



Building Community Agency – for social licence

Gippsland Offshore Wind Assembly



Introducing DemocracyCo

We support communities and governments to find sustainable solutions to some of the biggest and most complex problems of our time.

We do this by designing and delivering engagement ecosystems.

- We are a global leader in deliberative engagement both in Australia and overseas.
- nonpartisan and impartial.
- 120 deliberative projects over 11 years and combined facilitation experience of more than 40 years
- Clients include local, federal and state government;, utilities; regional development authorities; NGOs; and humanitarian and organisations.
- Portfolio of energy projects – renewables, transition, energy costs, regulatory proposals



The context...

65%

**Think we are
becoming more
divided**

(Amplify 2024)

62%

**Hold grievances
against gov,
business and rich
people**

(Edelman 2025)

32%

**Believe people in
government can be
trusted**

(AES 2025)

54%

**The social fabric that
held this country
together has grown to
weak to serve as a
foundation for unity
and common purpose**

(Edelman 2023)

61%

**The lack of 'civility'
and mutual respect
is the worst I have
ever seen**

(Edelman 2023)

The ... “loss of trust threatens the social licence to operate for Australia’s institutions, restricting their ability to enact long-term strategies.

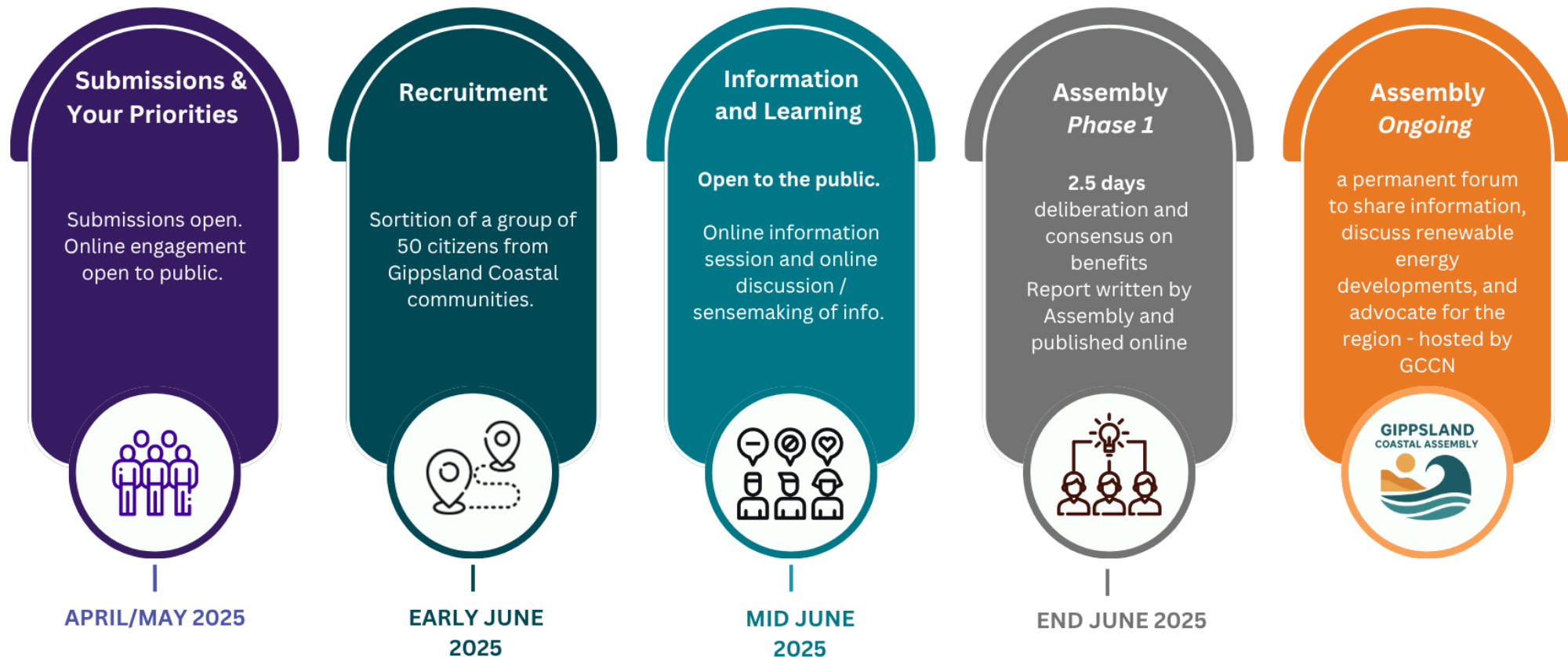
Unless trust can be restored, Australia will find it difficult to build consensus on the long-term solutions required to address the other challenges.”

