

Customer and Community Reference Group

– Minutes

Date and time: 1 June 2026

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

Attendees

CCRG Chair: Abigail Goldberg

CCRG Members:		Sydney Water:	
Rob Gravestocks	Community Representative	Darren Cleary	Managing Director (<i>part</i>)
Mary Karras	Ethnic Communities Council NSW	Dean Page	Executive General Manager, Finance & Commercial Performance (<i>part</i>)
Leigh Martin	Total Environment Centre	Clare Porter	Head of Marketing, Communications & Strategic Insights
Bruce McClelland	Business Western Sydney	Rachelle Legrand	Head of Strategy Change & Performance
Douglas McCloskey	Justice & Equity Centre	Josh Isben	Head of Customer & Strategic Insights
Gavin Melvin	Urban Development Institute of Australia (NSW)	Izzy Kerr	Customer Research Manager
Debbie Smyth	Wesley Mission	Sharon Bowyer	Senior Customer Governance Specialist
Graham Turner	Council on the Ageing	Ben Armstrong	Principal Manager Environment (<i>part</i>)
Ross Williams	Local Government NSW	Melissa Skrgatic	Environmental Stewardship Manager (<i>part</i>)
		Matt Rados	A/Head of System Planning & Land Acquisition (<i>part</i>)
		Chris Knowles	Senior Manager Enterprise Plan & Performance (<i>part</i>)
		Freya Hartley	Strategic Planning and Performance Lead (<i>part</i>)
Observer			
		The Hon. Niall Blair	Sydney Water Non-executive Director & Chair (<i>part</i>)

Apologies: Mario Ferreira Compart, Community Representative
Renee Acers, Community Industry Group

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 The Chair welcomed participants to the meeting.	
2	Acknowledgement of Country The Managing Director acknowledged country and National Reconciliation week.	

3	Introductions and apologies The Chair introduced Niall Blair Sydney Water Chair joining the meeting for a second time in an observer capacity. Apologies were noted and the Chair advised that Joy Horton had resigned from the CCRG due to work commitments. A replacement is being sought.	
4	Minutes of previous meeting and review of actions / issues log Declaration of interests Minutes of 13 April 2026 meeting were accepted. Mary Karras sought clarification on a potential conflict of interest related to her work.	Sydney Water to consider Mary's situation and revert with advice to her as soon as possible.
5	Managing Director update The Managing Director provided an update on the following topics: 1. Data centres • Applications for data centres are increasing, which require significant water volumes and highly reliable supply. • Sydney Water has set principles to support growth while ensuring existing customers are not worse off. • NSW Government is developing Data Centre Guidelines to support decisions and manage water and energy security risks. • Sydney Water's preference is for data centres to fund the required infrastructure. • A Board subcommittee has been formed to focus on data centres. Key comments and questions raised by CCRG Members: • Whether a new framework or reset of efficiency targets is needed. • Concerns about data centres potentially consuming Sydney Water's future growth capacity. • Expectation that costs/impacts should not be passed on to existing customers. • Need for clearer community communication regarding impacts and benefits. • Recognition of uncertainty in future demand and the need to balance growth, risk and customer outcomes. • Clarification was sought on how capital expenditure for data centres will be managed for any interim arrangements. The MD noted: • The importance of ensuring customers are not adversely affected by cost or supply risks. • That more proactive communication with customers is needed. 2. Pricing • A 6.7% increase in customer bills will apply from 1 July 2026, consistent with the IPART price determination. • Sydney Water will continue focus on ways of providing support for customers experiencing financial hardship. 3. Operational and environmental performance • Sydney Water had recently received a Land and Environment Court penalty relating to the 2022 Carramar sewage spill.	

