

Sydney Water Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG)

Independent Chair Annual Report November 2023 – November 2024

Committee name:	Sydney Water Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG)	Reporting period:	November 2023 to November 2024
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 second year of operations of the Sydney Water Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG), from November 2023 to November 2024. The report outlines the background to the CCRG and ways of working, membership, engagement, key issues addressed and the approach to developing a forward plan for 2025.

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](#)).

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 also applied to ways of working with the CCRG:

Principle 1: Diversity and inclusion

A diverse group of participants (Appendix 1) 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.

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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. (Appendix 2)

Principle 2: Engagement and interactivity

In order to operationalise the principle of engagement and interactivity, CCRG agendas (Appendix 3) 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. (Appendix 4)

Agendas make provision for participants to raise customer and community issues and concerns, for Sydney Water response (Appendix 5).

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.

(Appendix 5)

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.

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 1). 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 two members resigned for personal reasons and a replacement member was introduced.

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 Sydney Water Board Chair, Grant King, attended the August 2024 meeting in an observer capacity and responded to questions from participants.

The Sydney Water Managing Director, Roch Cheroux, has been present and participated at all but one CCRG meeting in the reporting period. Sydney Water Executive General Managers and General Managers also participate in CCRG meetings, including:

- Stuart Wallace - GM, Customer & Stakeholder Engagement (*every meeting*)
- Kathy Hourigan - GM, Customer Services (April 2024)
- Denisha Anbu - Executive GM Customer Experience (June 2024)
- Dean Page - Executive GM Finance Commercial & Digital (June, Aug, Sept and Nov 2024)

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 2024. These are outlined below:

Issue	Actions taken	Next steps
Issue 1: IPART Price Proposal	<p>With the 5 yearly Sydney Water IPART price proposal due for submission in September 2024, a key focus has been the proposal and customer and community engagement related to it. Members have been keen contributors and participants in this process.</p> <p>Members also worked <i>in camera</i> with the Chair to produce a letter for IPART regarding their involvement, lessons learned from the process and what they perceive as important areas for improvement (Appendix 6).</p>	<p>The MD and GM to keep members updated on progress with the submission and feedback regarding the price proposal at each meeting.</p>

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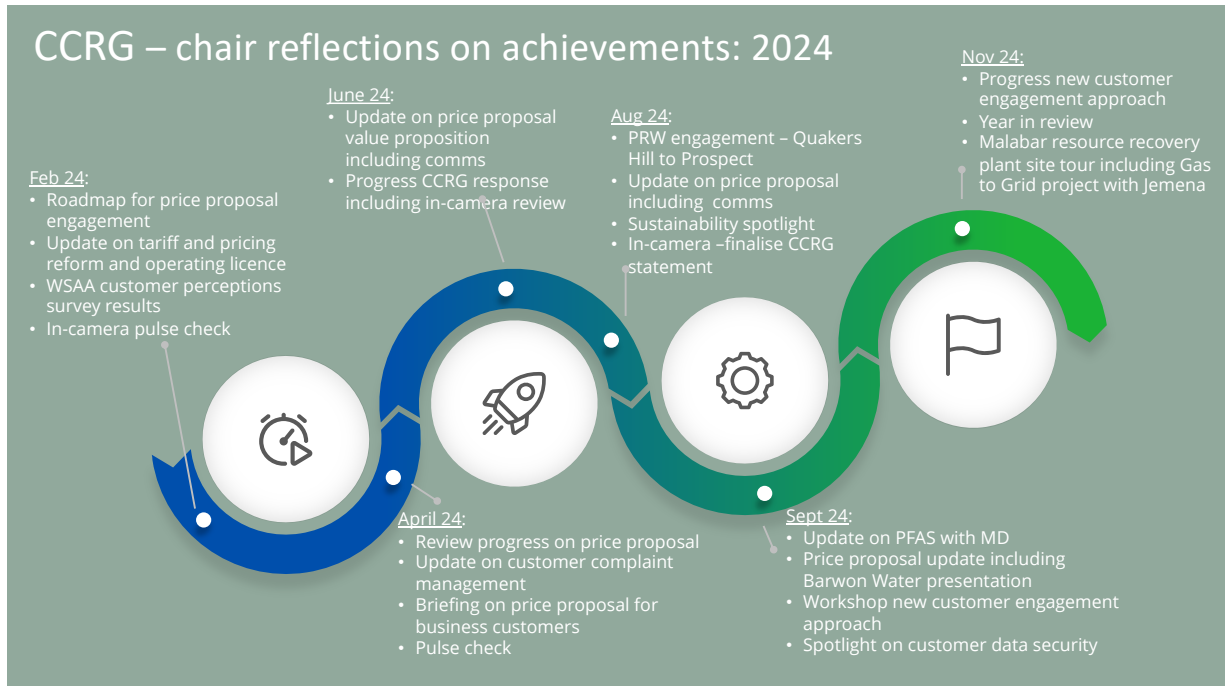
Issue	Actions taken	Next steps
Issue 2: Customer and community outreach	<p>The CCRG plays a particularly important role in providing advice to Sydney Water on customer and community engagement approaches and needs as well as communications strategies.</p> <p>Members provide information to Sydney Water 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>	<p>Community outreach is an ongoing matter and liaison will continue as a matter of course.</p>
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 issues such as water quality during flood events, purified recycled water opportunities and allegations regarding PFAS contamination.</p> <p>Members are kept abreast of business performance metrics.</p>	<p>Operations are an ongoing concern and members will continue to be kept informed on routine as well as emerging concerns.</p>

