



# Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2024 -28

# Acknowledgement of Country

VicWater proudly acknowledges the rich culture of Victoria's First Nations people and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We recognise that First Nations people have been caring for Country and managing water resources sustainably for thousands of years.

We value the wisdom, knowledge and resilience of First Nations people and their ongoing contributions to the Victorian community.

VicWater is committed to supporting efforts by the water sector to work in partnership with Traditional Owners towards reconciliation; self-determination and restorative justice.

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A more diverse, informed and engaged water sector that embodies a sense of pride and inclusiveness.

**We are better together.**

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# Contents

Our context	3
Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion	4
Our commitment to change	6
Our targets	9
Our framework for an inclusive equitable, diverse and workforce	12
Reporting and review	13

# Our context

There are eighteen water corporations in Victoria that provide a range of water, irrigation and wastewater services to rural and urban customers across Victoria. As a sector we directly employ approximately 6,300 employees and are actively involved in the communities that we live and work in.

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Across the water sector we believe inclusion starts with leadership. Leaders are the stewards of an organisation's culture, and their behaviours and mindsets reverberate throughout the organisation. Through the delivery of this strategy, we aim to build leadership capability in understanding systems of privilege and oppression that exist within our sector and to take responsibility for minimising these to create a culture that is inclusive and equitable for all to reach their full potential.

The Victorian government has provided strong leadership for the water sector by committing to and delivering on increased diversity on boards as part of the 2023 board appointment process. Female representation is now at 57% and 61% of water corporation Chairs are female. The number of Aboriginal directors has also increased and there is an expectation for all water corporations to consider the appointment of an independent Aboriginal board delegate.

At an organisational level, the Chairs and Managing Directors of Victorian water corporations recognise the importance of having a diverse workforce, and are committed to providing a safe and inclusive workplace that enables all staff to thrive. The Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-28 has been developed as our method to deliver this commitment.

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**All Victorian water corporations have committed to this strategy.**

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# Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

The Victorian water sector is committed to growing a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace culture, which is reflective of the communities in which we work and live.

We know that diverse workforces have improved performance and when organisations reflect the diversity of their communities, they gain greater insight into and connection with their customers. The heterogeneous thinking, skillsets and perspectives that comes with diversity is linked to improved problem-solving, decision-making and enhanced innovation and creativity, which positively contributes to a high-performing water sector.

Victorian water corporations recognise it is through the achievement of an inclusive workplace culture that we will provide a safe and inclusive environment for those that have historically and currently experienced lack of equity, and this in turn will also allow us to maximise the benefits of our diverse workforce. We recognise that some groups experience greater barriers to employment and advancement compared with others, and we strive to create equity within our systems and organisations to ensure all people have an opportunity to reach their full potential. We know that when teams orient members to learn from their differences and experiences, work can be reimaged, and the full benefit of diversity realised.



An inclusive culture is where all employees feel they belong and are enabled to make valuable contributions. An inclusive workplace will have more broad reaching societal benefits such as increased economic activity relating to increased participation of people in the workforce.

Since the first Victorian water sector Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) strategy was developed, the sector has made progress against all targets that were set and the Victorian water sector has given diversity a seat at the table. Our progress is summarised in the annual Water Industry ED&I Report produced by VicWater, which demonstrates a strong commitment and rate of change across the sector.

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# Our commitment to change

The approach embraced and supported by Victorian water corporations is to collaborate to build capacity, measure performance, influence change and embed culture. ED&I is being addressed at an industry level as well as an organisational level.

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Victorian water corporations' Chairs and Managing Directors have committed to improving inclusion and diversity in their organisations and all corporations have developed and are implementing their own Diversity and Inclusion Strategies, Equality Action Plans and Reconciliation Action Plans to drive continuous improvement, with significant achievements being delivered.

The VicWater Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC) have continued to be active and support the delivery of several targeted diversity and inclusion initiatives to build knowledge, understanding and capability across the sector.

This will be enhanced through the delivery of the 2024-28 strategy with the introduction of a practitioners network in addition to the DISC. The DISC will be made up of executives from across the sector and will focus on monitoring the delivery of the strategy, working collaboratively on strategic outcomes and tools to drive change. The practitioners network will comprise of subject matter experts across the water sector working collaboratively at an operational level.

The Chair of the practitioners network will be a member of the DISC. The DISC will be supported by at least two Managing Directors identified as sponsors. The sponsors will act as advocates at the most senior level of the water sector to maximise outcomes and delivery of the 2024-28 strategy.

Since the development of the 2018 strategy, Victorian water corporations have continued to make progress in key areas, however there is still work to do to make the Victorian water sector truly inclusive and diverse. The 2024 strategy will continue to build on the work done as part of previous strategies which will embed and sustain inclusion and diversity in all Victorian water corporations.

