Government response to the Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices

Report on Community Consultation Practices – 3 March 2026

Pursuant to Section 36 of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*, this paper provides a response to the recommendations contained in the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee report on *Community Consultation Practices*.

Committee recommendation	Government's response to the Committee's recommendations and actions it may take
Recommendation 1: That the Victorian Government mandate the application of the Public Engagement Framework for all departments, agencies and their consultants/contractors when conducting engagement and require them to publicly report on their adherence to the framework when conducting engagement.	**Response: Not support** The government recognises the importance of meaningful engagement with Victorian communities and commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. The way departments and agencies approach engagement must reflect the unique setting of the decision at hand and meet the needs of both decision makers and participants. The Public Engagement Framework will continue to guide departments and agencies in best practice, however the government does not intend to mandate its use. The government will develop a 'Community Charter' that will set community engagement and considerations as a priority for all Victorian departments and agencies to follow, led by an 'Executive Champion'. This

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	localised approach will allow for a sustainable, tailored and targeted system of ownership. An executive committee for the Public Engagement Community of Practice made up of cross-department members will also be established to: • oversee cross-department work to identify opportunities for collaboration and how departments report on adherence to the framework • plan a capability uplift program.
Recommendation 2: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet provide training for Department staff undertaking community consultation to ensure that they are aware of the principles of the Public Engagement Framework to work more closely with communities to make better decisions.	**Response: Support-in-principle** The Victorian Government supports the objective of consistent and transparent engagement across the Victorian public sector. The Public Engagement Framework provides valuable guidance to support effective engagement practices. However, departments and agencies vary in their scope and usage of the framework, and the government will therefore consider opportunities to strengthen the use of the framework through training as part of the updates.

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Recommendation 3: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require engagements to involve consultation with participants, rather than to simply inform. Information should be clearly labelled as that and not presented as consultation.	**Response: Support in part** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. The government does not support requiring engagements to involve consultation with participants rather than simply informing, as engagement skills and processes are still required for these types of engagements. However, the government will add clarity to the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation to outline that both the 'Inform' and 'Consult' levels are referred to as 'Participation' and not 'Engagement' – as outlined in the Victorian Auditor General's Office Better Practice Guide for *Public Participation in Government Decision-making*. References to one-way communication materials will be removed as an example of an engagement activity.
Recommendation 4: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to develop standardised language guidelines for engagement processes.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. The new Executive Committee for the Public Engagement Community of Practice will develop standardised language guidelines for engagement processes.
Recommendation 5: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to state that the input of participants should be sought at a point when it can be meaningfully used.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework, including guidance that the input of participants should be sought at a point when it can be meaningfully used.

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Recommendation 6: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require departments to outline the boundaries with participants of what aspects of a policy or project are within the scope of an engagement.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework, including guidance to outline the boundaries with participants of what aspects of a policy or project are within the scope of an engagement.
Recommendation 7: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require alignment between the purpose, language and design of an engagement to contribute to more effective community consultation.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework, including guidance to align the purpose, language and design of an engagement to contribute to more effective community consultation.
Recommendation 8: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require informing relevant stakeholders through diverse channels to ensure engagement opportunities are accessible and widely known.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework, including guidance to inform relevant stakeholders through diverse channels to ensure engagement opportunities are accessible and widely known.
Recommendation 9: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require departments to show how their engagement approach has reached, or attempted to reach, a broad and diverse cross-section of stakeholders.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. An evaluation template will be included with an 'Inclusive' metric to show how the department's engagement approach has reached, or attempted to reach, a broad and diverse cross-section of stakeholders.

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Recommendation 10: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to ensure engagement processes attract a diversity of community perspectives.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework, including guidance to have a process to attract a diversity of community perspectives.
Recommendation 11: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to specify methods of reaching engagement participants in addition to the traditional opt-in approach. This may include random lottery selection or deliberative engagement models.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework, including outlining options for mandatory, passive or selected engagement that are not opt-in.
Recommendation 12: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet create a centralised engagement calendar to track consultations and assess cumulative community engagement loads to avoid duplication and reduce the pressure on local communities.	**Response: Support-in-principle** The Victorian Government recognises the importance of avoiding duplication and reducing the pressure on local communities when it comes to engagement. Due to the sometimes unpredictable and fast changing nature of engagement work, a calendar can quickly become out of date. The new Executive Committee for the Public Engagement Community of Practice will oversee identification for collaboration and planning to avoid conflicting timelines for major engagements.

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Recommendation 13: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require departments to review and report on recent engagement findings in affected communities, explain their incorporation into current decisions and ensure new processes build on prior feedback.	**Response: Support-in-principle** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This will include an evaluation and lessons learnt template that should be completed for all engagements and provided to their engagement manager for review to identify opportunities for improvement. Findings will be shared with the Executive Committee of the Public Engagement Community of Practice to address at a whole-of-government level.
Recommendation 14: Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require: • holding engagements at appropriate times to allow for the participation of relevant stakeholders. • allowing sufficient time for participant input so engagements don't feel rushed and insincere or undermine the integrity of engagement.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework, including guidance that the public has adequate time, resources and opportunities to provide feedback before decision-making.
Recommendation 15: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require clear, sufficient, and timely information about the subject of the engagement to participants.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework, including guidance on providing clear, sufficient and timely information to participants. This guidance will be supported by the Victorian Government Accessible Communications Policy, which requires that public-facing content to be accessible and written in plain language, aiming for a Grade 8 reading level.

