

Sydney Water Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG)

Independent Chair Annual Report January 2025 – December 2025

Committee name:	Sydney Water Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG)	Reporting period:	January 2025 to December 2025
Independent Chair:	Abigail Goldberg	Business contacts:	Stuart Wallace, General Manager Customer and Stakeholder Engagement Josh Isben, Head of Customer and Strategic Insights

1. Executive summary

This document reports on the third year of operations of the Sydney Water Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG), from January 2025 to December 2025. The report outlines the background to the CCRG, key issues addressed and the forward plan for 2026.

2. Background: CCRG functions and ways of working

A new, independently chaired CCRG commenced meetings in November 2022 with a mandate to have significant input into Sydney Water's customer engagement program, strategic planning and regulatory submissions ([CCRG Annual Report Nov22-Nov23](#) and [CCRG Annual Report Nov23-Nov24](#))

The CCRG operates in a respectful and collegiate way where meetings are opened by the Chair with ground rules for ways of working relating to tolerance and inclusion. A Charter sets out expectations of the CCRG (www.sydneywater.com.au/about-us/our-people/who-we-are/customer-forums.html), which includes the intent that the CCRG will:

- Work alongside Sydney Water as an independent voice acting in the best long-term interests of customers and the community
- Provide a range of external perspectives reflecting stakeholder positions and community interests
- Assist Sydney Water in meeting IPART's requirements, particularly by providing inputs into the design and execution of customer engagement programs and response to these.

The Charter confirms that the CCRG is an advisory rather than decision-making group. It is not intended to replace engagement and research with customers and the community but rather to enhance and support customer-centric business practices.

Several principles are applied to ways of working with and within the CCRG (**Appendix 1**).

3. Membership

CCRG members bring a breadth of skills and professional experience ranging from consumer affairs, local government, utilities and the environment to public policy and business (**Appendix 2**). While some members represent a group others are individuals with expertise in relevant areas. Mini biographies for members are available online (www.sydneywater.com.au/about-us/our-people/who-we-are/customer-forums.html).

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During the reporting period a number of members resigned for personal reasons and replacement members were introduced. In addition, the inception term for committee members expired in November 2025, and new members were appointed to replace those wishing to retire, also enabling a membership refresh.

4. Levels of engagement

Engagement in the CCRG is excellent, with very high levels of participation at each meeting and all meetings face-to-face. Members arrive at meetings prepared for discussion. Interactive as well as Q&A sessions are lively and interesting, with an open approach to debate that encourages differing views and opinions rather than seeking consensus.

The new Sydney Water Board Chair, Niall Blair, attended the April 2025 meeting to introduce himself and meet members. He also responded to a diverse range of questions from participants.

The Acting Executive Officer, Paul Plowman participated in four of six meetings: April, June, August, and September. Paul also acknowledged the valuable insights and support from the CCRG. Sydney Water Executive General Managers and General Managers also participate in CCRG meetings, including:

- Stuart Wallace - GM, Customer & Stakeholder Engagement (*every meeting*)
- Denisha Anbu - Executive GM Customer Experience (June 2025)
- Dean Page - Executive GM Finance Commercial & Digital (April, June, August and September 2025)

Minutes of each meeting are drafted and approved by members then published on the Sydney Water website <https://www.sydneywater.com.au/about-us/our-people/who-we-are/customer-forums.html>.

5. Key issues over the last 12 months

CCRG meetings are held bi-monthly, with 6 meetings over the reporting period (**Appendix 3**). Three key issues have been primary topics over 2025. These are outlined below:

Issue	Actions taken	Next steps
Issue 1: IPART Price Proposal	<p>With the 5 yearly Sydney Water IPART price proposal submitted in September 2024, a key focus over the reporting period has been the proposal and customer and community engagement related to it. Members were keen contributors and participants in this process.</p> <p>Members, together with the Independent Chair, also met with IPART directly (without Sydney Water) in June 2025 to communicate what they regarded as pros and cons of their involvement, lessons learned from the process and important areas for improvement.</p> <p>At this meeting Members also took the opportunity to ask questions of IPART including with regard to their expectations regarding</p>	<p>The engagement team, Executive and GMs will keep members updated on and involved in next steps and preparations for the next pricing submission.</p>

