

Minutes

Venue: Sydney Water Parramatta Office
Level 5, 2 Parramatta Square, Parramatta NSW

Date and time: 2 June 2025
9:00am – 2:00pm

Meeting title: Customer and Community Reference Group

Attendees

Independent Chair: Abigail Goldberg

CCRG Members:

Narelle Brown – Community Representative
Mario Ferreira Compart – Community Representative
Joy Horton – Community Representative
Mary Karras – Ethnic Communities Council NSW
Leigh Martin – Total Environment Centre
Bruce McClelland – Business Western Sydney
Douglas McCloskey – Justice & Equity Centre
Donna Rogers – Community Industry Group (Illawarra)

Guest:

Leo Patterson Ross, Chief Executive Officer,
Tenants' Union of NSW

Sydney Water:

Paul Plowman – Acting Chief Executive (*part*)
Stuart Wallace – General Manager, Customer & Stakeholder Engagement
Dean Page – Executive General Manager Finance, Commercial & Digital
Denisha Anbu - Executive General Manager, Customer Experience
Rachelle Legrand – Head of Strategy Change & Performance
Josh Isben – Head of Customer & Strategic Insights
Izzy Kerr – Customer Research Manager
Daniel Peacock – Head of Customer Contact (*part*)
Arli Miller – Head of Government, Stakeholder & Community (*part*)
Clare Porter – Head of Strategic Comms and CSR (*part*)
William Dolan – Regulatory Finance & Pricing Manager (*part*)
Sharon Bowyer – Senior Customer Governance Specialist

Apologies/absent:

Graham Turner – Council on the Ageing
Ross Williams – Local Government NSW
Stephen McMahon – Urban Development Institute of Australia
Anna Bacik – Community Representative

Meeting purpose:

Bi-monthly meeting according to CCRG Charter

The CCRG works with Sydney Water at a strategic level to achieve the highest possible levels of customer focus within our practices. It supports Sydney Water to ensure that our business decisions, as set out in our strategy, enterprise plan and regulatory submissions, are in the best interests of all Sydney Water customers and the community and are shaped by them.

Desired outcome:

Discussion and feedback from CCRG Members

Agenda items

Item	Topic	Actions
1	Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country The meeting opened at 9:00am and the Chair welcomed participants. Joy Horton acknowledgment country and paid respects to elders past and present. Joy also acknowledged reconciliation week.	
2	Introductions and apologies Housekeeping In addition to regular participants, the Chair welcomed Denisha Anbu - Executive General Manager, Customer Experience to the meeting. Apologies were noted.	
3	Minutes of previous meeting and review of actions / issues log Declaration of interests	

