mosaicLAB

GIPPSLAND WATER SOUNDING BOARD

Community Value and Partnership

Summary report

August 2026

About this session

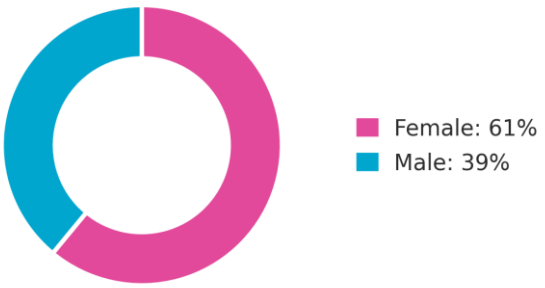
Every five years, Gippsland Water submits a plan to the Essential Services Commission, Victoria's independent regulator of water services, setting out the prices it will charge and the outcomes it will deliver. As part of preparing its 2028-33 Price Submission, Gippsland Water is engaging with its Sounding Board, a group of customers who have signed up to engage with Gippsland Water in more depth.

This Sounding Board session, held online on 5 August 2026, focused on community value and partnerships. It explored where Gippsland Water directs effort and investment beyond the essentials across its community and environmental initiatives, and gathering customer guidance on getting the balance right. This report is a summary of the session; for the full record of the discussion, please refer to the *Gippsland Water Customer Sounding Board – Community Value and Partnerships – What was said report*.

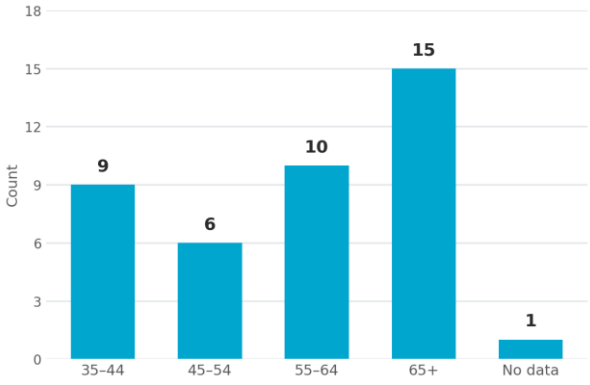
Who took part

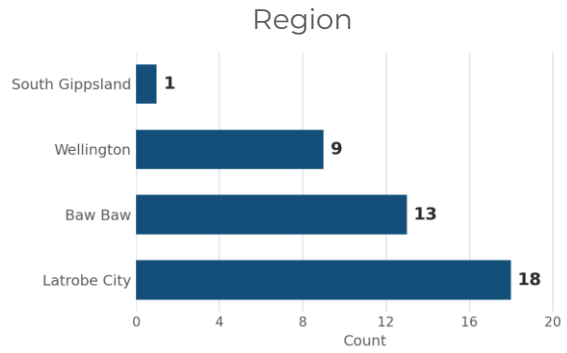
Forty-one Gippsland Water customers from across the region took part. Latrobe City had the largest share, followed by Baw Baw, Wellington and South Gippsland. Sixty-one per cent identified as female and 39 per cent as male, and the largest age group was 65 and over. Financial circumstances ranged from living comfortably to not having enough to meet basic expenses, and around three-quarters lived in large towns.

