

Regional Renewable Organics Network

Phase 2 engagement Report

November 2023

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Executive Summary

Barwon Water is planning a world leading Regional Renewable Organics Network (RRON) at the Black Rock Water Reclamation Plant in Connewarre. The planned facility will take household food and garden waste, local commercial and industrial organic waste and organic materials from wastewater treatment and safely convert it into products that capture carbon for high value use in agriculture and advanced sustainable materials, and at the same time produce renewable energy. In doing so, it will divert volumes of organic waste away from landfill, reduce emissions and help reverse the cycle of burning fossil fuels.

Barwon Water has drawn from its 110-year knowledge of managing water and wastewater to partner with four local councils to transform organic waste into valuable resources. This project also aligns with state-wide Circular Economy Initiatives and Recycling Victoria policy reform. The RRON will deliver significant environmental, economic and community benefits to the region.

It has been important to Barwon Water to share information with stakeholders and the local community and to listen and learn about any interests or concerns about the project.

An early phase of public consultation occurred in October and November 2021 to share early information about the proposed facility at the Black Rock Water Reclamation precinct and understand what is important to the community. A detailed report has been shared on the RRON Your Say website and distributed to stakeholders and key contacts.

Interim regular communication occurred in between the two formal engagement phases in 2022 to keep stakeholders, community groups and local landowners updated.

A second phase of public engagement occurred across 6 weeks from the 9th October to the 16th November 2023. The purpose was to share new information about the design and function of the facility including the technology to be used to process organic waste and additional information about biochar and renewable energy and other project benefits.

There was overall positive feedback from the community and stakeholders who shared their views, attended a drop-in session or participated in the online webinar. Areas of interest and where more information was sought included:

- the look of the facility within the surrounding area
- how the technology works
- how biochar will be produced and marketed
- how the local impacts will be managed and,
- the type of waste the facility will accept.

The next phase of the project is to progress the approvals of the project including submitting a development licence application to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Meeting the requirements of the EPA is an important process for Barwon Water and will address community concerns that have been raised so far.



Source: Image courtesy of Hitachi Zosen Inova (HZI)

Introduction

This report outlines the approach and outcomes from public consultation undertaken throughout October and November 2023. It includes an overview of communication and engagement activities and a summary of the feedback received on the Regional Renewable Organics Network (RRON) project during this second phase of engagement.

Barwon Water is committed to actively listening and learning from different perspectives across our region. We care about our Country, customers, community and each other and will work hard to understand others' views and follow through until we reach resolution.

Through earlier engagement in late 2021, we heard from our community and stakeholders what was important and areas of interest and concern as the project moves through facility design, technical assessments and approvals.

There are some aspects of the project that can't be changed, including the strategic location of Black Rock for the facility, its general footprint, and the technology that will need to be used. However, feedback from community and stakeholders will be taken into consideration, with a commitment to regular updates on new information about the project.

A second phase of engagement occurred across 6 weeks from the 9th October to the 16th November 2023 to share new information about the design and function of the facility including more detail on the technology used to process organic waste, specifics on the height and materials used to build the facility, how local impacts will be managed and how EPA and additional information about biochar and renewable energy as a resulting product.

The feedback collected will inform the next stages of the project, including finalisation of the design and technical assessments. This report provides a summary of this second phase of engagement.

Communications and Engagement Approach

This section outlines the communication and engagement activities to promote the opportunity to learn more about the project and provide feedback.

