MENDLESON
ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION CONSULTANTS

Essential Services Commission

Report on the engagement process
with Victorian consumers to inform
the Water Customer Service Codes Review

7 April 2022

Contents

1. Executive summary

This report documents the community engagement program that was delivered by Desley Renton and Nicola Mendleson in partnership with the Essential Services Commission (ESC) team which will inform a review of the Water Customer Service Codes. The aim was to seek out customer views on specific issues related to the customer protection framework and the updates to the rural and urban customer service codes. The review will also inform and improve payment difficulty support and protections provided to customers by water businesses, and communication by water businesses.

The engagement program ran from 20 to 27 March 2022. A community panel of 27 people was established to provide insights and recommendations to the ESC. Twenty-four panel members completed the entire process.

The remit of the panel was to provide feedback on the current Water Customer Service Codes, in consideration of the recommendations of the National Principles that have been developed to establish a national approach.

The engagement program was designed and implemented within tight timeframes and budget, with three weeks for the recruitment process and one week for the panel process. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the process was conducted entirely online including all client and panel meetings.

About the process

The facilitated process stepped participants through a series of three meetings. The first and last meetings included the whole panel, the second meeting comprised three small group meetings.

In these meetings, panel members developed an understanding of the role of the ESC, the Customer Service Water Codes and the National Principles. They focused on the impacts on those who identify as vulnerable and shared stories from their own lived experience. Panel members reflected on and discussed what it means to be vulnerable, how water businesses can work with people experiencing financial difficulty, the processes currently in place and how to define small businesses who could be covered by the codes.

A range of feedback was received at the meetings. This was summarised and agreed upon before being presented to the ESC at the final meeting. This information is provided as Attachment 1.

Evaluation

A clear set of success criteria was developed at the outset of the project. The extent to which these criteria were met was measured via a pre- and post-process survey with participants (see attachment 2), a lessons-learnt workshop with the project team and consultant observations recorded throughout the process.

Success criteria	Evidence of how the criteria was met
Recruited a representative (diverse) group of people.	• a diverse group of 27 Victorians was recruited with 24 completing the process • the ESC and the consultants were unable to recruit representatives from First Nations people and proportionate numbers of young people or people from rural areas within the tight time frame
Conversation tested the high-level principles. Participants felt heard, listened-to and provided good input. The ESC is not looking for decisions, it is seeking priorities and ideas for improving the codes.	• comprehensive feedback was provided to answer all the questions asked • final feedback was agreed to and presented to the commissioners • a number of panel members provided additional input via emails • a positive group culture of listening and respect was developed at the outset and adhered to throughout the process • participants strongly articulated the experience to be a positive one • consultants observed positive interaction in all sessions • Essential Services Commission staff and panel members provided positive feedback
Commissioner involvement and confidence in the outcomes.	• commissioners commented on the high quality of the feedback provided • three commissioners attended sessions
Internal skill development and capacity building in engagement processes.	• participants largely recorded an increase in capacity • ESC staff participated directly in all aspects of the engagement process
Reputation enhancement.	• participants expressed increased understanding of the ESC and its role

I wanted to express my thank you for being involved in the recent forum for the Essential Services Commission, it was an awesome experience.

I just thought 'wow' at the ideas that come in and proud to think that in some ways we may make a difference.

I wanted to say to the ESC thank you for giving everyday people a voice, how proactive they are it is certainly a credit to them.

Panel member

2. Introduction

The Essential Services Commission (ESC) is reviewing the Water Customer Service Codes to explore ways in which water businesses can work with people who are having difficulties paying their water bills.

This report documents a community engagement program that was developed and delivered in partnership with the ESC team.

The engagement program ran from 20 to 27 March 2022. A community panel of 27 people was established to provide feedback to the ESC. Twenty-four people completed the entire process.

Important things to note:

1. The remit of the community panel was to provide feedback on the current codes and how they can be improved, including reviewing them in line with National Principles that were recently developed to facilitate a consistent national approach. The current codes do not include protections for small businesses and the ESC was also interested in obtaining feedback about what kinds of small businesses should be covered by the codes.
2. The engagement program was designed and implemented within tight timeframes and budget, with three weeks for the recruitment process and one week for the panel process.
3. The process was conducted entirely online including all client and panel meetings.