CSIRO 2019



The Project... at a glance.

Remit: **Offshore wind energy is a defining part of Gippsland's energy future and a key contributor of Australia's renewable transition that will help power the nation. How can the change benefit us all – our families, our communities and our coastline?**



Built Social Licence

"I used to think communities were not listened to, now I know that there are avenues via which local opinions can be expressed and heard."

Participant

102%

Increase "I know a lot about the development and operation of offshore wind energy"

30%

Increase in support for offshore windfarms in Gippsland

83.6%

Increase in understanding of a community benefit scheme

Creating a constructive conversation

No Outrage!

The process created a collaborative and respectful environment ... & built advocates

100%

better understanding of the views of others

100%

Agreed it was a civil and respectful conversation

97%

"that they feel comfortable and confident to advocate for change".

Creating a constructive conversation

7%

Participants agreed that people are respectful when in online interactions talking about wind farms

28%

Participants agreed that people are respectful for in-person interactions about wind farms

100%

Participants agreed that people were respectful & civil to each other in the Assembly



“Decisions that directly affect our local communities must be made with us, not done to us.”

democracyCo

Gippsland Offshore Wind Assembly Report

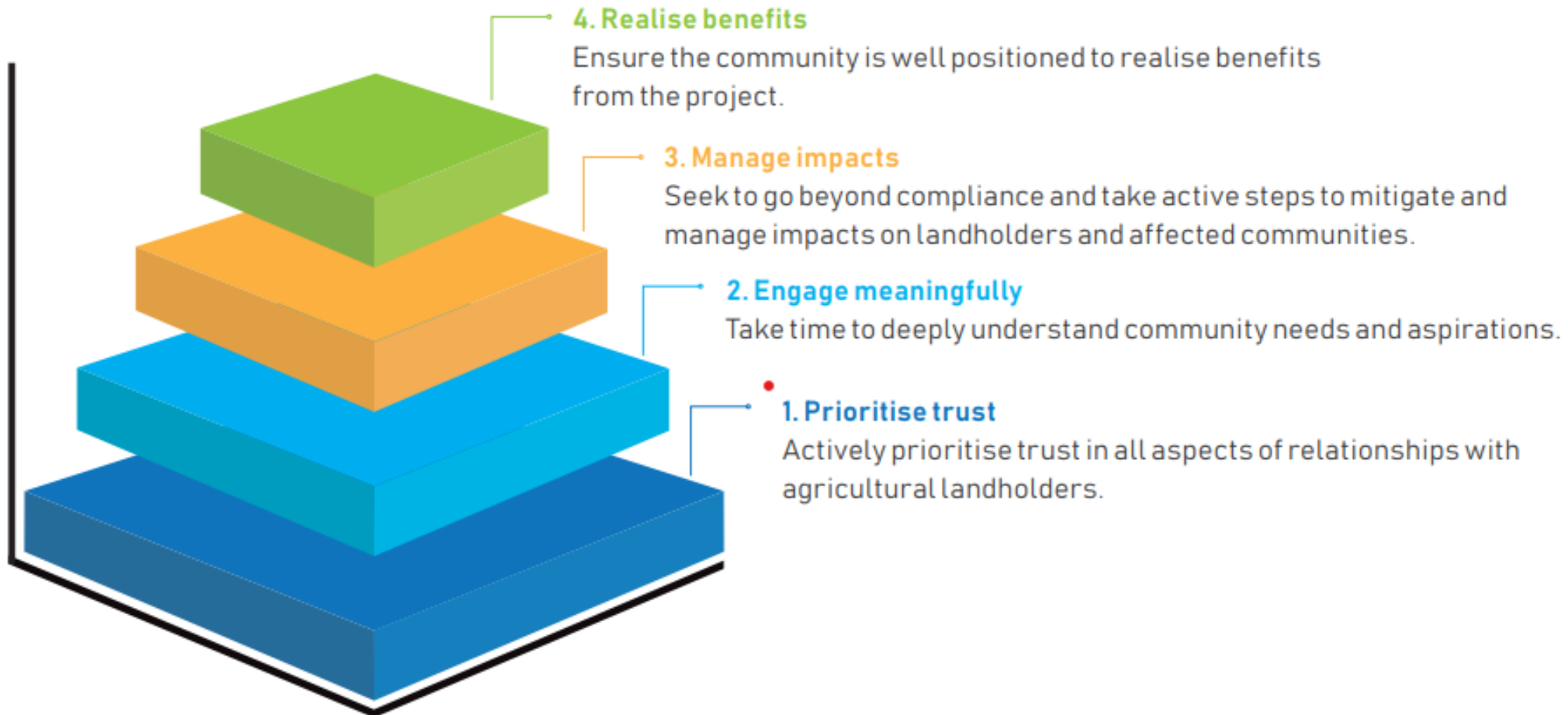
What made the Gippsland Offshore Wind Assembly so successful?

