

Minutes

Venue: **Malabar Water Resource Recovery Facility**
1 Fishermans Road, Malabar NSW 2036 Date and time: **11 November 2024**
9:30am – 2:00pm

Meeting title: **Customer and Community Reference Group**

Attendees

Independent Chair: **Abigail Goldberg**

CCRG Members

Mario Ferreira Compart – Community Representative
 Mary Karras – Ethnic Communities Council NSW
 Leigh Martin – Total Environment Centre
 Bruce McClelland – Business Western Sydney
 Douglas McCloskey – Justice and Equity Centre
 (formerly Public Interest Advocacy Centre)
 Stephen McMahon – Urban Development Institute of
 Australia
 Donna Rogers – Community Industry Group
 (Illawarra)
 Graham Turner – Council on the Ageing

Sydney Water

Roch Cheroux – Managing Director (part)
 Stuart Wallace – General Manager, Customer &
 Stakeholder Engagement
 Dean Page – Executive General Manager, Finance
 Commercial & Digital (part)
 Josh Isben – Head of Customer & Strategic Insights
 Izzy Kerr – Customer Research Manager
 Rachelle Legrand – Head of Strategy & Enterprise Plan
 (part)
 Sharon Bowyer – Senior Customer Governance Specialist
 Arli Miller – Head of Government, Stakeholder &
 Community Engagement (part)
 Troy Longworth – Community Engagement Advisor (part)
 Nic Cheetham – Manager Community Engagement -
 Regional Program
 Fiona Copeman – Production Manager Malabar (part)

Guest

Patrick Nolan – Integration Manager – Jemena (part)

Apologies/absent:

Narelle Brown – Community Representative
 Anna Bacik – Community Representative
 Ross Williams – Local Government 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

Item	Topic	Actions
1	Welcome and safety induction The meeting opened at 9:30am. The Chair welcomed participants and acknowledged the significance of Remembrance Day. Apologies were noted. The Chair introduced new CCRG member, Mario Ferreira Compart as the incoming youth representative, who also lives in and will represent Western Sydney as well as being a migrant of CALD background. Fiona Copeman, Production Manager Malabar, welcomed the CCRG to Sydney Water's Malabar Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF), provided a brief safety induction to the site and invited the members to participate in a site walk to the WRRF entrance.	
2	Site Walk: Acknowledgement of Country and Malabar fence renewal project Fiona Copeman acknowledged Country and paid respects to elders past and present. Troy Longworth – Community Engagement Advisor, provided an overview of the Malabar fence renewal project including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The purpose was to work with the community and stakeholders to care for country and construct new fencing with respect and appreciation for First Nations' knowledge. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sydney Water engaged with stakeholders including Randwick City Council, La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services, the Gamay Rangers, IndigiGrow and the Gujaga Foundation. • The Gamay Rangers and IndigiGrow were engaged for bush regeneration work and the creation of native gardens. • The Gujaga Foundation was engaged to consult with Elders and Senior Knowledge Holders to tell appropriate dreaming stories that could be shared. • A local First Nation's artist was commissioned to create artwork representing the surrounding water systems and their significance to the Aboriginal people of coastal Sydney. • A new walkway with Indigenous etchings has been constructed parallel to the new fence. A yarning circle (with sandstone seating) and a water station is now a place for people to meet, as well as to start or finish a walk over the Malabar Headland. • The project has respectfully incorporated native planting, language, storytelling and artwork along with the required perimeter fencing. <p>CCRG members were invited to walk along the new walkway.</p>	
	Sydney Water update	
3	<p>Managing Director (MD) update</p> <p>The MD provided the following update on the Sydney Water Price Proposal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Proposal was publicly released by IPART on 1 November 2024. Noted that the bill for an average customer would increase by 18% in 2025–26 and 6.8% each year to 2030. • The biggest drivers behind Sydney Water's planned investments are growth and renewing existing infrastructure. Most of this investment will support growth in both new and established areas – especially in Western Sydney, where development is booming and where population growth is pushing existing water and wastewater systems to their limits. • Sydney Water understands that customers are concerned about the price increase. • \$1 billion will be available to support customers who have difficulty paying their bills. • Public consultation is now open and everyone is invited to put in a submission to IPART. A public hearing will be held on 21 November 2024 • An expenditure review of Sydney Water has commenced. Discussions with IPART on the proposal will continue in November and December. <p>The Chair noted that the CCRG submission was sent in to IPART on 15 October 2024 and receipt acknowledged.</p> <p><i>Key points of discussion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is there such a big increase? Why wasn't there been more gradual increases in previous years? <p>The MD explained that IPART only lets Sydney Water invest when it is absolutely needed. As a result Sydney Water no longer has any spare capacity left within the network. Over the last 10 years Sydney Water bills have decreased in real terms but the outcome is that future bills now have to increase to support infrastructure investments. This year there has been no allowance for bill increase due to inflation (CPI).</p>	
4	<p>General Manager update</p> <p>Stuart Wallace provided an update on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community concerns regarding mosquito breeding in the settlement pond of the Liverpool Water Resource Recovery facility. Sydney Water is treating this mosquito incident seriously and have mobilised dedicated resources to manage the issue through removal of weeds from the ponds and spraying mosquito larvae. NSW Health mosquito experts have confirmed that that the species of mosquito encountered are 	