*Better Together*

**VicWater**  
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**VicWater Board**

*Working Together*

**Managing Directors Forum**

- Collaboration and information
- Developing industry positions
- Overseeing sector projects and initiatives

**Chairs Forum**

- Collaboration and information
- Shared strategic issues
- Identifying areas for sector leadership

**Practitioners Network**

Subject matter experts focused on the delivery of the collective actions

**DISC**

Executive group focused on monitoring the delivery of the strategy



**VicWater unites the water sector to deliver better outcomes for Victorian customers, community and the environment.**

# Looking ahead at 2028

We provide a workplace that is safe and enables all employees to thrive

**COLLABORATE** for improvement

**DELIVER** whole of sector case studies

**SUPPORT** talent pipelines

**GUIDE** executives to champion diversity

**CONNECT** with the Safety Executive Group (SEG)

## Measures for success

- Improved performance in key metrics
- Case studies developed and delivered

We enable all employees to have the opportunities that are tailored to them

**BUILD** relationships to improve equity

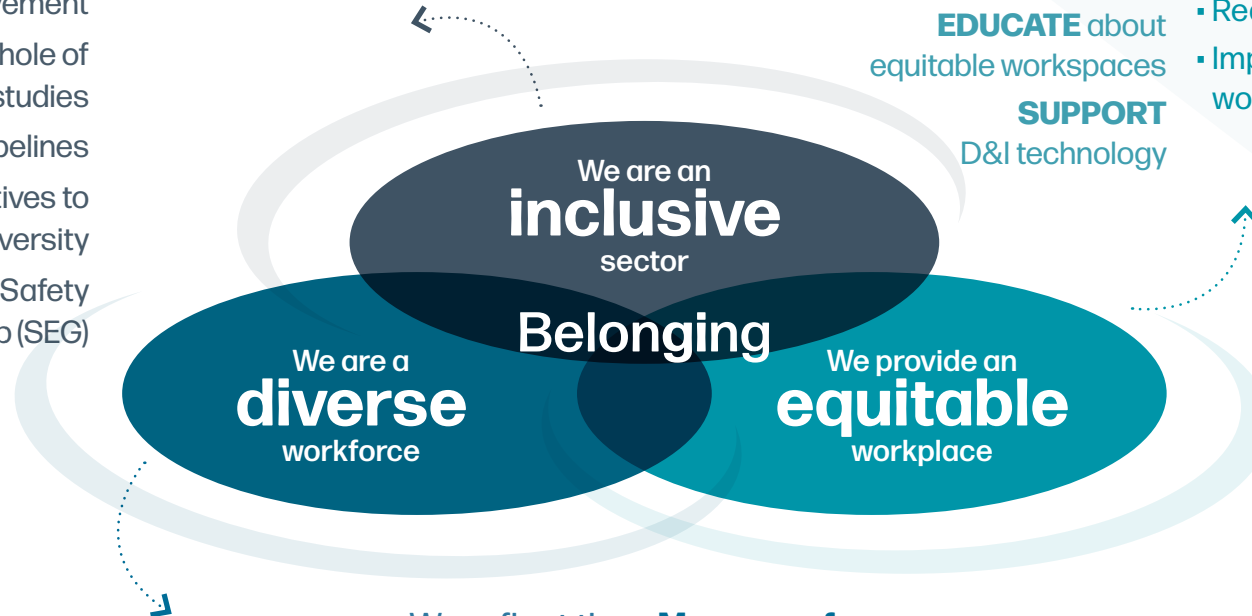
**TRAIN** leaders and frontline staff

**EDUCATE** about equitable workspaces

**SUPPORT** D&I technology

## Measures for success

- Improved performance against key metrics
- Increased voluntary disclosure of diversity measures
- Zero non-conformance with GEA
- Reduction in Gender Pay Gap
- Implementation of WaterAble workshop outcomes



We reflect the community that we serve

**REFLECT** our diverse communities

**MEASURE** our maturity

**CHAMPION** diversity

**ENGAGE** with Traditional Owner Groups

## Measures for success

- Greater visibility of ED&I performance
- A positive shift in ED&I maturity



# Our targets

The following targets describe the intended E,D&I performance of the water sector by 2028. The annual action plan will describe the activities that will be taken by water corporations each year of the strategy to support achievement of the described targets by 2028.

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The DISC in conjunction with the practitioners network will develop the annual action plan each year based on the current year's performance and identified focus areas.