What are the key repeatable elements – that can be applied in any renewables project?



Energy Charter – Building social licence framework

By meaningfully involving communities in the determination of benefits (who / how) and in determining how impacts can be managed – organisations would have engaged meaningfully and built trust.



Intentional Design

Be clear on the purpose of your engagement, and what can be achieved through it.

Design and deploy deliberative, engagement and communications tools to achieve your objectives.

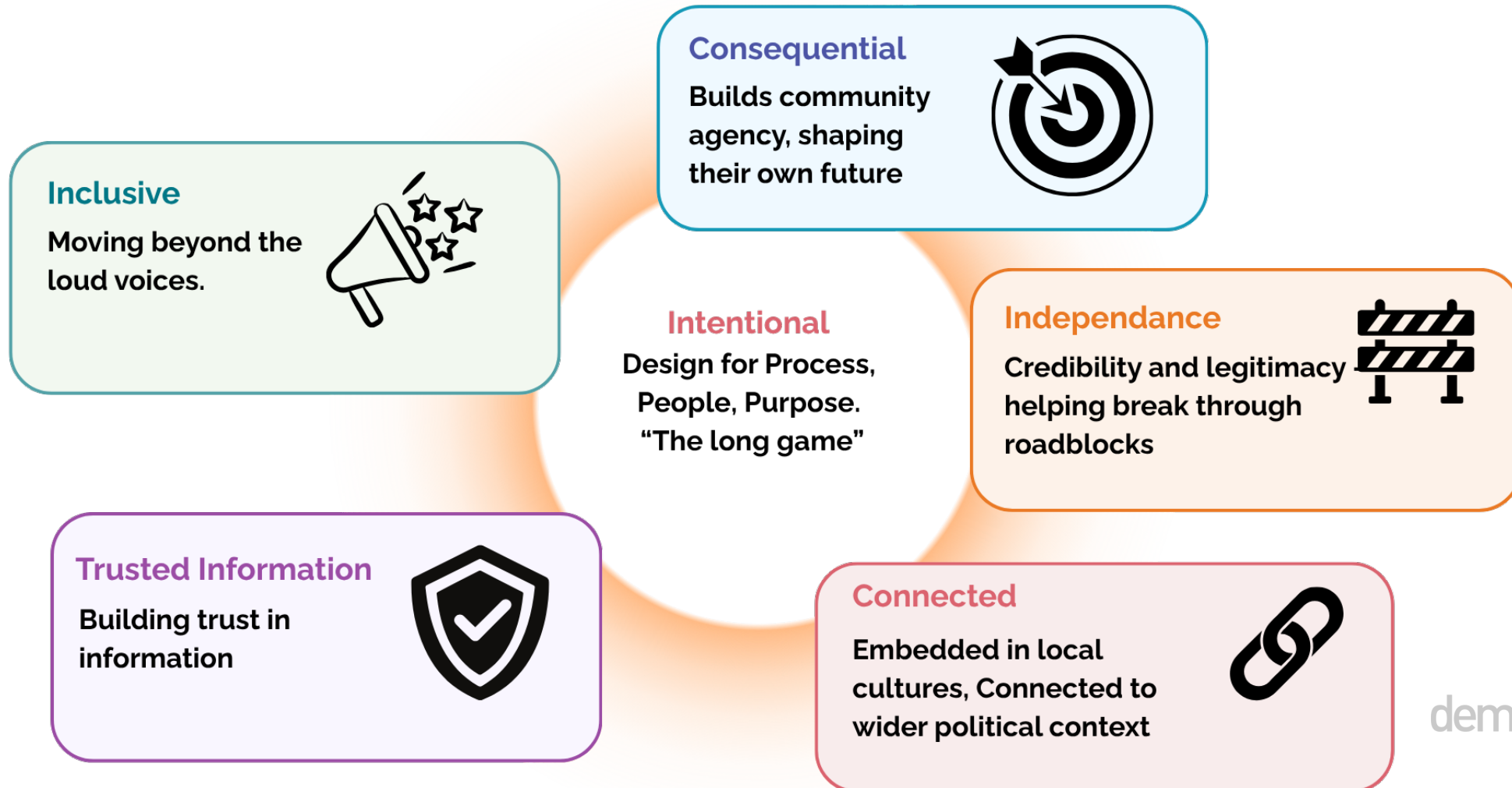
*Create processes that remove
remove obstacles to
emergence and enable people
people to contribute and
connect equitably.*

Gippsland Project Objectives

- Demonstrate an effective model for building social licence and trust
