



Fair Go Rates System Community Engagement Forum

Summary Report

January 2018



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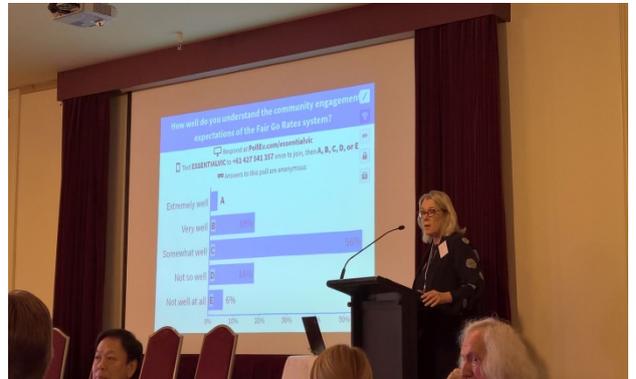
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Thank you

We would like to thank all the speakers and participants for sharing your perspectives and expertise and contributing to the insightful discussions. Thank you also to the City of Greater Bendigo for providing a venue and support for the forum.



Overview

On 26 October 2017, the Essential Services Commission held a forum in Bendigo on community engagement and the Fair Go Rates system. This report provides an overview of the forum, a summary of the key themes that came out of the day, and the content generated in group workshops and via Poll Everywhere.

Aim and agenda

The forum aimed to:

- ensure councils are better equipped to meet the community engagement expectations of the Fair Go Rates system
- provide updates on community engagement at the state government level
- facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences among councils.

The agenda included presentations from state government agencies and from councils who have been through the higher cap application process. There was also a panel on different perspectives on council community engagement and a session on small-scale deliberative engagement.

In workshops participants shared knowledge and collectively explored common engagement challenges and the requirements of the Fair Go Rates system. We used Poll Everywhere to ask questions and to seek audience questions and feedback throughout the day. See Appendix A for the full agenda.

Attendees

Over 70 local and state government staff attended, including speakers. Attendees were mainly council staff, and represented a mix of roles. Thirty-three councils were represented (42 per cent of all councils), with small rural councils most likely to attend.

Councils that attended

Type of council	No. that attended
Small rural	12 out of 19 (63 per cent)
Interface	5 out of 9 (56 per cent)
Regional centre	4 out of 8 (50 per cent)
Large rural	6 out of 21 (29 per cent)
Metropolitan	6 out of 22 (27 per cent)

Individuals that attended

Role	No. of attendees
Executive	21
Finance	20
Communications and engagement	13
Corporate and community planning	8
Other	6
State government	5

At the start of the forum we asked attendees what they hoped to get out of the day. Broadly, responses could be grouped into four key hopes (see Appendix B for a full list of responses). Attendees wanted:

- to gain a greater understanding of the Essential Services Commission's expectations of community engagement and higher cap applications
- to hear about the experiences of councils who have applied for higher caps
- to hear what other councils are doing and what has and hasn't been successful, particularly in:
 - engagement on complex financial, service and infrastructure decision-making
 - engagement with difficult or hard to reach parts of the community
 - engagement in a resource constrained environment
- guidelines and tools for effective community engagement.

Outcomes and feedback

Attendee understanding and confidence increased throughout the day. The proportion of participants who said they understood the community engagement expectations of the Fair Go Rates system 'not so well' or 'not well at all' decreased from 27 per cent to 3 per cent. The proportion of participants who were 'not so confident' or 'not confident at all' about engagement with the community on trade-offs and long-term planning decreased from 59 per cent to 14 per cent. See Appendix B for Poll Everywhere data charts.

Feedback on the forum was generally positive. Comments suggest that attendees liked the interactive format of the day (including Poll Everywhere) and the opportunities to network and share with colleagues. Attendees valued hearing from and having state government agencies in the room, and they strongly valued hearing from councils who had been through the higher cap application process. Key suggestions included:

- to run separate and more targeted sessions for metropolitan and regional
- that it would be good to hear the experiences of larger councils who have applied for higher caps and councils who were not successful
- to have a webinar or a live stream of the forum
- to have a later start time
- potential future topics such as exploring solutions to the challenges raised, and improving collaboration between the local government sector and state government.

We will take all the feedback and suggestions received on board in developing future events and resources.

Ten key themes

This section draws on the comments received via Poll Everywhere, the outputs from the group workshops, and the discussion throughout the day to distil ten key themes that emerged.

1. Engaging with communities on trade-offs that involve complex financial, service and infrastructure information

- Providing complex information in way that is accessible to communities
- Working across different areas of councils (e.g. engagement, infrastructure, finance)
- Equipping senior staff and councillors to talk to the community
- Having a strategic conversation about long-term planning, not just rate capping
- Balancing views when different parts of the community have very different preferences
- How to link a council's many engagement activities through to decisions (line of sight)

2. Engaging with hard to reach communities and supporting communities

- Getting input from people who are dispersed across a large area and/or are not online
- Capturing the views of those who don't reside in the municipality (e.g. future residents, future generations)
- Seeking a representative sample/range of views, rather than just the loudest voices
- How to engage communities on long-term planning issues rather than specific, short-term issues
- Activating communities that are uninterested or experiencing engagement fatigue
- Supporting communities to participate in engagement and provide meaningful input to decision-making

