

# Minutes

**Venue:** Sydney Water Parramatta Office  
Level 5, 2 Parramatta Square, Parramatta NSW

**Date and time:** 7 April 2025  
9:00am – 2:00pm

## Meeting title: Customer and Community Reference Group

### Attendees

**Independent Chair:** Abigail Goldberg

#### CCRG Members:

Narelle Brown – Community Representative  
Mario Ferreira Compant – Community Representative  
Mary Karras – Ethnic Communities Council NSW  
Bruce McClelland – Business Western Sydney  
Stephen McMahon – Urban Development Institute of Australia  
Douglas McCloskey – Justice & Equity Centre  
Donna Rogers – Community Industry Group (Illawarra)  
Graham Turner – Council on the Ageing  
Ross Williams – Local Government NSW

#### Sydney Water:

Niall Blair – Sydney Water Chair (*part*)  
Paul Plowman – Acting Chief Executive  
Stuart Wallace – General Manager, Customer & Stakeholder Engagement  
Dean Page – Executive General Manager Finance, Commercial & Digital  
Josh Isben – Head of Customer & Strategic Insights  
Arli Miller – Head of Government, Stakeholder & Community  
Rachelle Legrand – Head of Strategy Change & Performance  
Chris Knowles – Senior Manager Enterprise Planning & Performance (*part*)  
Kate Miles – Head of System Planning & Land Acquisition (*part*)  
Paul Higham – Head of Business Development (*part*)  
Izzy Kerr – Customer Research Manager  
Sharon Bowyer – Senior Customer Governance Specialist

#### Apologies/absent:

Anna Bacik – Community Representative  
Leigh Martin – Total Environment Centre  
Joy Horton – Community Representative

#### 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	Responsible	Actions
1	<b>Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country</b> The meeting opened at 9:00am and the Chair welcomed participants. Stuart Wallace acknowledged Country and paid respects to elders past and present.		
2	<b>Introductions and apologies</b> <b>Housekeeping</b> The Chair welcomed the Sydney Water Chair, Niall Blair and Paul Plowman, Acting Chief Executive to the meeting. Apologies were noted.		
3	<b>Sydney Water Chair update</b> Sydney Water Chair, Niall Blair provided a brief overview of his background and career experience across business and government. He outlined: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>his thoughts on Sydney Water including the recent change in leadership.</li> </ul>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the importance of the CCRG to continue to help Sydney Water improve engagement with customers and community and more generally to challenge and hold the business to account and act as a 'critical friend'.</li> <li>the challenges ahead including population growth, climate change impacts and maintaining affordability in the face of significant investment needs.</li> </ul> <p>Key points raised by CCRG members included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the challenges of growth and providing value for the community in relation to what is affordable.</li> <li>the need to have a conversation on how investment can be funded in a different way, rather than impacting customer bills.</li> <li>Sydney Water has been required to become the stormwater manager in the west, with higher costs being passed onto developers and consumers.</li> <li>the increase in ageing communities which rely on hardship programs / pensioner concessions and how costs would be borne by the rest of the community.</li> </ul> <p>Sydney Water commented on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>that affordability has always been and remains a priority consideration.</li> <li>there are various challenges of who bears the risks, who benefits and who should pay. PFAS is a good example of how others have benefited from products but that Sydney Water now has to bear the costs of having to rectify the issues.</li> <li>new customers to Sydney partially offset an ageing population.</li> <li>the role of innovation in driving efficiency, the importance of understanding communities and what's changing, and to be proactive to change.</li> </ul>	
4	<p><b>General Manager update</b></p> <p>Stuart Wallace confirmed that Roch Cheroux, former Managing Director, had left Sydney Water and that Paul Plowman is Acting Chief Executive.</p> <p>Paul Plowman was invited to give an overview of his background and career experience. Paul noted the impact of the leadership change and the resilience and unwavering commitment of staff to serve the community. Paul expressed his desire to attend future CCRG meetings.</p> <p>Stuart Wallace continued the Sydney Water update as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IPART to provide its <b>draft determination</b> to Sydney Water's price proposal in May.</li> <li>the EPA's recent announcement that <b>debris balls</b> previously found on beaches were likely from Sydney Water's wastewater system. Investigations are ongoing to understand unique characteristics (temperature, rainfall and ocean currents) that may have resulted in the formation of the debris balls. Sydney Water continue to work with the EPA. More information on debris balls can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</li> <li>On <b>PFAS</b>, Sydney Water continues to work with Water NSW and NSW Health and communication with the local community is ongoing. More information on PFAS can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</li> <li>The release of the <b>revised Drinking Water Quality Guidelines</b> has been delayed due to the Federal election.</li> <li>An audit by the Customer Service Institute of Australia against the International Standard for Customer Services describes Sydney Water's <b>customer centricity</b> as very high.</li> <li>Senior leaders are participating in a <b>Customer Pulse program</b> designed to give leaders firsthand experience with frontline staff and field crews.</li> <li>Sydney Water participated in the <b>Lakemba Nights festival</b> and will be attending the <b>Royal Easter Show</b>.</li> </ul>	

