

**Submission  
No 9**

## **A FRAMEWORK FOR PERFORMANCE REPORTING AND DRIVING WELLBEING OUTCOMES IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Bega Valley Data Collective

**Date Received:** 25 July 2024



## **Submission: A framework for performance reporting and driving wellbeing outcomes in NSW July 2024**



Participants at the Measuring What Matters in the Bega Valley workshop, 30 April 2024.

## About the Bega Valley Data Collective

The Bega Valley Data Collective is a volunteer-based, not-for-profit community association. Our mission is to empower our community to thrive together through a community wellbeing framework based on collaboration, data and action.

The initial idea behind the Bega Valley Data Collective emerged in 2022 in the aftermath of the post Black Summer Bushfires and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this environment, the need for equitable access to data for our community was paramount and a movement to achieve this began. An enthusiastic group of community members passionate about equitable data access to benefit the Bega Valley formed the Bega Valley Data Collective (BVDC).

Since then, the BVDC has launched a website with data insights and data stories. The BVDC has also undertaken the “*Measuring What Matters in the Bega Valley*” community consultation. This project engaged widely with the community through various platforms to better understand their views on community-led decision making and their thoughts on using wellbeing indicators in that process. The project ran from September 2023 to April 2024 and comprised of a community survey, an online information session, and a face-to-face workshop. The key findings of this consultation have been included as an Appendix to this submission.

We are currently seeking to extend these consultations to engage further with the community to develop a wellbeing framework for the Bega Valley. It would be developed through in-depth community engagement, with a particular focus on hearing diverse voices.

## Overview of submission

The BVDC is pleased to have the opportunity to provide feedback on the NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework. We feel that the Framework presents an important step in the NSW government enabling community-led decision-making and ensuring that NSW services are improving the lives of NSW residents in a meaningful way. Our submission includes four key recommendations for the NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework:

1. Undertake wide and genuine consultation with a large cross-section of the NSW population. The proposed timeframe for this (completion by December 2024) is too short
2. Make data available at a local level (LGA and SA2) to ensure the framework is useable across communities in NSW
3. Develop more relevant needs- and outcomes-based indicators
4. The wellbeing framework should comprise policy priorities and actions to support progress across NSW. Indicators by themselves will not improve outcomes.

We are very open to further discussions with the NSW government any aspect of our submission, and to discuss our plans for a Bega Valley community wellbeing framework.

## Recommendation 1: Undertake wide and genuine consultation

We commend the NSW government for incorporating a consultation process in the development of the NSW performance and wellbeing framework. Consultation is highly valuable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it helps identify what actually matters to the community, and thus what should be included in the framework. While there are core areas of wellbeing that appear to be relevant across most communities, nuances exist within all population groups and consultation is a valuable way of identifying these nuances<sup>i</sup>.

Secondly, community consultation gives a wellbeing framework greater legitimacy and credibility<sup>ii</sup>. Being directly based off feedback from the community helps ensure that a framework is accessible and relatable to NSW residents<sup>iii</sup>. Involvement in wellbeing frameworks can also help capture the ideas and opinions of community members, increase a sense of procedural justice, and make the populace more aware of social issues<sup>iv</sup>. Furthermore, community members being involved in the development of wellbeing frameworks can de-politicise the framework and help ensure its longevity<sup>v</sup>.

Thirdly, community consultation has wider benefits through empowering citizens with a voice on how their wellbeing is considered. Research has found that genuine consultation processes lead to greater empowerment of community members, helping them to become connected to services and information, and provides a space for community members to be listened to<sup>vi</sup>.

However, these benefits can only be gleaned if the consultation process is conducted in the right way. Unfortunately, tokenistic attempts to consult with citizens within the wellbeing space are commonplace<sup>vii</sup>. An authentic consultation process provides residents the opportunity for meaningful, in-depth engagement through community discussions, focus-groups and interviews<sup>viii</sup>. Furthermore, particular care should be taken to ensure that diverse voices are heard. This includes, but is not limited to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, those living in regional and rural areas of NSW, children and young people, culturally and linguistically diverse population groups, those living in poverty, and people with disabilities.

We note that the proposed timeframe (by December 2024) is too short to enable a genuine and wide consultation. Furthermore, we are concerned that wellbeing dimensions and indicators have been identified prior to any consultation. We strongly recommend that the NSW government extend this timeframe to ensure that this the numerous benefits of community consultation can be gleaned. We also suggest that consultations ask more open-ended questions about what aspects of wellbeing and services are important to NSW residents. Furthermore, the consultation process for the NSW Wellbeing Framework should be ongoing to allow for continual improvement.

