



East Gippsland **Water**

East Gippsland Water: Customer Consultation Stage 2

Report

July 2016

Insync Surveys Pty Ltd
ABN 58 108 768 958

www.insyncsurveys.com.au

Melbourne
Level 7, 91 William Street
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
Tel +61 3 9909 9209
Fax +61 3 9614 4460

Sydney
Level 20, 15 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000 Australia
Tel +61 2 8081 2000
Fax +61 2 9955 8929

Postal Address
PO Box 16107
Collins Street West
Melbourne VIC 8007
Australia

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Summary of key findings

The findings in this report are based on the responses of 63 participants in peer research conducted by the East Gippsland Water Customer Committee and East Gippsland Water (EGW) staff with the support of Insync. The project was conducted between 18 April and 12 July 2016.

EGW's Customer Committee sought a methodology that would be 'a conversation with the community' in diverse locations in the region, and were willing and enthusiastic to be hands-on peer researchers.

The findings are based on a discussion guide developed as the framework for the conversation, focused on four main areas: Service levels, Hardship, Sustainability and Liveability.

Service levels

The data revealed that respondents were unanimous that service levels should be maintained. Respondents perceived that a reduction in service could affect water quality and favoured the current pricing being maintained. A reasonably large number said they would not be affected if they stopped receiving paper bills.

There was reference to local employment and its value to the area in many interviews, as well as appreciation of local customer service.

Hardship

This area of investigation was contentious. Firstly, many people were not aware that EGW had hardship provisions. Those who had been on payment plans were very positive about them.

Respondents were divided on whether or not they would willingly pay extra on their bills to support those in hardship. Even some of those who were in favour were in two minds. A good number were willing to pay. They spoke of community good, of the low socio-demographic of East Gippsland, and of 'levelling the playing field'. Some specified that it should be a minimal amount that they would not notice. However there was a fairly high degree of misgiving that people would take advantage of the system, get something for nothing, and 'crying poor'

Sustainability

Respondents varied in their perceptions of what EGW's level of effort on sustainability should be. A few did not support the idea. Some simply indicated broad support, while others highlighted that EGW's future investment in this area was important for them as customers for reasons of: the particular environmental qualities of East Gippsland; climate change; maintaining the catchment for an enduring water supply; energy saving; seeking leadership from EGW; population growth; and tourism.

For community projects, the majority of respondents wished to see a demonstrated cost benefit for EGW's investment.

Liveability

The respondents provided a uniquely East Gippsland perspective on liveability as a mix of family, community and environment. For numerous respondents EGW's core role of providing water and sewage services was felt to be basic to liveability. At the same time many ideas came forward about EGW's potential contribution in this area, the majority of which would be the responsibility of other organisations and agencies.

A number of areas stand out as recommended focus areas for further research through broad scale quantitative methods:

- Testing of areas of high consensus in Stage 1 especially around Service Levels
- Hardship
- Sustainability
- Liveability

Introduction and methods

New ESC requirements

East Gippsland Water (EGW) is preparing for its Price Submission, to take effect in July 2018. Areas covered in the plan will include investments, priorities and levels of service to customers, each of which will be reflected in prices for water and sewerage services. EGW understands the importance of engaging with its community to gain an understanding of the views and expectations of customers before decisions are made on proposed prices. In the April 2016 update Victoria's Economic Regulator, the Essential Services Commission (ESC) highlights that it strongly encourages engagement with the community, moving from an early exploration of issues in the plan to later stages exploring specific issues.

The ESC has foreshadowed that it will consider water corporations' price submissions in the light of:

- **When** they began to engage with the community (early or late in the process)
- **How deeply** they engaged with the community (simple voting or genuinely trying to understand preferences and values) and
- The **breadth** of topics open for discussion (for example, just a few projects or the entire expenditure plan)

EGW has approached this project aware of the ESC's requirements, and with a strong willingness to bring the regulator into its process. This positions EGW as a community-oriented organisation, open to dialogue.

