

# 2024 Customer Assessment Panel

## Customer commentary summary report

As part of our promise to customers, we committed to delivering the outcomes and performance that customers sought as part of the 2023 Price Review process and report back to customers through our Annual Watermark. This document would include a customer-led performance assessment of how we performed against the following six customer commitments:

- Provide me with high-quality drinking water:
- Keep my essential services affordable
- Resolve sewer blockages quickly
- Keep water interruptions to a minimum
- Reduce your environmental impact and adapt to climate change
- Be there when I need you.

In 2024 we established a **Customer Assessment Panel** to review our performance and provide commentary on our performance over the 2023-24 period against these six commitments.

**The following report is commentary provided by the Customer Assessment Panel, and summarises the feedback:**

### Outcome 1 – High-quality drinking water

**This outcome is about perceptions of and measures of quality with drinking water, including customer satisfaction, water quality complaints, Safe Drinking Water Act non-compliances (tested by water sampling and audit).**

#### ***Where has WPW fallen short?***

- I would like to see Westernport Water aim higher than perhaps what they're doing at the moment, especially in regard to the drinking water. The fact that their target is 67%, I suppose I'd like to see that Westernport Water aim a little bit higher than that.
- The number one factor to me is the variation in taste and what everyone expects for clean, clear water varies. What I see is, Westernport Water fails with the expectation of people and your expert explaining it why that's the case to them when they come down to the island.
- I think Westernport Water has fallen short in that a third of customers surveyed are unsatisfied with the taste of the water. So perhaps over winter the aging of the water is something to look into.
- The only thing I can really complain about is the water pressure and fluctuations, the variations and the consequences involved.

#### ***What part of this Outcome would you encourage WPW to focus on in the coming year?***

- Here, from my point of view, I keep coming back to the customer satisfaction and the taste. What I'd like to see is transparency around, for bettering 67%. I'm for something better.
- Customer satisfaction rates need to go up and the answer might be education of those that are not here full time.

- I think focus on taste. I love it. I love the water.
- Customer satisfaction taste, quality and flow.

**What should WPW be commended for?**

- Communication with customers. That's from my own personal perspective, no problems. And having in place systems to monitor the quality of water.
- I'll say your attention to detail. The activity on the ground, all this to deliver a good taste. You should be commended for it. The commitment to continuous improvement. They've developed achievable performance measures that align with their customer's needs including a continuous improvement program for water quality.
- I believe Westernport Water should be commended for meeting the challenge of the summer versus winter population counter and for investing time and funds into continuous improvement.

**How would you describe WPW's performance on this Outcome to your neighbours?**

- The Water Board's actually had audits and we know auditing can be a very rigorous process and they are compliant with all legislation and regulation and I think getting seven out of 10 customers that were satisfied, it's a pretty good outcome. Though always room for improvement.
- I would say that and performance in comparison to our neighbours is exceptional, and in particular in relation to the fact that you're engaging the public to share information and the quality of water is awesome as well. I love it too.
- The standards that are set and the expectations are very, very high and Westernport Water consistently exceeds all of the targets that it sets.

## Outcome 1 summary

We think that Westernport Water is doing a commendable job in some areas, particularly in terms of compliance with regulations and their efforts in continuous improvement. The fact that they meet or exceed their targets and have a strong commitment to improving water quality is appreciated. Some of us even love the taste of the water, which is a positive note.

However, more could be done, especially on customer satisfaction with the taste of the water. Many of us feel that the current satisfaction target of 67% is not ambitious enough. We believe Westernport Water should aim higher to meet the expectations of a greater proportion of customers. Taste, in particular, seems to be a recurring issue, with a significant number of us noting that about a third of customers are not satisfied with taste. The variation in taste, possibly due to seasonal changes, is a concern that some of us feel needs more attention.

There's also some frustration with fluctuations in water pressure, which impacts our overall experience. Additionally, while communication has been praised by some, others feel that more transparency and education could help improve satisfaction, particularly for part-time residents.

In summary, while we recognise and appreciate the efforts and successes of Westernport Water, we think there's room for improvement, especially in enhancing the taste of the water and raising the bar on customer satisfaction targets.

