Customer Reference Group (CRG) – Meeting summary	
Time: 10am – 12 noon, Friday 16 October 2026 **Location:** Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams **Tour:** Nil	
Attendees	**Customer Reference Group (CRG members):** • Diane Wilkinson (Chair) • Adam Tyson • David Elder • Mike Kirkness • Rob Gaulton • Simon Ortega • Tania Brown • Tony Smith **Gippsland Water staff:** • Sarah Cumming, Managing Director • Katrina Coulson, Manager Communications and Engagement • Emma Lewis, Senior Communications and Engagement Lead • Shannon Dwyer, Manager Environment and Healthy Country • Tracey Jones, Acting Manager Strategy and Corporate Regulation • Annelise Answerth, Senior Corporate Affairs Lead • Natalie Laugeni, Communications & Engagement Advisor
Apologies	Liv Brewer, CRG member Mathias Wood, CRG member Michael Crane, General Manager People & Customer

Agenda items

1. Welcome and acknowledgement of Country
2. Appointment of the CRG Chair
3. Review of actions
4. Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy: Communications and engagement update
5. Any other business.

Meeting summary

1. Welcome and acknowledgement of Country – *Diane Wilkinson*

The meeting commenced with a welcome from Di and an Acknowledgement of Country. Apologies were noted.

2. Appointment of the CRG Chair – *Katrina Coulson*

Diane Wilkinson was announced as CRG Chair for the next 12-month period.

Di mentioned that she was pleased to continue as Chair after having various discussions with CRG members. She acknowledged that while a level of continuity is important, renewal is also good. Di expressed that she would be happy to have further discussions with members who may be considering taking on the role of Chair in future.

The group congratulated and thanked Di.

3. Review of actions – *Katrina Coulson*

Actions were reviewed. One item closed. Two items carried over. Refer to actions log.

4. Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy: Communications and engagement update – *Katrina Coulson, Emma Lewis, Annelise Answerth and Shannon Dwyer*

Katrina opened by thanking CRG members for their support by attending as observers for both the Sounding Board workshop sessions and the People's Panel. Katrina encouraged members to attend the remaining three People's Panel days as observers if able and interested.

Adam Tyson expressed interest to attend Day 3 of the People's Panel. Gippsland Water to send invitation to Adam.

Sounding Board Sessions – *Katrina Coulson*

- We ran a successful Sounding Board recruitment campaign earlier in the year (growing membership by 91% to 800 customers).
- All Sounding Board members were invited to participate in two 3-hour Sounding Board online workshop sessions.

Overall, the sessions indicated support for our existing Customer Outcomes as well as our existing community initiatives, especially education. There was not necessarily support for increased spend.

1. Customer outcomes – July 2026
    - 46 Sounding Board members attended
    - CRG members attended as observers
    - We asked: What matters most, what does success look like?
    - What we learned:

- Key themes were the importance of transparency and communication, affordability and education.

2. Community value + partnerships – August 2026
   - 41 Sounding Board members attended
   - CRG members attended as observers
   - We shared: What we do now. What we could do. Do we have the balance right?
   - What we learned:
     - Participants demonstrated broad support for our existing initiatives.
     - When we shared opportunities to do more for the environment, participants were divided on how far we should go and who should pay.

Next steps
In March 2027, we'll ask CRG members to work through the detail of these workshops and our broader engagement to help us:

a) Confirm our Customer Outcomes and how we report on our performance
b) Confirm how we approach any changes to our community initiatives.

Discussion

- Query around the number of participants compared to the number of Sounding Board members.

  Our expert facilitators for these sessions were very pleased with the number of participants we had and consider our Sounding Board a unique opportunity.

  Rob recognised 45 attendees as a manageable number that allowed the participants to get involved and have a say.

- Query around the role of the CRG and Sounding Board and comment that the Sounding Board has significantly more members. Is there overlap?

  Sarah Cumming shared that the Sounding Board and CRG perform very different roles. The Sounding Board is great for testing ideas and sentiment, and the higher numbers allow us to segment the group for place-based engagement. The Sounding Board has been a great resource for engagement, and we'll continue to find ways to bring them in meaningfully.

  The CRG's role has a more strategic lens. The insights and recommendations from the CRG shape how we engage more broadly with our customers and community, and how we implement next steps following engagement. The information we share with the CRG includes far more detail. The CRG helps keep us accountable and performs validating and sense checking functions.

  Di shared that the CRG tends to take feedback and assist in distilling it into a more workable framework. The CRG have been invited to People's Panel days because we will be required to attest to the Price Submission engagement process. This is part of the reason that having CRG members independently observing the process is very important.