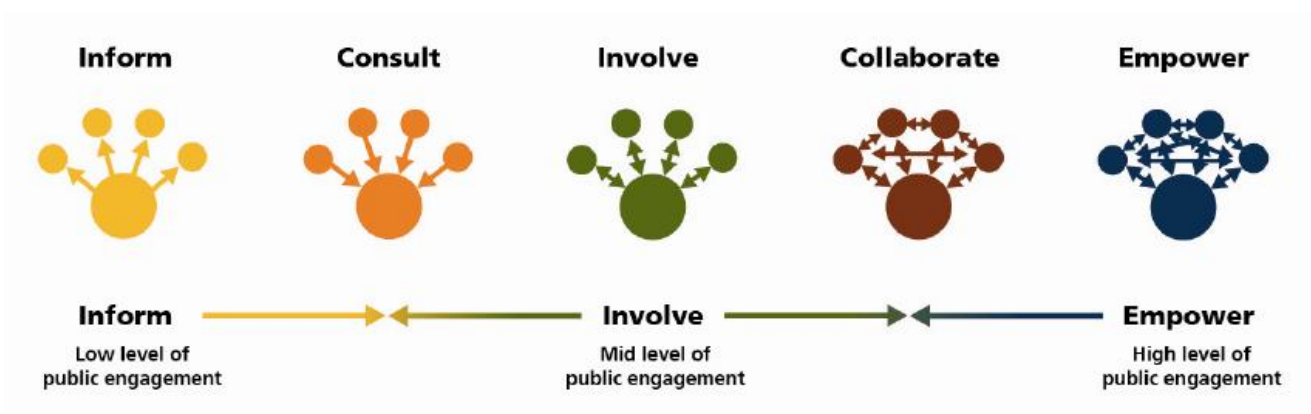
Through its 2013 Memorandum of Understanding with neighbouring water corporation Gippsland Water, EGW was able to leverage Gippsland Water's Customer Engagement Research. This cooperation creates efficiencies and mutual benefit, as the two water corporations look to the future needs of their customers.

Method: Collaborate

EGW serves a rural/regional community. EGW seeks to be accountable to them. As a rural/regional water corporation it cannot be faceless and remote. It has invested in the development of its Customer Committee (CC) over the past two years. The CC fits well in the Collaborate area of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum, with quality two-way communication between the organisation and CC members, and as exemplified by its community Chair who leads meetings. EGW's 'promise' (IAP2 Engagement Spectrum) is

to look to the CC for advice and community-facing innovating in getting to solutions, and to take into account its advice in decision-making.

As such the EGW CC has been well placed to guide the development of a project in the Collaborate area of the IAP2 spectrum for the Stage 2 engagement customer engagement. Members are networked within the structure of a large geographical community, from Bairnsdale to Mallacoota. Further, they bring relevant professional and life experience skills that fit them for collaboration with the water utility and its community on a project intended to bring future community benefit.



The CC were integral to the Stage 1 engagement, which consisted of conversations with a small and diverse group of customers. They took up a number of roles in this engagement including: advocating for a particular style of engagement, that is a ‘conversation with the community’; contributing to a stakeholder and community engagement matrix; providing critical feedback on the engagement guide; undertaking peer research (see Method below); and giving feedback on the report.



Figure 1: CC members: Noel Weston, Tricia Hiley, Lou Verde, Domenic Zappia (chairperson). Absent: Bill Phillips, Laila Bertelli and Carolyn Fowler.

The process adopted by EGW and the CC with support from Insync is shown below.



Customer Committee engagement

The CC expressed a strong interest in being involved with the Stage 2 engagement in a hands on way. They highlighted the following:

- The framework for discussion should not be reductionist
- The notion of interviews as 'hosted conversations'
- The importance of sewage being given the same profile as water

Based on the CC's willingness for hands-on involvement, and EGW's willingness collaborate, the method adopted for the project was peer research.

What is peer research?

Peer research is a form of participatory research. Key benefits are that it is a bottom up approach with the community interviewing the community. A number of CC members could comfortably undertake the task of being 'peer researchers' in the project. Further, some EGW staff members were also willing to explore the role of peer researcher.

The peer research approach is innovative in the Victorian context, enabling a critical community perspective on EGW's sewage and water services from the outset.

Developing the engagement guide

The CC defined a key criterion for the success of the project as 'a conversation with the community'. Step one in developing the guide was to seek an engagement approach that allowed for this style of interaction, that would at the same time yield worthwhile, semi-structured data. The approach selected to enable these two dimensions is ORID, a conversation facilitation approach that brings about dialogue and at the same time focuses conversations.

