



OUR FOCUS OUR FUTURE

Phase Three Engagement Report

Feedback on the draft Council Plan 2025-29
(incorporating the Health & Wellbeing Plan)



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Executive summary

The *Our Focus Our Future* engagement project was launched by Surf Coast Shire Council in November 2024 to guide the development of key strategic documents, including the Council Plan 2025-2029 (incorporating the Health and Wellbeing Plan), Long Term Financial Plan, and Asset Plan.

The engagement was delivered in three phases. Phases one and two were aimed at seeking broad and targeted community input into the development of the draft documents. Phase three sought to provide a final check in with community and provide an opportunity for feedback on the draft Council Plan.

This report summarises the findings this final phase of engagement.

Communications data indicated strong community interest in the topic with high visitation to the website and a high number of downloads of the draft report during the phase three engagement, which was open for a 6-week engagement period. 33 submissions were received, providing input on the draft plan.

Across the 33 submissions, community sentiment relating to the draft Council Plan was mixed but leaning positive. There was support for the focus on climate, health, and young people, with some highlighting gaps in inclusion, First Nations reconciliation, climate action ambition, and public transport advocacy. There was a preference expressed by some for a focus on basic service delivery.

Overall, community feedback was aligned to community sentiment expressed during the previous two phases of engagement.

Introduction

All Victorian local governments are required to prepare a set of strategic documents to guide their work. Surf Coast Shire Council is working with community and stakeholders through a project called 'Our Focus Our Future' to develop the Council Plan 2025-2029 (incorporating the Health and Wellbeing Plan), as well as a Long Term Financial Plan and Asset Plan.

The engagement took place over three phases:

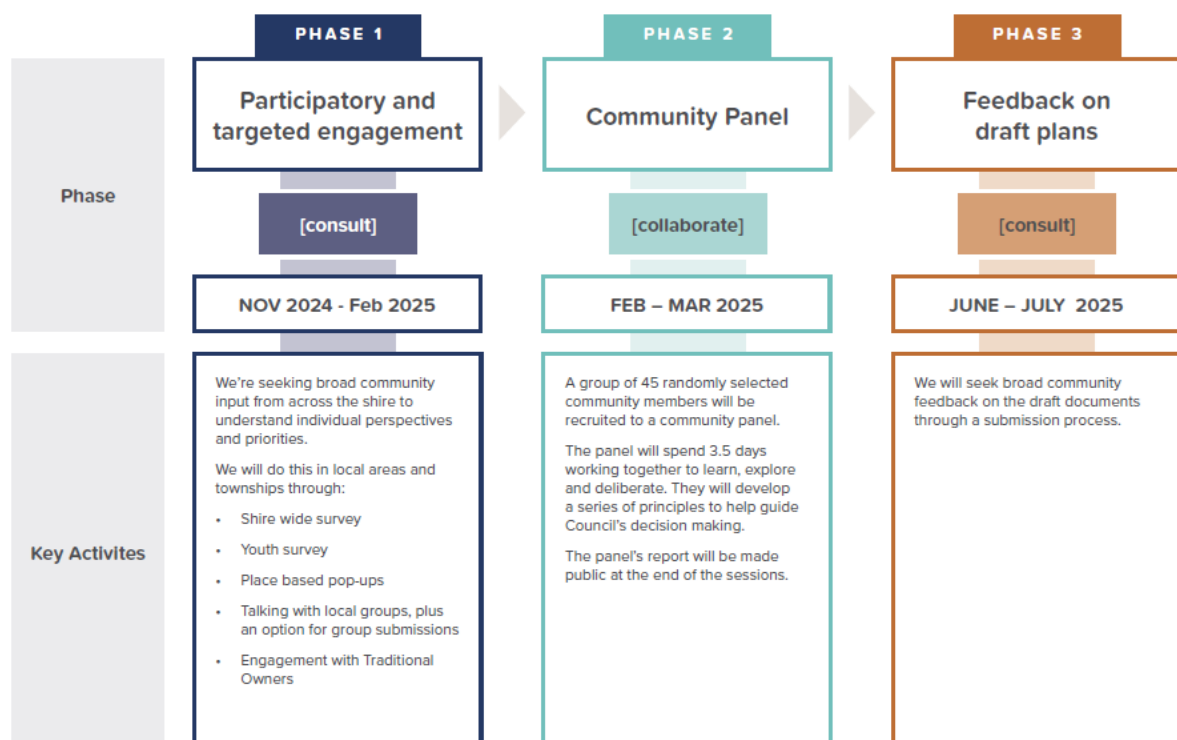
- Participatory engagement (November 2024-February 2025)
- Deliberative engagement (February 2025-March 2025)
- **Submissions process (June/July 2025)**

The roadmap below outlines the phases in more detail.

