democracyCo

Gippsland Offshore Wind Community Assembly

Impact Report

July 2025

In this report

Page	
03	About this report
04	About the process
10	Key highlights
11	Building social license
17	Supporting social cohesion
24	Building democratic skills
27	Participant experience
32	Want to learn more?

About this report

Coastal communities are at the forefront of Australia's transition to offshore wind.

Change of this scale needs more than just policy frameworks and investment – it requires trust, transparency, and genuine engagement with the communities who will be most affected.

The Gippsland Climate Change Network partnered with DemocracyCo to support and host a citizen's assembly to deliberate on how the communities of Gippsland envision offshore wind delivering genuine benefits to their communities.

The aim being to demonstrate how deliberative processes can support change by creating a positive and constructive environment for conversations between industry, government and the community.

This report demonstrates the impact of the Assembly – using data collected from Assembly participants via a pre and post Assembly poll. Through the polling process we sought to explore the extent to which the process

- **Helped to build social license,**
- **Supported social cohesion and**
- **Assisted in building participants democratic skills.**

Their data is reflected in this report.

About the process

A five stage process brought together a representative group of people to deliberate on “How Gippsland Coastal Communities envision offshore wind delivering genuine benefits to their families, communities and coastal environment”. The Assembly met online for two sessions and in Port Albert for two days. They completed their work on the 29th June 2025.

They experienced a facilitated deliberation which enabled them to:

- Consider the people, places and aspects of the economy which should be prioritized for benefit
- Understand the positive and negative impacts for those who would be directly impacted, indirectly impacted and those who would feel ripple effects
- Provide collective advice on how they think the community should be engaged going forward.

The Assembly was given a range of information to help them determine what community benefits were most important. This included information from a variety of experts, who were asked to help the Assembly more deeply understand their region now, and into the future.

Those experts included:

- Darren McCubbin – Gippsland Climate Change Network
- Erin Coldham – Chair, Gippsland Offshore Wind Alliance
- Bodye Darvill / Kristie Cooper Harvey – Dept Energy, Environment and Climata Action
- Ravi Kaskana – Corio Generation
- Andrew Pomeroy – Wellington Shire Council
- Alison Payne – Yarram & District Health Service
- Russell Mullett - Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC)
- Christian Stefani – South Gippsland Shire Council
- Shannon Hurley – Victorian National Parks Association
- Lachlan McKinnon – Recreational Fishing representative
- Simon Boag – SE Trawl Fishing Industry
- Mikaela Power – Federation University
- Tony Cantwell – Committee for Gippsland

Launch of Recruitment, Submissions & Your Priorities

Sortition of a group of 50 citizens from Gippsland Coastal communities.

Submissions open

Online engagement open to all

APRIL/MAY 2025

Welcome session

3 hours, online.

Welcome
Induction / Onboarding to the process, including presentation from GCCN about the opportunity.

Deliberation ready work as a group.

1 JUNE 2025

Information / learning session

Half day, online.

Learning about what the region needs now and into the future, from a series of guests speaking on People, Place and Productivity. Combination of presentations and dialogue about the current and future on each topic.

15 JUNE 2025

Analysis & Reporting

Analysis of submissions and Your Priorities.

Report presented to Assembly, and published online as a permanent record.

Assembly weekend

2 full days, in person.

Assembly deliberation and consensus on benefits, defining community & benefit priorities and prepare advice on citizen governance of the scheme.
Report written by Assembly and published online

28/29 JUNE 2025

democracyCo

Stakeholders supporting the process

A Project Advisory Group was established; a coalition of key stakeholders and partners committed to support the deliberative engagement process and provide guidance and advice.

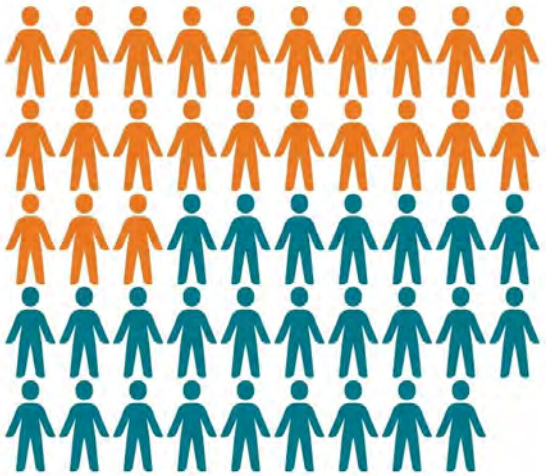
Members provided a range of local, regional and statewide representation relevant to the coastal Gippsland Offshore Wind Zone, as well as its geographical boundary. This ensured inclusion and direct involvement of impacted neighbours, and adjacent communities and broader regional communities.

