The aspirations of the people of Victoria for environmental quality shall drive environmental improvement

Environment Protection Act 1970
Principles of environmental protection - principle 1L

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The purpose of engagement

A healthy environment that supports a liveable and prosperous Victoria is the responsibility of all Victorians.

EPA is Victoria’s environmental regulator but we do not protect Victoria’s environment on our own. Businesses, other government organisations and the Victorian community all have a duty to protect the environment.

At EPA we believe effective engagement makes EPA a proactive, responsive and robust environmental regulator, delivering services and products that are attuned to the aspirations of the Victorian community.

Through effective engagement we are committed to enabling greater participation in environmental protection and fostering long term change in business practice. EPA actively encourages, supports and empowers the community, businesses and organisations to create lasting pro-environmental behaviour change. This behaviour change is promoted by improving accessibility to information, participation, responsibility, environmental equity, restorative action and environmental leadership.

EPA will continue to improve the customer service and engagement skills of all our staff, our systems and opportunities for stakeholder participation. We set the standard for effective engagement, leading by example for other organisations and businesses.

The purpose of EPA’s engagement is to:

• understand and respond to the needs and aspirations of all Victorians
• continually improve our regulations, policies, programs and services
• better enable Victorians to comply with environmental laws
• motivate action to protect the environment
• ensure all Victorians have equal access to a healthy environment
• bring stakeholders together to resolve issues collectively
• collaborate and build partnerships to leverage expertise
• achieve a more comprehensive resolution to the complex problems we face.
Principles of customer service and engagement

This policy outlines how EPA uses engagement as a foundation to achieve compliance, as well as develop partnerships and relationships to achieve a liveable and prosperous Victoria.

EPA expects all staff to plan and deliver customer service and engagement which considers practice standards that are:

- **accountable** - if customers are not happy with EPA’s services or the way we have engaged with them, we want to hear from them

- **transparent** - we will provide regular updates on customer enquiries and requests. We will explain our decisions, processes and where stakeholders can input into decision making

- **effective** - we will be clear, timely and purposeful in dealing with stakeholders to ensure we manage their needs, expectations and our obligations

- **inclusive** - everyone who is affected by EPA’s decisions will have access to EPA, including those from different backgrounds, people with disabilities and those in rural and remote areas

- **authoritative** - we will be an authoritative source of information on environmental matters. We will always act fairly and within our regulatory authority to ensure the environment is protected

- **consistent** - our engagement and customer service will be consistent and predictable. We will work to our statutory approval or alternatively agreed timelines and keep stakeholders updated and informed

- **targeted** - we will engage our stakeholders on issues that affect them in a way that is appropriate to their needs and the situation. Our work will be targeted at communities in the most affected areas to protect their liveability

- **proportionate** - we will use appropriate resources to meet the needs of our stakeholders.
EPA's engagement model is based on our commitment to all our stakeholders. As a modern regulator we will:

- raise awareness and understanding of EPA's activities, functions and constraints
- raise awareness and understanding of each individual's own responsibility to protect the environment
- involve stakeholders in the changes and decisions that affect them, to generate stronger and mutually beneficial outcomes
- listen and talk with all our stakeholders to build our intelligence and make informed decisions
- seek out and work with culturally and linguistically diverse communities on issues that affect them
- provide opportunities for stakeholders to become environmental leaders.
Everyone at EPA is responsible for engaging with stakeholders, internal and external to EPA. Our organisational culture is built on respect, courtesy and professionalism.

The way we work with each other is echoed in how we work with external stakeholders. The targeted model for engagement ensures we plan and allocate resources to work with our stakeholders where the biggest difference can be made, or where we can manage the biggest risks to environment, health, safety or wellbeing.

There are three aspects to the engagement model:

- customer service
- strategic engagement
- relationship management
Customer service – good customer service is the foundation of everyone’s interactions with EPA

Everyone at EPA is responsible for good customer service being delivered to all stakeholders and target audiences. We have a dedicated call centre and customer service team to answer queries or refer to an EPA specialist for follow up.

EPA’s Environment Protection Officers work with businesses, the community and all stakeholders, and are one of EPA’s key delivery areas for customer service.

We will actively improve our customer service standards by encouraging customer feedback so we can continually improve our service. EPA will conduct quarterly customer satisfaction surveys and report on our performance whilst adhering to privacy requirements.

We will be professional and show respect and courtesy to all those we interact with including those who have caused environmental harm. We expect this level of professionalism and respect when we work with each other at EPA, and this is mirrored in how our customers will be treated.

If EPA receives numerous reports about a single issue, this will trigger the next level of engagement which is to develop a strategic engagement plan in tandem with an operational plan to address the issue.

Strategic engagement – EPA has a planned approach to engaging its stakeholders in issues that affect or interest them, and in our decision making, policy and program design

Strategic engagement is the foundation to achieving compliance and environmental standards that meet the aspirations of all Victorians.

We will work with our stakeholders to develop and implement strategic engagement plans. To provide effective engagement we will map stakeholders by finding out what they want to know and the best way to communicate with them. Strategic engagement plans will be developed and implemented alongside operational plans for key issues and hotspot areas, and in the development and review of policies, regulations and programs. This will enable stakeholders to provide input to these areas in a meaningful way.

