

Minutes

Venue: Upper South Creek Advanced Water Recycling Centre
Badu Muru Grv, Kemps Creek.

Date and time: 10 November 2025
10:00am – 2:00pm

Meeting title: Customer and Community Reference Group

Attendees

Independent Chair: Abigail Goldberg

CCRG Members:

Renee Acers – Community Industry Group
Rob Gravestocks – 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
Debbie Smythe – Wesley Mission
Graham Turner – Council on the Ageing
Ross Williams – Local Government NSW

Sydney Water:

Stuart Wallace – General Manager, Customer & Stakeholder Engagement
Rachelle Legrand – Head of Strategy Change & Performance
Josh Isben – Head of Customer & Strategic Insights
Izzy Kerr – Customer Research Manager
Sharon Bowyer – Senior Customer Governance Specialist
Dimi Shortland – Delivery Manager (*part*)
Grant Thomas – Engagement Lead - Greater Sydney (*part*)
Django Seccombe – Circular Economy Manager (*part*)
Jodie Polutele – Manager Strategic Communications (*part*)
Aagna Chetan – Strategic Comms Advisor Major Projects (*part*)

Apologies/absent: Paul Plowman – Acting Chief Executive
Dean Page – Executive General Manager Finance, Commercial & Digital
Stephen McMahon – UDIA
Mario Ferreira Compart – 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

#	Topic	Actions
1	<p>Welcome and Acknowledgement of country</p> <p>The meeting opened at 10:00am and the Chair welcomed participants and introduced new CCRG members, Renee Acers, Debbie Smyth and Rob Gravestocks.</p> <p>The Chair noted apologies and advised that Stephen McMahon had confirmed he would not be continuing on the CCRG.</p> <p>Dimi Shortland, Delivery Manager welcomed the CCRG to the Advanced Water Recycling Centre, acknowledged country and paid respects to elders past and present. He provided a brief safety induction to the site.</p>	
2	<p>Advanced Water Recycling Centre - presentations</p> <p>Dimi Shortland, Grant Thomas and Django Seccombe presented an:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> overview of the AWRC facility (wastewater treatment, renewable energy solar farm), its purpose, benefits and commissioning timeline. When completed, the AWRC and its associated pipelines will support the population and 	

	<p>economic growth of Western Sydney, including the Western Sydney International Airport. It will have an initial capacity to treat up to 35 megalitres of wastewater per day, providing an ability to service future growth in the region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • summary of the community engagement for this project including a close look at the engagement with First Nations and project outcomes for First Nations (such as Road naming in Dharug language, waterway health and green space restoration and artefact repatriation). • outline of potential future circular economy zone as part of the site that supports Sydney Water and NSW resource recovery initiatives (e.g. biochar from biosolids and green waste). <p>Questions from the CCRG members were responded to during the meeting.</p>	
3	<p>Advanced Water Recycling Centre - site tour</p> <p>Dimi Shortland led the CCRG on a tour of the Advanced Water Recycling Centre (currently under construction by Sydney Water partners, John Holland).</p> <p>Dimi, Grant and Django responded to questions during the tour.</p>	
4	<p>Minutes of previous meeting and review of actions / issues log Declaration of interests</p> <p>The Minutes and action/issues log of the 29 September CCRG meeting, which had been transmitted inter-session, were accepted.</p> <p>No interests were declared.</p>	
Sydney Water and CCRG updates		
5	<p>General Manager update</p> <p>Stuart Wallace advised the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership update: Darren Cleary will commence with Sydney Water as Managing Director from 17 Nov. Bob Carr and Maree O'Halloran also join as new Board Directors. • New prices: Customers have started to receive their bills with new prices. Some negative feedback has been received regarding increased prices. • Affordability campaign: Now completed. Ongoing support available. • Data centres will increase Sydney Water's demand by 25%, not accounted for in the IPART determination. Sydney Water is working with government and industry to explore solutions • Save Our Sinks campaign: Outperformed all previous campaigns in recall, impact, and clarity. 34% of respondents adopted a suggestion, most commonly stopped pouring milk down the sink. • Brand tracker and community sentiment customer research results for Jul-Sept 2025: Sydney Water ranked first for Trust and second for Customer Satisfaction and Reputation (both behind day-to-day bank). The most important community issues are still cost-related, being the everyday cost-of-living expenses, housing ownership and rental costs. 	<p>Action: Sydney Water to make brand tracker and community sentiment research report available for members who wish to receive it.</p>
Customer and community engagement		
6	<p>Workshop: Sydney Water 'tone of voice'</p> <p>Jodie Polutele and Aagna Chetan joined the meeting and explained:</p>	

- tone is voice is **how** something is said rather than **what** is said.
- a clear, consistent voice helps customers and stakeholders recognise our identity and values
- A tone of voice can help us communicate consistently, clearly and authentically across the entire business.