Flexibility in the bi-monthly agendas has enabled matters of interest to customer representatives to be presented (Appendix 5) or for emerging matters to be addressed. In this reporting period topics have included customer complaint management, sustainability initiatives and customer data security.

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

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External information, guest presenters and site visit:

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

<p>Water Services Association of Australia (WSAA) - Customer Perceptions Survey (Paper for noting, Feb 2024)</p> <p>The purpose of this paper was to inform the CCRG about the results of a Customer Perceptions survey conducted by WSAA for member water utility organisations, including Sydney Water. The paper outlined where Sydney Water performs strongly compared to other water utilities across the key metrics and areas where there is room for improvement. This information provided context to help the CCRG fulfil its function to “provide direct feedback on existing customer service delivery and emerging customer issues and make recommendations”.</p>
<p>Price Proposal quality assurance – discussion with Richard Cawley, Associate Director, Richardo Group (June 2024)</p> <p>Richard explained the quality assurance process/guidance he is providing for the Sydney Water IPART price proposal submission.</p>
<p>Barwon Water’s customer engagement journey – Presentation from Kate Vallence – Strategic Engagement and Sustainable Water Lead, Barwon Water, Victoria (September 2024)</p> <p>Kate provided a briefing on Barwon Water’s customer engagement journey for their 2018 and 2023 price submissions. Questions from CCRG members focused on Barwon Water’s engagement strategies regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CALD groups • Purified recycled water and desalination • Affordability in relation to older customers.
<p>Malabar Water Resource Recovery Plant Site Visit (November 2024)</p> <p>Site visit included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malabar Fence renewal project, highlighting work with local First Nations groups • Water Resource Recovery Facility (presentation and site tour)

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- Biomethane (Gas to Grid) plant – Joint project between Sydney Water and Jemena (presentation and site tour).

Board showcase:

The independent Chair was invited to present to the Board at their May 2024 meeting regarding key issues of concern to the CCRG. The presentation was informal and the Board asked that thanks be passed on to participants for their contributions.

6. Focus for the next 12 months

Forward plan

A schedule of bi-monthly meetings has been agreed for the forthcoming reporting period, viz:

Monday 24 February 2025

Monday 7 April 2025

Monday 2 June 2025

Monday 4 August 2025

Monday 29 September 2025

Monday 10 November 2025

A draft 'roadmap' of topics 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 2025.