ORID's format is structured around four question types:

- Objective
- Reflective
- Interpretive
- Decisional

One of the advantages of this method for the purposes of this project is that it enables rational discussion in a staged process that draws on understandings of facts and external reality, invites personal reflections and draws out values, significance and implications. In other words rushing to judgement is avoided.

Leverage from Gippsland Water Research

Using desk research, relevant material from the Gippsland Water customer research and input from EGW, a draft engagement guide was developed.

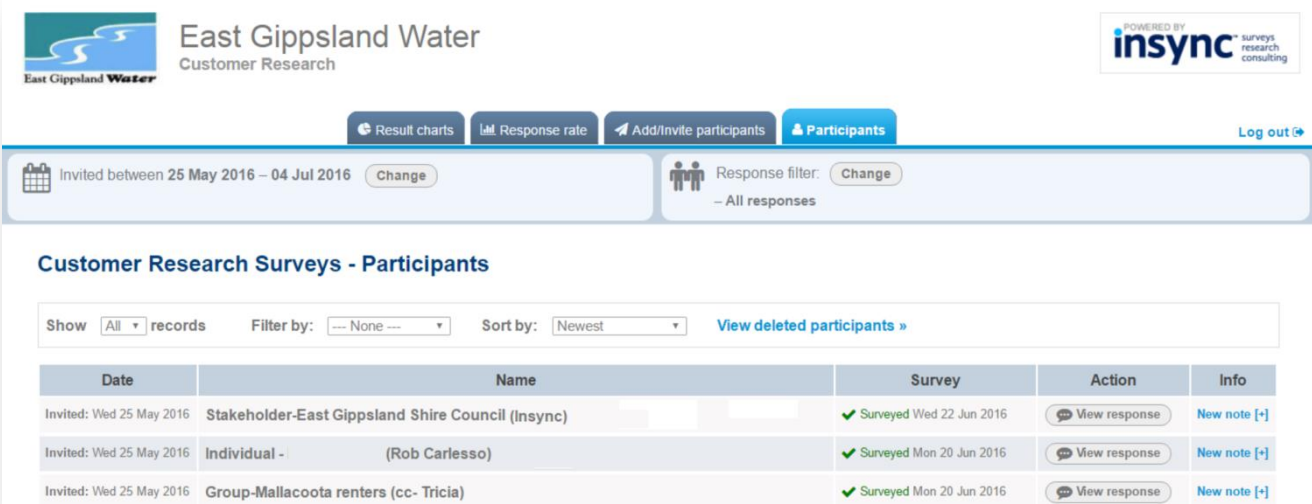
Gippsland Water's research provided value by illustrating that there are a number of things that most customers agree on, such as the importance of safe drinking water, reliable service, a low effort relationship (minimal contact required), and prompt response to leaks and faults. The research also highlighted areas of contention that require more in depth investigation. These areas were: hardship, sustainability and service levels.

The discussion guide aimed to take forward the areas described above while also investigating liveability, which is an area of interest to EGW.

EGW and the CC provided a critical review of the guide that led to revisions, for example of the wording of the question about EGW's investment in sustainability.

Portal development

Once the discussion guide was finalised, Insync built a portal (shown below) into which data could be submitted. This enabled all research data to be consolidated in real time, overcoming issues of distance, such as various peer interviewers being at significant distance from the EGW headquarters in Bairnsdale.



The screenshot shows the 'Customer Research Surveys - Participants' page. At the top, there are navigation tabs for 'Result charts', 'Response rate', 'Add/invite participants', and 'Participants'. Below these are filters for 'Invited between 25 May 2016 - 04 Jul 2016' and 'Response filter: All responses'. The main content area features a table with the following data:

Date	Name	Survey	Action	Info
Invited: Wed 25 May 2016	Stakeholder-East Gippsland Shire Council (Insync)	✓ Surveyed Wed 22 Jun 2016	View response	New note [+]
Invited: Wed 25 May 2016	Individual - (Rob Carlesso)	✓ Surveyed Mon 20 Jun 2016	View response	New note [+]
Invited: Wed 25 May 2016	Group-Mallacoota renters (cc- Tricia)	✓ Surveyed Mon 20 Jun 2016	View response	New note [+]

Figure 2: Screenshot of data portal.