This report outlines the approach, community feedback, and findings from final submissions phase.

Notably, each phase had a specific level of empowerment based on the IAP2 public participation spectrum. The community panel convened for phase two were allocated the highest level of empowerment, being collaborate.

Community engagement roadmap – all phases



Communications

During the phase three engagement period, information about the draft Council Plan 2025-29 was distributed in the following ways:

- emails to community contacts and networks (including people who were involved in previous engagement phases)
- social media posts
- media release
- advertising in the Surf Coast Times, Winchelsea Star and Lorne Independent

Communications impact

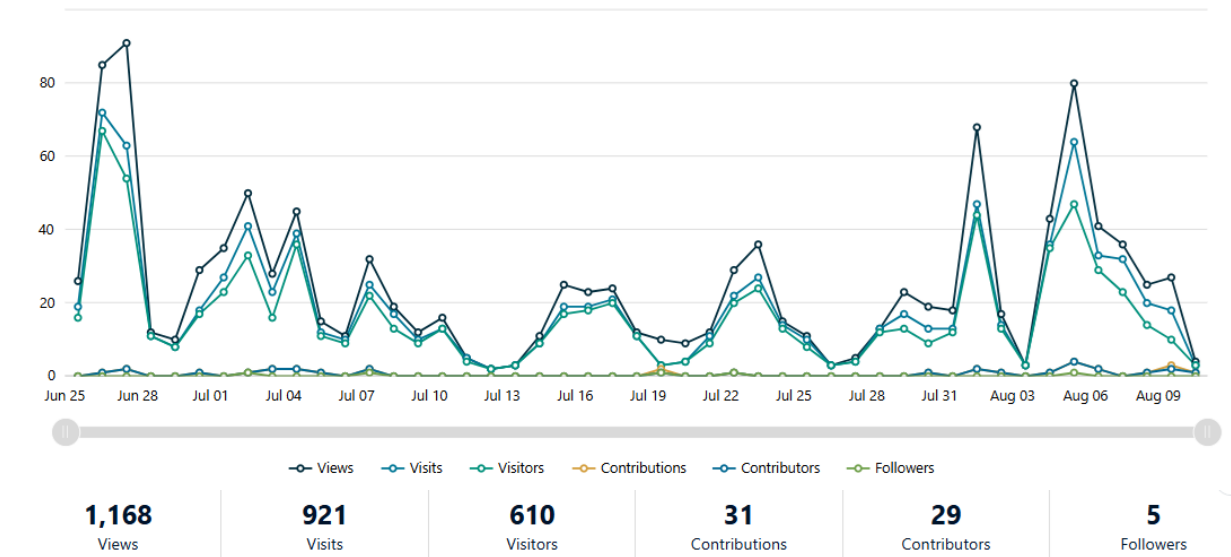
Communications ran over a six-week period to allow adequate time for contributions over the school holidays period. A targeted communications effort was undertaken to drive people to the website, resulting in the following online visitation during the engagement period:

- 610 individual visitors to the site
- 1168 total views of the site

In addition to 31 online contributions, people also accessed online resources, including:

- 583 people downloaded the draft Council Plan document
- 65 people downloaded the Our Focus Our Future Community Engagement Report
- 65 people downloaded the Community Panel Report