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Issue	Actions taken	Next steps
	<p>community consultation, and approach to sustainability and environmental matters.</p> <p>Prior to submission of the IPART Price Proposal, planning has commenced for the next 5-year submission, and how this will be approached from a community engagement perspective. CCRG members have been pleased to be involved ‘from the ground floor up’ and have been actively participating in the development of the scope / brief and engagement process for consultants. A new sub-group has been established to provide direct assistance to Sydney Water on these matters.</p>	
Issue 2: Customer and community outreach	<p>The CCRG plays a particularly important role in providing advice to Sydney Water on customer and community engagement approaches and needs as well as communications strategies.</p> <p>Members provide information to Sydney Water on events where community outreach would be helpful and valued e.g. at cultural festivals or special interest group gatherings.</p> <p>Members review and offer comment and feedback on Sydney Water’s community information campaigns such as those for CALD communities and small business customers.</p>	Community outreach is an ongoing matter and liaison will continue as a matter of course.
Issue 3: Operations	<p>Members have expressed interest in all aspects of Sydney Water’s operations and have been provided with information ranging from long term capital investments to daily operational concerns that have included PFAS contamination and ocean debris balls.</p> <p>Members are kept abreast of business performance metrics.</p>	Operations are an ongoing concern and members will continue to be kept informed on routine as well as emerging concerns.

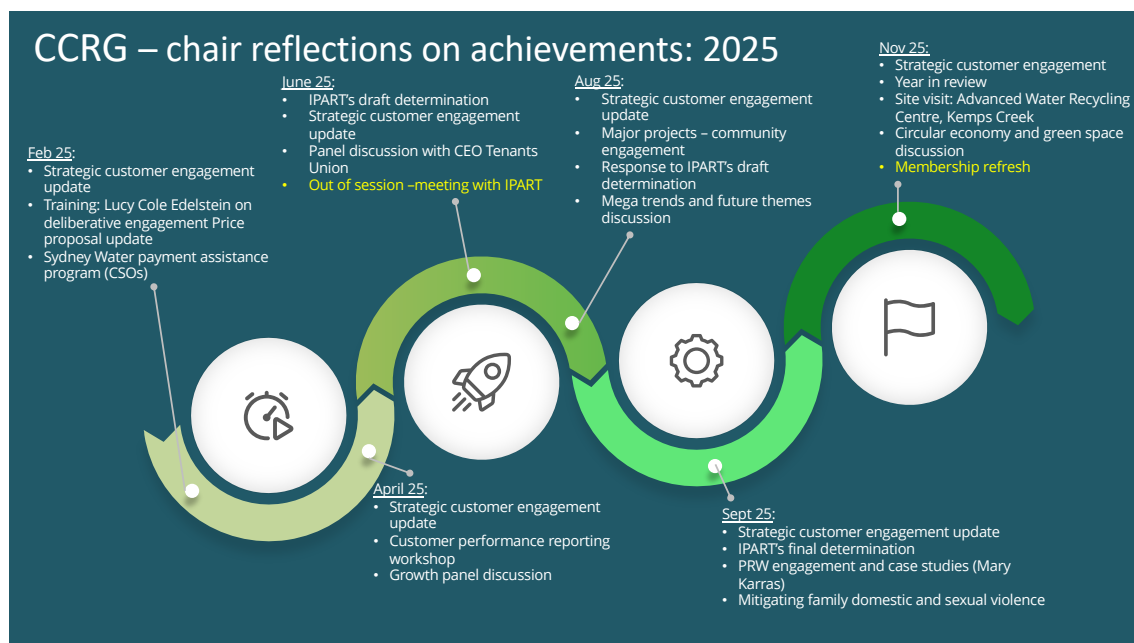
Flexibility in the bi-monthly agendas has enabled matters of interest to customer representatives to be presented (**Appendix 3**) or for emerging matters to be addressed. In this reporting period topics have included strategic customer engagement and major project engagement as well as steps possible for Sydney Water to mitigate family, domestic and sexual violence e.g. through privacy measures.

