



Customer, Consumer and Community Consultation Procedure

July 2023 (updated July 2025)

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INTRODUCTION

The Lower Hunter is a vibrant, diverse and growing community. From a thriving metropolis to small towns, new arrivals to the most ancient culture of all, the world's biggest companies to our smallest sporting clubs and community groups, everyone in our community relies on water.

As a utility, we need to respond to the challenges of floods, drought and climate change, support a growing population, and deliver the outcomes expected by our customers and community.

Hunter Water delivers services under an Operating Licence granted by the NSW Government. The Operating Licence is our overarching regulatory instrument and is set on the recommendation of, and compliance monitored, by the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).

Section 13 of the *Hunter Water Act* 1991 (NSW) requires that the Operating Licence 'include terms and conditions that require [Hunter Water] to maintain procedures under which [Hunter Water] is to consult with its customers at regular intervals in relation to the provision of the systems and services'.

Consistent with our governing legislation, and our Operating Licence we are required to articulate to our customers, consumers and community our consultation methods, activities and the outcomes we intend to achieve.

We consult with our customers and community in a number of ways and for a range of purposes, from the development of strategic and investment plans, willingness to pay for service levels through to the design, development and delivery of specific projects and programs. These activities help to guide our day-to-day operations, longer term strategies and investment decisions.

We are committed to regular, meaningful, unbiased and representative consultation with our customers and community and aims to:

- Understand our customer, consumer and community needs, interests and preferences as well as willingness to pay for service levels
- Understand how our systems and processes can better support more effective, direct relationships with consumers, including residential tenants
- Obtain advice and perspectives on our Customer Contract
- Obtain advice on such other key issues related to our planning and operations under our Operating Licence which impact on our customers, consumers and the community in our area of operations.

This Customer, Consumer and Community Consultation Procedure describes the methods that will be employed to achieve these outcomes, noting that activities outlined will necessarily evolve to ensure they are fit for purpose to accurately and objectively obtain relevant insights. This document will be updated to include new and emerging methods, techniques and topics as required.

Associated Hunter Water strategies and plans

There is a suite of strategic Hunter Water documents that describe our commitment to understanding customer and community insights to inform our decision making. These documents should be read in tandem with this procedure as they provide the rationale for the consultation activities we undertake, the 'why' as well as the 'how'. An overview of each of these are provided below.

Our Corporate Strategy

Our Corporate Strategy, *Miromaliko Baato*, builds on Hunter Water's strong track record to provide an ambitious blueprint to create a sustainable water future for all. Our Corporate Strategy is complemented by a number of tangible and measurable strategic objectives that will help us move

towards our desired strategic outcomes. These objectives are regularly monitored and reviewed through Hunter Water's annual Business Plan. Read [Miromaliko Baato](#) to find out more.

One of the strategic outcomes described in our Corporate Strategy is 'Customers and community at the heart of all we do'. We deliver on this outcome by actively improving our understanding of customer and community values and preferences and incorporating insights into our decision making (see Figure 1).

Our guiderails How we will deliver these outcomes



Strategic
Outcome

By understanding what our customers and community value, anticipating their diverse and changing needs, and reflecting this in our decision-making

By listening to and caring for our customers and community, and by doing what we say we will do

By using our deep local knowledge to deliver experiences and outcomes that customers value

Listening
and doing

Understanding
and anticipating

Delivering
experiences that
customers value

Customers and community at the heart of all we do

Figure 1: Corporate Strategic Objective 'Customers and community at the heart of all we do' from Hunter Water's Corporate Strategy 'Miromaliko Baato'

Community Engagement Strategy

Our Community Engagement Strategy is one of six organisation-wide strategies that support and complement Our Corporate Strategy. Through a strategic, tailored and considered approach to community engagement, our ambition is to educate, foster curiosity and develop enduring relationships and trust with our diverse and changing communities. We will gain a deeper understanding of what is important to our customers and community and provide ongoing opportunities for them to help guide the services we deliver and the investments we make in the short, medium and long term. By listening to our customers and community, we will have better insight into their changing needs and preferences.

We aim to build water literacy and meaningfully engage with our community across a range of water and sustainability matters, from encouraging behaviour change to save water and long-term water security planning, to wastewater education, waterways management and our response to climate change. We will put our customers and community at the heart of all we do by listening and learning and then reflecting their values in our decision-making. The principles shown in Figure 2 are our promise on what our community can expect from Hunter Water when they engage with us.