Overview of communications activities:

- Paid advertising in the Geelong Advertiser, Geelong Times, Bellarine Times, Armstrong Creek Times, Golden Plains Times and Geelong Independent (2 weeks of advertising)
- Information included in Barwon Water customer Electronic Direct Mail (which goes to 90,000 + people) (currently being issued)
- Mail / Email to more than 1,000 people signed up to project-specific database
- Email to interest groups previously briefed (Barwon Heads Association, Geelong Sustainability and Queenscliff Climate Action Now confirmed to on-share to their members and / or via their newsletters)
- Information shared with Barwon Water Customer Advisory Committee with a request to share to their networks
- Social media and paid social media ads (geo targeted to locations where events are) See Appendix A
- Request for Council partners to share social media posts (both Surf Coast and CoGG shared, each have 11,000 and 32,000 followers respectively)
- Media release issued to local newspapers and radio stations (K-Rock and Bay FM picked up)
- Latest news article pinned to the Barwon Water homepage of the corporate website
- Internal news story shared with Barwon Water and Barwon Asset Solutions staff
- Dedicated Your Say page updated with Latest News and sent to page followers
- Information Kit sent to Council Partners to enable briefing of elected representatives and executive leadership teams.

Overview of engagement activities:

A total of 83 people actively engaged in the opportunities across the formal engagement period, to find out more about the project, ask questions of the project team and provide feedback. Table 1 describes the engagement activity and who participated.

Engagement Activity	Description	Participation
Regional Roadshow Community	The drop in sessions were an opportunity for anyone from the public to find out more about the project and ask questions of the project team.	A total of 16 people attended the drop in sessions

Information 'Drop In' sessions x 5	<p>Information Boards were setup in community-based venues to share information across the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geelong, 23 October, 3 attended • Queenscliffe, 30 October, 3 attended • Bannockburn, 31 October, 1 attended • Barwon Heads, 8th November, 9 attended • Torquay, 9th November, no attendees 	
Online Webinar 15th November 5-6pm	<p>An online webinar was scheduled at the conclusion of the public consultation period, with an overview of the Regional Renewable Organics Network project and facility provided. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer session where project team members answered participant questions. The webinar was recorded and will remain on the Your Say Project page.</p>	<p>A total of 13 people attended the online webinar</p>
Your Say page	<p>During the 6 week formal engagement period (9 October – 16 November 2023) the Your Say page was promoted via the communications channels listed above.</p> <p>Feedback opportunities included being able to drop a pin on a map and provide a comment, as a question of the project team, make a longer submission, or complete a survey to share a preference for the colour of the facility exterior.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2094 visits to the RRON Your Say page during the consultation period. • 67 downloads of the Project Factsheet during the consultation period • 43 contributions to the 'Have Your Say on the Facility Exterior' survey
Feedback from neighbouring landowners	<p>During the 6 week formal engagement period (9 October – 16 November 2023) the Your Say page was promoted via the communications channels listed above.</p> <p>Feedback opportunities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to drop a pin on a map and provide a comment, • ask a question of the project team, • make a longer submission, or • complete a survey to share a preference for the colour of the facility exterior (see results below). 	<p>There were 11 landowners the project team spoke to directly either in person or over the phone.</p>

Table 1: Overview of engagement activities

Engagement Findings

This section outlines what we heard during community and stakeholder engagement.

There was overall positive feedback from the community and stakeholders who shared their views, attended a drop in session or participated in the online webinar. Areas of interest and where more information was sought included:

- the look of the facility within the surrounding area
- how the technology works
- how biochar will be produced and marketed
- how the local impacts will be managed and,
- the type of waste the facility will accept.

Table 2 provides a summary of feedback received through each of the engagement activities.

Engagement Activity	Summary of feedback
Regional Roadshow Community Information ‘Drop In’ sessions Geelong, 23 October Queenscliffe, 30 October Bannockburn, 31 October Barwon Heads, 8 th November Torquay, 9 th November	Generally positive sentiment and support for the project. Various questions and areas of interest included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in biochar use and market opportunities • Interest in site tours • Understanding what goes in the FOGO bin • Interest in understanding how the technology works, and what organic material can be processed • How/if the facility will be energy self-sufficient • What the local impacts will be and how they will be mitigated including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • height/sighting • traffic and increased impact on roads • safety, noise, odour, and environmental considerations • Better understanding of the business case/costs of the facility and project (feasibility) • Better understand why BW is leading this project • How the Distinct Area Landscape informs what can be done on the site • Negative sentiment heard at drop in sessions included relevance of facility to those who won’t use it (e.g. from a farmer)
Online Webinar 15th November 5-6pm	Following the presentation, a number of questions were asked that included the following areas of interest: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the output (i.e. biochar) • How technical assessments and projects mitigations will ensure no impact to the surrounding environment (odour, sound, rubbish, smoke, steam, pests) • The difference between this process and waste incineration