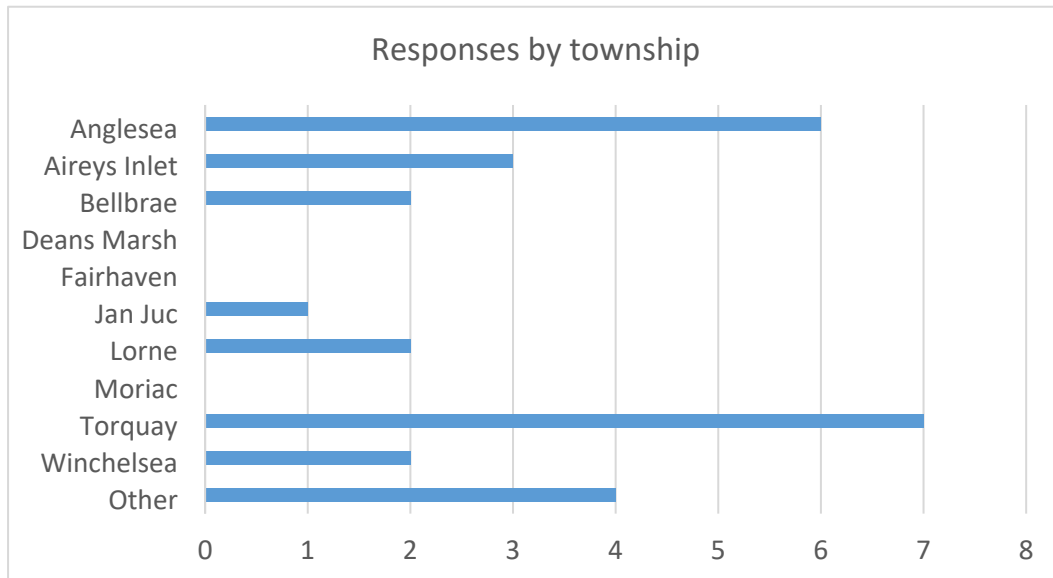
The below graph shows the website visitation and online contributions across the engagement period.



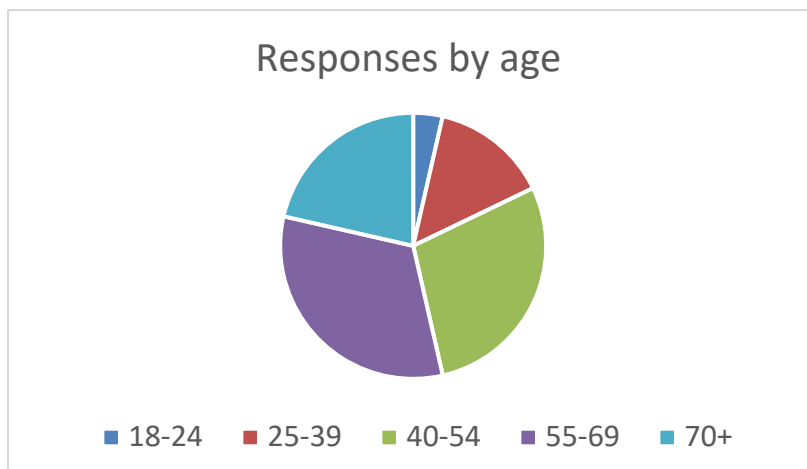
Survey responses

Throughout the 6-week engagement period, 31 submissions were received via the online form, with another two received via email.

The following graph shows the number of responses by township.

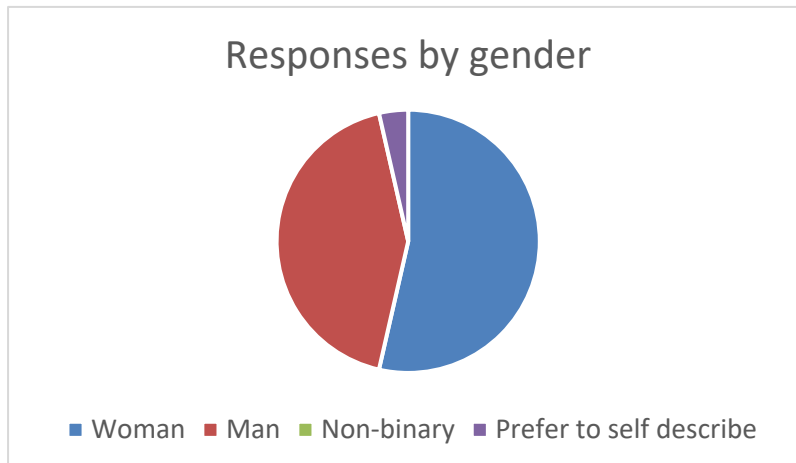


The following graph shows survey responses received by age group.