The stakeholders involved in the Project Advisory Group are listed here.

Organisation	Representative
Offshore Wind Energy Victoria	Bodye Darvill, local director of Partnerships
Vic Grid	Ash Hall
GOWA / developer representatives	Paul Johnstone + 1 proponent observer rotating
Regional Engagement Exchange (REX)	Kate Foster
Local Government – South Gippsland	Pauleen Boulton
Local Government Wellington Shire	Kirsten Power
Offshore Wind Energy Victoria	Mandy Neave
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 Energy Group	Chris Harvey
Community representative (Fishing)	Lachlan McKinnon
Australian Centre for Offshore Wind (ACOWE)	Jessica Reeves
Gippsland Climate Chance Network (GCCN)	Julie Gibson, Darren McCubbin

Demographics – Gippsland Offshore Wind Community Assembly

Gender

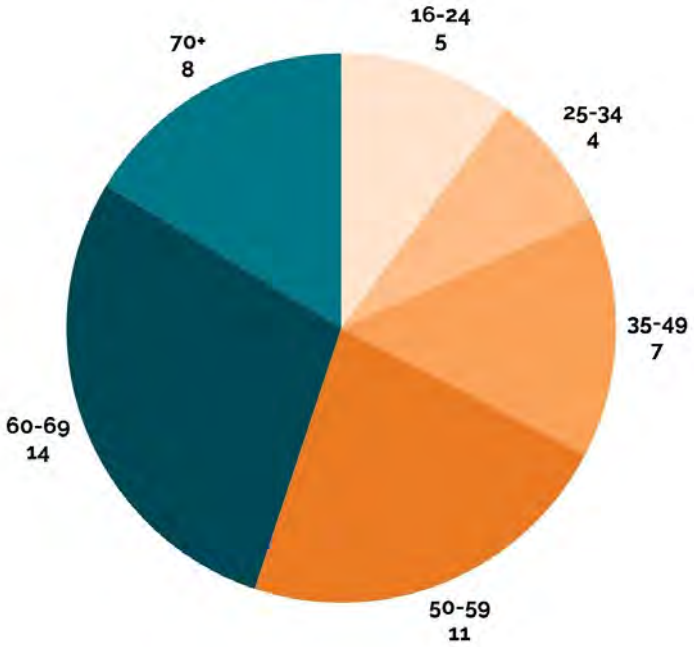


23 Women
26 Men

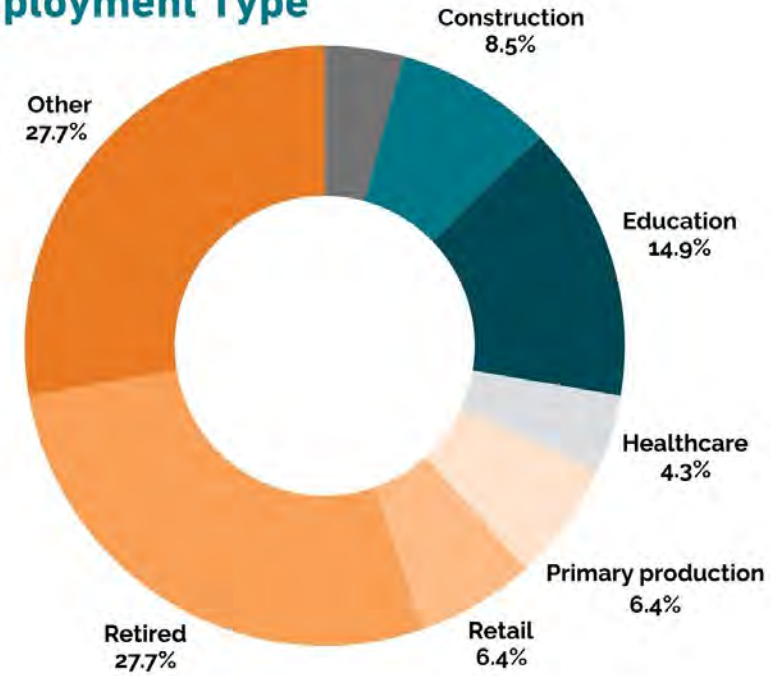
First Nations

Two participants are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Age

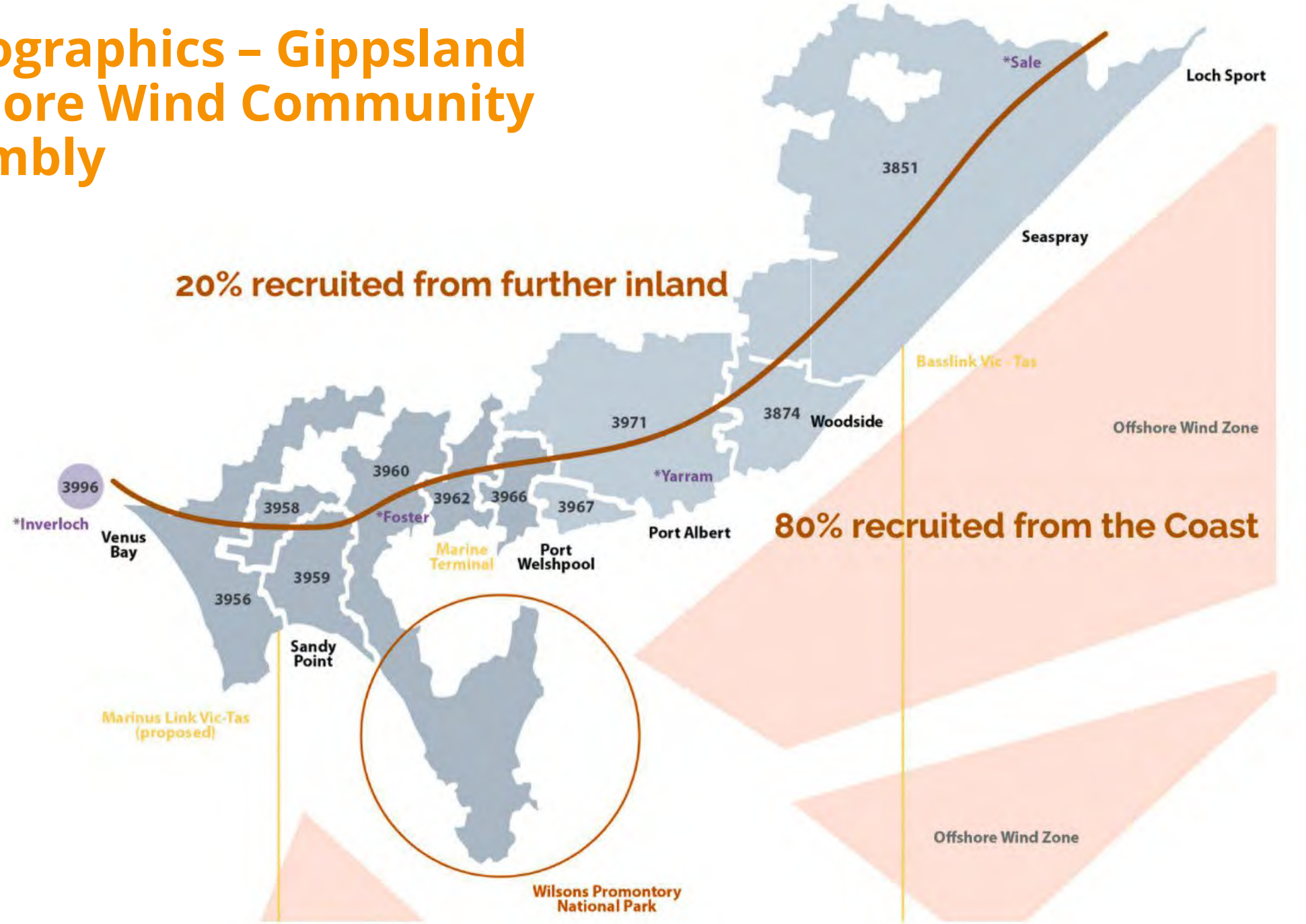


Employment Type



democracyCo

Demographics – Gippsland Offshore Wind Community Assembly



Gippsland Offshore Wind
Community Assembly

Summary & Highlights

We saw strong results in all three areas we were measuring. Some of the most interesting results are as follows:

Building Social License

- **Participants increased their knowledge** – there was a **102% Increase** in participants agreeing that they "… know a lot about the development and operation of offshore wind energy" (41.9% → 84.5%)
