

# yass valley council

the country the people

 **BECA** hunterh<sub>2</sub>O  
the future of water

## Yass Water Treatment Plant Upgrade Communication and Engagement Strategy

Yass Valley Council

May 2024

Beca HunterH2O | ABN 16 602 201 552



## Report Details

Project Title Yass Valley Council: Communications and Engagement Strategy  
Project No. 7490  
Enquiries Project Manager  
[Mark.Dawson@beca.com](mailto:Mark.Dawson@beca.com)

## Document History and Status

Revision	Report Status	Prepared By	Reviewed By	Approved By	Issue Date
1	Draft	Lesley Golds	Sarah Burnett	Mark Dawson	24-04-2024

Copyright © Hunter H2O Holdings Pty Limited 2024

The concepts and information contained in this document are the property of Hunter H2O Holdings Pty Limited for the sole use of the nominated client. Use or copying of this document without the written permission of Hunter H2O constitutes an infringement of copyright.

# Contents

- 1 Introduction ..... 2**
  - 1.1 Background..... 2
  - 1.2 Project overview ..... 3
    - 1.2.1 Project timeline ..... 3
- 2 Communication Approach..... 4**
  - 2.1 Project Community Engagement Indicative Timeline ..... 5
  - 2.2 Communication Objectives ..... 5
  - 2.3 Key messages ..... 6
    - 2.3.1 Overarching benefits to the community and the surrounding region..... 6
- 3 Stakeholder Identification..... 7**
  - 3.1 Stakeholder analysis..... 7
- 4 Communications and Engagement Tools..... 9**
- 5 Assumptions ..... 12**
  - 5.1 Branding..... 12
  - 5.2 Enquires..... 12
  - 5.3 Media ..... 12
  - 5.4 Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation ..... 12

# Figures

- Figure 1: Communication Approach
- Figure 2: Indicative Project Timeline

# Tables

- Table 1: Project Timeline
- Table 2: IAP2 Sprectrum
- Table 3: Communication Objectives
- Table 4: Stakeholder identification and items for consideration
- Table 5: Project Tools and Benefits

# 1 Introduction

This Communication and Engagement Strategy (the 'Strategy') has been prepared for Yass Valley Council (YVC, the Council) to provide a framework for communication and engagement activities to support the successful delivery of the Yass Water Treatment Plant Upgrade (Yass WTP). The Strategy will address:

- Communication and engagement objectives
- Communication and engagement approach, tools, and action plan
- Key messages
- Stakeholder analysis
- Roles and responsibilities
- Monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

The Strategy will be used to support Council in facilitating and managing communication and engagement activities. It is a working document and should be updated in response to community and stakeholder feedback and/or changes to the Project plan or scope.

## 1.1 Background

Yass is a town in the Southern Tablelands region of NSW, approximately 250 km south-west of Sydney and 55 km north-west of Canberra.

The villages of Bowning and Binalong are supplied with water through a rising main connected to the Yass reticulated water supply. Murrumbateman village is supplied with water through a rising main connected to the Yass reticulated water supply since May 2021. According to census data, the population of Yass Valley in 2021 was 17,281<sup>1</sup>.

The poor-quality water, sourced from the Yass River, and the various hazards and challenges associated with treating this water highlights that the Yass Water Treatment Plan (WTP) is aging and cannot treat the water to current standards and international guidelines. Any future changes to these standards and international guidelines will pose an additional compliance challenge. The Yass WTP was constructed in 1939 and augmented in 1990. The need for additional infrastructure to deliver good quality drinking water for the community of Yass was identified in the Integrated Water Cycle Management Strategy Plan (2008) with the Yass Water Treatment Plant (WTP) being scheduled for upgrade in 2020/2021.

Residents of the Yass Valley Council area have participated in surveys on water quality and reliability, and on-going informal dialogue with elected representatives and Council officers. Consultation and engagement regarding the potential associated costs to the community for the WTP upgrades is limited, noting current challenges with regards to funding for the WTP upgrades, the subsequent impacts on the community in terms of costs. As a result, this Strategy focuses on navigating the engagement and feedback to address these challenges.

Council acknowledges the ongoing water quality issues and challenges having not been resolved to date. The community has expressed their frustrations with Council over the lack of improvement to water quality.

