

**FAIR GO RATES SYSTEM  
ENGAGEMENT TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP**

**Notes from meeting 5 (1<sup>st</sup> meeting for 2017)**

**13 April 2017**

Organisation	Name	Organisation	Name
<b>Attendees:</b>			
Essential Services Commission	<b>Angelina Garces</b>	Local Government Victoria	<b>Youssef Youssef</b>
Essential Services Commission	<b>Lisa Horsburgh</b>	Melbourne City Council	<b>Georgie Meyer</b>
Essential Services Commission	<b>Andrew Chow</b>	Monash City Council	<b>Ross Goeman</b>
Essential Services Commission	<b>Freya McCormick</b>	Victorian Local Governance Association	<b>Bo Li</b>
KJA engaging solutions (independent facilitator)	<b>Kathy Jones</b>	Wyndham City Council	<b>Binda Gokhale</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>			
Baw Baw Shire Council	<b>Malcolm Lewis</b>	Municipal Association of Victoria	<b>John Hennessey</b>
Greater Geelong City Council	<b>Erin McHugh</b>	Municipal Association of Victoria	<b>Owen Harvey Beavis</b>
Hume City Council	<b>Joel Farrell</b>	Places Victoria	<b>Mark Ritch</b>
Knox City Council	<b>Kim Rawlings</b>	Strathbogie Shire Council	<b>David Woodhams</b>
Latrobe City Council	<b>Edith Heiberg</b>	Yarriambiack Shire Council	<b>Ray Campling</b>
Manningham City Council	<b>Juanita Haisman</b>	Victorian Local Governance Association	<b>Kathryn Arndt</b>
Mitchell Shire Council	<b>Rosemary Scott</b>		

In 2016 the Essential Services Commission (ESC) formed an Engagement Technical Working Group (ETWG). The group is a forum for sharing ideas and expertise in community engagement across the local government sector. The group helps the ESC to tailor and refine its guidance to the local government sector on the engagement requirements for applications for a higher rate cap.

**Purpose of this meeting:**

- To review the draft updated terms of reference for the ETWG
- To reflect on learnings from 2016 — the first year of the Fair Go Rates System (FGRS) — and where we are heading in 2017
- To agree on a 2017 meeting schedule for the ETWG

**Introduction**

Attendees introduced themselves and reflected on their (and their organisation's) motivation for participating in the ETWG. Attendee motivations included:

- to draw on the expertise of the ETWG to inform ESC guidance to the local government sector
- to disseminate expertise and lessons learned from the first year of the FGRS to the sector
- to provide information to the ESC about what's happening in the sector
- to be an integral part of the strategic conversation
- to build own capacity and help build capacity across sector
- to work collectively and ground ourselves in the experiences of others
- to help connect engagement with the services councils deliver (less silos)
- to learn from others and understand how other councils think about financial planning and engagement
- to gain an understanding of how this group links to the local government legislative reform process and other forums or organisations (e.g. Victorian Auditor-General's Office)
- to explore how engagement knowledge can be shared with councillors
- to harmonise engagement approaches and language across agencies.

**What have we learnt from 2016?**

In 2016 the focus was on supporting the first year of the FGRS and communicating ESC engagement expectations to the sector. The group discussed key learnings and achievements from the first year of the ETWG, which included:

- the FGRS approach to engagement is not prescriptive — it is principles based and outcomes focussed
- the 'truth' of ESC engagement expectations
- the paradigm is changing:
  - engaging with communities on what we need, not what we want
  - we are now operating in a constrained financial environment
  - not everyone's a winner
  - an integrated view is required
- integrating community engagement with financial planning is central to the FGRS and is challenging
- the ETWG provided valuable review of ESC engagement requirements and guidance materials on behalf of the sector
- over 40 councils attended the ESC workshops held in late 2016. Feedback from the workshops included:
  - holding concurrent modules on engagement and finance didn't work — some attendees were interested in attending both modules, and in smaller councils the same person may be responsible for both financial planning and engagement
  - the meeting people and networking part of the workshops was very valuable.

**Where are we heading in 2017?**

In 2017 the focus is on sharing learnings and experiences from the first year of the FGRS and from the sector more broadly, and continuing to refine and improve ESC engagement material. The group discussed potential focusses and tasks for the ETWG in 2017, which included:

- to review and disseminate ESC engagement material
- to facilitate sharing of knowledge around key themes:
  - engaging with communities on constraints, trade-offs and long term financial planning (difficult conversations)
  - less siloed approach to engagement
- to facilitate sharing of case studies and experiences across the sector
- to acknowledge and understand the structures of different organisations — e.g. in some councils engagement capability is distributed across the organisation, whereas others have a centralised unit or staff member
- to broaden the sector's understanding of the ESC's engagement expectations and materials including:
  - acknowledging the journey and diversity of councils
  - providing knowledge to councillors about ESC expectations
  - reaching councils who may not be engaging with the ESC or considering applying for a higher rate cap
  - encouraging agencies to speak in the same language around engagement
- to facilitate networking opportunities
- to encourage the cross fertilisation of training programs (e.g. engagement and finance modules) for council staff and for councillors
- to explore ways to make it easier for regional councils to participate in the ETWG and other forums — e.g. webinars
- to explore hosting a session with a LGPro special interest group, or with councils who have applied for a higher rate cap, to share engagement approaches and experiences.

**Schedule for 2017:**

Meeting	Timing	Key purpose
Meeting 2	May	Agree on 2017 work plan
Meeting 3	July	Determine delivery items
Meeting 4	September	Finalise delivery program

**Actions:**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Date</b>
1.	Provide update on the ETWG to VAGO and extend an invitation to participate.	AC	ASAP
2.	Review ETWG terms of reference and provide feedback to the ESC.	All	May
3.	Seek input to this meeting's discussion from non-attendees.	LH	ASAP
4.	Develop 2017 work plan for ETWG.	KJ/LH/FM	May