

WANNON WATER

Warrnambool Sewage Treatment Plant Effluent Management Strategy – Community Panel Summary Report

Giving every person a voice.

Capire Consulting Group
The Commons
Wurundjeri Country
Level 4, 54 Wellington Street
Collingwood VIC 3066
(03) 9285 9000

info@capire.com.au
capire.com.au

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Capire acknowledges the
Traditional Custodians of
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COMMUNITY PANEL SUMMARY REPORT, WANNON WATER II



PANEL OVERVIEW

This summary outlines the recommendations of the Community Panel (Panel) convened by Wannon Water in early 2025 to inform the long-term management of treated effluent at the Warrnambool Sewage Treatment Plant (STP).

Facilitated by Capire Consulting Group, the 12-member Panel deliberated across four sessions to provide clear guidance aligned with community values for managing more than 10 gigalitres of treated effluent annually over the next 50 years.

This report was written by Capire Consulting Group.

The Panel advised Wannon Water to prioritise long-term water security and water recycling, while in the short-term completing the current STP upgrades to enable future recycling opportunities.

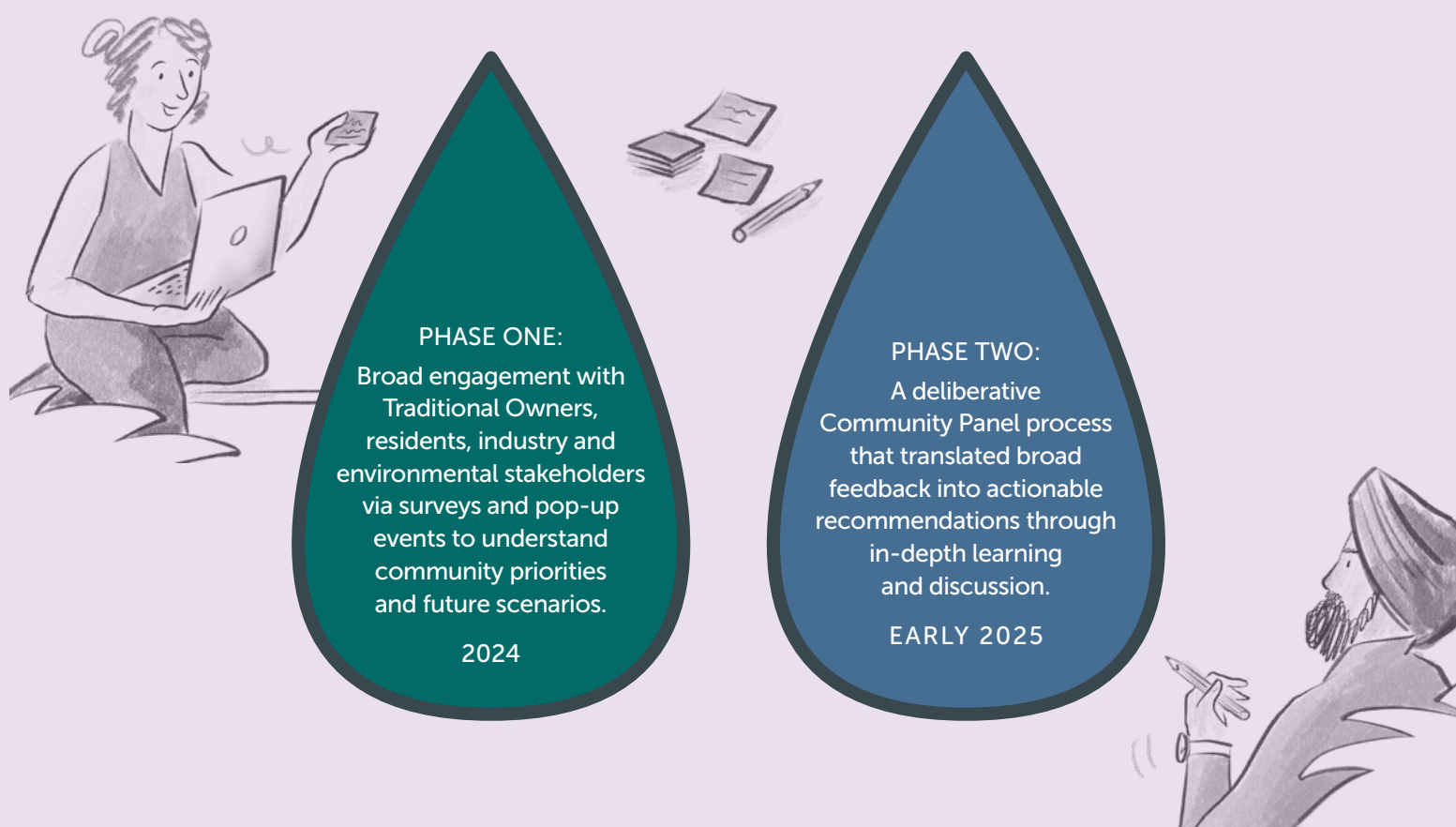
Other priorities included maintaining affordable water and sewerage services, and ensuring early, transparent communication to build trust and social licence. The Panel's input will directly shape Wannon Water's Effluent Management Strategy (EMS), ensuring it reflects community priorities, meets regulatory requirements and supports environmental best practice.

BACKGROUND

In 2018, Wannon Water secured Essential Services Commission funding for its largest-ever infrastructure project: Upgrading the Warrnambool STP.

As part of the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA Victoria) Development Licence (DL000300005), Wannon Water was required to consider different options for treated effluent management, including understanding and integrating community expectations.

To meet this requirement Wannon Water implemented a multi-phase engagement process:



PANEL APPROACH

The Community Panel brought together diverse community members including industry and environmental interests.