- Improve energy literacy – address misinformation / disinformation
- Positive participant experience
- Hear from diverse voices/ values
- Contribute to effective engagement in Gippsland
- Build internal capability
- Measure impact and share to build the practice

5 Key Elements made Gippsland successful

Meaningful engagement supports trust & social licence.



Using the Chat, tell us ...

How would you describe the type of people who usually turn up to your engagement workshops or townhall meetings?



Move beyond the loud voices

Work with a diversity of the community including those **without strong perspectives**.

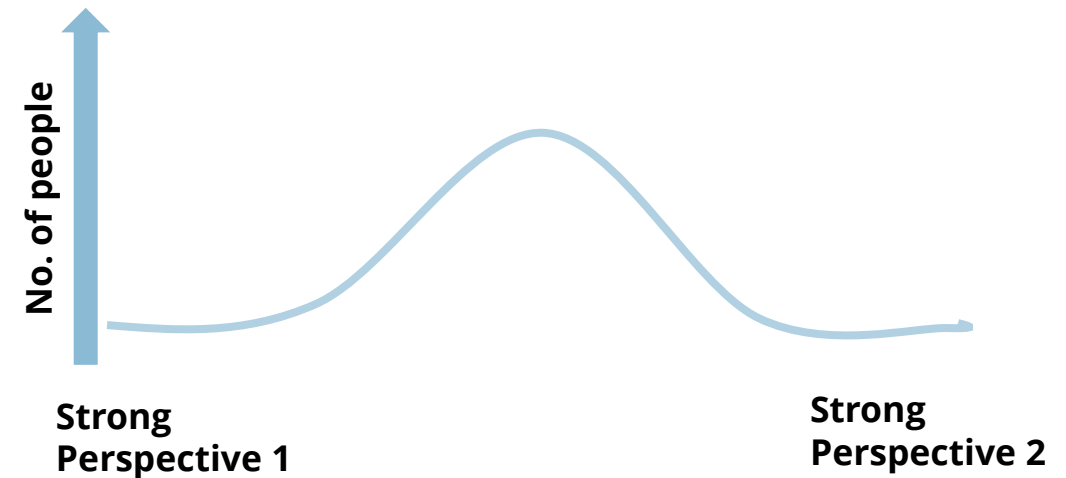
It will often be useful to bring these diverse voices together.

