



Customer Reference Group meeting summary

Time: 11:00am – 12:30pm, Friday 23 May 2025

Location: Moondarra Room, Traralgon

Tour: - Nil

Attendees

Customer Reference Group (CRG) members:

- Diane Wilkinson (Chair)
- Simon Ortega
- Desley Gray
- Olivia Brewer
- Tania Brown
- Adam Tyson

Gippsland Water staff:

- Shannon Dwyer, Senior Environment and Sustainability Lead
- Catherine Couling, Strategic Planning and Resources Engineer
- Celeste Briggs-Wilson, Project Comms and Engagement Lead
- Katrina Coulson, Manager Communications and Engagement
- Emma Lewis, Senior Communications and Engagement Lead

Apologies

- Rob Gaulton, CRG
- Suzie Lewis, CRG
- Sarah Cumming, Managing Director
- Michael Crane, General Manager People and Customer
- Leanne Williams, Chief Financial Officer

Items for discussion

1. Welcome – Diane Wilkinson
2. Hazel Creek engagement
3. Baw Baw Shire Wastewater Treatment Plant Odour Buffers update
4. Community Report
5. Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy update
6. Other business



Safety and wellbeing



Customer focussed



Innovation



Accountability



Collaboration



Integrity and respect

Item 1. Welcome

The meeting commenced with an Acknowledgement of Country and welcome from Diane Wilkinson (CRG Chair).

Item 2. Hazel Creek engagement

Shannon Dwyer and Emma Lewis

Shannon informed the group that as Warragul is growing, so is the demand for our services. We need to increase the capacity of Warragul's wastewater treatment plant to meet the community's needs into the future.

To upgrade the plant, we'll need to upgrade our EPA licence. This is because treated wastewater is returned to the environment via Hazel Creek, a process that has strict EPA requirements.

As part of the licence requirements, we need to understand how our community uses and values Hazel Creek. We reached out to our community to get these insights. Emma provided a summary of the engagement that was undertaken.

Our customer survey was promoted through letters to residents who bordered the creek, a stall at the Warragul Farmers Market, social media posts, a story in the Warragul and Drouin Gazette and coverage on ABC Gippsland radio. We received 119 responses to the survey.

Our community engagement found that participants value healthy waterways where wildlife thrive and people can enjoy activities like walking, fishing, bird watching and generally being in nature.

Community members want to know that returning treated wastewater to the creek is safe - for people, aquatic life, birds, animals and the environment.

The community would also like to see more care for the creek, particularly upstream of the Warragul wastewater treatment plant.

These findings were supported by an additional engagement workshop with local agency representatives, who shared values of the creek from the perspectives of the participants, the communities they work with and the organisations they represent.

The CRG members were very engaged in the discussion, and were interested to learn more about:

- What condition the treated wastewater in when it is returned to the creek
- What volume of water is being returned to the creek, including the percentage compared to natural flow
- What options could be explored for reusing the water, rather than returning the treated wastewater to the creek, and how viable these options could be
- Costs involved in seeking consultants to provide research and advice to support the licence request

The group thanked Shannon for the update and discussion and look forward to seeing the project progress.

Item 3. Baw Baw Shire Wastewater Treatment Plant Odour Buffers update

Catherine Couling

Catherine provided an update on the planning scheme controls for odours related to wastewater treatment plants in Baw Baw Shire.

She noted that even with good technology and practices there are times when odour, noise and dust may go beyond our sites. There may be costs incurred by property owners or our business if sensitive neighbouring properties are impacted. This could be expensive for our customers.

In August 2024, the new EPA Separation Distance Guideline was published. These updated guidelines provide clarification about conditions where separation distances apply, changes to the process for justifying separation distances, and clarity around the use of the term 'sensitive land use'.

Catherine informed the group that we've taken time to review the updated guidelines and considered what this means for our wastewater sites in Baw Baw Shire.

In planning for our Warragul wastewater treatment plant upgrades we'll include scope to complete odour studies and reassess our need for a planning scheme control. Following this assessment, we'll decide if we should go ahead with planning scheme controls for Warragul, and subsequent odour assessments for Drouin and Neerim South.

CRG members discussed:

- How measurements of the amount of odour in the air can be made
- Any alternative options for the plant, such as moving it beyond the town boundary, and how viable this would be with the impact to customer bills

The group were pleased with the update received.

Item 4. Community Report

Emma Lewis

Emma announced that our latest community report has been released on our website. The report is designed to share how we're tracking against our customer commitments in an engaging, accessible and transparent way.

Customers can view the results or download a copy of the report at www.gippswater.com.au/community-reports

Item 6. Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy

Emma Lewis

Emma updated the CRG on our Price Submission, and shared that we're starting early and aiming high.

We're committed to enabling customers to have a genuine influence on our decisions, and we're keen to combine our engagement for Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy.



Our first piece of work will be co-designing our engagement strategy with both internal and external stakeholders. Emma informed the group that the next meeting scheduled for late 2025 is planned to be a co-design workshop.

The CRG took an action to think about the kinds of representation they believe should be considered in our engagement, and how we can best engage with our customers. These thoughts will be shared at the co-design workshop in late 2025.

Item 5. Other business

Diane requested more site visits for new CRG members (particularly water and wastewater treatment sites).

Diane also shared with the group that Suzanne Lewis has resigned from her position in the CRG. The group wished her the best of luck on her retirement and thanked her for the valuable contributions she's made to the work of the CRG.

The meeting was closed at 12.15pm.

Next meeting

November/December 2025. Further details to be advised.

