



# Communications & Engagement Strategy **2023 - 2026**



## **Acknowledgement of Country**

Bass Coast Shire Council acknowledges the Bunurong as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters, and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and Lore.

Bass Coast Shire Council celebrates the opportunity to embrace and empower the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island Communities in their diversity.

Bass Coast Shire Council will create opportunities for future recognition and respectful partnerships that will honour the Traditional Owners and Custodians, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

Bass Coast Shire Council is committed to providing communications and engagement that is welcoming, safe, accessible and inclusive for our community including First Nations, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) peoples, people with disability and of all ages.



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# Mayor's Introduction

**I am very pleased to present Council's Communications & Engagement Strategy for 2023-26.**

How we communicate and engage with our community, businesses and visitors is at the heart of this Strategy.

This Strategy seeks to modernise the way Council currently provides information that is important to our community and stakeholders, and that provides an opportunity for everyone to be involved.

This Strategy has been guided by community feedback and sets a strong foundation for why, how, when and what Council will prioritise as its key communications and engagement activities based on your feedback.

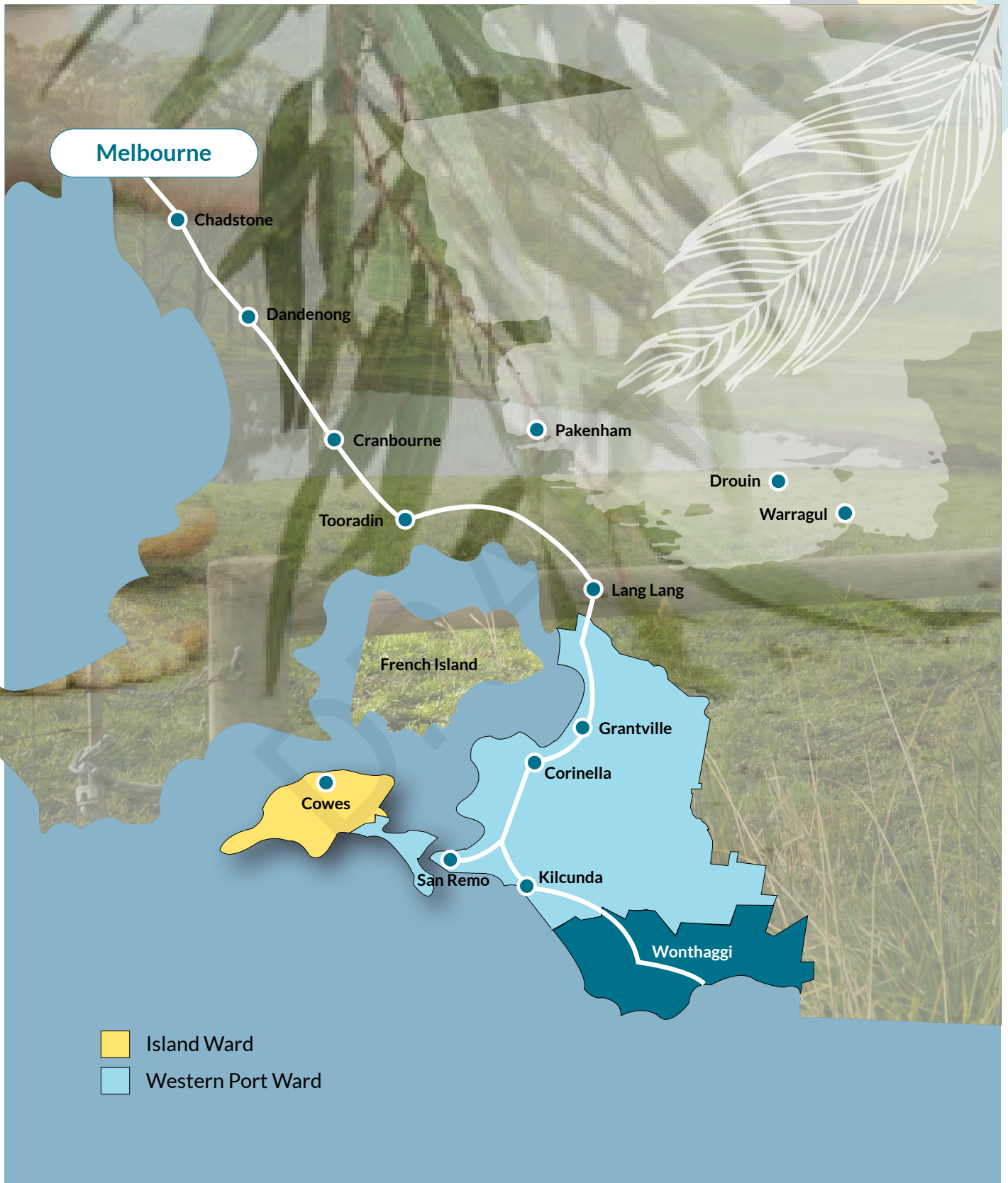
We are committed to communicating and engaging in a way that is welcoming, safe, inclusive, culturally