Examples of how inputs from the CCRG are being applied by Sydney Water are summarised in **Appendix 4**.

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The infographic below provides a symbolic representation of the ‘journey’ of the group over the reporting period:



In addition, the Chair has observed over the period:

- An evolution in the **relationships** across the CCRG, including:
 - Between members
 - Between members and Sydney Water
 - With the Independent Chair
- Maturing of the **ways of working**, including:
 - Streamlining of meeting structure and content
 - Optimising interactive initiatives ranging from panels to workshops
 - Inclusion of site visits and guest speakers
- Achievement of **key milestones**, including:
 - IPART price determination inputs
 - Inputs to the strategic customer engagement approach
 - Membership refresh.

In support of the CCRG approach to transparency and encouragement of inquiries and debate, the Chair has encouraged approaches such as Harvard's 'Strategic questions worth asking'. This approach suggests that participants apply a range of questions including:

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- Investigative questions – *what's known?*
- Speculative questions – *what if?*
- Productive questions – *now what?*
- Subjective questions – *what's unsaid?*

External information, guest presenters and site visit

A number of external activities formed agenda items during the year, viz:

Best practice customer engagement (February 2025) Information and training session with Lucy Cole Edelstein, expert on engagement techniques and approaches.
Improving engagement with tenants (June 2025) CEO, Tenants' Union of NSW, Leo Patterson Ross participated in a panel discussion.
Purified recycled water (September 2025) Danielle Francis from WSAA presented industry insights and experience.
Advanced Water Recycling Centre – site visit in construction (November 2025) Site visit included: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview and tour of the construction site• Overview of engagement and collaboration with local First Nations groups• Circular economy opportunities• Greenspace and naturalisation efforts.

6. Focus for the next 12 months

Forward plan

A schedule of bi-monthly meetings has been agreed for the forthcoming reporting period.

A draft 'roadmap' of topics proposed to be addressed at each meeting has been developed and put to members, whose input is being sought in order to refine the agenda for 2026.

Prepared by Independent Chair:	Abigail Goldberg
Date:	10 December 2024

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Appendices

The following appendices provide supplementary information. They are referenced within the body of the report.

Appendix 1 – CCRG ways of working

Appendix 2 - Customer and Community Reference Group membership

Appendix 3 - CCRG agenda items

Appendix 4 - Examples of CCRG input informing business outcomes

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Appendix 1 – CCRG ways of working

Several principles are applied to ways of working with the CCRG:

Principle 1: Diversity and inclusion

A diverse group of participants make up the CCRG membership so as to represent the many, varied customers of Sydney Water. Individuals as well as community groups are represented. Care is taken at meetings to enable each participant to contribute to the conversation and to provide opportunities for all participants to be included in discussions.

While there are no formal sub-committees, special interest sub-groups are formed on an as-needs basis. For example over this reporting period, a group supporting the Our Water Our Voice customer and community engagement initiative invested significant time and provided considerable inputs and contributions to Sydney Water on their engagement approach, substantively shaping the exercise.

Principle 2: Engagement and interactivity

In order to operationalise the principle of engagement and interactivity, CCRG agendas are structured so that discussions are focused on customer and community interests. Meetings include updates on Sydney Water operations and emerging issues as well as customer engagement and customer impacts of strategic and regulatory decisions.

Agendas make provision for participants to raise customer and community issues and concerns, for Sydney Water response

Principle 3: Mutual education and sharing of information

Value is placed on the knowledge and experience brought to the table by participants. As such, a culture of mutual education is supported by the Chair and Sydney Water and reciprocated by participants, who:

- Proactively seek the formation of sub-groups for specialised topics
- Request supplementary information from Sydney Water, such as conference papers
- Share resources of their own across the group through the Secretariat, such as supporting information from other customer and community groups
- Bring information to meetings for the benefit of Sydney Water and other participants.