The BVDC is currently planning to develop a community wellbeing framework through deep consultation with the community. Our proposed timeframe for this project is 12 months to ensure we consult widely with a large cross-section of the community, particularly to ensure that we hear from a range of diverse voices.

## **Recommendation 2: Make data available at a local level to ensure the framework is useable across communities in NSW**

To ensure that the framework has utility for communities across NSW, it is vital that wellbeing indicators are made available at a local level (LGA and SA2). It is important that the NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework not only track differences in populations and regions but enables local communities to be engaged in how NSW services are distributed in the regions. There is a wealth of data collected by governments across the country that is localised to the LGA and SA2 level but is not made available to communities. The NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework should make this a key priority to help ensure NSW communities have data readily available to improve services and outcomes across the state. Doing so will enable a deeper understanding of where NSW services are needed, and therefore allow for more effective delivery of services. The BVDC can play a part in the development of data quality and availability in our region.

## **Recommendation 3: Develop more relevant, outcomes-based indicators**

The indicators listed appear to be based on existing data and surveys that are not directly linked to the outcomes. This could give a false indication on outcomes of some NSW services. We urge the NSW government to be more ambitious in this respect and identify 'ideal' indicators which adequately reflect the outcome areas (and do not simply measure outputs). Indicators should be developed based on narratives that identify specific needs and the outcomes that will address these needs. This may require more effort and resources to collect data for relevant indicators.

## **Recommendation 4: Carefully consider how wellbeing can be embedded into decision-making**

While a measurement dashboard is a valuable way to ensure data on the wellbeing of NSW residents is more accessible, more needs to be done to ensure wellbeing is effectively embedded into decision-making. Indicators by themselves do not create change, and the NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework should incorporate accountability mechanisms and processes to help ensure the framework achieves impact. Suggestions include incorporating the wellbeing framework into budget processes, wellbeing impacts assessments for policy proposals, identifying targets for wellbeing indicators, and ensuring that communities are well informed on decisions and actions that are being made to achieve these targets.

## **Concluding remarks**

The BVDC is excited to see the establishment of the NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework. We are also pleased that there is a consultation process to develop the framework. However, we feel that the framework can be strengthened through more in-depth community consultation, developing relevant needs- and outcomes-based indicators, and better embedding wellbeing into decision-making. We also feel that the framework provides a valuable opportunity to make local data more accessible to enable more effective delivery of NSW services

The BVDC will be commencing community consultation for a Bega Valley community wellbeing towards the end of 2024. We are very open to further engagement with the NSW government to discuss this project and how it can align with the NSW framework, as well as any further discussion on the points raised in this submission.

## Appendix: Our community consultation - overview of Measuring What Matters in the Bega Valley

The Measuring What Matters (MWM) in the Bega Valley project is part of the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) Investing in Rural Community Futures (IRCF) program in partnership with the Bega Valley Shire Council. This program was funded by the Australian Government. The project sought to engage widely with the community through various platforms to better understand their views on community-led decision making and what their thoughts are on using wellbeing indicators in that process. The project ran from September 2023 to April 2024 and comprised these consultation components:

- A community survey
- An online information session
- A face-to-face workshop

During the project the BVDC developed a directory of data insights and a digital story telling platform that was launched at the workshop.

The insights obtained through engagement with the community over the past two years, and from this project are highly relevant for community-led decision making within a wellbeing framework. It has placed the BVDC in an ideal position to reflect and review the findings so that new objectives and actions can be defined and implemented.

### Findings from the consultation

The consultation process was well-received with high levels of engagement in the community survey and workshop. This emphasises a high level of interest in the use of data and community-led decision making within the community.

#### The value of data

The survey highlighted that the community values a range of different data, including demographics, health, education, environment, housing, the economy and social wellbeing. As expressed by one individual:

*“I think all sorts of data is important. The more information that we have on any subject has to be a good thing.”*

There were concerns about using outdated data and that data needs to be localised to the Bega Valley. Individuals identified the importance of accessing a wide range of data that enables comparison to other regions.

#### Data use and support

Group discussions in the workshop highlighted that many organisations use data in the Bega Valley. Data quality was considered important, along with informed conversation to accompany the data. Individuals identified several challenges including a lack of sharing of data, a lack of strategies on data use and a lack of skills in collecting and analysing data.

Several opportunities were also identified. These included developing a data strategy alongside a framework for sharing data. Important goals to strive for included aggregating data for sharing and improved decision-making, informed local decision-making through data and improving access to relevant data.

Groups suggested that organisations could be empowered, and their activities could be more effective by using data. Desirable outcomes from data use included:

- Evidence-based grant applications
- Awareness about important issues
- Inform future organisational strategies
- Transparency and community engagement.