appropriate and supports the diversity and uniqueness of our community. We also strive to communicate in a way that is accessible, responsive and open to encourage ongoing partnerships with our community.

Ultimately, we seek to build and maintain transparent and open communications about Council's activities, initiatives and projects that demonstrates Council's commitment and drive to making a difference to the lives of everyone who lives, works and visits the region.



**Mayor**  
**Cr Michael Whelan**



# About Bass Coast and our community

**Bass Coast Shire is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria and regional Australia and is an exciting place to live, work and visit.**

Located on Bunurong land with a rich Indigenous history, we are predominantly a coastal municipality complemented by a beautiful hinterland.

The Shire is made up of different towns with distinct personalities and communities. We have a dynamic population that fluctuates with peak holiday periods and our permanent residents continue to grow in numbers and diversity.

The beauty of the area, welcoming communities and unique experiences result in high levels of visitors every year as one of Victoria's key international destinations.

Tourism is a major influence on the local economy, with our main centres, Wonthaggi, Cowes, Inverloch, San Remo and Grantville, serving the local population and more than 3.4 million visitors who arrive in Bass Coast each year. Construction, healthcare and social assistance, retail and manufacturing are also contributors to the local economy.

Community spirit is exceptionally high in Bass Coast. We are committed to working together to support our

community and our businesses, protect our natural environment and native wildlife and promote health and wellbeing.

We connect with our neighbours, feel welcome in our neighbourhoods, feel safe to walk at night and are more likely to volunteer and be involved with a local sporting club.

Bass Coast Shire is divided into three wards with three Councillors elected to represent each ward. They are responsible for driving the strategic direction of Council, representing the local community in their decision making, developing policy and monitoring performance.

Our active and engaged community are always top of mind when we make decisions and determine priorities, and we continually seek feedback from those who live in, work in and visit Bass Coast – so that together we can protect our unique region and ensure our community thrives.





## About Communications & Engagement activity

Bass Coast has many stories to share that demonstrate the volume and depth of Council's work that serves our community. All our decisions are made with the community's best interest at heart, and many put us at the forefront of the local government sector in Victoria and Australia.

### Our Goal

Engage with our community in a timely and open way using multiple channels and platforms to connect with people of all ages, interests and backgrounds who love to live, work and visit Bass Coast.

### Our Aims

- ① Unite our townships by appreciating their differences while tackling issues that have regional interest.
- ② Ensure our policies, processes and projects are communicated clearly and simply.
- ③ Provide opportunities for input into projects, policy and strategies to help inform Council decisions and ensure we are always improving and living our values.

# Definitions

Communications and engagement are Council-wide activities and can include; information sharing; one-off or regular interactions with individuals or groups; and large-scale decision-making processes.

## Communications

Effective communication is best achieved through multiple channels and platforms, acknowledging that our community, business owners, workers and visitors consume content in a range of different ways that suit them best.

The primary channels that Council focuses on to reach our community and other stakeholders include direct mail and email, the Bass Coast Shire Council and Engage Bass Coast websites, various social media channels such as Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, and via local newspapers and other media outlets. Signage and printed material are also used to get messages to the right people at the right time.

## Engagement

Engagement processes provide opportunities for our community to have their views considered in local decision-making.

These engagements may be required under the Local Government Act, or Council designs these to best meet the needs of the relevant community, project or issue.

Engagement can have a broad definition. However, in this Strategy we are referring to a process that is designed to understand community sentiment and capture community views to shape a council decision or activity.