Quality control

A key concern for EGW was quality control. To this end, training was provided for CC members and EGW staffers.

Insync conducted an hour-long training by phone with potential peer researchers, highlighting quality control and consistency of approach. In particular all trainees were shown the benefits and pitfalls of a peer research approach. For example interviewees' familiarity with a local would lead to a comfortable atmosphere and good insights (benefit. At the same time familiarity with the interviewer and shared experience, could lead interviewees to be chatty and go off track (pitfall). The importance of following the discussion guide was emphasised, as this provided a detailed manual for conducting the research.

EGW decided that having a three person team in the room: community peer researcher, EGW staffer and operations worker would enhance quality as well. This would provide the opportunity for staffers to be out in the community listening, and for interviewees to have the local operations person on hand.

The training stressed peer researchers and EGW staffers being clear about their roles, and the importance of reflective practice between all members of the team.

An Insync researcher travelled to Bairnsdale to undertake the two days of customer engagement. This enabled peer researchers to see the process in action, and also enabled all peer researchers to pilot the engagement guide.

Social Media

EGW conducted a modest social media campaign during the course of Stage 2 comprising four Facebook posts:

- East Gippsland Youth Ambassadors
- Announcement of customer engagement
- Two posts on the Engagement Guide's Liveability question: *How can we contribute to making our great region an even better place to live and visit?* and *What are your thoughts on us providing locations for people to undertake bird watching?*



Figure 3: Example facebook post by EGW.

Recruitment

Twenty-four conversations were held, with a total of 63 participants attending.

Recruitment highlights

The sample size achieved a wide breadth of customer engagement. EGW made recruiting a diverse sample a high priority, and their efforts are reflected in the locational, age, gender, interest group and cultural characteristics of the sample:

- Orbst Senior Citizens Centre Inc
- Moogji Aboriginal Council
- East Gippsland United Football (Soccer) Club
- Private Businesses (Crowther and Sadler; Crossco Consulting)

- Noweyung disability services
- Mallacoota Senior Citizens
- Mallacoota residents living in rental properties
- Small businesses in Mallacoota
- Bairnsdale Neighbourhood House
- Nagle College staff and year 9 students
- Patties Foods
- Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative
- East Gippsland Shire Council - Mayor
- East Gippsland Shire Council - Deputy Mayor
- Lakes Entrance Action and Development Association
- East Gippsland Shire Council Youth Ambassadors
- Rotary Club of Lakes Entrance
- East Gippsland Historical Society
- Storytime Parents and Childrens group
- Two individual water customers

The successful recruitment of three Indigenous organisations enabled dialogue and worthwhile learning.

Further, word of EGW's engagement with customers spread in the community, and led to people asking to participate. EGW chose not to engage outside their chosen demographics during this phase, letting these people know there would be opportunities in the future. This focused approach enabled more in-depth analysis of the respondent's feedback.

Recruitment challenges

The project group sought to engage with the widest possible breadth of customer representatives. Customers were mainly engaged at their meeting or work place or during a specific activity. Discussions were arranged to best suit the customers' circumstances without unnecessarily imposing on their time. The diversity of customers meant flexibility with meetings from attendance at a Storytime reading group, neighbourhood centres through to a Youth Ambassadors meeting.

Despite on-going efforts throughout the fieldwork stage of the project, the project group were unable to engage with every target group. For example, the project hoped to speak to customers on their experiences and knowledge of how people deal with bills and hardship. Two financial counselling organisations were contacted but no customers offered to speak with EGW. Additionally, they also hoped to target hospital employees and parents from a child minding group, thinking that they would engage with a young parent customer and/or professional in a young-mid age group. However, no relevant individuals expressed interest.

Interestingly, EGW also experienced some circumstances where customers, particularly those over 55 years, had to be respectfully declined despite their overwhelmingly generous urge to participate in discussions.

Of particular note was the concerted effort to engage with a farmer in Orbost. The two appointments arranged to hold discussion on their farm could not proceed due to their involvement in caring for family and farm as a result of major rainfall causing flooding at their farm.

Findings

EGW Service

The largest majority of customers understood EGW's service to consist of water and sewerage services, with few referring to water only. A small minority needed coaching on what EGW does. A proportion of customers understood customer service or 'serving the community' to be part of the water company's service. Finally, one interviewee included engagement in stakeholder relationships as a component of EGW's service.