## Outcome 2 – Reduce your environmental impact and adapt to climate change

**This outcome is measured by nutrients discharge, greenhouse gas emissions and volume of effluent reused.**

### ***Where has WPW fallen short?***

- I think where it's fallen short is in the trend. So, if you look at the nutrient discharge, we've had around about a 20% increase in nutrient discharge. If this trend continues, we'll be bumping up against the EPA limit.
- Well, I think in informing the customers about what you're actually doing here. I think you're doing some great stuff but 53% of not knowing about it is very high.
- I think you've fallen short. By calling wastewater "wastewater" when it should be called enriched water because it's going to be more and more valuable as time goes on, and it's just wonderful stuff so give it another name.
- I think you have fallen short in informing customers. 53% said they don't know, which may mean that the information is not getting through to them. Maybe a newsletter or Email newsletter. You know, every so often to say what's happening at Westernport Water. A lot of people won't keep asking questions if they know what's going on.

### ***What part of this Outcome would you encourage WPW to focus on in the coming year?***

- The volume effluent used/treated as an asset, not as a waste.
- Increase the sequestration through your reedbeds and tree planting and perhaps seek general farm use as a place to get rid of your enriched water.
- Customer education. Just so that people can understand while the targets are being achieved, they may not see the link between the projects being undertaken and what their purpose is. A bit more education around that might get some better results in the surveys. And the wastewater, highlighting it as an asset.
- It's simply continuing with trialling floating wetlands in other location.

### ***What should WPW be commended for?***

- I think they should be commended for investigating alternate solutions and acting in addressing climate change.
- I think Westernport Water should be commended for the fact they're consciously considering the climate and the environment through the work that you're doing. Further effort in educating residents on this in an easy to understand way so that you can join the dots.
- Consistently exceeding the targets in reducing environmental impact, but specifically the improvements in the net greenhouse gas emissions. As it's a particularly sensitive area to many, many people.

### ***How would you describe WPW's performance on this Outcome to your neighbours?***

- Westernport Water are tackling environmental impact and adapting to climate change in multiple facets.
- Clear cut. Great performance to all targets now and forward planning, meeting compliance and expectations of users.
- Thoughtful and forward thinking in this, area, really good.
- I'd like the aid of a brochure to actually get it out to all the uh neighbours to show them what a wonderful job they're doing.

## Outcome 2 Summary

Westernport Water has made great progress in reducing its environmental impact and adapting to climate change, particularly in the areas of greenhouse gas emissions and overall environmental efforts. The panel appreciates the thoughtful and forward-thinking approach that Westernport Water has demonstrated.

However, the Panel is concerned about the increase in nutrient discharge, which rose by nearly 20% last year. This is a significant point that needs attention.

We also believe that there is room for improvement in how Westernport Water communicates its efforts to the community. Many customers feel that they are not well-informed about the positive work being done. A more effective communication strategy, such as regular newsletters or educational materials could help customers better understand and appreciate the company's environmental initiatives.

While the performance in reducing environmental impact is strong and meets all targets, better communication and addressing the increasing nutrient discharge are areas that could enhance Westernport Water's efforts in this outcome.

## Outcome 3 – Resolve sewer blockages quickly

**This outcome is measured by average sewer blockage response time and average sewer blockage rectification time.**

### ***Where has WPW fallen short?***

- Wastewater not meeting the target. It's very hard when you have, I could say aging infrastructure and the time it takes to replace that. So, I think that's a hard KPI to meet.
- Sewer, obviously you've got to do that quick. You're trying as hard as you can on that one. I can't give any negativity on that. With aging infrastructure, it's going to take some time.

### ***What should WPW be commended for?***

- 400km of sewerage pipe, 18 blockages in a year, and to rectify them that quickly is really good.
- Halving response and resolution times to sewer blockage is a great achievement.

### ***How would you describe WPW's performance on this Outcome to your neighbours?***

- They're reliable for wastewater as soon as they're notified. They're there in half an hour and they correct it quickly. I'll describe their performance with wastewater disruption as excellent. And I was impressed by the CCTV checking and pipes remotely. I think that's very innovative.

## Outcome 3 summary

Westernport Water has done an excellent job in addressing sewer blockages. The panel recognises the challenges posed by aging infrastructure, yet despite these challenges, Westernport Water's performance has been impressive. Halving the response and resolution times is a significant achievement, and it's clear they are putting in the effort to address issues promptly.

We were also impressed by their innovative use of technology, such as CCTV inspections of pipes, which helps ensure that problems are identified and dealt with effectively. We believe that the low number of blockages in the year is a result of their excellent maintenance practices.

