

Minutes - Customer and Community Reference Group

Date and time: 23 February 2026

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

Attendees

Chair: Abigail Goldberg

CCRG Members:

Sydney Water:

Renee Acers	Community Industry Group	Darren Cleary	Managing Director (<i>part</i>)
Mario Ferreira Compart	Community Representative	Clare Porter	Head of Marketing Communications & Strategic Insights (<i>part</i>)
Rob Gravestocks	Community Representative	Rachelle Legrand	Head of Strategy Change & Performance
Mary Karras	Ethnic Communities Council NSW	Josh Isben	Head of Customer & Strategic Insights
Leigh Martin	Total Environment Centre	Izzy Kerr	Customer Research Manager
Bruce McClelland	Business Western Sydney	Sharon Bowyer	Senior Customer Governance Specialist
Douglas McCloskey	Justice & Equity Centre	Paul Higham	Head of Business Development (<i>part</i>)
Debbie Smythe	Wesley Mission	Kate Miles	Head of System Planning & Land Acquisition (<i>part</i>)
Graham Turner	Council on the Ageing	Raquel Tracy	A/Head of Strategic Communications & Corporate Social Responsibility (<i>part</i>)
Ross Williams	Local Government NSW	Nicole McCarthy	Head of Customer Hub (<i>part</i>)
Gavin Melvin	Urban Development Institute of Australia (NSW)	Christine Covington	Non-executive Director
		Dr Alex Fisher	Non-executive Director

Absent: Joy Horton, 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	Welcome and acknowledgement of country The Chair welcomed participants including new CCRG Member, Gavin Melvin, to the meeting. The Managing Director acknowledged country.	
2	Introductions and apologies The Chair invited all participants to introduce themselves. The participation of the new Managing Director and observing Non-executive Directors was acknowledged.	
3	Minutes of previous meeting and review of actions / issues log Declaration of interests Minutes of 10 November 2025 meeting were accepted. No conflicts were declared.	