Principle 4: Rigour and structure

In addition to each agenda being carefully structured, specialised engagement techniques are ranging from the Harvard 'Cultures of Thinking' techniques (e.g. 'stand in my shoes' or 'making thinking explicit') to the Oxford Business School 'social impact' approach (e.g. in relation to ways of approaching difficult social issues such as increasing bill payments) are employed.

Other approaches that are applied include in-camera and in session pulse checks with members and round-the-room feedback opportunities.

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Appendix 2 - Customer and Community Reference Group membership

There are 12 member positions on the CCRG. The table below reflects changing membership over the reporting period.

#	CCRG Member	Member organisation (if relevant)	Broad customer perspective
1	Douglas McCloskey	Justice Equity Centre	Financial hardship / social advocacy Expert consumer advocates for NSW households Engagement specialists
2	Graham Turner	Council on the Ageing (COTA)	Aged / disability
4	Ross Williams	Local Government Association	Local Government / Council
5	Mary Karras	Ethnic Communities Council (ECC)	Cultural and linguistically diverse communities (CALD)
6	Stephen McMahon	Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) <i>Note: member resigned Oct 2025</i>	Property development
7	Anna Bacik	N/A – Individual <i>Note: member resigned Aug 2025 due to a change in personal circumstances</i>	Customer policy and advocacy for people living in disadvantage. Regional – Illawarra
8	Bruce McClelland	Business Western Sydney (BWS)	Business, Western Sydney
9	Leigh Martin	Total Environment Centre (TEC)	Environment and urban ecology
10	Narelle Brown	N/A – Individual <i>Note: member resigned July 2025 due to a change in personal circumstances</i>	Customer advocacy and consumer financial management
11	Donna Rogers	Community Industry Group (CIG) <i>Note: member resigned July 2025 due to a change in personal circumstances</i>	Community services and social justice (family, child, housing and homelessness) Regional - Illawarra
12	Mario Ferreria Compart	N/A – Individual <i>From Nov 2024</i>	Young people Resident – Western Sydney Migrant and CALD background
13	Joy Horton	N/A – Individual <i>From Feb 2025</i>	First Nations
14	Renee Acres	Community Industry Group (CIG) <i>From Nov 2025</i>	Community services Regional - Illawarra
15	Debbie Smythe	Wesley Mission <i>From Nov 2025</i>	Customer advocacy and consumer financial management
16	Rob Gravestocks	N/A – Individual <i>From Nov 2025</i>	Public policy and community engagement

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Appendix 3 - CCRG agenda items

Date	CCRG agenda segments and items		
	Customer Engagement	Price Proposal	Governance and other
Feb 2025	Strategic customer engagement update: Are the current principles adequate and reflective of good customer engagement practices? Best practice customer engagement - Information and training session with Lucy Cole Edelstein*	2025-2030 Price Proposal update. Building on Sydney Water's payment assistance program	CCRG Charter - annual review
Apr 2025	Strategic customer engagement update: Does the Strategic Customer Engagement draft scope and plan align with best practice?		Customer performance reporting – workshop Planning for growth - panel discussion*
Jun 2025	Strategic customer engagement update: Proposed approach (including alignment to best practice customer engagement) and CCRG involvement. Improving engagement with tenants – Panel Discussion including with CEO, Tenants' Union of NSW, Leo Patterson Ross*	IPART's Draft Determination and Report (DDR) Presentation and Q&A.	Pulse check (in camera)
Aug 2025	Strategic customer engagement update: Incorporating gaps and improvement opportunities identified in IPART's review into planning for future strategic customer engagement. Major projects – community engagement. Presentation and Q&A	Sydney Water response to IPART's Draft Determination and Report (DDR) of the 2025-2030 Price Proposal	Workshop: Seeking customer and community views to inform our future strategic planning
Sept 2025	Strategic customer engagement planning update and check-in: How well Sydney Water is listening and responding to CCRG feedback? Purified Recycled Water (PRW) – How do we best engage and build support Mitigating Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence	Presentation: IPART's Final Price Determination	Report back: Seeking customer and community views to inform our future strategic planning
Nov 2025	Strategic customer engagement: Report back on progress of RFI. Sydney Water 'Tone of Voice' workshop		CCRG Year in Review and Year Ahead Advanced Water Recycling Centre: Presentations and Site Tour (including Circular Economy and Greenspace/naturalisation)

*Denotes CCRG member suggested topics

In addition to the topics above general updates are provided by Sydney Water at each meeting. During 2025 this included updates on leadership changes; discussions regarding water quality, environmental performance and public health issues; pricing, affordability and customer support considerations; performance reporting and results; data centres; customer and community engagement, education and events and campaigns and marketing programs.