The primary channels that Council focuses on to engage with our community and other stakeholders and welcome their input include the Engage Bass Coast website, surveys, written submissions, pop-ups and activations, roundtables and forums, mobile vans and exhibitions.







## Channels

When preparing content, it is important to consider the relevant audience and what channels will be most effective in reaching them. This section outlines the channels available to Council and how we will use them.

Channel	How we will use it
Website	Maintain up-to-date information about Council, its services, news, and key focus areas and projects.
Engage Bass Coast	Online engagement platform used to engage, consult and inform on policy, strategies, programs and projects.
Social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter)	Update and engage with audiences on key announcements, achievements and updates about Council and Bass Coast as a place. *More detail provided page 11
Electronic Direct Mail (eDMs)	Highlight important announcements, achievements, updates and stories about Council and Bass Coast as a place and link to further information.
Newsletters	Highlight important announcements, achievements, updates and stories about Council and Bass Coast as a place and link to further information.
Mayor's message	A regular column from the Mayor to provide up-to-date information about what is happening in Bass Coast Shire and raise awareness of key priorities and issues.
Council meetings	Participate in discussion about key issues, respond to queries raised by the community and other key stakeholders, determine priorities and make decisions.
On-site signage	Here and now information about what's happening and available on-site.
SMS	Targeted alerts that need immediate attention or action.
On-hold message	Bite-sized information about a key focus area, project or other activity planned or supported by Council and direct to further information.
Videos and imagery	Present information about Council and Bass Coast as a place in a way that's engaging for all audiences.

Channel	How we will use it
Email signatures	Bite-sized information about a key focus area, project or other activity planned or supported by Council and link to further information.
Annual report	Provide a comprehensive wrap up each year on Council's performance, priorities, plans and projects.
Surveys	Gather feedback from targeted individuals, groups and/or organisations on key focus areas, issues, projects and processes and other activities undertaken or planned to be undertaken by Council.
Visitor Information Centres	Provide information about Council, uncovering hidden gems and promoting smaller towns as well as promoting the major attractions.
Cultural centres	Tell the story of Bass Coast and showcase its rich history.
Pop-ups/activations	Engage targeted individuals, groups and/or organisations on key focus areas, issues, projects and processes and other activities undertaken or planned to be undertaken by Council.
Exhibitions	Provide opportunity for people to learn more and speak to Council officers by creating onsite exhibitions.
Mobile vans	Engage targeted individuals, groups and/or organisations on key focus areas, issues, projects and processes and other activities undertaken or planned to be undertaken by Council.
Roundtables/forums	Update, engage and gather feedback from targeted individuals, groups and/or organisations on key focus areas, issues, projects and processes and other activities undertaken or planned to be undertaken by Council.
QR Codes	Link to channels and collateral to provide quick and easy access to full information about Council and Bass Coast as a place.



# Social Media Channels

Types of content we post on our social media channels.

Channel	How we will use it
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Highlights of events or activities</li><li>- Images and videos of activities</li><li>- Profiles of people living or working in Bass Coast</li><li>- Highlights of announcements and decisions</li><li>- Sharing snapshots of information with links to the website</li><li>- Tag relevant people, events and businesses</li><li>- Be a gateway to the Council website and more information</li></ul>
Twitter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The information you need to know now</li><li>- Quotes from key speeches</li><li>- Gateway to find out more about Council via the website</li></ul>
LinkedIn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Blogs or posts which celebrate local business, promote local business and networking events</li><li>- Thought leadership posts</li><li>- Gateway to find out more about Council via the website</li></ul>
Instagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Visually-led content</li><li>- Highlights of events or activities</li><li>- Images and videos of activities</li><li>- Images of people living or working in Bass Coast</li></ul>



# How this plan fits in with the Council Plan

All our communications and engagement activities will support, and align with, the Council Plan 2021-25.