Prepared by Independent Chair:	Abigail Goldberg
Date:	2 December 2024

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Appendices

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

Appendix 1 - Customer and Community Reference Group Membership

Appendix 2 - Examples of CCRG input informing business outcomes

Appendix 3 - CCRG Agenda Items

Appendix 4 - Sydney Water updates

Appendix 5 - CCRG member suggested topics and member updates

Appendix 6 - CCRG submission to IPART regarding the Price Proposal

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Appendix 1 - Customer and Community Reference Group Membership

#	CCRG Member	Member Organisation	Broad Customer Perspective
Chair	Abigail Goldberg	N/A - Independent Chair	Specialist chair, governance and engagement expert
1	Douglas McCloskey	Justice Equity Centre (previously Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC))	Financial hardship / social advocacy Expert consumer advocates for NSW households Engagement specialists
2	Graham Turner	Council on the Ageing (COTA)	Aged / disability
3	Steven Collins	N/A - Individual <i>Note: member resigned effective May 2024 due to a change in personal circumstances</i>	First Nations
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)	Property development
7	Anna Bacik	N/A - Individual	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	Inaara Jindani	N/A – Individual <i>Note: member resigned effective May 2024 due to a change in personal circumstances</i>	Young people Urban resilience Tenants
11	Narelle Brown	N/A - Individual	Customer advocacy and consumer financial management
12	Donna Rogers	Community Industry Group (CIG)	Community services and social justice (family, child, housing and homelessness) Regional - Illawarra
13	Mario Compart	N/A – Individual <i>From November 2024</i>	Young people Resident – Western Sydney Migrant and CALD background

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Appendix 2 - Examples of CCRG input informing business outcomes

CCRG subgroup:

CCRG involvement and feedback - Our Water Our Voice customer engagement	Change to business outcomes
<p>A sub-group of CCRG members were instrumental in advocating for the introduction of additional phases (5 and 6) and the approach to engagement in these phases. They were also heavily involved in the design of Phase 5 and Phase 6 of the program, to ensure that elements of best-practice customer engagement were incorporated into the approach.</p> <p>Specific involvement from the sub-group included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in Phase 5 and 6 Planning Day and Rehearsals ahead of Customer Panel • Reviewed and assisted in the design of customer engagement activities, stimulus and materials for Phase 5 and Phase 6 Deliberative Panel sessions • Observed Phase 5 and Phase 6 Customer Panel sessions (Nov 2023-Feb 2024) • Participated in and provided feedback on lessons learnt 	<p>Sydney Water considers that the customer engagement program evolved and improved through feedback from the CCRG. This included significant aspects of methodology, design of materials, structure of questions and frameworks to support deliberation (e.g. L-Scale, investment windows, fairness principles).</p> <p>In response to feedback from CCRG (and other stakeholders, including IPART and URA) Sydney Water significantly restructured the Phase 5 and Phase 6 Customer Engagement program.</p> <p>Feedback from lessons learnt is being incorporated into development of the next customer engagement program.</p>

CCRG overall:

Date	Item	CCRG Feedback	Change to business outcomes
Feb 2024	GM update	CCRG members emphasised the importance of targeting the media, government agencies and MPs to promote positive messages for PRW and to prepare the ground for community support.	Feedback from the CCRG was referred to the Water Literacy Working Group for inclusion in the stakeholder engagement plan.
Feb 2024	Tariff and Pricing Reform	The CCRG noted there are multiple ways to gain insights from broader stakeholders with greater understanding of the issues to represent the interests of customers. Members suggested that it is important to look at the public good for all customers and a broader set of informed stakeholders may be important to assist. May also be helpful to more formally include the CCRG as a consultative group.	Sydney Water are considering strengthening the CCRG's role in providing input to Sydney Water's strategic planning decisions and policy positions.
April 2024	Price proposal - Customer Engagement DRAFT Chapter	<p>Key themes of feedback were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positioning of the CCRG • Complexity of the customer engagement process • Strengths • Shortcomings, lessons learnt and opportunities for improvement • Balancing different customer's needs • Environmental focus • Future customers 	Sydney Water incorporated CCRG feedback into the Customer Engagement Chapter of the Price Proposal.

