



# STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY FORUM CHARTER

## 1. Background

We are committed to building trusted relationships with our stakeholders and community so that together, we can deliver a sustainable, resilient and prosperous future for our region. To help us achieve this, Hunter Water Corporation (Hunter Water) maintains and regularly consults with a range of its stakeholders and community on topical matters through a Stakeholder Advisory Forum (SAF). The SAF, formerly known as the Customer and Community Advisory Group (CCAG), builds on the legacy of community consultation established through previous forums since the early 1990s.

The SAF comprises representatives from a wide range of organisations and interest groups across the Lower Hunter community who are able to provide advice and views on behalf of their members and constituents.

## 2. Role of the Stakeholder Advisory Forum

### 2.1. Purpose and role

The SAF provides independent, representative advice from a cross-section of Hunter Water's stakeholders on matters relating to strategy, planning, operations, and the Customer Contract.

[Clause 13\(2\) of the Hunter Water Act 1991](#) requires Hunter Water's Operating Licence to include: "*terms or conditions that require the Corporation to maintain procedures under which the Corporation is to consult with its customers at regular intervals in relation to the provision of [its] systems and services*".

Hunter Water's current Operating Licence (2022-2027) requires that Hunter Water develops and fully implements a procedure for consulting with its Customers, Consumers and the Community at regular intervals ([Clause 29](#)).

Hunter Water has developed a detailed [Customers, Consumers and Community Consultation Procedure \(July 2025\)](#). The Procedure outlines that Hunter Water will manage and maintain a Stakeholder Advisory Forum to enable two-way, open communication between Hunter Water and local councils, customer representatives, environmental groups and community organisations. The SAF, and its predecessors the Customer and Community Advisory Group (CCAG) and Community Consultative Forum (CCF), have operated since the early 1990s and will continue to do so in accordance with the Procedure.

### 2.2. Objectives

To fulfill its purpose, the objectives of the SAF are to:

- provide a forum where members can share and discuss advice on strategy, policy, planning and service decision-making processes relevant to Hunter Water
- disseminate information from meetings to their constituents/organisation's members
- invite stakeholder engagement in decision-making
- make recommendations for consideration by Hunter Water in relation to the above, as appropriate
- foster trusting relationships between SAF members and Hunter Water aligned with Hunter Water's values of Trust, Leading, Learning, Inclusion and Wellbeing.

## 2.3. Duties and responsibilities of SAF members

To fulfil its objectives, the SAF will:

- participate actively in meeting discussions and agenda items
- notify the SAF Secretary if they are unable to attend a meeting
- provide feedback, analysis or alternative ideas during SAF meetings that reflects the interests of the members' constituents/community group members
- be open to consider a broad range of needs and interests within the local community and other stakeholders across Hunter Water's area of operations, respecting their right to have different views
- keep constituents/community group members informed about the outcomes of SAF meetings via the member's community networks, representing the outcomes of meetings fairly and accurately
- provide suggestions for meeting agenda items as needed
- act in a way that demonstrates respect for Hunter Water staff and other SAF members
- work together with openness, trust, cooperation, flexibility and honesty
- respond within agreed timeframes
- protect and preserve the confidentiality of any information provided or discussed via the SAF that is identified explicitly as being commercial-in-confidence or confidential.

## 2.4. Duties and responsibilities of Hunter Water

Hunter Water will:

- keep members informed on topical issues concerning Hunter Water
- listen to and acknowledge aspirations and concerns raised by SAF members, and provide feedback on how members' input has influenced decision-making
- provide open and honest answers to questions raised by SAF members
- provide responses to questions taken on notice
- produce accurate and factual minutes of SAF meetings
- incorporate agenda items suggested by the SAF into future agendas.

# 3. Members

## 3.1. How members of the SAF are appointed

To provide a broad range of views from stakeholders across our community, the SAF will, to the extent practicable, include at least one representative from each of the following interest areas:

- Business & Industry
- Organisations representing low-income households
- Customers living in rural and urban fringe areas
- Residential customers
- Local government
- Pensioners, seniors and older people
- Customers with disabilities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Customers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Renters
- Young people
- Environmental groups

Hunter Water may also, by written notice, invite representatives with interests beyond those listed above, which may provide value to SAF deliberations or advice.

