

# Minutes

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

**Date and time:** 4 August 2025  
9:00am – 2:00pm

## Meeting title: Customer and Community Reference Group

### Attendees

**Independent Chair:** Abigail Goldberg

#### CCRG Members:

Mario Ferreira Compart – Community Representative  
Mary Karras – Ethnic Communities Council NSW  
Leigh Martin – Total Environment Centre  
Douglas McCloskey – Justice & Equity Centre  
Graham Turner – Council on the Ageing  
Ross Williams – Local Government NSW

#### Sydney Water:

Paul Plowman – Acting Chief Executive  
Stuart Wallace – General Manager, Customer & Stakeholder Engagement  
Dean Page – Executive General Manager Finance, Commercial & Digital  
Rachelle Legrand – Head of Strategy Change & Performance  
Josh Isben – Head of Customer & Strategic Insights  
Izzy Kerr – Customer Research Manager  
Arli Miller – Head of Government, Stakeholder & Community  
Ben Grogan – Engagement Manager - Major Projects (*part*)  
Sharon Bowyer – Senior Customer Governance Specialist

### Apologies/absent:

Bruce McClelland – Business Western Sydney  
Stephen McMahon – Urban Development Institute of Australia  
Donna Rogers – Community Industry Group (Illawarra)  
Narelle Brown – Community Representative  
Joy Horton – Community Representative  
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	<b>Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country</b> The meeting opened at 9:00am and the Chair welcomed participants. Mario Ferreira Compart acknowledged country and paid respects to elders past and present.	
2	<b>Introductions and apologies</b> <b>Housekeeping</b> The Chair welcomed participants, noted apologies and advised that resignations had been received from Donna Rogers and Narelle Brown due to changing circumstance. The Chair reflected on the contribution from Donna and Narelle on the CCRG. The CCRG supported the Chair's proposal that a vote of thanks be sent to each. The Chair noted that the initial term of CCRG members will be expiring at the end of this year. The CCRG members were asked to consider their interest in continuing on	Action: vote of thanks to be issued to retiring members.  Action: CCRG members to consider their interest in

	the CCRG, noting that ongoing members would be thoroughly appreciated. Members will be contacted individually in this regard.	continuing on the CCRG.
3	<p><b>Minutes of previous meeting and review of actions / issues log</b></p> <p><b>Declaration of interests</b></p> <p>The Minutes and action/issues log of the 2 June 2025 CCRG meeting, which had been transmitted inter-session, were accepted.</p> <p>The Chair advised that she had been appointed to the Board of Infrastructure NSW and the Transport for NSW Transport Asset Management Advisory Board.</p> <p>Douglas McCloskey and Graham Turner advised that they had been asked to participate in Sydney Desalination Plant's (SDP) new Customer Advisory Panel (although this has not yet commenced). Both indicated that they intended to take up these roles.</p> <p>No additional interests were declared.</p>	
<b>Sydney Water and CCRG updates</b>		
4	<p><b>Acting Chief Executive Officer update</b></p> <p>Paul Plowman advised the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IPART have released its updated Price Determination for WaterNSW which proposes a 10% increase. This increase will be passed through to Sydney Water customers in the form of bulk water charges.</li> <li>Three new Sydney Water <a href="#">Board</a> members have recently been appointed and a fourth member will commence in November.</li> </ul> <p>He also highlighted the value he placed on the CCRG contribution to Sydney Water, providing a balanced and 'outside in' perspective. He thanked the CCRG Chair and members for their ongoing support including in recent participation in a meeting with IPART.</p>	
5	<p><b>General Manager update</b></p> <p>Stuart Wallace provided an update on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sydney Water's new <b>Save our Sinks</b> <a href="#">campaign</a>, which was shown during the meeting. The key message of the campaign is <b>Only water, detergent and soap down the sink</b>, targeting the issue of fats, oils and grease (FOGS) being disposed of down the sink, which is a major issue for Sydney Water's networks. The campaign is being targeted in geographic areas where known issues of "chokes" within the wastewater network have occurred. More information on <a href="#">Save our Sinks</a>.</li> <li>Sydney Water has been involved in recent <b>NAIDOC</b> events and the <b>Bankstown Bites</b> festival sharing information about water literacy.</li> </ul> <p>Questions from the CCRG included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does Sydney Water have information on the major sources of 'fatbergs' (retail, small business, trade and business customers)?</li> </ul> <p>Sydney Water advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>residential customers still have a large impact on the wastewater network because of the greater % of residential properties. Larger businesses have additional trade waste requirements.</li> <li>there is a separate trade and business customer campaign where Sydney Water is partnering with the Restaurants and Catering Association. The <a href="#">retail food</a> trade wastewater page of the website contains various factsheets (including in language) for business and commercial customers.</li> </ul>	

