



MEETING MINUTES

Committee name	Hunter Water Customer and Community Advisory Group (CCAG)
Date and time	Tuesday 28 February 2023 9.30am-12noon
Location	In person at Hunter Water's boardroom, and via MS Teams online

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cr Brian Adamthwaite	Lake Macquarie City Council (Chair)
Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk	City of Newcastle
Mayor John Connors	Dungog Shire Council
Ms Linda Bowden	Save the Williams River Coalition
Cr Peter Francis	Port Stephens Council
A/Prof Troy Gaston	University of Newcastle
Mr Graham Jones	Maitland Masonic Hall
Cr Sally Halliday	Maitland City Council
Ms Jean McGarry	Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhoods Alliance
Mr Douglas McCloskey	Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC)

APOLOGIES

Mr Bill Lennox	Maitland Masonic Hall (represented by Mr Graham Jones)
Ms Sue Johns	National Seniors Association
Mr David Beins	

IN ATTENDANCE

Darren Cleary	Managing Director
Kylie Bennett	Team Leader Customer Assistance
Matt Hingston	Executive Manager Customer Services
Mr David Derkenne	A/Executive Manager Strategy and Engagement
Ms Emma Turner	Senior Economist
Dr Clare Hogue	Senior Community Engagement Advisor
Declan Clausen	Executive Officer (CCAG Secretary)

WELCOME

The Chair opened the meeting at 9.35am, and provided an Acknowledgment of Country.

Apologies were noted, and Mr Graham Jones welcomed to the meeting representing Mr Bill Lennox and the Maitland Masonic Hall.

The CCAG noted the resignation of Ms Sue Hirsch from the CCAG, as she had moved away from the Hunter Water area. The Committee expressed its best wishes and thanks to Ms Hirsch for her contribution to the CCAG.

OVERVIEW OF AGENDA AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil conflicts of interest were declared.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The December 2022 meeting minutes were adopted as a true and correct record of the meeting (M: Cr Halliday, S: Ms Bowden)

Actions arising from the minutes: discussion regarding the production of hydrogen and use of drinking water. Mr Cleary advised that many of the discussions with hydrogen industry proponents related to the use of recycled water, rather than potable water. Further updates to be provided to the CCAG.

MANAGING DIRECTORS REPORT

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

- Water storages update: dams are currently full. While Newcastle and the lower Hunter Valley have been dry in recent months, regular rainfall has continued in the catchments. Hunter Water forecasting that dams will remain in a strong position over coming period.
- Corporate scorecard: Hunter Water continues to perform well against its targets for the 2022-23 year. Changing methodology for measuring corporate reputation by introducing a new online survey. Reduction in Non-Revenue Water below target, as a result of several large breaks within recent months.
- Continued implementation of the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan, including progress with Belmont Desalination and Glennies to Lostock investigations with Water Infrastructure NSW
- 15 yearly routine dam safety review: major review underway for both Chichester and Grahamstown Dam, consistent with Hunter Water's responsibilities as a registered dam owner. Assessing dam performance in rare and low likelihood events. Action: further updates to be provided to the Committee as investigations continue.
- Love Water Grants: grants currently open for application. CCAG members were encouraged to share details of the grant programs within their networks.

CCAG members discussed the Managing Director's report, and several questions were raised, including how the Glennies-Lostock scheme would likely work.

Slides from Mr Cleary's report are attached to these minutes.

NATIONAL PERFORMANCE REPORT RESULTS

Mr Cleary presented on Hunter Water's performance in the National Performance Report (NPR) facilitated by the Commonwealth Government. Hunter Water continues to perform strongly when compared with its peers:

- Water bills: average Hunter Water bills remain below national average
- Residential water usage: continues to decline, and is below the national average
- Leakage reduction: significant inroads have been made to reduce network leakage. Hunter Water continues to have an aggressive target to reduce leakage to 50L per property per day.
- Complaints: continued decline in complaints, in part following introduction of a new billing system and Hunter Water's focus on customer experience

Members commended Hunter Water on the improvements, especially with respect to leakage.