  We took the above two issues to the Sounding Board (rather than the People's Panel) because we already had a lot of information e.g. from surveys, community pop-up sessions.

People's Panel – *Emma Lewis*

- The People's Panel consists of up to 50 people who are representative of our community.
- They are deliberating on key issues over 5 days.

The People's Panel is considering our core remit:
How can we balance the services our community needs, now and into the future, while keeping bills fair?

As we face rising costs, ageing infrastructure, a changing climate, and changes to local industries, we need to work through the trade-offs that shape an affordable bill and reliable services.

In addition to the remit, the panel is deliberating on:

1. Meter replacement – how quickly should we implement our digital meter program?
2. Service reliability – how much more should we invest to meet our targets and deliver preventative maintenance?

Drivers for digital meters:

- There is a sector-wide shift toward digital meters.
- The digital intelligence they provide can help us get the best results for customers, our system and environment.
- Our mechanical meters will require replacement soon. We're also facing increasing pressure to:
    - Make every drop count in a changing climate to enhance water security
    - Manage ageing infrastructure with smart solutions
    - Meet regulator expectations for leak detection.

What we're asking the panel:

- To consider how quickly we should implement our digital meter program, so we can balance service delivery and keeping bills fair.
- We've outlined and costed four options but will also model any alternative options the panel is interested in exploring.

Service reliability – what more could we do?

- Adding more team members will help us meet our target of responding to Priority 3 jobs within 1,500 minutes (1 day and 1 hour).
- Adding further members to our team will increase capacity for preventative works, such as valve maintenance and water main cleaning.
- Meeting our response times.
- Water back on within the promised 5 hours after unplanned outage
- Less customers have their water off during an outage
- Better quality water when we have faults.

What we're asking the panel:

- To consider how much more we should invest to meet our targes and provide preventative maintenance.
- We've outlined and costed three different options. Each considers trade-offs between cost, staffing levels and service improvements. We'll also model any alternative options the panel is interested in exploring.

Panel days
A breakdown of what the two panel days so far have involved was provided, along with the plan for the remaining three panel days.

Discussion

- Di and Dave shared feedback on their experience observing the People's Panel days so far.

  Dave: Really great buy-in and involvement. Kudos to the facilitators. Seems like very authentic engagement. Gippsland Water team very welcoming. Inviting people into Gippsland Water's space (Traralgon office) was a good idea. Sound was a bit of an issue though.

  Di echoed Dave's comments and that added it's great to see such a demographic spread, including a number of young people. Engaging young people is always really difficult, especially for such a big commitment. One of the young people in particular is very articulate. Observing was a little awkward due to sound issues.

  Di will share her observation notes with Katrina and Emma.

- Gippsland Water reiterated the role of observers after feedback from facilitators. Observers need to be conscious of not infringing on the space for the panel so they feel comfortable to speak freely. There are informal opportunities to connect through the day during break times.

- Gippsland Water acknowledged issues with sound and shared that solutions are being sought to improve this for future panel days.

Stakeholder engagement – *Annelise Answerth*

- We've engaged with over 40 stakeholders so far. This will continue to grow as we progress through the Price Submission and Urban Water Strategy.
- This includes councils, regulatory bodies, industry partners, Traditional Owners, advocacy and community groups, environmental groups and support agencies.
- Stakeholders have reiterated the importance of:
  - Supporting people experiencing vulnerability
  - Managing the impacts of regional transition
  - Ensuring reliable services into the future.

Traditional Owner engagement – *Shannon Dwyer*

- We've been working with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) and Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC)
- We've focused on:
  - Delivering on existing commitments
  - Supporting Cultural Connection to Country
  - Promoting Culture and Inclusion
  - Supporting Education and Employment Pathways.
- Both groups have identified key priorities and we're speaking about specific opportunities we could explore together.

First Nations engagement – *Shannon Dwyer*
We're also working to ensure the priorities of First Nations people in our region are reflected in our plans for the future.

So far, some common themes have emerged:

- Strong relationships
- Communication
- Education.

Urban Water Strategy – *Katrina Coulson*
We're taking extra steps to understand the assets that matter most to our community in times of water shortage – this will involve Councils and Community.

Next steps for the CRG – *Katrina Coulson*

- Discussed next steps and key milestones for CRG involvement from October/November 2026 through to early August 2027.

5. Other business

No other business raised.
Di thanked everyone for their time and the presenters.

Meeting closed.