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If opportunities within this project were being considered such as carbon offsets/credits and optimising dewatering the Sludge Biomass at the Black Rock WWTP
Your Say webpage	There was a high visitation to the website and evidence of documents being opened and downloaded. The feedback received was in relation to the colour of the facility exterior and the reasons why. See results below under 'Community preference on exterior of facility'.
Meetings with neighbouring landowners	<p>11 people took up the offer of a phone call or in-person meeting. Of the 11 people that took up the offer of a phone call or in-person meeting the following feedback questions and concerns were recorded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally supportive of the project Several were comfortable and had no further questions or comments Interest in Biochar applications (agricultural and gardening) Several had follow up questions related to issues or opportunities outside of the RRON scope including Connection to Class A water and concerns with the operations at the biosolids facility Concern about building height of 14 metres, and any opportunity to lower the building Interest in screening options to minimise visual impact (e.g. earthen berms or plantings) Concerns about speed limits/traffic on Black Rock Road and the safety risk Wanting to better understand the lighting design of the RRON Questions and concerns about odour and traffic, particularly increase in trucks on Bluestone School Road, as there has been some negative experience of septic waste trucks Keen to see the facility blend into the landscape as much as possible Concerns about noise during construction, in particular reverse sensors of trucks Question on what commercial waste including abattoir waste being processed at RRON

Table 2 – Summary of feedback

Community Preference on colour of facility exterior

43 people shared their feedback concerning the preferred colour selection for the exterior walls and roof of the RRON facility and provided additional comments online. An additional 8 people voted with sticky dots at the in-person drop in sessions. The graphs and summary below are collated findings concerning the preferred colour selection for the exterior walls and roof of the RRON facility.