4	<p>Managing Director update and Q&A</p> <p>Darren Cleary provided an update on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price Determination outcome - The Board and Executive are reviewing priorities to determine what can be delivered within the refined funding envelope confirmed by IPART as part of the recent independent price review process. As Sydney Water is infrastructure-heavy and capital-intensive, this will require careful balancing of risks and customer outcomes. • Data centres - This issue is a major focus for the water industry. Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) members are meeting to discuss shared challenges, determining how best to service and respond to data centre demand. Sydney Water is working closely with NSW Government. • Debris balls - The likely source of the debris balls has been identified as the Malabar Water Resource Recovery Facility. Work is underway on short-term measures to minimise impacts, alongside a review of longer-term solutions that meet the expectations of both the regulator and the community. • Housing agenda - Sydney Water continues to work closely with Government, developers, and local councils to support the housing agenda. Efforts are focused on improving responsiveness and better aligning infrastructure planning with growth needs across the region. • Water security - Sydney Water continues to deliver the core components as outlined in the Greater Sydney Water Strategy. A renewed focus on water security will address demand-side actions (such as reducing leakage and encouraging community water conservation, even when dams are full) as well as planning for rainfall-independent supply options. Meaningful, transparent conversations with the community about future water source augmentation continues to be essential. <p>Key comments and questions raised by the CCRG members were on the following themes:</p> <p>Long-term wastewater and environmental risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members reiterated concerns about ocean pollution, sustainability, and foreseeable environmental risks, particularly linked to major treatment facilities. • Views that these risks require proactive long-term investment, integrated into planning, government policy, and community engagement. • Community pressure has historically driven major wastewater reforms (e.g., deep ocean outfalls), and current concerns (including PFAS) are again prompting attention. Members stressed these issues should be addressed through structured planning, not reactive measures. <p>Community engagement and customer priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members questioned how Sydney Water will bring the community along, especially as new and emerging issues arise. • There is a need for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clear feedback loops to the community on what customer priorities Sydney Water will deliver. ○ Validation of expectations and stronger communication on outcomes. • Concerns that Sydney Water is not pushing back strongly enough when community priorities and funding constraints don't align. • Questions raised about how the organisation will balance the 15 customer priorities against internal decision-making and the Board/Executive's own prioritisation framework. <p>Funding, growth and responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members noted that servicing population growth is fundamentally a government policy issue, and funding for growth should not fall disproportionately on customer bills. • There is concern about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ageing infrastructure and escalating risks (breaks, leaks). 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The adequacy and timing of mechanisms like Developer Contributions, which do not cover total costs or align well with recovery timelines. ● Members highlighted the need for a new model to fund network upgrades and expansion, reflecting the scale of growth. <p>Risk management and policy alignment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Members believe risk management will be a growing issue for the community. ● Questions raised about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How priorities will be set when the organisation cannot deliver everything. ○ Who ultimately pays for risk management—customers or government. ● Broader sentiment that risk, growth, customer priorities, and infrastructure decisions must be aligned with clear policy direction from government. <p>The Managing Director provided the following responses to the discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acknowledged the challenges of responding to the debris balls issue. He noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Short-term actions underway at Malabar. ○ Strengthening of trade waste controls (e.g., fats, oils, grease). ○ Exploration of longer-term approaches for ocean outfalls. ● Highlighted that engagement occurs through multiple channels including customer research, CCRG, and other forums and channels. ● The organisation cannot operate solely within 5-year regulatory cycles, as the broader context moves faster. ● Noted the need to remain open and transparent about changing circumstances and shifting priorities. ● Stated that Sydney Water cannot deliver on all customer priorities within a single regulatory period, requiring prioritisation decisions. ● Confirmed ongoing discussions with Government, noting housing is currently a major focus. ● Reinforced that servicing growth remains a core organisational priority. ● Confirmed Sydney Water is actively reflecting on the 15 customer priorities identified through customer and community consultation, and how these inform planning and decision-making. 	
5	<p>Sydney Water update</p> <p>Clare Porter provided an update on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Refreshed communications approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The team has reflected on past communications, noting they have often been reactive and not as transparent or proactive as they could be. ○ A new Tone of Voice framework—developed with input from the CCRG (November meeting) and the Executive—will be built around three pillars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Authenticity; honesty and accountability ▪ Engagement; clarity, inclusion and connection ▪ Innovation; with a focus on future thinking and explaining the ‘why’ behind decisions ○ This Tone of Voice will be applied consistently across the organisation to lift communication quality. ● Water Conservation Campaign <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A new campaign, for which illustrative campaign material was tabled, will focus on practical, personal actions people can take to save water and reduce costs. <p>Key points raised by the CCRG members included the following:</p> <p>Water Conservation campaign feedback including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Audience and inclusion ● Messaging effectiveness ● Behaviour change compared to long-term solutions ● Water use contexts ● Tools and tactics 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value of water. <p>Water supply and Purified Recycled Water (PRW)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community support exists for PRW. Community more comfortable with indirect PRW than direct. PRW is also essential for addressing wastewater challenges. Issues cannot continue to be deferred. <p>Communication challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to convey urgency when dams are full. Reinforces the need for consistent, long-term community education, not reactive messages tied to dam levels. 	<p>Action: Any additional comments on the campaign to be provided directly to Sydney Water c/o Sharon Bowyer.</p>
6	<p>CCRG updates</p> <p>The Chair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provided a reminder and overview of the ground rules for the CCRG , which are based on respect and tolerance to assist in the effective operation on the group. She further encouraged members to take a big picture view of issues considering the diversity of the customer base and regardless of their own affiliations. referred to the CCRG Independent Chair Annual Report for Jan-Nov 2025 that had been published on the website. <p>There were no other CCRG member updates.</p>	
Customer and community engagement		
7	<p>Paper for discussion: Customer engagement.</p> <p>Josh Isben and Izzy Kerr provided a recap of the Customer Engagement program and invited the CCRG subgroup to provide their report back.</p> <p>Themes from the CCRG Subgroup member report back included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resourcing and delivery constraints Maturity and capability in deliberative engagement Risks with supplier capacity and capability Understanding effective community engagement CALD and vulnerable community inclusion <p>Sydney Water then outlined the proposed phases of the Customer Engagement program, confirming steps already undertaken and those to follow.</p> <p>CCRG members raised the following key points:</p> <p>Clarity on what customers can influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to define what questions are appropriate to ask customers. What sits outside their influence. Important to be explicit about the “non-negotiables” in areas like long-term planning. Clarification is needed on aspects of the LTCOP that can be influenced by customers. <p>Confidence in the engagement approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflection on lessons learned from previous deliberative engagement processes. Need to assess confidence in the proposed path forward and ensure the approach is effective and fit-for-purpose. Recognition that not every engagement method works for every topic or customer group; different approaches will be needed for different contexts. 	