3. Project objectives

The project team determined at the outset that it was important that the engagement delivered the following:
● recruited a representative (diverse) group of people
● had good conversations and tested the high-level National Principles
● participants reported feeling heard and listened-to and provided good input. ESC is not looking for decisions, it is seeking priorities and ideas for improving the codes
● provided a learning experience for ESC staff and built staff capacity
● reputation enhancement.

4. The approach

Nicola Mendleson and Desley Renton developed an innovative approach that was accessible in an online environment. The consultants were mindful that a number of people were not used to video conference discussions and/or panel engagement processes and would require support to participate.

The consultants worked very closely with the ESC project team to ensure ESC needs were met. Project team members were directly involved in the recruitment criteria and the development of the

participant information pack to build understanding by providing accurate and timely data to inform their feedback.

Recruitment

The successful approach was underpinned by a thorough recruitment process that used two broad strategies:

- approaching people who had served on the community panel for the Getting to Fair strategy in late 2019
- working with the specialist recruiter to obtain new people.

The previous panel and new people recruited for this panel were randomly selected, using a number of criteria, to form a 'mini-public' representation of Victoria. The selected participants broadly matched the demographics of the Victorian consumers of the regulated sectors with regard to:

- gender
- age range
- geographic location
- household type
- different job type and economic status, (for example: farmers, unemployed and underemployed, business community, helping professions, carers and teachers)
- cultural background
- disability (including physical and/or intellectual disabilities).

The decision to recruit equal numbers of participants from four distinct geographical areas (rural, regional, urban fringe, metropolitan Melbourne) was strategic, based on the understanding that where you live affects how people purchase and use water. It also affects how people in our community may be vulnerable.

For example, the cultural, economic and social demographics of people who live on the urban fringe differ from their city-based neighbours. People who live on rural farms or larger properties will have different requirements to people living in other geographic areas and may have different pressures affecting their ability to pay their bills. It was felt that each sub-group would have a unique perspective on the issues central to this project.

Working with a specialist recruiter adds another layer of independence and transparency to the process. This recruiter advertised widely across a variety of networks and also directly approached people from its databases. In addition, the panel opportunity was promoted through the Engage Victoria platform and through ESC communication channels. The recruiter interviewed all participants and used a rigorous selection process to determine the final group.

Around 600 people were contacted with the aim of securing 40 appropriate candidates who were further shortlisted to 33. The consultants and recruiter then assessed the shortlisted candidates to select the final group. An agreement was entered into to ensure selected participants attended all sessions and familiarised themselves with all materials as required. Twenty-seven people committed to serving on the panel.

The panel was made up of an even mix of men and women and the age range spanned those in their 20s to those in their 80s. Three people identified as having a disability and nine people care for, or have cared for, someone with a disability. Fifteen indicated that they had tertiary or post graduate

qualifications. The panel obtained a good mix of those living either in metro, outer metro, regional or rural.

Ten people reported having dependents at home. Eight people were born outside of Australia including India, Sri Lanka, Italy, Singapore, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. A diverse range of occupations were represented including those who were either volunteering or unemployed.

An incentive, or stipend, is typically paid to compensate community attendees for their time and commitment. As this project required participants to commit around eight hours of their time, including pre-reading, meetings and homework, a stipend of $150 per person was paid. Payment of the stipend was conditional on attending all meetings.

Twenty-seven people started the process and 24 completed all sessions. A drop-out rate of around 15% is typical with these types of processes.

Initial contact

Nicola and Desley contacted all panel members prior to the first meeting to check that they had received the emails, dates and meeting links; ask whether they had used Zoom before and if they had any questions. Two panel members were supported to use Zoom, including undertaking a short training session to assist them with downloading and using the software. This was vital to ensuring that meetings could start on time with full attendance and to ensure that all participants felt confident using the platform.

