



Community Engagement Strategy 2019



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About this strategy

Kempsey Shire Council (KSC) community vision for the Macleay Valley is:

“We live in a community that provides opportunity to all, to prosper in an environment that supports well-being, connectedness and access to resources the community wants and needs.”

To achieve this vision, KSC places a high priority on open and transparent community engagement to ensure:

- We understand the needs of the community
- We leverage local knowledge and expertise
- Our community is informed about Council decisions and developments that impact them
- We encourage and enable the community to participate in decision making
- We ensure we meet our legislative requirements

The Community Engagement Strategy (CES) provides the guiding principles and approach for ensuring the community has an opportunity to have their say in a meaningful way. This document should be used in conjunction with the Community Engagement Toolkit to ensure a consistent approach to engagement across all Council projects.

The CES has been developed in accordance with Section 402 of the *Local Government Act 1993* requirement for the development of the Community Strategic Plan (CSP); and meets the requirements for a single community participation plan as detailed in the March 2018 update to the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Key Definitions

Active participation is when the community is involved in the development and decision-making process of a project or issue.

Community refers to the people who live, work, play, own land or property, study or visit Kempsey Shire, community groups and government organisations.

Engagement allows the community to provide comment and input. It is a process where input / feedback is taken into consideration in Council’s decision-making processes.

Project refers to any Council project, program, policy, initiative or issue which has a community impact.

Provision of information is letting people know what is happening with Council projects and processes.

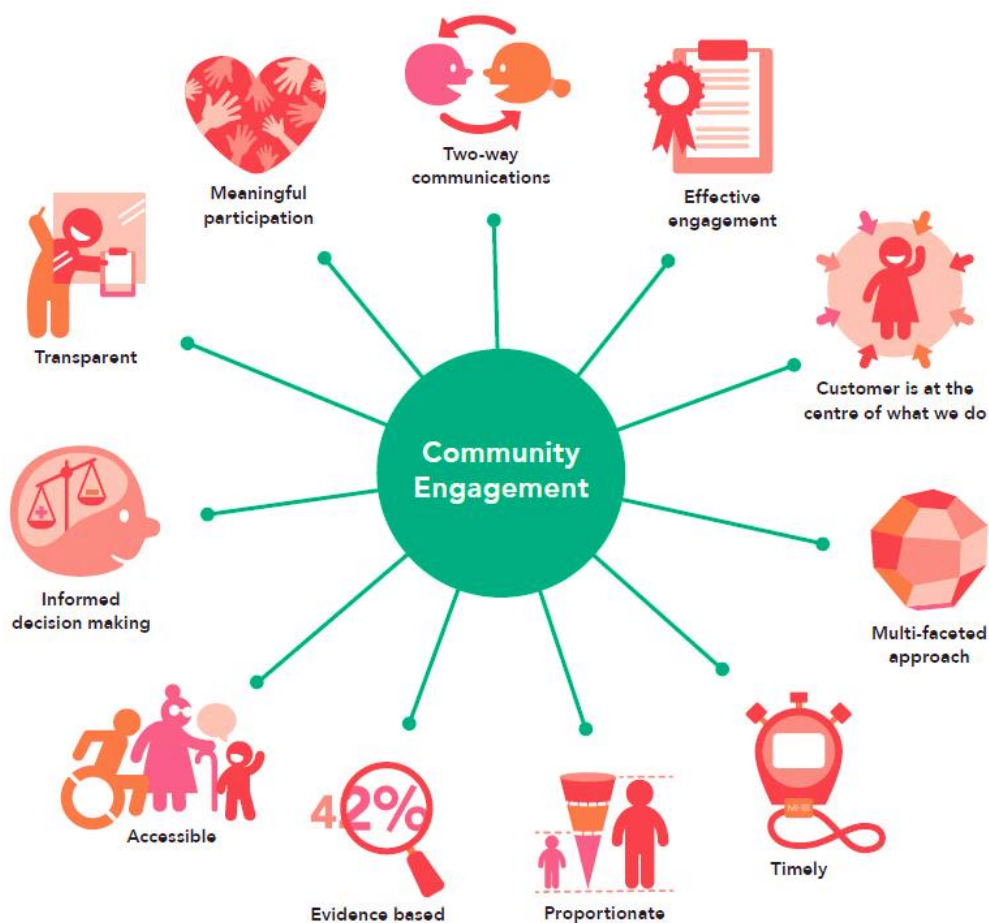
Stakeholder is a person or group who has, or feels they have, an interest or stake in a project or issue (for example local businesses, Government agencies, local associations and organisations or project partners).

