Customer Reference Group meeting summary	
Time: 10am – 1pm **Date:** 26 June 2026 **Location:** Narracan Room, Traralgon **Tour:** Nil	
Attendees	**Customer Reference Group (CRG) members**: - Diane Wilkinson (Chair) - Olivia Brewer - Adam Tyson - Desley Gray - Rob Gaulton - Mike Kirkness - Mathias Wood - Mick Harrington - Tony Smith **Gippsland Water staff**: - Sarah Cumming, Managing Director - Michael Crane, General Manager People and Customer - Emma Lewis, Senior Communications and Engagement Lead - Annelise Answerth, Senior Corporate Affairs Lead - Paul Jones, Manager Electrical and Energy Solutions - Shannon Dwyer, Manager Environment and Healthy Country - Trudy Hodgson, Manager Strategy and Corporate Regulation - Natalie Laugeni, Communications and Engagement Advisor
Apologies	- Simon Ortega (CRG) - Tania Brown (CRG) - David Elder (CRG) - Laurie Marks, Board Committee Independent Aboriginal Delegate - Katrina Coulson, Manager Communications and Engagement

Welcome
The meeting commenced with an introduction from Diane Wilkinson with an Acknowledgement of Country.

Meet and greet
All attendees introduced themselves to the group.

Review of actions
- Gippsland Water provided advice to the group on the management of rising reinstatement costs.
- Most actions completed. Two actions are ongoing. Refer to actions log.

Items for discussion

1. Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy Communications & Engagement update
2. Energy Investment
3. Customer Reference Group terms
4. Other business

Item 1. Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy Communications & Engagement update – *Emma Lewis and Annelise Answerth*

Activations – how did we deliver on what we committed to?
- Closing the loop session with subject matter experts – completed March 2026.
- Internal session for building organisation understanding and support – completed April 2026.
- Focus on recruiting for the Sounding Board – 85% increase in members so far, resulting from broad promotion (social media, newspaper, bill insert, pop-up events, newsletters and more).
- Recruit and activate – we've connected with 35+ stakeholders and recruited 6 new CRG members.

Community outreach
- We held over 20 community pop up events in 19 towns in a range of settings to reach as wide audience as possible. This included shopping centres, Bunnings, cafes, markets and sporting events.
- The aim was to capture Customer Outcome priorities and take feedback on any areas of interest or concern.
- We also encouraged people to join the Sounding Board.
- CRG members who attended some of the sessions were thanked.

Customers experiencing vulnerability
- Effective engagement with these customers is essential for our Price Submission.
- We have promoted engagement opportunities broadly and through targeted messaging.
- We're also working directly with support organisations, including learning from their team and creating opportunities for our Customer Care team to provide on-the-spot assistance to customers.
- We're looking at creating experiences for the People's Panel to give members a deeper understanding of this group.

Stakeholder outreach

- We've spoken with local councils, government agencies, Rights Holders and regulators.
- We've also spoken with major customers about expected future demands.
- Next steps – close the loop with these groups; deepen Rights Holders engagement; engage further with community, business and environmental groups, as well as Consumer Action Law.

Rights Holders engagement

- We're pursuing a partnership agreement with GlaWAC, who have expressed a desire for a formal relationship.
- GLaWAC wish to engage directly with us, not as a group with other water corporations. We're working towards agreement on engagement approach and scope, support needed and capacity.
- We have a growing relationship with Bunurong Land Council, who are in their Nation Building phase. We've engaged with Cultural Heritage team on some projects.

What we've learned so far

- We've conducted surveys since 2023, with six surveys in total, plus additional surveys at pop-up events. We have around 2,000 responses so far.
- Customer are asked to rank Customer Outcomes in order of priority.
- Overall priority has remained largely unchanged:
    - Do your job well – consistently ranked first
    - Be involved in the community – consistently ranked last but commentary is important to understand (see below)
    - Plan for the future - stable
    - Be easy to deal with – small decrease
    - Be environmentally responsible – has risen. We asked Urban Water Strategy questions related to water sustainability in the last round which may have influenced this slightly.
- We also asked for open ended responses
    - Cost and affordability comments ranked number one in people's comments. Also most emotionally charged language. Intensity has increased over time.
    - Be involved – in spite of ranking last, elements of community support rank second in the comments. Education is the second most common theme after affordability.
    - Other comments are around water quality and cost and no savings due to fixed charges

Issues to explore

Draft issues have evolved into seven key areas to explore:

1. Affordability and fairness
2. Digital metering
3. Customer Outcomes
4. Community value and partnerships
5. Service standards (TBC)
6. Environmental initiatives (New, TBC)
7. Urban Water Strategy



