Customer and Community Reference Group - Minutes

Date and time: 3 August 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	Dean Page	Executive General Manager, Finance & Commercial
Mario Ferreira Compart	Community Representative	Denisha Anbu	Executive General Manager, Customer Experience
Rob Gravestocks	Community Representative	Rachelle Legrand	Head of Strategy Change & Performance
Glenn Johnston	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
Douglas McCloskey	Justice & Equity Centre	Luke Van Hooft	Head of Economics and Regulation (*part*)
Debbie Smyth	Wesley Mission	Michael English	Competition & Licencing Manager (*part*)
Graham Turner	Council on the Ageing	Lisa Nguyen	Principal Regulatory Advisor (*part*)
Ross Williams	Local Government NSW	Louise Beer	Head of Water Environment & Infrastructure Performance (*part*)
		Susan Kitching	Principal Manager Integrated System Performance Management (*part*)
		Nicole McCarthy	Head of Customer Hub (*part*)
		Daniel Peacock	Head of Customer Contact (*part*)

Apologies:
Darren Cleary, Managing Director
Clare Porter, Head of Marketing, Communications & Strategic Insights
Bruce McClelland, Business Western Sydney
Gavin Melvin, Urban Development Institute of Australia (NSW)

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** Denisha Anbu, Executive General Manager, Customer Experience, Acknowledged Country.	
3	**Introductions and apologies** The Chair introduced new CCRG member, Glenn Johnston. Glenn is a respected Aboriginal governance and business leader who champions the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in governance, policy and business practice. Glenn has worked at a senior level at organisations including Infrastructure NSW and the Australian Graduate School of Management at UNSW.	

4	**Minutes of previous meeting and review of actions / issues log** **Declaration of interests** Minutes of 1 June 2026 meeting were accepted. The Chair noted a declaration from a CCRG member that they were providing engagement fundamentals training services to Sydney Water staff through an external organisation Sydney Water noted that while the activity relates to a similar area of work, it does not present a conflict of interest.	
5	**Sydney Water update** Dean Page, Executive General Manager, Finance & Commercial provided an update on a range of strategic and operational matters, including: • **Data centres:** Ongoing discussions with government and other stakeholders regarding the implications of increasing water demand for data centres. • Successful **connection of the new Prospect Pre-Treatment Plant to Channel 1**: A significant milestone that strengthens Sydney's future water security and network resilience. The works were completed without interruption to customer supply. • **Stakeholder engagement:** Recent boardroom conversations with industry and business leaders focused on infrastructure investment, growth, partnerships, supply chain challenges, housing growth, data centres and the circular economy. • **Sydney Water Board June meeting:** The Board received insights from the Energy & Water Ombudsman NSW on customer complaints and dispute resolution trends, highlighting the importance of early issue resolution, customer feedback, and continued support for vulnerable customers. Other Board items included approval of the Statement of Corporate Intent and Business Plan, endorsement of the Enterprise Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment, progress on the Malabar Pollution Reduction Program, and assurance review of the Northwest Treatment Hub program. • **Enterprise HR system implementation:** Update on the rollout of the HR system, including actions being taken to resolve payroll issues and support affected employees during system stabilisation. Key questions and comments from CCRG members included: • whether the Prospect Pre-Treatment Plant (once completed) would operate continuously or only when required. • questions about the impact of recent price increases, including whether Sydney Water has seen an increase in complaints, requests for financial assistance, or new cohorts of customers experiencing hardship. • how awareness of financial assistance programs is being promoted and how contact centre staff are trained to identify and support customers experiencing hardship. • availability of interpreter services and whether employees with second-language capabilities are identified and utilised. • concerns regarding cyber security risks facing water utilities and Sydney Water's preparedness to respond to emerging threats. Sydney Water responded that: • the Prospect Pre-treatment plant will allow Sydney Water to meet customer demands during poor raw quality conditions (such as droughts, storms and bushfire). • it is still early in the current pricing period and no significant increase in requests for payment assistance has been observed, although some increase is anticipated as broader household costs continue to rise. • financial assistance programs continue to be actively promoted, with specialist customer care staff available to support customers with additional needs. • interpreter services are available, and staff with second-language capabilities are identified and utilised where appropriate. • it continues to monitor cyber security risks and maintain appropriate resilience arrangements in line with its obligations as an essential service provider.	