## Council's Strategic Objectives 2021-25

The Council Plan sets out six strategic objectives to make Bass Coast the place our community wants it to be. It describes what these strategic objectives are, why they are important and the actions we will take to ensure we address the key challenges and opportunities we face:

### Protecting our Natural Environment

Building resilience and protecting and enhancing our natural assets

### Healthy Community

An inclusive community that embraces its lifestyle and supports health and wellbeing

### Our Places

Strengthening the connection between people and the public places they share

### Growing our Economy

Progressing opportunities for visitation economy and business growth in harmony with our natural environment and sustainable values

### Sustainable Development

Prepare for growth while ensuring the intrinsic values and character of Bass Coast are retained

### Leading for our Community

Demonstrating leadership through good governance, transparency and accountability





## How this fits in with the Community Vision and Engagement Policy

### Community Vision

The Bass Coast Community Vision 2041 was developed in 2021 by our community panel to articulate our long-term aspirations for the future of our Shire. Together this Vision for our community and region was crafted:

*“From its flowing hills to its wild unspoiled coastlines, the Bass Coast is a source of celebration for all who live in and visit the region.*

*Our townships are vibrant, rich with culture and full of life, each with its own distinct character. Drawing on our creativity, innovation and resilience we’ve created a thriving and diverse economy that supports sustainable agriculture and industry.*

*We live proudly on Bunurong Country and build on learnings from our First Peoples and their knowledge. We coexist in harmony with our environment and are prepared for future challenges and changes.*

*We are the people of the Bass Coast. Experience our cultures and history and contribute to our story.”*

### Community Engagement Policy

In line with Council’s Community Engagement Policy 2021, we promise to engage our community in line with the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum. The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is an internationally recognised tool, designed to assist with the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any public participation progress. It stretches from simply providing information, through to empowering the public to make the final decision.

# Community feedback

Council undertook a comprehensive consultation process to understand community expectations on our approach and the different systems for collecting and sharing information and informing decisions. From February to May 2022 Council actively engaged with the community to understand how they currently hear from us, how they want to hear from us in future, how successful we are at engaging with them, and how we can improve.

## How we engaged

We implemented various methods to gather this feedback from our community, including online through the Engage Bass Coast, face-to-face sessions, seven pop-up listening posts, a survey which received 109 responses and an invitation to provide written submissions, which was accepted by seven individuals and businesses. We also included the relevant feedback from the 38 submissions provided during the consultation period for the development of the Community Engagement Policy 2021.

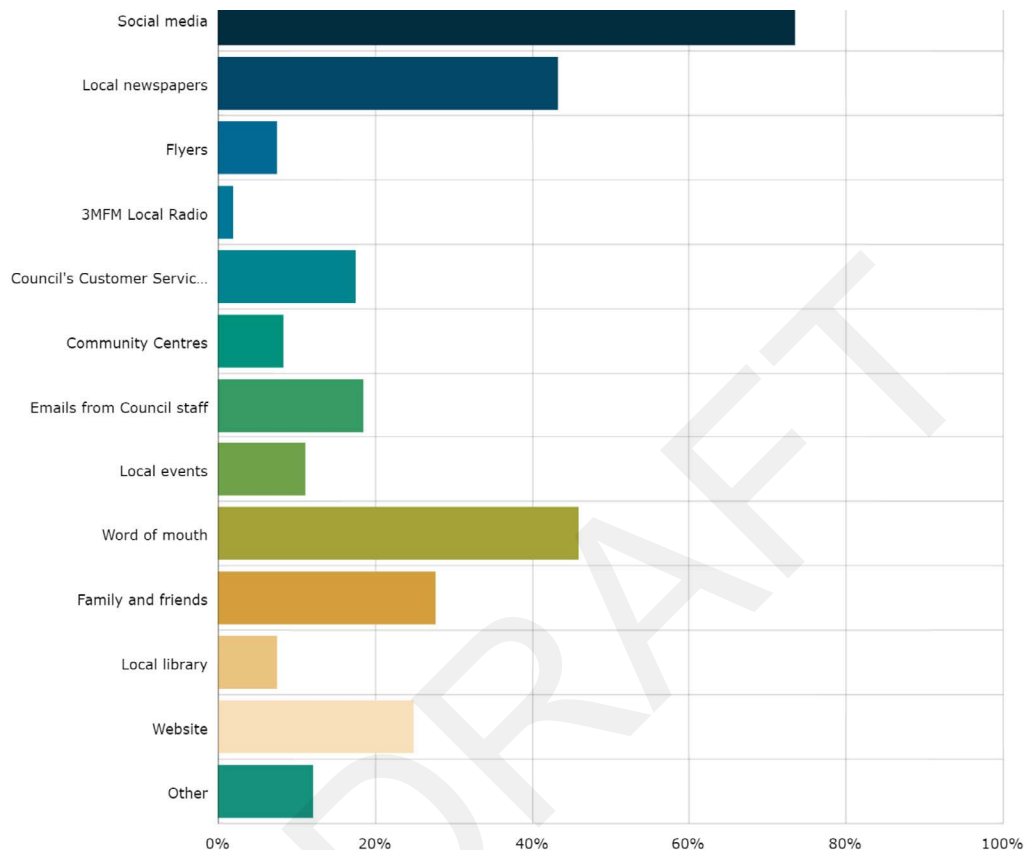
Question	How do you currently receive information from Council?	What social media channels do you currently use?	What types of information of would you like to receive from Council?
Popular Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Social media</li><li>- Newspapers</li><li>- Customer Service/ website</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Facebook</li><li>- Instagram</li><li>- TikTok</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Regular updates on major and infrastructure projects</li><li>- Upcoming events</li><li>- Council Services</li></ul>

