ENGAGEMENT INSTITUTE CALLS FOR STRONGER LEADERSHIP AS COMPLEX DECISIONS RESHAPE COMMUNITIES

MEDIA RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Brisbane, Australia | 3 November 2026

As governments, industries and communities grapple with increasingly complex decisions, the Engagement Institute is calling for meaningful engagement to be recognised as a strategic capability essential to better decision-making and lasting outcomes.

The call comes as engagement professionals from across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand gathered in Brisbane recently for the Institute's 2026 Annual Conference, *Engage. Elevate. Lead. Shaping what comes next.*

The conference marked a significant moment for an increasingly influential profession moving beyond traditional consultation to play a more pivotal role in organisational strategy, governance and decision-making.

For the Engagement Institute, the challenge is not simply to respond to this evolution, but to lead it.

Engagement Institute CEO Marion Short said **meaningful engagement must be recognised as fundamental to navigating the complex challenges facing governments, organisations and communities.**

"Whether we're talking about the energy transition, major infrastructure, emerging technologies or decisions about the future of our communities, the challenges we face are increasingly complex. Good decisions cannot be made in isolation. Meaningful community and stakeholder engagement must be treated as core governance, helping produce better, more durable decisions and stronger public trust." Ms Short said.

"Meaningful engagement brings lived experience, local knowledge and diverse perspectives into the decisions that shape our future. It helps decision-makers better understand the people, places and interests affected by their choices.

"Engagement has matured into a sophisticated profession with an important strategic role to play. Our responsibility as its professional body is to lead that evolution and equip practitioners with the tools, capability and influence to make a meaningful difference."

Central to strengthening professional practice is the **Engagement Cortex**, the Institute's next-generation model for influence and action, recently released for member consultation.

Developed for contemporary practice across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, the model recognises that meaningful engagement extends beyond traditional organisation-led consultation. It incorporates community-led engagement, connects participation with decisions and action, and recognises building understanding as the foundation for meaningful influence.

The Institute has also released its **Engagement Timeframes Policy and Guidance Tool**, providing a practical framework to help practitioners and decision-makers plan engagement that is proportionate to the complexity of a decision, the needs of communities and the opportunities for genuine influence.

"These initiatives reflect our commitment to moving the profession forward, not simply responding to the challenges it faces," Ms Short said.

"That means advocating for meaningful engagement early in the decision-making process, strengthening professional capability and giving practitioners the confidence and tools to challenge approaches that fall short."

"Our communities are not just audiences. They are more than customers or voters, too. We need to see them as partners with unique lived experience and local knowledge that can help shape decisions, actions and the outcomes that affect *their* communities.

Conversations at the conference about project-related community benefits challenged delegates to consider not only what constitutes a genuine benefit, but who gets to define it and what role communities should have in designing it. Shaping benefits together helps organisations deliver demonstratable public value and build social license – which last well beyond an individual project.

Looking ahead, the Engagement Institute also signalled its next area of advocacy, with a **Data Centres and AI Position Paper** to be released. As investment in AI infrastructure accelerates, questions about land, energy, water, local impacts and community benefit are creating a new frontier for meaningful engagement.

Delegates left Brisbane with a challenge embedded in the conference theme: to engage, elevate and lead.

For more information, visit engagementinstitute.org.au

Media contact:
Marion Short
CEO
Engagement Institute
marion@engagementinstitute.org.au

ABOUT THE ENGAGEMENT INSTITUTE

The Engagement Institute is Australasia's leading authority on stakeholder and community engagement.

With almost 15,,000 members and over 5,600 professionals trained in the past year alone, the Engagement Institute plays a critical role in lifting engagement standards across government, infrastructure, energy, health services, consulting and corporate sectors. The organisation provides the skills, connections and advocacy to make a meaningful difference in decision-making.