6	**CCRG member updates** Sharon Bowyer provided an update on the Wollongong World Cup refugee event which was hosted by STARTTS (NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors) in partnership with a number of organisations, including Sydney Water. This community event was brought to the attention of Sydney Water by former CCRG member Donna Rogers. Sydney Water's Education and Water Literacy team participated in the event to improve awareness around water use and conservation and to support new arrivals to build trust in tap water reducing plastic bottle waste.	
7	**Paper for discussion: Operating Licence and Customer Contract** Luke Van Hooft, Michael English, Lisa Nguyen were introduced. The Chair then invited CCRG member Douglas McCloskey to provide opening remarks on the Operating Licence to assist with framing of the discussion. **Opening remarks** Douglas introduced the discussion by highlighting the importance of understanding customer and community needs, interests, preferences and values. He noted that community values can only be provided directly by the community, while stakeholders can help articulate broader community interests. He emphasised that some needs, such as safe drinking water, are non-negotiable and form the foundation of Sydney Water's responsibilities. Douglas observed that while the Operating Licence was originally focused on defining Sydney Water's essential obligations and minimum service requirements, it has evolved over time to incorporate broader customer and community interests. He noted the need for the Operating Licence to be practical and a flexible mechanism, with a focus on the outcomes it delivers rather than the licence itself. **Overview of the Operating Licence and Customer Contract** Sydney Water provided an overview of the Operating Licence and Customer Contract, including IPART's role in regulating prices, service performance and customer protections. **Discussion** Key comments and questions from CCRG members included: • views that future licence considerations should focus on minimum service requirements, intended outcomes and protection of drinking water quality and supply reliability. • suggestions that large water users, including data centres, may benefit from alternative service arrangements, including different levels of supply reliability. • recognition that recycled water services may present opportunities to support some large water users. • the need to balance prescription and flexibility within the Operating Licence and agreed that not all emerging issues should necessarily be addressed through licence requirements. The discussion reinforced the importance of focusing on customer outcomes, essential service obligations and long-term community interests. Sydney Water responded that: • data centres may require different service standards, and any future arrangements would need to ensure existing customer service levels are not adversely impacted, and in line with Government policy and direction. • the Operating Licence applies to Sydney Water's regulated monopoly services, while some large users may have access to alternative service options.	
8	**Paper for discussion: Service standards - what they are, and do these service standards get the right outcome on meeting customer outcomes** Louise Beer, Susan Kitching and Nicole McCarthy were introduced. Louise opened the session by highlighting the growing importance of risk management, including balancing current and future risks associated with growth and identifying where protections and investments should be prioritised. Susan then provided an overview of its water continuity and water pressure service standards, which are set through the Operating Licence and establish minimum levels of service for customers.	