	<p>nuisance mosquitoes (not disease carrying). Sydney Water is conducting door knocking and letter box drops within the local neighbourhood to inform the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent media about tar balls found on Sydney beaches which have also been found to contain human faeces. Sydney Water has identified no issues with Bondi or Malabar water resource recovery facilities that could relate to these findings. NSW EPA have considered several possible causes (including shipping) but the complex composition of the balls meant they are so far unable to confirm their exact origin. Sydney Water has recently won the following National Awards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australia Services Excellence Awards for Customer Service Project of the Year - Customer Impact for our Customer Charter. The CCRG played a role in shaping the Customer Charter back in 2023. Australia Services Excellence Awards for Customer Service Organisation of the Year (Government/Not for Profit). CCRG Member, Mary Karras contributed to the Sydney Water submission through a video. Roy Morgan Trusted Brand Awards for Australia most trusted utility in 2024. Water is Life Youth Forum a new youth forum hosted by Sydney Water at Parramatta as part of National Water Week. Engaging youth in key water challenges is crucial for boosting water literacy across communities. Schools selected 100 secondary students who are engaged in issues regarding the environment, water, and sustainability to participate in the forum, which was well received. 	
Governance		
5	<p>Minutes and declarations</p> <p>The Minutes and action/issues log of the 30 September 2024 CCRG meeting, which had been transmitted inter-session, were accepted. Comments received from CCRG member Narelle Brown have been incorporated into the minutes.</p> <p>No new interests were declared.</p>	
6	<p>CCRG Member update</p> <p>The Chair advised that she had attended the WaterAid Gala Ball as a guest of Sydney Water. WaterAid works to reach everyone, everywhere with clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene. Sydney Water is a supporter of the WaterAid mission.</p> <p>CCRG Member Graham Turner advised that he had participated in a meeting with Sydney Water and Council on The Ageing (COTA) regarding the Sydney Water Price Proposal. Graham noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> COTA will make a submission to IPART about the Price Proposal. The price increase of 18% for an average customer is of concern. However, the range of increase for some customer demographics will be much higher and is of even greater concern. Majority of the price increase is from increase in fixed service charges and there is little incentive for customers to save water. He experienced a deficit in the information provided to the CCRG on the economics of the price proposal and the final proposed 18% price increase. He also considered that more information was needed as to why the increase is needed, <p>Stuart Wallace encouraged CCRG members to review the bill impacts details within the Price Proposal appendices and offered to investigate the background to COTA discussions. The Chair observed that communications could be addressed in the CCRG engagement going forward, which is starting from the outset of the process.</p>	