6	<p><b>CCRG Chair and Member update</b>  <u>Chair update</u></p> <p>The Chair outlined the meeting held on the 16 June 2025 with IPART and CCRG Members (Mary Karras, Leigh Martin, Bruce McClelland, Narelle Brown and Anna Bacik). The Chair advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IPART provided an overview of their Draft Determination of Sydney Water's price proposal.</li> <li>• CCRG members raised the importance of a number of issues, including pre-treatment and purified recycled water projects, limiting Sydney Water investment in growth areas such as Western Sydney, concern around higher water usage charges, particularly for large families and multi-generational homes.</li> <li>• In response to prompting, IPART advised that it does not see itself in the position of specifying requirements for customer engagement, but rather consider the business, who should know their customers best, to be well placed to engage, and to innovate on engagement practices.</li> </ul> <p>CCRG members agreed that the meeting with IPART was useful.</p> <p><u>CCRG Member update</u></p> <p>Douglas McCloskey provided an update on recent research carried out by Justice and Equity Centre (JEC) on the effectiveness of pre-visits prior to disconnection/restriction notices in the Energy sector. The report is available <a href="#">here</a>.</p>	
<b>Price Proposal</b>		
7	<p><b>Sydney Water response to IPART's Draft Determination and communications approach</b></p> <p>Jodie Polutele, Manager Strategic Communications also joined for this item. Dean Page and Stuart Wallace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gave an update on Sydney Water's response to IPART's draft determination</li> <li>• sought feedback on Sydney Water's approach to communications in this regard.</li> </ul> <p><u>Sydney Water response to IPART's draft determination</u></p> <p>Questions asked and comments made by the CCRG related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pensioner rebates.</li> <li>• Balance of service charges and usage charges and the impacts on different users.</li> <li>• Confusion regarding the impacts/ changes to the success measures and the directional arrows of the customer outcome performance measures.</li> <li>• Future forecast performance needs to be shown against the current state, not compared to forecast performance in the price proposal.</li> <li>• Ensuring adequate resourcing for customer contact and customer care teams if there is a spike in payment assistance requests. AI driven customer interactions are driving negative customer experience.</li> <li>• Negative perception around modifying targets where the results were unfavourable. Will be very important how any such changes are communicated.</li> <li>• Differences in growth forecasts and timing of infrastructure required to support government housing strategy.</li> <li>• Government should be sharing the cost of new water infrastructure. Consumers should not have to fund development.</li> </ul> <p>Sydney Water noted that Government does have options for different funding models such as reduced dividend and changing tax arrangements.</p>	