Of the range of examples of service components provided by interviewers, not many respondents saw one thing as most prominent. However some standouts were:

- EGW's local staffing, and
- Education provided by EGW.

In addition, one interviewee highlighted the importance of affordability of water for particular community members.

With the same list, interviewees were asked if any areas were not important. Several gave the response 'paper bills'. One interviewee highlighted that he uses water on a 'need to know' basis, saying 'Please don't tell me what I don't need to know'.

Service levels

There was an unanimous view that service levels should be maintained. Further individual respondents said:

- a reduction in service could affect water quality
- they would like the current pricing to be maintained, and
- it would be okay to stop receiving paper bills.

There was reference to local employment and its value to the area in many interviews, as well as appreciation of local customer service.

"I wouldn't pay less for a reduced service. As a builder and an owner of a business I know you pay for what you get."

"Local staffing is very important - using metro people to answer local questions is dangerous. EGW is a key contributor to local jobs."

Responsibility to communicate change

Many customers spoke strongly about EGW's obligations in notifying their customer base of any change to the way they deliver any of their services. They highlighted quality communication, hard copy letters, website and email notifications, social media, newspaper, TV and notifying via the bill. Notice well in advance was seen to be important. However one person noted that she might not notice if EGW took away the local call centre since she doesn't call them now.

Hardship

Many people were not aware that EGW had hardship provisions. Some had made use of being on a payment plan and found that extremely helpful.

Respondents were divided on whether or not they would willingly pay extra on their bills to support those in hardship. Even some of those who were in favour were in two minds. One person highlighted that this question is a moral one, which made it 'tricky'. A good number were willing to pay. They spoke of community good, of the low socio-demographic of East Gippsland, and of 'levelling the playing field'. Some specified that it should be a minimal amount that they would not notice.

However there was a fairly high degree of misgiving that people would take advantage of the system, get something for nothing, and 'crying poor'. There were a very significant number of responses to the effect that today it is a user pays society, with the suggestion that support programs should not be required since people must take responsibility for themselves.

Many people sought clarification on EGW's hardship criteria, and the level of increase being sought. Some who were aware of the circumstances in which people ran up large water bills suggested complex reasons for this. At the same time there was a suggestion that it would be helpful to demonstrate volumetric use through pictures and diagrams.

There were suggestions that financial support to enable hardship provisions should come from other avenues, mostly 'the government'.

One or two respondents highlighted that this extra amount would impact those with multiple properties.

Finally respondents between 18-25 who would most likely not have water bills themselves were most likely to state that people should have the right to access water.

"Could be minimal. Just a couple of dollars, then I'd be happy to help. But EGW is a corporation, a service provider, not a charity."

"I would not be a happy customer."

"It is providing a benefit to society. It's being proactive. There shouldn't be any disadvantages."

"How this scenario would affect me would depend on how much extra I had to pay on my bill."

"I don't see any advantages, I only see the disadvantage of having to pay more."

Sustainability

Things that stood out for respondents about EGW putting effort into sustainability were:

- EGW's legislative, strategic responsibility for this
- EGW leadership, especially on renewable energy
- The legacy for future generations
- Access to the same level of services under a scenario of population growth and development
- Sites such as Macleod Morass and Bruce's Track

- The financial risk of not putting in the effort
- Maintaining a balance of vision and cost

The spectrum of ideas about sustainability ranged from broad ideas such as making sure that assets do not decline and being 'responsible to the environment' to sewerage water recycling and reducing energy use. Some wished to see EGW looking at ways of making the water delivery and sewerage more sustainable.

However respondents varied in their perceptions of what EGW's level of effort on sustainability should be. A few did not support the idea. Some simply indicated broad support, while others highlighted that EGW's future investment in this area was important for them as customers for reasons of:

- The particular environmental qualities of East Gippsland
- Climate change
- Maintaining the catchment for an enduring water supply
- The needs of future generations to access as good a water supply as the one customers enjoy today
- Energy saving
- Wanting leadership from EGW
- Population growth eg in Paynesville
- Tourism

On the question of whether EGW should fund community projects in this area there was mixed response, with some welcoming the idea, and others speaking strongly for assessment of the cost benefit. A co-funding arrangement was seen as appropriate, with the community responsible to foot some of the bill.

