

# Fair Go Rates system

## Engagement technical working group

### Notes from meeting 8 (4<sup>th</sup> meeting for 2017) 14 September 2017

| Organisation                  | Name                        | Organisation                           | Name            |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|-----------------|
| <b>Attendees</b>              |                             |  |                 |
| Baw Baw Shire Council         | Malcolm Lewis               | Melbourne City Council                 | Georgie Meyer   |
| Essential Services Commission | Lisa Horsburgh              | Mitchell Shire Council                 | Rosemary Scott  |
| Essential Services Commission | Freya McCormick             | Monash City Council                    | Ross Goeman     |
| Latrobe City Council          | Edith Heiberg               | Victorian Local Governance Association | Walter Koch     |
| Local Government Victoria     | Chris Phoon<br>Peter Jones  |  |                 |
| <b>Apologies</b>              |                             |  |                 |
| Development Victoria          | Mark Ritch                  | Manningham City Council                | Juanita Haisman |
| Essential Services Commission | Michelle Bryne              | Municipal Association of Victoria      | John Hennessey  |
| Greater Geelong City Council  | Laura Potter<br>Erin McHugh | Strathbogie Shire Council              | David Woodhams  |
| KJA                           | Kathy Jones                 | Yarriambiack Shire Council             | Ray Campling    |
| Hume City Council             | Joel Farrell                | Wyndham City Council                   | Binda Gokhale   |
| Knox City Council             | Kim Rawlings                |  |                 |

#### Purpose of the working group

In 2016 the Essential Services Commission established a local government engagement technical working group. The group is a forum for sharing ideas and expertise in community engagement with the aim of building capacity across the local government sector. The group is a conduit between the sector and the commission and helps the commission to tailor and refine its guidance on the engagement requirements for applications for a higher rate cap.

#### Purpose of this meeting

The purpose of this meeting was to hear an update on the community engagement and rate capping forum being planned for 26 October, to hear an update from Local Government Victoria on the Local Government Act review, and to review the Essential Services Commission's guidance and communication material.

## Welcome and recap of last meeting

The group reviewed the notes from the last meeting on 13 July 2017, and agreed to publish them on the commission website.

## Update on community engagement forum

The commission gave an update on the community engagement forum planned for 26 October. The group discussed the agenda and the outcomes sought from the day. These include:

- updates from state agencies
- increased understanding of the community engagement requirements of the Fair Go Rates system
- discussions of community engagement challenges and knowledge sharing.

It was agreed that the forum will need to come back to the objectives throughout the day. This will be led by the chair, Kathy Jones. The group discussed strategies for promoting the forum, including through channels such as Yammer.

## Deliberation at scale report

The commission has asked KJA and newDemocracy to do a piece of work on deliberation in small rural council/resource constrained environments. The commission would like to get feedback from the working group on the draft paper, and will circulate this in the coming weeks. The paper will serve as a basis for discussion at one of the sessions at the forum.

## Update from Local Government Victoria

Local Government Victoria gave an update on the Local Government Act review, with a focus on the community engagement themes.

## Review of guidance material

The group reflected on observations of strengths, challenges and gaps in community engagement in applications for higher caps. The group reflected that:

- the key gaps overserved by the commission were similar to the findings of the Victorian Auditor-General's audit of public participation and community engagement in the local government sector
- the best applications – in terms of community engagement – demonstrated integrated, ongoing engagement
- councils tend to have resources dedicated to engagement, rather than research, which may underpin the lack of qualitative evaluation of engagement programs
- engagement fatigue can be an issue, and that this may limit community appetite for engagement on non-controversial issues.

The group reviewed the commission's community engagement reference material and made the following observations:

- The importance of providing evidence (documentation) is communicated in the reference material but perhaps isn't emphasised enough in the case studies.
- There may be interesting community engagement findings from water corporations' price submissions to the commission.
- Engagement on trade-offs is very difficult. It is challenging to get the community to say what they are willing to make trade-offs on, and it is difficult to get elected representatives comfortable with it.

- There are already lots of tools out there (e.g. lots of resources in the VAGO audits) and the commission does not want or need to reinvent the wheel. There may be scope to better guide councils to the tools available.

The group made a number of suggestions for revising the community engagement reference material, including:

- creating a diagram showing the different engagement steps, and potential evidence
- creating a pyramid shaped depiction of the different guidance materials and community engagement resources
- updating the case studies to better demonstrate evidence and documentation
- reduce duplication between the core guidance document and the community engagement reference material
- publishing a list of key gaps.

The group noted that the guidance and communication survey is open until 22 September and the working group can complete it and/or send it to relevant colleagues.

### Actions

| Action  | Deadline            | Responsibility                  |
|---|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 Circulate slides from Local Government Victoria presentation to the working group                 | ASAP                | Freya                           |
| 2 Publish notes from 13 July meeting on the website   | September           | Freya                           |
| 3 Send items to go on the list of engagement events and resources to the commission (to Freya)      | Ongoing             | Working group                   |
| 4 Distribute list of engagement events and resources  | Periodically        | Freya                           |
| 5 Circulate <i>Deliberation at scale</i> report to working group for feedback                       | September           | Commission staff, working group |
| 6 Working group to provide any further feedback on guidance material via email, phone or the survey | By 22 September     | Working group                   |
| 7 Revise guidance material drawing on working group feedback and survey                             | September- November | Commission staff                |

### Meeting schedule

| Meeting                              | Date        | Key purpose   |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Meeting 9 (5 <sup>th</sup> for 2017) | 16 November | Final meeting of the engagement technical working group – wrap up and review. |