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Recommendation 16: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement framework to require departments to: • Provide multiple formats for engagement, including surveys with open-ended questions and opportunities for in-depth discussions. • Include sufficient time for participants to ask questions and receive answers.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework, including guidance for providing multiple formats for engagement and allowing sufficient time for questions and answers.
Recommendation 17: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to specify that: • Wherever possible, engagement processes should create inclusive forums that enable the open exchange of views within the community. • Engagement processes should be transparent and enable participants to share and engage with a diversity of views, online and in person.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This includes expanding the guidance around inclusive engagement.
Recommendation 18: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require local, in-person engagement in the communities that will be impacted, addressing barriers like distance and digital exclusion, particularly in rural and regional Victoria.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This includes direction around how best to engage with people who live in regional and rural areas.

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Recommendation 19: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require appropriate engagement with young people using appropriate times, formats and venues.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This includes direction around how best to engage with young people.
Recommendation 20: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require consistent application of culturally responsive practice to engagement processes.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This includes direction on how best to engage with people from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds and First Nations people – developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders.
Recommendation 21: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to reflect the principles of engagement of First Peoples articulated by the Statewide Treaty Act 2025 (Vic). The Department should also ensure engagement with First Nations communities is culturally safe, tailored, and undertaken early, with meaningful opportunities for First Nations peoples to influence decisions. Engagement should prioritise respectful listening, collaboration with appropriate representatives, and incorporation of cultural knowledge.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This includes adding the principles of engagement as articulated by the *Statewide Treaty Act 2025* (Vic). An upskilling program will also be put in place for all departments and agencies to understand these principles, drawing on specialist expertise across the VPS.
Recommendation 22: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to ensure that engagement with people with a disability is accessible and inclusive.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This includes direction around how best to engage with people with disability and carers.

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Recommendation 23: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to ensure engagement processes are accessible to people with low digital literacy.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This includes direction around how best to engage with people with low digital literacy.
Recommendation 24: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to summarise the benefits of conducting engagements in house.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This includes adding the benefits of conducting engagements in house.
Recommendation 25: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require departments to: • Justify and publish the rationale for using external consultants in engagement processes and ensure consultants meet the same transparency and accountability standards as government staff. • Ensure that where an external consultant is used, a departmental or agency representative is present at all consultations to both oversee the process and answer any questions from participants.	**Response: Under review** The Executive Committee for the Public Engagement Community of Practice will review this approach and establish guidance for working with external consultants. It has been found that in some cases, where trust in government is low or previous experience with government (either in Victoria or other countries) has been harmful, having a government representative attend can infringe on the engagement process.

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Recommendation 26: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require that non-disclosure agreements should not be used, except in circumstances where confidentiality is genuinely required or requested by participants. The Framework should: • clearly define when non-disclosure agreements are appropriate • require transparency about their purpose and scope • not prevent recipients disclosing that they are subject to a non-disclosure agreement • ensure they do not prevent recipients from sharing general information with their communities • reaffirm that open, transparent engagement is the standard practice.	**Response: Support** The Victorian Government commits to updating the Public Engagement Framework. This includes adding guidance around the use of non-disclosure agreements.

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Recommendation 27: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Government Services jointly develop and implement a mandatory guide for departments using the Engage Victoria Platform to ensure that: • Engage Victoria is sufficiently publicised to attract input from wider sections of the community • engagements offer people with barriers to using Engage Victoria other ways to participate • Engage Victoria apply functionality that allows nuanced input • a style guide be produced to ensure that users have, as much as possible, a common user experience when responding to Engage Victoria surveys • the accessibility of Engage Victoria is improved through increased use of plain language, multiple languages and text for people with vision impairment • the Engage Victoria platform provides greater transparency and publishes de-identified community consultation feedback.	**Response: Support in part** The Victorian Government recognises the importance of meaningful engagement with Victorian communities and commits to promoting the guidance which already exists for users of the Engage Victoria platform. The government does not intend to mandate its use. The guidance includes best practice including clearly setting out the purpose, how to structure content, use of plain language, and schedules for reporting back. Engage Victoria provides a common platform and tools to deliver a consistent experience to users. The Engage Victoria platform currently offers a range of digital tools for users to seek and provide feedback and provide nuanced input. This includes catering to multiple languages. The Executive Committee for the Public Engagement Community of Practice will: • explore updates to the Engage Victoria guidance and promotion of these to platform users • explore opportunities to promote the Engage Victoria platform • explore ways to improve platform functionality to support a better user experience including text reading for people with vision impairment and notifications to support engagement consultation owners • encourage publication of de-identified consultation feedback on the Engage Victoria platform following community engagement.

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Recommendation 28: That the Department of Premier and Cabinet update the Public Engagement Framework to require departments to provide feedback to engagement participants about the outcome of the engagement. Where an engagement has asked for the input of participants regarding a decision, such feedback should include, but not be limited to: • The decision made; • The impact of participant input on the decision; and • Clear explanations for decisions made contrary to a major theme of participant input, and the feedback should explain why that input was not taken up.	**Response: Support-in-principle** The Community Charter will include as a core pillar a commitment to reporting back to participants on the outcome of the engagement. It will be the responsibility of each department/agency to follow this charter, led by an Executive champion. The Executive Committee for the Public Engagement Community of Practice will develop an Outcomes and Monitoring plan to track and support the reporting back of engagement outcomes.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pay our respect to them, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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