Why?

1. Helps to address concerns of fairness / inequity – improves transparency
2. Those with more neutral positions become ‘bridge builders’ – trusted neutral parties
3. Builds community rather than divides it

Inclusive

Moving beyond the loud voices



How we got diversity in Gippsland

Inclusive

Moving beyond
the loud voices



Recruitment undertaken through a combination of

- **Democratic lottery** - random invitation / random stratification
- **Outreach** – to 'hard to reach' groups

RESULTS

- **Primary focus on coastal communities** - 80% of participants from coastal areas (Inverloch to Loch Sport)
- **Balanced mix of residents** – full-time residents, long-term renters, and holiday homeowners
- **Demographic diversity** – age and gender, aligned with census data
- **First Nations** - representation
- **Youth representation** – supported by DemocracyCo's youth scholarship
- **Employment diversity** – focus on primary production (farming, fishing), tourism, retail, education, and healthcare
- **Representatives from 6 local community groups** - providing representation from existing key community groups
- **Values Diversity** – across the spectrum of strong support, support, neutral to not supportive



"We are the community that will experience the transition, so it is really important we have a voice in the process."

Ben, Gippsland Offshore Wind Citizen's Assembly

"It's how we deliver them (renewables) in a way that's fair for everyone - that communities are properly consulted."

Peter Star, Victorian Farmers Federation, speaking about the renewable energy transition, ABC News

Influence is a possibility

**Community agency = a
community can shape its own
future.**

The community can't change the transition to renewables – but potentially they can help you to determine how to minimise the impact on them and or how best to share the benefits.

Consequential
Needs to lead to
change / outcomes



How we did it in Gippsland

Gippsland Offshore Wind - How can the change benefit us all – our families, our communities and our coastline?

- ✓ Appropriate to the status of the Project
- ✓ High level conversation – broad directions for benefits
- ✓ Influenceable
- ✓ Enabled a conversation about offshore wind – without focusing on whether it was a good idea or not

Consequential

Needs to lead to
change / outcomes



Connection – why it matters

Connection involves working with stakeholders and local connectors.

Benefits include -

- Process success –it understands local context and needs
- Improves influence / impact
- Gives the process legitimacy
- Scale: Enables more people to learn about the process and the project – building trust beyond the ‘people in the room’
- Builds local ownership

Connected

Embedded in local cultures, Connected to wider political context



“Only by connecting to the broader public can deliberative have an impact beyond its immediate participants”

University of Canberra Guidebook for Deliberative Engagement

How we did it in Gippsland

Connected

Embedded in local
cultures, Connected to
wider political context



1. Project Advisory Group

- Oversight
- Design advice
- Speakers

2. Trusted local host – GCCN

- Independent
- Strong relationships across sectors
- Established central role convening community on this issue
- Bridge between community and proponents

