



Customer Reference Group meeting summary	
Time: 10.30am – 12.30pm 6 March 2026	
Location: Moondarra Room, Traralgon	
Attendees	<p>Customer Reference Group (CRG) members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diane Wilkinson (Chair) - Simon Ortega - Olivia Brewer - Tania Brown <p>Gippsland Water staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sarah Cumming, Managing Director - Michael Crane, General Manager People and Customer - Katrina Coulson, Manager Communications and Engagement - Emma Lewis, Senior Communications and Engagement Lead - Annelise Answerth, Senior Corporate Affairs Lead - Tracey Jones, Regulatory and Corporate Planning Lead - Natalie Laugeni, Communications and Engagement Advisor <p>Gippsland Water Board of Directors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tom Mollenkopf, Chair <p>Critical friends representative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jo Benvenuti
Apologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adam Tyson, CRG - Desley Gray, CRG - Rob Gaulton, CRG - Laurie Marks, Board Committee Independent Aboriginal Delegate - Trudy Hodgson, Manager Strategy and Transformation

Items for discussion

1. **Price Submission 2023-28: Mid-point performance review**
Update on how we are currently performing against commitments to customers
2. **Price Submission 2028-33 and Urban Water Strategy: Communications and engagement update**
 - Strategic engagement plan
 - Issues for engagement
 - Internal and external activation
 - Key engagement milestones for 2026.



Safety and wellbeing



Customer focussed



Innovation



Accountability



Collaboration



Integrity and respect

Welcome

Diane Wilkinson opened the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country. Board Chair, Tom Mollenkopf, thanked the CRG for their ongoing commitment to Gippsland Water and encouraged members to continue offering honest, diverse perspectives on community issues.

Item 1: 2023 Price Submission: Mid-point performance review (July 2023 to December 2025)

Tracey Jones shared a mid-point review on how we are performing against commitments made in our 2023-28 Price Submission.

Outcome 1: Be Affordable and Fair

Overall status: Mostly on track (green light indicators), with Customer Outcomes and Outputs rated amber for 2024–25.

Performance notes:

- Commitments to customers are largely being met.
- Cost-of-living pressures continue to affect customers.
- A new customer app will launch soon to help customers manage water use and billing.
- Lower-than-expected growth in new connections is increasing cost-to-serve pressures.
- 69% of customers believe we provide value for money.

Discussion:

- New connections: Numbers are beginning to recover but remain around 1,200 below expectations.
- Risk mitigation actions implemented:
 - Reviewed controllable expenditure.
 - Renegotiated outsourced contracts for efficiency and value.
 - Ensured major customers contribute appropriately through revenue negotiations.
 - Continued disciplined capital expenditure planning.
 - Continue with an enterprise approach to managing operational expenditure.

Outcome 2: Do Your Job Well

Overall status: Mostly green, with one red indicator for 2024–25.

Performance notes:

- Output Overall Performance: Rated red due to sewer spill response (96% vs 100% target; average rectification time 97.44 minutes).
 - Field Services teams have worked to reduce response times.
- Improvement in customer perceptions of being kept informed during service interruptions.

Discussion:

- CRG members acknowledged that some performance measures involve a very small sample size (e.g. one or two customers), which can influence results.

Outcome 3 – Be easy to deal with

Overall status: All indicators were green.

Performance notes:

- In 2025–26, 98% of surveyed customers agreed that we're easy to deal with.
- Work is underway to expand SMS notifications to include planned wastewater outages.



- AI translation services for the website are being reconsidered to ensure this is the best solution. Key webpages have been translated into the six most common languages in the region.

Outcome 4 – Environmentally responsible

Overall status: Output Overall Performance was amber in 2023–24 but returned to green in 2025–26.

Performance notes:

- We transitioned to 100% renewable electricity in July 2025. Progress continues toward net zero emissions by 2030.
- We engaged customers about what action to take to address our amber result. 77% of customers backed planting of 10,000 trees. This action is now underway.

Outcome 5 – Be involved

Overall status: All indicators were green.

Performance notes:

- We've increased our community initiatives, including education campaigns and presence at local events.
- 68% of customers recognised us as a valued local member of the community.

Outcome 6 - Plan for the future

Overall status: Customer promises and actions have been on-track over the last 2.5 year. This includes delivery of our top 10 capital projects, securing strategic land for future infrastructure projects, and development of our Urban Water Strategy. However, the output performance measure has been red or amber across the reporting period. This measure is currently based on customer perception: Customers who believe we plan for the future (rating 'yes' in our annual customer satisfaction survey)

Performance notes:

- We regularly share information about how we plan for the future, including infrastructure upgrades and long-term investments.
- Only 2% of customers believe the organisation does not plan for the future, while the majority responded with "don't know," indicating low awareness rather than negative sentiment.