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Date	Item	CCRG Feedback	Change to business outcomes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key messages 	
April 2024	Price proposal - Customer Outcomes DRAFT Chapter	Key themes of feedback were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audience and language Applicability of measures Business customer needs Key messages Communication formats and channels 	Sydney Water incorporated CCRG feedback into the Customer Outcomes Chapter of the Price Proposal.
April 2024	Price proposal update for business customers – trade waste and backflow charges	CCRG members supported Sydney Water’s proposal for a user (pollutant) pays model for proposed changes to trade waste and backflow charges.	CCRG support for Sydney Water’s proposal for a user (pollutant) pays model for proposed changes to trade waste and backflow charges was noted in the final Price Proposal.
June 2024	Price Proposal – Customer Value Proposition	Draft material related to Sydney Water’s messaging for customers regarding the 2024 price proposal was presented to the CCRG. Feedback addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target audience Infographics 	Sydney Water incorporated CCRG feedback into the Executive summary for the price proposal, key messages and the Customer Facing summary of the Price Proposal.
Aug 2024	Sustainability workshop	The CCRG raised that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the ‘materiality’ topics presented were important and it was difficult to rank them as priorities. Further refinement needed before running this workshop activity with the Board. 	CCRG feedback was taken into consideration and influenced Sydney Water’s approach moving forward, e.g. electing to modify workshop materials prior to presentation to the Board.
Aug 2024	Sustainability spotlight	The concept of an Intergenerational Guardian was discussed with the CCRG. Key points raised by the CCRG included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The concept is worthwhile. The role of an intergenerational guardian doesn’t have to be an individual or the CCRG The term ‘Guardian’ may not be appropriate as it has other connotations Consider embedding intergenerational equity considerations into normal business planning and decision making. Need to balance the ‘now’ and ‘future’ in decision making. 	Feedback from the CCRG has influenced the way Sydney Water is talking about intergenerational equity, highlighting how this is a challenge for society in general, some of the good work Sydney Water have done to date and how this will assist in evolving intergenerational approaches.
Aug 2024	Securing our water supply, Quakers Hill to Prospect project: Purified Recycled Water (PRW) community engagement.	CCRG members feedback included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive support that Sydney Water are progressing PRW Key messages on PRW Laying the foundations that PRW will become a normal part of future water supply across Sydney. Potential for using trusted people/community leaders as PRW ambassadors and champions 	CCRG feedback has helped to shape the key messages being used in community advice about the proposed introduction of PRW. CCRG feedback on the Waterwrap article was noted and will be acted on in future messaging.

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Date	Item	CCRG Feedback	Change to business outcomes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to constantly educate and engage political leaders and future leaders. • Don't underestimate the community but continue education and engagement - the community are getting better at accepting change as they understand the impacts of climate change • Consider including a PRW article in Waterwrap • A number of CCRG members would like to be consulted further and/or be involved with aspects of the PRW community engagement program. 	Follow up discussions with CCRG members on PRW community engagement are planned for 2025
Aug 2024	Proposed approach to the Customer Facing Price Proposal	CCRG feedback included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight what it means for the customer • Explain the need up front • Outline what Sydney Water is going to deliver • Relevant title and language • Ensure graphics support the story • Customer representation 	Sydney Water incorporated CCRG feedback into the final Customer Facing Price Proposal including a one page infographic.
Sept 2024	Discussion and workshop - developing our new Customer Engagement approach	Feedback from the CCRG was collated into themes on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall approach to customer engagement • Demographics and groups • Methodologies • Topics for engagement • Closing the loop with customers • Procurement factors to consider • Other factors to take into account • What level and type of information should come to the CCRG 	Sydney Water is incorporating CCRG feedback into planning the new customer engagement approach.

