

# Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2019-2023



**Creating an inclusive and equitable water industry,  
reflective of the richly diverse communities we serve.**

*“We are better together!”*



*On Goulburn Valley Water's Wall – there are two murals. One for the males and another for the females of the local Indigenous Community.*

*The female mural that features Aunty Margaret Tucker (MBE) and Nora "Nanny" Charles - two significant past local elders.*

*Yorta Yorta woman, Aunty Margaret Tucker (MBE) (on the left) was one of Australia's first female Aboriginal rights activists and was highly active from the early 1930's within the Australian Aborigines League (which she was involved in establishing) as well as holding many positions in different representative bodies and Government advisory groups throughout her life. Aunty Margaret, also known as Aunty Marge, spent much of her childhood at the Cummeragunja and Moonacullah Missions however was later taken away against her mother's wishes and it wouldn't be until years later that Aunty Marge would reunite with her family.*

*Aunty Marge worked alongside various Yorta Yorta representatives include William Cooper, Sir Douglas Nicholls, Bill and Eric Onus and also her younger sister Geraldine Briggs to advocate for the rights of Aboriginal people. Aunty Marge Tucker is currently on the Aboriginal Honour Roll and is admired by the local Aboriginal community for her continued efforts in supporting and advocating for her people. Aunty Marge spent her last years in a nursing home in Shepparton and died in 1996.*

*Yorta Yorta woman, Nanny Nora Charles (on the right) was one of the earliest and best known local Aboriginal midwives. She was renowned throughout the region for travelling up and down the Murray to camps and missions to assist in the delivery of babies at a time when Aboriginal women were not permitted access to hospitals or medical professionals.*

*Nanny Nora Charles participated in the Cummeragunja walk off and lived on 'The Flats' on the Goulburn River located between Mooroopna and Shepparton where she continued to deliver babies as a midwife. Nanny Nora would later become a resident within the town of Shepparton where she continued to support the local Aboriginal community. She died at the age of 89.*

*Left: Goulburn Valley Wall Mural of Indigenous Elders  
Artist: Matt Adnate*





## Acknowledgement

The VicWater Board and Victorian water corporations' Chairs acknowledge the work undertaken by the VicWater Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee in the development of this strategy. This would not have been possible without the support of VicWater and the water corporation Managing Directors who have made staff available for the Steering Committee and have been actively engaged in the development of the Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2019-2023).

Created by  
Victorian Water Industry Association - Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee



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## Our context

There are nineteen government owned water corporations in Victoria that provide a range of water, irrigation and sewerage services to rural and urban customers across Victoria. These services significantly contribute to public health, economic activity, healthy environments, irrigation and agriculture production and productivity, and sustainable water resource management and licensing enabling our communities to carry out their business and lives.

The Victorian government has provided strong leadership for the water sector on the benefits of having diverse workforces and inclusive workplace cultures. The appointment of gender-balanced boards is a significant and important commitment. In November 2016, the Minister for Water endorsed the first Water Industry Diversity Strategy.

As a collective, the Chairs and Managing Directors of the Victorian water corporations recognise the importance of having a diverse workforce, reflecting the diversity of the communities in which we work and live.

The Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2019-2023) has been developed as our commitment to build diverse workforces with inclusive cultures across the Victorian water sector.

All of the Victorian water corporations have committed to this strategy.



## Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

The Minister, Chairs, Directors, Managing Directors and staff within the Victorian water sector are 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 that include individuals from a range of backgrounds lead to better outcomes for our business and sector. These backgrounds include gender, age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, cultural and linguistic background, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability status, and those who are carers. When organisations reflect the diversity of their customers and community, they gain greater insight into and connection with their customers. The diversity of thinking, skillsets and perspectives that comes with this diversity is linked to improved problem-solving and decision-making, and enhanced innovation and creativity, contributing to a high-performing water sector.

The Victorian water corporations recognise and embrace the diversity each person brings to the workplace, and we work to build an inclusive culture within the water industry. 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. We also know that we can only capitalise on the benefits of diversity if we grow an inclusive culture within the water industry; a culture where all employees feel they belong and are enabled to make valuable contributions.



Through embracing diversity we also make a significant contribution to helping our communities be more liveable, equitable, safe and more inclusive places for everyone. There are many important wider societal benefits from embracing diversity and inclusion, such as: the positive impact that gender equity in the workplace has on the prevention of family and domestic violence in our community; the flow-on benefits of increasing participation of people with disability in the workforce; the increased participation of our indigenous population in jobs within the sector and their economic outcomes.