3. Benefits of engagement for the council and community

- Value added to the organisation and decision-making (but this challenging to measure and evaluate)
- Building trust
- Increased community knowledge and understanding of council operations

4. Leadership and alignment of state government agencies

- Interest in Engage Victoria and whether the platform/a similar platform could be used by the local government sector
- Interest in the Victorian Government engagement framework and hope that this will be made public and available to local government
- Like seeing the commission and Local Government Victoria in the same room and listening to the sector
- Scope for collaboration across levels of government to support communities to participate in engagement

5. The Essential Services Commission's requirements and expectations

- Understanding the requirements (including engagement expectations) of the Fair Go Rates system and higher cap applications
- Applying a principles-based approach (one size doesn't fit all when it comes to engagement)
- Deliberative engagement is not mandated or expected (though some councils may choose to use a deliberative approach)
- Embedding engagement on higher caps with a council's financial and strategic planning processes
- Concern about the cost of putting together an application, particularly for the first time or for a single year higher cap

6. Impact of the Local Government Act review

- How will a new Local Government Act impact on rate capping and the commission's community engagement expectations
- Concern about the cost impacts of the engagement requirements in the new Act
- Concern about not being able to meet the engagement requirements in the new Act due to an engagement skills gap in Victoria

7. Community engagement in a resource-constrained environment

- Effective engagement can be time-consuming and resource intensive
- Resourcing of engagement needs to be proportionate to the outcome sought
- Lack of resourcing impedes the adoption of consistent approaches and continuous improvement in the local government sector
- There is an imbalance across the sector, and councils who are more likely to be engaging on higher caps (small rural councils) are the least well resourced
- There is an engagement skills gap with supply of qualified professionals not keeping up with demand

8. Building council capacity in community engagement

- A strong authorising environment and internal culture is needed for organisations to break down internal silos and recognise the value of engagement
- Important to get the finance team, and other areas (such as infrastructure), on board with engagement
- Councillors and senior staff need to clearly understand long-term financial information and be able to present it to the community
- Challenge and opportunity of getting councillors involved with community engagement

9. Balancing short-term and long-term interests

- Difficulty in balancing long-term needs with short-term preferences (exacerbated by election cycle)
- Can be difficult to activate the community (and councillors) to get involved in something that's not an immediate, specific, ward-based issue
- May be better to engage on financial sustainability and planning (including rate capping) every four years and in the middle of a council term, instead of every year

10. Long term impacts of the Fair Go Rates system

- What will rate capping look like in 5, 10, 20 years time?
- Concern about the long term impacts of rate capping and potential unintended consequences (e.g. running down of infrastructure, unsustainable service cuts)
- How to promote financial sustainability of regional councils that have a low rate base

Appendix A – Forum agenda

Time	Session
	Forum chaired by Kathy Jones
9:00	Welcome from Greater Bendigo City Council <i>Cr Rod Fyffe OAM, Deputy Mayor, Greater Bendigo City Council</i>
9:10	Introduction from the chair
9:20	Group connector <i>Facilitated by Keith Greaves, MosaicLab</i>
9:30	Rate capping: Why the need for community engagement? <i>Dr Ron Ben-David, Chairperson, Essential Services Commission</i>
9:50	Engagement in Victoria at the state level <i>Dr Graeme Emonson, Executive Director, Local Government Victoria</i> <i>Vicky Delgos, Senior Manager, Victorian Auditor-General's Office</i> <i>Michael Baranovic, Product Manager Engage Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet</i> <i>Lucy Marshall, Engagement Practice Lead, Department of Premier and Cabinet</i>
10:45	Morning tea
11:05	Council experiences applying for higher caps <i>Juliana Phelps, Chief Executive Officer, Towong Shire Council</i> <i>Evan King, Director Corporate and Community Services, Pyrenees Shire Council</i>
11:35	Group session: Engagement under the Fair Go Rates system <i>Facilitated by Keith Greaves, MosaicLab</i>
12:30	Lunch
1:15	Perspectives on council community engagement <i>Cr Rod Fyffe OAM, Deputy Mayor, Greater Bendigo City Council</i> <i>Domenic Isola, Chief Executive Officer, Hume City Council</i> <i>Ross Goeman, Manager Corporate Performance, Monash City Council</i> <i>Laurie Ellis, Director Governance and Corporate Performance, Mitchell Shire Council</i> <i>Dr Robyn Sheen, Darebin community member</i>
2:10	Group session: Common engagement challenges <i>Facilitated by Keith Greaves, MosaicLab</i>
3:00	Afternoon tea
3:20	Deliberation at scale: Principles and practical ideas <i>Introduced by Andrew Chow, Director Local Government, Essential Services Commission</i> <i>Kathy Jones, Executive Chair, KJA</i> <i>Iain Walker, Executive Director, newDemocracy Foundation</i>
3:50	Closing remarks from the chair
4:00	Finish

Appendix B – Poll Everywhere responses

How are you feeling?

Start of the day (~9:15 am)

Responses: 21 | Participants: 21

How are you feeling today?

🔒 Poll locked. Responses not accepted.



End of the day (~3:30 pm)

Responses: 21 | Participants: 21

How are you feeling at the end of the day?

🔒 Poll locked. Responses not accepted.



