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| **Customer Reference Group meeting summary** | |
| **Time:** 10:00am – 1:00pm, Thursday 29 February 2024  **Location:** Traralgon office  **Tour: -** Nil | |
| **Attendees** | Customer Reference Group (CRG) members: - Diane Wilkinson (Chair) - Suzanne Lewis  - Adam Tyson  - Robert Gaulton - Tania Brown  - Simon Ortega  - Desley Gray - Olivia Brewer  Gippsland Water: - Sarah Cumming, Managing Director - Michael Crane, General Manager People and Culture - Mel Thek, General Manager Business Transformation - Paul Young, Acting General Manager Assets - Geoff O’Raya, Manager Customer Services - Michelle Firmager, Customer Experience Team Leader - Trudy Hodgson, Regulatory and Corporate Planning Lead - Catherine Couling, Strategic Planning and Resources Engineer - Celeste Briggs-Wilson, Project Communications and Engagement Specialist - Katrina Coulson, Manager Communications and Engagement - Emma Lewis, Senior Communications and Engagement Lead - Mark Vitlin, Communications and Engagement Advisor |
| **Apologies** | CRG members: - Erlinda James |

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| Items for discussion  1. Welcome – Diane Wilkinson 2. Customer Satisfaction survey results 3. Customer outcome reporting 4. Customer experience strategy 5. Customer app 6. Wastewater treatment plant buffer overlays for Baw Baw shire 7. Research into taste of water in Sale 8. Other business |

Following an Acknowledgement of Country and welcome from Diane Wilkinson (CRG Chair), the meeting moved to key discussion items.

**Item 2.Customer Satisfaction survey results**

*Katrina Coulson*

Updated results were presented from the customer survey completed in October 2023. Results covered the key customer perception areas of trust, value for money, reputation, and overall satisfaction. We received our best ever score for trust, a statistically significant improved score for value for money and the results for the remaining survey areas were largely improving or static, with a positive overall result.

The Chair observed that perceptions of ‘trust’ are based on how respondents perceive our competence and our character. Michael outlined how our Customer Care campaign may have contributed to our high trust score and Katrina spoke to other initiatives underway or planned that will boost customer perceptions.

Katrina noted that we have also implemented a new survey to check in on our six customer outcomes. This will be undertaken six-monthly via our Customer Sounding Board.

**Item 3.Customer outcome reporting**

*Katrina Coulson and Trudy Hodgson*

Katrina recapped the outcome measures and targets for Essential Services Commission (ESC) reporting. She explained that the original targets and smaller tolerance levels - while more challenging to achieve - reflect our desire as an organisation to be ambitious, set stretch goals and deliver real value for our customers.

The CRG noted that the organisation was clearly on track and suggested the lower result for ‘planning for the future’ is likely a reflection of lower awareness, not lower performance. The CRG suggested that while the individual score for ‘planning for the future’ may be lower, a high trust result would not be possible if customers did not have confidence in our ability to plan.

The CRG agreed that raising awareness of our future plans should result in improved results for this measure. The Chair supported the need to look for new opportunities to promote this message. It was also suggested the public would be more interested in hearing about individual project plans than a broad ‘planning for the future ‘concept.

A CRG member noted the mine rehabilitation works and their relevance to the future of the region.

Discussion included how customers are kept informed of service interruptions. Geoff explained that only 55% of accounts had current mobile phone numbers and that a program to encourage customers to provide updated numbers was underway.

In summary, the CRG supported the ‘traffic light’ style of reporting results and endorsed the proposed survey targets, noting the opportunity for annual review.

**Item 4.Customer experience strategy**

*Geoff O’Raya and Michelle Firmager*

Michelle explained that the customer experience strategy focusses on delivering value from the customer’s viewpoint, not simply fulfilling every request. This perception is shaped by all their interactions with us. The strategy seeks to embed customer centricity into our actions and decisions. Our guiding principles are Care, Ease, Responsive, Involved and Responsible. The strategy is for four years and will be reassessed two years in.

CRG members sought clarification of the term ‘customer centricity’. It involves ensuring that concern for customers is central to all decision making.

**Item 5.Customer app**

*Geoff O’Raya and Celeste Briggs-Wilson*

Geoff and Celeste provided an overview of a proposed app to allow customers more flexibility and control of their billing and water use. The app would allow customers to conduct their business at any time on demand. The app development process and timeline were discussed, and Celeste explained how previous community engagement had informed the requirements of the app. Further engagement will occur at the design stage of the project.

The CRG expressed strong support for the initiative.

The Chair summarised that ease of use would be the biggest test for the app, particularly for people who were not tech savvy or familiar with how our systems work.

**Item 6.Wastewater treatment plant buffer overlays for Baw Baw shire**

*Catherine Couling and Paul Young*

Catherine explained the lengthy process of introducing a buffer zone around our wastewater treatment plants in Baw Baw Shire Council. The buffer zone is designed to prevent unsuitable commercial, industrial or residential developments too close to our plants. Taking this action is important to protect our assets and prevent unnecessary costs for our customers.

In response to questions, it was explained without a formal buffer overlay in place that developments considered inappropriate could still go ahead if the developer effectively indemnified us through a negotiated s173 agreement. It was also explained that the extent of the buffers account for long term development projections at our treatment plants until 2060.

The Chair noted that in any community communication that it was important to explain the ‘why’ of the buffer zones and not just the ‘what’.

**Item 7. Research into taste of water in Sale**

*Paul Young and Emma Lewis*

Paul explained that past surveys in the early 2000s had revealed taste issues with Sale drinking water. A two-part strategy was developed to address this, with stage one implemented in 2012. Further work is needed to determine if we have sufficient strategic justification to proceed with stage two.

Emma explained that while we have some indicative data on the Sale community’s satisfaction with their tap water, it is not statistically representative. We need to survey the community to see if there is still dissatisfaction with the taste of drinking water before proceeding. Water tests would also be benchmarked against other water supply areas.

The CRG suggested that Sale water could also be benchmarked against other aquifer systems rather than surface water systems. It was noted that it would not be realistic to try and match the taste of other water sources and we should be openminded about potential alternative solutions.

The Chair suggested that we may need to explain to customers that taste is not necessarily related to water quality/safety. The cost impact of additional treatment processes may also need to be explained.

**Item 8. Other business**

* Simon raised a question about possible carbon deposits in some Moe water. It was explained that this would be investigated if specific locations could be reported (1800 057 057). It was possible it may be rust in domestic pipes.
* Adam asked why Sale used an aquifer for water supply. The historic reason was not known by Gippsland Water staff in the meeting. An answer will be supplied.
* The Chair asked that the sample personas used in developing the customer app be sent to CRG members for interest.
* Emma advised that the final version of the Climate Change Strategy document will be sent to CRG members when available.

**The Chair closed the meeting at 1:00pm.**

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| Next meeting Wednesday May 22, 2024, 10am – 1pm |