	<p>Methodology: flexible but not reactive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement methodology needs to remain flexible and adaptable to achieve the right outcomes. However, it cannot be reactive or ad-hoc. Planning and structure are essential. Clarification needed on why deliberative engagement is chosen, what trade-offs exist, and what decisions genuinely require deliberation. <p>Fit for purpose engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some activities are about supporting complex decisions. Others focus on understanding customer perspectives or providing education. Hunter Water has positive examples of clearly explaining what actions are simply informing rather than deliberating. <p>Roles and interaction between parties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear roles and strong collaboration are needed between suppliers, Sydney Water, and the CCRG. Positive interaction and alignment across these groups will be critical to engagement success. <p>The CCRG then broke into two groups in a workshop style to consider the existing 15 customer priorities and if anything had changed. The groups discussed key points and notes taken on Post-it notes.</p>	<p>Action: Sydney Water to collate key points of discussion on the customer priorities. An update on further changes is to be provided to the group, noting the next step of discussion with the Board.</p>
8	<p>Paper for discussion: Servicing Data Centres in Greater Sydney</p> <p>Paul Higham, Kate Miles and Raquel Tracey provided an outline on Data Centres, the opportunities and unique servicing challenges faced, Sydney Water’s servicing principles for data centres, engagement approach, interim and long-term servicing solutions.</p> <p>CCRG members raised the following key points and questions:</p> <p>Efficiency and water quality requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current data centre designs are seen as inefficient, with opportunities to improve water and energy performance. Clarification is needed on the specific water quality requirements for data centres and whether lower-grade recycled water can be used. <p>Responsibility for water provision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions were raised about why Sydney Water should carry the responsibility for supplying water to large commercial users such as data centres. Suggestion that data centres could adopt their own localised solutions, such as sewer mining, rather than relying solely on the network. <p>Community concerns and fairness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to understand potential community concerns, including impacts on housing and access to drinking water during growth or drought. Strong equity concerns: it would be viewed as unfair if data centres retained access to water during drought while households faced water restrictions and incurred higher prices (drought pricing). Such an outcome could further strain already stressed communities, particularly given recent price increases. <p>Funding and customer impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions remain about capital funding responsibilities—who pays, and how this affects customer bills. Any cost burden passed onto customers is likely to be highly sensitive. <p>Public understanding and misconceptions</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General public awareness of what data centres are and what services they enable is very low. • Emphasis on transparency and proactive communication. <p>Economic and sustainability opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There may be opportunities but these remain speculative. • Need to assess the realistic probability and scale of benefits for NSW and Sydney. • The environment is changing rapidly; plans and assumptions may change quickly. <p>Importance of agility and collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with government, business and customers must focus on sustainability, evidence and clarity of purpose. • Flexibility is required as conditions evolve, but transparency and communication is important. <p>Broader community context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue plays out in a sensitive social climate, with widening economic divides in the community. • Customers need reassurance about the value of data centres, their economic contribution, and how their impact on water and energy systems will be managed. 	
9	<p>Tour: Customer Hub - Parramatta Nicole McCarthy took members and observers on a tour of the Sydney Water Customer Hub and introduced members to the multiple teams within the Hub, including faults triage, dispatch monitoring, analytical reviews, incident and customer response. Interactive discussion took place during the tour, enabling members to clarify activities, approach and methods of working.</p>	
10	<p>Paper for discussion: CCRG charter – annual review No amendments to the proposed draft were raised, however CCRG members were invited to provide any comments by 9 March 2026.</p>	<p>Action: Sydney Water to recirculate for final review</p>
11	<p>Other business and general Q&A Key points of discussion raised by CCRG members included on the following themes:</p> <p>Changing housing landscape and tenant issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need clearer statistics on the growing proportion of renters in Sydney. • Tenant-specific concerns, particularly affordability and housing availability, require further discussion. • Desire for a follow-up engagement with the Tenants’ Union on how best to support and communicate with renters. • Improved communication is needed for both tenants and landlords on water usage, responsibilities and impacts. <p>Environmental concerns and community perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty about the available research on whether community concern for the environment is rising or declining. • Some broader political research suggests declining concern, while other insights indicate climate change concern is actually increasing. • Need to clarify and reconcile these perspectives with reliable evidence. <p>Interconnection between water quality and the environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality cannot be separated from environmental impacts. Both concepts are interlinked. • Examples such as PFAS in drinking water, biosolids management and debris balls demonstrate the intersection between water cycle management and environmental outcomes. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wastewater management is a key component of environmental protection and must be communicated to the community as part of discussions on the entire urban water cycle. 	
12	<p>Look ahead to April meeting Key topics suggested by CCRG members included:</p> <p>Tenant issues and support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued discussion on the specific needs and vulnerabilities of tenants. Better communication approaches for both tenants and landlords around water use, rights and responsibilities. Opportunities for collaboration with tenant-focused organisations. <p>Financial abuse and customer protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deep dive into financial abuse affecting customers, including elder abuse and misuse of Power of Attorney. Understanding how the organisation currently manages Power of Attorney processes and where improvements are needed. Issues such as pensioner discounts being misused, and direct debits being maintained when the resident is no longer living at home. <p>Broader customer support and safeguards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to ensure strong protections for customers facing family, domestic or sexual violence. Support mechanisms for vulnerable groups—tenants, elderly residents, people with disabilities, and those relying on NDIS or aged-care services. Exploration of the extent to which the organisation should take on risk or responsibility in these areas. <p>Intergenerational equity and policy links</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connections to broader systems such as NDIS, aged care, Centrelink and government policy on respite or nursing homes. How these intersect with water service needs and customer vulnerability. <p>Potential of an Advocacy Role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was suggested that there may be potential for the group to advocate for broader issues that require wider policy attention. The Chair noted that this may not be an appropriate action for the group, and diverges from the mandate and Charter for the CCRG Agreed that as this would be unrelated to Sydney Water, it could be further discussed at an ‘in camera’ session at the next meeting. In the interim members can continue to advocate as individuals or through their existing networks, associations or representative bodies. 	<p>Action: Inclusion of an ‘in camera’ pulse check as an item for the next meeting.</p>
13	<p>Thanks and meeting close The Chair thanked participants and Sydney Water team members for their contributions to the meeting. The meeting closed at 2pm.</p>	