The Yass WTP upgrade aims to address several issues. The key issues are:

- Poor water quality and quantity has hindered attractiveness of the area for housing growth, and has included intermittent pausing on development approvals due to water supply
- Raw water quality during extreme weather events
- Ageing treatment assets that are wearing out and are expensive to fix
- Consumer dissatisfaction with scaling, discolouration, and boil water alerts

---

<sup>1</sup> 2021 Yass Valley, Census All persons QuickStats | Australian Bureau of Statistics ([abs.gov.au](https://abs.gov.au))

- Barriers to provision of housing through consumer dissatisfaction with potable water quality
- Increasing level of treatment performance to meet new Health Based Targets (HBT) requirements of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG)
- Inadequate treatment process redundancy
- Climate change impacts

## 1.2 Project overview

The Yass WTP Upgrade Detailed Business Case (DBC) identifies the best possible activity that meets the long-term needs of the community and stakeholder requirements. The business case considers community benefits and welfare, deliverability, and whole-of-life considerations. It allows for the identification of technical options for the works that have been thoroughly considered, and for the evaluation of these options against financial and non-financial issues.

The Business Case revisits and confirms the case for change, identifies the preferred option, identifies potential sources of funding, and undertakes a financial appraisal for the two shortlisted options.

After the DBC has been approved, stage 2 of the Detailed Business Case seeks the final funding for the design and construction of the upgrade. Construction of the upgrade will be based on the identified preferred option, the high-level concept design, and a Reference Design to be prepared in 2024. A Constructor will be engaged in FY2025 to complete the design and construction of the Upgrade of Yass WTP.

It is identified that Council have sought feedback on issues through the survey conducted in 2023. Council will inform the community on the currently proposed funding model, to finance the upgrades with the presentation of this business case in May 2024 Council meeting. It is acknowledged, that further development of a detailed action plan for engagement on this should be developed to gauge the feedback of the community. The engagement and feedback on this topic should be led by Council, with all concerns noted and used to further develop and inform the project’s engagement strategy.

### 1.2.1 Project timeline

The project timeline is listed below in Table 1.

Table 1: Project Timeline

Project Milestones	Target Completion Date
Business Case Approval	June 2024
Funding Deed Executed	June 2024
Reference Design and Specification	Nov 2024
Approvals (Section 60)	Dec 2024
EOI/ ETI Complete	Feb 2025
Tender Closing Date	Apr 2025
Award	July 2025
Contractor’s Design	Sep 2025
Construction	Jul 2027
Commissioning	Feb 2027
Handover (Main Plant)	Feb 2027
Post Completion (CWT Conversions etc)	July 2027

## 2 Communication Approach

The Strategy provides the approach for communication and community engagement to be undertaken to support the business case application related community education and acceptance, business case approval, funding and approvals, design, construction, commissioning, operational testing, and “go-live” activities to be delivered for the Yass WTP.

The approach recognises the importance of tailoring communication to the project context and needs of identified stakeholder groups, with an aim for transparency about both positive and challenging aspects of the project. This will include the aspect of upgrade funding implications on the community. Key aspects of the project will be considered and coordinated when scheduling the project’s communication and engagement activities.

The primary objective is to foster a collaborative environment with an open channel for stakeholders to seek information or express concerns, creating a well-informed and engaged stakeholder community, and contributing to the overall success of the project. The communication approach proposed is a combination of the *Prosci Change Management approach* and the *International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)* principles of engagement. There is both a technical side and a people side, which should be considered in parallel for optimal engagement. In combining these two, the community stays engaged along the whole process, including technical aspects, and is informing and helping shape the change management process for an effective outcome.

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) principles of engagement will be used as a guide for the design of communication and community engagement. The IAP2 spectrum of engagement aims to provide a values-based framework to effectively engage with stakeholders. In addition to the principles listed in the spectrum below, the engagement process should also align with the Prosci Change Management diagram below. In the circumstances of the Yass Water Treatment Plant upgrade, the approach will lean towards the Inform and Consult end of the IAP2 spectrum (see Table 2).