Liveability

Liveability is a broad and general concept, and has largely been framed as an issue for urban settings. Since Stage 2 was framed as a qualitative exploration, EGW decided to include a question on the topic. There was no expectation that responses would pin down what liveability is, but rather that it might draw out a general feel of what liveability means to a rural/regional person in Victoria. Further, some probing might lead to a greater understanding of what water contributes to this.

The range of responses was wide and thoughtful. Family, community and environment all featured as significant values for respondents, as shown on the word map below. Other dimensions relating to water, health and wellbeing were also frequently mentioned.

For numerous respondents EGW's core role of providing water and sewage services was felt to be basic to liveability. For example some noted the importance of a good water supply and maintenance of infrastructure. One highlighted how much difference moving from on-site systems to a sewage service can make.

At the same time many ideas came forward about EGW's potential contribution in this area: sponsorship and support of community gardens; water parks; promoting the region; partnership in environmental projects; creating a man-made lake; helping neighbourhood houses and so on.



Other findings

Communicating the EGW message

An outstanding finding from this stage of the customer engagement is the degree to which customers wish to see EGW do more to communicate its work.

One respondent stated: *Your problem is that you're hidden.*



A significant number of respondents suggested informative public signage at the Morass, and more water play areas in the region.

The value of 'In the Flow' in its current form was queried by one respondent who suggested it should provide highlights that are quicker to read. Those respondents who reported reading it on a regular basis were males over 55 years old.

Many respondents spoke about a digitized, social media oriented society, and some specifically highlighted the value of EGW actively seeking followers on its Facebook page, and using the page interactively with non-print based communicators. One interviewee suggested EGW changing its name to include the word sewage, to make this element of its mandate visible.

Insights from Operations staff

Several interviews were held with Operations staff who observed interviewees to learn about their insights. This revealed that bringing them into the interviews brought them closer to the customers they serve. They were proud to learn how much their work is appreciated by customers. *It was interesting to hear what customers had to say. It makes you a bit proud to work for EGW.*

Further, they validated research findings, for example, on service levels: *People didn't really want change.* With regard to responses to the Hardship question: *Question came up how's that means tested. Don't want the dole bludger.*

This dimension of the research revealed the value of a skilled informed workforce that delivers timely well communicated service to the community.

The operations staff were also asked: How do you feel the interviews prepare EGW for the pricing submission?

"I think the customer engagement is essential – and that's a lot of the feedback we got. I think it's essential to know what customers want. It can steer company direction though we are restricted as a regulated industry. The ESC will be looking at EGW's individual needs but also across the whole industry. It'll depend on their priorities, and what drives them."

Recommendations for further research

EGW as an organisation is intending to influence the ESC to understand its specific priorities based on strong customer engagement. The findings from the Stage 2 Customer Engagement highlight clear areas of focus for wider customer feedback with specific questions Stage 3.

Analysis of the Stage 2 engagement has brought forward three recommended focus areas. The methodology for the next stage will be ascertained through further discussion.

The areas which stand out as recommended focus areas for further research are:

- Hardship
- Sustainability
- Liveability

Suggested items for quantitative measurement

The following draft items have been developed for use with an agreement scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Items intended to confirm qualitative findings:

- I don't want to have to think about my water/wastewater services
- Having a local person answer my call at East Gippsland Water is important
- Prompt response to leaks and faults is essential
- Communications, such as the newsletter, are an important source of information about my water/wastewater service
- I do not want any reduction in the quality of service provided by East Gippsland Water

Items relevant to focus areas:

- East Gippsland Water should provide funding for community projects featuring environmental innovation (E.g. stormwater harvesting, and wastewater recycling)
- East Gippsland Water should show environmental leadership in the region
- East Gippsland Water should pursue large scale renewable energy projects
- I want to use East Gippsland Water customer services online as it's most convenient for me
- I support East Gippsland Water being more efficient by not providing paper bills
- I support East Gippsland Water assisting people in a difficult financial situation through hardship policies
- I support East Gippsland Water providing discounts to customers who are legitimately in need of help
- East Gippsland Water's support of the community through education and other avenues should continue

Appendices:

Appendix A: Invitation to training

You're invited to take part in training for peer research

Background

In the first phase of its investigation into customer views, East Gippsland Water is working with Customer Committee (CC) members as peer researchers. The CC has assigned interviews to different members who will 'host conversations' with individuals and community representatives. The research will be based on a discussion guide provided by Insync who will provide a training session on gathering information and using the Insync portal. The training is a key aspect of ensuring quality, consistent research data.