Organisation	Name / role
Gippsland Climate Change Network	Darren McCubbin, CEO
Offshore Wind Energy Victoria	Bodye Darvil, Local Director of Partnerships
Vic Grid	Ash Hall – Senior Advisor
Gippsland Offshore Wind Alliance (GOWA) & Regional Engagement Exchange (REX)	Paul Johnson + 1 rotating observer, & Kate Foster, REX Chairperson
Local Government – South Gippsland	Pauleen Boulton, Business Development Officer
Local Government – Wellington Shire	Kirsten Power, Economic Development Officer
Offshore Wind Energy Victoria	Mandy Neave, Offshore Wind Partnerships
Golden Paradise Beach Community Development Fund	Andrew O'Rorke
Yarram Progress Association (Future of Yarram)	Kevin Mackin
Port Albert Resident and member of the Southerly Ten Community Reference Group	Sue Heal
Resident of Sandy Point and member of the Sandy Point Community Power Inc.	Chris Harvey
Community Representative (Fishing)	Lachlan McKinnon
Australian Centre for Offshore Wind (ACOWE)	Jess Reeves
GCCN Board Member	Julie Gibson

How do you build trust in information?

We trust information when ...

1. Values aligned – it 'feels' true to us
2. Credible - it comes from a credible source
3. Established Trust - it comes from someone we already trust
4. Candor – those providing it are balanced and open



Trusted Information

Building trust in
information



People

Speakers should be able to help the assembly get a good grasp of:

- Population / demographic projections,
- community services and organisations (and how they are funded)
- Social Wellbeing,
- Traditional Owner issues / opportunities

Place

Speakers should be able to help the assembly get a good grasp of:

- the natural environment, habitat, biodiversity, land and sea
- the built environment - towns, communities, place making, infrastructure (roads, telecommunications) needs into the future

Productivity

Speakers should be able to help the assembly get a good grasp of:

- Our economy - industry and business status and projections
- Workforce - Skills and capability development status and projections
- Planning and strategic direction

How we did it in Gippsland

Trusted Information

Building trust in
information



Speakers selected by PAG – to ensure that the speakers were:

1. Credible
2. Local
3. Respected
4. Represented diverse perspectives / values

Speakers were candid – discussed pros and cons (ie not selling) and were empathetic to community needs.

Scaffolded with Critical thinking skills

PEOPLE

Andrew Pomeroy	General Manager Development, Wellington Shire Council.
Alison Payne	Manager Community Health, Yarram and District Health Service.
Russell Mullett	Registered Aboriginal Party Manager, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC).

PLACE

Christian Stefani	Director Strategy and Partnerships, South Gippsland Shire Council.
Shannon Hurley	Nature Conservation Campaigner, Victorian National Parks Assoc.
Lachlan McKinnon	Senior Fisheries Manager, Brown & May Marine Australia.

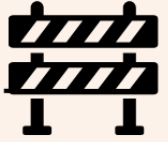
PRODUCTIVITY

Simon Boag	South East Trawl Fishing Industry
Mikela Power	Associate Director – Partnerships and Growth at Federation University.
Tony Cantwell	Chief Executive Officer Committee for Gippsland.

Why independence matters

Independence

Credibility and legitimacy
helping break through
roadblocks



Having an independent process expert helps to ensure:

- Neutrality and impartiality – no skin in the game.
- Improves credibility – building trust
- Supports equity – manages dominant voices
- Ensures quality and integrity

