



# CONSULTATIVE FORUM CHARTER

*caring  
for our  
community  
and the  
environment*

## 1 THE CHARTER

Hunter Water's Consultative Forum is an advisory body established in accordance with Section 5.4 of the Operating Licence. The Licence specifies a range of requirements relating to the operational framework of the Consultative Forum.

The Forum is a combination of organisations representing key community and environmental interests in the lower Hunter, as well as Hunter Water senior management. It has an important role in providing a direct link between Hunter Water and its customer base, and helping to build positive relationships with Lower Hunter communities.

The continuing aim of the Forum is to provide for two way communication between the community and Hunter Water's decision-makers, particularly on issues relevant to the performance of Hunter Water's obligations under its Operating Licence.

## 2 ROLE OF THE CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Section 5.4.1 of the Operating Licence requires that Hunter Water establish and regularly consult with a Consultative Forum to enable community involvement in issues relevant to the performance of Hunter Water's obligations under the Licence.

Section 5.4.2 of the Operating Licence states that:

*"The Consultative Forum may be utilised by Hunter Water, among other things, to provide it with high quality advice on the interest of Customers and Consumers of Hunter Water, on the Customer Contract and on such other key issues related to Hunter Water's planning and operations as Hunter Water may determine, consistent with the Consultative Forum Charter developed under clause 5.4.7."*

The Forum is intended to be an advisory body, whose role is to provide advice, feedback and assessment on appropriate matters.

The Forum will provide:

- 1 a means for achieving effective customer and community input into Hunter Water's decision-making processes in line with its obligations under the Operating Licence
- 2 a means for examining relevant matters by community representatives and Hunter Water management
- 3 opportunities for matters raised by community representatives to receive direct consideration and response from Hunter Water management
- 4 a means of facilitating and encouraging two-way communication between the representative groups and Hunter Water

## 3 MEMBERSHIP OF THE FORUM

In accordance with Section 5.4.6 of the Operating Licence, the Forum will include organisations representative of the following sections of the community:

- business and consumer groups
- organisations representing low income households
- people living in rural and urban fringe areas
- residential consumers
- environmental groups, including environmental education
- local government, and
- people from non-English speaking backgrounds

Individual members of the Forum are representatives of the member organisation which identified and nominated them. A member of the Forum may represent more than one section of the community specified above.

Membership of the Forum will be limited to a number that ensures the group remains workable and effective.

In addition to community representatives, the Forum will also include representatives of Hunter Water senior management.

## 4 MEMBERSHIP SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT CRITERIA

Members must be nominees of community organisations that fit into one or more of the sections of the community outlined above.

The appointed member organisation is responsible for nominating a representative to the Forum. Member organisations must be able to demonstrate:

- that the organisation is a formally constituted entity, with a reasonably sized membership
- appropriate established mechanisms to provide two-way feedback between Hunter Water and their respective organisations
- primary objectives directed towards promoting the interests of one or more of the nominated sections of the community
- direct links with one or more of the nominated sections of the community

- non-party political in nature
- non-profit-making characteristics

The member organisation should nominate a representative for the Forum who meets the following:

- an interest in water-related matters
- an ability to report the views of their represented organisation to Hunter Water
- an ability to give feedback from Forum meetings to their member organisation
- a commitment to work within the framework and philosophy of the Forum Charter

Hunter Water will determine the member organisations that represent the various sections of the community, as required under the Licence.

Member organisations will be chosen for appointment by a selection panel of Hunter Water senior management and Forum representatives, based on the selection criteria outlined above.

Hunter Water also reserves the right to alter the representation at any time during the member organisation's tenure.

The person who will represent each member organisation will be nominated by the organisation itself. The term of each representative's membership will be aligned to the organisation's own processes for terms of office. Replacement members will be selected by each respective organisation.

At least once each Licence period, Hunter Water will formally review the membership of the Forum. As part of this process, Hunter Water will consult with member organisations represented on the Forum seeking confirmation of the continuation of their representation and their existing nominee.

If a member's position on the Forum becomes vacant at any time, Hunter Water may request a replacement from the member organisation.

Where necessary, membership vacancies that may arise on the Forum from time to time will be advertised in a newspaper circulating in Hunter Water's area of operations. Approaches may also be made directly to relevant community organisations.