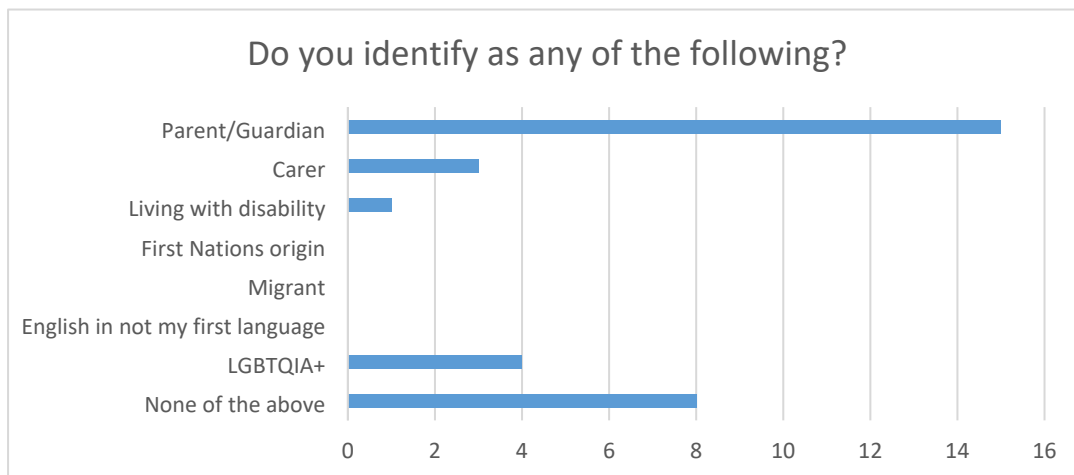
Responses by gender

As a part of Council's ongoing commitment to gender equality, and in line with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act 2020, Council collects and reviews community feedback by gender. This is to investigate whether a given program or project has different impacts on people of different genders.