	<p>The Minutes and action/issues log of the 7 April 2025 CCRG meeting, which had been transmitted inter-session, were accepted. No additional interests were declared.</p>	
	Sydney Water and CCRG updates	
4	<p>Acting Chief Executive Officer update Paul Plowman provided an update on the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconciliation Week - Time to reflect on significance of the week. Staff events held including guest speaker from Reconciliation Australia. • World Environment day and environment week - staff events, including focus on projects on naturalisation of canals near the Tram Sheds. • EPA site visits and meetings - 2 days spent with the EPA including visits to PRW and North Head with Sydney Water Board and Exec members attending. EPA acknowledging the scale of Sydney Water operations. • Debris balls – ongoing investigations. Sydney Water leading clean ups of any suspected debris balls. • Thanked the CCRG for the discussion on customer performance metrics at the last CCRG meeting and advised that the Sydney Water Annual Environmental Performance Report 2023-2024 has now been published. • Applications for Sydney Water's Community Grants program close 16 June. • Residential WaterFix – new campaign to promote available service to customers to help save water and money. 	
5	<p>General Manager update Stuart Wallace provided an update on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Service Obligations (CSOs) – Discussions with Minister and Treasury. DCCEEW leading a Government review of CSO across NSW. Review will be extensive and likely to take till 2027. • Fats, Oils and Grease (FOG) education campaign – Sydney Water will be working with the Restaurants and Catering Association about managing these waste products effectively. <p>Key points of discussion from CCRG members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Justice Equity Centre is involved in the broader government discussions on CSOs. • there would be benefit in tailoring the Fats Oils Grease campaign for a CALD small business audience. 	<p>Action: Sydney Water to discuss CSOs and FOG campaign at future CCRG meeting.</p>
6	<p>CCRG Chair and Member update There were no updates from the Chair or CCRG members.</p>	
	Price Proposal	
7	<p>Paper for discussion: IPART's Draft Determination and Report (DDR) Presentation and Q&A. Dean Page, Denisha Anbu and Stuart Wallace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided a recap of Sydney Water's Price Proposal. • gave an outline of IPART's Draft Determination. • highlighted areas where Sydney Water will ask IPART to consider further before making their final determination. These included: 1. Growth servicing 2. Pretreatment 3. Critical sewers 4. Renewals 5. Growth and maintenance operating expenditure 6. Tax allowance. 	<p>Action: Sydney Water to share IPART's "Tell us what you think" questions with the</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlined implications of the Draft Determination on Sydney Water's operations, for customers and the community (including the environment). <p>Key comments and questions raised by the CCRG members were grouped on the following themes:</p> <p>IPART process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is this a normal price determination process with IPART? In the context of IPART not supporting certain expenditure (such as pre-treatment), does IPART audit how Sydney Water spends the money? <p><i>Sydney Water response:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The IPART Determination process is following the normal process. However, for this period, Sydney Water was requesting a significant price increase to support investment needs.</i> <i>Sydney Water does have the option to spend the money in the way it believes is best, though this means trade-offs with other initiatives. IPART then audits the efficiency of expenditure at the end of each price determination period.</i> <p>Price structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CCRG members supported IPART's decision to include a greater proportion of the bill increases onto the water usage charge rather than on the service charge. <p>Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growth is broader than just 5 a year timeframe. Existing customers should not be responsible for a step change in growth infrastructure. It's a bigger question for the wider water industry. There is a need to align on the Housing Growth Forecast and growth figures need to include industrial/business uses and take into consideration the different water/sewer needs. In terms of growth forecasts, does this include expected numbers for apartments as well as standalone houses? <p><i>Sydney Water response:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>the Growth forecasts that IPART used doesn't include growth forecast in the Illawarra and doesn't include industrial/commercial land use which Sydney Water needs to factor into our growth planning. Sydney Water accounts for all dwelling types.</i> <i>IPART forecasts also don't address the current Government's objectives of increasing housing delivery.</i> <i>Sydney Water working with Minister (Government) on alignment of growth forecasts.</i> <p>Water quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the implications of the price determination on management of PFAS? Pre-treatment is needed to support move towards Purified Recycled Water. What is IPART's rationale for disallowing expenditure for pre-treatment / purified recycled water? <p><i>Sydney Water response:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We understand that IPART feel that Sydney Water can effectively manage potential water quality and water security risks within this price period.