

Community Engagement and Partnerships Framework for Victoria's Catchment Management Authorities

Recognising the value of effective engagement and partnerships in achieving the best outcomes for natural resource management

Prepared by the Community Engagement and Partnerships Working Group for the Victorian Catchment Management Forum, November 2012

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Why a Framework?

The Catchment and Land Protection (CaLP) Act (1994), Water Act (1989) and respective Statement of Obligations (2007, 2006) outline responsibilities for CMAs in relation to facilitating and coordinating the management of catchments in an integrated and sustainable manner and to engagement and consultation with communities and stakeholders. They are generally not, however, prescriptive of the expectations and requirements of CMAs¹.

This framework outlines a common approach to community engagement and partnerships which Victoria's Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) are committed to. It presents a shared understanding of our community engagement responsibilities so that we can work together with our communities, partners and stakeholders with confidence.

The Framework sets out key principles, clarifies expectations and provides an approach to measurement and evaluation of community engagement and partnership practice, effectiveness and efficiency.

Why do we engage with communities?

Achieving the best natural resource outcomes for Victoria requires the involvement and engagement of a diverse range of stakeholders and communities.

As CMAs we do not own or directly manage natural resources and must achieve agreed outcomes and meet our responsibilities by partnering with those that do. We therefore often act as integrators and brokers – we facilitate, coordinate, partner with, engage and support others as part of our everyday work. We must proactively and effectively engage and work with others to deliver strategies and initiatives which achieve improved catchment health and sustained practice change.

Our effective engagement can leave a lasting legacy of informed, involved and confident communities who understand the value of good natural resource management, and appreciate that their own contribution can improve Victoria's catchment health.

Defining Community Engagement

We define 'communities' as including individuals, public and private landholders, community groups and business owners. We define 'community engagement' as the activities which see us interact with members of our communities to inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower others*.

*See the IAP2 spectrum for more information www.iap2.org.au

Defining Partnerships

We define 'partners' as those community groups, organisations, local, state and federal governments, or individuals with whom we seek specific and mutually beneficial outcomes. As partners, we share both the problem and the solution.

Our 'partnerships' are critical and sustained relationships which bring benefits to each of the parties involved, and achieve outcomes which the parties could not achieve on their own. Partnerships can be either informal or formal and where appropriate, can be supported by a written agreement outlining specific objectives, roles and responsibilities.

¹ For further detail regarding prescribed requirements refer to the Act(s)

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A brief overview

Undertaking community engagement activities and establishing and managing partnerships are both essential elements of our broader work. These activities must be guided by a clear strategy which supports organisational objectives and priorities and focuses on achieving sustained practice change. With that strategy in place, our engagement and partnership approaches can be planned, tailored and delivered in order to achieve improved natural resource outcomes. We must always be able to demonstrate that our engagement and our partnership approaches are strategic, purposeful and valuable.

An overview of our approach to community engagement and partnerships



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A principles based approach

The following principles underpin our approach to community engagement and the establishment and management of our partnerships. They reflect our focus on achieving integrated natural resource management through effective facilitation and coordination. Our CMA strategies, initiatives, programs and projects will all evidence these principles at work.

- 1 We will embed community engagement and build partnerships in all that we do
- 2 Our people will be actively supported to engage communities and to build partnerships
- 3 Our community engagement and partnership approaches will be well planned, tailored, targeted, and evaluated
- 4 We will provide meaningful opportunities for our communities and partners to contribute to strategies and initiatives
- 5 We will work transparently and respectfully with our communities and partners, and establish clear roles and expectations

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Understanding the Community Engagement and Partnerships Principles

Principle 1

We will embed community engagement and build partnerships in all that we do

Enactment of this Principle can be demonstrated by:

- Ensuring that our commitment and approach to community engagement and partnerships is outlined in all key organisational strategies and formal agreements including Regional Catchment Strategies;
- Building community engagement into all projects and initiatives as a mandatory planning step; and
- Recognition and investment in the development of sustained relationships and partnerships.

“Every time we walk out the door, pick up the telephone or post something online, we are engaging with our communities and developing relationships. We must take every opportunity to do this with purpose and confidence.”

Principle 2

Our people will be actively supported to engage communities and to build partnerships

If our people are to engage well with diverse communities, to plan and tailor their interactions, and to form and sustain healthy partnerships, then we must support this by:

- Recognising that this work requires significant time and investment;
- Providing specialist support or training to our teams to build skills and confidence;
- Providing regular feedback to our people on their community engagement and relationship management activities;
- Acknowledging and sharing success; and
- Fostering innovation and continuous improvement in our everyday practice.

“We all engage regularly with our communities and our partners. I just don't think we recognise it enough, or think about the particular skills we need to do it really well.”

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Understanding the Community Engagement and Partnerships Principles (cont'd)

Principle 3

Our community engagement and partnership approaches will be well planned, tailored, targeted, and evaluated

While we seek to broadly engage and communicate with all community members and stakeholders, we know that targeted engagement is often more successful in achieving specific NRM initiatives. Careful planning and innovative approaches to tailored and targeted engagement and partnerships help us to achieve practice change within the community, which is the ultimate goal of our work. To enact this principle we can:

- Carefully plan and consider the purpose and type of engagement to be undertaken and partnerships to be used;
- Ensure that engagement and consultation occurs as early as possible and include sufficient engagement;
- Target our efforts to reach the community members most impacted by our strategies and initiatives;
- Understand our communities, and tailor our approaches to suit, including consideration for place-based engagement, and engagement of diverse and indigenous communities; and
- Evaluate our engagement and our partnerships to understand the effectiveness and efficiency of our approach and continue to improve our practice.