The CAP understands that there are challenges with aging infrastructure, however Westernport Water is doing well in this Outcome and their efforts in resolving sewer blockages quickly are appreciated.

## Outcome 4 – Keep water interruptions to a minimum

**This outcome is measured by average duration of unplanned water supply interruptions and Average number of planned and unplanned water supply interruptions per customer.**

### ***Where has WPW fallen short?***

- It appears on paper that in some instances they've fallen short, but with the explanations that we were given I understand there's been consideration as to what's required to try and make the infrastructure or the service better, whilst still considering a better service at the detriment of the KPI's that are reported on – so, whilst it's fallen short, I think it's strategic.
- Obviously, the average duration of unplanned outages is where Westernport water has fallen short. But in saying that, average is a horrible metric to try and meet a target to in that area. You can blow your average out by one bad failing. All the other data points in there could be extraordinarily good, but without that data, it's hard to say if that's a good measure of a bad target.
- If you had a calendar when the outages are going to occur then they're not unplanned. So, you don't have to put them as a statistic

### ***What part of this Outcome would you encourage WPW to focus on in the coming year?***

- Westernport Water can provide more communication around the upgrading of, and replacement of existing assets to reduce unplanned disruptions.
- On the scale that was provided, the Water Board is fourth out of roughly 16. I would think that that would be a major task to be focused on lowering that position.
- Just continuing to focus on providing minimal interruptions through investment into repair and renewal of our infrastructure.

### ***What should WPW be commended for?***

- I think Westernport Water should be commended for prioritizing quality of the water and taking the hit on the KPI.
- Considering you know that one of the major interruptions was not caused by Westernport Water. They responded very well. So,
- I think they did quite well for all that.

### ***How would you describe WPW's performance on this Outcome to your neighbours?***

- The way it's measured as an average is the problem. I'd happily say they do a pretty good job considering that some circumstances are completely beyond their control.
- For water supply, I would say you've got their finger on the pulse.
- With water interruptions, there might be some but the communication around why and when's been really great.

## Outcome 4 summary

The Customer Assessment Panel recognises that Westernport Water has not met its target in average duration of unplanned water supply interruptions. The CAP notes that in this instance the average metric was skewed by one significant incident that was beyond the corporation's control. We also recognise that in this instance, Westernport Water chose to prioritise quality and long-term improvements, which impacted their performance in this area. We encourage WPW to keep investing in repair and renewal efforts and to minimise interruptions.

Westernport Waters's communication about water interruptions is a strong point, with clear explanations about ongoing infrastructure upgrades. Maintaining or improving communications may help to manage customer expectations around supply interruptions.

Overall, while there is room for improvement, Westernport Water is performing well and should be recognised for its commitment to water quality and infrastructure improvements.

## Outcome 5 – Be there when I need you

**This outcome is measured by number of complaints, average response time to Priority 1 bursts and leaks, average response time to Priority 2 bursts and leaks, customer satisfaction with ease of effort – ‘Would you say that they are easy to deal with?’**

### ***Where has WPW fallen short?***

- I'd like to see Westernport Water improve on identifying what are priority one and two jobs so they can reduce their outages.
- The average response time is the major issue that you've fallen short on, also maybe some of the signage on some of your vehicles might be improved to help the situation as well.
- The second output, on paper is the one to work on, but clearly without that one issue, things are going really well.
- I like the focus on the snap send solve to make those response times a little bit quicker.
- I don't think they have fallen short, I think you're always transparent, helpful and willing to negotiate if there is a problem in reducing water fees with the breakages, so full points from my end.

### ***What part of this Outcome would you encourage WPW to focus on in the coming year?***

- Some of the market, the signage and some of your vehicles might be improved to help the situation as well.
- Focus on the snap send and solve, so maybe that's something to look into.
- I'd actually increase the transparency over these average response times, but the number of compliant responses versus the noncompliant responses because the 36.3 hides that you're good in 20 out of 21 responses. I'm saying use the actual numbers. Rather than reporting the average times, use the numbers of average responses. And just improving that response time, even with taking that long one out of the equation.
- Well, you can't please all the people all the time. 92% is pretty good, but maybe just got to focus on that last 8%.
- It was mentioned that other waterboards have an app and that should be a focus in the future because I know a lot of people would like to use that. But in the meantime, why can't there be an urgent phone number that you can just text a picture to and a few comments where someone could be monitoring that phone number. Some people haven't got time to sit around on a phone, they might just go quick, take a photos, text it. They might be busy in their life, they don't have time to wait on the phone or on a website or an app.