	The discussion considered whether current service standards continue to appropriately reflect customer outcomes and expectations. **Discussion** Key comments and questions from CCRG members included: • the exclusion of outages caused by third-party damage from service standard performance reporting and whether affected customers remain eligible for rebates. • the purpose of customer rebates and the principle of equity. Members noted that customers pay the same prices across the service area and that rebates serve as a form of compensation when agreed service standards are not met. Some members suggested that the same principles should apply irrespective of the cause of the outage. • customer expectations regarding service standards, acceptable levels of service, and whether customers might be willing to accept different levels of service in exchange for lower costs. • how service standards should account for differing customer expectations and circumstances, including variations in infrastructure condition across the network (including ageing infrastructure that performs below standard). Sydney Water responded that: • customers are supported through outage response processes, with the priority being timely restoration of service and minimising disruption. • the operational response to outages is the same regardless of whether they are caused by third-party damage, with a focus on minimising customer impacts through measures such as temporary water connections or water tankers where required. However rebates are not paid for outages caused by third parties. • direct costs of repairing the damage caused by third-parties may be recovered by Sydney Water through the responsible party's insurance arrangements to limit overall cost impacts on customers. • there is a need to better understand which service outcomes matter most to customers, what levels of service are considered acceptable, and whether customers may be willing to accept different service levels in exchange for lower costs. Key themes of the discussion are summarised below. • Maintaining customer outcomes and minimising impacts during service interruptions. • Equity and consistency in the application of customer rebates. • The irrelevance of the cause of an outage from a customer perspective. • Balancing service levels, customer expectations and affordability. • Understanding community expectations for future service standards and investment decisions.	Action: Sydney Water to consider CCRG comments as part of future planning for engagement on the Operating Licence, including Service Standards and rebates.
9	**Operating Licence and Customer Contract** The CCRG Chair introduced this item and emphasised the panel's purpose to obtain diverse stakeholder perspectives. CCRG members participated in a panel discussion on the Operating Licence review as outlined below. **Douglas McCloskey** • The Operating Licence should continue to focus on community and customer outcomes and evolve through targeted refinements rather than significant changes. • Service standards should reflect the varying needs of customers, including consideration of critical customers and essential services. • Current outage measures may not fully capture customer experience, particularly where multiple short outages have a greater impact than a single longer outage. • Effective communication during service interruptions can be as important as the duration of the outage. • Any review of service standards and rebate arrangements should be informed by customer values, expectations and preferences. **Graham Turner**	

	• The Operating Licence should remain focused on service delivery and customer outcomes, with caution against overreliance on performance metrics. • Outage notifications may not always reach tenants and residents directly, given the licence's focus on property owners as customers. • Greater clarity may be needed around terminology, including the definition of "outage" and the relationship between the Operating Licence and the Customer Contract. • Consideration should be given to strengthening customer protections in areas such as cyber security, elder abuse, powers of attorney and metering faults. • Concerns were raised that current meter fault arrangements may place a burden on customers and that rebates may not always reflect the full period of impact. **Ross Williams** • Performance reporting is important but may not fully reflect customer and community experiences, with customers generally placing greater value on how service interruptions are managed and communicated. • The impacts of water outages can extend beyond service restoration, including ongoing effects on local roads, footpaths and the environment. • Stronger communication and coordination between Sydney Water and local government was identified as important, both during incidents and for longer-term planning. • Opportunities were noted to strengthen engagement with Local Government NSW. • There is a need to ensure the Operating Licence remains aligned with future housing growth, development and infrastructure needs. **Rob Gravestocks** • Consideration of alternative outage measures, such as customer minutes lost, may better reflect customer impacts than current performance metrics. • Recognition that service interruptions can have broader community impacts, including traffic disruptions and road closures affecting people beyond directly impacted customers. • Suggestions to improve the accessibility of the Operating Licence through a plain-language summary supported by visual explanations. • Opportunities to better recognise renters and improve information about recycled water services and how these services can be accessed. • Concerns that some terminology and technical concepts (eg 15 m head of pressure) used throughout the licence may not be readily understood by customers and could benefit from clearer explanations and plain-language descriptions. **Facilitated discussion:** The CCRG Chair thanked the panel members for their views. During the broader discussion, members: • considered how service interruptions are counted in multi-unit developments and whether current reporting adequately reflects the experience of individual residents. • reiterated that technical performance metrics often have limited meaning for customers without appropriate context and explanation. • raised questions about the origin and rationale for various service standards and performance targets currently contained within the licence. • noted the importance of demonstrating how previous customer and community engagement activities have informed reviews of the Operating Licence and Customer Contract. • suggested that customer priorities, particularly environmental outcomes, could be more explicitly reflected within the licence framework and that customer engagement outcomes should be acknowledged as part of the review process. Sydney Water: • noted the comments and suggestions from the CCRG members on the Operating Licence. • outlined that the organisation is actively considering matters relating to elder abuse and powers of attorney and is working to improve processes for supporting elderly and vulnerable customers.	Action: Sydney Water to consider CCRG comments as part of future planning for engagement on the Operating Licence.