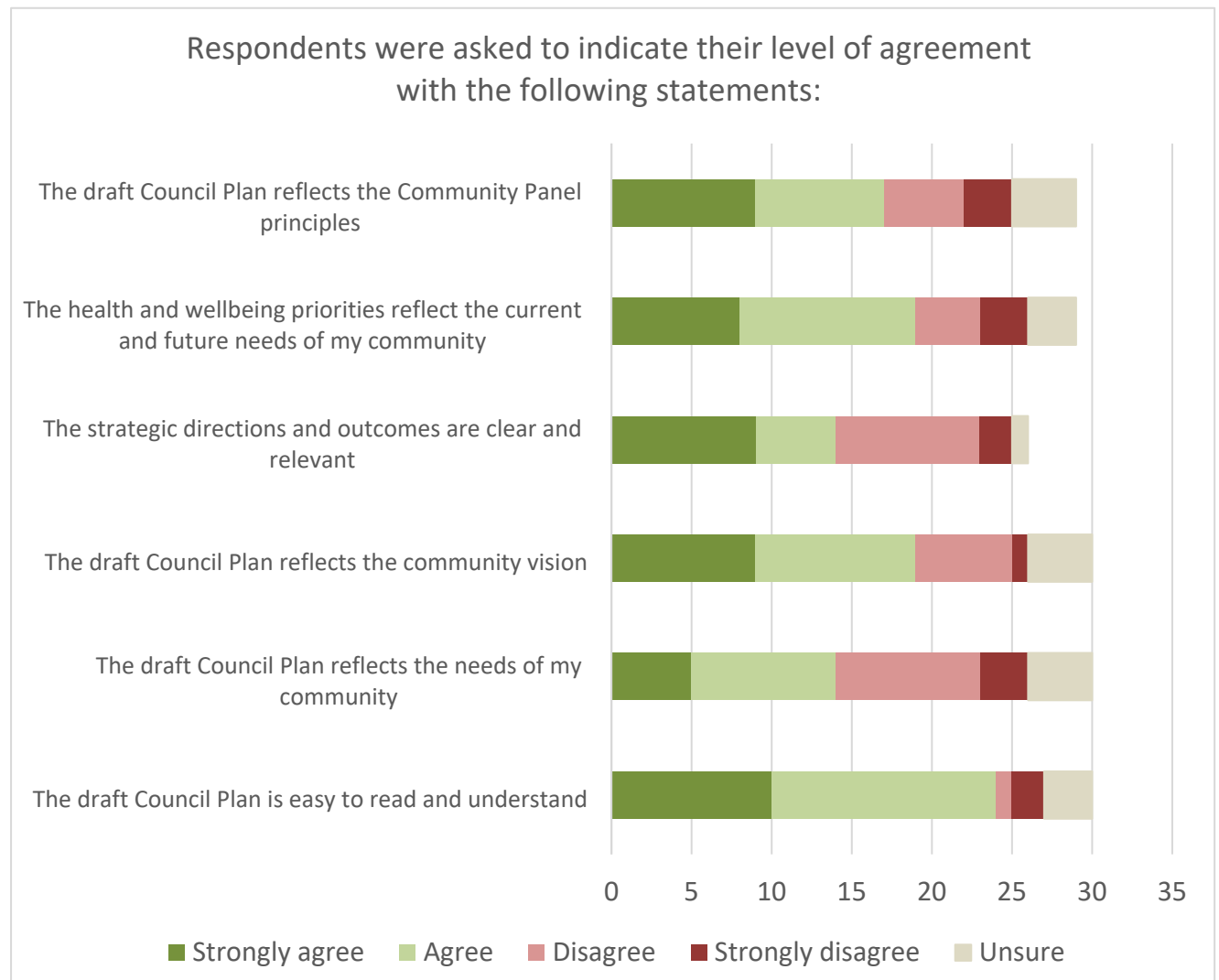
Community demographics

The below graph provides insight into the diversity of respondents, highlighting a mix of personal identities and caregiving responsibilities.



Survey results

The survey asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about the draft plan and related priorities.



The rating of 'level of agreement', along with community comments, indicated that overall community sentiment towards the draft Council Plan was mixed but leaning positive.

Survey results show that most respondents think the plan is clear, readable, and aligned with stated principles.

Overall comments indicated the plan is valued for its vision and clarity, with stronger action in inclusion, climate, transport, and essential services suggested by some to build community support and trust.

The following themes emerged from the feedback received:

- **Climate change and environmental action**

While there is support for addressing climate issues, there is criticism regarding the lack of ambition and specific actions on climate change, including more proactive climate recovery and resilience plans. The comments also expressed frustration over the use of softer language like "climate" instead of "climate change."

- **Health and wellbeing**

General support for the focus on mental health, family violence, and wellbeing, but feedback indicates the community feels more should be done. Specific suggestions include increasing services for ageing populations, addressing health impacts of climate change, and providing more local health and wellness programs.

- **Bureaucracy and governance**

Feedback indicated frustration with the growing bureaucracy of the council and increasing rates, along with calls for the council to focus on core services (including roads, waste and infrastructure) and reduce its involvement in broader issues.

- **Housing**

Feedback highlights the need for affordable housing, especially for essential workers and retirees. There are calls for innovative housing solutions, with concerns also raised over potential risks of social housing and development proposals.

- **Inclusion and diversity**

Feedback indicated a preference for a clearer commitment to inclusion, with more actionable steps toward supporting diverse communities and reducing discrimination. Some disappointment was expressed relating to how First Nations communities are referenced in the plan, with comments noting it was considered a shift backwards from the last Council Plan.

Key findings and next steps

Analysis of community feedback from the 33 submissions received during this phase three review process highlighted diverse perspectives. These are generally in line with community sentiment expressed across the detailed engagement conducted during phase one, and the representative engagement conducted in phase two (see report Our Focus Our Future – Community Engagement Report February 2025).

In line with the strategic engagement plan for this project, the phase three review process was an opportunity for a final check of strategic directions developed by council, based on community input from earlier phases.

A significant number of community members visited the webpage inviting community input, and more than 500 community members downloaded the draft Council Plan document, indicating community awareness of the plan and the opportunity to provide feedback.

The small number of submissions compared to the large number of document downloads is considered important contextual data.

All community feedback from the three phase Our Focus Our Future project – including these community submissions and the more detailed input from previous phases – should continue to inform the action plan and ongoing implementation of the finalised Council Plan.