Information pack

All participants received an information pack in advance of the first meeting containing information about the ESC, the Water Customer Service Codes, the National Principles, key question areas, the community panel purpose, draft group culture (which was endorsed by the panel at the first meeting) and contact details.

The information pack was essential to build the capacity of the participants early in the process. The consultants recognised that the technical nature of the issue would take time for people to fully comprehend.

Meetings

The process included three meetings which all took place online via the Zoom video conferencing platform. A senior ESC staff member attended all meetings to observe the process and to be available to answer questions. Commissioners attended the first and last meetings to address the panel members and observe the process.

Participants were asked to participate in the process in their role as water customers – as everyone uses water and almost everyone has a business relationship with a water company.

Meeting One took the form of a 90-minute meeting that included all the panel members. The purpose was to brief the panel members on the process, their remit and provide information about the Water Customer Service Codes review process and the National Principles. Presentations were made by Commissioners and team members about the ESC, its role and the review, and emphasised the ESC's commitment to taking on board the feedback received through this process. A question about what should be included in e-bills was raised during the meeting for panel feedback. For

homework, panel members were asked to speak with three young people about how water businesses should work with people who were having difficulty paying their bills. The intention was to bring the opinions of younger people into the panel process as we had been unable to recruit many people under 25 for the process.
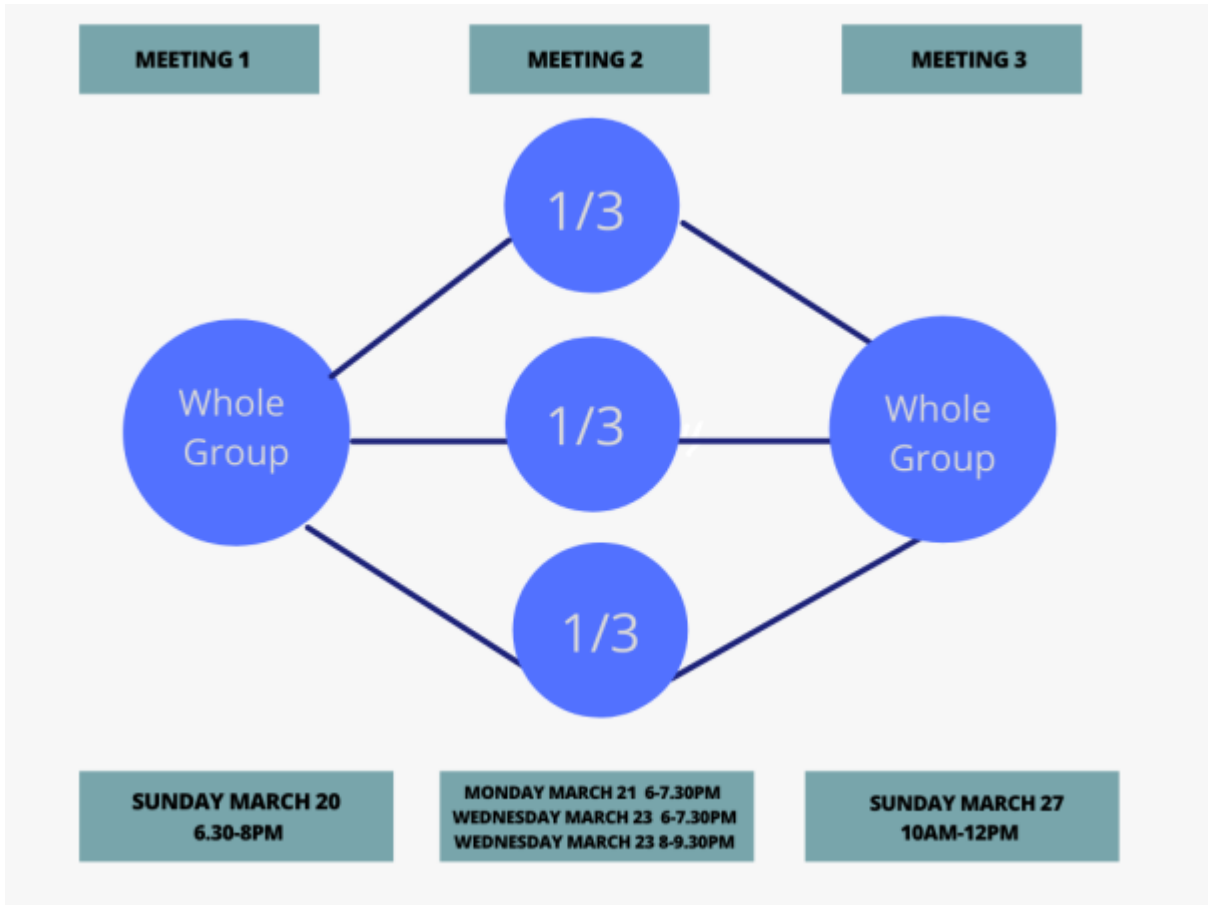
Meeting Two took the form of three small group meetings of 90 minutes each. Questions posed at this meeting included how water businesses could work with people experiencing financial difficulties, communication assistance, what should be included in reminder and final notices and actions for non-payment, including restricting water supply and taking legal action. For homework, panel members were asked to consider what kinds of small businesses should be covered by the codes.