	- Lessons learnt have been implemented and ongoing improvements to processes and investment in network upgrades are underway to reduce future environmental impacts. Key comments and questions raised by CCRG Members - Interest in how Sydney Water is improving processes and investing in infrastructure to prevent future incidents and minimise environmental impacts. The MD responded that: - Managing a large, ageing and predominantly underground network is challenging. - Asset age is not necessarily an indicator of condition, and condition assessment for underground infrastructure is inherently difficult. - A balance is required between reactive and proactive maintenance, focusing efforts based on likelihood of failure. - Funding constraints necessitate innovation and targeted investment to effectively manage assets and protect the environment. 4. National Reconciliation Week Sydney Water is: - Recognising National Reconciliation Week, including hosting an internal event with First Nations partners. - Committed to transition to a First Nations-led strategy to inform business decisions. - Focusing on increasing First Nations participation and expanding procurement opportunities. - Using insights from the recent OzWater conference that highlight opportunities to strengthen engagement. 5. Other updates - The Australian Water Association has announced that Clare Porter as President from May 2027. - Darren Cleary has been announced as Chair of the next OzWater conference, to be held in Sydney. - The Sydney Water Chair, Niall Blair advised that the Sydney Water Board had a recent joint meeting with the EPA at Malabar. Matters such as the 'debris balls' were discussed. The Chair asserted that environmental performance is top of mind for Sydney Water.	Sydney Water to note future update on Sydney Water's Reconciliation Action Plan on the CCRG Forward Plan
6	CCRG member updates Bruce observed that the new Powerhouse Museum in Parramatta is set to open soon and will provide an excellent venue for events.	
7	Customer outcomes performance reporting approach for 2025-26 - response to feedback Chris Knowles and Freya Hartley provided an update on the performance reporting approach. Key comments and questions raised by the CCRG included: - Queries about the inclusion of hardship and payment assistance measures, as well as concerns about the use of an average affordability target and its ability to reflect impacts on lower-income households. - Queries about changes in affordability targets over time and whether these are influenced by price increases, questioning the suitability of the measure as an indicator of fairness.	

	- Members also highlighted that existing metrics focus on routine performance and do not adequately capture service disruptions, incidents, or emergency responses, suggesting a need for greater transparency in reporting these events. Sydney Water: - Noted that the current affordability metric is a high-level indicator used as a general reference point. - Clarified that the session focused on how metrics are communicated to customers, rather than on reviewing the metrics themselves. Sydney Water demonstrated a potential website interface for presenting customer metrics, including features such as links to additional information, multilingual functionality, and mobile compatibility across phones and tablets. A workshop was conducted to explore alternative reporting options for customer metrics. CCRG members were invited to share their likes, dislikes, and key observations for each option.	Sydney Water to collate CCRG feedback to inform the development of the final reporting format. Sydney Water to consider if a second subgroup for the customer performance metrics would be useful.
8	Paper for Discussion: Environmental management and performance Ben Armstrong and Melissa Skrgatich provided an overview of Sydney Water’s - Environmental objectives - Regulatory environment - Environment regulator interface - How compliance is managed - Environmental Management System - Environmental performance. CCRG Member comments and questions were on the following themes: - Regulatory framework, legislation and emerging risks - How enforcement decisions are made and their overall effectiveness - Implementing learnings from past incidents. Sydney Water responded: - Legislation referenced was not exhaustive - Trade waste agreements regulate industry discharges - Carramar incident caused by maintenance and process issues - Regulator uses varied enforcement tools depending on circumstances - Legal action has reputational impacts and can influence future regulation - Ongoing challenge of managing competing regulatory requirements - Circular economy and natural asset management are emerging focus areas	
9	Paper for Discussion: Planning for Environment Outcomes in the medium-long term Matt Rados provided an: - Overview of Sydney Water’s planning framework to support meeting environmental performance in the medium to long term. - Outline of the current Long-term capital and operating plan - Overview of the challenges and opportunities we have in meeting environmental outcomes over the medium to long term - Overview of some of the Long-term environmental outcomes that we need to consider and balance. Matt also explained that environmental decisions often involve trade-offs that are not purely technical but include choices such as: - how quickly environmental outcomes should improve? - should we go beyond minimum requirements? - are costs and benefits shared across the community? - how are impacts distributed across areas and generations?	