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Appendix 4 - Examples of CCRG input informing business outcomes

Pivotal CCRG discussions and feedback in 2025	Sydney Water actions
1. Provide direct feedback on existing customer experience, and emerging customer issues and make recommendations	
Discussions with the CCRG on customer issues included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mosquito breeding at Liverpool WRRF • PFAS • Debris balls • IPART's determination of the Sydney Water Price Proposal • Growth and service delivery • Data centres 	Sydney Water took on board CCRG member customer perspectives to approach issues of customer concern.
February 2025 'Building on Sydney Water Payment Assistance program' discussion including Customer Service Obligations options. An additional follow up session with the CCRG on this topic was requested.	This topic is now part of a broader NSW Government review.
June 2025 'Improving engagement with tenants' panel discussion and debate.	Sydney Water continuing to explore options to improve engagement with tenants.
2. Act as a 'critical friend' to shape, strengthen and co-develop Sydney Water customer and community engagement plans and activities (including approach, structure, methodology, tools, materials)	
Strategic customer engagement planning discussed at every CCRG meeting in 2025. Key themes of feedback included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance and oversight • Strategic alignment • Process and methodology • Organisational support 	<p>The principles, purpose and objectives of the Strategic Customer Engagement Scope and Plan were refined.</p> <p>Feedback incorporated into the Strategic Customer Engagement Request for Information documentation industry briefing.</p>
3. Observe inputs and provide feedback that customers and the community are being engaged broadly and effectively, and that their preferences are understood and reflected in the decision-making processes	
CCRG have provided advice on positioning customer engagement insights into the response to IPART's Draft determination report.	Sydney Water adjusted its response to IPART's Draft Determination including by strengthening connection between IPART's draft decisions and the tangible risks to customer services and compliance objectives.
4. Assist Sydney Water to identify and engage hard-to-reach customer groups	
Across all areas of discussions in 2025 the CCRG advocated for the interests of CALD (in particular emerging communities), First Nations, financially vulnerable people, seniors and young people.	<p>CCRG feedback incorporated into the Price Proposal communications plan (including channels to reach specific customer groups).</p> <p>Sydney Water Brand & Marketing team sought tailored advice from CCRG to reach specific language groups.</p>

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5. Provide strategic input into Sydney Water's strategy, enterprise plan and regulatory submissions, projects and campaigns; and engage with the Sydney Water Executive and senior leaders on these issues

April 2025 – CCRG panel discussion on 'Growth' with Sydney Water Board Chair in attendance.	Different community perspectives on growth noted and addressed.
June 2025 - Discussion on IPART Draft Determination with General Managers.	CCRG input to Sydney Water's communications plan and approach for the price increase. Key messages modified following CCRG input.
Aug 2025 – CCRG participated in a Workshop: 'Seeking customer and community views' to inform future strategic planning.	Sydney Water updated the 'Horizon scanning' themes based on CCRG feedback.

5. Provide an assessment of the quality and the extent of customer engagement, and the degree to which this has been reflected in Sydney Water's strategic plans and regulatory submissions

Members of the CCRG met with IPART in June 2025 to better understand IPARTs Draft Determination and communicate their perspectives.	Feedback from CCRG noted for next round of Customer Engagement.
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6. Assist with evaluating Sydney Water performance against customer facing performance targets

April 2025 – Workshop on customer performance reporting. CCRG provided general feedback on the draft performance report.	Feedback from the CCRG will be used to shape future performance discussions and reporting to customers.
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