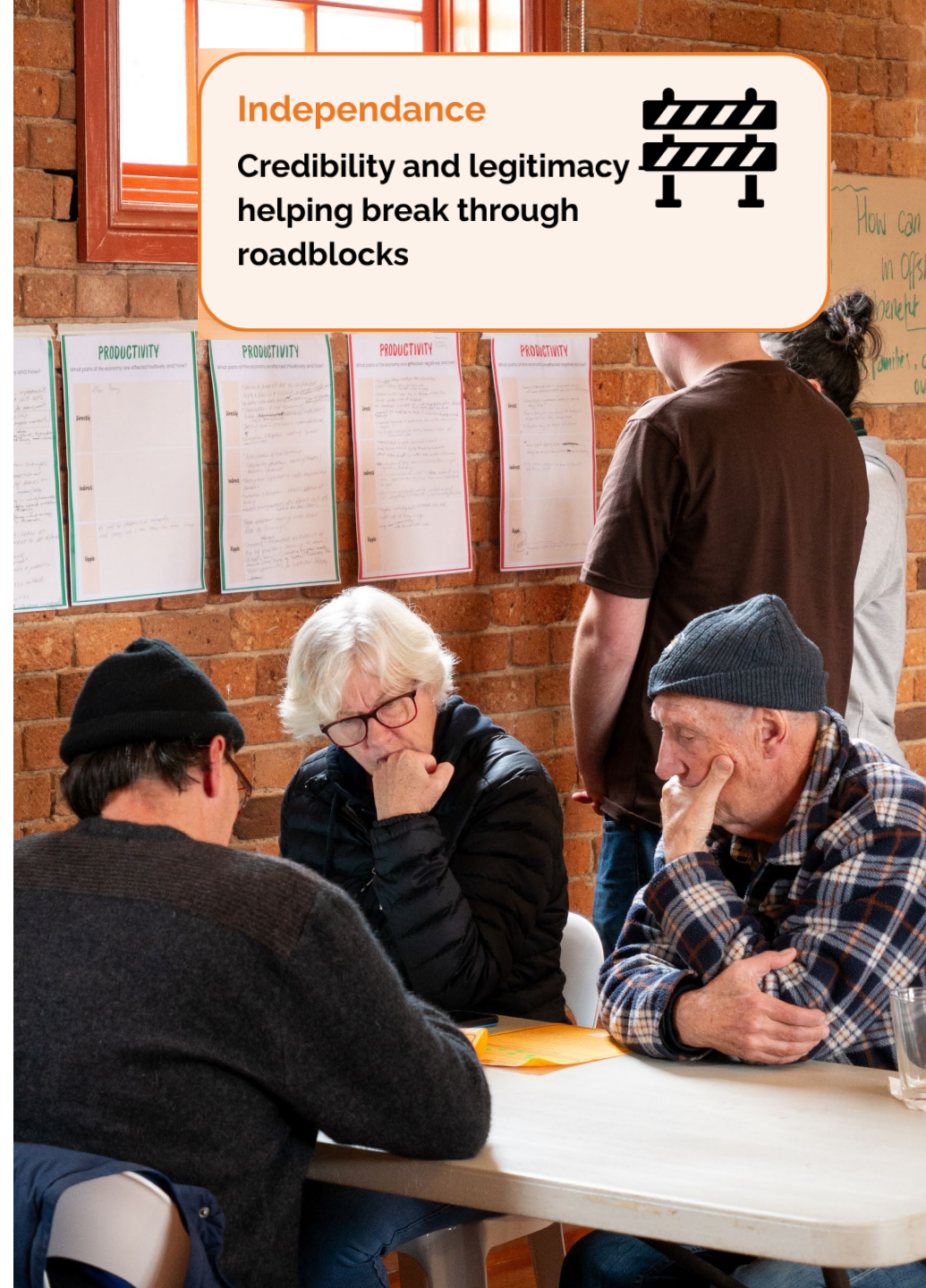
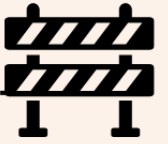
“Independence in deliberative facilitation is crucial because it ensures neutrality, prevents bias toward a predetermined outcome, and builds public trust in the process. Without it, participants and the public may view the results as manipulated by the commissioning authority.”