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is how KSC informs and involves individuals, businesses, community groups and other government organisations based in the local government area (LGA) in decisions relating to Council plans, policies, procedures, service delivery and development applications.

Effective community engagement is inclusive, open, easy, meaningful, relevant and timely; it involves a two-way conversation between Council and the community.

Engagement does not necessarily aim to achieve consensus amongst all participants; it does however provide an opportunity to understand the critical issues and attitudes associated with projects prior to a decision being made.



Community Engagement Principles

KSC has eleven key principles which all staff and contractors must follow to ensure we are engaging with the community in a meaningful and transparent way.

1. *Engagement is a core part of Council's role*

Community engagement is part of everyone's role, from running community engagement forums to asking an individual what they think on a project. Every Council staff member is involved in some way in engaging with the community.

2. *Inform the community*

KSC will engage with the community in a relevant and timely manner to ensure the community has factual and balanced information to develop an informed opinion on any project.

KSC will ensure all information will be in plain language, easily accessible and at an appropriate level of detail for the size of the project being considered.

3. *Engage before decision making*

KSC will consult with the community before decisions are made to ensure feedback can be evaluated and concerns addressed prior to commencing a new project.

There may be times when enough research and community engagement has already occurred about a project. In this situation it is important to inform the community of the engagement conducted previously, the findings and the rationale for decisions made.

KSC strongly recommends where a major development is proposed, the developer engages with members of the community who are affected by the proposed major development before an application for planning approval is made.

4. *Be upfront and open*

When engaging with the community, we will be clear about our intentions, the type of feedback being sought, and the process being followed. Council will clearly explain the issues faced and the next steps in the decision-making process.

5. *Be representative*

KSC has a diverse population, including young families, an aging population, people living with disabilities, Aboriginal and multicultural communities. KSC will aim to ensure community engagement is reflective of the communities impacted by a project.

KSC will establish ongoing partnerships with relevant community organisations, businesses and groups to help facilitate meaningful opportunities for community engagement.

6. *Don't over-engage*

KSC values the time our community and stakeholders commit to provide their input and feedback about Council projects. Throughout the year, the community is engaged on many topics, therefore, prior to commencing any community engagement process, it is important to determine if there is existing research or findings from previous community engagements to ensure there is no duplication of effort and that we do not waste stakeholders time.

Too much community engagement can result in the community feeling like KSC is not listening to their feedback.

7. *Respect all views*

The community holds significant expertise and knowledge of the local area; KSC will respect all views and opinions.

Community engagement does not aim to achieve agreement or consensus on all topics and issues. It is also expected that the community treats KSC employees and representatives with respect during community engagement initiatives.

8. *Ongoing communication*

KSC will regularly communicate to keep the community informed of progress for projects. All communications should aim to provide clear explanations of the nature of the project, including constraints, decision making steps and any delays throughout the life of the project.

9. *Provide feedback*

KSC will provide the community with feedback on how their input has been used, the next steps in the decision-making process and if there is further opportunity for input.

10. *Close the loop*

At the conclusion of a community engagement process, KSC will inform councillors, community stakeholders, employees and people who have made a submission of the final decision. The final documents or plans will be published online using Council's engagement platform 'Your Say Macleay'.

11. *Evaluate the community engagement process*

KSC is committed to continually improving its approach to community engagement and will evaluate its performance through internal reviews, stakeholder feedback and community surveys.

The community engagement principles are aligned to meet the requirements for community engagement as part of the CSP development as detailed in s402 of the *Local Government Act 1993*. These principles also meet the requirements for the Community Participation Principles outlined in the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979* (section 2.23 (2)).