After the first two meetings, all the panel feedback generated to date was collated and synthesised by the facilitators. This content was reviewed by the ESC and then sent to the panel members to consider prior to the final meeting.

Meeting Three took the form of a two-hour meeting that included all the panel members. Members discussed what kinds of small businesses should be covered by the codes. The summarised feedback from all the meetings was reviewed and discussed, and the panel endorsed the final feedback to be presented to the ESC.

Several panel members presented the feedback to ESC commissioners and shared their experience of being on the panel. ESC commissioners thanked the panel.

MEETING 1	MEETING 2	MEETING 3

Whole Group — 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 — Whole Group

SUNDAY MARCH 20 6.30-8PM	MONDAY MARCH 21 6-7.30PM WEDNESDAY MARCH 23 6-7.30PM WEDNESDAY MARCH 23 8-9.30PM	SUNDAY MARCH 27 10AM-12PM

5. Evaluation and key learnings

A clear set of success criteria was developed at the outset of the project. The extent to which the criteria were met was measured via a pre- and post-process survey with participants (see attachment 1), a lessons-learnt workshop with the project team and consultant observations recorded throughout the process.

Success criteria	Evidence of how the criteria was met
Recruited a representative (diverse) group of people	• a diverse group of 27 Victorians was recruited with 24 completing the process • the ESC and the consultants were unable to recruit representatives from First Nations people and proportionate numbers of young people or people from rural areas within the tight time frame
Had good conversations and tested the high-level principles. Participants felt heard, listened-to and provided good input. The ESC is not looking for decisions, it is seeking priorities and ideas for improving the codes	• comprehensive feedback was provided to answer all the questions asked • final feedback was agreed to and presented to the Commissioners • a number of panel members provided additional input via emails • a positive group culture of listening and respect was developed at the outset and adhered to throughout the process • participants strongly articulated the experience to be a positive one • consultants observed positive interaction in all sessions • Essential Services Commission staff and panel members provided positive feedback
Commissioner involvement and confidence in the outcomes	• commissioners commented on the high quality of the feedback provided • three Commissioners attended sessions
Internal skill development and capacity building in engagement processes	• participants largely recorded an increase in capacity • ESC staff participated directly in all aspects of the engagement process
Reputation enhancement	• participants expressed increased understanding of the ESC and its role

Thank you for including me in the panel. The many and varied ideas put forward showed just how varied we are.

Panel member

Key learnings to emerge from the reflections to take forward to inform future engagement programs include:

Recruitment process and composition of the panel

Approaching previous panel members to serve on another panel was a very successful recruitment strategy, especially for this process which had a very tight budget and timeline. The panel included 15 members of the former panel and 12 new people. Lived experience of vulnerability was evident on the panel and shared in the meetings and with the consultants.