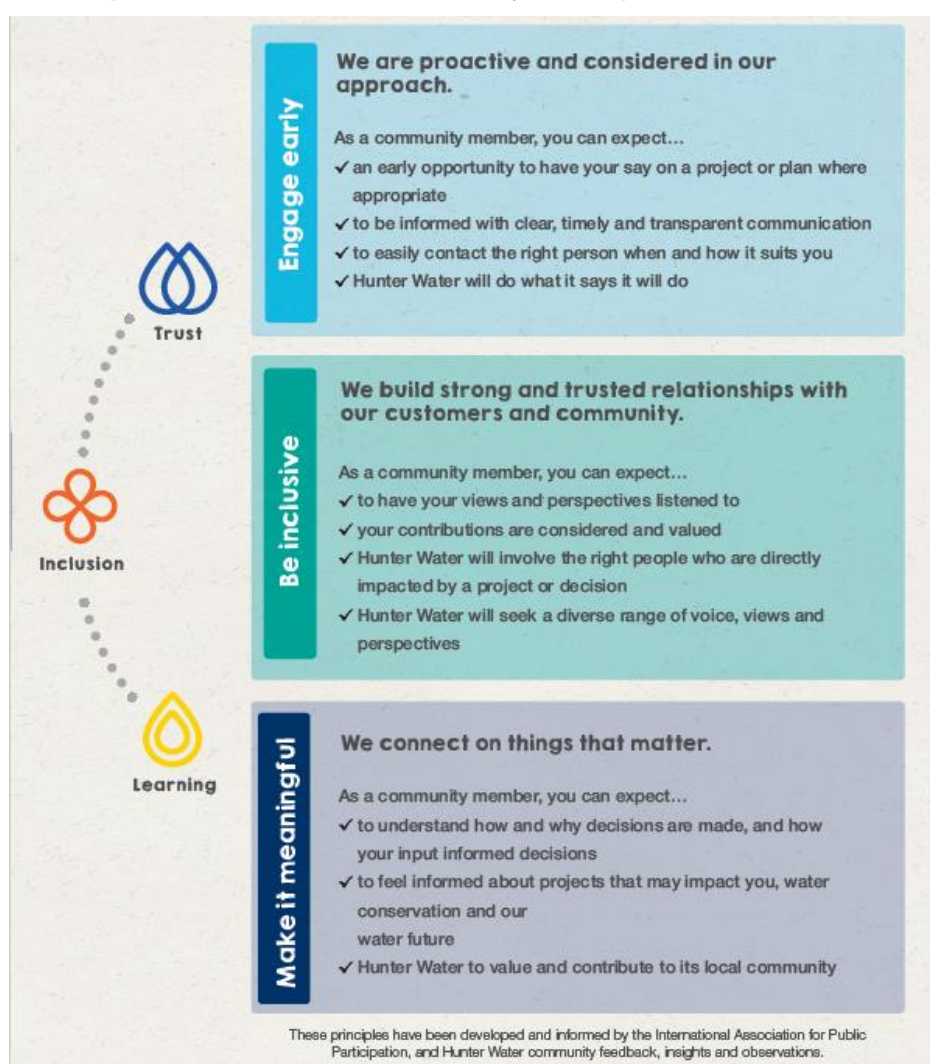


Figure 2: Overview of our engagement principles from Hunter Water's Community Engagement Strategy

To understand more about our read our [Community Engagement Strategy](#).

Customer Experience Strategy

Our Customer Experience Strategy is how we will succeed and deliver on our ambition of becoming a customer centric organisation, where customers and the community are at the heart of all we do. It aims to evolve our capability to get closer to our customers through an ongoing focus on making their experience with Hunter Water better, by reducing effort, giving them time back and resolving their problems.

We regularly ask customers for feedback after they've had contact with us. This includes interactions like making an enquiry, lodging a complaint, using our development or connection services, receiving payment support, or being affected by an outage. This feedback helps us understand how we're doing, what matters most to customers, and where we need to improve. We use this information to track overall customer satisfaction and make sure we're focusing on the areas that matter.

We also collect feedback from our digital platforms, such as our website, My Account, and the developer portal - to better understand customer's online experience. This helps us improve how these channels are performing, recognising that many of our customers engage with us in different ways.

Read about our [Customer Experience Strategy](#) to find out more.

