

# Parliament of Victoria

## Online Community Roundtable

1 September 2025, 7.00pm - 8.30pm

### Summary Document

The Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee held several online community roundtables to talk to people about how consultation practices can be improved.

These roundtables were informal meetings of the Committee and therefore, not formally transcribed by Hansard. In lieu of Hansard transcripts, the Committee has summarised its discussions during the roundtable held on 1 September 2025 from 7.00pm – 8.30pm.

#### Attendees

This roundtable was attended by seven members of the public and eight Members of the Committee.

#### Discussion prompts

Participants in the roundtable were invited to respond to four discussion prompts. Their responses are summarised below.

Discussion Prompt 1 – What prevents people from participating in consultation processes?

| Issues raised   | What the Committee heard  |
|---|---|
| Stakeholders wrongly believe they don't have anything of value to contribute. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consultations can be intimidating.</li><li>• Consultations can be on complex or technical topics.</li><li>• Stakeholders may not feel qualified to participate in consultations.</li><li>• There is very little relationship building being done to encourage more people to engage in consultations.</li></ul>   |
| A belief that consultations are a 'tick-box' exercise.                        | <p>This belief was in part, a result of poor experiences with consultations in the past. Stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Raised legitimate issues but felt dismissed by those running the consultation.</li><li>• Believed those running the consultation were not genuinely interested in community concerns.</li><li>• Considered past consultations to be patronising and minimised what they could offer, which</li></ul> |

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|  | <p>discouraged them from participating in future consultations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Felt as though their feedback wasn't acted upon.</li> </ul>   |
| Uncertainty as to how a proposal might impact them.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders may not have a good understanding of how a proposal may impact them.</li> <li>• Consultation materials do a poor job informing people how they will be impacted by a proposal.</li> </ul>  |
| Stakeholders are not aware of current consultations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultations can be poorly advertised through ineffective communication channels.</li> <li>• Consultations may be held at late notice or during business hours.</li> <li>• Stakeholders are given limited time with consultation materials to prepare for or provide input into consultations.</li> <li>• Consultations only seek to engage with select groups of people and are not open to the whole community.</li> <li>• Consultations may only become known to the broader community after it has concluded.</li> </ul> |

Discussion prompt 2 – How can governments and non-government entities improve community awareness of consultations?

| Issues raised   | What the Committee heard   |
|---|--|
| By making consultations open to everyone.                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders were critical of closed door, selective consultations, which appear as if an outcome has already been decided.</li> <li>• Selective consultation does not give everyone an opportunity to be heard.</li> <li>• Consultations can exclude many demographics, including people with disabilities, people who work full time or people with caring responsibilities.</li> </ul> |
| By giving stakeholders multiple ways to engage in a consultation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders have busy lives and many competing responsibilities.</li> <li>• Online options are appreciated, as they afford more flexibility to people who work full time or are unable to leave the house due to caring responsibilities or other reasons.</li> </ul>  |
| By giving stakeholders adequate notice of consultations.          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice of upcoming consultations should be proportionate to how complex they are. For example, stakeholders should be given more notice of technical consultations with difficult supporting materials. This will allow them time to get across the material and prepare. `</li> </ul>  |

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| Private developers should not run consultations. The Committee heard that Stakeholders:                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Such consultations can become ‘sales pitches’.</li> <li>• Some view private developers with suspicion and don’t consider they genuinely want to engage with the community.</li> <li>• There were poor experiences during consultations run by private developers, particularly with renewable energy developers in regional Victoria.</li> <li>• Local governments should play a larger role in facilitating consultations in their areas.</li> </ul> |
| Provide people with meaningful information about the consultation. The Committee heard that stakeholders: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It would be helpful if consultation materials explicitly explained both the pros and cons of a proposal.</li> <li>• If consultation materials were more honest, more people would want to engage.</li> </ul>  |

Discussion prompt 3 – Do you know how your input into a consultation factored into final decision making?

| Issues raised                | What the Committee heard   |
|------------------------------|--|
| More transparency is needed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was a lack of transparency in the decision-making process.</li> <li>• There was a disparity between the community feedback given and the final decision made.</li> <li>• Some felt let down by a lack of feedback loops to explain how a decision was made.</li> <li>• Some felt their efforts in engaging with consultations were a waste of time, as they didn’t feel their contributions were listened to.</li> <li>• The engagement was too late for any input to properly factor into decision making in a meaningful way.</li> <li>• There were positive experiences, where an appointed conduit between the community and decision makers facilitated effective communication and feedback loops. The community felt heard.</li> </ul> |

Discussion prompt 4 – How could consultations be improved?

| Issues raised  | What the Committee heard  |
|--|---|
| Consultations must occur earlier in the process before decisions have been made. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultations happen too late and feel like an afterthought.</li> <li>• People directly impacted by proposals should not be the last to know.</li> </ul> |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some positive examples where lengthy periods were afforded to genuine consultation, which allowed people to contribute and feel heard.</li> </ul>   |
| Stronger feedback loops are needed.                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent processes allow stakeholders to understand and accept the outcomes.</li> <li>• Greater transparency would give people more confidence that decision makers are making good decisions.</li> <li>• Feedback loops would encourage decision makers to be accountable and explain how stakeholders input was considered.</li> </ul> |
| Consultations should encourage inputs, rather than be defensive. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More people should be encouraged to participate in consultations and be heard.</li> <li>• Consultations that feel defensive discourage people from participating and weakens the quality of engagement.</li> </ul>  |