## 5 MEMBERSHIP PROTOCOLS

### 5.1 Hunter Water agrees to:

- provide the necessary agenda papers, presentations, field visits and corporate documentation to facilitate understanding and discussion of relevant matters

- provide a good mix of appropriate presentations from Hunter Water staff, Forum members and external persons
- provide active senior management participation in the Forum
- pass on any advice and recommendations from the Forum to relevant Hunter Water staff
- report on relevant projects and proposals (particularly in relation to key water and wastewater matters) and seek input from Forum Members
- encourage all Forum Members to present their views
- respond within agreed timeframes to requests for information
- support the effective operation of the Forum by providing the appropriate administrative and other resourcing
- help promote the Forum's existence and objectives to the broader community and Hunter Water employees
- encourage Forum discussion on continuous improvement of the process
- work within the framework of the Consultative Forum Charter

## 5.2 External Members agree to:

- attend meetings and actively participate in discussions
- report the views of their organisation to Hunter Water
- give feedback to their organisation on Forum matters
- suggest agenda items, in advance of the meeting where possible
- respect the position they hold with regard to access to information from Hunter Water, and not use this position in any way for personal gain.
- work within the framework of the Consultative Forum Charter.

## 6 NATURE OF MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE FORUM

The Forum will address matters relating to Hunter Water's performance, particularly in relation to its customer service and operational obligations under the Operating Licence, as appropriate from time to time. Appropriate matters raised by Forum Members will also be addressed.

The Forum's role in addressing such matters is advisory. It does not have a formal decision-making role or management responsibility.

Hunter Water will make every effort to ensure that the issues placed on the agenda will be limited to a number that will allow for appropriate levels of discussion. It will also endeavour to ensure that matters, particularly those of a technical nature, are presented in a suitable format to enable an informed discussion at Forum meetings.

## 7 CONFIDENTIALITY

From time to time, Forum Members may be given confidential material or information that relates to sensitive issues.

These materials are provided in good faith and Forum Members will ensure that confidentiality is maintained. Documents that are confidential will be marked accordingly.

## 8 ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

### 8.1 Frequency of Meetings

Forum meetings will be held quarterly – as a general rule in March, June, September and December.

### 8.2 Agenda and Minutes

All Forum members have the right to raise agenda items.

Minutes from the previous meeting, formal agendas and support materials will be forwarded to Forum Members at least one week prior to the meeting.

### 8.3 Chairperson and support

Hunter Water's Managing Director or his/her senior management nominee will chair each Forum meeting.

Forum Members will be provided with contact details for relevant Hunter Water management and support staff.

### 8.4 Resourcing the Forum

Hunter Water will provide the necessary resourcing to enable the Forum to function effectively, including:

- 8.4.1 A sitting fee aligned to the fee for "Advisory Boards and Committees" outlined in the

Premier's Guidelines for Government Boards and Committees (Memorandum No.99-3), as amended from time to time

- 8.4.2 Reimbursement of appropriate out-of-pocket expenses

- 8.4.3 Appropriate secretariat support will be provided by Hunter Water to the Forum to perform the following tasks:

- assembly of material for Forum meetings, including liaison with the Chairperson and Members to establish the agenda
- documentation of Forum meetings, monitoring and reporting of follow-up actions and responses to Matters Arising
- assisting the Forum to obtain information from different parts of Hunter Water
- co-ordination of reports of the Forum's activities
- reimbursement of members' out-of-pocket expenses and payment of sitting fees

## 9 COMMUNICATION OF OUTCOMES

Hunter Water will communicate outcomes from the Forum in the following ways:

- 9.1 Minutes from the previous Forum meeting will be published in the Open Board papers
- 9.2 A summary of the Forum's work for the previous year will be provided in Hunter Water's Annual Report
- 9.3 An outline of matters addressed at the previous Forum meeting will be provided to employees in their newsletter "*Backwash*" and to the wider community in the "*Aquorion*" newsletter.

Additionally, a copy of the Consultative Forum Charter will be placed on Hunter Water website and made available to interested members of the community through Hunter Water's Customer Centres, Public Affairs Unit or by mail.