A discussion with the CCRG focused on the following questions. Feedback from the CCRG was collated into themes.

If Sydney Water was a person, what kind of person would we be?

- **Technically skilled and an educator:** An engineer - technically competent, understands the seriousness of responsibilities (public health, environment) and a science communicator that can explain complex concepts simply.
- **Dependable and trustworthy:** Reliable like a doctor - someone you don't think about daily but refer to and trust when needed. Quick to respond and solve problems.
- **Passionate and committed:** Passionate about their role and the environment, committed to helping people.
- **People centred:** Open, welcoming, helpful, respectful, considerate and holistic in approach.
- **Practical and process driven:** Managerial, competent, process-oriented but flexible, a "can-do" person who delivers.
- **Essential service provider working behind the scenes:** Works quietly, not a show-off, yet essential to public health and well-being.
- **Wise:** Like an Elder - someone who finds water and solves problems.
- **Faces human challenges:** Can be overworked and exhausted. Sometimes resented, like when receiving a big bill from a doctor.

Summary: A skilled, dependable, and caring professional - intelligent, trustworthy, and responsive, balancing technical expertise with a people focus mindset.

What three words best capture how you'd like to feel after engaging with Sydney Water?

- Heard, listened to, understood.
- Respected, valued, treated as an individual.
- Safe, reassured, content.
- Informed, empowered, engaged.
- Supported, satisfied that action is being taken.

Summary: customers want to feel acknowledged, respected, and confident that Sydney Water is taking action, while leaving them informed, safe, and valued.

When has Sydney Water's communication (written or spoken, internal or external) been effective and what made it stand out?

- **Humour and creativity:** Campaigns like Save Our Sinks and messaging on flushable wipes - memorable and engaging.
- **Timely and practical:** SMS alerts for outages and job follow-ups are succinct. Customers appreciated knowing action was taken (e.g. leak repairs).
- **Educational and informative:** School programs (Wonders of Water Van), community days and events. Public education – tap water is safe, water conservation and wastewater education (what to put/not put down the sink/toilet). Clear explanations during water restrictions using visuals (graphs of storage levels) helped people understand the "why."
- **Inclusive:** Multiple languages and platforms: SMS, email, radio, brochures, community influencers. Tailored communication e.g., CALD communities

<p>(including language consideration), vulnerable customers (including access to digital tools)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful and honest: Messaging that resonates and has a clear purpose. Honest communication (compare previous punitive messages on Water Restriction comms, not being honest about Debris balls). Listening to the community - builds trust. • Customer/community centric approach: Customer Care and community engagement team – listen and value customers and community members. Respectful tone, not talking down to people. • Action oriented: Communication backed by visible action (e.g. fixing leaks quickly, desal plant decision). Relationship-building through community involvement before delivering information. <p>Summary: effective communication is clear, timely, and purposeful, uses multiple channels, and combines education with action. It resonates when Sydney Water is honest, inclusive, and customer-focused, making people feel informed and respected.</p> <p>What key messages should Sydney Water always communicate, no matter the topic or audience?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tap water is safe and dependable. • Sydney Water is always contactable. • Teach the water cycle, water conservation, wastewater, sustainability. • The value of water and what Sydney Water provides (and costs). • Be transparent about billing impacts, projects and any changes. • Admit when you don't know - avoid misleading information. • Ongoing engagement, including tailored communication for diverse audiences. • Communicate with the right amount of information, be realistic, don't oversell. • Provide practical tools and tips (eg sinks/toilets, water conservation actions). <p>Summary: Back words with visible action to build confidence and trust.</p> <p>Feedback from the CCRG will be consolidated along with feedback from other focus groups. This collective insight will be used to develop a guide that will help Sydney Water be clear and consistent in communications while strengthening the brand and reinforcing values.</p>	<p>Action: Sydney Water to provide an update to the CCRG on this work at a future meeting.</p>
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<p>7</p>	<p>Strategic Customer Engagement planning: Report back on progress of Request for Information (RFI).</p> <p>Izzy Kerr provided a progress report on the Request for Information including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 submissions received • 5 considered above average • CCRG subgroup will be invited to review the top submissions (or any other if required) <p>Josh Isben provided a summary of the Sydney Water engagement with the CCRG on planning for the Strategic Customer Engagement, outlining that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this has been early and often • Sydney Water aims to continue to work with the CCRG across the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation levels of Inform, Consult, Involve and Collaborate. • Sydney Water is committed to co-designing the customer engagement program with the CCRG. <p>The CCRG were asked to reflect on the level of engagement so far including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A kick off workshop with the CCRG was held Sept 2024, at the very beginning of the planning phase. • Regular updates have been provided to the CCRG at all meetings since the kick off workshop • Feedback from the CCRG on principles, objectives, and scope has been incorporated into the plan. • Sydney Water partnered with CCRG subgroup members for input to RFI and collaboration in Industry briefing. 	<p>Actions: CCRG members to provide additional feedback on the level of engagement by Sydney Water either to the CCRG Chair or directly to Sydney Water.</p> <p>Sydney Water to arrange follow up meetings on the RFI with the CCRG subgroup.</p> <p>New or existing CCRG members to consider involvement in the CCRG subgroup and advise Sydney Water.</p>
<p>Year in review and look ahead to 2026</p>		
<p>8</p>	<p>Achievements for the year: CCRG Member look back and CCRG journey</p> <p>The Chair invited CCRG member Leigh Martin to provide a summary of the past 3 years of the CCRG from his perspective.</p> <p>Leigh reflected on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CCRG had played a crucial role in shaping the Our Water Our Voice customer engagement program. Sydney Water had seriously taken on board feedback from the CCRG. • CCRG members had met with IPART to discuss the Draft Determination of the Sydney Water Price Proposal. IPART needed to be educated about the role of the CCRG. • IPART have a short-term approach to the next price path. There is opportunity for the CCRG to advocate for longer term planning and pricing models especially as Sydney grows (“so as to not keep kicking the can down the road”). • Sydney Water has seen the need for Purified Recycled Water and this is a critical topic for the future. However, it is important to note that in effect we already have PRW through examples of upstream treated wastewater going back into rivers which flow into Sydney’s drinking water catchments (Warragamba and Nepean). • In the recent Price Determination IPART is not as ambitious for PRW. There is opportunity for the CCRG to advocate for this in the future. • While Sydney Water’s previous Customer Advisory Committee was still valuable, the CCRG is more engaging and Sydney Water is serious about 	