Appendix 3 - CCRG Agenda Items

Date	CCRG Agenda Segments and Items			
	Customer Engagement	Price Proposal	Other	Governance
Feb 2024	Elevate Business Customer Experience update Our Water Our Voice Customer Engagement update	CCRG Engagement on Price Proposal – Roadmap Tariff and Pricing Reform Sydney Water’s Operating Licence – IPART’s Draft Operating Licence Package	Strategic Planning update Water Services Association of Australia - Customer Perceptions Survey	In camera - pulse check CCRG Charter - Annual Review
Apr 2024		Price proposal - Customer Engagement DRAFT Chapter Price proposal - Customer Outcomes DRAFT Chapter	Customer complaint management Optional session: IPART price proposal for business customers – trade waste and backflow charges	Pulse check
Jun 2024		Price proposal customer value proposition. Discussion with Richard Cawley on the quality assurance process/guidance regarding the Sydney Water Price Proposal Submission Close-the-loop - Revised Chapter 3 of the Price Proposal Draft price proposal materials for communication.		Member update In camera - approach for optional message from CCRG to IPART
Aug 2024	Securing our water supply, Quakers Hill to Prospect project: PRW community engagement	Proposed approach to the Customer Facing Price Proposal Sydney Water’s new Operating Licence 2024-28	Sustainability workshop - materiality assessment. Sustainability spotlight	In camera - finalise optional message from CCRG to IPART
Sept 2024	Barwon Water’s customer engagement journey. Developing Sydney Water’s new customer engagement approach – workshop	Price proposal update	Spotlight on customer data security	
Nov 2024	Developing our new customer engagement approach - overview of plan Overview of community engagement		Year in review Malabar Water Resource Recovery Plant overview and site tour (including fence renewal project and Biomethane - Gas to Grid project with Jemena)	

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Appendix 4: Sydney Water updates

Water quality and reliability updates

The CCRG were provided the following updates on water quality and reliability:

- Sydney Water's response to the severe rain/flooding event in April 2024. While assistance was provided to many customers and there was some damage to Sydney Water assets no major service interruptions to drinking water supply were experienced.
- Drinking Water Quality and PFAS
 - Information on PFAS was provided to the CCRG out of session via email
 - The Managing Director provided a comprehensive update on PFAS at the September 2024 meeting.
- During 2023 Sydney Water provided various updates to the CCRG on Purified Recycled Water as a future rainfall independent source of water. This included a site tour of the PRW demonstration plant in November 2023. In 2024, discussions on PRW continued with the following updates:
 - Purified Recycled Water Demonstration Plant recent media has been positive. Stakeholder visits to the Plant are continuing. (GM Update Feb 2024)
 - Parliamentary showcase event hosted by Sydney Water which included information on Purified Recycled Water, which was very well received and as a result is likely to be repeated later this year (GM Update April 2024)
 - Securing our water supply, Quakers Hill to Prospect project: The community consultation approach for Purified Recycled Water (PRW) initiatives (Paper for discussion Aug 2024)
 - CCRG members were invited to register to attend Sydney Water webinars on PRW held in Aug 2024

Regulatory updates

In addition to Price Proposal updates, the CCRG were provided the following regulatory updates:

- Sydney Water's Operating Licence – IPART's Draft Operating Licence Package (Paper for noting Feb 2024)
- Sydney Water's Operating Licence Review – Our new Operating Licence 2024-28 (Paper for noting Aug 2024)
- Mamre Rd Stormwater Scheme- IPART draft report (GM Update Sept 2024)

Performance updates

The CCRG was advised of the following performance reports:

- Water Service Association of Australia Customer Perceptions survey results conducted for member water utility organisations, including Sydney Water (Paper for noting, Feb 2024)
- Annual Report (MD Update, Feb 2024 and link provided out of session)
- Sydney Water Annual Environment Performance Report for 2022-2023 (GM Update and link provided out of session)

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Appendix 5: CCRG member suggested topics and member updates

Customer complaint management presentation (April 2024)

An overview of Sydney Water’s customer complaint management was provided. The CCRG noted that Sydney Water has:

- A low number of complaints
- An empowered frontline to resolve complaints
- A certified complaint management system which is externally audited. Sydney Water views complaints as an opportunity to review business processes and focus on improvements.