Question	What are we doing well to communicate news to you?	How could we improve communications with you?	If you were Bass Coast Mayor for the day, what information would you prioritise to share?
Popular Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Social Media</li><li>- Newspaper stories</li><li>- Customer Service staff</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Regular email newsletters</li><li>- Social media posts</li><li>- Updates on projects</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Updates on current projects</li><li>- Climate change awareness</li></ul>

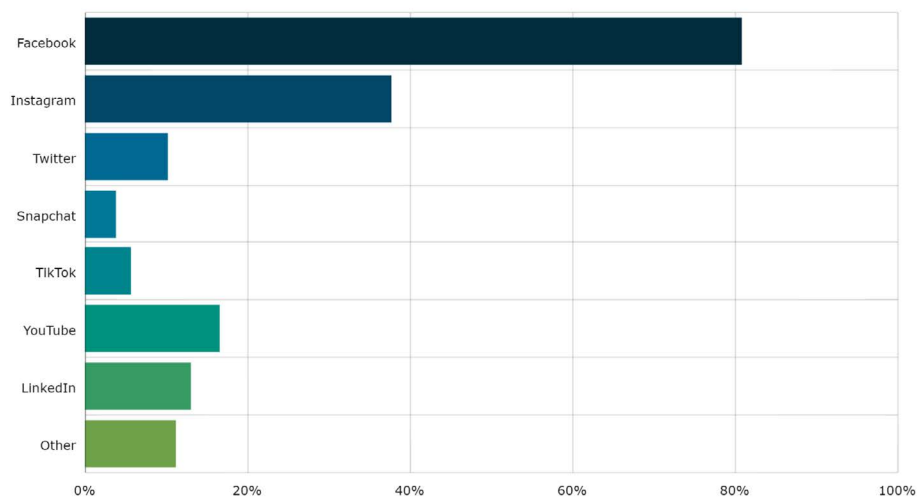
# Community feedback

Data from Engage Bass Coast submissions.

How do you receive information from Council?



Which social media channels do you use?

