

# Customer and Community Reference Group Minutes

**Date and time:** 13 April 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	Clare Porter	Head of Marketing, Communications & Strategic Insights
Mario Ferreira Compart	Community Representative	Rachelle Legrand	Head of Strategy Change & Performance
Rob Gravestocks	Community Representative	Josh Isben	Head of Customer & Strategic Insights
Mary Karras	Ethnic Communities Council NSW	Izzy Kerr	Customer Research Manager
Leigh Martin	Total Environment Centre	Sharon Bowyer	Senior Customer Governance Specialist
Bruce McClelland	Business Western Sydney	Tracey Willingham	Manager, Water Literacy & Education ( <i>part</i> )
Gavin Melvin	Urban Development Institute of Australia (NSW)	Dr Kaye Power	Principal Water & Public Health Advisor ( <i>part</i> )
Debbie Smyth	Wesley Mission	Susan Kitching	Program Manager Integrated System Performance Management ( <i>part</i> )
Graham Turner	Council on the Ageing	Raquel Tracy	A/Head of Strategic Communications & CSR ( <i>part</i> )
Ross Williams	Local Government NSW	Maree O'Halloran	Non-executive Director

**Apologies:** Darren Cleary, Managing Director  
Joy Horton, Community Representative  
Douglas McCloskey, Justice & Equity Centre

**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	<b>Welcome</b> The Chair welcomed participants to the meeting.	
2	<b>Acknowledgement of Country</b> CCRG Member, Debbie Smyth acknowledged country.	
3	<b>Introductions and apologies</b> The Chair invited Maree O'Halloran observing Non-executive Director to introduce herself. Apologies were noted.	

4	<p><b>Minutes of previous meeting and review of actions / issues log</b></p> <p><b>Declaration of interests</b></p> <p>Minutes of 23 February 2026 meeting were accepted.</p> <p>No conflicts were declared.</p>	
5	<p><b>Sydney Water Update</b></p> <p>Clare Porter provided an update on the following:</p> <p><b>Debris balls</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing focus on mitigation and reduction strategies relating to debris balls.</li> <li>• A summary of the investigation report has been published on the website.</li> <li>• A media visit was facilitated at Malabar Water Resource Recovery Plant to provide insight into operational issues.</li> </ul> <p><b>West Ryde pumping station incident</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A burst water pipe caused damage to the building and impacted electronics, resulting in the pumping station being shut down.</li> <li>• An incident response team was activated to monitor reservoir water levels.</li> <li>• A 24-hour conserve water notice was issued to the affected community.</li> <li>• Customer and stakeholder engagement included social media updates, direct notifications, and briefing the Minister’s office.</li> <li>• Repair works at the site are ongoing.</li> </ul> <p><b>Supply Chain expo</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sydney Water hosted a Supply Chain Expo to enable supplier engagement and recognition through awards. It’s the third time this event has been run and has been found to be a good way to foster collaboration through the supply chain, aligned to where Sydney Water will be focusing investment.</li> </ul> <p><b>Community education and engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Water conservation campaign</b> – The campaign is live across light rail, social media, and television. No media release was issued for this campaign. Upcoming analysis will review customer research data to assess changes in customer behaviour.</li> <li>• <b>The Wiggles</b> – Water cycle education content is currently in market and available <a href="#">here</a>.</li> <li>• <b>Sydney Royal Easter Show</b> - The stand focused on water literacy, including education on the water cycle and fats, oils, and grease. Visitors could win a water bottle by completing a Water Literacy quiz. Sydney Water was awarded Best Commercial Stand at the Show.</li> </ul> <p><b>CCRG member comments and questions:</b></p> <p>In regard to the West Ryde incident, a concern was raised that affected communities had to rely on informal networks for information. What level of incident information was provided in-language?</p>	<p><b>Action:</b> Sydney Water to share the links to the published report (as below).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Reducing the impact of debris balls</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Deep ocean outfalls assessment</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Action:</b> Sydney Water to follow up on whether incident communications are provided in-language.</p>
6	<p><b>CCRG Member update</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members raised concerns about three water leak issues: (1) a minor water main leak in Hunters Hill reported back in January had escalated into a major burst, (2) an ongoing leak from a roadway hydrant advised as privately owned but still perceived by the public as Sydney Water’s responsibility and (3) a leak between council land and a supermarket car park, which similarly reinforces community confusion and concern that leaks are often assumed as Sydney Water responsibility regardless of asset ownership.</li> <li>• Sydney Water noted the concerns raised and will include water leak management as part of a future agenda item.</li> </ul> <p><b>CCRG member comments and questions:</b></p> <p>A question was raised regarding Sydney Water’s response to the fuel crisis.</p>	<p><b>Action:</b> Sydney Water to include water leak management as part of a future agenda item.</p>