## Equity

**80%**

of water corporations allocate a diversity portfolio (including intersectionality in all portfolios) to each Executive Leader to champion

**80%**

of people leaders across the water sector attend at least one ED&I professional development activity each year

**REDUCE**

gender pay gap year-on-year

**ZERO**

non-conformance with GEA audits across the sector

**DISC**

facilitates professional development for people leaders in the water sector

**MATURITY**

A positive shift in ED&I maturity across the sector

# Diversity

While each water corporation will have their own targets to reflect their local community, by 2028 we aim for the collective workforce of our industry to be:

## GENDER – NON BINARY

Gender balance (40:40:20) in senior leadership positions

Gender balance (40:40:20) across the organisation

A reduction in gender segregation in all areas

## LGBTQI\* 7%

of our workforce identify as belonging to the LGBTQI+ communities

\*Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex

## DISABILITY 10%

of our workforce identify as a person with disability, including neurodiversity

## CALD\* 20%

of our workforce identify as having a multicultural background

\*Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

## FIRST NATIONS 2.5%

of our workforce identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



# Inclusion

Metrics taken from the People Matters Survey

## EQUAL

I have equal chance of promotion in my organisation

## LISTEN

My manager listens to what I have to say

## SPEAK

I feel comfortable to speak up in my organisation

## SAFE

I feel culturally safe at work

As an industry we are seeking to understand and reflect as best as possible our diverse communities and understand that different water corporations will have different community profiles. Although the overall targets are an aggregate value, by using consistent data from statewide reporting platforms it is expected that individual water corporation data will be presented in the annual performance report as well as the overall sector performance.

Where individual targets in water corporations differ from the sector wide targets due to specific community profiles this will be noted in the performance report.

The addition of inclusion targets in the 2024-28 strategy demonstrates the sector's commitment to maximising the benefits of diversity through targeted actions to create and improve inclusion at an organisational and sector level.

This strategy is supported by an annual action plan. The initiatives identified as part of the annual action plan are designed to challenge how we work and break down the organisational silos to work collectively for the betterment of the Victorian water sector.

# Our framework

## For an equitable, diverse and inclusive workforce

Strategic priorities	<b>INCLUSIVE</b> We are an inclusive sector	<b>EQUITABLE</b> We provide an equitable workplace	<b>DIVERSE</b> We are a diverse workforce
Strategic outcome	<b>WE PROVIDE</b> a workplace that is safe and enables employees to thrive	<b>WE ENABLE</b> all employees to have the opportunities that are tailored to them	<b>WE REFLECT</b> the community that we serve
Achieved through initiatives over 2024-28	<b>COLLABORATE</b> for improvement <b>DELIVER</b> whole of sector case studies <b>SUPPORT</b> talent pipelines <b>GUIDE</b> executives to champion diversity <b>CONNECT</b> with the Safety Executive Group (SEG)	<b>BUILD</b> relationships to improve equity <b>TRAIN</b> leaders and frontline staff <b>EDUCATE</b> about equitable workspaces <b>SUPPORT</b> D&I technology	<b>REFLECT</b> our diverse communities <b>MEASURE</b> our maturity <b>CHAMPION</b> diversity <b>ENGAGE</b> with Traditional Owner Groups
Annual Workplan (for 2024)	<b>DEVELOP TOOLKITS</b> to help raise awareness of visible and invisible disabilities <b>AGREE A SECTOR WIDE APPROACH</b> to Equality Impact Assessments <b>PROGRESS A CASE STUDY ON INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT</b> and toolkits to support leaders and employees <b>PROGRESS A CASE STUDY ON SUPPORTING DIVERSITY</b> at an apprenticeship or trainee level and how to build their learning opportunities and provide access to leadership <b>COLLATE PMS DATA</b> on identified questions to identify sector wide opportunities to collaborate and improve	<b>ARRANGE FOR EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT TRAINING</b> for people leaders <b>DEVELOP TOOLKITS</b> to help raise awareness of systems of oppression and privilege in the workplace and to support equity across all areas of diversity <b>SUPPORT WATERABLE</b> in the delivery of the Day of Action outcomes	<b>DEVELOP AN ANNUAL ASSESSMENT</b> for the sector to measure ED&I maturity <b>EACH WATER CORPORATION</b> to undertake an assessment of the diversity of the communities they serve
Measures for success	<b>IMPROVED PERFORMANCE</b> in key metrics <b>CASE STUDIES</b> developed and delivered	<b>IMPROVED PERFORMANCE</b> against key metrics <b>INCREASED VOLUNTARY DISCLOSURE</b> of diversity measures <b>ZERO NON-CONFORMANCE</b> with GEA <b>REDUCTION</b> in Gender Pay Gap <b>IMPLEMENTATION OF WATERABLE</b> workshop outcomes	<b>GREATER VISIBILITY</b> of ED&I performance <b>A POSITIVE SHIFT</b> in ED&I maturity

# Reporting and review

The VicWater DISC will report to water corporation Chairs and Managing Directors on performance and progress in delivering the strategy on an annual basis. An annual summary report will be made publicly available on the VicWater website and will be released at the beginning of each calendar year, with the first report of the 2024-28 strategy due for release in February 2025

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The Victorian water corporations will provide the requested data by the end of each calendar year. Most of the data that is requested is covered in the annual VPSC People Matters Survey and/or the Gender Workplace Audits. A streamlining of the data collection will be undertaken to reduce the administrative burden on DISC members.

The VicWater DISC will continue to monitor and review the strategy. Where applicable recommendations relating to the Strategy will be made to Managing Directors to ensure that the objectives continue to remain relevant and achievable for the industry.