Our community engagement objectives

Community engagement is an important part of effective project planning, relationship building and decision making. KSC community engagement objectives are to:

1. Create an organisational culture that supports active and relevant engagement with stakeholders and community
2. Commit to a calendar of engagement activities
3. Use a variety of engagement mechanisms

KSC community engagement objectives were developed and endorsed as part of the KSC Communications Strategy 2017-21.

Key actions

Objective 1 - Create an organisational culture that supports active and relevant engagement with stakeholders

To achieve this objective, KSC will:

- Ensure relevant staff are educated about community engagement processes and procedures
- Create a culture which recognises and promotes the value of community engagement in a timely, transparent and meaningful way
- Develop and implement a whole of organisation approach ensuring community engagement processes and procedures are included in our planning and delivery of programs, projects and services.

Ref	Activity	2019-20	2020-21	Ongoing
1.1	Update Council engagement policies to reflect an organisational wide approach	●		
1.2	Develop an engagement toolkit to increase commitment and skill levels among staff	●		
1.3	Create 'engagement champions' within the organisation and ensure they are trained in common principles and engagement techniques		●	
1.4	Highlight community engagement learnings across the organisation to build a knowledge bank			●
1.5	Embed community engagement into project planning/management frameworks	●		

Objective 2 – Commit to a calendar of engagement activities

To achieve this objective, KSC will:

- Ensure Councillors, senior staff and relevant employees are educated and have the capability to engage effectively with the community
- Ensure consistent approach to scheduling community engagement to allow the community to be engaged in an effective and relevant manner demonstrating that we value their time and opinions

Ref	Activity	2019-20	2020-21	Ongoing
2.1	Compile an annual organisational-wide engagement calendar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community catch ups • Presence at existing community events e.g. markets, NAIDOC • Specific project-based events 			●

Objective 3 – Use a variety of engagement mechanisms

To achieve this objective, KSC will:

- Continuously improve the tools and mechanisms available for conducting community engagement
- To ensure the Community Partnerships section has the resources and capability to deliver advisory services which support effective community engagement

Ref	Activity	2019-20	2020-21	Ongoing
3.1	Develop, revise and expand usage of online engagement tools such as Your Say Macleay Portal			●
3.2	Community Partnerships provides advisory services to ensure coordinated organisational approach where engagement with stakeholders is accurate and appropriate			●
3.3	Use paid advertising, editorial, direct marketing and social media to promote opportunities for the community to have a say			●

Our approach to community engagement

Community engagement is a planned process with the specific purpose of working with identified groups of people, whether they are connected by geographic location, special interest, or affiliation to address issues affecting their well-being.

Community engagement is required when there will be:


- A new strategy or plan
- Changes to an existing policy
- A significant impact on residents during the delivery or construction of a project
- Changes to the level of existing environment, space, accessibility or convenience
- A change to the actual provision of a service to the community
- An opportunity for stakeholders to influence a project or outcome of a decision

When conducting community engagement, KSC will ensure the engagement:

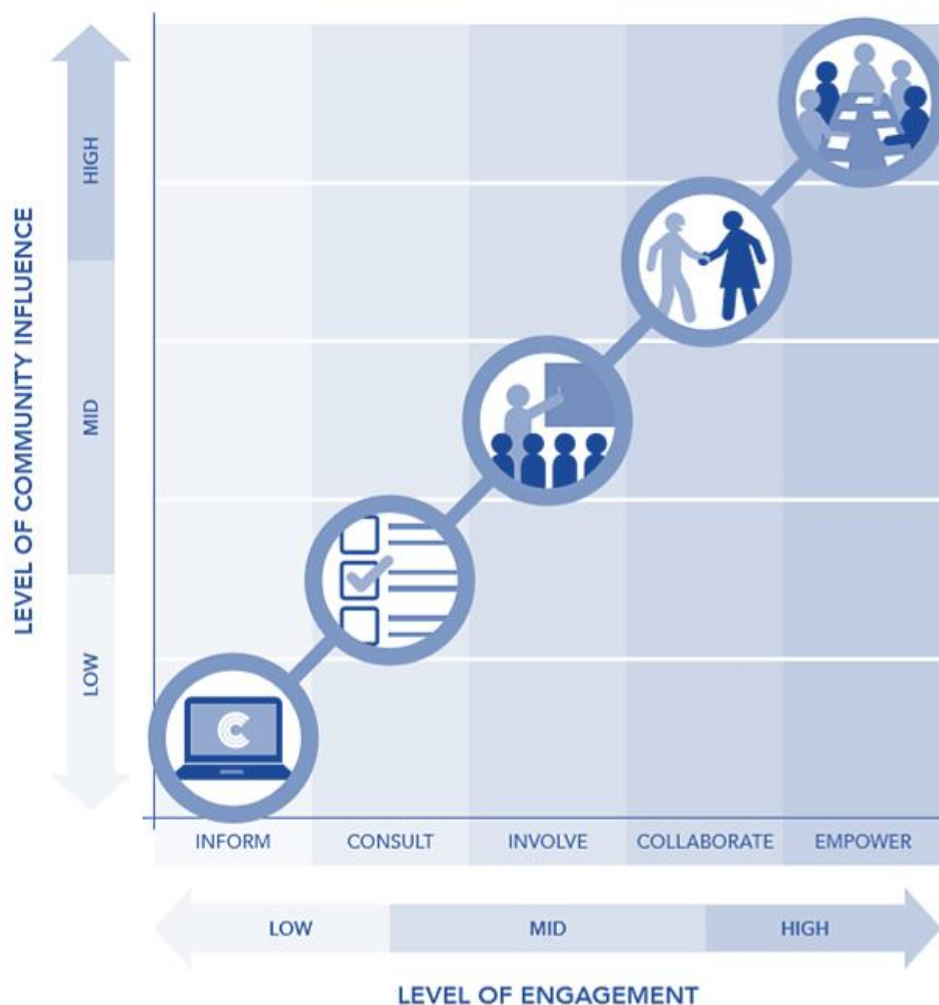
- Is representative of the community members potentially affected by a project e.g. young people, people living with disabilities, older people, parents with young children, Aboriginal or other multicultural groups, businesses or other community-based organisations and key stakeholders
- Is accessible
 - Where possible, face-to-face engagement is held at physically accessible venues with appropriate facilities including parking, footpath access, lighting, public transport access, accessible bathrooms etc
 - Produces content suitable for hearing or visually impaired community members
 - All written communication is in plain English
 - Language barriers should be taken into consideration and interpreter services used as required
- Respects the rights and cultural needs of Aboriginal community members
- Considers the values and constraints of people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background

In line with KSC Community Engagement Toolkit, a comprehensive stakeholder assessment will be conducted at the start of each project to identify relevant stakeholders and appropriate engagement mechanisms in line with project scope and level of impact.

KSC values community engagement in decision making and as such, aligns its processes with the IAP2 Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement developed by the International Association for Public Participation.

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT 				
INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of the alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public

KSC will use the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum to inform the development of engagement strategies to ensure the community and relevant stakeholders are appropriately involved in projects that impact them.



Determining the 'level of impact' of a project

The table below can be used to identify the likely 'level of impact' of a project.

Level of Impact	Level of engagement to be considered	Criteria for determining level of impact	Examples
Level 1 High level of impact across the whole community or a large part of the LGA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform • Consult • Involve • Collaborate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of real or perceived impact or risk across the LGA • Any significant impact on attributes considered to be of high value to the whole of the LGA such as the natural environment or heritage • Any impact on the health, safety or well-being of the community • Potential high degree of controversy / conflict • Likely high level of interest across the LGA • Potential high impact on state or regional strategies or directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting suite of documents for example the Community Strategic Plan (CSP), Operational Plan, Delivery Program • A major strategy or plan subordinate to the CSP e.g. Local Strategic Planning Statements (LSPS), biodiversity strategy, flood risk management etc • Plan of Management (regional) • A change to land categorisation, i.e. community to operational land • Disability Inclusive Action Plan • Removal of a regional facility or service • Provision of regional facility • Key changes to the LGA
Level 2 High level of impact of a local nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform • Consult • Involve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of real or perceived impact on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service • The loss of, or significant change to any facility or service to a local community • Potential high degree of controversy or conflict at the local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service delivery change, e.g. waste management • Plan of management, local e.g. Crown Lands plan of management • Local strategic planning (place specific) • Change to or loss of valued activity or program • Redevelopment of a sportsground • Proposed removal or development of a local park • Increase or removal of car parking in local shopping centre