	<p>Questions and key points of discussion from the CCRG included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will Sydney Water be fined by the EPA for the debris balls? Do fines trickle back into customer bills? Is there liability to Sydney Water for the cost of clean-up or other costs?</li> <li>the community needs to have a good understanding on the level of wastewater treatment.</li> <li>What is the process and timeframe for recruitment of a new Managing Director and who is responsible for the final decision?</li> </ul> <p>On debris balls and wastewater treatment Sydney Water advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sydney Water's water resource recovery facilities have been compliant with their EPA licences. EPA have indicated that there will be no fine.</li> <li>Sydney Water will bear the cost of previous clean ups conducted by councils and will take the lead role in any future clean ups if the need arises.</li> <li>There is a need to treat wastewater where growth is occurring so that it alleviates the pressure on the coastal plants.</li> </ul> <p>On the departure of the former Managing Director, Sydney Water advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A plan is being implemented to advise key stakeholders of the change in leadership. A media statement was released by the Government.</li> <li>Sydney Water is managing the recruitment of a new Managing Director with the assistance of an external provider. The recommendation to appoint a candidate is made by the Minister and approved by the Governor. Recruitment will commence imminently and may take several months.</li> </ul>	
5	<p><b>CCRG Chair and Member update</b></p> <p>The CCRG Chair provided an update on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The follow up session on Payment Assistance (item from Feb 2025 CCRG meeting) has been deferred pending receipt of IPART's recommendations and the outcome of the larger Government-led review.</li> <li>The CCRG's suggestion for a discussion between CCRG and IPART on IPART customer engagement requirements is also deferred pending receipt of IPART's recommendations.</li> </ul> <p>Bruce McClelland provided an update on the Western Sydney Dialogue Airport City Summit (held 13/3/25). Development is occurring rapidly, however there are various hurdles around precincts including in relation to utilities.</p>	
6	<p><b>Minutes of previous meeting and review of actions / issues log</b></p> <p><b>Declaration of interests</b></p> <p>The Minutes and action/issues log of the 24 February 2025 CCRG meeting, which had been transmitted inter-session, were accepted.</p> <p>No additional interests were declared.</p>	
7	<p><b>Customer performance reporting – Workshop</b></p> <p>Rachelle Legrand and Chris Knowles presented a draft simple dashboard for metrics, results, targets and a 'performance rating'. This is in addition to existing external reporting, such as the Annual Report, water conservation, drinking water quality and environmental performance reports.</p> <p>The CCRG provided general feedback on the draft performance report and then broke into groups for further discussion. The key themes from the workshop were summarised as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>greater clarity – be clear on purpose, link to objectives and the 'So what?'</li> </ul>	<p><b>Action:</b></p> <p>Feedback from the CCRG will be used to shape future performance discussions with the CCRG and reporting to customers.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• simplicity – language, look, readability (not too much text) and numbers need to be easy to understand.</li> <li>• prioritisation – order metrics in what is important to customers – drinking water quality and affordability.</li> <li>• trends – outline the direction of performance, is it improving or not?</li> <li>• data and reporting - Historical reporting but be forward looking, where too next, timeline and frequency of reporting, details of methodology.</li> <li>• channels – print, online, links and other methods for obtaining further information.</li> <li>• link to IPART and customer outcomes.</li> </ul>	
8	<p><b>Planning for growth - panel discussion</b></p> <p>The CCRG Chair introduced this item and emphasised the panel's purpose to obtain diverse stakeholder perspectives. Participants included representatives from Sydney Water and CCRG members with different perspectives outlined below.</p> <p><i>Key points included:</i></p> <p><b>Kate Miles (Sydney Water):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the unprecedented scale of growth and the need for strategic investment.</li> <li>• the importance of robust information for efficient investment and the complexity of planning including with changing densities and timings.</li> </ul> <p><b>Stephen McMahon (Developer perspective):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• examples of delayed sewer services.</li> <li>• various planning complexities in Western Sydney.</li> <li>• issues with Sydney Water's "just in time approach", no willingness to adopt flexible or interim servicing solutions and onerous stormwater requirements for Mamre Rd/Aerotropolis.</li> </ul> <p><b>Donna Rogers (Consumer and Illawarra perspective):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• growth can be positive as it can bring opportunities for communities. However, if the cost of growth isn't carefully managed, increasing utility prices put further strain on household budgets.</li> <li>• affordability is a concern in the Illawarra and there is also a risk that the focus of infrastructure investment could be concentrated in more urbanised areas leaving regional areas like the Illawarra with outdated systems.</li> <li>• impacts of climate resilience need to be built in.</li> <li>• the importance of involving the community in how growth is managed, services are delivered and the environment protected.</li> </ul> <p><b>Paul Higham (Sydney Water):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sydney Water's new role as Stormwater Manager for Mamre Rd and the Aerotropolis.</li> <li>• the importance of managing stormwater from new impervious surfaces and supporting new industries.</li> </ul> <p><b>Bruce McClelland (Business perspective):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• challenges with land constraints, competition, and the need for jobs where people live.</li> <li>• the staging of infrastructure doesn't keep up with delivery.</li> <li>• the need for industrial plans (not just housing plans) and the needs of different business owners/tenants (eg data centres) and mixed uses to be carefully considered in planning infrastructure.</li> <li>• need for adequate resourcing and funding for stormwater management in western Sydney.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Action:</b> Sydney Water to consult more broadly during early stages of planning to ensure community considerations are taken into account.</p>