## Community-led decision making

The survey also showed that our community wants to be involved in decision making. Individuals expressed that doing so leads to better outcomes and that they do not trust the current structure of decision-making processes. As expressed by one individual:

*“Local knowledge not run by suits.”*

There is a clear need within the community for a transparent and inclusive process where decisions are made based on evidence. As expressed by one individual:

*“Community needs to understand clearly how to use data to the relevant level of government. To influence and provide input into local government decision making and performance. It is critical that local community has a clear understanding of the local specific data and use that to shape the community's position on issues that matter.”*

Challenges identified by individuals include time commitment, ensuring diverse representation, and potential dominance by vocal minorities.

## The use of wellbeing indicators

Feedback indicated that data should cover a broad range of wellbeing indicators encompassing health, education, environment, housing, economy, social connection, services, and access to amenities. Both social and economic wellbeing measures were considered important, incorporating social cohesion, connectedness, and a sense of belonging. As noted by one respondent:

*“Decision making driven by wellbeing indicators rather than economic profit.”*

People emphasised the importance of taking a holistic approach that incorporates transparent use of data for community decision making. They highlighted the need for data to be used for concrete actions that improve community wellbeing. Individuals wanted to be involved in defining and measuring wellbeing and suggested focus groups and workshops that included diverse perspectives.

## Wellbeing frameworks

Group discussions in the workshop highlighted that there is strong enthusiasm within the community for a Bega Valley wellbeing framework. Based on the survey responses, community members have a clear idea of what they think is needed for the community. For example, as noted by some survey respondents:

*“To make the Bega Valley a modern and futuristic hub where people thrive, and the young can stay with employment opportunities.”*

*“A thriving and prosperous Bega Valley where prosperity is shared equally with all.”*

*“Healthy happy community, engaged in living well and sustainably.”*

*“General feeling of wellbeing. Pride in what we have, rather than disappointment in what we lack.”*

Individuals identified that potential benefits of a wellbeing framework include establishing a shared vision, collaboration and unifying the community.

There was unanimous agreement from individuals and organisations that the development of a wellbeing framework should be community-led. Individuals indicated that they would be interested in participating in different ways, such as focus groups, workshops and sharing expertise.

There was a sense amongst the group that developing a community wellbeing framework would enable greater collaboration and have the benefit of identifying shared goals to work towards in the Bega Valley. There were concerns about who would develop and own the framework, how wellbeing would be made a priority, challenges in ensuring collaboration, and ensuring groups who tend to be marginalised in the community are included.

Individuals emphasised that framework should be led by the community with the assistance of an independent group. Community trust, expertise and funding were considered important requirements.

Collaboration and partnerships with local organisations and the Bega Valley Shire Council were considered vital to ensure the success of the framework. Effective action is needed to initiate a wellbeing framework and there is a need for further discussion to determine the most suitable approach for the Bega Valley.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Sollis, K., Yap, M., Campbell, P., & Biddle, N. (2022). Conceptualisations of wellbeing and quality of life: A systematic review of participatory studies. *World Development*, 160, 106073. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106073>

<sup>ii</sup> Hall, J., & Rickard, L. (2013). *People, progress and participation: How initiatives measuring social progress yield benefits beyond better metrics*. Global Choices. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283996367\\_People\\_progress\\_and\\_participation\\_How\\_initiatives\\_measuring\\_social\\_progress\\_yield\\_benefits\\_beyond\\_better\\_metrics](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283996367_People_progress_and_participation_How_initiatives_measuring_social_progress_yield_benefits_beyond_better_metrics); Wallace, J., & Schmuecker, K. (2012). *Shifting the dial: From wellbeing measures to policy practice*. Carnegie UK Trust. <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/shifting-the-dial-from-wellbeing-measures-to-policy-practice/>

<sup>iii</sup> Sollis, K. (2023). Participatory Wellbeing Frameworks and the Secret to Impact. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 24(2), 163-193.

<sup>iv</sup> Kroll, C. (2011). *Measuring progress and well-being: Achievements and challenges of a new global movement*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/08509.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Sollis et al. (in press). A national conversation on Measuring What Matters in Australia. *Centre for Policy Development*.

<sup>vi</sup> Sollis, K. (2023). Participatory Wellbeing Frameworks and the Secret to Impact. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 24(2), 163-193; Hall, J., & Rickard, L. (2013). *People, progress and participation: How initiatives measuring social progress yield benefits beyond better metrics*. Global Choices.

<sup>vii</sup> Pennington, A., Pilkington, G., Bache, I., Watkins, M., Bagnall, A.-M., South, J., & Corcoran, R. (2017). *Scoping review of review-level evidence on co-production in local decision-making and its relationship to community wellbeing*. What works for wellbeing. <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Co-production-scoping-review-July-2017.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216-224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>