	<p>Sydney Water advised that an incident response team has been established to manage potential impacts. While Sydney Water is not currently prioritised at the same level as some other government services, the needs of the water sector are recognised. Preparatory incident response planning is underway, including with regard to the hiring of storage tanks. Servicing field crew incident response vehicles will be prioritised.</p>	
7	<p><b>Customer and community education - urban water cycle</b></p> <p>Josh Isben provided background on the urban water cycle activity as a foundational tool that could be used as part of the upcoming Customer Engagement program.</p> <p>Tracey Willingham ran the CCRG members through the activity, a flexible education and engagement tool that is used for all ages, including at schools, universities, and community groups.</p> <p><b>CCRG member comments and questions:</b></p> <p>Members agreed the activity is a strong, engaging resource suitable for a wide range of age groups and understanding levels. The resource was seen as having strong potential for both face-to-face and digital education.</p> <p>CCRG members provided additional feedback on the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and accessibility</li> <li>• Content and messaging</li> <li>• Delivery formats</li> <li>• Education, outreach, and partnerships.</li> </ul> <p>CCRG members also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• highlighted that the activity could be used to highlight customer priorities and clarify shared responsibilities between Sydney Water and customers.</li> <li>• noted that education initiatives can have long-term impacts and may be more effective than advertising campaigns. It was suggested that the level of investment in water education be reviewed.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Action:</b> Sydney Water to consider feedback on urban water cycle educational tool.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> CCRG members note that more information on Sydney Water education program resources can be found on the website links below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Primary</a> education</li> <li>• <a href="#">Secondary</a> education</li> <li>• <a href="#">Tertiary</a> education</li> <li>• <a href="#">Community</a> education</li> </ul>
8	<p><b>Drinking water quality</b></p> <p>Kaye Power, Susan Kitching and Raquel Tracy joined the meeting.</p> <p>Sydney Water provided an overview of drinking water quality management including the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and emerging issues related to PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances).</p> <p>The CCRG members were invited to participate in a discussion with questions responded to during the meeting.</p> <p><b>PFAS disposal and management</b></p> <p>Sydney Water provided background that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PFAS has not been manufactured in Australia and PFOS, PFOA and PFHxS can no longer be imported or used</li> <li>• There is a federal register of banned chemicals</li> <li>• PFAS was historically widely used due to its effectiveness but application in consumer products is expected to decline over time.</li> </ul> <p><b>CCRG member comments and questions:</b></p> <p>CCRG members raised a question regarding the handling of PFAS once it is removed during the water treatment process and noted concerns that removal may shift the problem elsewhere.</p> <p>Sydney Water explained that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concentrated PFAS from the treatment process will be disposed of at specialised facilities.</li> <li>• Disposal requires careful management to avoid secondary contamination (e.g. incineration releasing PFAS into air or leaching into groundwater).</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broader national conversations are ongoing regarding best-practice PFAS waste management.</li> </ul> <p>CCRG members observed that vigilance remains necessary as PFAS-containing products are still present in the community.</p> <p><b>PFAS and wastewater</b></p> <p>Questions were raised about how PFAS enters wastewater systems through everyday activities (e.g. washing clothes or cleaning carpets) and whether it accumulates in the environment.</p> <p>Sydney Water advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted monitoring is underway, particularly through trade waste controls for specific industries.</li> <li>• High PFAS concentrations have not generally been observed in Sydney’s wastewater.</li> <li>• Data collection is ongoing across wastewater catchments</li> </ul> <p><b>Research and lessons learned</b></p> <p>Discussion highlighted the long-term nature of PFAS impacts, potentially spanning decades.</p> <p>CCRG members suggested a greater research focus on catchments and emerging risks.</p> <p>Sydney Water noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sydney Water and WaterNSW undertake joint research and in the process of identifying the research needs.</li> <li>• Due to the cost associated with monitoring it must be strategic and risk-based.</li> </ul> <p><b>Communications and community engagement</b></p> <p>Sydney Water provided a summary on the communication response to the recent PFAS issue. Key comments from CCRG members included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drinking water guideline reviews can take significant time; there is an opportunity to be more proactive on emerging issues rather than reactive.</li> <li>• Sydney Water should be transparent and forward-looking, including learning from other jurisdictions.</li> <li>• Communication should not be defensive and should acknowledge uncertainty where answers are not yet available.</li> </ul> <p><b>Community expectations and support</b></p> <p>CCRG members commented that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community members seek an end-to-end understanding of PFAS, including historical use, clean-up responsibilities, and long-term health concerns.</li> <li>• Vulnerable groups may experience heightened anxiety and require additional reassurance.</li> <li>• Effective engagement should go beyond media communications to include two-way engagement, such as briefings, one-on-one discussions, helplines, support sessions or counselling services.</li> </ul> <p>Emphasis was placed on balancing scientific information with empathetic, human communication and ensuring communities have opportunities to be heard.</p> <p><b>Summary of key messages from CCRG members</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be proactive, not reactive.</li> <li>• Use a consistent and credible “personal face” for communications.</li> <li>• Support messaging with clear, evidence-based science.</li> <li>• Balance technical detail with human, community-focused communication.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Action:</b> Sydney Water to continue to strengthen a proactive, evidence led communication approach ensuring messaging are tailored to resonate with community perspectives.</p>
9	<p><b>Customer Engagement update and engaging with customers on drinking water quality</b></p> <p><b>Update on Customer Engagement</b></p>	