Level of Impact	Level of engagement to be considered	Criteria for determining level of impact	Examples
<p>Level 3</p> <p>Lower level of impact across the whole community or a large part of LGA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform • Consult • Involve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower, although still some real or perceived, impact or risk across the LGA • Potential for some controversy or conflict • Potential for some, although not significant impact on State or Regional strategies or directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to a Kempsey wide service, e.g. emergency services, library services • Upgrade of a district or regional facility, e.g. netball courts • Changes to customer service processes, e.g. payment of rates • Most changes to fees and charges (unless contentious) • Provision of a community wide event • Review of community needs, e.g. biennial survey, recreation needs assessment
<p>Level 4</p> <p>Lower level of impact of a local nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform • Consult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower level of real or perceived impact or risk on a local area, small community or user group/s of a specific facility or service • Only a small change or improvement to a facility or service at the local level • Low or no risk of controversy or conflict at the local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade of a small local playground, local street or streetscape upgrade • Changes to a local activity program, e.g. timing or venue/location

Developing a community engagement plan

Having decided on the level of impact, the next step is to determine the level of community engagement appropriate for the project. Not all high impact projects or issues will be appropriate for a high level of community involvement.

It is also important at this stage to identify if there has been previous research or community engagement relating to the project or a similar type of project.

In determining the level of community engagement, the following should be considered:

- Is it a new issue?
- Is it a complex or sensitive issue?
- What level of impact will it have on residents, stakeholders and the broader community?
- What level of influence can the community have in the decision-making process?
- Where in the decision-making process should engagement occur?
- What resources are available and needed?
- How will we communicate the engagement and overall project?

Once the level of community engagement is determined, the Community Engagement Toolkit, developed by KSC Community Partnerships, should be used to develop a detailed community engagement plan for approval by the project owner, Community Partnerships and the appropriate Directorate. This toolkit is relevant for community engagement initiatives conducted by KSC staff or external consultants. The table below provides an overview of the community engagement strategies relevant for using with increasing levels of community impact.

At any time during a project, issue or action, it may be necessary to reassess the 'Level of Impact' or 'Engagement Level' and vary the engagement approach accordingly, due to a change in the situation or recognition of implications. When engaging with the community Council will advise participants of the current engagement level for the specific project, issue or action.

Increasing level of impact	Engagement Level	Definitions	Promise to the public	Engagement Techniques examples	Increasing level of engagement
	1. Inform	To provide the public and stakeholders with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	We will keep you informed	The type of methods you will use e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public notice in newspaper • Website • Newsletter • Media release • Council displays • Factsheet at Libraries and Customer Services 	
	2. Consult	To obtain stakeholder feedback on analysis alternatives and/or decisions	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Say Macleay • Surveys • Public exhibition • Briefings 	
	3. Involve	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that the stakeholders' concerns are consistently understood and considered.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with existing groups • Workshop sessions • Community forums • Face to face • Pop up info sessions 	
	4. Collaborate	To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal taskforce/working group • Community reference group • Deliberative polling • Management committees 	
	5. Empower	To place the final decision making in the hands of the public.	We will implement what you decide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegated decisions • Legislated voting 	

To ensure the appropriate level of community engagement, staff also need to consider specific legislative requirements and other relevant Council policies.

Appendix B details the legislative requirements for community engagement, specifically public exhibition timeframes.

Evaluation of community engagement activities

KSC is committed to continually improving our engagement with the community. The following mechanisms will be used to evaluate our community engagement:

- Level of interactions via face to face and digital channels
- Volume of responses via Your Say Macleay
- Volume of submissions
- Number of attendees at community events, workshops and other forums
- Stakeholder feedback
- Types of feedback provided
- Feedback from participating community members for each specific engagement

Use of external consultants for community engagement

At times KSC may utilise the assistance of external consultants to deliver specialist projects that also have a community engagement component. In these instances, the consultants will be expected to adhere to this strategy and follow the procedures detailed in the KSC Community Engagement Toolkit.