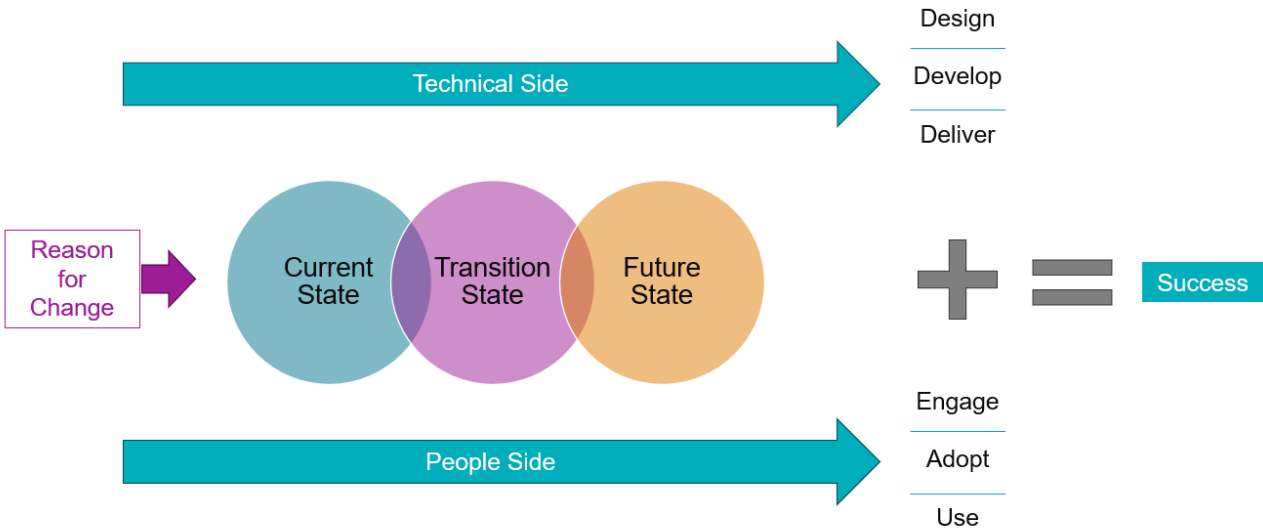


Figure 1: Communications Approach

Project communication activities will span the first 3 categories of the IAP2 engagement spectrum. This is due to the community processes to date, plus the need for a technical solution meeting legislative requirements which places limitations on potential solutions. The technical and people sides continue to require attention for an optimal approach to effective engagement in forthcoming Project phases. Due to ongoing water quality related social, health and economic impact related pressures, there is a push for a rapid response from the community which colours the approach to communications, engagement, and decision-making processes.

Table 2: IAP2 Spectrum

	Increasing impact on the decision				
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal	Provide balanced and objective information to assist with understanding problems, alternatives and options, solutions and potential costs, and opportunities.	To obtain feedback from the community on the engagement, and any concerns the community have are made known.	To work with the community throughout the process ensuring that concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place the final decision-making in the hands of the community.

Source: <https://www.iap2.org.au/About-Us/About-IAP2-Australasia-/Spectrum>

## 2.1 Project Community Engagement Indicative Timeline

The Strategy is focused on the preparation and deployment of communication and community engagement activities to support the final phase of delivery for the Yass WTP. The communication planning is to be delivered in a phased approach (Figure 2) aligning with the overall project timeline:

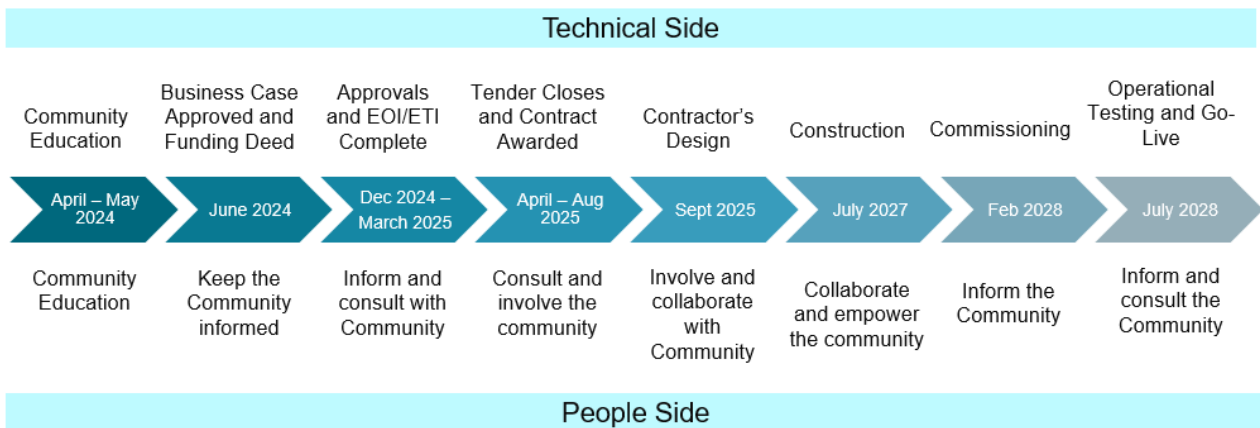


Figure 2: Indicative Project Timeline

## 2.2 Communication Objectives

Communication objectives have been developed to form the foundation for effective communication for the commissioning of the infrastructure delivered by the Yass WTP.

The eight objectives as listed in, *Table 3* below, articulate the benefits from the delivery of the project and will be used as the foundation to design key messaging with the purpose to deliver tailored communication, that engages and connects with stakeholders.

Table 3: Communication Objectives

Communication Objectives	
1	Inform and engage with communities on the benefits and the timing of the Yass WTP and how it strategically aligns with various Council and NSW Government policies.
2	Engaging to address the impacts of, and options for, the community paying for the WTP upgrade.
3	Increase and improve education in the community on how water supply is managed within the Yass River, the key challenges, and how this will enhance the quality, continuity, and resilience of supply of drinking water.
4	Seek to identify where the chosen approaches, opportunities, and issues affecting the community can be worked through in a constructive and proactive manner.
5	Develop communication that is clear, concise, planned and tailored to the audience.
6	Use a range of digital and traditional tools to communicate and engagement with community.
7	Provide methods for community to provide feedback; and to understand how their feedback will be addressed.

### 2.3 Key messages

Key messaging has been developed to frame future communication and engagement activities. They are the baseline information that the community and the business should be aware of and are aligned to the communication objectives listed in Table 3. These messages are the 'go-to' for introductory paragraphs in correspondence, opening lines of conversations, the first few slides in presentations and any media articles.

Consultation with key stakeholder groups and approvals will be adhered to prior to any communication being disseminated. Having a consistent narrative across stakeholder groups will help to shape the story and community adoption of the Yass WTP Upgrade project.

#### Overarching benefits to the community and the surrounding region for key messaging

1. Improved attractiveness and ability for new housing and business investment to choose to be in Yass Valley due to improved water quality and reliability.
2. Improve treated water quality to meet Australian Drinking Water Guidelines (ADWG) and community expectations.
3. Enhance continuity of water supply and quality and ensure the WTP has adequate redundancy to match water supply service levels.
4. Enhance flexibility to address potential water quality risks in future and ensure the upgraded WTP complies with relevant standards and regulations.
5. Improve resilience to climate change variability in the water supply by upgrading the WTP to manage impacts on raw water quality during extreme weather events.



### 3 Stakeholder Identification

It is important to identify all key stakeholders and anticipate their interests and expectations as this will help focus the engagement with stakeholders, identify opportunities, and positively build enduring relationships. Council staff and Councillors are key conduits for stakeholder identification, using existing council mechanisms, in an ongoing process that continually evolves over the life of the project to see all stakeholders covered.

Stakeholders in the context of the Project are identified as individuals, communities, government agencies, non-government organisations, not for profit associations, local businesses, staff, and contractors. In this instance the simple definition of a stakeholder is anyone who:

- Has an interest in the project
- Is impacted by the cost of the upgrade
- Is impacted by the WTP upgrade in any other way

Stakeholders can have varying interest or influence. Influence is the extent to which a stakeholder can affect the operations or outcomes (positively or negatively). In general, the greater the interest or influence in the decision, the greater the level of effort required to manage the engagement with the stakeholder/s.

#### 3.1 Stakeholder analysis

As part of the Detailed Business Case, an initial analysis of stakeholders was conducted. This is shown in *Table 4*, below. However, further collaboration with the Council is necessary to identify and engage stakeholders across the entire project lifecycle. The project stakeholders have been broadly assessed, to determine their level of interest and items for consideration when planning and developing communication product for the project.