How we did it in Grippsland

1. Design of engagement roadmap – the other processes around the Assembly
2. Formulation and Facilitation of:
 - Project Advisory Group meetings
 - Citizens Assembly
3. Process design informed by stakeholders and host, but done independently
4. Report written by participants (small working group of Assembly members involved in editing / making the report cohesive)

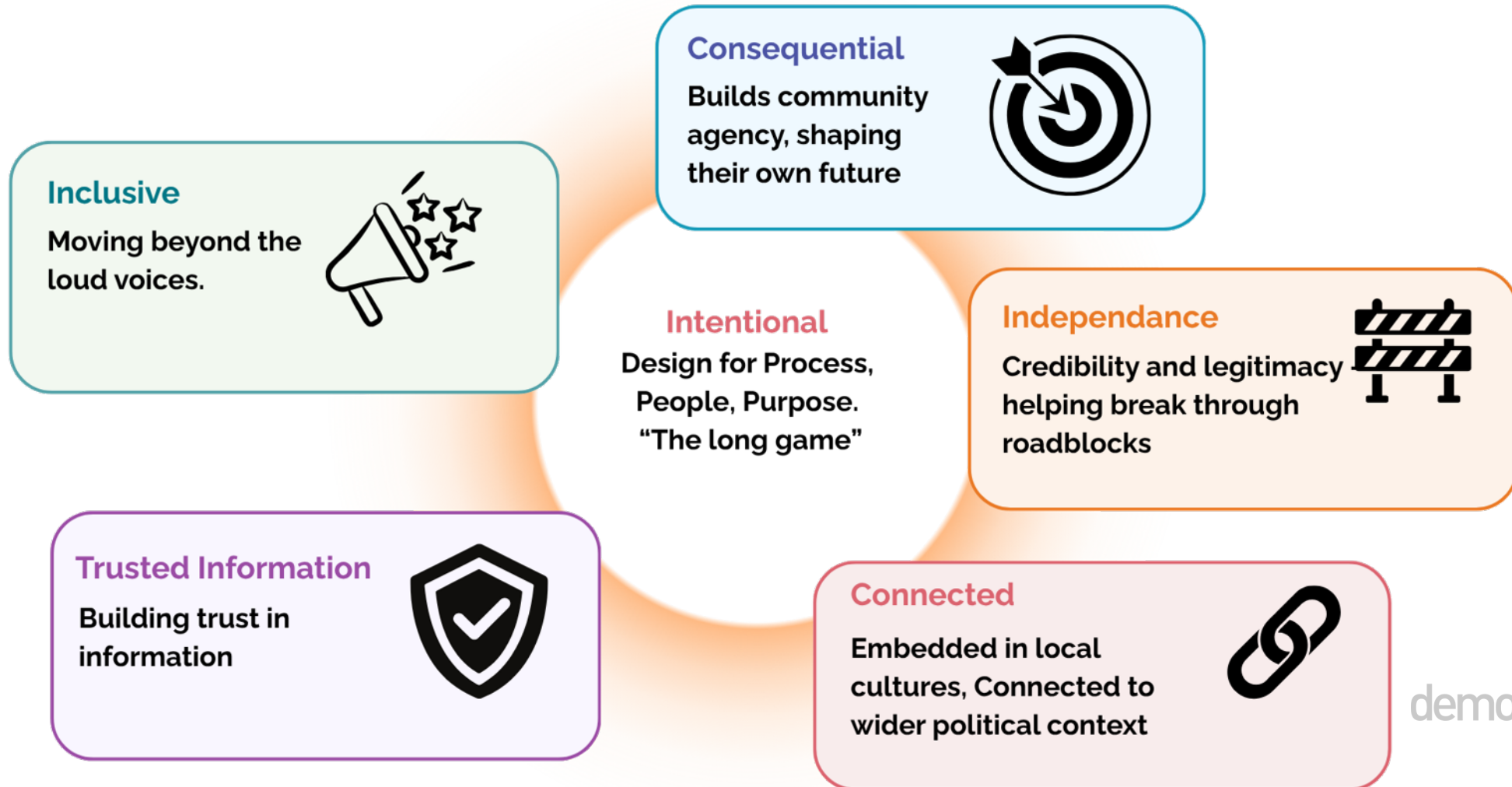
Independence

Credibility and legitimacy helping break through roadblocks



The 5 Elements – work for any transition project

Meaningful engagement supports trust & social licence.



Questions and Reflections ...



Grippsland Offshore Wind Community Assembly