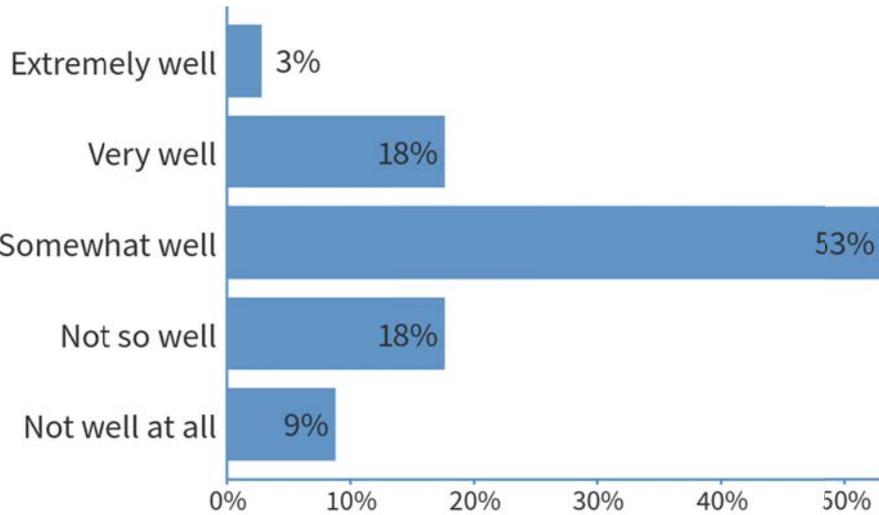
How well do you understand the community engagement expectations of the Fair Go Rates system?

Start of the day (~9:15 am)

Responses: 34 | Participants: 34

How well do you understand the community engagement expectations of the Fair Go Rates system?

 Poll locked. Responses not accepted.

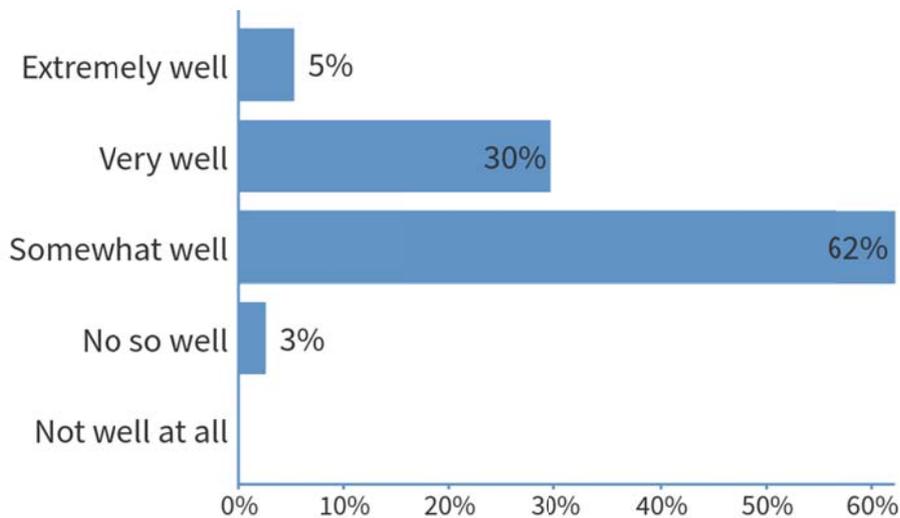


Before lunch (~12:25pm)

Responses: 37 | Participants: 37

How well do you now understand the community engagement expectations of the Fair Go Rates system?

 Poll locked. Responses not accepted.



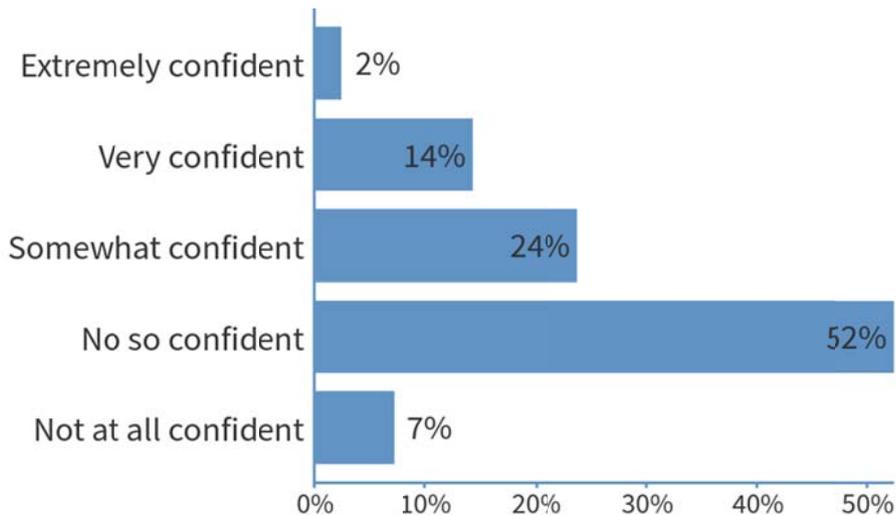
How confident do you feel about engaging with the community on trade-offs and long-term planning?

Before lunch (~12:25 pm)

Responses: 42 | Participants: 42

How confident do you feel about engaging with the community on trade-offs and long-term planning?

 Poll locked. Responses not accepted.

