechanical and electrical upgrades within the footprint of the existing treatment plant.	Meet housing, economic, peak demand, and wet weather needs; improve management of wastewater treatment by-products; and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to limit climate change impacts..	Traditional Owners, stakeholders, customers and community	2025-29
Replace corporate website	Develop a custom website that will provide access to new technologies, support future upgrades, improve user experience and enable e-service provisions.	A modern website will improve the user experience, provide mobile optimization, faster load times and enable integration.	Customers and community online	2026-28
Distribution Network Resilience Project	Construction of new and upgraded water storages, further integration with the Victorian Desalination Pipeline, water treatment infrastructure, and smart telemetry across four critical water distribution network sites.	Build water security and help asses climate change impacts and risks.	Traditional Owners, customers and stakeholders.	2026-30

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