Operating at the 'Involve' level of the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, the Panel worked alongside Wannon Water to embed community values in future planning.

Across four sessions, the Panel:

- Received detailed background materials.
- Visited the STP site.
- Engaged with subject-matter experts from Wannon Water, Jacobs Engineering and the Clean Ocean Foundation.

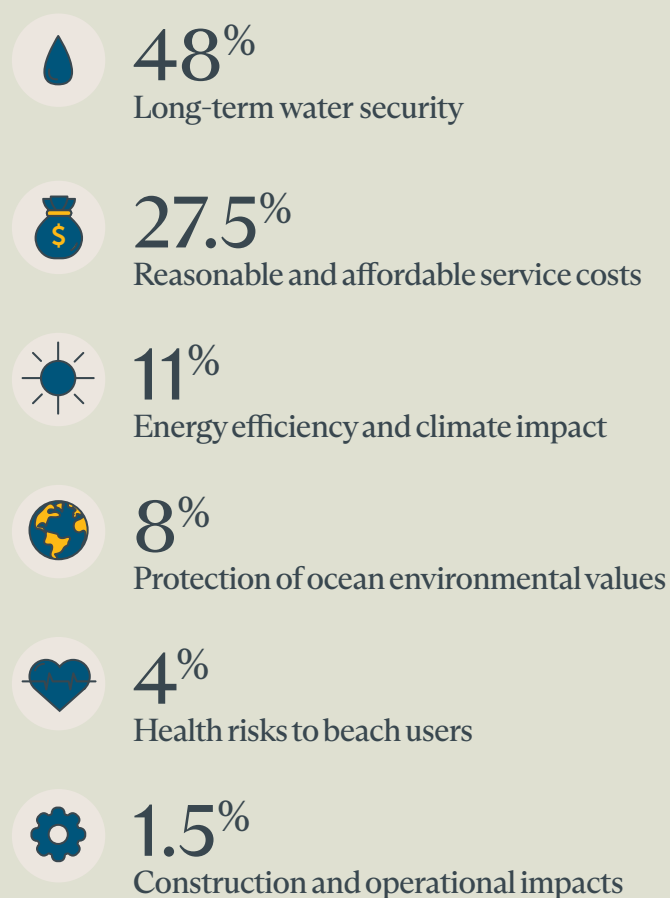
The Panel's task was to recommend priority criteria and evaluate management options for more than 10 gigalitres of treated effluent over 50 years – balancing environmental, public health, economic, social and technical factors.



Key Findings

PRIORITISATION OF CRITERIA

Panel members allocated 20 tokens across six criteria to indicate importance. The results were:



POSSIBLE LONG-TERM SCENARIOS

The Panel considered several scenarios that could influence treated effluent management:

Direct potable substitution permitted

Most Panel members were comfortable or very comfortable with the idea of drinking recycled water. Panel members suggested that public education, quality assurance and growing water scarcity could help increase community acceptance.

Current Victorian legislation does not permit reuse of effluent water for potable substitution.

Results of health monitoring

All Panel members agreed improving the quality of treated effluent to make swimming or diving safer near the ocean outfall is not an important priority.

Results of environmental monitoring

The Panel agreed it was acceptable that human impacts could change the environment (e.g. nutrient levels changing algae), providing it remains sustainable. They acknowledged that human impact on the marine environment cannot be avoided, including when we endeavour to minimise it.

OTHER SCENARIOS CONSIDERED INCLUDED:

Policy or legislative changes

Recommendation: Include in the EMS risk register and continue monitoring.

Global crises (e.g. pandemic)

Recommendation: Include in the EMS risk register, with Board-level mitigation planning.

key findings cont...

continued Key Findings

RANKING OF EFFLUENT MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

The Panel evaluated and ranked five effluent management options. After small group and whole-Panel discussions, the agreed ranking was:

- 1 Business as usual / upgrade the STP in the future while focusing on future recycled water options.
- 2 Wait for environmental investigations and the outcome of the current STP upgrade.
- 3 Invest in a major recycled water scheme.
- 4 Upgrade privately run trade waste facilities through trade waste agreements and/or co-investment at major trade waste customers.
- 5 Construct a longer pipeline to discharge treated effluent further offshore.

The Panel supported a flexible, staged approach that enables future recycling opportunities and minimises environmental impact - aligning with a broader vision of sustainability and regional water security.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The Panel discussed additional factors Wannon Water should consider in future planning:



Community education

Continue investing in community education, helping people understand the facts, opportunities and challenges around water into the future. Promote water conservation and responsible use (including what is put down the drain).



Trust and transparency

Wannon Water must continue to build community trust and transparency in its communications.



Young people

Involve young people in discussions about the future of water to build awareness and engagement.



Equity of water access

Ensure fair and equal access to water services for all community members.





RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Panel’s recommendations will directly inform Wannon Water’s Effluent Management Strategy.

Key actions arising from the Panel’s work include:



Implement further STP upgrades when changes to the treatment process is needed to meet public health and environmental requirements. These upgrades will enable future water recycling capabilities.



Developing an early and transparent community education program to build understanding and trust for recycled water.



Actively pursue water recycling initiatives when opportunities arise considering changes to legislation, and public health and environmental requirements.



Embedding long-term scenario monitoring and risk.

Wannon Water is committed to reporting back to the community on how these recommendations are adopted, reinforcing trust and accountability in its decision-making.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Wannon Water sincerely thanks all Community Panel members for their time, insights and commitment to this important process. Special thanks to Jacobs Engineering and the Clean Ocean Foundation for their valuable contributions and expertise throughout the process.

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