	<p>listening to CCRG members. In comparison to some other committees, the Sydney Water CCRG is more effective.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCRG members were encouraged to continue to work with and support Sydney Water while also cautioned about staying independent. <p>The Chair then shared her reflections on the CCRG journey since its formation in November 2022 including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting topics covered over the last 3 years • Relationships developed between members, Sydney Water and the Chair • Ways of working evolved including meeting structure, interactive activities ranging from panels to workshops, site visits and guest speakers • Milestones: including inputs to Sydney Water price proposal and Strategic Customer Engagement <p>The Chair then shared 'strategic questions worth asking'. These questions (What's known?, What if?, Now what? What's unsaid?) are based on a Harvard Business Review technique and are useful questions for CCRG members to consider asking during future CCRG meetings. The Chair reinforced that meetings are a 'safe space' for any and all questions, and that questions are key to the meetings purpose, and always welcome at meetings or in advance.</p> <p>The Chair thanked members for their participation in the CCRG throughout the year and looked forward to working with the new CCRG members.</p> <p>Members expressed their gratitude to the Independent Chair for leading the CCRG over the past three years. They highlighted that having an Independent Chair has strengthened the group's role and commended the Chair for her professionalism and for creating an environment where all voices are heard and the insights of CCRG members are valued. Members added that the Chair's ability to ensure smooth well-structured meetings, with discussions kept on track and on time was greatly appreciated.</p>	
9	<p>CCRG 2026 draft forward plan</p> <p>Josh Isben shared a draft CCRG Forward Plan for 2026 and outlined key meeting themes aligned to the CCRG Charter. Comments on the forward plan were sought from CCRG members.</p> <p>Topics suggested by CCRG members included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance reporting against the customer outcomes • New ways to support vulnerable customers – affordability • Tariff structure and reform. Have a discussion on the balance between water usage charges and service charges. How this impacts some customers that cannot reduce their water usage and therefore do not have control over their water bill. • Business decision making and operating models and how impacts on customer bills are being taken into consideration. (e.g. decisions such as AWRC circular economy zone - will this bring revenue in for Sydney Water? AWRC operating model being outsourced.) • Options for CCRG tours included the desalination plant, customer hub and listening to customer calls. • Round back on outcomes of the tone of voice discussion. <p>Sydney Water advised that other topics or questions on notice can be provided at any time through the Chair or CCRG secretariat.</p>	<p>Action: Sydney Water to consider CCRG feedback for Forward Plan</p>
	<p>General business</p>	

10	<p>Other business</p> <p>There was no other business</p>	
11	<p>Thanks and meeting close</p> <p>The Chair thanked Sydney Water for the organising the site visit to the AWRC site and to CCRG members for their participation in the meeting and throughout the year.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 2:00pm.</p>	