	CCRG Member comments and questions included: • Need for risk-informed planning and investment alignment • Need for transparency in communicating options and trade-offs with the community • Understanding the cost and benefits of going beyond compliance while considering affordability and intergenerational equity. • Uncertainty around whether IPART would support investment beyond compliance and the degree of flexibility to exceed minimum regulatory requirements. • Concerns that workforce constraints, including an ageing workforce, may impact the ability to deliver future infrastructure and investment programs. • Expectation that existing customer engagement insights and research are actively used to inform planning and decision-making. Sydney Water: • Emphasised the importance of presenting customers with clear pros and cons of different pathways. • Highlighted key trade-offs between local wastewater treatment, reuse options, and upgrades to existing infrastructure. • Noted the importance of considering future expectations, including evolving environmental standards. • Reinforced the need for flexibility to respond to droughts, floods, and changing conditions. • Advised that technology, innovation, and process improvements are being explored to improve safety and efficiency.	
10	Paper for discussion: Environmental Outcomes and Customer Values: Informing Future Choices Josh Isben and Izzy Kerr provided an update on the planning for the future Customer Engagement program. Josh outlined that the purpose of engaging customers on environmental outcomes is not to ask them to assess technical options or endorse specific investments. Rather, it is to understand what customers value most, and how they think about fairness, when choices and trade-offs are unavoidable. Josh led a discussion with the CCRG to seek feedback and insights on customer and community values related to environmental outcomes, including priorities and perceptions of fairness and feedback on a proposed approach for engaging the wider community on environmental trade-offs to inform future planning and pricing decisions. Key comments and questions raised by the CCRG were on the following themes: 1. Role of customer engagement in decision-making • Customers are not leading the decisions; final decision-making sits with the organisation. • The environment cannot represent itself and must be explicitly considered in decision-making. • A stressed ecosystem indicates the environment has already exceeded its “capacity to pay.” • Do not assume what the community thinks or values. 2. Scope and clarity of engagement • Clear communication of negotiables and non-negotiables is required as a starting point. 3. Phasing and structure of engagement • Initial phase should focus on how decisions are made and the extent of customer influence. • Engagement sequencing should ensure customers are engaged alongside stakeholders, not secondary to them. 4. Framing of outcomes and language	Sydney Water to update Principle 1 to be ‘customer informed’ or ‘customer aligned’ rather than ‘customer-led’ and ensure alignment across different collateral. Sydney Water to incorporate overall CCRG feedback on the engagement approach into the Plan.

	• “Developing solutions” is not the right framing; focus should be on outcomes. • Engagement is about broad decisions rather than detailed options analysis. 5. Willingness to pay and capacity to pay • Avoid designing processes that reflect internal biases, which may lead to different customer reactions to costs. • The discussion should focus on degrees of cost rather than fixed positions. • Consider additional tools to assess the economics of decisions. • Impacts are not limited to residential customers; developer contributions, timing, and certainty are also important. 6. Environmental considerations • Definitions of “healthy waterways” differ across customers (e.g., swimming, fishing) versus environmental needs (natural cycles, turbidity, biodiversity). • Customers tend to focus on visible pollution, while less visible forms (sediment, chemicals) are also significant. • Real examples of environmental impacts and actions are needed to support understanding. 7. Environmental literacy • Environmental literacy is critical to enable meaningful engagement. • Use concepts such as ecological footprint to help explain trade-offs and system impacts. 8. Trade-offs and prioritisation • All decisions involve trade-offs, especially when starting from a “pure environment” perspective. • Customers need to understand these trade-offs clearly. • Decision-making should consider whether to “raise the floor or raise the ceiling” in service and outcomes. 9. Equity and fairness • Equity and fairness are critical and must be addressed early in the engagement process. • There are many differing views on fairness; it cannot be strictly defined and must be balanced. 10. Representation and inclusion • Customer views vary by location and context, particularly on environmental issues. • Effective sampling is required to avoid skewed representation. • Clarity is needed on who participates in engagement and how different viewpoints are managed. • Engagement content must be adapted for different groups (e.g., CALD communities), recognising varying levels of understanding. 11. Participation risks • Recent bill increases may lead to resistance or negativity from participants in the engagement process.	
11	GM update Clare Porter provided an update on the following: • Sydney Water’s report on debris balls including website engagement metrics (views and downloads). • Noted completion of the water conservation campaign with behavioural research and tracking across LGAs underway. • Advised that a wastewater campaign is commencing, targeting males 18-29yr to improve awareness on what they should / shouldn’t put down the sink. A tik tok campaign will embed the slogans. • Highlighted that the Malabar Pollution Reduction Program includes an education campaign on fats oils and grease.	
12	Look ahead to next meeting Josh Isben discussed the August meeting agenda. Noted that the October meeting is to be held at the Desalination Plant, Kurnell and the November meeting at Rydges Central in the CBD.	

	Key comments on the CCRG Forward Plan were with regard to interest in the following themes: • Operating Licence • Customer support and affordability • Service reliability and emergency preparedness • Reconciliation Action Plan and alignment with strategy.	Sydney Water to note suggestions for the CCRG Forward Plan.
13	Other business There was no other business.	
14	Thanks and meeting close The Chair thanked the CCRG members for their participation and inputs during the meeting. The meeting closed at 2pm	