This commitment is more than just words. In the last 15 months the Victorian water sector has made significant progress at a rapid pace. Our progress is summarised in the annual Water Industry Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Report, which demonstrates a strong commitment and rate of change across the sector.

# Our commitment to change

The approach embraced and supported by the Victorian water corporations is to collaborate to build capacity, measure performance, influence change and embed culture.

Equity, diversity and inclusion is being addressed at every level from a whole of industry approach, to actions delivered by individual Victorian water corporations.

The government has achieved a gender balance (53% female) for Directors on Boards. Victorian water corporations' Chairs and Managing Directors have committed to achieving a number of diversity targets by 2020, and all corporations have developed and are implementing their own Diversity and Inclusion Strategies, with significant achievements being delivered.

The Victorian water corporations have formed a Water Industry Diversity Steering Committee, which includes representation from every water corporation.

During the 2017 Water Reform Review by the Productivity Commission, the VicWater submission provided advice about the improvements in productivity and customer benefits from embracing equity, diversity and inclusion. This illustrates our commitment to leading the Australian water sector.





# Our targets

While each water corporation will have their own targets to reflect their local community, by 2023 we aim for the collective workforce of our sector to be:

- Gender balance (50:50) in senior leadership positions.
- 10% of our workforce identify as a person with disability
- 20% of our workforce speak a language other than English
- 3% of our workforce identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- 35% of our workforce identify as carers, with caring responsibilities for children, elderly family, a person with disability or other caring responsibility.
- 7% of our workforce identify as belonging to the LGBTI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) communities
- Flexible work arrangements are available to all employees unless there is a specific operational constraint
- 35% of employees work flexibly (through informal and formal flexible working arrangements)\*

\*flexible work arrangements include changes to work days, times and locations of work. Formal arrangements might include regularly working from an alternative location, part time work, 9-day fortnight, purchased leave and time off in lieu. Informal arrangements include changes to start and finish times and work locations on an irregular or ad-hoc basis.

*Top Right: West Warrnambool Water Tower  
Photo: Amanda Hennessy*



targets

As an industry we are seeking to understand and reflect as best as possible our diverse community, and understand that different water corporations will have different community profiles. For example some water corporations may have a community with higher than 20% Language Other Than English (LOTE), and this difference may be reflected in their individual diversity strategy or plan.



# Our framework for an equitable, diverse and inclusive workforce

## Guiding principals

- We are committed to enabling equity within the industry, understanding that some individuals and groups within Victoria experience sustained disadvantage or systemic barriers to gaining employment and progressing within organisations.
- We are committed to growing an inclusive water industry, which recognises and seeks to manage unconscious biases and stereotypes, and where everyone, regardless of background, feels they belong and can make meaningful contributions.
- As the Victorian water industry, we strive to be a leader in equity, diversity and inclusion.
- We take a whole of industry approach to supporting and embedding practices that support equity, diversity and inclusion, through collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

## Why grow an equitable, diverse and inclusive water sector?

- Organisations with higher levels of demographic diversity experience greater innovation and improved decision-making.
- Industries and organisations that are viewed as equitable, diverse and inclusive are better-placed to attract diverse talent.
- Organisations that reflect the diversity of the communities they serve gain greater insights into their customer's and community needs.
- Recognising barriers to employment and seeking to address these has broader benefits for our communities and society.

## What we plan to achieve

- We increase the diversity of our workforce to better reflect our communities and seek to retain our diverse talent.
- We leverage our diverse workforce through growing an inclusive culture, to improve our innovation and performance as a sector.

## How we plan to achieve this

- We build our reputation as an industry committed to equity, diversity and inclusion, to enable us to attract diverse talent.
- We leverage our collective knowledge, connect and collaborate across the industry.
- We develop new pathways into and within the industry, particularly for groups that experience barriers to employment.
- We gather and report on industry-wide data to enable evidence-based decision making and tracking of progress over time.
- We look for opportunities to form partnerships to build on opportunities that embrace inclusion.



## Reporting and review

The Victorian water industry Diversity Steering Committee will continue to meet on a quarterly basis to share knowledge and support progress against the commitments made within this strategy. The group will review the objectives and make recommendations to the VicWater Board and Victorian water corporations' Chairs to ensure that the objectives continue to remain relevant and achievable for the industry. The group will also identify and share best practice approaches and measures from all industries.

The Steering Committee will report to water corporation Chairs on performance and progress in delivering the strategy on an annual basis. The Chairs will use this information to report to the Minister and Departmental Secretary on progress made.

The Victorian water corporations will provide the requested data to enable reporting on an annual basis, by the end of each calendar year.

The strategy will be reviewed and updated annually with progress reported to the Minister and Chairs. 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 due for release in February 2020.

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