<p>Izzy Kerr provided an update on planning for the upcoming customer engagement program. Members of the CCRG subgroup confirmed they had provided input into Sydney Water’s Scope of Services for the program.</p> <p><b>Customer engagement on drinking water quality</b></p> <p>Josh Isben provided context that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe, clean drinking water is customers’ top priority, with water projects accounting for over one-third of capital expenditure in IPART’s recent price determination.</li> <li>• This highlights the need for meaningful customer engagement on drinking water quality in the upcoming Customer Engagement process.</li> <li>• Effective engagement requires transparency about what decisions customers can influence and clear commitments on how engagement outcomes will be used.</li> </ul> <p>Sydney Water sought feedback from the CCRG on how Sydney Water might have meaningful engagement with customers on matters and issues related to Sydney Water’s decisions on drinking water quality especially within a regulated context.</p> <p><b>CCRG member comments and questions:</b></p> <p><b>Equity, cost, and willingness to pay</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers and communities are primarily concerned about fairness, equity, and willingness to pay for water services.</li> <li>• Drinking water quality varies across the network due to different sources (dams vs desalination), treatment processes, distribution distances, and proximity to dosing plants, which can affect customer experience.</li> <li>• Although water meets drinking water guidelines, customers perceive differences in quality between geographic areas (e.g. eastern and western regions).</li> <li>• The varying costs of producing and transporting water by location are not well understood by customers.</li> <li>• Growing awareness of emerging issues such as PFAS has the potential to increase concern if not communicated carefully.</li> <li>• There are questions about whether the customer engagement program is the right forum to address these complex and technical issues.</li> <li>• Previous engagement efforts were perceived as lacking transparency around cost differences, water sources, geographic variation, and social equity.</li> </ul> <p><b>Customer trust and behaviour</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing purchasing of bottled water was noted, including by customers experiencing financial hardship.</li> <li>• Impetus for bottled water use is not well understood and may include low trust in tap water quality or government institutions, dissatisfaction with taste or perceived quality as well as lifestyle preferences and broader social trends.</li> </ul> <p><b>Depth of engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A distinction was made between one way information-only communication (such as during incidents) and the need for meaningful two-way engagement.</li> <li>• It was highlighted that while customers may not be able to influence drinking water quality requirements directly, they could contribute to how issues are reported and how information is shared publicly.</li> </ul> <p><b>Lived experience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong emphasis was placed on creating opportunities for customers to share their lived experiences.</li> <li>• Listening to customer stories was seen as essential to understanding community concerns and improving engagement outcomes.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Action:</b> Sydney Water to take CCRG inputs on customer engagement program on drinking water quality into Board and Executive discussions to shape the customer engagement strategy.</p>	
<p>10</p>	<p><b>Other business</b></p>	

	There was no other business	
11	<p><b>Look ahead to next meeting</b></p> <p>Josh Isben outlined the proposed agenda for the June meeting</p>	
12	<p><b>Pulse check - In camera session</b></p> <p>The Chair led an 'in camera' discussion with CCRG members.</p>	
13	<p><b>Thanks and meeting close</b></p> <p>The Chair thanked the CCRG members for their participation and inputs during the meeting.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 2pm</p>	