	<p><u>Sydney Water's approach to communications.</u></p> <p>Feedback provided by the CCRG was grouped into the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Streamline wording and ensure tone of voice is appropriate to audience.</b> e.g. just refer to "have your say".</li> <li>• <b>Terminology</b> – avoid using terms like "investment" and "value". It sounds like Sydney Water is using customers' money to make money by "investing".</li> <li>• <b>Need for simple CALD communication</b> – don't just "translate" message, ensure messages are simple and easy to understand 'in language'.</li> <li>• <b>Ensure relevance to customers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Customers don't care about growing Sydney. Just refer to population growth or new housing.</li> <li>○ Don't refer to Sydney or Greater Sydney. Just refer to 'us'.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ensure messages convey simple, understandable and <b>direct outcomes</b>. Don't be general (e.g. "Help is at hand"), focus on the outcome (e.g. "Support is available to help you pay your bill").</li> <li>• <b>Avoid 'corporate speak'</b> – not necessary to talk about 'commitments' (e.g. we are committed to health and safety of our customers) or phased increases.</li> <li>• <b>Avoid averages</b> - don't refer to 'average' household (because everyone thinks they are average). Don't use average costs, use a range of total costs. Alternatively use examples of costs with different scenarios of water usage.</li> <li>• <b>Need to focus on tenants</b> which are also a large portion of vulnerable and diverse customers.</li> <li>• Vulnerable customers channels should include <b>community outreach</b> e.g. "bring your bill" days and providing regular and short emails to local government and ministerial officers to share with their communities.</li> <li>• Consider including <b>Places of worship</b> - as these often run groups such as English classes that can share payment assistance information with community groups.</li> <li>• Include <b>Financial Counsellors and Service Providers</b> e.g. Aged Care, other support bodies – as they need to know where customers can go for help.</li> <li>• Foster stronger cross pollination between Energy and Water customer service officers so they can cross promote each other's payment assistance programs.</li> <li>• Need to ensure <b>frontline teams</b>, including contractors, are trained to communicate these messages effectively with customers.</li> </ul> <p>Mary Karras noted she will be involved in consultation that Multicultural NSW are running on the role of service providers. Mary can provide an update on this at next CCRG meeting.</p>	<p>Action: include a presentation and tour of the Sydney Water Contact Centre on the CCRG Forward Plan.</p> <p>Action: MK to report back on Multicultural NSW consultation re service providers.</p>
<b>Customer and community engagement</b>		
8	<p><b>Paper for discussion: Strategic customer engagement.</b></p> <p>Josh Isben and Izzy Kerr provided an update on strategic customer engagement.</p> <p>Questions and key comments raised by the CCRG included on the following themes:</p> <p><b>Support from the Board</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caution that new Board members could be disrupters to the Customer Engagement program.</li> <li>• Given that customer engagement has to be diverse, what is the multicultural diversity of the new Board members?</li> <li>• What soft skills (ie in customer engagement) do members of the Board bring? Are these skills part of the Board skills matrix?</li> </ul>	

	<p><b>Demonstrating customer support in relation to the Price Proposal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing willingness to pay for specific projects with customers is not good engagement practice and Sydney Water was advised not to take this approach.</li> <li>• Customers have an interest in not suffering the 'outcomes' of failure of assets, but customers do need to understand what assets are needed.</li> <li>• Engagement needs to confirm outcomes that are supported by consumers, but can also include testing different ways of managing risk and performance (with different associated costs) to achieve the outcomes.</li> </ul> <p><b>Closing the engagement loop</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to confirm customer recommendations and preferences with customer panels at the end of the process.</li> <li>• Sydney Water to seek broad public feedback on draft price proposal before being submitted to IPART.</li> <li>• Need to be careful how we communicate how customers have been heard and how their input has influenced decisions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Balancing technical needs with community expectations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is hard for the regulator to evaluate customer engagement 'on paper'. Customers broadly express whether you are aligned to customer values, but investment decisions need to take all input on board.</li> <li>• Engaging with customers on the detail can make things too complex.</li> </ul> <p><b>General</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is Atkins? What are their skills in customer engagement?</li> <li>• Water utilities and regulators are still in the learning phase on customer engagement. There are opportunities to work together to understand lessons and improve.</li> <li>• Recommend a collective conversation with IPART, Hunter Water, and CCRG members on developing a common approach to customer engagement.</li> <li>• Engaging the CCRG at the outset and throughout the program will assist with demonstrating credibility of the results with IPART and Atkins.</li> </ul> <p>Sydney Water commented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that the new Board member starting in November 2025 will have a First Nations focus.</li> <li>• that customers do not tend to think in terms of asset classes.</li> <li>• Atkins are an efficiency auditor based in the UK.</li> </ul>	<p>Action: Sydney Water to explore options for collective meeting with SWC, IPART, Hunter Water and CCRG.</p>
9	<p><b>Major projects community engagement</b> Arli Miller and Ben Grogan gave an:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overview on Major Projects Community Engagement at Sydney Water</li> <li>• discussed three case studies of Aerotropolis Stormwater Schemes, Advanced Water Recycling Centre and Vaucluse Diamond Bay</li> <li>• outlined that a First Nations Advisory Group is soon to be established.</li> </ul> <p>Questions and key points of discussion included the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention and management of complaints</li> <li>• Engagement on land acquisition</li> <li>• Engagement with specific stakeholders e.g. First Nations and small business</li> <li>• Resourcing levels to support community engagement</li> </ul> <p>Sydney Water responded to the questions during the presentation.</p>	