Agenda

- Who's in the room
- Task overview for peer researchers
- Role clarification: peer researchers, EGW – coordinator and support staff, Insync
- Framing the discussion
- Discussion questions and Q/A
- Portal Q/A
- Review and close

Portal details

In order to access the portal on your computer you will need to [Laura]

Look forward to seeing you there:

Date:

Time:

Annie Bolitho

Laura Dainton Smith

Appendix B: Discussion guide

Rationale

The draft discussion guide covers four areas that have emerged from Insync's research, including their recent project with Gippsland Water as requiring further investigation, as well as one suggested by East Gippsland Water (EGW):

1. Service levels
2. Hardship
3. Environmental sustainability
4. Liveability

Conversational style: The discussion approach preferred by the EGW Customer Committee (CC) is one that has a conversational style.

Semi-structured approach: The material generated by the discussions or conversations needs to feed into a portal, and follow a reasonably consistent approach to enable robust analysis.

The method selected to enable these two dimensions is ORID, a conversation facilitation approach that brings about dialogue and at the same time focuses conversations.

ORID's format is structured around four question types:

- Objective
- Reflective
- Interpretive
- Decisional

One of the advantages of this method for the purposes of this project is that it enables rational discussion in a staged process that draws on understandings of facts and external reality, invites personal reflections and draws out values, significance and implications. In other words rushing to judgement is avoided.

Discussion guide

Opening:

[Establishing context]

EGW plans ahead on its investments, priorities and levels of service to customers so that it can set prices that are fair and reflect the costs of provision. This process is overseen by the state government's economic regulator, the Essential Services Commission. Their role is to make sure that EGW doesn't charge any more than is necessary and that EGW's plans reflect community priorities.

Some things we know already are that:

- Customers want their tap water to be perfectly safe to drink at all times. They also want:

- Dealing with their water corporation to be easy and low effort
- Prompt response to leaks and faults
- Reliable service (water and sewerage)

1. What do you think of those points? Do you agree with them?

(Portal will enable us to capture yes/no responses and comments for each)

There are some things we'd like to understand better, and we have four questions we'd like to explore with you.

1. Would you accept a reduced level of service if it meant you got a cheaper bill?
2. Would you be willing to pay slightly more on your bill so that East Gippsland Water can better support other customers in a difficult financial situation?
3. How much effort should East Gippsland Water put into environmental sustainability?
4. Some of the money you pay EGW is used to fund things that improve liveability for the whole community. What are important things in the town or region that make your place liveable?

Which question stands out for you?*

**Optional: Conversation leaders should start with this question to empower the respondent to start with something that is meaningful to them.*

Is there one in particular that you would like to discuss first?

What's interesting about it? What made it stand out to you?

Proceed to relevant question.

2. Would you accept a reduced level of service if it meant you got a cheaper bill?

A. What is your understanding of what EGWs service consists of?

Here are some examples of service, and ways in which EGW could save money.

For example, EGW spends money replacing or upgrading pipes and pumps before they break and cause spills/disruptions. EGW could save money by slowing down these replacements, but there would be more spills and more incidents where your water supply is not available than there are at the moment

Another example is the money EGW spends on their call centre. At the moment they are well staffed by local people and answer calls promptly. Reducing the hours of operation would save some money but it might cause inconvenience. Automating systems would be efficient and not require longer times to attend to issues, but would involve reducing staff.

Another good example is that EGW has staff on stand-by so they can respond to leaks and bursts within a certain timeframe, both during and after business hours. EGW could save money on after-hours response to faults, but customers would have to put up with longer disruptions and spills or leaks.

Another example is EGW doesn't have a separate charge for paper bills. It could save money by asking everyone to accept online bills and charging more for paper bills. This would save money overall, but it would adversely impact customers who didn't have email, and these customers are more likely than average to be in financial hardship.