There was a very good mix of people with a good diversity of backgrounds, demographics and locations around Victoria that led to robust conversations and quality feedback. The make-up of the panel of participants from different geographic areas (rural, regional, urban fringe and metropolitan Melbourne) worked very well and encouraged a diversity of insights.

We were not successful in recruiting representatives from First Nations people or many young people. For the Getting to Fair panel, ESC recruited two First Nations people through their partner networks and this support may be required for future engagement processes. More time will be required to recruit younger people.

Online

The process worked very well in the online environment. Even with 27 participants plus ESC staff and the consultants, it was possible to create an atmosphere of intimacy where people felt safe sharing their experiences. Participants made valuable contributions resulting in quality feedback.

Collaboration with the ESC team

There was collaboration with the ESC team to deliver an effective process on such a tight timeframe and budget.

Everyone contributed with a high level of input and enthusiasm which delivered a powerful message as to the genuine nature of the engagement and the promise, 'that the ESC would consider and use the feedback provided by the panel'.

Logistical support was essential for a project delivered on such a tight timeframe and budget. The ESC team led the development of the pre-reading information package, uploading the pre-and post-process surveys, developing the slides and questions to be asked about the codes, and attended to answering questions in a timely manner.   ESC team members also participated in all of the panel meetings and took notes.

Collaboration between panel members

Panel members unanimously agreed to a group culture at the beginning of the process. The consultants observed regard for the group norms, with most members engaging in active listening and demonstrating respect for one another's points of view, even when they differed from their own.

Panel members shared the responsibility of presenting the final feedback to the ESC. Several members also spoke to the experience of being in the engagement process.

Meeting structure, content and length

The meeting structure and length worked well. In particular, the small group sessions proved successful in:

- drawing out a range of insights
- encouraging all members to contribute, including the quieter voices.

The homework worked well, with some panel members noting the feedback they had received when commenting, and some emailed their homework directly to the consultants.

Survey results

Panel members were asked to complete a survey before and after the process. Of the 27 people who started the process, 26 (96%) completed the pre-process survey and 28 people completed the post-process survey which is an excellent completion rate (possibly someone did it twice). Areas that recorded the largest differences in responses between the surveys are noted below.

The survey had a mixed response with four people choosing to strongly disagree or disagree for almost every field on the post-process survey. It is possible that this fast-moving process did not suit them and it would be interesting to do some post-process interviews to explore these results further.

Overall, survey results showed an increase in:

- confidence in civic/community participation processes
- understanding of the ESC and its remit.

They showed a flatness or decrease in levels of:

- trust in decision-making processes
- understanding of, and support for, collaborative decision-making processes.

For more details, see Attachment 2.

What could have been improved

The timeframe for this process was very short. The ideal scenario would have been to:

- have had at least four-to-six weeks for the recruitment process. This would have helped to recruit more new members, and especially to recruit representatives from First Nations people (which was done last time with the assistance of ESC partner organisations) and more young people.
- run this process over a minimum four-week period, with an additional set of small group meetings to reflect and build on the feedback over time, and more time in the final meeting to reflect on and discuss the feedback put forward to the ESC.

Additional time would also have allowed for more participant interaction between the work that was produced in the small groups and the whole group. The consultants assisted with synthesising the results of the first four meetings in preparation for the final whole group meeting when the feedback was finalised and presented to the ESC. Ideally, and with more time, this work could have been undertaken by the group.

The ESC team said that the panel provided useful feedback but not always directly on the questions raised. More time would have been useful in drilling into the key points being explored. The team also said that having pictures of, or being able to circulate, actual documents like bills and final notices, may also have resulted in more tailored feedback.

Learnings from the process also highlighted a need to ensure participants are aware of their responsibility to arrive at meetings appropriately situated and attired. It was agreed that in future this request would form part of the meeting instructions and culture guidelines and discussed at the outset so that all participants are comfortable and able to fully contribute.

Attachment 1: Feedback from the panel

The consultants reviewed all the feedback made in the first four panel meetings and developed a summary which was sent to panel members before the final meeting. Panel members were asked to review this document before the meeting and then this was discussed and reviewed at the final meeting.

