

**Murray River Council**  
**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY**  
**POL104.V1**

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**1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1** The purpose of this Policy is to detail Murray River Council's ('Council') commitment to effective and relevant community engagement. For Council, community engagement embraces ongoing dialogue with our communities to improve decision making processes through inclusive, accessible and responsive community participation.
- 1.2** Community engagement is defined as “a way to improve communities by identifying and addressing local ideas, concerns and opportunities by involving the public in certain processes that affect them and their communities.”
- 1.3** The Council aims to be recognised as open and honest with the community it represents, willing to listen and value what residents have to say about an issue. On a daily basis, Council makes decisions which affect the lives of its residents. One of the mechanisms that Council uses from time to time to interact with its community is community engagement.
- 1.4** Community engagement does not replace the decision making functions of the elected Council, or the organisation, but informs it.
- 1.5** While it is not possible to consult with the community on every issue, Council would like to ensure that the community is as well informed as it can be on major issues, plans and projects; has the necessary factual information to form an opinion; and has opportunities through community engagement to enhance Council's decision making.

**2. COMMENCEMENT OF THE POLICY**

- 2.1** This Policy will commence from **29 June 2017**.
- 2.2** It replaces all other community consultation/community engagement policies of the Council (whether written or not).

**3. APPLICATION OF THE POLICY**

- 3.1** This Policy applies to Councillors and employees of the Council; and consultants responsible for community engagement undertaken for and/or on behalf of the Council.
- 3.2** Community engagement at the Council takes place before a decision is made. It encompasses formal, planned opportunities for participation in exploratory, capacity building or decision making processes; information delivery or sharing; the informal building of networks and relationships; and individual interactions between the organisation and residents.

## 4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Community engagement plays a vital role in assisting Councillors and employees of the Council to work together with communities and other stakeholders to achieve the stated Vision and Mission Statement of the Council. Community engagement underpins the Council values, as expressed in the Community Strategic Plan.
- 4.2 Engagement involves a range of activities that allow residents to:
- ▶ Be informed of Council activities;
  - ▶ Be involved with Council in improving the community;
  - ▶ Provide input to Council on local issues; and
  - ▶ Help make decisions.
- 4.3 Engagement allows the Council to:
- ▶ Gather information, data and facts;
  - ▶ Gather a range of opinions;
  - ▶ Understand better opportunities and concerns;
  - ▶ Learn about unintended consequences;
  - ▶ Build alliances and relationships for the future;
  - ▶ Bring different groups together for a common outcome; and
  - ▶ Think about how to address/minimise outcomes.
- 4.4 Engagement activities range from everyday informal discussions, contact with stakeholders during service delivery, group discussions or meetings, formal consultation processes, through to Council supporting community members in taking action on issues themselves.
- 4.5 Engagement is not just about discussion and relationships, it leads to real outcomes in communities, such as better services, facilities, policy and infrastructure. Engagement can help these outcomes be achieved by community members being more informed of the Council's direction and activities, being able to have input into some decisions, better understanding of the Council's decisions and priorities, and working more collaboratively with the Council.
- 4.6 Engagement does not mean that every detail of Council's operation is open to community comment and/or control. Nor does it mean that Council's employees will be distracted from their delivery of services. There are many situations where engagement is not necessary and the *Community Engagement Framework* clearly identifies these situations.

## 5. POLICY

- 5.1 It is policy that, undertaking community engagement encourages practices within the Council area that can result in:
- (a) Residents knowing when and how the Council will consult them and when Council needs to make decisions on their behalf;
  - (b) Residents being well-informed about issues, strategies or plans that may directly or indirectly affect them;
  - (c) Councillors, Council employees and consultants (engaged by Council) engaging effectively and appropriately within the community when making decisions or forming policies and plans;

- (d) Community engagement being appropriate, designed for task and audience across all areas of activities;
- (e) Active, informed and engaged residents.

**5.2** Council is committed to community engagement that is:

- ▶ **Sincere in its intent.** Councillors and Council's employees are upfront and explain the level of influence that the community can have in the community engagement process and will highlight the negotiable and non-negotiable elements of any community engagement;
- ▶ **Clearly focussed, available and understood by all.** For all critical planning processes the Council undertakes (ie Community Strategic Plan, Budget, Strategic Plans, major projects or significant changes to service delivery) a community engagement plan will be developed and effectively resourced;
- ▶ **Inclusive, accessible and diverse.** All encompassing and provides for a diverse range of perspectives to be heard, and will actively seek to gain a broad representation of views. Council will ensure that it provides mechanisms to engage with the aged, youth, parents, one-parent families, carers, people with disabilities, different religious and cultural backgrounds, as well as people with language barriers;
- ▶ **Informative and provides feedback.** Sufficient, easy to read and accessible information to ensure the participants are given the opportunity to provide informed input to the engagement. Any informative process that will advise of progress on issues of interest or concern and on outcomes;
- ▶ **Well timed** so that the results are able to influence the policy, planning and decision-making process;
- ▶ **Responsive and transparent** enabling communities to have a more meaningful role in Council's planning and prioritisation processes. Participants know at the start of the community engagement how their input will be used;
- ▶ **Evaluated and monitored** to assess whether the goals of the consultation process have been achieved;
- ▶ **Effectively resourced** at the beginning of the engagement process to ensure the success of the engagement. Support Council's employees to continue to develop capacity and gain confidence to engage effectively with communities.

## **6. PRINCIPLES OF GOOD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**6.1** Council is committed to people taking part in public discussion relating to Council decision making. Good decision making is influenced by a number of factors including the way Council engages the community in the process. Council considers the following principles of community engagement as critical to quality outcomes:

- (a) A collaborative process;
- (b) Flexibility of engagement tailored to each set of circumstances;
- (c) Valuing community input;
- (d) Building trust; and
- (e) Beginning early and following through on feedback loops.

## 7. IMPLEMENTATION

7.1 Council has developed the following documents to aid in the implementation of this Policy:

▶ **Community Engagement Strategy**

A public document for the community so that they know the types of issues that Council will consult on, how Council will consult and what the feedback loops will be to give line of sight to how community input has influenced decision making.

▶ **Community Engagement Toolkit**

An internal working document that provides Council's employees with the tools and templates required to engage in appropriate, effective community engagement.

▶ **Community Engagement Factsheet for Councillors**

Sets out the role of Councillors in the community engagement process. It will be used during Councillor induction and to keep Councillors informed of the adopted community engagement model and the commitments of Council to that model.

## DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version No.	Details	Date	Resolution No.
1	Initial Issue – <i>On 12 May 2016, the Premier of NSW, The Hon Mike Baird MP, made the Local Government (Council Amalgamations) Proclamation 2016 under the Local Government Act 1993, whereby Murray Shire Council and Wakool Shire Council were amalgamated to constitute the new area to be known as Murray River Council, effective immediately.</i>	29 June 2017	320617

*Council reserves the right to review, vary or revoke this policy at any time  
This Policy is scheduled for review in June 2018*