	CCRG Member Douglas McCloskey commented that the Justice Equity Centre's submission to IPART would also raise concerns on the split between fixed and usage charges. Moreover similar feedback had been provided to Hunter Water. He also confirmed that the split between fixed and usage charges is a fundamental question for customer engagement going forward.	
	Malabar Water Resource Recovery Facility - briefing	
7	<p>Malabar Water Resource Recovery Facility</p> <p>Fiona Copeman provided a presentation regarding the Malabar facility which included an outline on the facility's age, catchment area, operational processes and contribution to circular economy principles.</p> <p><i>Questions from the CCRG included:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malabar is still primary treatment. What could future treatment at the plant look like? • Where are samples for covid testing taken? • Did Malabar previously have wind generators? What happened to them? • How often does the system fail? What happens if raw sewage is pumped out? How are health and environment authorities notified? How are customers and the general public notified of any incidents? <p>Sydney Water responded to the questions during the meeting and on the site tour.</p> <p>Patrick Nolan from Jemena provided an overview of the Biomethane (Gas to Grid) plant at Malabar. It is the first facility of its kind in Australia.</p> <p><i>Questions from the CCRG included:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What energy input is needed to operate the biomethane plant? • How much is the actual reduction in carbon? • Who built the biomethane infrastructure? • How can customers sign up for biogas? <p>Jemena responded to the questions during the meeting and on the site tour.</p>	
	<p>Remembrance Day</p> <p>One minute's silence was observed at 11am to acknowledge Remembrance Day.</p>	
	Customer and community engagement	
8	<p>Sydney Water presentation: Community engagement</p> <p>Josh Isben introduced this session with an overview on how customer and community engagement is organised at Sydney Water. This included a view on engagement across:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer and strategic insights • Government, stakeholder and community engagement • Strategic communications • Brand, media and marketing • Customer experience • Developer interactions <p>It also included a view of engagement activities that shapes and influences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic and enterprise plans and decisions • Infrastructure delivery, maintenance and operations • Customer experience <p>CCRG members commented on how helpful this information was for them.</p>	

	<p>Arli Miller outlined her role within Sydney Water which includes responsibility for community engagement across:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major Projects - projects >\$100 M, such as Purified Recycled Water and infrastructure to support the Aerotropolis. Regional Programs - smaller projects in maintenance and operational infrastructure delivery, such as stormwater naturalisations, maintenance and renewals of assets including the Malabar fence renewal project. <p>Nic Cheetham presented on Community Engagement Regional Programs including case study examples during infrastructure projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning stage – case study on Johnstons Creek naturalisation project community consultation day used to inform decision on design Delivery stage – case studies on Westleigh residential garden restoration following essential wastewater works and Asquith project works community consultation morning Completion stage – case study on Muddy Creek Stormwater Naturalisation project community consultation day at project handover from Sydney Water to Transport for NSW. <p>Nic also provided an overview of First Nations and CALD engagement, use of collateral and on-line tools for engagement, monitoring and responding to compliments and complaints, community engagement capability uplift for Sydney Water project teams and alignment to the IAP2 framework.</p> <p><i>Key feedback from CCRG members included:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital tools – Don't rely on digital engagement as this excludes many community members. QR codes – don't assume people know what these are or how to use them, many organisations are also warning people against clicking on QR codes as these can be misdirected and individuals can be compromised. CALD engagement – should be tailored to the local community through use of translation in relevant language, local media, podcasts and with community leaders including through places of worship. Responsibilities – community needs clarity on responsibilities between local council, other utilities, contractors and Sydney Water works and responsibilities. Example was cited that there was no notice was given to residents for road closure works attributed to Sydney Water but undertaken by contractors. 	<p>Action: Include broader community engagement topics on CCRG Forward Plan</p> <p>Action: Discuss road closure example with Mary Karras to unpack root cause and identify improvement opportunities</p>
9	<p>Sydney Water presentation: Planning for future customer engagement</p> <p>Josh Isben and Izzy Kerr shared the draft purpose statements for the future customer engagement program.</p> <p><i>Key feedback from CCRG members included:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purpose statement #3 – (Support an ongoing iterative planning process with evidence of the use of customer insights in developing and refining Sydney Water's long-term strategic plans.) Reword. Customer insights actually need to be used, it's not just having evidence of using them. Purpose statement #4 – (Continue to build on evidence of customer support and willingness to pay, including necessary trade-offs, for key components of Sydney Water's long-term strategic plans). Reword. This statement sounds like it is post-validation, it should reference customer preferences and values instead of customer support. Include importance of education and capability building of the participants (also make this clear as part of the scope of work phases). This also needs to include early 	