A final example is the money EGW spends on education and environmental programs, such as tours and presentations, and other community involvement such as the EGW water trailer at events and water fountains. These are all paid for out of your bills (insert total amount per customer **per bill** if possible), so EGW could reduce service and save you some money.

- B. What do you think of these examples? Are there any that stand out to you as particularly important?
- C. Are any of these areas not important to you?
- D. Would you prefer lesser service as outlined in any of these examples if it meant more savings for you?
- E. What do you see as EGW's responsibilities to you as a customer if they decide to change the way they deliver any of the examples we've talked about?

3. Would you be willing to pay slightly more on your bill so that East Gippsland Water can better support other customers in a difficult financial situation?

- A. What is the first thing that comes to you about this question?
- B. How does the scenario sit with you?
- C. What surprises you about this question?
- D. How do you think this scenario would affect you as a customer?
- E. What are advantages and disadvantages?

3. How much effort should East Gippsland Water put into environmental sustainability?

- A. What word or phrase stands out for you in this question?
- B. How does this question affect you?
- C. What makes EGW's future plans important to you as a customer?
- D. Try and put yourself in the shoes of EGW. Why would you say they're interested in this question?
- E. What do you think about EGW and community organisations such as schools and sports groups co-funding environmental innovation such as stormwater harvesting, wastewater recycling?

4. Some of the money you pay EGW is used to fund things that improve liveability for the whole community. What are important things in your town or region that make it a nice place to live?

Interviewer: So [x] and [y] require water.

- A. These are just a few of the ways people at East Gippsland Water think about liveability: they value walking down tree lined streets, friendships in the workplace, gym and fitness activities, the Lakes what do you feel makes your town and region liveable?
- B. How do you see East Gippsland Water playing a role in contributing to liveability?
- C. Would you speak positively to others about EGW doing this?

Closing

Is there anything you need more info on?

Thank the respondent for their time and feedback.

Appendix C: Peer research training summary

1. Who's in the room.

All relevant people present.

2. Task overview for peer researchers

People who aren't experienced in research are often known as 'peer researchers'. We hope that with some training and a collaborative approach, there won't be too much nervousness, and that there will be good results.

- a. The peer researcher is conducting the conversation based on the discussion guide.
- b. The peer researcher is contributing to a collaborative reflection with the EGW people present, at the end of the meeting (see below).
- c. The first three peer researcher conducted conversations will be reviewed as a pilot, with Insync going through the portal material, and peer researchers being available briefly to discuss how it went.

Benefits of the approach

- d. Interviewers are at home in the place, and are likely to be comfortable with interviewees. This enables good insights.
- e. Interviewers are role models. Interviewees may think 'One day I'll join a committee like this and contribute to the community

Pitfalls of the approach

- f. Due to being familiar with the interviewer and having some shared experience, interviewees may be more chatty and go off track. Gently bring them back to topic.
- g. Interviewers may be tempted to ask questions in a leading way, thus influencing the interviewee's response. Be careful not to do this.

3. Role clarification

- a. Peer researcher is in charge of conducting the conversation. EG Water people hold back.
- b. EG Water admin person to take notes. Individuals not to be identified. #note Tricia not aware of EG Water staff role
- c. EG Water operations person to be the friendly face # note operational people will be on call and that is there priority
- d. All to spend 20 minutes in joint reflection. What came through the discussion? What were key insights? What was surprising? Together get to agreement on the salient points for the notes to be inputted.
- e. EG Water coordinator to be available to everyone when necessary, to note when meetings are to happen, and that they have happened

4. Framing the discussion

- a. As the peer researcher, you're opening up the topic. Introduce the discussion as per Opening in the discussion guide referring to EGW and the Essential Services Commission.

5. Discussion guide actions

- a. Laura to put in letters for the dot point questions in the guide.
- b. Dominic highlights that question 3 does not capture the CC's concerns. Revise question and provide to Insync
- c. Question 4: *improve liveability* to be re-phrased as 'make your town a nice place to live'.

6. Portal

- a. Laura to indicate which are the most important questions to capture data for.
 - b. Laura to provide print preview once changes to portal have been made.
- 7. In summary, to enable good practice
 - a. Keep in touch with the coordinator
 - b. Take time to explore main points collaboratively at the end of the interview
 - c. Enjoy the conversation