The following have been removed because we don't believe customers can robustly get involved and impact them:

- Asset resilience
- Technology data and AI
- Renewable energy
- Windfall revenue

Sounding Board online sessions

- We will recruit from over 800 members
- 2-3 hour sessions facilitated by our engagement partner, MosaicLab
- Session 1: Customer Outcomes – already strong support. Need to ensure targets and measures are useful and meaningful.
- Session 2: Community value and partnerships – share what we've delivered. Check to see whether we've got the balance right. Suggestions for changes.
- The findings from these sessions will be shared with the People's Panel, as well as the Customer Reference Group, who will help us distil and action the insights
- We'll report back to our Sounding Board to share what we've learned so far.

People's Panel

- Up to 50 people over five days from August to November. Deliberating on key issues.
- Expecting final recommendations in November.
- Opportunity for CRG members to come and observe
- May be opportunity from CRG to represent and get involved in some of the activities e.g. speed 'dating' round.

Urban Water Strategy engagement path

- September 2025 – National perception survey by Water Services Association of Australia
- October 2025 – Customer Satisfaction survey by Regional Victorian Water Corp Alliance
- December 2025 – Rights Holder conversations initiated and ongoing
- Feb-March 2026 – Major customer conversations
- April 2026 – Customer expectation survey
- April – June 2026 – Stakeholder conversations
- May – June 2026 – Supply modelling completed
- June – July 2026 – Engage on supply options (if needed)

Urban Water Strategy engagement findings

- 522 responses (target was 400 for statistically significant results)
- 68% said they'd prefer a balanced approach in times of reduced rainfall or drought. 27% said stricter restrictions. 4% higher investment.
- 92% did not want to pay more for improved water security. 8% would be willing to pay.
- 87% believe water-intensive industries should take action to reduce their water use in normal conditions.
- 98% believe water industries should take action to reduce their water use in drought conditions.
- 91% believe action should be taken to protect community assets (e.g. parks, ovals, gardens, pools) in times of water shortage.
- Next steps:
  - Close the loop with major customers

- Work with Councils
- Place-based engagement (to understand which community assets)
- Share the results
- Ongoing Rights Holders engagement

Question from CRG: Do towns/councils (other than Sale) redirect stormwater for parkland etc. use?

Response
Funding from government was provided to develop plans. Plans are expensive making them difficult for councils to afford.

Item 2. Energy Investment *Paul Jones*

Our Pricing Submission 2023-2028 commitments include:
- Invest $10M ($2022) (~$11.3M $2026) in energy projects for resilience, renewable energy generation and reduce costs
- 30% of renewable energy will be generated by our “behind-the-meter” infrastructure
- Self-generated electricity will reduce our energy consumption by 2.5GWh per year
- Save an average of $297,000 per annum

Investments in energy generation
- Market strategy – go to market and buy to offset our usage
- Asset strategy (behind-the-meter generation) – generate yourself and find opportunities that provide positive rates of return-on investment.
- There’s a balancing point between market and asset strategy. Staying NPV positive and relief tariff impact finds the balancing point.

Generation technology
- The national electricity market is saturated by solar generation causing negative generation prices. This penalises our investments. We need to be careful how we size investment.
- During times of critically high demand, we can use our backup generation assets to support the national electricity market and earn money.
- Resilience in overall system is much higher now. Future plans for bio diesel usage. Old machines at end-off life being replaced with new machines which are bio diesel.

Revised Customer commitments
- Savings of $1.9M ($2026) from $11.3M ($2026).
- No less than 15% of renewable energy will be generated by our “behind-the-meter” infrastructure – maintaining 100%renewable usage.
- Self-generated electricity will reduce our energy consumption by 2.5GWh per year.
- We save an average of $297,000 per annum.

Item 3. Customer Reference Group Terms *Emma Lewis*
- The terms of reference for the Customer Reference Group have been updated to allow for up to 14 members.
- Current term for existing members ends September 2026. All members are encouraged to continue if willing and able.
- Nominations will be welcomed for the position of Chair. Please contact Emma Lewis prior to the next meeting if interested.

Item 4. Other business *All*

- CRG members who attended community pop-up sessions provided positive feedback saying the team was really engaging and handled any (rare) curveballs well.
- The Chair noted that she'd received feedback from event goers appreciating having non-Gippsland Water people (CRG members) there as representatives of the community.
- The Chair requested the updated Terms of Reference be provided with the agenda for the next meeting.

Next meeting
Friday 16 October, 10am to 12pm, online.