	<p><b>Graham Turner (Environment perspective):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the impact of new developments on waterway health and the need for careful environmental management.</li> <li>western Sydney including greenfield sites are not a 'blank canvas' – it is an existing environment of Cumberland forest, agriculture, turf farms, fish nursery all dependent on South Creek.</li> <li>the environment will become a highly 'managed' waterway. Water will no longer go to groundwater, rather it will be "dammed in" retention pits and will be "denied" to the broader environment. It will interfere with the natural water runoff cycle.</li> </ul> <p><b>Mario Ferreira Compart (Youth perspective):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the importance of land for recreational use and effective stormwater management to keep parks available for sport and other uses (even after rain).</li> <li>growth is not just about housing. Public parks are the "backyards" of the community.</li> <li>the need for a youth voice in planning decisions and the importance of public parks for the community.</li> </ul> <p><b>Facilitated discussion:</b></p> <p>The CCRG Chair thanked the panel members for their views and commented on the richness of the conversation and the diversity of the challenges to be considered.</p> <p>CCRG Members raised additional points of discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the need for government coordination to bring all the issues together.</li> <li>growth in the east, particularly high rise/high density development, continues at a rapid pace.</li> <li>the impact of changing demographics, and the evolution of land uses.</li> <li>the diversity of customer and community needs and the complexity of challenges.</li> </ul> <p>Sydney Water explained that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>previously there was a central government committee for growth sequencing. Sydney Water has been advocating for a cross-government approach.</li> <li>Government needs to consider broader planning issues such as transport, education, hospitals/health care, justice and other social services. Government is trying to make informed decisions on liveability for communities.</li> <li>the sequencing of new developments needs to be aligned to what government services can be delivered overall.</li> <li>growth in infill areas doesn't require entirely new water infrastructure compared to greenfield areas.</li> </ul> <p>The Sydney Water Chair thanked the CCRG panel for the discussion. He appreciated the opportunity to hear the different perspectives and the different ways of thinking.</p>	
9	<p><b>Paper for discussion: Strategic customer engagement update</b></p> <p>Josh Isben and Izzy Kerr provided an update on the planning for the future Strategic customer engagement program and input was sought from CCRG members.</p> <p>Key comments and questions from the CCRG included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>future engagement should reference the customer priorities determined in Our Water Our Voice.</li> <li>has there been a budget set for the future engagement program? There is a need to clarify with IPART how much customer engagement is expected.</li> <li>how will the CCRG be involved in the procurement process for customer engagement suppliers?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Action:</b> Sydney Water to outline proposed approach for CCRG involvement in the procurement phase.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>engagement methodology needs to align to the engagement objectives.</li> <li>what are Sydney Water's expectations from CCRG members on being involved in future customer engagement program? What are the expected time requirements? Greater clarity is required.</li> <li>need to get value out of the customer engagement program. Reflect on lessons learnt and spend time engaging on the things that matter.</li> <li>there is a need to clarify the role of stakeholders as part of the customer engagement. Informed stakeholders can have greater time and understanding of the key issues than the general public.</li> </ul> <p>Sydney Water advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IPART do not need to approve specific budgets for customer engagement.</li> <li>If we target a higher IPART grading on future Price Proposal, then a higher budget may be required.</li> <li>IPART outline example principles for customer engagement but do not specify the extent of customer engagement required to support price proposals.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Action:</b> Sydney Water to outline the expected time requirements on CCRG members.</p>
10	<p><b>General Q&amp;A</b></p> <p>There were no further questions from CCRG members.</p>	
11	<p><b>Thanks, look-ahead to June meeting contents, meeting close</b></p> <p>The draft June agenda was discussed. Members reinforced their support for fewer agenda items with more time to discuss each item.</p> <p>A discussion on tenants was supported and inviting a guest speaker was suggested.</p> <p>Apologies for the June meeting was noted by Graham Turner and Ross Williams.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the CCRG members. Meeting closed at 1:10pm.</p>	<p><b>Action:</b> Further discussion on Customer Service Obligations (topic from the Feb 2025 CCRG meeting) to be considered as a separate out of session meeting.</p>