Colour preference for exterior walls

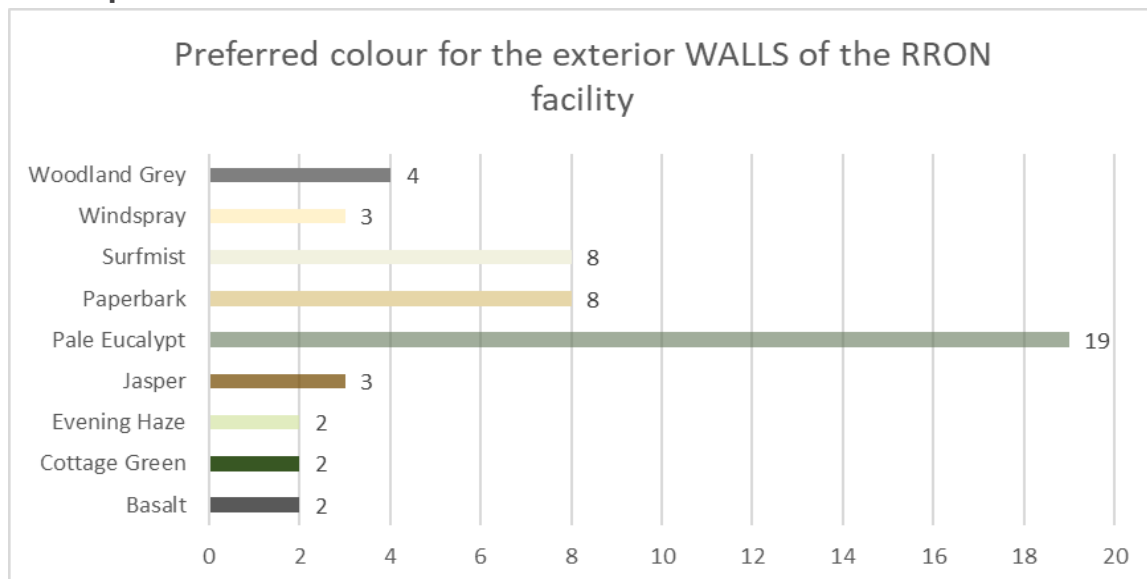


Figure 1: Preferred colour selection for exterior walls (n = 51)

As indicated in *Figure 1*, the most voted-on colour as the preferred option for the exterior walls is 'Pale Eucalypt' followed by 'Surfmist' and 'Paperbark'. The least voted colours were 'Dune', 'Classic Cream' and 'Shale Grey'.

Respondents were asked to provide further comments on their preferred selection and the overwhelming response to 'Pale Eucalypt' related to its ability to allow the facility to blend in with the natural environment and to reduce visibility.

Colour preference for the roof

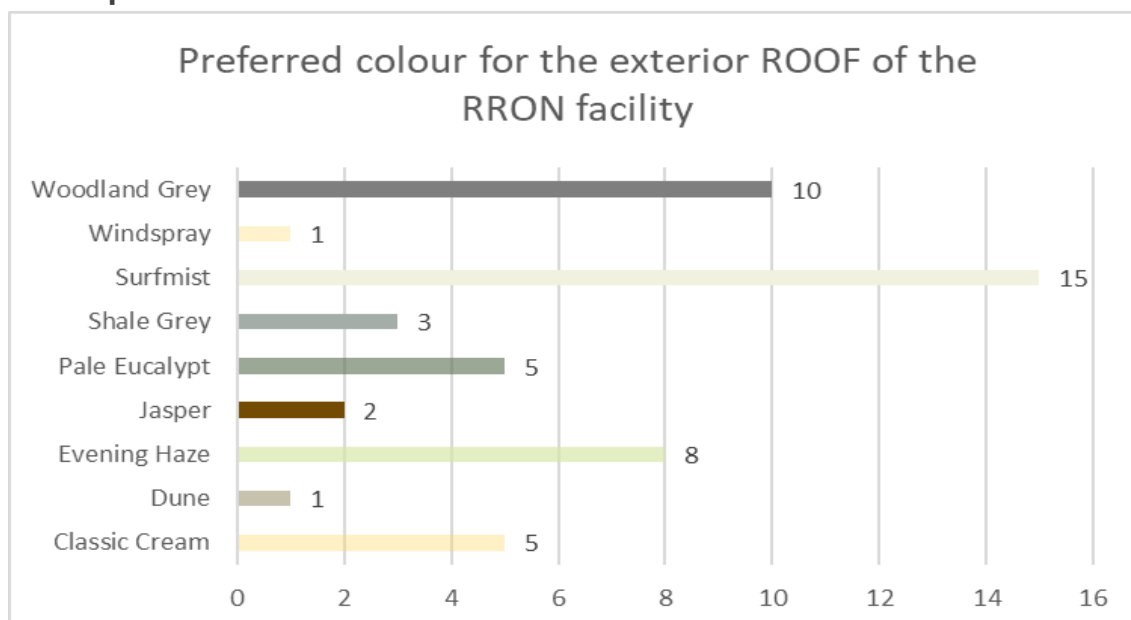


Figure 2: Preferred colour selection for roof (n = 48)

As indicated in *Figure 2*, the most voted-on colour as the preferred option for the roof is 'Surfmist' followed by 'Woodland Grey' and 'Evening Haze'. The least voted options were 'Paperbark' and 'Basalt'.

An overwhelming number of respondents stated that a roof colour that deflects from the heat was their reason for selecting '*Surfmist*'.