- **Built support for Offshore Wind in Gippsland-** there was a **30% increase** in support for offshore wind in Gippsland (between pre and post polls), with **91% supporting** their development in Gippsland by the end of the process.

Social Cohesion and community strengthening

- **Building empathy - 100%** participants felt that they better understanding of views of people with different perspectives than them as a consequence of their involvement in the Assembly.
- **Building communication skills- 87%** of participants felt that the Assembly helped built their skills in talking to people with different views than them
- **Building Trust in institutions -** Trust in GCCN to support and deliver climate-positive initiatives within the local area increased, from 47% in the pre-poll to 82% in the post-poll. (**76% increase**)
- **Enabled Civil and respectful conversations** - Before the Assembly, very few participants agreed that **"***people in their community are generally respectful and civil to each other when talking about offshore wind farms, either online or in person***"**. Only 7% agreed with the statement for online interactions, and only 28% agreed for in-person interactions. **100% agreed that the Assembly enabled them to have civil and respectful conversations.**

Democratic Skills -

- **Compromise** – Post the Assembly, 87% of participants agreed, that "the Assembly helped me to develop my skills to compromise with others".
- **Advocacy -** 97% of participants agreed that they feel comfortable and confident to advocate for change**.**
- **Deep Active Listening -** 90% of participants agreed, that "the Assembly helped me to develop my skills to actively listen to others".