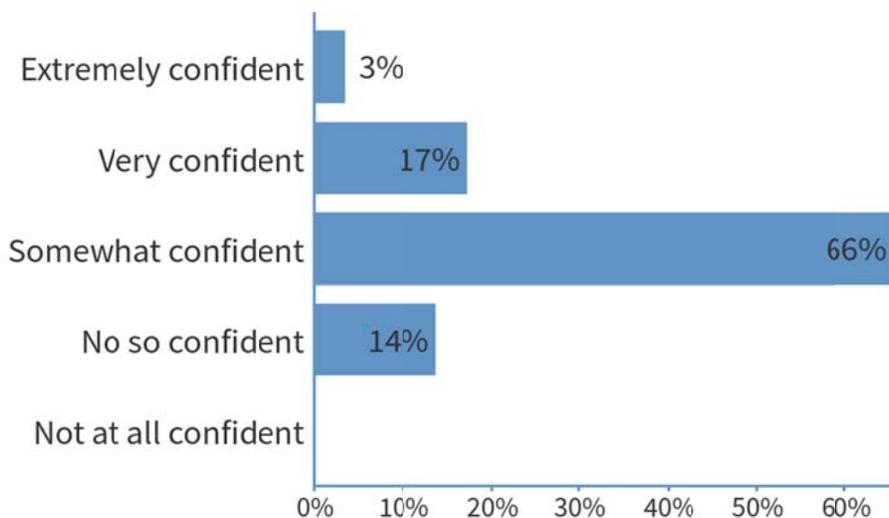


End of the day (~3:30 pm)

Responses: 29 | Participants: 29

How confident do you now feel about engaging with the community on trade-offs and long-term planning?

 Poll locked. Responses not accepted.



What do you hope to find out today?

Start of the day (~9:15 am)

Responses: 42 | Participants: 36

- Ideas and discussion for linking the many engagement activities through to planning
- Different ideas for community engagement
- Who has been successful and their experiences and tips
- Requirements for community engagement around rate cap variance
- Where have the goalposts moved to
- How to improve our engagement, especially with an audience that are resistive to engaging with Council
- Better understanding of the ESC expectations and LGAs current practice
- A better understanding of the requirements
- What others are doing
- Regulatory requirements
- Clarity on the framework and the benefits to Council and community
- Convert complex information into something the community can understand
- Online tools used and how to get to less engaged citizens
- Better methods for engaging with rural stakeholders when staff and funds are already stretched
- How to make service and infrastructure cost discussions interesting to the community and meaningful for organisation and councillors
- Innovative ways of engaging with a very conservative rural community
- A broader understanding of the Fair Go Rates system, and a greater insight into the impacts on community and local government
- Better understanding of Fair Go Rates system expectations
- How to improve engagement
- Experience of Councils submitting higher rate cap applications
- Requirements for community engagement at a reasonable cost
- How to successfully engage with the community around priorities under rate capping
- Community engagement tips
- Further understanding of these expectations from the ESC in relation to community engagement
- A greater understanding of ESC expectations with community engagement
- Lots
- How the new Local Govt Act may impact / assist community engagement and how this relates to the rate capping environment
- Identify strategies for meaningful community engagement.

- How to have meaningful conversations on trade-offs
- What ESC means/wants from 'community engagement'
- Opportunities for improvement
- How we can be more comfortable with the principles
- ESC expectations with engagement
- Best practice
- Further progress of ESC and LGV work
- Learnings for community consultation
- Best practice approach to engaging the community in financial challenges
- Need to continue rate capping
- How to create a trade-off discussion authentically
- To learn more about what's happening in engagement in local government – challenges, successes, gaps in capability
- Opportunities for improvement

Engagement in Victoria at the state level - audience questions

Responses: 12 | Participants: 9

- How do you get input from people who are not online or are hard to engage with?
- Citizens juries highlight the level of detail often required to make a decision so how do you engage more broadly on complex issues?
- Could you share Engage Vic resources with Local Govt?
- What does the growth in engagement mean for elected reps tempted to pass up longer term, difficult decisions for short term, populist decisions?
- What is best practice in engaging on financials / budgets that are often not well understood by anyone?
- Will LGV consider the use of the Engage Victoria format to engage with councils re the new LG Act?
- What support is given to community to improve their ability to participate in consultation and the sophistication of their input?
- Will LGV or State Government resource LGAs to collaborate on a digital platform that can be shared?
- Better practices and higher standards is fantastic – what's the plan to educate COUNCILLORS and get them on board LGV?
- What did you learn from SA's yoursay.sa.gov.au? What will you copy and what do you aim to do better?
- What might prevent a State-developed engagement APP that can be branded to my Council?
The APP should:
 - A) allow our community to simply tick boxes to select which specific Council services they wish to engage in (eg Rates, Council Plan, Sports Facilities, Library, Health, etc, and any sub-services eg basketball but not football)
 - B) allow each Council to send/receive feedback in each of those specific areas.
 - C) optionally allow the State to oversee the process in a de-identified format.
- How do you get input from people who are not online or are hard to engage with?

How do you feel about the direction of community engagement in Victoria at the state level?