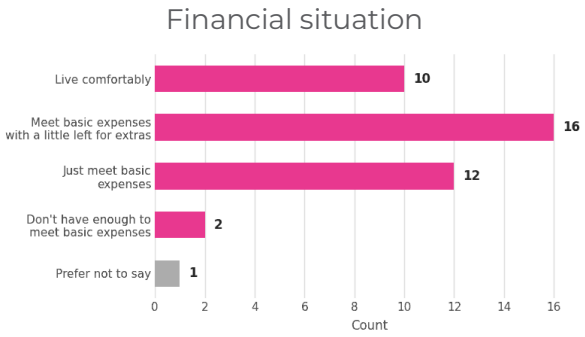
Gender

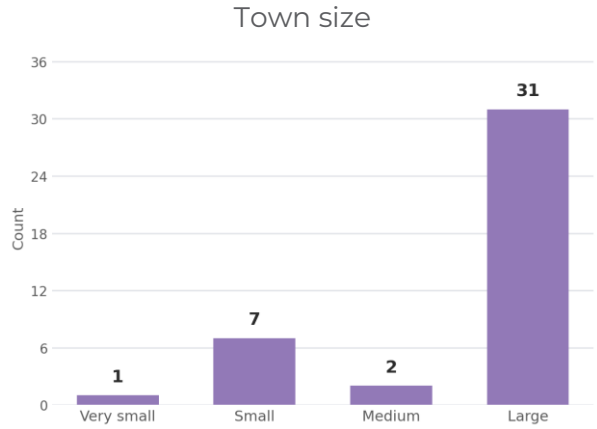


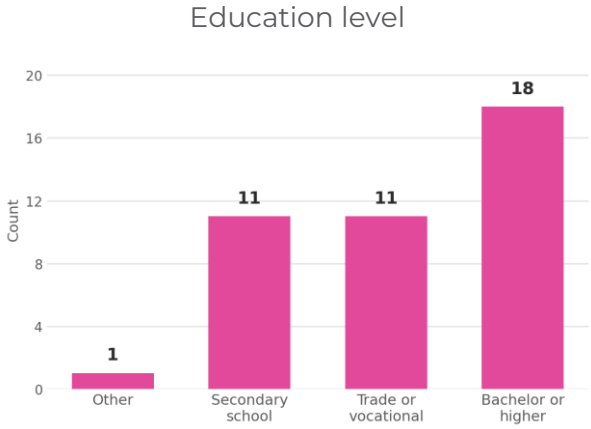
Age range











Key themes across the session

The **environment** generated the most comments and the **most divided views** of the evening. Participants broadly agreed on wanting Gippsland Water to keep prioritising **sustainability and waterway protection** over the long term, but were split on how far to go and who should pay, with some keen to see more investment even at a modest cost to bills and others wanting new environmental costs minimised or deferred given Gippsland Water's existing debt and cost-of-living pressures. **Communication and transparency** were prominent throughout: participants want to know where community and environmental spending goes and confidence that initiatives reflect genuine values rather than compliance. **Continued community engagement** (forums like this one continuing, more visibility on social media) was a recurring wish, and education drew strong, largely positive comment across the session.

What we heard

Expectations of a water corporation

Before hearing from Gippsland Water, participants shared what they expect from a water corporation on community value and partnerships. Transparency and honesty came up most, including being upfront about water quality issues such as PFAS and

chemicals, and ensuring vulnerable customers are not cut off from water regardless of circumstance. Education, particularly in schools, and closer engagement with the community and with environmental groups were also common threads. A couple of participants referenced past Sounding Board suggestions, such as filtered water bottles and an app, and were curious what became of them.

Questions about community value and partnerships

Participants' questions reflected genuine surprise at the scope of Gippsland Water's existing community work; several said they hadn't realised how much was already happening and wanted to see these achievements better celebrated and promoted, including on customer bills. Common questions included how sponsorship decisions are made (whether organisations are chosen or need to apply), how Gippsland Water's community investment compares with other water authorities, and practical questions about the Community Emergency Support Program, education partnerships and public drinking fountains.

Have we got the balance right?

Beyond its core water service, Gippsland Water already invests in three areas: the Community Emergency Support Program, education and sponsorship. In the environment, the organisation currently focuses on what regulation requires, but is considering going further, having heard through customer surveys that there is an appetite for more. To ground that part of the discussion, Gippsland Water presented three potential new environmental initiatives (recreation, environmental education and a landholder sponsorship fund) with their estimated cost. Participants then considered whether Gippsland Water has the right balance of effort and investment across all four areas, including where it should do more or less. They were broadly positive about the current initiatives, but views differed on how far to go on the environment, and on who should pay.