What kind of small businesses should be covered in the Water Customer Service Codes?	● Need a tailored approach that takes into account several variables, e.g., reliance on water, location, importance to local community and volume of water used. ● Could use ATO/ASIC definitions — keeps things simple because these definitions are well known. Some panel members suggested FTE 30-50 employees or less? (as some definitions have a larger number). ● Prioritise categories of businesses that rely on water to operate. ● Large water users, e.g. agriculture, restaurants, hairdressers, may struggle the most with large bills.

What information Should be included in an e-bill?	
Content of e-bills:	● **Concern about lack of standards and consistency** between e-bills from water businesses – should all contain standardised information. All have paper bills, some have e-bills, some have SMS reminders. ● **Make e-bills as easy to read and understand as possible** with less text, more graphics: ● A **simple easy read** using pictures and simple phrasing to highlight key messages. ● **Buttons to click** through to additional information, payment options and support available. ● **Comparison graphics of usage –** current usage and historical usage. ● **Clear breakdown of all charges and time periods**. Water bills are a bit different because the services charged may not be for the same period of time. Show service fees and concessions.
Easy access to more information or assistance:	● **Payment support button needs to be as big as pay bill** to cater for different levels of digital literacy. Provide clear information on how to get help if you need it and payment options. ● **Button for other languages**. YVW has small banner at the end that says 'we speak your language' this gets people at ease immediately, esp. people who don't speak English, important one as well. ● **Include button to request a paper copy** ● **Button for printable version**.

	● **Must be mobile-phone compatible.**
Access to e-bills:	● **Offer the choice of paper or e-bills or both**. No cost for paper bills if you are in hardship.
	● **Concerns for people who may not have emails or ability to pay via an e-bill.** E.g. one panel member supports her mother who gets e-bills but needs help paying them.
	● **E-bill is easy to forget or miss - needs to be accompanied by a text**.
Other considerations:	● **Need to understand behaviour**: what do people actually do when they receive e-bills? Do they just pay it? Do they click through to get more information?
	● **How do water companies target e-bills**? e.g. in local government sector, a lot of transition to e-bills is based on customer feedback. How many disadvantaged people are getting e-bills and is this something that they have asked for? Are the e-bills helping them or creating more stress?
	● **Definition of an e-bill**. The bill shown on the slide isn't an e-bill - it is an email with a link to the bill. An e-bill is an email with the bill attached, or a URL for the bill in the email. The email or e-bill should clearly state its purpose, e.g. is it a reminder email, letting you know your bill is due. We want people not to have to click through but actually see the bill upfront. Does SMS messaging come into the same category as an e-bill?
	● **Paper can be used as one of the 8 points of ID**. Can an e-bill be used for this?
Supporting customers with financial stress	
When should water businesses communicate with customers?	● **Ensure the billing cycle matches their income cycle**, e.g. if they get fortnightly payments, match the bills to when they receive their payments.
	● **Provide flexibility for the consumer to choose payment options and frequency**.
	● **Send <u>friendly</u> reminder texts and emails <u>before</u> bills are due which include**:
	o link to payment options
	o option to get in touch if you're going to have trouble paying on this date. Emphasise that support is available.
	o clear, friendly, non-threatening language.
	● **Send information when they first sign up explaining** all payment options.
	● **Support options should be readily available on an ongoing basis** – clearly stated on the website and communications so people know what is available before they get into difficulty or understand that there are options available and know how to get in touch.
	● **Call to check in if they are paying regularly**. If they've had difficulty and are now paying regularly, get in touch to see how they are going.