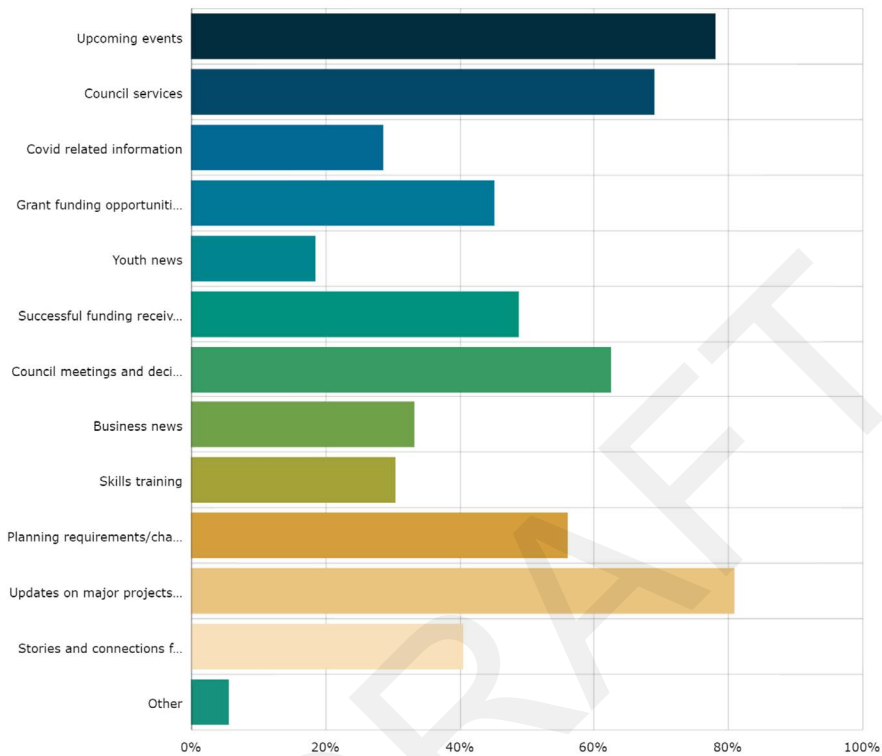




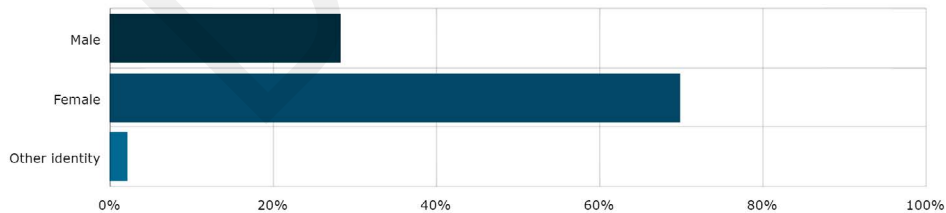
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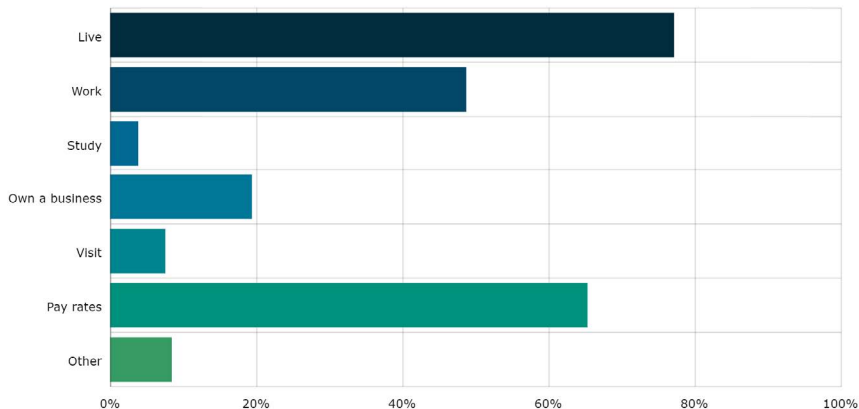
What types of information would you like to receive from Council?



Who we heard from



Connection to Bass Coast



# Community feedback

## Direct quotes

### How we engaged

'Be clear when engaging what influence community can have on a project'

'Allow adequate time for the community to consider information to give feedback.'

'It is important that the community have access to the wide range of ideas and suggestions offered by other community members and organisations.'

'The most important thing is that community engagement should be respected and actually utilised to shape council actions.'

### Use of digital and social media

'More variety on social media platforms'

'The Engage Bass Coast website is a positive step forward.'

'LinkedIn infrastructure projects promoted well.'

'Website is helpful, and I follow Bass Coast Shire Council on Facebook for updates'

'Social media is an important part of modern communications for individuals and organisations.'

### Council content

'Publish regular email newsletter with updates on projects and events.'

'Staff are fabulous and very informative social media.'

### Council channels

'Council should make use of direct email communication as an easy and inexpensive way to communicate and engage with non-resident ratepayers.'

'Simple explanations via email, newsletter, mail to cover all the different communications in different age groups.'

'There needs to be a clear and transparent process that shows demonstrated accountability and responses in regard to listening to Community concerns and issues.'

'More notice boards.'

'It must be remembered that there are some people who do not use the internet.'

'An open letter to residents and ratepayers to explain reason behind recent Council decisions.'

## Our plan

Based on community feedback and our commitment to enhancing how we communicate and engage, we have identified four key focus areas and developed a set of actions that will underpin our communications and engagement activities over the next three years.