Strategic engagement can be used to help solve both proactive and reactive environmental issues. Reactive engagement involves the creation of an engagement plan to respond to many pollution reports on a single issue. Proactive engagement involves identifying opportunities to gather stakeholders together to work on a project that will benefit the Victorian environment.

Relationship management – EPA establishes and maintains relationships with key stakeholders to achieve better outcomes

When working with our stakeholders we will identify, develop and implement relationship plans, to manage proactive and reactive relationships and issues.

We will identify shared goals and opportunities to work together for the protection of the environment. Relationship plans will be developed for strategic partnerships, our regional offices and memorandums of understandings.

All staff, at all levels of EPA Victoria, will be responsible for implementing relationship plans.
We will engage with our stakeholders across all areas of the EPA operating model. We will conduct purposeful and planned engagement which will work towards our goal of providing a healthy environment that supports a liveable and prosperous Victoria.
Inform and educate - raising awareness of environmental impacts, obligations, EPA’s role and social duty of care

EPA will inform our stakeholders about the state of the environment and our progress towards our vision of clean air, healthy water, safe land and minimal disturbance from noise and odour. We will listen to the community and understand its aspirations for an improved environment. We will educate and inform businesses on their role in protecting the environment. We will work with our government stakeholders to deliver clear and concise information about our shared jurisdictions. We will promote everyone’s role and duty of care in protecting the environment.

We will action this commitment to engaging with customers through publishing clear and concise guidance material and information on EPA’s website. We will ask the public to inform us about noise, odour and dust pollution events in their local area via our call centre (1300 EPA VIC). We will inform stakeholders and request their input when reviewing and developing laws and guidelines through the state environment protection policies.

Set standards - providing clear and authoritative standards based on science and community aspirations

EPA sets environmental standards based on good science and consideration of community aspirations. EPA will provide opportunity for businesses, industry associations, community and government stakeholders to have their say when we develop standards and promote good practice. We will leverage our university partnerships to ensure we are promoting best practice in environmental standards.

We will action this commitment through engaging meetings, information forums, public conferences, written submissions and other activities. At these events we will listen and understand our stakeholder’s views on licences and changes to them, works approval applications and the development of new policies, guidelines and programs.

Support to comply - providing practical, constructive and authoritative advice on how to comply with the law

EPA provides advice on how to comply with the law. Where non-compliance is found we will work with our stakeholders to remedy it. EPA is responsible for supporting anyone who has a duty under the Environment Protection Act 1970, (EP Act) regulations and policies.

We will action this commitment through the creation of strong relationships between EPA officers and businesses to provide advice and feedback on ambiguity in regulations, and through regular, scheduled compliance visits, as per the Annual Compliance Plan. EPA will work with government stakeholders to assess processes that spread across multiple government departments, to streamline support, guidance material and multiple processes.
Monitor compliance - monitoring compliance with the law and maintaining a credible risk of detection

EPA’s primary focus is on prevention. Wherever possible, we want to ensure that incidents of non-compliance and their impacts are avoided. We will provide a clear plan for compliance visits each year, and be clear to our stakeholders about the consequences of non-compliance.

EPA will action this commitment through Annual Performance Statements as required from businesses each year and our audit process. We will work with the community, businesses and government stakeholders to ensure pollution incidents are reported to our call centre on 1300 EPA VIC, for follow up action from EPA officers. We will inform our stakeholders of outcomes from monitoring compliance, such as the clean-up of pollution incidents, through website updates, media releases and at regular community forum events.

Enforce the law - requiring parties to make good any harm caused and deterring non-compliance

EPA will enforce the law when legal requirements are not complied with. We will clearly communicate to those who have not complied with the law what action we are taking. We will work with them to enforce a remedy to the problem, to ensure there is no further environmental harm. This means EPA will engage and work with the non-complier to direct any cleaning up and restoration of the environment.

In the event of non-compliance, EPA may also apply a sanction, which is a penalty or punishment for breaking the law. A sanction may result in a fine. If a company is prosecuted under section 67AC of the EP Act, a community group may be awarded funds from the prosecution through EPA’s Inspiring Environmental Solutions program to improve the local environment affected by the harm.

When prosecuting, EPA relies on evidence from the community through affidavits. Often a community member has experienced hardship due to the environmental harm, which can be captured through affidavits and used in court. We will let the community know the outcomes of all enforcement activities and in most cases we will also require the offending business to inform their local community. We will report any environmental issues, restoration and outcomes associated with the enforcement activity.
Encourage higher performance - building the case for improving practices and influencing future standards

EPA will work with our stakeholders to drive performance, improvements and leadership that may apply to specific sites, sectors, geographic areas, businesses and industry groups.

EPA will action this commitment through supporting networks, such as the Business Reference Group, Community Reference Group and key industry associations. We will provide grants and incentives for people who go beyond the minimum standards, using new technologies to improve business practices. We will partner with universities and build those relationships to ensure that EPA is at the leading edge of emerging technologies, resulting in better outcomes for the environment.