Before morning tea (~10:40 am)

Responses: 36 | Participants: 34

- Inconsistent
- Keep it simple
- Good to see!
- State level?
- Positive
- Punitive
- We need to share resources
- Better planned
- About time
- How do we fund it?
- How do we pay for it?
- More money and support
- Exciting
- Agnostic
- Not reaching small communities
- Misses the mark
- Kicking goals
- Not addressing needs of wider rural areas
- Surface-level
- Growing
- Why new?
- Superficial
- Not accessible
- Still behind the times
- Not reaching communities that don't have good digital connectivity
- Limited
- Limited
- Realistic?
- Appalling
- Where are the funds coming from for LG's to fund this? More pressure placed under rate cap environment
- Political
- Needs work
- Lots of direction, little support
- Tertiary institutions aren't producing qualified people
- Not exhaustive
- Hypocritical

What further information would you like?

Before morning tea (~10:40am)

Responses: 18 | Participants: 17

- How rural councils can get assistance to fund the additional consultation
- Will the Vic Govt Public Engagement Framework be made available to everyone? ie tools and resources able to be used by councils too
- I'd like to know how the State will lead the development of the Sector from above, rather than expecting it to come from below. For example Mc Donald or Bakers Delight would not survive if they allowed each of their franchises to implement their own accounting / business processes. How are we so different to these organisations?
- Practical application the issue, not info alone
- Minimum standards to be met in within act
- Reality and resourcing
- What value has consultation added to your organisation? What has the community learnt about council finances and services as a result? Has it helped build trust?
- How can we support community to raise their level of input?
- Clearer expectations
- We must see cooperation, collaboration and a genuine willingness to serve the public into the future
- Tools detailing best practice engagement and evaluation tools
- Guidelines and tools to effective community engagement
- Guidelines would be helpful
- More detail about the level of engagement ESC require
- Discussion of practices!! Easy to say, harder to implement in context
- What are the measures of success
- A chance to workshop the future

What's your key takeaway from this morning?

Before lunch (~12:25 pm)

Responses: 39 | Participants: 35

- Wide range of scenarios across councils means one size doesn't fit all
- LGV – more support!
- There is no one size fits all
- Start super early...
- Demonstrating how community has been engaged in variance application
- Proactive engagement informs decision making, however constraints on resources and lack of consistent approaches does not help with continuous improvement across the sector
- No understanding of the value of consultation and ways it can help
- Be genuine and listen
- ESC trying
- Not a fair go
- Universal rate capping is a short-sighted approach
- The councils with less resources are the ones having to do consultation. Need to improve the resource balance
- Expectation is consultation should occur annually but a better approach may be for it to occur every 4 years – mid-term so new Council understands its position – and focus should be on long term sustainability not this year's rate cap
- More to learn. Better guidance
- Rate cap is not the answer
- Effective community engagement can be expensive
- Public engagement is complex and needs proper parameters. Managing expectations is key
- Keep supporting us on the journey that is rate capping
- Sector needs a lot of support
- The engagement process for small rural shires is resource hungry and does not result in high quality or quantity responses
- Our council has a lot of pre-work to do before applying for a rate cap variation
- Importance of trust and link to engagement
- Rating system is broken
- Community thinks: yay rate caps
- Councils think: rate caps bad
- State very much do as I say, not as I do. Resourcing imbalance
- Everyone's situation is different and needs to be considered when ESC assessing cap application
- Shared experience is underutilised in LG but of high value!
- ESC is genuinely listening

- Small council issues
- Costs of this new approach will be large
- Rate capping was an arbitrary process
- Necessary evil
- Rate cap variations are one part only of long term sustainability
- Collaboration
- We need to think about how we structure the conversation
- We're not alone
- Start the conversation early
- Question ability of community to fully participate even if we get process right

What specific challenges do you have around engagement for long-term financial management?

After lunch (~1:15 pm)

Responses: 26 | Participants: 22

- Having Councillors and senior staff clearly understand long term financial info and present it to community engagement sessions
- Community care factor
- Forward thinking and converting to real data.
- Activating the community and councillors to get involved in something that's not an immediate, specific ward-based engagement
- Engaging with fast growing communities, especially with people who are not yet resident in the municipality
- Making complex easy to understand
- Pitching it in a way that it sounds like you're not turning up to an Accounting 101 lecture
- Why do we have to engage the community on something that regulators should be able to assess?
- Accountants can have fun too
- Ensuring the essential, non-sexy stuff isn't lost in the populism
- How do we manage the varied expectations from community within the confined requirements
- Long-term financial management? Huh, what's that?
- Poor financial literacy – senior staff, Crs, Executive and community
- Getting our financial team excited and on board with it
- Resourcing and time
- We are not yet where we need to be regarding our LTFP – especially regarding Asset management (but we are working on it). Difficult to get good Asset / IT skills in rural areas
- Community tends to engage on specific interests, not our idealised approach!!
- Making it simple for community to understand
- Building capacity and understanding of community
- Involving finance department in design of engagement
- Community care factor
- Educating staff on how information for the community needs to be communicated – less Council jargon and make it more relevant to the community
- Obtaining broader community engagement – only hear from special interest groups on their projects
- Expecting the community to be able to engage (or care) with high level strategy
- Engaging sparse, isolated and disinterested community members

- Making it interesting enough for community to engage with and providing enough depth – it's complex and detailed and deserves more than a superficial tick a box survey or "boring" technical forum

Questions – Perspectives on council community engagement (panel session)