Key focus area	Access and inclusion Our community is more likely to connect with our communications and participate in our engagement if content is easy to understand and access.	Strengthening relationships through engagement Community input is vital to inform Council's decision making. Creating opportunities for collaboration and conversation will help build trust and create strong partnerships.
What we will do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Our communications and community engagement practices will provide equal opportunities for everyone to participate in local decision making and to receive inclusive, accessible communications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with our community and create opportunities for collaboration and conversation to help build trust and create strong partnerships.</li> </ul>
How we will do it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use simple and inclusive language</li> <li>- Provide accessible options to connect with our community</li> <li>- Actively represent and listen to diverse and underrepresented voices</li> <li>- Be timely and open so everyone can contribute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be clear about the level of influence the community has on decision making</li> <li>- Provide a mix of face-to-face and digital engagement to encourage feedback from everyone in our community</li> <li>- Work with relevant community networks when their input can help guide greater outcomes</li> </ul>
What to expect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop strategies to engage meaningfully with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, as well as with people with disabilities, senior citizens, young people and the LGBTQI+ community</li> <li>- Written and visual content will be clear and consider all audiences</li> <li>- A regular newsletter to opt-in, highlighting what's on in Bass Coast, current projects and opportunities to connect on matters of interest and that impact our communities</li> <li>- Promotion of information across multiple and diverse channels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engage Bass Coast website used to its full extent for engagements open for feedback</li> <li>- Council teams working with external groups/committees to build networks and strengthen relationships</li> </ul>



<b>Being effective and efficient</b> How we communicate defines who we are. Each of us has a responsibility to communicate and engage with our community effectively.	<b>Innovation and technology</b> The way we communicate is changing. We need to be adaptable and create communications that reach our audience in a way that suits them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Communications and Engagement Team will work closely with relevant staff to help them develop their understanding, skills and capacity to plan and deliver effective communications and engagement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop more meaningful participation and community engagement by using methods that place us closest to our community and their needs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build our understanding of good communications and engagement</li> <li>- Enhance our capability</li> <li>- Coordinate activities across townships to ensure activities are efficient, don't clash and complement each other</li> <li>- Evaluate effectiveness of our processes and refine over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We will deliver content on platforms that meet the needs of a diverse audience</li> <li>- We will embrace technologies and techniques to enhance the flow of information into our community</li> <li>- We will keep up with technology trends</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effective communications and engagement</li> <li>- People that are skilled and capable, leading engagement on projects that impact our community</li> <li>- More opportunities to share your voice on Council projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explore communications options, especially those used by younger and older people</li> <li>- Adapt to changing techniques to maintain and increase engagement with our community</li> <li>- Increased use of social media and video</li> <li>- Further support and increase participation through Engage Bass Coast</li> </ul>

# How to stay involved

## Contact us

Visit our website [www.basscoast.vic.gov.au](http://www.basscoast.vic.gov.au)  
or our engagement hub [www.engage.basscoast.vic.gov.au](http://www.engage.basscoast.vic.gov.au)

Call us on **1300 BCOAST (226 278)** or **(03) 5671 2211** or via the National Relay Service (for people with speech or hearing difficulties) on their website: <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/phone/services-people-disability/accesshub/national-relay-service>

Email us at [basscoast@basscoast.vic.gov.au](mailto:basscoast@basscoast.vic.gov.au)

Write to us at **PO Box 118 Wonthaggi VIC 3995**

## Connect with us



**Facebook**

Bass Coast Shire Council



**Instagram**

@basscoastshire



**YouTube**

Bass Coast Shire Council



**Twitter**

@BassCoast



**LinkedIn**

Bass Coast Shire Council

## Visit us

### Wonthaggi

76 McBride Avenue

### Inverloch

16 A'Beckett Street

### Cowes

154-156 Thompson Avenue

### Grantville

1504-1510 Bass Highway







## Communications & Engagement Strategy **2023 - 2026**

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Bass Coast Shire Council  
76 McBride Avenue, Wonthaggi, VIC 3995  
PO Box 118 Wonthaggi, VIC 3995

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1300 BCOAST (226 278) or (03) 5671 2211 or  
via the National Relay Service (if you are deaf  
and/or find it hard hearing or speaking with  
people who use a phone) on their website:

[infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/phone/services-people-with-disability/accesshub/national-relay-service](https://infrastructure.gov.au/media-technology-communications/phone/services-people-with-disability/accesshub/national-relay-service)

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[basscoast.vic.gov.au](https://basscoast.vic.gov.au)