Two case studies were shared on complaints and how Sydney Water worked to resolve these issues.

Sustainability spotlight (August 2024)

An outline of Sydney Water’s **Net Zero Carbon plan** was shared with the CCRG which also included a **short video** on the approach.

Themes that were discussed based on member questions were:

- Need to mature understanding of supply chain carbon emissions and full lifecycle analysis
- Educating subcontractors and small businesses (as part of Sydney Water’s supply chain) to achieve net zero carbon emissions
- Supporting customers to be more water and energy efficient
- Additional tree planting for carbon offset and biodiversity
- Building in sustainability decisions as part of development of new land areas (e.g. pumping stations vs gravity distribution)
- Modern Slavery as part of Sydney Water’s sustainability goals.

The spotlight item also included a discussion on the concept of Intergenerational Guardians.

Customer data security (Sept 2024)

A presentation on Sydney Water’s approach to customer data security was provided followed by discussion with the CCRG.

Member updates

- Feb 2024 - Ross Williams provided an update on a meeting held between Sydney Water and the Local Government Association of NSW (LGNSW) on how the organisations can work together to improve the experience for Business Customers through sharing information on sustainability water use, development application processes and meeting the needs for a greener Sydney.
- June 2024 - Narelle Brown and Mary Karras provided feedback from the Our Water Our Voice customer engagement Lessons Learnt workshop, focusing on what worked well and areas for improvement.
- Aug 2024 - Mary Karras assisted Sydney Water to help bring a CALD perspective to brand strategy and direction discussions. She had also participated in a short video to support Sydney Water’s Australian Service Excellence Awards for Customer Service ‘Organisation of the Year’ application.

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Appendix 6 – CCRG submission to IPART regarding the Price Proposal

GoldbergBlaise

Abigail Goldberg et al Pty Ltd

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trading as GoldbergBlaise

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PO Box 1928
Bondi Junction
NSW 1355

2 September 2024

Dear IPART

Re: Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG) response to Sydney Water's Price Proposal 2025-30

As Independent Chair of the Sydney Water Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG), I write with the input of and on behalf of the group Members in response to Sydney Water's Price Proposal 2025-30 to IPART.

Sydney Water's CCRG serves as an independent voice to ensure that Sydney Water's strategic plans, investments, and regulatory submissions align with the long-term interests of customers and the community.

The CCRG provides external perspectives to help Sydney Water maintain an 'outside-in' view of its operations and plans, supports compliance with IPART's new regulatory framework, and contributes to the design and evaluation of customer engagement programs as part of broader business planning.

Throughout the process, the CCRG has gained a deeper understanding of the complex and changing environment in which Sydney Water operates. This includes the impact of floods, droughts and bushfires, population growth, ageing assets, and increasing regulatory obligations, as well as the efforts Sydney Water makes to keep prices for their essential services as affordable as possible. These challenges highlight the importance of robust, genuine engagement to determine the community values, priorities and preferences, and ensure Sydney Water has an understanding of how difficult decisions balancing complex priorities should be made.

The CCRG acknowledges Sydney Water's efforts in attempting to develop a price submission that seeks to address customer priorities. The CCRG began meeting in November 2022 – after the customer engagement process for the regulatory submission was already underway and before the IPART handbook was available. While the group was not able to influence the program from the outset, the CCRG actively provided input and advice during subsequent phases of the implementation of the engagement.

The CCRG was introduced to Sydney Water's engagement program- 'Our Water Our Voice' at the first meeting of the group. A subgroup was then formed and briefed on its objectives, methodology, and strategy. Throughout 2023 and into 2024, CCRG members reviewed engagement materials, observed customer sessions, and provided critical feedback, including on the consultation case studies used in phases 3 and 4. Importantly, CCRG critique and detailed feedback led to the introduction of an additional phase (phase 5) to address fundamental issues identified by the CCRG.