When planning community engagement, external consultants should consider KSC scheduled community engagement activities (available on the community engagement calendar) and known busy periods such as school holidays and public holidays. It is recommended consultants provide at least two timeframe options to the KSC Community Engagement team for approval.

APPENDIX A

Statutory Roles & Responsibilities

The *Local Government Act 1993* defines the following roles and responsibilities.

Councillors represent the collective interests of residents, businesses and community groups based in the local government area.

The Council engages regularly with community organisations and other key stakeholders and keeps them informed of its decisions.

The Mayor, as leader of the Council and as a community leader, promotes partnerships with key stakeholders; and together with the General Manager ensures adequate opportunities and mechanisms for engagement between the Council and the local community.

The General Manager advises the Mayor and Council on appropriate forms of community engagement in different situations and prepares a Community Engagement Strategy.

APPENDIX B

Legislative Requirements

Integrated Planning and Reporting, Section 402 of *Local Government Act 1993*

The CES meets KSC legislative requirement under this Act to outline engagement methods that Council will use ‘to facilitate the involvement of councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and Council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of local government.’. The CES meets the commitment to ‘establish and implement a strategy based on social justice principles for engagement with the local community’.

The Local Government Act 1993

KSC will meet the statutory requirements for public exhibition of policies as required under the *Local Government Act 1993* and other relevant legislation e.g. *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (NSW)*, *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998*

The Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979

The legislation was created to help the community understand how they can participate in planning decisions in a clear and easy to understand way. The CES meets the requirement for a single community participation plan as specified in the March 2018 update to the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act)*.

The table below details the minimum requirements for exhibition as required by the EP&A Act.

EP&A Act (Schedule 1)	Minimum statutory requirement	KSC level of engagement (in addition to statutory requirement)
Draft community participation (engagement) plans (CPP)	28 days	Level 1 impact engagement strategies
Draft local strategic planning statements (LSPs)	28 days	Level 1 impact engagement strategies
Planning proposals for local environmental plans subject to a gateway determination	28 days or a) If a different period of public exhibition is specified in the gateway determination for the proposal – the period so specified, or b) If the gateway determination specifies that no public exhibition is required because of the	Dependent on the assessed level of impact

EP&A Act (Schedule 1)	Minimum statutory requirement	KSC level of engagement (in addition to statutory requirement)
	minor nature of the proposal – no public exhibition	
Draft development control plans	28 days	Dependent on the assessed level of impact
Draft contribution plans	28 days	
Application for development consent (other than for complying development certificate, for designated development or for State significant development)	14 days or: a) If a different period of public exhibition is specified for the application in the relevant CES – the period so specified, or b) If the CES specifies that no public exhibition is required for the application – no public exhibition	
Application for development consent for designated development	28 days	
Application for modification of development consent that is required to be publicly exhibited by the regulations	The period (if any) determined by the consent authority in accordance with the relevant CES	
Environmental impact statement obtained under Division 5.1	28 days	

Local Government Act / Water Management Act	Minimum community engagement requirement	KSC level of engagement (in addition to statutory requirement)
Community Strategic Plan (CSP)	28 days	Level 1 impact strategies
Delivery Program	28 days	Level 1 impact strategies
Operational Plan	28 days	Level 1 impact strategies
Development Servicing Plans for Water and Sewer	30 days	

Local Government Act / Council as Crown Lands manager	Minimum community engagement requirement	KSC level of engagement (in addition to statutory requirement)
Plan of Management	Public notification 28 days Public exhibition 42 days	
Plan of Management where there proposed plan will categorise or alter the categorisation of community land under section 36(4)	As above plus 21 days notification of a public hearing where <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the person presiding is not currently or has been in the past 5 years a councillor or employee of the council - the report of the public hearing must be made available on public exhibition 	
Native Title Assessment	28 days	Dependent on the assessed level of impact

Note:

For any of the above, the period between 20 December and 10 January is not counted towards the minimum public exhibition periods.

Where a 28-day exhibition period is identified it is inclusive of weekends.



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