Commitments to our customers: our Pricing Proposal & IPART regulatory framework

IPART's revised water regulatory framework is designed to promote a genuine shift to businesses being more customer centric organisations. Under the framework, a water business' pricing proposal must demonstrate how customers and the community have been involved in setting the engagement agenda and how the resulting proposal demonstrates that our activities and expenditure promote customer value.

Hunter Water submitted its first pricing proposal under the new framework in late 2024. IPART released its final determination in June 2025, rating our proposal as 'Advanced', with new prices commencing from 1 July 2025 for a five-year regulatory period. To support this proposal, we implemented a comprehensive customer and community engagement plan that was implemented across multiple phases over two years in a way that was flexible, iterative and built on insights as the work progressed (see Figure 3). This work informed our long-term strategic thinking and direction setting and fed into proposed service levels, customer outcomes and expenditure plans.

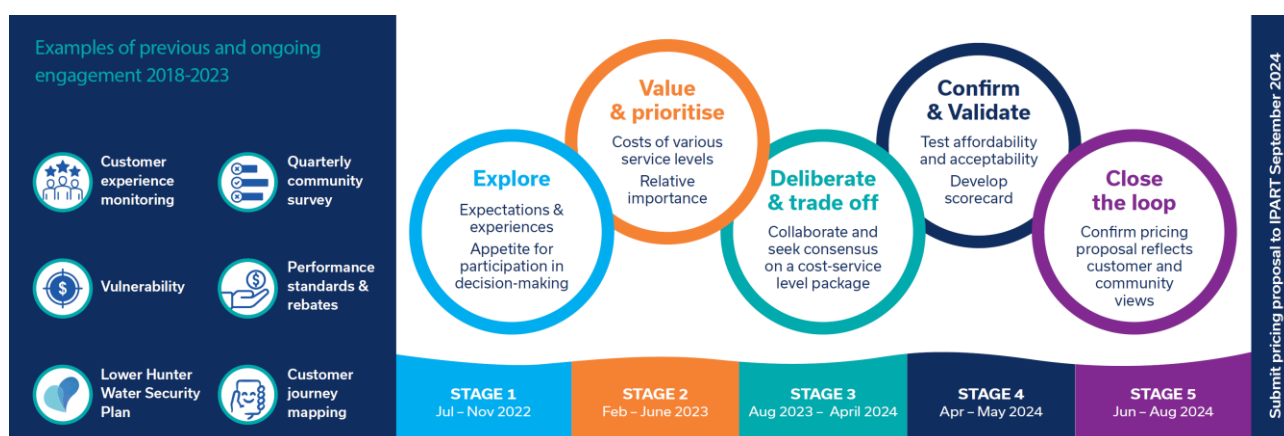


Figure 3: IPART pricing proposal engagement plan

In its final determination, IPART found that:

“Hunter Water has shown a commitment to delivering customer value, understanding customer preferences and integrating these into its decision-making processes.”

“Hunter Water has established clear plans for achieving its proposed outcomes, which are well aligned to outcomes that customers expressed were important to them.”

“Through a comprehensive multi-stage engagement program, Hunter Water demonstrated the customer engagement principle at an Advanced level.”

Our Pricing Proposal also outlined the commitments we are making to our customers over the 2025-2030 regulatory period, including our Customer Outcomes, which reflect the values and aspirations of our customers and communities.

To understand more about how our customer and community engagement informed our 2025-2030 pricing proposal to IPART, visit our [website](#).

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIVE GROUPS

We work closely with those who are impacted by the decisions we make, including our customer, community and stakeholder advocacy groups. We have, and will continue to, establish project specific Community Liaison Groups (CLGs) to constructively work with community and stakeholder representatives throughout the development and delivery of initiatives such as strategic plans and asset delivery. In addition to these CLGs, we also have two advisory groups, the Stakeholder Advisory Forum (formerly known as the Customer and Community Advisory Group) and the Community Committee.

The role and function of these groups will be assessed overtime and will be adapted according to corporate, community and customer priorities.

Community Committee

One of the commitments we made to IPART in our 2025-2030 pricing proposal was to establish an ongoing Community Committee comprised of approximately 50 members that is representative of the demographics of our area of operations. The Committee will help keep us accountable for the delivery of our Customer Outcomes and to have a say on our annual performance assessment. This will help ensure transparency and keep customers and the community at the heart of all we do throughout the pricing period.