Other key areas where CCRG input led to improvements included:

- simplifying complex information, using an educational approach to explain key concepts, and the use of plain language focused on consumer needs
- promoting greater diversity and better representation of emerging communities
- suggestions for more effective engagement styles after concerns were raised about the skills of moderators, including consideration of a more deliberative approach

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- introduction of more support for community participants to understand and engage with some of the difficult trade-offs being considered.
- running rehearsals before engagement sessions, allowing for content refinement and better preparation
- improvements to reporting, ensuring reports became more detailed and useful for future phases over time.

Overall, the majority of CCRG members considered they had a material impact in shaping the delivery of Sydney Water's engagement, though some members desired a greater shift in methodology. and retained concerns regarding how some results could be treated.

In May 2024, following the final sessions in this iteration of 'Our Water, Our Voice', a workshop highlighted lessons learned through the group's 18-month involvement. Primarily, the CCRG acknowledged that Sydney Water showed a genuine willingness to engage with customers, but noted earlier input from them would have been beneficial, and that tight timelines for the group's responses sometimes hindered the engagement process, suggesting that more time for review and planning is needed.

The CCRG also recommended that future programs:

- understand the need to match appropriate engagement methods to different purposes, according to the nature of the issues under consideration and how results will be used
- enhance the capacity and capability of Sydney Water's customer engagement team and the organisational understanding of engagement
- expand the engagement base to ensure diverse perspectives are represented in decision-making, include those of new, emerging and CALD communities
- provide materials and sessions in preferred languages for smaller groups to improve understanding and participation
- retain a core group of interested customers for ongoing consultation, valuing their continuity and expertise in future discussions.

CCRG members believe that these lessons will help enhance future engagement processes, ensuring they are more robust, inclusive, responsive, and effective. Overall, the CCRG expressed respect and support for Sydney Water's demonstrating a willingness to respond to feedback and pivot their approach as necessary.

When reviewing Sydney Water's price proposal, the CCRG focused mainly on the Customer Engagement chapter, as per the group's mandate. CCRG members had diverse perspectives on the final submission due to their varied backgrounds and expertise. The technical complexity of some sections, such as tariff reform, made it difficult to reach a unanimous view on the proposal's benefits and reflection of community values and priorities. Therefore, a collective stance was presented where possible, and members may submit their own responses either on their own behalf or on behalf of a stakeholder group that they represent.

Please don't hesitate to be in contact should you wish to discuss the CCRG response further.

Yours sincerely, with the input of and on behalf of Members



Abigail Goldberg FAICD FPIA
Independent Chair, Customer and Community Reference Group, Sydney Water

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Appendix 1 - Customer and Community Reference Group Membership and Skills Matrix

#	CCRG member	Member organisation	Broad customer perspective
Chair	Abigail Goldberg	N/A - Independent Chair	N/A
1	Douglas McCloskey	Justice and Equity Centre (JEC, formerly Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC))	Expert consumer advocates for NSW households Engagement specialists
2	Graham Turner	Council on the Ageing (COTA)	Aged / Disability
3	Steven Collins	N/A - Individual <i>Note: member resigned effective May 2024 due to a change in personal circumstances</i>	First Nations
4	Ross Williams	Local Govt Association	Local Government / Council
5	Mary Karras	Ethnic Communities Council of NSW (ECCNSW)	Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities
6	Stephen McMahon	Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA)	Developers
7	Anna Bacik	N/A – Individual	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	Inaara Jindani	N/A – Individual <i>Note: member resigned effective May 2024 due to a change in personal circumstances</i>	Youth and urban resilience, tenant perspective
11	Narelle Brown	N/A – Individual	Customer advocacy and consumer financial management
12	Donna Rogers	Community Industry Group (CIG)	Community services and social justice (family, child, housing and homelessness). Regional - Illawarra