Environment (35 comments): Attracted the most comments and the most mixed views. Many participants questioned who should pay for new initiatives and how much, wanted proof that any extra spending delivers genuine outcomes rather than compliance or "greenwashing", and called for stronger partnerships with farmers and Landcare to protect waterways.

Education (19 comments): Participants welcomed the school-based programs and want them extended to adults and older residents, with more visibility through bills and updated resources for teachers.

Community Emergency Support Program (12 comments): Drew strong support, especially for its value in remote areas, though some wanted clearer reporting on its impact and closer coordination with other emergency services.

Sponsorship (8 comments): Participants were generally supportive of the current approach but wanted clearer eligibility criteria, particularly around funding for young people and those most in need, and more visibility of which community groups receive support.

Your view: other things Gippsland Water could be doing

Education and awareness (21 comments): Participants want continued and expanded education, from school programs to adult learning, delivered through videos, bills and community events.

Environmental partnerships and action (19 comments): Comments called for stronger partnerships with Landcare, farmers, universities and local government to protect waterways and reduce chemical use.

Communication, transparency and reporting (16 comments): Participants want more transparency about where money goes and what Gippsland Water is achieving, advance notice of planned works, and confidence that initiatives reflect genuine values rather than compliance or "greenwashing".

Community engagement, events and feedback (16 comments): Many wanted more visible, ongoing engagement, through open forums, social media and regular feedback opportunities.

Sponsorship and support for community groups (4 comments): Comments called for clearer criteria for community groups requesting support.

Public amenity and water quality (3 comments): Participants raised public amenities such as water fountains and access to Moondarra dam.

Digital services and account access (3 comments): A few comments called for easier online account access.

Affordability and financial hardship (1 comment): One comment cautioned that new initiatives should wait until existing affordability pressures ease.

Your view: what should guide future contributions

Community engagement, feedback and inclusivity (22 comments): The most common view was that Gippsland Water's future contributions should be guided by ongoing, genuine engagement: continuing forums like the Sounding Board, seeking feedback from a wide and diverse range of customers, and being honest, caring and trustworthy in how decisions are made.

Sustainability and environmental stewardship (20 comments): This was the next most common guide participants named, particularly wanting Gippsland Water to rehabilitate land, reduce pesticide and PFAS use in partnership with farmers, protect waterways, and continue building on its progress toward renewable energy.

Financial responsibility and value for money (12 comments): Spending that is evidence-based and cost-effective, doesn't add unfairly to bills during a cost-of-living squeeze, and is reported on transparently.

Transparency, evidence and accountability (9 comments): Comments called for clear performance measures and well-considered, evidence-based decisions rather than short-lived initiatives.

Genuine values: honesty, care and trust (7 comments): Comments emphasised friendly, knowledgeable and trustworthy people as central to how Gippsland Water should operate.

Long-term thinking for future generations (6 comments): A long-term view that protects water resources for future generations.

Selecting the right partners (5 comments): Comments called for careful selection of partner organisations aligned with Gippsland Water's values.

Education and youth focus (5 comments): A continued focus on educating young people.

Next steps

This input will go to Gippsland Water's Customer Reference Group and Leadership Team, to help refine its Community Value and Partnerships Program for the 2028-33 price submission. Gippsland Water will report back to participants on how their input was used.

PLEASE NOTE:
This report has been prepared by MosaicLab on behalf of and for the exclusive use of Gippsland Water. The sole purpose of this report is to provide Gippsland Water with materials produced at the Community Value and Partnerships Workshop on 5 August 2026.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the scope of services set out by Gippsland Water. In preparing this report, MosaicLab has relied upon the information provided by the participants at the session.

A customised AI tool has also been used to help MosaicLab theme and summarise participant feedback and comments.

Gippsland Water can choose to share and distribute this report as they see fit. MosaicLab accepts no liability or responsibility whatsoever for or in respect of any use of or reliance upon this report by any third party.

MosaicLab is a Victorian-based consultancy that specialises in community and stakeholder engagement, facilitation, negotiation, strategic planning and coaching.

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