



## Customer Reference Group meeting summary

**Time:** 10:00am – 1:00pm, Wednesday 4 December 2024

**Location:** Traralgon office and online

**Tour:** - Nil

### Attendees

Customer Reference Group (CRG) members:

- Diane Wilkinson (Chair)
- Simon Ortega
- Desley Gray
- Olivia Brewer
- Adam Tyson
- Rob Gaulton

Gippsland Water staff:

- Sarah Cumming, Managing Director
- Michael Crane, General Manager People and Culture
- Tanya O'Shea, Chief Technology and Strategy Officer
- Paul Young, Manager Asset Planning
- Trudy Hodgson, Regulatory and Corporate Planning Lead
- Paul Jones, Manager Electrical and Energy Solutions
- Dale Yeates, Manager Environment and Healthy Country
- Geoff O'Raya, Manager Customer Services
- Deas Dalton, Manager, Asset Management
- Dave Toohey, Senior Water Quality Lead
- Katrina Coulson, Manager Communications and Engagement
- Emma Lewis, Senior Communications and Engagement Lead
- Alice Ryan, Communications and Engagement Lead
- Mark Vitlin, Communications and Engagement Advisor

Gippsland Water Board Delegate Observer:

- Laurie Marks

### Apologies

CRG members:

- Suzie Lewis
- Tania Brown
- Olivia Brewer (latter part of meeting)
- Rob Gaulton (latter part of meeting)



Safety and wellbeing



Customer focussed



Innovation



Accountability



Collaboration



Integrity and respect

## Items for discussion

1. Welcome – Diane Wilkinson
2. Sale water research
3. Climate Change targets
4. Customer Charter
5. Other business

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The meeting commenced with an Acknowledgement of Country and welcome from Diane Wilkinson (CRG Chair) and introduction of Board Delegate Observer, Laurie Marks. Laurie provided a brief background, before the Chair moved to key discussion items.

### Item 2. Sale water research

*Paul Young, David Toohey and Emma Lewis, with consultants Helen Bartley and Ros Griggs*

Paul provided a brief introduction, recapping the project milestones to date. He highlighted that the purpose of the research was to explore if further work is needed to improve the taste of water for Sale customers, with comparative studies in Warragul and Morwell. He then introduced consultants Helen and Ros who conducted the research.

The CRG was invited to taste Sale water samples, with most saying the water was fine and some detecting a slight mineral or chlorine taste.

Helen outlined the findings of the research. This showed that Sale had a lower level of satisfaction with the taste of their water, however, only a minority of Sale residents surveyed were prepared to pay higher bills to enhance treatment further. Helen and Ros shared the key themes that emerged through customer feedback.

Paul and David summarised that comments on chlorine and freshness were similar across the towns, and complaints from Sale customers were similar or lower to those in other towns.

CRG members noted that the water is safe, and considered that any improvements to taste would likely be marginal. They suggested that the greater issue may be community perception and suggested that community education in Sale would be beneficial.

It was also suggested that groundwater may need to be a future topic as there is need to understand the impact of falling aquifer levels on our future supply.

The Chair asked whether we would get back to customers involved in the survey. Individual responses are not possible as the survey was completed anonymously, however, updates will be published on the website.

The team will look at potential treatment options for Sale water, which can be considered further in the next price submission process.

The Chair commended our active customer engagement.



### Item 3. Climate change targets (renewable electricity and emissions reduction)

*Katrina Coulson, Dale Yeates and Paul Jones*

Katrina recapped the background to our community survey on renewable electricity use and emissions reductions within our climate change targets.

The survey highlighted a potential shortfall in our previously agreed targets and empowered the community to decide what we should do next.

The online survey asked customers to decide whether we should:

- A) Purchase additional renewable electricity to meet our self-imposed climate targets set out in our 2023 Price Submission (estimated cost \$600,000), or
- B) Plant 10,000 trees as this is what we promised to do if we didn't meet the target (estimated cost \$60,000)

The results showed that 77% of customers supported option B.

Dale explained that the plantings would be planned to provide ongoing environmental benefit (such as waterway restoration) and include locations where the trees can be enjoyed by the community.

The Customer Reference Group agreed that we should mark our performance against the electricity and emissions targets as amber for the 2024/25 year.

The Chair commented that this exercise again showed the need and value of community education and understanding of our issues.

### Item 4. – Customer Charter

*Geoff O'Raya and Alice Ryan*

Geoff and Alice gave an update on our approach to completing reviews and updates to our Customer Charter and Trade Waste Customer Charter - a Price Submission commitment.

A number of updates have already been made to the charters since we made this commitment to align them with the Water Industry Standards and to reflect new service standards and Guaranteed Service Levels. This review is in addition to those changes.

To meet this commitment, we'll:

- Have the management group review the charters and see if anything else needs updating or changing
- Consult with our customers. The level of engagement will be decided by the type of changes requested
- Come back to the Customer Reference Group to provide an overview of the changes.

The Chair asked whether customers were aware of the charters and what was the interaction between customers and the charters. Geoff replied that all new customers receive a summary charter, and the charters are also on our website. We include advice of changes to the charters with customers' next bill. We look at customer complaints to determine areas of concern and how these might indicate where the charter could be improved. Sarah said that while we can consider our own changes the ESC can dictate on



an ad hoc basis what we can include and how to include it. The charters are also significant in that the ESC and Ombudsman rely on the charters when assessing any complaints they receive.

**Item 5 - Other business**

Desley had seen the new mural on the Stratford water tower and was very impressed.

Emma explained that progress on the proposed Baw Baw Buffer Zone to encompass our Warragul treatment plant has been delayed due to changing EPA requirements. The impact of these changes is being assessed.

Laurie commented that he was impressed by the professionalism and focus of the CRG meeting.

Emma asked members to consider what the best days and times for next year's meetings be. There was support to continue hybrid arrangements where possible. Adam also suggested installing AV capabilities in the Narracan room for future meetings.

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

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**Next meeting**

February, on a date to be advised.