97% said they would like to participate in an Assembly like this again!

Building Social License

Understanding concerns – now and for the future

Understanding the issues that communities are already experiencing greatly assists in building positive relationships. In the pre-poll, 46.6% of participants indicated that they are **currently** experiencing issues in relation to developing wind energy in the region.

The top 5 concerns people currently have are:

- Stress about future impacts / uncertainty of change
- Onshore wind issues / resistance
- Community Division
- General discussion
- Opposition to offshore wind farms

"Proposed wind farms are already dividing the community."

Other issues listed include; pressure from offshore providers to support the wind farms, potential visual pollution, conspiracy theories, community not getting to influence decisions that impact them, and engagement fatigue.

When asked what issues they might be concerned about **into the future** (as offshore wind is developed in the Gippsland region) the following arose:

1. **'Damage to the environment'** (landscape, water, plants and animals)' was the top concern both before and after the Assembly with 73.8% and 72.7%, respectively.

2. **'Local impact without local benefit'** was the next highest concern, with 69.1% in the pre-poll and 69.7% in the post-poll worried about this.

3. **'Conflict in the community between people with different views on wind energy'** was a concern that decreased slightly at the end of the Assembly (64.3% to 60.6%) as did '**waste from energy production** (30.9% to 21.2%).

Participants were slightly more worried about **'Community uncertainty / confusion'** (54.8% to 60.6%), 'Loss of people in my community / people moving away' (9.5% to 21.2%), 'Loss of opportunity for young people' (7.1% to 12.1%) and 'Loss of jobs' (4.8% to 9.1%).

democracyCo

Deliberation builds knowledge and awareness

We know that knowledge is central to our ability to form evidence-based views.

When comparing responses between the pre and post poll, participants demonstrated a significant increase in their knowledge and support of Offshore Wind Farms.

The following compares participants pre-poll and post-poll responses, with those who agreed with the following statements:

15% Increase **"I am confident in my ability to find reliable information about the development of offshore wind energy"** (79.1% → 90.9%)

102% Increase **"I know a lot about the development and operation of offshore wind energy"** (41.9% → 84.5%)

83.6% Increase **"I understood what a community benefit scheme is and how it could work in my local community"** (51.2% → 93.9%).

"I am feeling somewhat unsettled by the uncertainly of knowing a big change is coming, without knowing what the impacts will be"

84.5%

know a lot about the develop and operation of offshore wind energy

Deliberation builds knowledge and awareness

These results are not surprising as in addition to the information provided by experts and stakeholders within the Assembly sessions participants spent significant time reading, researching and thinking about the process outside of sessions:

- 30% spending 1-5 hours,
- 40% spending 6-15 hours
- 26.67% spending 16-25 hours.

All up, participants undertook between 230 - 450 hours of additional reading and research.

The Assembly did up to

450 hrs

of research, outside of the process to understand the issue

Shift in opinions - enabling participants to find common ground

In the post-poll **21% of participants indicated that they had changed their opinion** during the Assembly and there was a **30% increase in support for offshore windfarms in Gippsland.**

The types of shifts that people experienced:

- Feeling more confident in wind farms and that the community is interested in looking after the environment
- Feeling they can speak more confidently about the issues and hopes
- Feeling a higher expectation of success
- If community works together for the good of all I see good results
- Expanded opinion
- Possibility of low electricity prices
- Variety of knowledge within group

What caused the shifts:

- Talking to other community members
- The green dot exercise (dotmocracy)
- Gaining knowledge from the variety of experts
- Reflection of input in construction of this report.
- Realising the opportunity to effect real changes
- Active community interest
- There are avenues already in existence and also avenues which can be created whereby the community can have open, respectful, transparent dialogue with offshore wind companies as well as government and we leave knowing that we have been heard.
- Moving past negative views

"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."

30%

Increase in support for offshore windfarms in Gippsland

21%

of participants changed their opinion

Consensus on sharing the benefits

Despite having different views on the merits or otherwise of Offshore wind in Gippsland – participants were able to reach strong agreement about how they would like to share any benefits that might flow from the investment in offshore wind in their region.