</i> <p>Alignment of Sydney Water, PART and customers view of risk profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk, service levels and affordability need to be palatable. Are the risk profiles reasonable? Need to understand the difference in the assessment of what is acceptable risk and why IPART thinks the risk is different to Sydney Water. Where is the discrepancy in the risk profile between Sydney Water's views and IPART's views? What risks are tolerable from IPART's point of view and why? 	<p>CCRG Chair.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sydney Water's customer engagement is only one piece of the puzzle to be considered when making the price determination. There is a big gap from the customer priorities to the final outcome. • To what level has Sydney Water and IPART responded to customer priorities and risk appetite. How has Sydney Water interpreted customers' level of risk appetite? • Need to really assess how customer values align with the level of risk. IPART have accepted risks (growth, affordability) but just to a different level. <p><i>Sydney Water response:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Government may be in a better position to take on a broader risk profile, rather than this being passed onto customers.</i> • <i>One example on risk was provided - 80% of Sydney's water supply comes via the Prospect reservoir. There is only one water main from Prospect to Sydney city. There is no redundancy for any major breaks which adds to the risk profile.</i> <p>Limitation of regulatory framework in balancing investment and affordability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a structural problem in funding to balance affordability and investment. This is not unique to water – other services are facing similar challenges. Central Coast was cited as an example of where lack of investment has led to deterioration in the quality of service and a need for an even bigger price increase. • The water regulatory framework is not fit for purpose and does not allow for a step change in water investment. How we handle growth is a big challenge and cannot be treated in the same way as renewals and maintenance. Current approach is not sustainable for risk. Need to investigate other options for funding. What is the 'circuit breaker' to balancing risk and affordability? • There is a need to really think about funding models (especially to fund growth). <p><i>Sydney Water response:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Opportunity to review what Sydney Water is returning to the Government as a dividend.</i> <p>Deferral of investments and intergenerational equity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consequences of investment deferral – costs passed on to the next generation. Past decisions impact youth / future generations. • Did the youth voices from OWOV get isolated? Would be helpful to separate voices from youth and those with a 'youth perspective'. • Don't oversimplify intergenerational voices/issues. Sydney Water need to focus on the level of risk. • The issues of deferral of investments have affordability consequences for customers. Same applies to strata buildings where lack of timely investment results in larger strata levies. <p><i>Sydney Water response:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sydney Water has engaged with 18-30yr olds. (Under 16yr not permitted).</i> <p>Reputation risk and loss of social licence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a reputation risk if Sydney Water loses community and stakeholder trust. <p>Deliverability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does Sydney Water have the capability to deliver the investment within the price period? (suppliers, materials and contractor delays). What is the level of confidence in cost? Industry facing double/triple cost overruns. • Sydney Water need to have a hard look at delivery capability. Sydney Water currently isn't delivering in a timely fashion. <p><i>Sydney Water response:</i></p>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sydney Water is working on a supplier ecosystem to build capability to deliver (includes Supply Chain expos to assist in getting the market ready).</i> • <i>Allowance for typical industry delivery delays have been factored in.</i> <p>Customer communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When communicating the price proposal Sydney Water need to tell customers what they are actually getting for their money. • In terms of explaining to customers and stakeholders, Sydney Water needs to have a strong risk focus/position (not just focus on the cost increase). • Sydney Water needs to explore the actual consequences of the risk publicly. • Need to focus on what's in the customer's best interest. • It was noted that there is no new money available for Not-for-Profit organisations that are supporting people in need. There will be more people struggling with increasing costs and less opportunity for NFP to support customers (with information, guidance, education). <p>Global risk context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sydney Water needs to be prepared for unpredictable events. Covid may have gone, but there are increasing geo-political tensions and impacts on the global economy. <p><i>Sydney Water response:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sydney Water notes and acknowledges the changing global context.</i> <p>Denisha Anbu then provided an update on Sydney Water's Payment Assistance program including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the objectives are to increase awareness of the program among customers, to encourage participation and referrals to the program and to expand awareness and advocacy with social services and community organisations. • key messaging, target audiences (geographic/demographic) and target channels such as radio, social media and digital billboards. <p>Key questions and comments from the CCRG included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is interpreter service available for CALD? How does privacy/identity requirements impact CALD customers needing to speak to Sydney Water translators / operators? How can authorised people speak on their behalf without prohibitive requirements to identify themselves. • What applies to Dept of Housing residents? How do customers know if they can apply for payment assistance? • Need to get to people early and include broader options to support. Promote bill smoothing that can really support customers with their payments. 	