It is recommended that stakeholders are continually engaged, consulted, and informed during the project lifecycle.

*Table 4: Stakeholder identification and items for consideration*

Stakeholder group	Items for consideration	Responsibility	Level of Interest
Internal Yass Valley Council	Owner and operators of the Yass water supply scheme, responsible for planning, funding, delivering, and managing the Yass WTP upgrade project.	Engages with the community, regulators, contractors, and consultants throughout the project lifecycle.	High
Yass Valley Council Residents and Water Supply Customers	<p>Yass Valley Council residents and ratepayers are important stakeholders in the upgrade of the Yass WTP, as their feedback and financial contributions are taken into consideration in the decision-making process. Out of 15,000+ residents in the LGA, some 7,200 are supplied with water and are those who will pay for the upgrade (as part of wider funding secured).</p> <p>In 2023, Council reached out to 3,395 customers served by the Yass WTP through a comprehensive survey. The results of this survey helped the council in choosing the option that best reflects their customers' wants and needs within the Yass Valley.</p>	<p>Be informed and raise concerns to Council when needed.</p> <p>Ratepayers are financially contributing to the upgrade.</p>	High

Stakeholder group	Items for consideration	Responsibility	Level of Interest
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	Provides regulatory guidance and assurance frameworks for local water utilities and helps with the application process for water treatment works approvals.  DCCEEW also provides technical assistance and support throughout the upgrade process	Provides guidance and assistance when required during the project lifecycle.	High
NSW Health Local Health Unit and NSW Health Water Units	The regulator of drinking water quality and public health protection in NSW, ensuring that the Yass WTP upgrade project complies with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and the Public Health Act 2010.	Provides advice, feedback and approval for the water quality management plan and the commissioning plan for the upgraded plant.	Medium
Beca HunterH2O	The engineering consultant appointed by YVC to prepare the business case, detailed design, and tender documentation for the Yass WTP upgrade project.	Provides technical expertise, options analysis, cost estimation, risk management and stakeholder consultation services.	High
Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure	The administrators of the Housing Acceleration Fund and the NSW Government Election Commitment Ad Hoc Fund, which provide funding support for the Yass WTP upgrade project are separate teams based within DPHI. These teams have ensured that the project aligns with the NSW Government's strategic objectives and priorities for regional growth and water security.  Reviewed and approved the funding deed and the election funding commitment and monitored the project compliance with the funding conditions and milestones.	Funding approval and monitors compliance.	High
Water Infrastructure NSW	The NSW Government agency that provides funding and strategic guidance for the delivery of water infrastructure projects in regional NSW, including the Yass WTP upgrade project.	Reviews and approves the business case and monitors the project progress and performance.	High
NSW Environment Protection Authority	The regulator of environmental impacts and licenced activities in NSW, ensuring that the Yass WTP upgrade project complies with the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 and the conditions of the environmental protection licence.	Provides approval for the Environmental Assessment and the regulates treatment residual disposal from the WTP.	High
Local Media Organisations	Local media which have been involved in prompting any Council news, reporting on water quality issues, and covering local news stories.  Any local media companies may choose to cover project updates and funding stories.	Report on and publish dictated information given by the Council or other involved stakeholders.	Moderate

# 4 Communications and Engagement Tools

Effective communication and engagement are pivotal in managing the project communication and community engagement successfully.

A diverse range of communication tools, encompassing both traditional and modern mediums, will be used engage with various stakeholder groups. The intent is to use, where practicable, existing communication channels to provide stakeholders with timely and targeted information about all stages of delivery for the WTP upgrade, including relevant information about the project, upcoming community events, impacts and contact information.

The intent is to engage with community to understand the appetite for the currently proposed funding model to deliver the WTP upgrades.

The development of Table 4 serves as a high-level overview of tools for communication and the benefits of adopting. The table and tools require further analysis after the funding stage is complete, and should also be verified continually, to make sure it aligns to the project phases.