“We need to take the time to plan and tailor our partnerships and our engagement with communities just as we would any other aspect of our work.”

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Understanding the Community Engagement and Partnerships Principles (cont'd)

Principle 4

We will provide meaningful opportunities for our communities and partners to contribute to strategies and initiatives

The Statements of Obligation outline a number of requirements to achieve this Principle. Enactment can be demonstrated by:

- Regular communication on CMA strategies and initiatives;
- Use of a diverse range of channels and forums to communicate and engage;
- Providing respectful notice periods and timelines when there are opportunities to get involved;
- Use of appropriately designed engagement methods to target or support the involvement of particular community groups, (such as young people or indigenous communities); and
- Appropriate diversity and views being included in representative forums.

“We cannot reasonably expect ‘everyone’ in the community to engage with us, but we can go a long way to providing meaningful opportunities for people to engage with us if they want to.”

Principle 5

We will work transparently and respectfully with our communities and partners, and establish clear roles and expectations

Enactment of this Principle can be demonstrated by:

- Learning from and listening to communities - Engaging genuinely, really listening to all voices, and demonstrating that CMAs can learn a great deal from community members;
- Supporting community members and partners to hear and understand the diversity of views held;
- Always including feedback to communities and partners on the impact of their input;
- Working within the IAP2 spectrum (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, or Empower) to define and communicate the roles and expectations of others we engage with;
- Providing clarity on what we are engaging about, what our own role is, and what is negotiable / non-negotiable;
- Celebrating and communicating achievements, and acknowledging our communities and partners for their input to those achievements; and
- Where appropriate, providing suitable written agreements or Terms of Reference to support our partnerships.

“It’s important that we as CMAs are also clear about our own role as at different times we can be communicator, facilitator, coordinator, educator, decision-maker, sponsor or funder.”

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Achieving and Measuring Success

It is important that we measure and evaluate our community engagement work and our partnerships in order to assess the benefits of our investment and its impact on contributing to the achievement of improved catchment health and positive natural resource outcomes. The following pages outline in further detail a number of measures that CMAs can use to assess and evaluate our success. This Framework does not prescribe the extent or scope of monitoring and evaluation which CMAs will have in place, but rather serves to provide a common set of guidelines to develop local programs for measurement of success. In summary, they require that we:

1

Have a Community Engagement and Partnerships **Strategy** in place to drive and guide our work

2

Review our **practice and approach** to community engagement and partnerships as part of regular monitoring and reporting frameworks

3

Assess the **value and effectiveness** of our community engagement and partnerships

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Measuring the Success of our Community Engagement

We can monitor and assess the **practice** and **approach** of our engagement using the following elements*:

E1	Adequate scoping and planning is undertaken
E2	Early and sufficient engagement occurs
E3	The diversity of communities is well represented
E4	Suitable information and materials are provided
E5	Feedback is provided to participants on the value of their input
E6	The engagement is transparently and respectfully conducted
E7	Roles and expectations are clear
E8	The influence of communities on the project outcome is captured
E9	Cost and time is considered properly
E10	Promises are kept

Measuring the Success of our Partnerships

We can monitor and assess the **practice, approach and health** of our partnerships using the following elements:

P1	The purpose of the partnership is clear
P2	Membership of the partnership is appropriate for the task
P3	Leadership and governance of the partnership is functioning well
P4	Decision-making processes are considered rigorous and reasonable
P5	Partners are clear on their roles and responsibilities
P6	There are suitable support resources in place for the partnership
P7	The partnership remains valuable and mutually beneficial
P8	The partnership allows all members to contribute

*Adapted from the DSE guide, *Introduction to Evaluation for Engagement and Communications*, developed by Dr Jess Dart, Clear Horizons.

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Measuring the Value and Effectiveness of our Community Engagement and Partnerships

While our ongoing practice and approach to community engagement and partnerships is important, we can also take a targeted and longer term approach to evaluating the value and effectiveness of our work. This form of evaluation of activity can be time and cost intensive occurring over a multi-year period, and as such, CMAs will plan in advance which initiatives, partnerships, business areas or specific geographic areas would benefit from this approach.

We can measure the **value** and **effectiveness** of our engagement in supporting the achievement of natural resource outcomes against any of the following statements:

V1 Communities are further informed and engaged in NRM

V2 New partnerships or relationships have been established

V3 There is evidence of practice change in the community

V4 Partnerships are healthy and productive

V5 There is facilitation of an integrated approach to NRM

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Document Information

This Framework has been developed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Victoria's ten Victorian Catchment Management Authorities.

For further information, please contact your relevant Catchment Management Authority or phone DSE on 136 186.

If you are referencing, using or publishing aspects of this Framework, please attribute it to the Victorian Government and Victorian Catchment Management Authorities 2012.

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