	● **Communicate, check in and offer support if required when** a water bill is getting excessive or bills increase. ● **Turn off auto-generated payment reminders** if in discussions with the customer.
How should water businesses communicate with customers?/ What information and advice should be shared?	● **Provide different options for contacting them**. When an agreement is made to how they're going to deal with the debt, ask for three different ways they want to be contacted. Options should include phone, self-service access, social media, email, live website chat, app, need for an interpreter. ● **Use a variety of communication channels, targeted appropriately,** e.g., tik tok and Instagram for younger people, older on Facebook, some people will want to talk to a real person, others digital channels or traditional media. Needs to be interactive. ● **Third party advisors should not receive commissions**. When providing a third party to provide advice, it needs to be an organisation that won't receive a commercial incentive to return as much money to the company. Can be fee-for-service regardless of outcome. ● **Have a centralised response (utilities working together) as well as the individual company approaches** – services working together taking a case management approach. Provide support to people holistically as they are likely to be facing difficulties with more than just their water bills. Use existing community organisations that are known and trusted. ● **Make bills as easy to read and understand as possible** with less text, more graphics. ● **Change language - tone and plain English**. ● **Don't use acronyms.** ● **Be judicious regarding information and advice** provided – don't bombard with too much information. ● **Use storytelling and case studies** that normalise financial difficulties and the benefits of getting in touch with the water businesses to work things out. ● **Include information on how to *save* water** (and therefore money) ● **Flip the lens -take a social impact approach.**
What types of payment support should be offered?	● **Prefer payment plan with water co than paying by credit card, even if interest is charged**. This is better than paying high credit card interest rates. ● **Free call numbers** to water companies if using mobile phones. ● **Include option of debt write-off** for extenuating circumstances, e.g., house fire where 14 people died and utility refused to write off the debt. ● **Provide free services to fix water leaks** (currently only offered to concession card holders). ● **Help people understand their past usage and plan** for future bills. ● **Supply rainwater tanks and information on how to save water to reduce future bills.**

	● **Proactive communication**, e.g., a farmer spoke of his local water company that sends lots of information, texts if they find a leak and won't make you pay for it. They go to great effort to promote effective, efficient use of water. Proactive contact if water bill is higher than usual. ● **Collect information/statistics** on gender, cultural background, disability, etc so water co's can target information and provide appropriate assistance. ● **Different water rate - flat rate to make it easier**.

Communication assistance: Support for customers who may need additional support as they have low literacy skills, low English skills or disability	● **Make sure people are aware of**: ● **multiple engagement channels** available to them, what a customer charter is and how to access it ● how to **change payment arrangements** ● how to **get information in their own language**. ● If water businesses haven't been able to reach the consumer, **make a personal visit** by someone with appropriate training in working with the relevant needs. ● **Communications should be visual and not text-based**, e.g., cartoons and diagrams. ● **Use appropriate communication channels, targeted appropriately**, e.g., community media in a range of languages and social media. ● **When phoning in or on a website, include options for interpreter, TTY or if you are visually impaired.** ● **Information about assistance should be made generally available in the community** Involve community organisations and information channels (e.g., websites, social media) that already provide support to specific groups, e.g. different language groups ● **Companies should be aware of the range of assistance required** by people with low literacy skills or disability and provide appropriate options (e.g. braille and easy read). ● **Important that translators come from community** and use working language. Partner with community groups to manage this.

Information on reminder and final notices	
Information to be included on reminder and final notices	● **Include all information currently provided on the notices**. ● **Show payment and support options at the top** and make the offer of support very clear. ● **Reminders should be simple, just essential words** on how much to pay, what the customer should do next and where to get help if they need it. Simplify charges and include one amount that needs to be paid. ● **Use non-threatening language** - must be friendly. ● **Information must be concise and simple** – a letter with dot points. Change colour of text to give a sense of urgency. ● **Educate on the consequences of non-payment and restriction**. ● **Provide access for further information** about the bill.
Actions for water businesses to take before they restrict a customer's water supply or take legal action	● **All mandated attempted contact needs to be made before any restrictions are made.** Need to reach the customer and put a plan in place. ● **Communicate by the best channel for that person.** Some people may find a personal visit very confronting and so need to offer other options, e.g., phone, text, email. ● **Water businesses need to show proof of contact,** e.g., that an email has been opened, photos, geotags when making a personal visit, etc. Contact should be direct and responsive so water company can get understanding of customer circumstances. If no contact is made, provide a calling card with the information provided, text or leave a voice message. ● **Provide an option to nominate an alternative contact person**. ● **Ensure information about restrictions and legal action is communicated** and easily available to find online. ● **Revisit the 20 business days** – this is only one and a half pension periods from one bill to restricting water supply. ● **Water businesses need to demonstrate proof that there will be no unintended consequences of restriction, e.g. children, disability, sick**
Comments	● **Emphasis needs to be on doing everything they can before they get to this point**. Could make the most of other workers who are already in the field (meter readers, etc.). These people may be less intimidating than field agents turning up in suits/casual office. ● **Concern expressed by some panel members about restricting water supply** and this should never be done in Victoria as it is cementing in hardship and poverty. ● Do utilities companies share information about people that are experiencing financial difficulties so that a holistic approach can be taken without the stress of dealing with multiple companies and communications?