	<p>economic education and explanation to participants on what Sydney Water funding is needed, cost details and impact.</p> <p>Josh Isben and Izzy Kerr shared the draft objectives for the future customer engagement program.</p> <p><i>Key feedback from CCRG members included:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 – (Sydney Water achieves an overall ‘Advanced’ rating on IPART’s Customer Principles in the next regulatory submission in 2030-2035.) This is internally focused and some members suggested this could be listed last for a customer audience. • Objective 3 – (specifics of IPART’s water regulatory framework are adequately addressed, including depth and breadth of engagement and executive participation, and that hard-to-reach voices are included.) Reword ‘hard to reach’ to ‘diverse voices’. • Objective 4 – (engagement is carried out in accordance with relevant, best practice including IAP2 and deliberative methods.) Reword, doesn’t need to include ‘deliberative methods’ should reference ‘a range of approaches/methods to align with best practice’. <p>Josh Isben and Izzy Kerr shared the scope of customer engagement phases for the future customer engagement program.</p> <p><i>Key feedback from CCRG members included:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCRG engagement should be across all phases. • Customer engagement subplans are needed to differentiate on the difference between customer and stakeholder engagement including direct engagement with stakeholders such as the CCRG. Engagement plans need to outline difference in engagement on customer preferences (individuals) and customer interests (that can be represented by stakeholder groups). • Flexibility is essential – scope of work needs flexibility in timing and budget. Needs allowance to be iterative with customers. • Education on Discreet Choice Experiment (DCE) - CCRG need education on DCE (what they are for, how they are used, can they be iterative). • Be conscious of 2025-2030 price increases – customers will be more aware of price rises and this may impact future customer engagement outcomes. 	<p>Action: Sydney Water to share presentation and clearly identify what areas additional feedback is being sought and when and how to respond.</p>
	Year in review and look ahead to 2025	
10	<p>Achievements for the year</p> <p>The Chair shared her reflections on the CCRG journey since its formation in November 2022 and invited Donna Rogers to provide a summary of the past year from her perspective. Donna highlighted key aspects of the year in the form of a poem.</p>	
11	<p>CCRG 2025 draft forward plan</p> <p>Josh Isben shared a draft CCRG Forward Plan for 2025 and outlined key meeting themes aligned to the CCRG Charter. Comments on the forward plan were sought from CCRG members.</p> <p>CCRG members supported topics already noted on the Forward Plan including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycled Water roadmap. • Mamre Rd Stormwater. • PFAS and new Drinking Water Quality Guidelines. 	<p>Action: Sydney Water to share draft Forward Plan and CCRG members to provide feedback.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microplastics. <p>CCRG members suggestions for additional topics included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economics to support the Price Proposal. • Customer education. • Stormwater management and approach to naturalisation. • Strata schemes and guest presenter from the Office of the NSW Strata and Property Commissioner. • Strategic plan for housing, business and commercial development in the Southwest growth area and the Aerotropolis and updates on Sydney Water infrastructure delivery and alignment with NSW Government. • Identifying areas for shared advocacy (e.g. opportunity for the CCRG to explore areas where they can advocate for broader change within the water sector, cross government). • Financial assistance in context of changes within the Aged Care sector. • Broader community engagement topics. 	
	Close	
	<p>The Chair thanked members for their participation in the meeting and throughout the year.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 12:30pm.</p>	
	Malabar Water Resource Recovery Plant – site tour	
Tour	<p>Following the formal close of the meeting, CCRG members were invited to participate in a site tour of the Malabar WRRF with Sydney Water and the Biomethane plant with Jemena and their on-site operational group, Zinfra.</p>	