	Customer and community engagement	
8	<p>Improving engagement with tenants – Discussion</p> <p>Daniel Peacock, Head of Customer Contact and Leo Patterson Ross, CEO, Tenants' Union of NSW joined the meeting.</p> <p>Daniel Peacock provided background and outlined objectives, constraints, and what Sydney Water have done, are doing and have planned to improve engagement with tenants.</p> <p>Leo Patterson Ross outlined key issues facing tenants and challenges and opportunities for Sydney Water as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concealed leaks – as the water bill goes to the owner, tenants are often not aware of concealed leaks in a timely manner. Tenants need timely water usage information. 	<p>Action: Sydney Water to consider topic on water efficiency for future</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water efficiency standards linked to the Tenancy Act provides some protection for tenants in how properties are maintained. Social housing tenants mostly don't get usage bills at all, as usage is usually averaged out at a building level and proportioned to capacity to pay. Tenants Union have estimated that 70,000 people could be in social housing in Sydney Water's area. Multiple dwellings (e.g. units, granny flats) do not always have separate meters so water usage can be split in different ways. Rental Bond system tracks changeover of tenants. Tenants' Union estimate that 93% of rental properties have bonds lodged with the Rental Bond Board. This could provide opportunities or potential for tenants to opt-in for information from Sydney Water. Would need to be opt-in for privacy reasons. Tenants' Union estimate that 50% of tenants stay in one property for more than 2 years, and 25% stay in the same property for 5 years or more. This high level of stability provides more opportunities for Sydney Water to improve communications with tenants. Privacy issues need to be carefully considered. If owners see water usage data, so should tenants. Managing Agents primarily act in the interests of property owners. <p>Key comments and questions from CCRG members included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an opportunity for parallel communications with landlords as well as with tenants. Communicating information to tenants independently of a third party (landlord or managing agent) would also be positive. Options for a Sydney Water portal for tenants and further investigations of electronic billing that separate water usage charge (for tenants) and water service charges (to owners) were viewed as positive initiatives. What is the role of Dept of Fair Trading? It would be useful for Sydney Water to talk to Fair Trading on this topic. The Owners Corporation Network would also welcome Sydney Water to attend meetings and/or provide additional information relevant to tenants. Emerging CALD communities are mostly tenants, often in large families and often in apartments/units (not always separately metered). Need for greater communication with tenants on water literacy and wastewater education especially with CALD communities. Is focusing on tenants a strategic focus for Sydney Water? JEC would welcome the opportunity to explore this topic more with Sydney Water (on a regular basis). Opportunity for further engagement with Social Housing to discuss water efficiency, water conservation and increased water usage charges following the price determination. Opportunity to discuss water efficiency for hot water and heating and also the links to energy efficiency. <p>Sydney Water advised that improving engagement with tenants is a focus for Sydney Water and forms a key part of the Customer Experience Roadmap.</p>	CCRG agenda item.
9	<p>Paper for discussion: Strategic customer engagement</p> <p>Josh Isben and Izzy Kerr provided an update on strategic customer engagement.</p> <p>Key comments from the CCRG included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for the formation of a CCRG subgroup for future discussions on this topic. Douglas McCloskey, Mary Karras, Mario Ferreira Compart and Narelle Brown expressed interest in participating in the subgroup, subject to time commitments and location of meetings. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subgroup would benefit from diversity of views, subject matter perspectives, continuity of involvement (to provide overview assessment of the program) and ability to bring in other external expertise. The JEC has scope to support the procurement and planning phase of the strategic customer engagement program. 	
	Other business and close	
11	Look-ahead to August meeting contents, forward plan Josh Isben discussed the draft August agenda. The option for an update on Major Projects Community Engagement was supported.	
12	Pulse check (<i>in camera</i>) The Chair led an 'in camera' discussion with CCRG members that focused on a response to IPART's draft determination and broader feedback regarding meeting efficacy.	
13	Thanks and meeting close The Chair thanked the CCRG members. Meeting closed at 2.00pm.	