

# 2024 Pricing Proposal Engagement

## STAGE 1 SUMMARY REPORT



We're asking our customers and community to help shape our water and wastewater services to the end of the decade, so that we can make sure that we continue to meet your needs and deliver value.

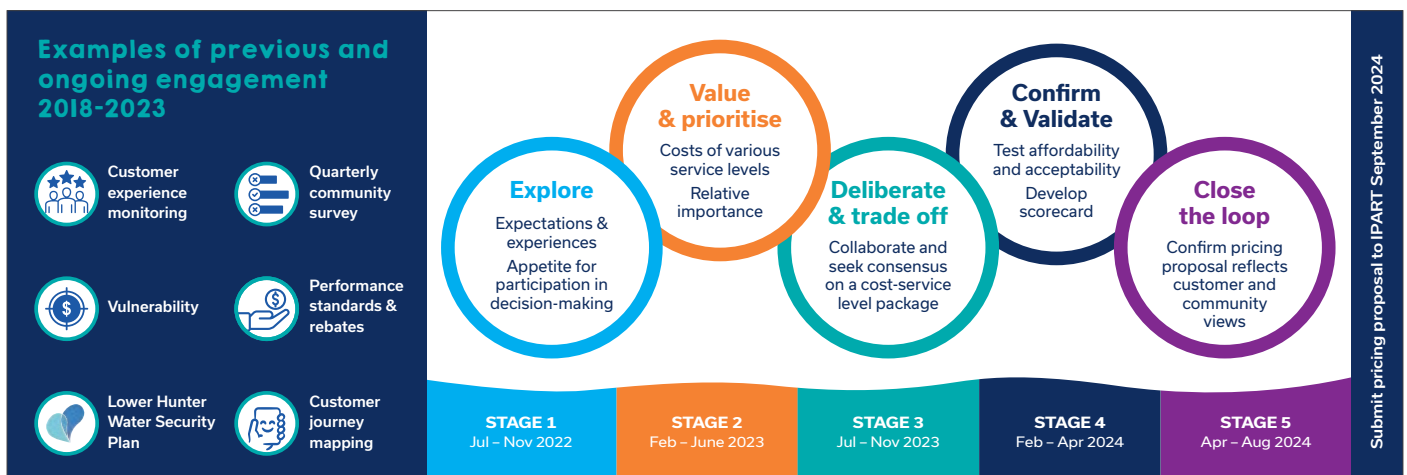
We have started a multi-stage engagement program with our customers, community and stakeholders to help inform decision making and shape our pricing proposal to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) that will be submitted in September 2024.

### What happens in a price review



### Engagement timeline

Each stage of our engagement is designed to deepen our understanding of what's important to you and what your priorities are. We started by taking a deep dive into the insights our customers and community have been providing us through our recent and ongoing engagement activities.



## What we did in Stage I

Our engagement has been broad and deep. We heard from about 900 customers, community members, stakeholders and customer representatives through online workshops, focus groups, surveys and in-depth interviews between July and November 2022. We focused on understanding the experiences our customers and community value, their concerns, and expectations.



## Online community 'listening post' workshops

We conducted a series of listening post workshops, one for each of the LGAs in our area of operations (Newcastle, Maitland, Port Stephens, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock and Dungog). The purpose of these sessions was to understand the interests, concerns and priorities of Hunter Water customers from across the service region. We wanted to understand their values and what experiences embody those values.



Participants were asked to describe experiences where Hunter Water has delighted them and disappointed them in the past, as well as the kinds of things they expect from us now and by 2030.

### When has Hunter Water delighted you?

*Getting the invite to these community forums. Great that HWC takes the time and effort to listen to the community.*

- LISTENING POST PARTICIPANT

The results highlight that the same experiences were likely to delight (if done well) or disappoint (if done poorly). In particular:

-  Fast or slow response to interruptions and service faults
-  Billing support (eBills, informative bills, support for customers struggling to pay) as a delight vs billing and payment issues/high cost of bills as a disappointment
-  Frontline customer contact centres were more likely to delight (responsive, knowledgeable, local) than disappoint (slow response to queries, information hard to find).

## The top five expectations of Hunter Water related to:

-  Providing a reliable, efficient service through maintaining and improving infrastructure
-  Providing high quality, safe drinking water
-  Ensuring future water security, including recycling and water conservation
-  Fair and affordable bills
-  Water literacy

## I expect Hunter Water to:

*Make it easy for me to budget for, and pay my water bills.*

- LISTENING POST PARTICIPANT

Looking towards 2030, ensuring future water security and stabilising bills remain top priorities. Participants would also like improved online user experiences (e.g. apps to monitor water usage in real time and alerts for high usage) and a greater focus on environmental sustainability.

## Levels of participation desired on investment decision making

To help us make the next stage of engagement meaningful, we wanted to understand the level of influence customers desired over the issues that mattered most to them. By asking about what level of participation people want in decision making across a range of potential issues and investments, we have started to build a picture of what services and products our customers value and need.

Three different tools were used to cross-check community sentiment.

A series of focus groups were conducted with different demographic groups to understand how different types of customers view their role in making decisions that will have an impact on bills.

An additional focus group was conducted with members of Hunter Water's Customer and Community Advisory Group.

**HUNTER WATER'S CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP (CCAG) PROVIDES A CHANNEL FOR ADVICE AND FEEDBACK BETWEEN HUNTER WATER AND LOCAL COUNCILS, CUSTOMER REPRESENTATIVES, ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS.**

In-depth interviews were conducted with peak body representatives and advocacy groups and we included questions in our quarterly community survey in August and November.

Insights from the focus groups, surveys and in-depth interviews indicate that:



There is an expectation that Hunter Water delivers a wide range of customer and community experiences



Customer concerns and expectations are not necessarily more important than affordability



Financial stress from cost of living increases is causing concern about what it might mean if water prices rise



The level of participation expected on issues is varied across our community.

## I expect Hunter Water to:

*Continue to listen to customers using whatever means are suitable e.g. activities like tonight and those that have been happening since 2018. It's really important to have conversations with the people who use their services.*

- LISTENING POST PARTICIPANT

**WE HEARD IN OUR FIRST STAGE OF ENGAGEMENT THAT YOU EXPECT US TO BE EFFICIENT, AND TO DELIVER OUR SERVICES IN A MANNER THAT SEEKS TO MINIMISE THE PRESSURE ON OUR CUSTOMERS' BILLS, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.**



## Next steps

In the next stage of engagement (stage 2) we will seek insights into our customers' and community's relative priorities and how they would like various experiences and issues addressed.

Thanks to everyone who participated in stage 1. To stay up to date and register to get involved in upcoming engagement activities as an individual, or on behalf of a business as an owner or manager visit:

[hunterwater.com.au/haveyoursay/2025-2030-price-submission](https://hunterwater.com.au/haveyoursay/2025-2030-price-submission)