



# Hunter Water Community Committee summary report

March 2026



Item	Description
1. Planned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours
2. Planned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours
3. Unplanned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours
4. Unplanned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours
5. Unplanned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours
6. Unplanned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours
7. Unplanned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours
8. Unplanned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours
9. Unplanned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours
10. Unplanned water investigation	• 100% of the water that has been of high water pressure within 24 hours

# Summary

Hunter Water provides water and wastewater services for a population of over 630,000 in almost 260,000 homes and businesses throughout the Lower Hunter region. We are the second largest urban water utility in NSW and amongst the group of 15 major urban water utilities in Australia with more than 100,000 customers. Hunter Water is a state-owned monopoly.

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) sets prices for most of our services, as we are the only provider of these services for almost all of our region. Prices are currently set for the regulatory period running from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2030. Towards the end of this period, Hunter Water will propose new prices. IPART will review the proposal and set prices to come into effect.

Under the IPART framework, Hunter Water needs to describe the value it delivers to customers through a defined set of customer outcomes. These outcomes represent clear commitments to the community about what customers will receive in return for the prices they pay. Each outcome is supported by a suite of key performance measures (“measures”) that provide tangible evidence of service delivery and performance.

While performance against these measures is largely quantitative and reported through traffic light ratings, interpretation is not always straightforward. A measure that is not met may reflect insufficient organisational focus, but it may also be influenced by external factors such as measurement limitations, natural disasters, or broader global events. Conversely, a measure that is achieved may be the result of sustained organisational effort, favourable circumstances, or both. As such, traffic light reporting alone does not fully capture the effort, or the contextual complexity, that can sit behind performance results.

Hunter Water is genuinely interested in customer and community perceptions of our performance and the value we provide which has led to the establishment of a Community Committee (“committee”). The committee provides an additional layer of independent judgement alongside quantitative reporting. Over the past 18 months, Hunter Water has invested significant time and resources in developing this committee. Its membership includes both new participants and individuals involved in the development of the 2025 pricing proposal.

The committee is evolving into a well-informed and independent group of community representatives. Members understand their responsibility to reflect community perspectives and to help the people of the Lower Hunter assess whether Hunter Water is delivering on its commitments and providing appropriate value for money. In doing so, the committee strengthens transparency, accountability, and community confidence in the regulatory framework, and in Hunter Water’s performance within it.

In August 2026, the committee will be convened to recommend a performance rating for each outcome for the preceding financial year and provide commentary to help IPART and the broader community understand the context behind the reported figures and traffic light ratings. This session is a critical mechanism for translating quantitative performance data into a balanced narrative that reflects both results and the drivers behind those results.

To support an effective review in August 2026, Hunter Water convened the committee in March 2026 at McDonald Jones Stadium in Newcastle for a preparatory session. The purpose of this workshop was to rehearse the review process in practice, allowing both the committee and Hunter Water to test, refine, and strengthen the approach ahead of the formal session.

Hunter Water subject matter experts (SMEs) presented performance outcomes to date and engaged directly with committee members. The session demonstrated strong accountability and openness, with presenters acknowledging both achievements and areas of challenge. In parallel, committee members practised developing clear, balanced statements suitable for public communication, aimed at helping the community understand whether performance outcomes reflected genuine effort, external constraints, or a combination of both.

This preparatory engagement has strengthened the capability and confidence of both Hunter Water and the Community Committee. It has also improved the robustness of the August 2026 review process, reinforced transparency, and supported informed community oversight in the current regulatory period.

Hunter Water provides services in accordance with its Operating Licence and Customer Contract. The Contract outlines customer rights and obligations, including a defined set of events and the rebates payable when those events occur. These events relate to service failures or disruptions that directly affect customers, with rebates intended to acknowledge the inconvenience caused.

The relative severity of these events has been assessed on two previous occasions, once through the Community Committee and once through a broader community survey. Drawing on insights from both research exercises, Hunter Water consolidated a list of eight key inconvenience events for further testing with the Community Committee.

At the March 2026 session, committee members were asked to allocate 100 tokens across the eight events in proportion to the level of inconvenience each represented. The reasons why committee members allocated the tokens the ways they did were also recorded. Under this approach, an event considered twice as inconvenient as another would receive twice as many tokens. This exercise provided a structured and transparent way to test community views on the relative impact of service disruptions, supporting future consideration of rebate settings and licence obligations.

The session also included a comparative water tasting exercise. Committee members sampled two water sources from the Lower Hunter alongside Brisbane water, bottled water, and water from the Sydney Desalination Plant. The activity provided an engaging and practical demonstration of water quality, and supported discussion about service standards.

In addition, committee members received an update on the progress of key initiatives previously recommended by the deliberative panel ahead of the 2025 pricing proposal. This provided continuity between past engagement activities and current performance oversight, further strengthening the role of the Community Committee within Hunter Water's broader regulatory and accountability framework.



# Key takeaways



**What worked well:** Participants valued the collaborative environment and felt the activities allowed them to clearly express their views. The Hunter Water subject matter experts were seen as knowledgeable, helpful and informative.



**Timing:** Participants would like more time with subject matter experts to ask questions and process information. They felt too much time was allocated to discussion, leaving limited time to draft outputs. A better balance is needed between full group discussion, small group work, and dedicated writing time.



**Pre-work:** To address time constraints, participants supported the use of short pre-reading materials and optional webinars. They noted this would allow more time during the session to develop and draft outputs.



**Background and context:** Participants requested more information about the performance targets and data sources. Simple summaries and FAQs would help their understanding.



**Small editing group:** Participants supported a process where a small editing group refines the outputs after the committee meeting. The draft outputs would be shared with the full group for comment, before being published on Hunter Water's website.



**Use of AI:** Participants supported using AI to draft outputs during the session, on the condition that committee members review the inputs and check the outputs.



**Report card design:** Participants preferred a simple design, including the use of colour coding and icons. Year-on-year comparisons should be used to show progress over time.