Members of the SAF may represent one or more of the above interests or be representatives of an organisation which does so. The overall number of members will be limited to an amount that ensures the SAF remains workable and effective.

### 3.2. Selection criteria

A key aim of establishing the SAF is to represent a diversity of viewpoints and community concerns. To best facilitate this representation the following criteria have been developed for the evaluation of applications:

- Interest in and relevance to water utilities and/or water-related matters
- Willingness to contribute constructively to the purpose and objectives of the SAF
- Experience and ability to communicate community and other stakeholder views
- Experience and ability to provide feedback to members of the community and other stakeholders
- Currently residing/operating within the Lower Hunter area and have an awareness of local issues
- Can demonstrate how they represent their constituents/community/group.

Hunter Water determines the membership and is ultimately seeking a SAF that is reflective of the diversity of the Lower Hunter Community with a blend of social, economic and environmental interests and a range of professional expertise on the SAF.

Where a community group or other organisation nominates a representative, the community group or organisation must be able to demonstrate that they:

- have a formally constituted entity, with a reasonably-sized membership base
- have appropriate mechanisms in place to report on the views of the community and to disseminate information from Hunter Water to their respective community members
- have primary objectives aligned with the interests of one or more of the areas nominated as requirements for membership to the SAF with direct-linkages in place
- are non-political in its purpose or character.

If a member's position should become vacant mid-term, then Hunter Water may choose to seek further nominations to fill this position. Any such decision including membership selection will be at the discretion of Hunter Water.

### 3.3. Selection process

Hunter Water will invite expressions-of-interest from identified stakeholder organisations representing business and community groups listed in Clause 3.1. Hunter Water will also invite applications from the community via public advertisements and in writing to its customers.

Selections will be made in accordance with Hunter Water's standard recruitment and governance processes.

### 3.4. Membership vacancies

If a member's position on the SAF becomes vacant at any time, Hunter Water may request a replacement from the member organisation, or select a new member organisation to represent the interests of the vacancy. Where appropriate, membership vacancies that may arise on the SAF may be advertised on Hunter Water's website, or approaches may be made direct to relevant organisations.

Either Hunter Water or the member agency may terminate a member's tenure on the SAF. Termination notices will be issued in writing to both the member and the nominating body.

Termination of membership could result from:

- Missing three or more consecutive meetings without an apology
- Misconduct (such as inappropriate behaviour in meetings, or abuse of position on the SAF for personal gain)
- Disclosing information that has been explicitly identified as commercial-in-confidence or confidential
- Violating the intent and philosophy of the Charter
- Not adequately representing the views of member agency or the wider community
- A member of the SAF becoming an employee or contractor of Hunter Water
- In the case of local government representatives, at the conclusion of the local government term
- If membership is otherwise withdrawn or terminated by the nominating body.

## 4. The term for which members are appointed

Members will be initially appointed for a term of up to four (4) years, which can be renewed up to a maximum of one time (i.e. to a total of eight (8) consecutive years), except in exceptional circumstances (as determined by Hunter Water, in consultation with the member and/or their representative organisation).

## 5. Operations

### 5.1. Meetings

The SAF will hold at least three (3) regular meetings per annum and such additional meetings as Hunter Water may decide. Typically meetings will be held quarterly as a guide. In-person attendance is preferred for meetings; however, a virtual option will be offered when practicable.

### 5.2. Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson

An independent Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson will be appointed by Hunter Water from the SAF membership for a period of up to two (2) years, and may be renewed up to a maximum of three (3) times.

In addition to the responsibilities of members (Clause 3.2), the Chairperson will:

- support Hunter Water in ensuring that the SAF performs its functions, and acts in accordance with this Charter
- facilitate the conduct of meetings to allow frank and open discussion
- ensure individual members make an effective contribution
- support continuous improvement in the SAF's function and member engagement
- facilitate the flow of information to members and stakeholders
- liaise with Hunter Water in the development of the meeting agenda.

