

PO Box 1928
Bondi Junction
NSW 1355

4 September 2023

Dear IPART

Re: Sydney Water Operating Licence Review 2023

As **Independent Chair** of the Sydney Water **Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG)**, I am pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the approach being taken to consulting with customers through this forum, and to provide a response to the IPART **Sydney Water Operating Licence Review 2023**.

APPROACH TO COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMER CONSULTATION THROUGH THE CCRG:

A number of **principles** are being applied to consultation through the CCRG:

Principle 1: Diversity and inclusion

A diverse group of participants have been selected to participate in the CCRG so as to represent the many, varied customers of Sydney Water. A range of factors including gender, age and cultural background informed the combination of participants, whose mini biographies are available online. Individuals as well as community groups are represented, including overall culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), First Nations, business, environmental and property developer representatives.

Care is taken at CCRG each meeting to enable each participant to contribute to the conversation and to provide opportunities for all participants to be included in activities whether through 'round the room' check-ins in addition to general Q&As or more structured arrangements for questions or mini-presentations to be developed ahead of time with the support of the Chair and Secretariat.

To date, both CCRG members and observers of our meetings have been struck by the diversity of participants, and commented on how this is reflected in the variety of views that are put forward at meetings.

Feedback from members to date is positive, as the testimonial below indicates:

"As a young woman with a minority cultural and religious background, the CCRG has shown me and the segments I represent an unwavering commitment to embrace diverse intergenerational perspectives within Sydney Water's operational and strategic endeavours."

Inaara Jindani, CCRG member, quote volunteered August 2023

(also refer CCRG minutes – available online)

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 customer engagement, and customer impacts of strategic and regulatory matters are put forward for discussion.

Agendas also make provision for participants to raise community issues and concerns for Sydney Water response, and papers to participants include prompts for discussion or questions, ensuring engagement and encouraging an interactive format where dialogue is encouraged.

To assist participants in managing the workload, papers are clearly marked as being either *'for discussion'* or *'for noting'*, helping CCRG members to focus their attention on key matters of the day.

Agendas are also deliberately varied, so that speakers alternate with panel discussions / small group work / video presentations or group forums, so that engagement and interaction is prioritised.

Feedback from members to date is supportive, as the testimonial below indicates:

"As a long-standing member of Sydney Water's Customer and Community Reference Group (CCRG), (previously known as the Customer Council,) I have had the privilege of being involved in a journey of transformation with Sydney Water.

Sydney Water has fine-tuned its processes and practices, to ensure its customers are at the centre of their work. As a member of the CCRG and CEO of a statewide peak body that represents multicultural communities, I commend Sydney Water for its extensive customer and community engagement, in particular its continuing efforts to undertake opportunities to listen to the voices of those customers from culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse communities."

Mary Karras, CEO Ethnic Communities Council of NSW and CCRG member, quote volunteered August 2023

(also refer CCRG minutes – available online)

Principle 3: Mutual education and sharing of information

A high level of 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 seeking 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.

Sydney Water has demonstrated that it is listening to CCRG input and that CCRG input has been applied to shape business materials ranging from community brochures to strategic plans.

Feedback from members to date confirms this approach, as the testimonial below indicates:

"As a consumer representative on the CCRG I have witnessed change and improvements taken up by Sydney Water, particularly for the cohort I represent, that is "low income and vulnerable consumers". Sydney Water has shown a willingness and respect for the CCRG's consultation and discussion for the benefit of consumers and stakeholders. The issues are complex and dealt with in a considerate manner, well led by the chair and are varied, complex and vital to the future sustainability of the water network."

Narelle Brown, CCRG member, quote volunteered August 2023

(also refer CCRG minutes – available online)

Principle 4: Rigour and structure

In addition to each agenda being carefully structured, specialised engagement techniques are applied at each meeting 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).

Other approaches that are applied include:

- **Creating a safe-space approach**, ranging from setting ground rules, to managing questions through the chair
- **AICD and other Board-style management approaches**, which relate to positioning participants around the table, ensuring all participants are engaged and take part discussions as well as Q&A
- **Engagement and feedback approaches**, including pulse checks and round-the-room feedback opportunities
- **Wellbeing approaches** that also improve concentration, such as stand-up breaks.

To date, engagement in the CCRG has been excellent, with very high levels of participation at each meeting and no drop-outs. Members arrive at meetings prepared for discussion, and with questions and queries ready to go. Q&A sessions are lively and interesting, with diverse points of view put forward and an open

approach to engagement that encourages all views and opinions rather than seeking consensus.

“In my role as a community representative, I've genuinely valued not only the structure of each meeting but also the way they are conducted. When you have a diverse group of voices at the table, there's always a risk of straying from the schedule, deviating from the main topics, or individuals not getting a chance to contribute effectively.

I've found it quite enjoyable to engage in discussions in a manner that feels safe and to witness the level of respect extended to everyone in the group, ensuring their viewpoints are both heard and comprehended. The chair has done an outstanding job in maintaining focus and preventing us from becoming overwhelmed with information, which is especially crucial for individuals like me who are new to and learning about the industry.”

Steven Collins, CCRG member, quote volunteered September 2023

(also refer CCRG minutes – available online)

RESPONSE TO SYDNEY WATER OPERATING LICENCE REVIEW 2023 ISSUES PAPER QUESTION:

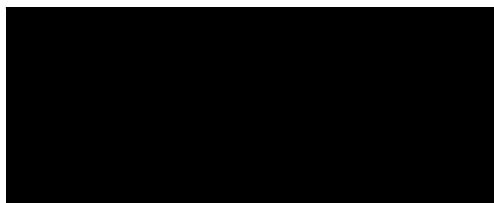
With regard to the Issues Paper question of

whether additional prescription is required for the Customer and Community Reference Group through the operating licence,

I would suggest as chair of the CCRG that as the group is operating highly effectively in its current format, and is able to provide input to Sydney Water as well as being responsive to the needs of participants, further prescription is not required.

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

Yours sincerely



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