Responses: 33 | Participants: 21

- Doesn't the council plan and other internal strategic plans help determine project prioritisation?
- Engagement is not new! The difference here is highlighting resourcing and impacts at point of consultation. Oh and also demonstrating consideration.
- How do you influence Councillors to truly respond to community feedback from engagement processes?
- Not sure why juries are given such prominence when they also include many cons at high expense.
- They repurposed the word engagement in reference to the council engaging with the data
- For the officers, did the consultation result in different decisions to what they may have otherwise progressed?
- What framework do you use to prioritise projects, once you have all the feedback from the community engagement forums?
- So you don't think councillors have one eye (two eyes?) on re-election?
- How do we engage silent majority
- Is there an issue when people who are not representative of others make decisions on behalf of others?
- Were you aware of council's other consultation efforts and did they come into your deliberations?
- What in your experience are the areas that need the greatest focus in terms of increasing community knowledge and understanding re. council operations as part of engagement?
- What does the growth of engagement/pseudo plebiscites mean for representative democracy?
- Are councils moving along the engagement continuum? From inform to empower?
- You mentioned consolidating consultations. How do you do it?
- Two streams here:
 - People coming to grips with consultation
 - Using consultation
- Research decisions made at citizen juries and their values basis. Then apply those values to future decisions. Or just survey entire community on their values and use as a filter.
- Silent majority will only engage when the issue impacts them, need a broader discussion to enable people to have the motivation to engage
- How could councils tap into state govt to further community engagement practises?
- Did you interact with councillors and how did you find that?
- What does effective consultation look like? How did the State perform when they introduced rate capping?
- How do you think councils should be/could be supported by the state government in engaging with the community?

- Was the return from the engagement worth the investment especially if we are still reaching such small percentages of total ratepayers?
- What are the engagement skill gaps in finance teams and how do we improve that?
- People are not literate to the processes and the terminology. Where appropriate we need to use language and engagement activities that the community can feel comfortable with
- If community is cynical about the consultation, how should expectations be managed?
- From your experience, can Citizen Jury apply to whole budget or only narrower topics?
- Where do your service plans fit into determining what projects get in?
- There is not one community there are many. Even council boundaries are arbitrary and did not exist as they are before 1994
- Is the push for engagement a symptom of a decline in community skills amongst councillors?

What is your key takeaway from today?

End of the day (~3:30 pm)

Responses: 27 | Participants: 25

- What is required for a variance – community engagement
- Principles – sampling, getting engagement from people other than the usual suspects
- We are not far away from bridging the gap on consultation and deliberation
- Build trust and change internal culture
- The need to look at org expenditure and service planning critically, not just focus on rate capping
- It's reassuring to know we're all in it together & all leaning as we go
- Plan, engage early and evaluate
- Be confident and continue striving for genuine consultation and engagement!
- Effective engagement is a sector wide issue and we all need to improve
- The sector needs more sessions like today's
- The push of deliberative democracy as a panacea is misplaced
- Analysis of cost of engagement needed – time is a cost. Start planning for new LG Act now
- Everyone in same boat
- Importance of meaningful engagement for each decision making
- Start early
- Towong Shire sessions format utilising well informed and positive Councillors
- Good engagement link to building trust
- Consult proactively and engage community with a clear purpose
- For ESC
- The importance of critical thinking as part of the ongoing conversations with the community
- Engagement doesn't need overthinking. We are all well on our way with what we do
- Engage early
- Use a variety of methods
- While community engagement is great, wouldn't it just be easier to allow rural councils a rate cap of 3 or 4%?
- Be clear about your objectives and plan early
- Keep it simple, listen to all relevant groups. Build trust
- We are not alone

How would you like the Essential Services Commission to engage with you?

End of day (~3:30 pm)

Responses: 21 | Participants: 18

- A range of forums and approaches
- Confirmation on what ESC is doing to engage with the community regarding rate capping
- I thought the shadowing with a Council right through the process was a good idea.
- Present best practice examples
- Toolkit, guidance materials
- Regional workshops would be helpful
- Phone advice as needed
- Via LGPro special interest groups
- Providing frameworks and tools so we have
- Provide guidance and tools for consistency
- Different sessions for different types of Councils eg rural, interface, inner urban, etc
- Provide clear expectations regarding what is acceptable
- Access to international best practice
- A one stop portal to get all the resources (this might already exist!)
- Face to face approaching each council or a support line
- Regional forums
- Sessions similar to today in smaller region settings
- Workshops relevant to size of councils
- Sessions split by Council size
- Consultancy
- Local workshop. Toolkits and ready resources

Appendix C – Content from group sessions

Table B.1 – Morning session: Engagement under the Fair Go Rates system

At the end of the first workshop participants formed groups and reflected on the day so far. They wrote down what they liked, wished and wondered about the forum and community engagement and the Fair Go Rates system.