Attachment 2: Survey results

Panel members were asked to complete a survey before and after the process. Of the 29 people who started the process, 26 (90%) completed the pre-process survey and 28 (97%) of the 29 people who finished the process completed the post-process survey, which is an excellent completion rate. Areas that recorded the largest differences in responses between the surveys are noted below.

The survey had a mixed response with four people choosing to strongly disagree or disagree for almost every field on the post-process survey. It is possible that this fast process did not suit them and it would be interesting to do some post-process interviews to explore these results further.

Overall, survey results showed an increase in:

● confidence in civic/community participate processes
● understanding of the ESC and its remit.

They showed a decrease in levels of:

● trust in decision-making processes
● understanding of, and support for, collaborative decision-making processes.

Increased trust in decision-making processes

I am confident that the Essential Services Commission will consider the outcomes of this process.
     Pre-process survey: 85% agreed or strongly agreed
     Post-process survey: 82% agreed or strongly agreed

I am confident that the review of Water Customer Codes will have a beneficial impact on Victorians.
     Pre-process survey: 81% agreed or strongly agreed
     Post-process survey: 79% agreed or strongly agreed

I trust that the Essential Services Commission actively supports community involvement in Government decision-making processes.
     Pre-process survey: 85% agreed or strongly agreed
     Post-process survey: 86% agreed or strongly agreed

Civic/community participation

I feel confident participating in consultation activities
     Pre-process survey: 92% agreed or strongly agreed
     Post-process survey: 86% agreed or strongly agreed

I feel I have skills and knowledge to contribute to the discussion
     Pre-process survey: 85% agreed or strongly agreed
     Post-process survey: 89% agreed or strongly agreed

I am confident that my fellow participants have the skills and knowledge to contribute to decision making processes
     Pre-process survey: 69% agreed or strongly agreed
     Post-process survey: 79% agreed or strongly agreed

Knowledge of the Essential Services Commission

I have a good understanding of the Essential Services Commission and its commitment to supporting Victorians experiencing vulnerability.
    Pre-process survey: 81% agreed or strongly agreed
    Post-process survey: 89% agreed or strongly agreed

I understand the role of the Essential Services Commission.
    Pre-process survey: 85% agreed or strongly agreed
    Post-process survey: 86% agreed or strongly agreed

I understand the different ways the community intersects with the Essential Services Commission.
    Pre-process survey: 65% agreed or strongly agreed
    Post-process survey: 86% agreed or strongly agreed

I understand the services provided by the Essential Services Commission.
    Pre-process survey: 92% agreed or strongly agreed
    Post-process survey: 89% agreed or strongly agreed

I understand the roles and responsibilities of different agencies involved with the Essential Services Commission.
    Pre-process survey: 58% agreed or strongly agreed
    Post-process survey: 71% agreed or strongly agreed

Knowledge of collaborative community engagement processes

I understand the concept of community consultation processes.
    Pre-process survey: 92% strongly agreed
    Post-process survey: 93% strongly agreed

I understand my role as a participant.
    Pre-process survey: 96% strongly agreed
    Post-process survey: 89% strongly agreed

I value the diversity and perspective of others in consultation processes.
    Pre-process survey: 92% strongly agreed
    Post-process survey: 82% strongly agreed

I value consultation processes in government decision making
    Pre-process survey: 96% strongly agreed
    Post-process survey: 86% strongly agreed