80-100%

Agreement achieved on all recommendations in the Assembly's report

Supporting Social Cohesion

Building social cohesion

Social cohesion, is the "glue" that binds society together. It comprises several key elements – including

- trust in institutions and other people,
- a sense of belonging,
- shared values,
- social inclusion,
- participation in social, economic, and political life, and a commitment to the common good.

Additionally, respect for diversity, social justice, and equity are vital components

Deliberative processes such as the Gippsland Offshore Wind Community Assembly supports the development of social cohesion in communities broadly and has the greatest impact with regards to enabling a cohesive approach on the issue which is the focus of their conversation, in this case offshore wind.

In this instance, the Gippsland Offshore Wind Community Assembly assisted in enabling social cohesion by:

- enabling participation in political life
- enabling civil and respectful conversations
- Improving belonging
- building trust in institutions
- bringing people with diverse values together to find common ground
- Enabling equity – through raising voices of the diversity of the community and bringing them together

Enabling participation in public life

The Gippsland Offshore Wind Community Assembly was designed to reach out into the community and enable the community to work together, to find common ground and to raise their collective voices. The aim being to enable the community to participate in the issues that impact on their lives. To achieve this:

- 10,000 invitations were sent, creating broad awareness of the Assembly and process
- An online space was created for anyone in the community to participate and all stakeholders and or community members were invited to provide a submission. 12 online contributions were made and 1 formal submission received.
- A Project Advisory Group was established involving 15 members from State & Local Government, coastal community groups, wind farm proponents, and key stakeholders.
- 50 Assembly participants were recruited to represent the diversity of the region, and they estimated that they collectively spoke to approximately 340 people in their families and communities about offshore wind farms and the associated community benefits.
- Anecdotally we have been told “In Coastal Gippsland, everyone is talking about the Assembly”

The Assembly wrote their own report which reflects their agreed priorities for community involvement and the important benefits they wanted to see realised for their communities.

There was a commitment by conveners to act as follows-

- GCCN – committed to receive, respond and advocate for Assembly recommendations
- Gippsland Offshore Wind Association (GOWA – the proponents) is committed to receive and respond to the Assembly’s recommendations
- DemocracyCo is committed to promote the process and the opportunities it provides offshore wind processes, both in Australia and Overseas

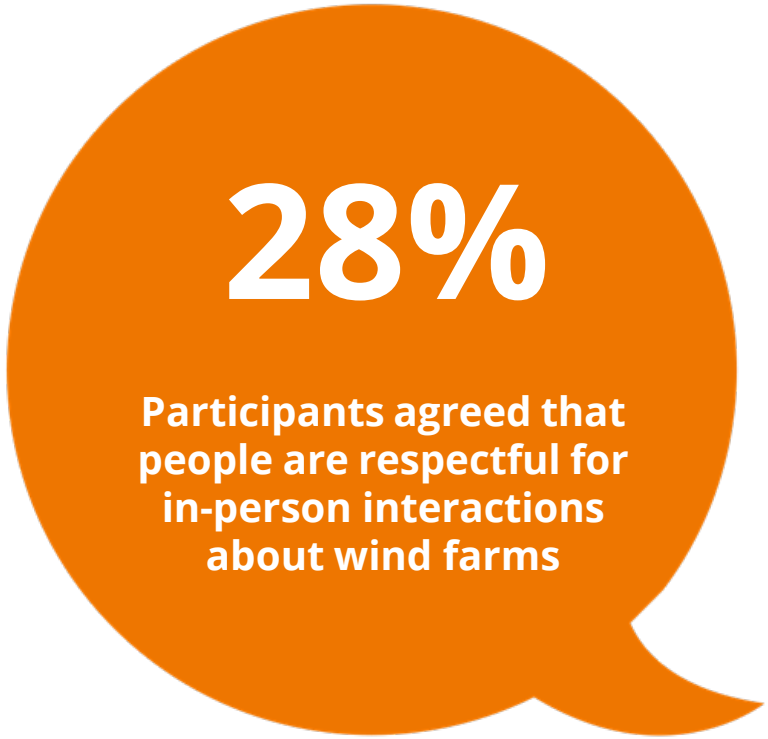
VicGrid, Offshore Wind Victoria will also receive the Assembly recommendations.

Enabling respectful and civil conversations

Before the Assembly, very few participants agreed that **“people in their community are generally respectful and civil to each other when talking about offshore wind farms, either online or in person”**.

Only 7% agreed with the statement for online interactions, 27.9% agreed for in-person interactions, with 41.9% feeling neutral about both statements.

In stark contrast, by the end of the Assembly, **100% of participants agreed** **“that people were respectful and civil to each other in the Assembly”.**



Building trust in institutions

By design deliberative processes bring key decision makers / host organisations and their communities closer together. The following data gives insight into the attributes which support trusted relationships.