If the Chairperson is absent from a meeting or unable to perform the duties of the Chair, the Deputy Chairperson will perform the duties of the Chairperson. In the absence of both, Hunter Water shall nominate an alternative member to chair the meeting.

### 5.3. Attendance at meetings

Attendance at any meeting of the SAF is generally limited to the following:

- SAF Members (or a member organisation's alternative representative, should the Member be unavailable)
- Hunter Water attendees (including the Managing Director and SAF Secretary)
- Other Hunter Water staff and external persons invited by Hunter Water or the SAF.

### 5.4. Quorum

A quorum shall consist of 4 SAF members.

### 5.5. Matters to be considered by the SAF

Hunter Water will refer matters to the SAF that are of strategic or operational importance, where there is benefit in understanding customer issues and expectations. This will include topics of relevance to the membership of the SAF.

The SAF Chairperson and members may additionally nominate topics for discussion/presentation at the SAF.

## **5.6. Meeting agendas and business papers**

SAF members are encouraged to nominate topics for inclusion on the SAF meeting agenda at least seven (7) business days of the meeting.

Hunter Water will provide members with business papers at least three (3) days prior to the meeting for consideration.

## **5.7. Authority**

The SAF is an advisory committee and does not have any formal decision-making role or any responsibility for the management of Hunter Water.

## **5.8. Conflict of interest**

SAF members must declare their interest relating to agenda items, whether perceived, pecuniary or otherwise, should they feel a conflict may arise at a SAF meeting. Employees of organisations that receive grants or sponsorships from Hunter Water or are a significant provider of goods and services to Hunter Water, must declare their potential conflict of interest prior to the SAF commencing to discuss relevant agenda item, or as soon as the potential conflict becomes known to the SAF member.

## **5.9. Sub-committees/working parties**

With support of Hunter Water, the SAF may resolve to form sub-committees or working parties for consideration of particular matters. The motion to form a sub-committee or working party should include information on scope, purpose, duration and membership.

# **6. Monitoring and reporting on issues raised at the SAF**

## **6.1. Minutes**

Hunter Water will ensure that the business of the SAF is properly recorded. Minutes will be recorded by a Hunter Water representative and will include a summary of actions arising to ensure appropriate follow up and reporting back to the SAF membership.

Draft minutes will be presented to the SAF for endorsement at the following meeting.

Endorsed meeting minutes will be published on Hunter Water's website. Confidential and/or matters of a sensitive nature will be redacted from the published minutes, at Hunter Water's discretion.

# **7. Communicating the outcomes of the SAF's work to the public**

## **7.1. Reporting responsibilities**

Hunter Water will promote the existence and objectives of the SAF to the community and employees of Hunter Water. SAF activities will be reported by Hunter Water in accordance with the following:

- Publishing endorsed minutes of SAF meetings on Hunter Water's website
- Publishing a summary of the SAF's work each year in Hunter Water's Annual Report

Additionally, a copy of the SAF Charter will be placed on Hunter Water's website.

# **8. Funding and resourcing of the SAF**

Hunter Water will resource the SAF to ensure it operates effectively and efficiently, including venue hire, technical tours, and administrative support.

In consultation with the SAF, Hunter Water will facilitate appropriate technical tours and site visits to coincide with SAF meetings.

Hunter Water will provide secretarial support to the SAF who will be responsible for the collation of the agenda and minutes and support the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson in convening meetings of the SAF.

A sitting fee will be paid to members of the SAF consistent with the half-day daily rates set for Advisory Boards and Committees in the NSW Premier's Memorandum M2012-18 Classification and Remuneration Framework for NSW Government Boards and Committees, as amended from time to time. Fee increases will be considered at the start of each financial year, in line with relevant NSW Government policy.

## **9. Charter**

### **9.1. Amendment and revision**

The Charter will be reviewed at least once every four years, or earlier if required, to reflect changes in best practice and engagement requirements.

The Charter is to be approved by Hunter Water, following consultation with the SAF.

## **10. Approvals**

Date reviewed by CCAG: 17 June 2025

Date approved: 1 July 2025

Next review by: 1 July 2028