The Community Committee makes an invaluable contribution to ensuring our customers, community and stakeholders are confident that their values and preferences are driving our priorities and that we are delivering on our promises.

The Community Committee will:

- 1. Recommend a performance rating for each outcome on our customer report card**

In addition to quantitative performance, the Committee may consider qualitative factors such as the degree to which any target was missed, the impact of external factors on performance, actions taken (effort) toward achievement of a target, and the number of targets achieved per outcome.

- 2. Be engaged on plans, strategies or proposals, as appropriate**

As an example, the Committee will be offered an opportunity to engage with us in developing our next pricing proposal ahead of the 2030-35 pricing period, and in determining service standards and expectations for our Operating Licence review.

- 3. Be consulted if mid-period changes are necessary to the report card measures, or targets during the pricing period**

We envisage this would only be triggered in exceptional circumstances such as where a measure can no longer be reliably measured due to a change in a service provider or discontinuation of a measure adopted from a third party. In such circumstances the Committee may consider an appropriate replacement measure and/or safeguards to ensure transparency. The Committee's feedback will be used to inform discussions with IPART.

The inaugural meeting of the Community Committee was held in June 2025. For more information about the Committee, including information about its framework and Charter, visit www.hunterwater.com.au/communitycommittee.

Stakeholder Advisory Forum

Our Stakeholder Advisory Forum (SAF) (formerly the Customer and Community Advisory Group) enables two-way, open communication between Hunter Water and local councils, customer

representatives, environmental groups and community organisations. The SAF and its predecessor groups have operated since the early 1990s.

The SAF's membership is made up of community representatives whose role is to provide advice and feedback on emerging issues, performance, strategies, programs and projects representative of their constituents in Hunter Water's area of operations.

Membership of the SAF includes representatives of local government, residential and business customers, environmental and community organisations.

The SAF operates under the terms of its Charter which describes its purpose, role and responsibilities. More information about SAF can be found here www.hunterwater.com.au/saf

