



OZWATER 14

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Delivering value to Customers and
the Community – what do your
consumers value?

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UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection

- The right to be heard: to have consumer interests represented in the making and execution of government policy, and in the development of products and services
- The right to consumer education: to acquire knowledge and skills needed to make informed, confident choices about goods and services, while being aware of basic consumer rights and responsibilities and how to act on them



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Access to information, consultation and active participation in policy-making contributes to good governance by fostering greater transparency in policy-making, more accountability through direct public scrutiny and oversight; enhanced legitimacy of government decision-making processes; better quality policy decisions based on a wider range of information sources; and, finally, higher levels of implementation and compliance given greater public awareness of policies and participation in their design.

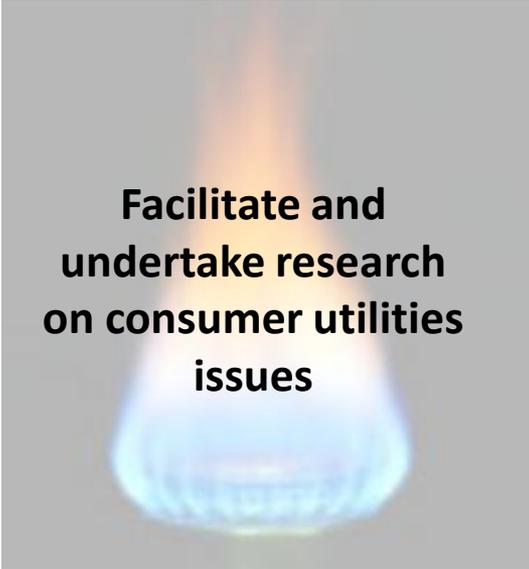
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Public Management Policy Brief (July 2001), Engaging Citizens in Policymaking: Information, Consultation and Public Participation, at 6.

About CUAC

Established in 2002 to:



**Represent all
Victorian energy
and water
consumers in policy
and regulatory
processes**



**Facilitate and
undertake research
on consumer utilities
issues**



**Monitor grassroots
consumer utilities
issues with
particular regard for
low-income,
disadvantaged and
rural consumers**



The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)

Defines public participation as:

- any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses the public input to make more informed decisions
- occurs across a spectrum - at one end engagement is one-way and involves the provision of information by an agency to the community
- at the other end of the spectrum, decision-making rests in the hands of the community
- between these two extremes, engagement entails consulting, involving and collaborating with the community



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[Consultation] needs to be genuine and not tokenistic. Sometimes it's very perfunctory and occurs once decisions have been made; they think they need 'consultation' to window-dress the decision a bit and to say it's been done. But it ends up not being genuine consultation at all.



Actions to Guide a Meaningful and Genuine Consultation

1. Define the objectives and purpose of consultation
2. Develop a transparent engagement process
3. Allow for adequate time to consult
4. Consult with diverse stakeholder groups
5. Overcome barriers to access
6. Target underrepresented groups for consultation
7. Challenge your own views
8. Consider feedback received
9. Acknowledge peoples expertise



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I've been in so many situations where I've been frustrated because I've wanted to go and I just can't do it. I get frustrated because I would have loved to have heard what people would have said on the issues and I would have liked to have said things myself, but it's an opportunity I've missed. I'm a firm believer that if you don't get out there and say something, nothing is going to change. If you can get people to go to a forum they may come back surprised with what they learned not necessarily from people up the front but people with disabilities in the room.



Yarra Valley Water, Water Plan 2013/14 to 2017/18

A six hour deliberative forum with 39 residential customers (representative of YVW's customer base) were chosen as part of the methodology due to the wide range of topics to be considered, some of which were complex; e.g. proposed investments, tariffs, pricing paths, effect of desalination plant on prices etc.

- The forum was chaired by a consultant. YVW senior staff presented the draft water plan and answered questions.*
- Participants were divided into five tables where a moderator facilitated discussions*
- Participants used handheld audience response devices to provide feedback to quantitative questions*
- The materials used had been tested in an earlier focus group*
- Throughout the entire water review, YVW provided an online portal for customers to access information and provide feedback on proposals.*

What do your customers value?

The challenge is to tap (excuse pun) into the diverse community knowledge

<http://www.cuac.org.au>