General comments

The survey received positive feedback with respondents recognising the need for such a facility and supported Barwon Water. Additional, general comments related to:

- Incorporating art/paintings outside the facility.
- A respondent suggested that the facility windows be painted lighter or white to offset the darker colours.
- Solar panels to generate more energy.
- A suggestion for Barwon Water to partner with local industry and regional agricultural community to increase community awareness and involvement.
- Respondents were interested in knowing more about odour and its potential impact on the community.
- An inquiry about the opportunity for community members to purchase fertiliser cheaply through the facility.

Next Steps

This section outlines the next steps of the project.

Following two phases of formal public consultation, the next step for the project is to make a submission for a Development Licence Application with the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and other necessary planning applications. These will be published and promoted for community feedback in 2024.

Barwon Water is committed to ongoing communication and engagement with customers, stakeholders and the community throughout approvals, construction and operation of the facility.

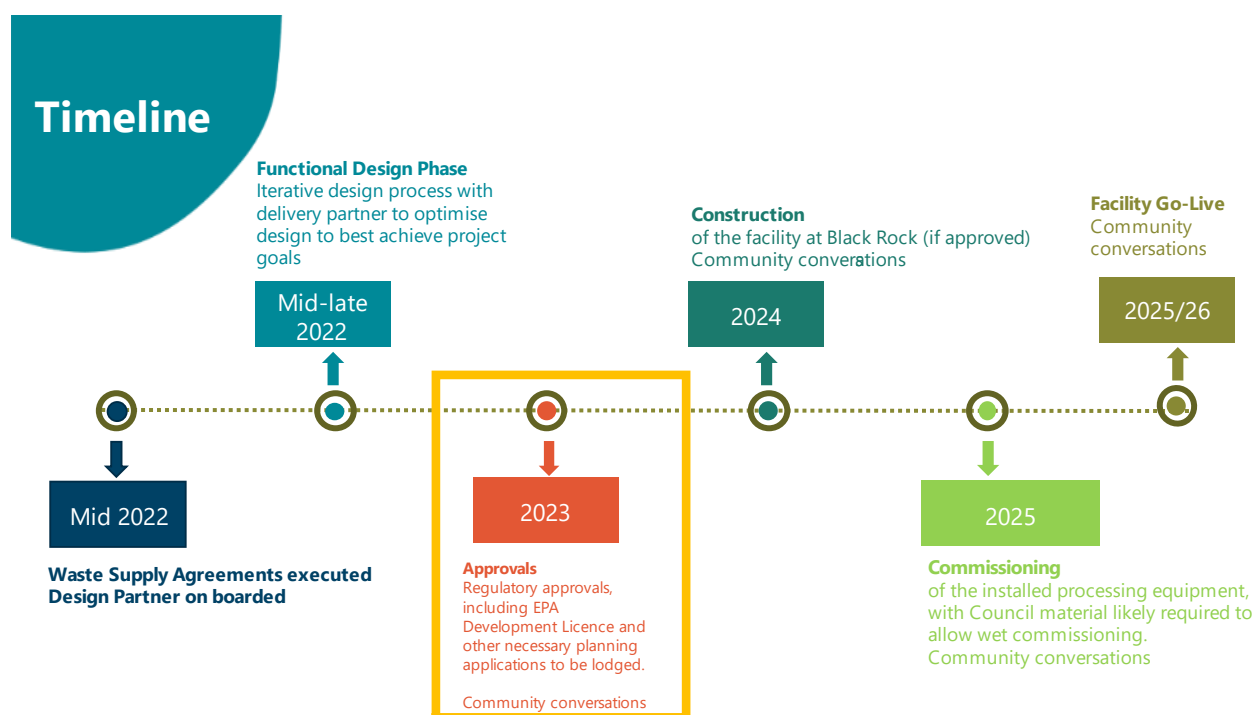


Figure 3: Project Timeline