



MEETING MINUTES

Committee name	Hunter Water Customer and Community Advisory Group (CCAG)
Date and time	Tuesday 9 April 2024 9.30am-12noon
Location	Hunter Water Head Office (and via MS Teams)

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cr Brian Adamthwaite	Lake Macquarie City Council (Chair)
Cr Karen Jackson	Cessnock City Council
Dr Craig Evans	University of Newcastle
Mr Graham Jones	Maitland Masonic Centre
Ms Linda Bowden	Save the Williams River Coalition
Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk	City of Newcastle
Mr David Beins	
Ms Jean McGarry	Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhoods Alliance
Cr Peter Francis	Port Stephens Council
Ms Sue Johns	National Seniors Association
Cr Sally Halliday	Maitland City Council
Mr Douglas McCloskey	Public Interest Advocacy Centre

APOLOGIES

Ms Thea Bray	Public Interest Advocacy Centre
Assoc Prof Troy Gaston	University of Newcastle
Mr Glenn Lyons	Local Land Services
Mayor John Connors	Dungog Shire Council
Ms Kerindy Clarke	(Resigned from CCAG)

IN ATTENDANCE

Darren Cleary	Managing Director
Declan Clausen	Group Manager Strategy & External Affairs
Emma Berry	Executive Manager, Strategy & Engagement
Laura Boland	Stakeholder and Government Relations Advisor (CCAG Secretary)
Duncan Rayward	Project Lead - Belmont Desalination

WELCOME

The Chair opened the meeting at 9.30 am and provided an Acknowledgment of Country.

Apologies were received and noted.

OVERVIEW OF AGENDA AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil conflicts of interest were declared.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The September 2023 meeting minutes were adopted as a true and correct record of the meeting (M: Mr David Beins, S: Peter Francis)

MANAGING DIRECTORS REPORT

Mr Darren Cleary, Managing Director

Mr Cleary presented the Managing Director's report to the CCAG, which included:

- Water storage outlook – storages are currently around 82%, which is healthy following summer.
- Toronto Wastewater Treatment Works upgrades reduce odour and protect the environment.
- Love Water grants have now closed, and Hunter Water (HW) is reviewing the applications. Grants of up to \$10,00 each will support community groups and organisations to implement water saving and sustainability initiatives.
- Significant efforts have been made in recent months to engage with community about the next pricing proposal (2025-2023). Mr Cleary noted the value in hearing from customers.
- Belmont Desalination Plant modification report has gone on public display in January and February 2024, and Hunter Water is now responding to community submissions.
- HW's work to reduce odours around the Newcastle West vent stack are complete.
- Seaham Weir upgrades included new gates to mimic the natural water flow regime, and promote fish movements for Australian species of fish.
- Australian Water Association Awards – HW had three projects nominated, including a project to rehabilitate a water main in Rutherford without digging up 500+ metres of pipe. This set a record for use of the new lining product.
- **National Performance Report (NPR) data 2022-23:**
 - Performance data is reported annually by 86 water service providers around the country, for 166 indicators.
 - Leaks increased by 24% in the HW network compared to the last period. This was due to a small number of large, hard-to-access breaks. Leaks are a challenge with aging infrastructure. The overarching trend continues to be favourable, and significant resources are being deployed to help reduce leaks and breaks.
 - The benchmarking report confirms that HW performed well for operating costs, handling complaints, water consumption and rectifying outages compared with its peers.
 - Data is available publicly via the Bureau of Meteorology's website

Mr Cleary's presentation is available on the CCAG website.

Members asked how HW differs to other utilities for leaks. Mr Cleary noted that more monitoring in the HW network due to the spread-out area of operation. Mr Cleary noted that HW is investing more in leak detection.

Members asked about private property jetting, and odours after rain in sewer. Mr Cleary noted that messages about not putting waste in the drain is getting through to community, and that odours are reported to the call centre by the community.

Customer complains were discussed, noting that 57% of 'complaints' to the call centre are due to cost-of-living pressures and requests for bill assistance.

Members asked if Love Water grants had increased in value. Mr Cleary said that overall grants had increased by \$30,000 this year. He agreed to take on notice options to increase the grants over time.

BELMONT DESALINATION PLANT – MODIFICATION PROPOSAL

Duncan Rayward, Project Lead Belmont Desalination Plant

Mr Rayward provided members with an overview of HW's modification proposal to construct a permanent desalination plant at Belmont. The plans were on public display in January to February 2024, and HW is now responding to 9 public submissions about the proposal. Mr Rayward provided technical design details about the ocean intake and outfall realignment, solar-ready capacity, increased site elevation, noise assessment, and increased traffic movements during the 3-year construction period.

Members were pleased to see the desalination plant proposal progressing.

Members questioned the duration of increased traffic movements. Mr Rayward indicated that it is likely to be highest over the three-month period in which fill material will be brought to site to raise the site level.

Members questioned the capacity for renewable energy at the desalination plant. Mr Rayward noted that the plant will be solar-ready, and that solar design elements will be part of a separate approval process. HW is committed to renewable energy use, and already has an agreement with AGL to provide 100% renewable energy from the energy market for existing assets. It is intended that HW will explore a similar agreement for the desalination plant, to supplement the onsite solar.

Mr Rayward noted that the team has also looked at other examples of desalination plant in the Gold Coast, Sydney and Melbourne.

Ms Berry noted that desalination plant will operate at a base level continuously, but will ramp-up during period of low dam levels. The plant needs continuous operation or it risks a two-year re-start period.

Mr Rayward's presentation is available on the CCAG website. Further information about the desalination plant is available at: www.hunterwater.com.au/haveyoursay/desalination

STAGE 3 PRICING PROPOSAL OUTCOMES

Emma Berry, Executive Manager Strategy and Engagement

Ms Berry provided an update on the outcomes of recent community engagement to inform HW's 2025-30 pricing proposal. The presentation included an overview of the stages involved in developing the pricing proposal, having just completed (phase 3) deliberative forums with a community panel.

The community panel were asked to deliberate on how they'd like to invest a portion of their future bill to help address a range of issues such as carbon reduction, water conservation, and fixing hotspots of low pressure and wastewater overflows.

Ms Berry noted the difficulty in attracting younger age groups to the forums despite considerable effort to engage.

CCAG members discussed wider community attitudes towards recycled water, noting that different groups and age groups tend to show differing opinions on how they would prioritise recycled water as a water conservation option.

A copy of Ms Berry's presentation is available on the CCAG website. Further details about the pricing proposal is provided on the HW website: [Shaping our water future - 2025-2030 Price Proposal - Hunter Water](#)

GENERAL BUSINESS & QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers to questions previously submitted on notice by Linda Bowden were answered in writing in the April agenda, which is available on the CCAG web page.

A question previously taken on notice regarding barbeque facilities at Grahamstown Dam was held over until the next meeting.

Members were interested to hear a future presentation about potable recycled water.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 18 June 2024.