Knowledge - Prior to receiving their invitation to participate in the Assembly, 32% of participants had heard of the Gippsland Climate Change Network, 49% had not and 19% were unsure if they had heard of GCCN.

Understanding - In the pre-poll 39.5% of participants felt they had a good understanding of what the Gippsland Climate Change Network does. Unsurprisingly, this rose to 81.8% in the post-poll. (**107% increase**)

Feeling Heard - In the post-poll there was a high level of agreement that participants felt heard by GCCN, at 93.9% and by the Gippsland Offshore Wind Alliance at 81.8%.

Trust

Trust in GCCN to support and deliver climate-positive initiatives within the local area increased, with agreement with this statement going from 46.5% in the pre-poll to 81.8% in the post-poll. (76% increase)

Increased sense of belonging

The following data demonstrates an increase in participants experiencing an increased sense of belonging to their community –

- 100% of participants agreed they felt they had "**gained a better understanding of the views of people who have a different perspective to them"**.
- In the post poll, 93.8% agreed **"that people who have very different viewpoints are able to make decisions together if they spend time together to talk through the issues".**
- Many participants began the process "**feeling like they belong in their community"** (72.1%). However, the percentage of participants who felt like they belonged increased by 21.4% by the end of the forum to 87.5%
- 81.3% agreed that the Assembly **"gave them an opportunity to interact with a greater diversity of their community than they normally would".**
- 43% of participants have **"already done something to help their community as wind farms are developed"**, as a result of this Assembly.

"I feel more empowered to be involved with community representation, initiatives and advocacy"

Equity and Diversity

"Whilst we each come with our own skills, knowledge and experience we have openly and collaboratively shared our views, values and visions with one another."

The Gippsland Offshore Wind Community Assembly involved a diversity of the Gippsland community.

The graphs and tables on pages 5 and 6 demonstrate how the Assembly was diverse in respect of age, gender, location in the region and employment type.

In the post-poll almost all participants (96.9%) agreed the process enabled people who might not normally have their voices heard to contribute.

Deliberative processes also provide opportunities for people to come together to have healthy disagreement, find common ground and then make tough, but important decisions.

At the end of the Assembly, 87% of participants agreed, that "the Assembly helped my skills to talk with others who have a different viewpoint to me".

Despite the healthy disagreement the members of the Assembly were able to reach consensus on so many things including their report.

https://www.democracyco.com.au/impact/

democracyCo

Democratic Skills

Reinforcing and building democratic skills

Being a citizen in a democracy is more than voting every three to four years. The way we live our lives makes a big difference to how successful our democracy is.

Deliberative processes help participants to build democratic skills they can use throughout the electoral cycle -

Empathy – Post the Assembly, 84% of participants agreed that "the Assembly helped me to develop the skills to put themselves in the shoes of others to understand their viewpoint".