10	**Customer experience deep dive: Lived experience across diverse housing contexts** CCRG members participated in a panel discussion on "lived experience," exploring the Sydney Water-related challenges faced by customers across diverse housing contexts. **Debbie Smyth** Debbie shared insights from her experience as a financial counsellor with Wesley Mission, highlighting: • the increasing financial pressures facing vulnerable customers. Contributing factors include unemployment, physical and mental health challenges, trauma, language barriers and limited digital literacy. • customers experiencing financial hardship are often well connected within their communities but may have limited engagement with service providers and organisations issuing bills. • financial hardship can affect customers in different ways, with some experiencing it for the first time and others moving in and out of hardship as their circumstances change. • access to safe, reliable and affordable water services was emphasised as essential, particularly for households experiencing financial stress. • the importance of raising awareness of available support services before customers reach crisis point was highlighted, noting that fear of consequences can deter customers from seeking assistance. • early intervention and payment support tailored to a customer's capacity to pay were identified as important measures to help customers maintain access to essential services. **Mary Karras** Mary highlighted the growing prevalence of apartment and high-rise living, noting that around 20% of customers currently live in apartments, with this expected to increase to 30-40% by 2030 and up to 80% within the City of Sydney area. Mary highlighted: • that many culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, emerging communities and refugee populations live in high rise apartments due to housing affordability and access to transport and services. • many residents are unfamiliar with strata living arrangements and shared responsibilities, including by-laws, common property management, waste services, parking, maintenance obligations and the roles of strata committees, building managers and property managers. • customers in strata developments are often navigating multiple services and systems simultaneously, which can make it difficult to understand responsibilities and identify the appropriate organisation to contact when issues arise. (such as confusion over who to contact for water and wastewater issues - private plumbers, strata managers, real estate agent or Sydney Water). • the importance of providing clear, accessible and apartment-specific information was highlighted to support customers living in strata and high-rise developments. • opportunities were identified to improve engagement through multilingual information, promotion of interpreter services and partnerships with multicultural organisations to build trust and improve customer understanding. **Daniel Peacock (Sydney Water)** Daniel advised that: • Sydney Water is seeking to strengthen engagement with tenants and managing agents, while recognising the challenges associated with engaging managing agents directly. • opportunities to improve direct communication with tenants and better understand their needs are being explored. • Sydney Water's Customer Care team collectively speaks nine languages and that financial assistance options are available to tenants, although eligibility and support arrangements vary. • customer circumstances can differ significantly, with support programs needing to balance assistance for those experiencing financial hardship with appropriate management of available support measures.	