Slides from the NPR report are attached to these minutes.

STRATEGIC PRESENTATIONS: SURVEY AND MEMBER DISCUSSION – FEEDBACK ON OPERATION OF CCAG

Mr Cleary introduced the CCAG survey, and explained that Hunter Water has an Operating Licence obligation to review its Community Consultation Procedure before 1 July 2023, which includes the role and operation of the CCAG.

Mr Cleary reiterated the value the CCAG provides, and the opportunity to refine the forum to provide the best value to both Hunter Water and, importantly, to members.

Mr Clausen presented on the results of the CCAG survey. Members discussed the findings, including utilising the CCAG to receive presentations from external parties, with insights relevant to the topics discussed.

The survey results are attached to these minutes. Members were encouraged to provide additional feedback on the operation of the CCAG to the Chair or Secretary.

Slides from the survey report are attached to these minutes.

CUSTOMERS AT THE HEART

Mr Hingston, Ms Bennett and Ms McEntyre provided the CCAG with an update on Hunter Water's Customer Experience work, including efforts to understand Hunter Water's customers and experiences, and supporting customers experiencing vulnerability.

The comprehensive work has helped to map customer experience engaging with Hunter Water, and the various touchpoints for different members of our communities.

Ms Bennett provided an overview of her team's work to support customers experiencing hardship and vulnerability.

Members discussed the findings including the impact of the cost of living on Hunter Water's services, how Hunter Water triages engagement to correct subject matter experts, and the work to develop easy English accessibility of key documents, including bills and website.

Members discussed how Hunter Water works with other support agencies, and local government, to promote engagement.

Slides from the customers at the heart presentation are attached to these minutes.

Electronic copies of Hunter Water's Easy English documents are available to download here: <https://www.hunterwater.com.au/home-and-business/managing-your-account/easy-english-documents>

PRICING PROPOSAL AND REGULATORY UPDATE

Mr Derkenne, Ms Turner and Dr Hogue provided an update to the CCAG on Hunter Water's pricing proposal, including changes to the regulatory model. New prices will apply for the 5-year period commencing 1 July 2025. The presentation reported on the findings of the stage 1 community engagement. Stage 2 is currently underway, and updates will be provided to the CCAG.

There was discussion as to the way Hunter Water prices are calculated, and the costs associated with the IPART pricing process.

Dr Hogue advised that Hunter Water would be establishing an engagement expert panel to assist in overseeing the community engagement for the price submission. It is proposed that this panel would engage with the CCAG at key junctures. It is intended that the CCAG will receive an update on the pricing proposal at each meeting.

Slides from the pricing proposal presentation are attached to these minutes.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Nil items of general business were discussed.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Mr Beins had raised a question on notice regarding the Voice referendum. Discussion was held over until the next meeting to enable Mr Beins to participate. A copy of the question and response is below.

Q: Will Hunter Water publicly advocate for the YES vote in the Voice referendum?

A: Hunter Water supports and is committed to reconciliation with First Nations people. We are on our own reconciliation journey, currently implementing our [Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan \(RAP\)](#). Our second RAP includes a range of actions to support meaningful reconciliation, including increasing our First Nations supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes. We are currently working with Adam Goodes and the Indigenous Defence and Infrastructure Consortium (iDiC) to develop our First Nations Procurement Strategy.

The Voice is an important constitutional step towards reconciliation, and has been supported by both the Commonwealth and [NSW](#) Governments.

As a State Owned Corporation, it is important that Hunter Water remains politically neutral, and it wouldn't be appropriate for us to directly advocate in the referendum campaign. We will certainly continue to share the positive experiences of our reconciliation journey, and the value it is providing to our organisation, customers and communities.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

TBC – the Chair advised that he was unable to attend on 30 May 2023. Hunter Water to work with members on an alternate meeting date.

MEETING CLOSE

11.48am.