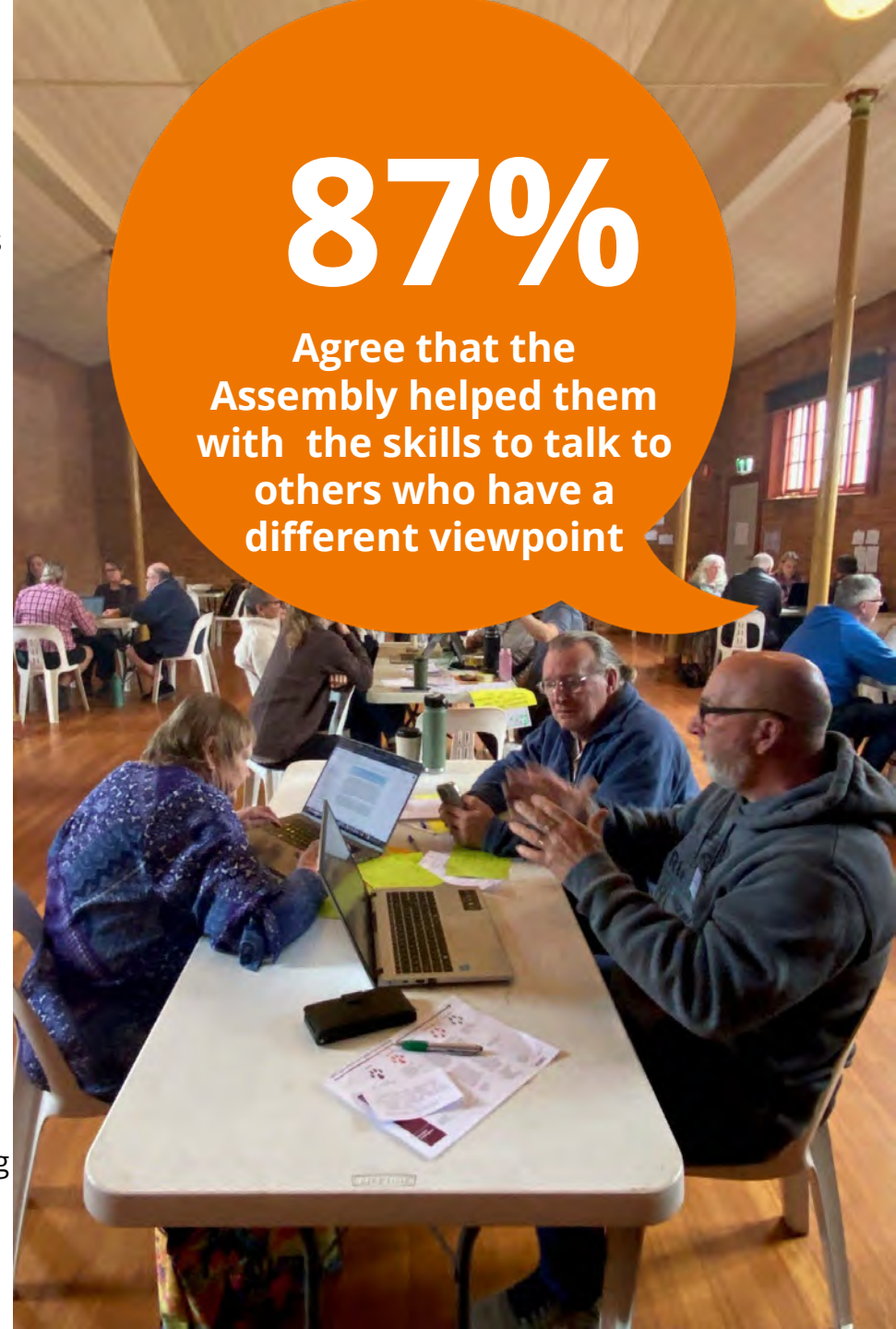
Compromise – Post the Assembly, 87% of participants agreed, that "the Assembly helped me to develop my skills to compromise with others". 3% disagreed and 10% were neutral to this statement.

Healthy Disagreement – Post the Assembly, 87% of participants agreed, that "the Assembly helped my skills to talk with others who have a different viewpoint to me". 13% were neutral to this statement

Deep Active Listening - Post the Assembly, 90% of participants agreed, that "the Assembly helped me to develop my skills to actively listen to others".

Verbal self-confidence – Post the Assembly, 97% of participants agreed,-"that during this forum I was able to share my views on the issues". 3% were neutral to this statement.

Critical thinking – during the Assembly, participants are encouraged to exercise their critical thinking skills, especially when analysing information provided by speakers.



Building advocates for change

By the end of the process, a high number of participants were confident to act as an advocate for change.

By the end of the Assembly**, 97%** of participants agreed that they feel comfortable and confident to advocate for change**.**

Other positive impacts that were shared, included:

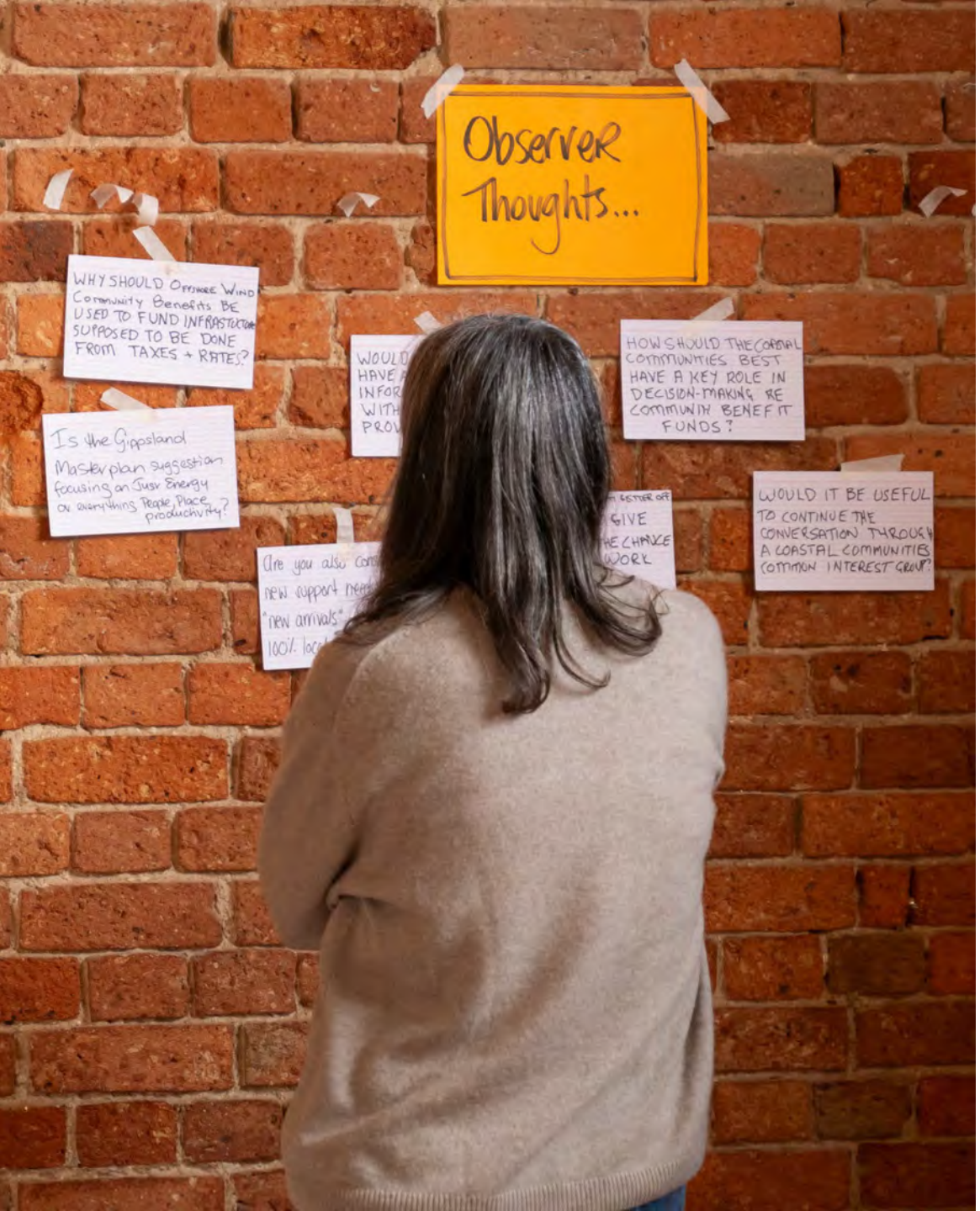
- Positive connection to community
- Feeling empowered and a sense of personal agency
- Cross-regional connections
- Feeling heard
- Intellectual engagement

Participants also felt that change is possible and that their empowerment can make a difference. Before the assembly participants were quite hopeful that “there are actions that will make sure that developing offshore wind farms is positive for our communities”, with 83.7% agreeing with this statement, increasing to 96.9% in the post-poll.

“I feel more empowered to voice my opinion, represent my small community, advocate for change”

“I feel heard and that my voice mattered”

Participant Experience



97%

of participants said that they would like to participate in an Assembly like this again

The participant's experience

Participants had a very positive experience and expressed that they had access to reliable information, time to learn, deliberate and to compile their final report.

Evidence
Participants felt that they "had access to the information they needed to participate effectively in the workshops", with 93.9% indicating a level of agreement with the statement.

Reliable information
Participants mostly "considered the information they heard during the assembly reliable and trustworthy" with 97% indicating agreement with this statement. They also mostly "considered it balanced", with the same number (97%) agreeing to that statement.

Time to learn
Participants mostly "felt that they had enough time to learn about the key topics of interest" with 81.8% indicating a level of agreement with this statement.

Time to deliberate
76.7% of participants felt that "they had enough time to deliberate on their recommendations".

Time to write our report
70% of participants felt that they had enough time to compile their final report, with 2 people neutral on this statement and 1 person who 'somewhat disagreed'

Why did participants say “Yes” to participating?

The top reasons provided were:

- Interest in Offshore wind / energy and its local impact (20 responses)
- To have a say in the region’s future (15 responses)
- Interest in Offshore wind / energy generally (10 responses)
- To learn about the topic (7 responses)
- Interest in local benefits / well being (6 responses)
- Environment Care (6 responses)
- To interact with the community (5 responses)

“I am wanting to find out more, so I can make informed decisions.”

“It's important for small communities to have a voice”

“Because it's an opportunity to both learn about and have a say int he energy future in Gippsland”

“I am passionate about renewable energy and want regional communities impacted by the projects to receive as much benefit as possible.”

“I thought it would be an interesting experience in shaping the future of the region and interacting with the community in a different way than I would normally do.”

“I am interested in the development of renewable energy in the region and its impacts/benefits to the local community”

DemocracyCo want to thank everyone involved in the Assembly … it truly was a whole of community endeavor!

Want to learn more?

You can visit www.democracyco.com.au or please don't hesitate to reach out to discuss this work with us.

Dan Popping, Project Manager

dan@democracyco.com.au

democracyCo