	• challenges were identified in obtaining and maintaining accurate tenant contact information for outage notifications and service communications, with privacy requirements, data accuracy and high tenant turnover creating barriers. • opportunities for greater collaboration between organisations were discussed to improve access to tenant contact information and enhance customer communications. • some tenants may be reluctant to seek assistance due to concerns about being perceived negatively by landlords or property managers. • opportunities were identified to provide support in ways that protect customer privacy and encourage tenants to access assistance when needed. **Discussion** Members discussed: • opportunities to improve support for tenants and customers experiencing financial hardship. This included consideration of whether there may be opportunities for collaboration with government assistance programs and exploration of data sharing or data matching arrangements to help identify and support customers accessing hardship assistance. Members noted that any such arrangements would require careful consideration of privacy obligations and customer expectations. • highlighted opportunities for Sydney Water to strengthen engagement across the rental sector, including with landlord representative organisations, to improve communication pathways and awareness of support services for tenants. • the importance of ensuring customer assistance programs remain targeted towards customers experiencing hardship and noted that program design and communications should seek to minimise the risk of unintended misuse of available support measures.	
11	**Paper for discussion: Customer Engagement: How to engage with customers on the Operating Licence and Customer Contract** Izzy Kerr provided an update on the Customer Engagement Program, including early stakeholder engagement, establishment of internal program governance through a Program Steering Committee, development of an overarching Customer and Community Engagement Strategy, and preparations for internal working group representation. CCRG members acknowledged: • the scale and complexity of the program and the importance of early planning and preparation to support successful delivery. • noted that engagement programs of this nature require significant lead time and • that Sydney Water's proactive approach would assist in managing future risks and challenges. • the importance of actively seeking customer and community perspectives and building trust and understanding through the engagement process. Josh Isben provided an overview of a potential approach to customer engagement on the Operating Licence review. Key comments and questions from CCRG members included: • engagement should focus on practical customer outcomes and real-world trade-offs, rather than technical licence requirements alone. • customer views should be sought on service standards, affordability and willingness to pay, including expectations for service levels above minimum regulatory requirements. • engagement should explore customer expectations across acceptable, exceptional and unacceptable services, while distinguishing between genuine service improvements and unnecessary over-servicing. • decisions on service levels should consider both the costs and benefits to customers and how these align with customer values and preferences. • principles such as equity, fairness and cost recovery should be more explicitly reflected in the Operating Licence framework. • affordability and social acceptance should remain key considerations, including minimum service levels, customer assistance programs, rebates and financial support arrangements.	

	• service performance discussions should consider broader customer impacts and equity outcomes, not just technical measures such as outage duration. • customer stories and lived experiences should be incorporated into engagement activities to help participants better understand the impacts of service interruptions and service-level decisions. Sydney Water: • noted the feedback and confirmed that customer engagement for the Operating Licence review will focus on understanding customer expectations, priorities and trade-offs related to service levels and affordability. • acknowledged the importance of considering customer values, equity, fairness and affordability alongside technical performance measures. • agreed on the value of incorporating customer experiences and lived perspectives into engagement activities to support informed discussions and decision-making.	Action: Sydney Water to consider CCRG comments as part of future planning for engagement on the Operating Licence.
12	**Report back from last meeting – customer outcomes reporting (verbal update)** Rachelle Legrand provided an update on the development of Sydney Water's customer outcomes reporting, following feedback received during the CCRG Customer Outcomes Reporting Workshop at the June 2026 meeting. She advised that feedback from members had been incorporated into the final reporting design. As there was no clear preference for any of the reporting formats tested, a balanced approach has been adopted, with reporting structured around the three customer outcomes. Members appreciated the 'close the loop' and welcomed the refinements made in response to previous CCRG feedback. A question was raised regarding whether performance trends would be included alongside the customer outcome measures to provide additional context on performance over time.	Action: Sydney Water to confirm whether trend information will be included in the customer-facing reporting.
13	**Look ahead to next meeting** Josh Isben advised of the meeting themes for the October and November 2026 meetings to be held at Sydney Desalination Plant, Kurnell and Rydges Central, respectively.	
14	**Other business - Q&A** A request was made for information on the number of water meters tested by Sydney Water and the proportion found to be faulty. Members also noted an interest in receiving a broader update on metering, including the implementation of smart meters. Members discussed the value of providing additional context on outage performance measures, including a breakdown of outage durations within the current reporting thresholds. A request was made for information on the average duration of outages that fall within the one to five-hour range.	Sydney Water to provide future update on metering, including meter test outcomes and smart meter initiatives and information on the average duration of outages within the one to five-hour range.
15	**Thanks, and meeting close** The Chair thanked the CCRG members. Meeting closed at 2.00pm.	