We [participants] like...	We [participants] wish...	We [participants] wonder...
Getting a little clearer.	The cap is lifted through a different cap model.	What rate capping will look like in 5 years.
Recognises accountability to community, and role of engagement in decisions.	More for applications and funding.	What is our rate cap going to be? What the unintended consequences will be? Does reality match the purpose?
The opportunity to share examples today.	More ESC and LGV support / assistance.	How rate capping links to the upcoming, new LG Act.
To engage and be better informed through genuine engagement practices.	Ongoing dialogue and development.	Longer term impact of rate caps on infrastructure and services.
Principles of robust corporate and financial planning.	For more resources and tools to undertake better engagement.	How LGV / ESC are going to help create financially stable regional councils.
The examples of other councils. Opportunity to network and share.	Face to face support about opportunities and methods – training.	If resourcing applications is too high. If timing of applications adequate. If the state is similarly accountable.
Community are more involved. Councils are more accountable.	Rate capping was based on a local government index rather than CPI.	What the basis is for getting to rate capping in the first place. Where is the evidence?
The drive for transparency.	Greater guidance on outcome of engagement.	For variations "yes or no", what is the relative importance on community engagement?
The encouragement for the community to be involved.	Consultation on 4 year cycle re long term sustainability not rate capping, at mid-year term.	How small rurals will deliver services with a low rate base.
ESC do listen.	Peak bodies' voices were louder.	Level of engagement and frequency expectations in new LG act.
ESC prioritising genuine, good engagement that is planned and delivered in a meaningful way.	Wish the minister honoured the ESC's suggested formula.	If LGV would fund the engagement process for the weakest 10 councils.
That there is a structured and consistent process for councils to go through.	More fundamental conversation about role and focus for local government.	When effective thought will be given to what is a broken rating system?

We [participants] like...	We [participants] wish...	We [participants] wonder...
That we have been forced to take a harder and more critical look at ourselves.	More resources for engagement.	When ESC will engage with us the way they expect us to engage with our communities.
That there appears to be relative basis for evaluation of submissions.	Guidelines, tools. Engagement was embedded.	Whether WPI will be considered this year.
ESC coming to speak as part of process and consistency of advice, detailed summary of assessment.	Quality is considered in council's service delivery.	Worth of process in how it is applied to adding value to the community and organisation. Is it changing community perceptions about being involved in decision making?
That overall engagement about practice is the cornerstone before getting to just the money conversations.	Could consult without the political ramification.	
Sharing experiences and best practice.	Set a rate cap for 4 years.	
ESC making a real effort to connect.	Cheaper, more effective way to undertake engagement.	
	More training for councillors.	
	The rating system across the state would be turned on its head.	
	There was better alignment of the work required to the actual timeframes.	
	That ESC would shadow a rural council application from start to end of application.	
	Consideration of regional vs metro rate capping.	

Table B.2 – Afternoon session: Common engagement challenges

In the second workshop participants moved freely around the room and could visit each of the community engagement challenges. (The challenges were identified from Poll Everywhere and the panel session, or were added by the participants.) In ad-hoc groups, or individually, participants unpacked the challenges and identified potential solutions.

Challenge	What [do participants think] is challenging?	[Participants suggest] we can overcome this by...
Activation. Getting community active and interested.	Present issues in common language.	Create a sense of urgency and ownership.
	Resource the engagement.	Provide food! Engage with the community in this space.
	Engaging with true cross section of the community.	Shared responsibility.
	Identify a community relevant issue.	Have ongoing community conversation to identify the hot spots.
	Need to understand what we need to engage on. We don't need to do for everything.	If people are interested in the subject they will engage.
	Demonstrating value of participating – being involved in decision making process.	Be controversial. Promote some bold topics to elicit a strong response.
	Find out what their barriers to being involved are.	Closing the loop. Design engagements to address these [barriers].
Financial info. Translating complex financial information for community, councillors and senior staff.	Having people that are educated with a technical language and skill set used day to day not being entrusted and empowered to use it.	Develop trust within the community for financial capability and back the people paid to do this job.
	Difficult concepts that are in LG speak.	Use case studies (stories) of real life examples to explain concept in a different context.
	Only finance understand financial language!	Don't get finance team to develop messages. Use comms team to plain English. Use graphics, images, pictures. Relate back to smaller concepts i.e. for \$100 you get this...
Transparency. Giving community genuine	Setting definite parameters of expectations, of what's achievable, to avoid disappointment and cynicism.	Very early engagement, set up good understanding of deliverables and communicate to the public.

Challenge	What [do participants think] is challenging?	[Participants suggest] we can overcome this by...
opportunity to influence.	Culture of the organisation - elevating community views.	Cultivate a culture and clear mandate that elevates community views from the top.
	Engagement often isn't factored into project plan timeline so is often an afterthought with quick time frames.	Identify what community can and cannot influence at start of project and plan to engage on that.
	Getting buy-in from councillors and senior managers.	Bring them along on the process. Design it together. Continuously close the loop.
Long term financial planning. Engaging on long term financial planning, services, asset management is hard!	Understanding a budget.	Staff understanding of budgeting. Council explaining in layman terms.
	Defining a financial plan.	Consistent across sector.
	Ability to find the time to be able to effectively engage on a complex issue.	Use case studies? Ask for community to apply weightings for priorities.
	Providing understanding of service levels.	Use pictures of what the service level outcome looks like.
	Explaining non-negotiables.	Showing outcome (pictures). Create a plan on a page identifying assumptions and linkages. Tell the story.
	Sticking to the plan!	Outlining assumptions. Being clear about why and when the plan could change.
	Are we agreed on the assets to be managed? And their service level?	Check basis for asset.
	How big or small should a service be?	Resource based? Need based?
Diversity of views. When there are so many varied views across the community.	Determining the balance that will provide a compromised satisfaction.	
	Working out what the majority want to see happen.	Getting input from a broader group of people.
	Entrenched views and localised focus rather than for the 'better good'.	Engage with various groups and provide data to support various options and benefits.
	Data analysis.	In-depth engagement program to assist understanding. Cleverly crafted questions.