Discussion:

- The group commented that it is difficult to change this perception unless customers are experiencing issues or concerned about water (e.g. water restrictions).
- The group reflected on whether this is a useful performance measure – is perception of planning as important as actual planning? This will be considered through the Price Submission 2028 process.

Financial performance

We've worked hard to find additional operational cost savings. Forecast \$1.5M lower than predicted despite experiencing lower than forecast connections growth.

Operating expenditure

We're within our benchmark allowance. Slight increase due to increased reinstatement costs (e.g. repairing nature strip, driveways roundabouts etc). Prescribed operating expenditures 1.28% or \$3.15M above price submission.



Liv asked what was driving reinstatement costs and if this could be reduced. Response: ageing infrastructure and dry weather can lead to more breaks. Customer Charter requires us to reinstate properties to pre-repair conditions. Our reinstatement contract was negotiated with a new supplier.

Capital expenditure

Net capital expenditure 9.7% or \$28.9M above price submission. We're progressing well with delivering our top ten projects. We've received government funding for two capital projects. Increased expenditure due to pipe material costs, flora and fauna considerations for Saline Wastewater Outfall Pipeline and Gippsland Water Factory anaerobic reactor cover replacements.

Item 2; Price Submission 2028-33 and Urban Water Strategy: Communications and engagement update

Strategic engagement plan

Diane welcomed Jo to the meeting. Emma thanked Jo and the CRG for the role they have played as critical friends in co-designing the engagement strategy and issues for the next Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy.

Emma highlighted the completed Strategic Engagement Plan, Planning for the future. This reflects feedback from the co-design process.

Issues for engagement

Confirmed key areas to explore with customers:

1. Affordability + fairness
2. Service standards
3. Environmental investment (new)
4. Digital metering
5. Urban Water Strategy
6. Community value + partnerships.

Removed:

- Asset resilience
- Technology, data + AI.

Discussion:

- The list may change as topics are explored internally, or new topics emerge.
- Diane mentioned that, while an important consideration, the wording 'environmental investment' may be polarising given the different perspectives within the community.
- Jo suggested technology, data and AI may continue to be a consideration within other issues, if not a standalone topic, and it will be important to consider customer views on this.

Internal and external activation

We're closing the loop with those who helped co-design our engagement plan:

- Internal subject matter experts
- CRG
- Critical friends
- Sophisticated stakeholders

We'll be recruiting for:

- CRG (March to April recruitment)
- Sounding Board (March – June recruitment)



- People's Panel (June – August recruitment)

Sounding Board promotion:

- Chance to win a \$1,000 gift card.
- Bill inserts (March – June 2026) to all customers, website, media releases, social media campaign, newsletters, events and pop-ups.
- The Sounding Board will be used to recruit panel members.

CRG members provided feedback to ensure good accessibility for potential Sounding Board members by allowing in person and phone sign-ups. The engagement team confirmed this would be enabled through face-to-face events, Customer Service support and working with advocacy groups.

CRG members expressed an interest in attending face to face events and reviewing the website to provide feedback.

People's panel:

We'll use a hybrid model to recruit:

1. Contact all Sounding Board members inviting them to participate in the People's panel. MosaicLab will recruit based on demographics spread.
2. Targeted outreach where any gaps identified.

Stakeholder engagement:

Annelise shared the groups we are connecting with, including stakeholders (e.g. financial vulnerability, disability advocate groups), rights holders, major customers and organisations who work with our target communities. Feedback has allowed us to understand how they'd like to be engaged to allow meaningful and genuine engagement.

Item 4. Key engagement milestones for 2026

- November 2025 – Getting ready
- March 2026 – Raise awareness and create interest
- May 2026 – Check in and talk
- August 2026 – Dive in (expecting panel over 5 days)
- October 2026 – Work on submission

Item 5: Final reflections and discussion

Overall feedback:

- Jo shared that the engagement direction demonstrates an advanced approach.

People's panel:

- CRG will be welcome to observe the panels.
- Facilitators will ensure all voices heard.
- Participants will be incentivised to participate in the panel to support attendance.
- Recall days can be used if feedback is not clear on a particular topic.
- We intend to hold the sessions in person.

Questions:

- Vic Government \$300 billion in debt – does that affect Gippsland Water?

Response: We always need to find efficiencies without impacting service or costs to customers. We're looking at new revenue options.



- Could there be impacts from the upcoming elections?
A change in Government could mean a change in policy. Caretaker period impacts what we can and can't communicate publicly. This has been considered when planning timing for window of engagement.
- Can you share anything about data centres? People are saying they'll use a lot of water and power.
We've been talking to government about this. Our role is to educate our community about expected volumes of water required. We'll have information on the website soon.

Next meeting – May 2026. Details to be advised.