Table 5: Project Tools and Benefits

Tool / Channel	Benefits of Using
Website and social media	<p>Project pages on Council's website used to outline the scope of works, the funding model, timeframes, potential impacts, engagement activities, changes to operations and status updates. Website can also include Frequently Asked Questions for the community to seek out when required. This aids in keeping messaging consistent across all platforms.</p> <p>Utilise Council's existing social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn) to update, inform and engage community at all stages of the project lifecycle.</p> <p>Updates to both platforms can be used when engaging the community on the funding model for the upgrade.</p>
Council phone	<p>Briefing customer service team on the project, and funding model arrangements, to enhance effective management of enquiries relating to the project.</p> <p>FAQs can also be issued to the customer services team for consistent messaging across all platforms.</p>
Video and / or infographics	<p>Visual documentation and education on the project and how it will benefit the community is an effective tool for engagement and information. The video or infographics could be deployed using social media, or TV advertisement.</p> <p>Further in the project lifecycle, professional videos of project milestones and interviews with Ministers, Councillors, or the mayor can keep the community informed and engaged with the project.</p> <p>Drone footage can be utilised in videos as well if Council have better access to this.</p> <p>Deploy via website, local advertising routes and/or social media channels once complete.</p>
Advertising (through local media)	<p>Radio and print advertisements for engagement sessions, project updates, and feedback are an effective way to engage and communicate with community.</p> <p>FAQs can be published via this method for a consistent approach to messaging.</p>
Rate notice inserts	<p>Inform ratepayers of increase for upgrade project and notify of any future engagement and information sessions.</p> <p>Keep ratepayers up to date with project status and key milestones, along with water education messaging.</p> <p>Single topic information sheets, or FAQs guides can be used for education purposes. Can also be utilised to inform ratepayers, and community, on the benefits of the upgrade.</p> <p>Benefits include consistent messaging across all platforms, and early informed community on the funding model for the upgrade.</p>
Paper – fact sheets, letters / flyers	<p>Project information fact sheets can be developed for the purposes of informing and educating the community on benefits and goals of the upgrade project.</p> <p>Letter and flyers can also be distributed as educational and informational tools.</p>

Tool / Channel	Benefits of Using
	<p>Paper based methods of communication benefits community members who have challenges with accessing technology.</p> <p>FAQs can also be included under this tool, for consistent messaging across all channels.</p>
<p>Community meetings, and drop-in sessions</p>	<p>Formal or informal meetings where community are invited and informed on the funding model for the upgrade project. A face-to-face setting where community can raise any concerns regarding the project.</p> <p>Drop-in sessions can give another platform to community for being engaged and informed on benefits and impacts.</p> <p>Meetings can be held with specific stakeholders to discuss privately, offering more private setting for concerns to be lodged.</p> <p>Members of the project team can be present at these sessions to confirm consistent messaging is being delivered in an appropriate way.</p>
<p>Councillor briefing meetings or memos</p>	<p>Briefings or memos to Councillors to keep them across the status of the projects, key milestone achievements and any arising issues. Community concerns can also be raised in the sessions or memos. Memos provide a written way of communicating with Councillors who may have challenges in attending briefing sessions.</p> <p>These sessions can also be used to update Council staff on the project, and issues that have arisen.</p>
<p>Council eNewsletters</p>	<p>Regular community updates, distributed weekly, or fortnightly. To make sure messaging is consistent, so FAQs can be included.</p> <p>Project specific eNewsletters may be used as projects progress and more comprehensive databases are developed.</p> <p>Can also include a way for community to give feedback, and progress and issues raised by community.</p>

# 5 Assumptions

At time of writing, the analysis identified the following branding, enquiries, and media assumptions. It was noted that Council also has a Community Engagement Strategy<sup>2</sup>, which should be adhered to when developing and delivering any community engagement materials.

## 5.1 Branding

All program and project communications materials will adhere to Council’s corporate branding. Any design files, video/drone footage and photography produced by a third party will be provided to Council unless otherwise specifically agreed.

## 5.2 Enquires

All enquiries and complaints will be managed via Council’s existing customer service process.

## 5.3 Media

All media enquiries will be managed via Council’s existing media protocols.

- 1. Executive Leadership Team approve project communications
- 2. Approved documents given/issued for use status, ready for release as required

## 5.4 Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation

The Strategy is a living document will be reviewed during the entire project campaign to confirm the communication objectives set out in *Table 2: Communication Objectives*, of this document is met.

The Council should monitor media issues, community enquiries and feedback to update and adjust activities as needed.

---

<sup>2</sup> Yass Valley Council, Community Engagement Strategy, 2023. [community-engagement-Strategy.pdf \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)