Challenge	What [do participants think] is challenging?	[Participants suggest] we can overcome this by...
	Sorting quality from quantity.	Improved reporting / data analysis.
	Impact on re-election.	Time major consults outside of election cycle.
	Balancing priorities and expectations.	Sort into common higher level themes. Force conversations to find common ground.
	Competing interests.	Plan your processes and questions better so you don't end up with the possibility of that mess! Make them choose.
Community capacity. Care factor of the community. Ability to understand complex issues. Willingness to have the conversations.	Low care factor.	Create a burning issue. Rather than expect community to come to you, go to community and start the conversation.
	Complex issues.	Education, break issues down into smaller components. Language – something people can understand.
	Willingness to have conversations.	Go to the community. Suitable spaces / places.
	Time poor community.	Technology. Incentivise!
	Targeting the community on services / issues they value.	Consulting first, to identify what are the burning issues within the community.
Compiling info. Collating useful, meaningful information in an understandable and accessible way.	Making complex issues digestible.	Theme areas / topics. No jargon. Create visual alternatives. Focus on challenging areas.
	Time to collect and then report and distribute – also need to evaluate and close the loop.	Road shows. Comms plan. Timely and relevant.
	Internally, lack of analytical skills to rationally evaluate statistical and qualitative data.	
	Cost of converting data to meaningful / interesting visuals.	Sector wide tools. Expansion of LGPRF dashboard?
	Not everyone responds to text.	Exploring different modes of presentation suited to target groups.
Involving finance. Getting finance teams across	Appreciating the social benefit.	Engage with finance team early and take them through process. Engage community early to inform budgets.

Challenge	What [do participants think] is challenging?	[Participants suggest] we can overcome this by...
importance / implementation of engagement.	Introverts.	Build trust and working relationships with engagement officers. Hold their hands and encourage them to be brave and bold in asking questions they don't know the answers to.
	Our finance team don't think engagement is part of their role! They see themselves as an internal process provider.	Strong leadership. Bringing them into the process more. Getting a clear understanding of what their purpose should be.
	Finance have a concern that consultation equals greater spend and budget blowouts.	Provide feedback that consultation will be based on trade-offs, not add-ons, to a limited budget.
	Finance teams understand the importance but are struggling to complete the budget as it is.	More resourcing to undertake consultation. LGV support with more funding.
	Finance have limited time to collate and analyse all the data that comes out of the evaluation process.	
	Finance may not understand the type of information needed for communication (over-detail or think).	Workshopping between engagement and finance.
Representativeness. How to ensure broader community views and not just vested interests.	Resourcing - more is required to reach those who don't normally have a voice.	Clear aim and commitment to obtain broader community views.
	Difficulty in reaching all areas of community.	Exploring multiple engagement techniques to reach diverse audience representing a good cross section of demographic.
	Vocal minorities.	Investing time in the minorities.
		Taking teams out together to cross pollinate and share the foot traffic you generate.
Long lead times. Good long term financial planning and engaging on it takes a long time.	Internal silos. Difficulty knowing what is being engaged on throughout organisation.	Better collaboration.
	Sometimes people consult to tick a box, or don't have the skills to consult properly.	Having a robust framework and policy that is followed.
	Diversity of community's priorities.	Link the consultation to address community benefits not isolated needs.

Challenge	What [do participants think] is challenging?	[Participants suggest] we can overcome this by...
	For all key outputs required by council – e.g. budget, council plan, health and wellbeing plan, etc. – engage once.	Do the engagement and consultation to address outputs, highest priorities needs to be gained, which inform the key outputs.
	Internal council culture. Who owns the playground, road. Need to step back and think about this.	
	Having rules for levels of expected engagement and then being told that we haven't done either.	Change the rules and create new expectations that can be resourced effectively or don't subjectively think doing more is appropriate.
	Too many one-offs and short term focus.	Community led long term plans. Asset-based community development. Cross-pollinate across community.
Providing feedback. Closing the loop and clearly showing how community input has influenced decision making or not.	They may not like the outcome.	Clarity around expectations. Understanding negotiables / non-negotiables.
	Engagement as an afterthought or tick the box option – tokenistic.	Embedding engagement planning process and including closing the loop and evaluation as part of that.
	How can we actually resource multiple layers of communication to just prove it has been effective.	Regulators actually playing a role substantiating and reviewing what is imposed on councils.
	For broad engagement where we don't collect personal details it's very difficult to reach the population again to communicate results.	Don't rely on one communication technique.
	General busy-ness of day to day work. Pressures to move onto next project / task.	Include method and enough time for closing the loop in project plans.
		Record keeping of the contact details of participants – send them the council report, then the minutes.
How much is too much? When is consultation too much? Consultation fatigue.	Lead time for data (and modelling).	Better use of technology to produce the data. Data to support the consultation.
	Planning for communities that don't exist yet – changing demographics.	Planning taking a long time.
	Redundant LT assets in aging communities.	Whole of life asset purchase techniques.

Challenge	What [do participants think] is challenging?	[Participants suggest] we can overcome this by...
	Responding to changing demographics / expectations.	Continual mapping of changes. Integrating community plans and other resourced plans to consideration.
	Too much existing infrastructure now redundant - new requirements not realised.	Social infrastructure mapping. Wish list > real list.