### ***What should WPW be commended for?***

- Except for that one outlier. Keep on keeping on. You seem to be doing the right thing.
- Yeah, you're dealing with the unusual and unexpected. I think having the versatile workforce you've got is obviously doing the right thing.
- It just shows that the customers are a priority for them because they have the outcome “be there when I need you” and they are.
- They should be commended for 92% saying they were easy to deal with. I can't imagine other government bodies getting that high a result and it's well deserved.

**How would you describe WPW's performance on this Outcome to your neighbours?**

- Getting 92% of great comments back and halving the number of complaints from the previous year and especially during peak periods when lots of things can go wrong, I think that's a tremendous outcome.
- I think the results are good in comparison to our neighbours and considering the distance that the technicians have to cover along with some of the challenges around the peak periods, I think it's good, a great performance.
- Outages happen and Westernport Water has impressive response times to issues that do affect customer supply. The customer satisfaction rating is a testament to that.

**Outcome 5 summary**

Westernport Water performs well overall in the Outcome 'Be there when I need you', but the CAP has some concerns that the target for average response time to Priority 2 bursts and leaks has not been met.

The CAP recognises that using an average as a reporting metric is problematic, and a suggestion is to report the number of responses meeting the required response time rather than the average time. The CAP also suggests better promotion of existing reporting tools like Snap Send Solve, or to create an app or a text-based urgent contact system to make it easier for customers to report issues.

Despite these suggestions, the panel notes the great achievements of Westernport Water's with a high customer satisfaction rate of 92% and halving the number of complaints year-on-year. We appreciate their helpfulness and willingness to address issues.

Though improvements can be made in response times, overall Westernport Water's performance in being there when needed is strong and appreciated.

**Outcome 6 – Keep my essential services affordable**

**This outcome is measured by Number of hardship grants approved and Number of utility relief grant scheme payments.**

**Where has WPW fallen short?**

- Westernport hasn't fallen short, it has satisfied its targets, but the targets don't really work to measure the true purpose of the outcome.
- Listen on these metrics Westernport, has done fantastically well. And to meet the heading "keep my essential services affordable" where there should be some KPIs on it for all customers. So, what are we doing for all customers to keep it affordable? That's, but that's not captured there.
- I don't think Westernport Water is falling short on this. I think they've stepped up in line with the tough economic times.
- I don't particularly think they've fallen short, you know, maybe just getting the information out a bit better.

**What part of this Outcome would you encourage WPW to focus on in the coming year?**

- I'm a little bit confused by the heading on this one. But having just got my water bill, it's still affordable. So, no complaints.
- We've got to keep that idea of watching out for the people who need help.
- They've obviously excelled in these areas and the last 12 months. So just keep focusing on doing that. And yeah, carry on.

- Similar, just continuing to help people help themselves through payment plans and grants.

**What should WPW be commended for?**

- They've got to be commended for helping in this high cost of living crisis for many people. They should be really proud of themselves and what they've been doing it's fantastic.
- Agree they should be commended. But I think again, the communication around that could be improved. I was also confused with the outcome heading versus the results.
- Agree - it's really nice to find out and discover that Westernport Water actually does care for the people who can't meet their own needs and meet their own costs, and provides them with a way to actually get through and get back on track.

**How would you describe WPW's performance on this Outcome to your neighbours?**

- I would say that Westernport Water providing great assistance. That to those of us that are having a bit of hardship.
- Westernport Water are working hard to provide an affordable service to those that can't afford it. The ESC checks the pricing, so maybe some information on how we measure up there on affordability because that would better suit the heading "making it affordable". I think they're doing a great job overall,
- Meeting hardship by listening, assessing and working towards solutions.
- All seems to be in keeping with reasonable cost of living increases.

## Outcome 6 summary

Westernport Water has performed well in keeping essential services affordable. The Customer Assessment Panel acknowledges that Westernport Water has met its targets providing hardship grants and utility relief payments and commends Westernport Water for providing these supports. The CAP recommends improved communication to customers about these supports.

The CAP has some concern about how the metrics on grants align with the broader outcome of keeping essential services affordable and note that the metrics do not measure affordability for all customers. The CAP recommends increased transparency, communication, and improvements on metrics to capture their performance on affordability more broadly.

Overall, the CAP applauds Westernport Water for its efforts to assist those in hardship and for maintaining affordability amid rising costs of living.