PROCEDURE SCHEMATIC AND METHODS OVERVIEW

Hunter Water Operating Licence Community Engagement Objectives

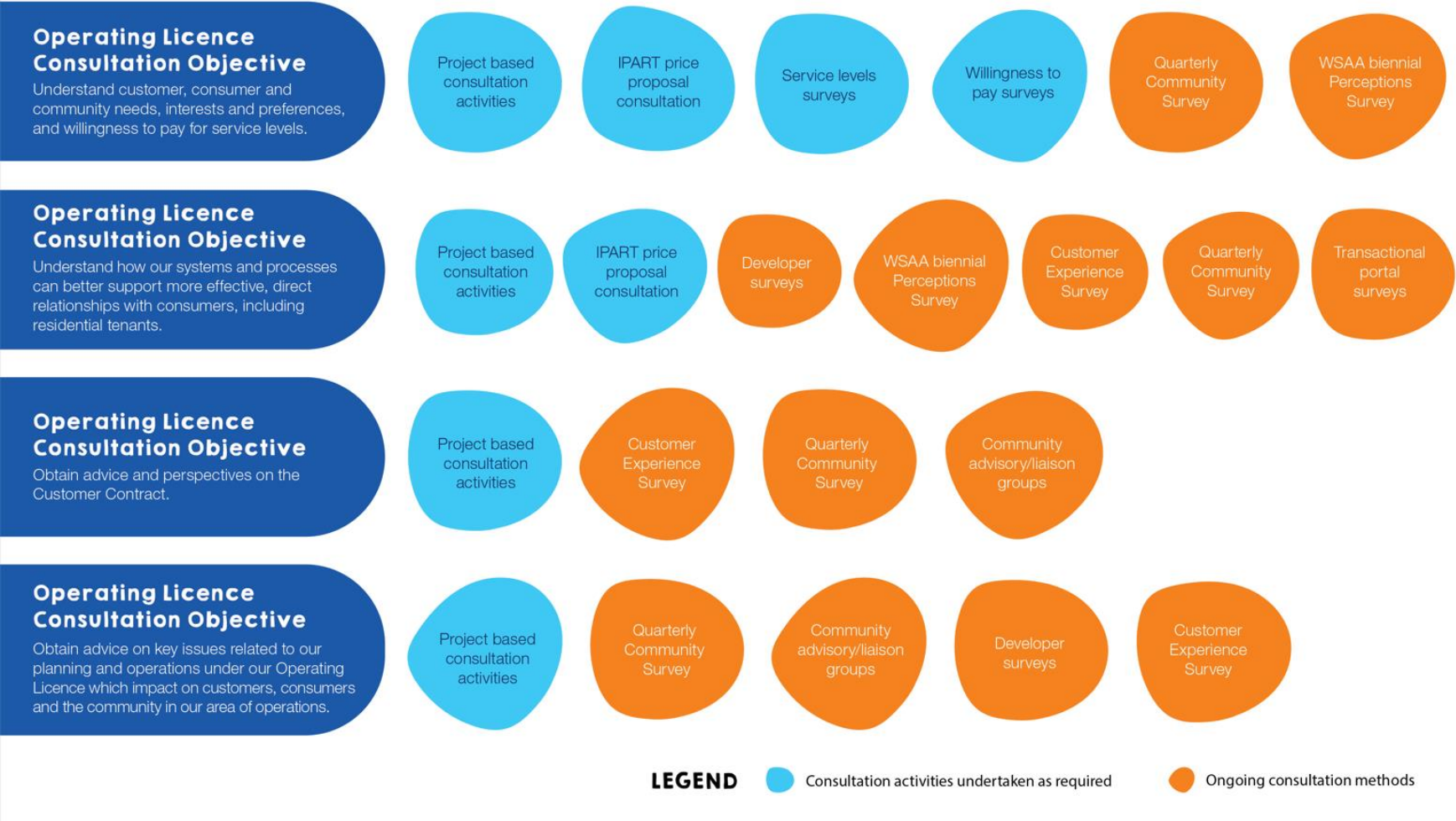


Figure 4: Consultation activity procedure aligned with Operating License

Consultation activities		
Consultation activities undertaken as required		
Activity	Method(s)	Topics
Willingness to pay (WTP) surveys	Representative online surveys	<p>We have undertaken WTP surveys on a range of topics including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbon reduction • Liveability and environmental service standards • Recycled water • Stormwater amenity
Service level surveys	Representative online surveys and online discussion boards and engagement with the Customer Committee and SAF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service levels and attributes valued by customers • Levels of satisfaction with the services we deliver • Customer expectations about rebates and services
IPART pricing proposal consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Committee • SAF • Deliberative forums • Bill simulation survey • Prioritisation survey • Online community workshops • Focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community values, aspiration and appetite for participation in decision-making • Relative importance and prioritisation of various service levels • Cost-service level package trade-offs
Project based consultation activities	<p>Various qualitative and quantitative methods aligned to insights required and IAP2 spectrum. See Community Engagement Strategy for description.</p> <p>Examples include community drop in sessions, co-design processes, surveys, workshops and focus groups, public exhibition of draft Plans and Strategies.</p>	<p>Aligned to project requirements to inform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business case/investment plan development • Strategy and plan development • Asset design and delivery

Table 2: Ongoing consultation activities, methods and topics

Ongoing consultation activities		
Activity	Method	Topics
Transactional portal surveys	Online surveys from community members using any of our transactional portals	How well our transactional channels (e.g. website) are serving user needs and identification of potential improvements
WSAA biennial Perceptions Survey	Representative national online survey with Hunter specific cohort (distributed on online panel)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community trust • Corporate reputation • Ease of doing business • Satisfaction with water quality • Affordability • Water literacy and conservation • Community expectations for service delivery
Quarterly Community Survey	Representative online survey conducted every three months (distributed to online panel and via an open link)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Trusts • Corporate reputation • Ease of doing business • Satisfaction with water quality • Affordability • Water literacy and conservation • Community expectations for service delivery • Ad hoc project based questions
Customer Experience Survey	Online survey distributed to participants who have had an interaction with our customer service team on any topic per month. The survey is also sent to all customers when they experience an outage (planned or unplanned) or make a complaint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer experience (ease, sentiment, satisfaction) performance • Satisfaction with customer service provision

UPDATING THIS PROCEDURE

A review of this procedure, and its effectiveness in supporting Hunter Water to achieve the outcomes stated above, will be conducted and reported to IPART by 30 June 2026.

Additionally, this procedure and associated activities described, will be updated and adapted over time according to:

- Changes in regulatory frameworks and processes
- Customer and community feedback
- Emerging consultation methodologies and technologies
- Shifts in corporate or customer and community priorities
- Implementation of relevant new corporate strategies and plans
- Unknown local, regional, national or global events.

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