Strategy and Planning		
10	<p><b>Workshop: Seeking customer and community views to inform our future strategic planning</b></p> <p>Rachelle Legrand and Josh Isben outlined Sydney Water's strategy review process and the initial work done to identify external trends that may impact delivery of customer outcomes going forward.</p> <p>Through a workshop format the CCRG were asked for their views on the significant medium to long-term trends that Sydney Water should take into account during the review.</p> <p>Comments from the CCRG on the external trends included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Trust' should be a separate external trend (not just grouped with public health). Perceptions of trust will evolve.</li> <li>• Trends should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Social cohesion, social instability and disparity</li> <li>○ Changing demographics</li> <li>○ Changing composition of Sydney – decentralisation, regional, e.g. the possibility of Hawkesbury City Council water becoming part of Sydney Water. (the boundaries of Sydney change from what we expect),</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Modify the 'water resource' trend - Changing water use is the trend – water use specifically for Data Centers are short term issues rather than longer term trends.</li> <li>• Climate change to be separate trend - Outlier incidents can suddenly occur while systemic issues are becoming the norm (e.g. flooding). Adaptability to resilience - Need to build in resilience to manage impacts of the long term. Natural disasters and impacts on SWC assets is a trend.</li> <li>• Other considerations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Need for increased naturalisation – new waterway systems and not denying the environment of its water needs.</li> <li>○ Implementing change and financial burden – need for better planning</li> <li>○ Trends of AI impacting employment – if increasing unemployment, customer affordability becomes more of an issue. Sustainability of payment assistance.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>During the workshop CCRG members provided feedback on Post-it notes. This feedback was provided to Sydney Water who will incorporate it into input to Sydney Water Executive and Board discussions.</p>	<p>Action: Sydney Water to provide a short update at the September CCRG meeting. This is to be in the form of a table of the trends before and after the advice of the CCRG members.</p>
Other business and close		
11	<p><b>Other business, General Q&amp;A</b></p> <p>CCRG members asked and commented on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where does the Sydney Desalination plant (SDP) customer advisory group fit in. Where does IPART fit in with SDP?</li> <li>• What is the growing trend on ownership of Desalination Plants or Purified Recycled Water plants? Is it evolving similar to the Energy sector with wholesale and retailers?</li> <li>• The Government are making a decision not to expand SDP but this impacts a private entity. Private entities may not want to invest in future if they are limited by Government.</li> </ul> <p>Sydney Water explained that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDP is its own entity, privately owned by a Canadian Pension Fund and Australian Infrastructure investor.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SDP is still covered by IPART and the 3Cs framework.</li> <li>It is a tricky situation as Sydney Water determines when it needs to access water from SDP. While Sydney Water needs to work with SDP it is also arm's length from SDP. This is also similar to the relationship with WaterNSW.</li> <li>Noted the impacts for Sydney Water supply and demand and efficient use of different water sources. If SDP expansion does not proceed, then pre-treatment is required so that more water can be accessed from the Dams.</li> </ul>	
12	<b>Look-ahead to September meeting contents, forward plan</b> Josh Isben discussed the draft September agenda and the proposed field visit to the Advanced Water Recycling Centre at Kemps Creek in November.	
13	<b>Pulse check (<i>in camera</i>)</b> Not undertaken for this meeting.	
14	<b>Thanks and meeting close</b> The Chair thanked the CCRG members. Meeting closed at 1.30pm.	