

Gwydir Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Town & Country Club, 5 Frome St, MOREE
Date: 9 July 2024
Time: 9.00am

Present: Louise Gall (acting Chair), Harry Cush, Chrissy Jeffries, Chris Robinson, Zeb Chapman, David Preston (online), Lila-Jane Fisher (online), Bernie George (observer) and Kirra-Lee McNamara (observer).

WaterNSW: Andrew George, Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Ken Gee, Kate Masters, Michelle Yeaman, Tom Riley, Chris Shaw, Sonia Townsend (online), Chris Bath (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: Sam Stokes, Duncan Wallace, Ben Arabin, Alexandra Spink, Jon Hocking, Michael Martinson, Martin Brooks,

Agency and external staff: David Andersen (NSW DCCEEW, online), Fiona Court (SEC Newgate) and Jackson Streeter (SEC Newgate, online).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: Jim Cush, Joe Robinson, Mark Winter, Michael Seery.

1.3 Confirmation of Agenda Items:

1.4 Declaration of Interest(s):

– Declarations of interest were sought from attendees in relation to the meeting's agenda items. No interests were declared. Items included in the agenda are not considered confidential unless declared as such.

1.5 Election of Chairperson

– Jim Cush was nominated by Zeb Chapman, seconded by Harry Cush. Nil other nominations received.
– Accepted and carried.

1.6 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 19 March 2024:

– Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [19 March 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

D Preston/Z Chapman (carried)

1.7 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. OPERATIONS:

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Gee)

– WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Gwydir valley, including rainfall and outlook, recent actual vs statistical inflows, overview of the Water Resource Monitoring Dashboard, current storage status and water availability and usage 2023/24 and 2024/25.
– WaterNSW expects to deliver large volumes of water out of Copeton Dam in the upcoming season.
– Winter maintenance on downstream weirs and regulators is largely complete. Tyreel is the only remaining structure, with dates to be scheduled. It is expected the work will take one week.

- Releases will be order on demand for the 2024/25 season. Channel capacity constraints may occur on the Lower Gwydir below Tyreel during peak demand (late Jan/early Feb).
- The Gwydir Valley 3-year rolling average supplementary roster was presented and discussed.
- WaterNSW provided an explanation of the management of the top end of the Carole system and how decisions were made in April 2024, as requested by members:
 - Under the interpretation of the WSP rules at that time, there was a change to d/s Barwon triggers (previously if forecast to be met, NSW DCCEEW would typically have given approval for a supplementary event). There were two reasons the top end didn't receive an allocation at this time: the North West Flow Plan rules have been added to the WSP and simplified, and in doing this some intent was removed. As triggers were not initially considered met, no access was made on the Carole and; Marshall Ponds inflow came up and down over 36 hours (too late to announce access for the top section of the Carole). It is important to note that despite no announcement in the top section of the Carole, the three-year rolling average will even that out across the valley.
 - Members sought assurance that misinterpretation of the rules would not happen again. WaterNSW advised that it seeks approval from NSW DCCEEW based on a forecast that triggers will be met. NSW DCCEEW has provided advice that Barwon triggers are considered to be met with actual or forecast flows.
 - Members stated there needs to be some stipulation from NSW DCCEEW around appropriate number of days after triggers are met can WaterNSW still make the release; what is fair and reasonable.

2.2 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional operations and maintenance and NSW DCCEEW's Hydrometric Network Remote Sensing (HNRS) program.
- Overhaul of Copeton Dam 914mm end of line release valve was completed for the first time in 25 years. This will extend the life of the asset for another 25 years and was done as capital maintenance by our maintenance team with contractors.
- Flood erosion repair work u/s of Tareelaroi Weir due to damage that occurred in the 2022 floods is complete. The damage has not only been repaired, but future proofed. Most of this was done under insurance.
- The HNRS program is a collaborative program of four projects funded by the Australian Government to enhance the quality, availability and transparency of water monitoring and information for the Northern Murray-Darling Basin.
- WaterNSW was engaged by NSW DCCEEW under the program to deliver 20 new or upgraded sites across the network. Selection of stations done with a technical working group, including WaterNSW staff, to work out where the optimal location for sites would be (utility, accessibility, usability). The data is now available on [WaterInsights](#), however new gauges will take some time to validate rating tables.
- If the CAG would like more detailed information on any of the projects presented at the next meeting, please provide feedback via toni.hayes@waternsw.com.au.
- Members are interested in more information on work done on LiDAR for remote sensing.
- Members sought an update on progress of the new gauge at Gurley Creek. WaterNSW advised the gauge has been installed under the HNRS program and data is now live in WaterInsights. In terms of the relationship between height and flow rate, there may be a period required to develop the relationship/flow. The river height/level will be correct however the flow rate will take time to validate.
- WaterNSW provided information on gauging station management and flow accuracy, as requested by members via email out of session. The Gwydir catchment had 372 gaugings performed across 42 gauging stations. The average visit per flow site was 4.5 visits per year; 14/372 gaugings (3.8%) are still being addressed to be within the quality prescribed +/-10%.

- Members believe there are some gauges in the Lower Gwydir that are continually out. WaterNSW to investigate.

Action GWY2407.01: Members to provide details of gauges believed to be inaccurate to WaterNSW for investigation.

Responsibility: D Preston

2.3 WaterInsights – Current Development Approaches and Feedback – workshop/discussion (T Riley)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the [WaterInsights platform](#), including background and design intent, key functions and relation to real time data (RTD), recent updates, future planning and roadmap for future development.
- WaterInsights is WaterNSW's interactive online tool that provides information about how water is managed by WaterNSW. The data on WaterInsights is the fastest and most up to date data available.
- WaterNSW is planning for the next pricing determination and sought feedback from members on what is working/not working for them, what information they would like included etc, to ensure customers have access to the information they need.
- A live demonstration of the WaterInsights platform and key functions presented and discussed. Customers can view water availability, allocation, account balances, water quality data, storage volumes, river flows and levels, historical data on dam and stream levels and rules and conditions that govern water management, and more.
- Customers also have the option to register for an account and log in to the platform. While not a requirement, the benefits of logging in are that flow alerts can be set for specific gauges, salinity levels, flow, river height etc. Customers can also register to receive notifications and be alerted via SMS or email.
- Members provided valuable feedback which will be consolidated and considered by the WaterInsights team for future improvements and inclusion where appropriate. Customers can also provide feedback direct to the WaterInsights teams via the feedback tab on the WaterInsights page.
- Short instructional videos that explain how to use the main features of WaterInsights, including navigation, registering for an account, setting river gauge and water source alerts etc, can be found at the bottom of the [WaterInsights](#) landing page and [WaterInsights - YouTube](#).

2.4 WaterNSW involvement in Northern Connectivity Expert Panel draft report (K Masters)

- The panel was established to provide the Minister for Water with independent advice on potential changes to flow targets in water sharing plans that could help improve connectivity across the northern NSW Murray-Darling Basin. The panel's interim findings and recommendations report was released in April.
- Summary of proposed key recommendations/rule changes to increase connectivity presented and discussed.
- WaterNSW's involvement included presentation to the panel on how forecasting works and limitations/considerations, as well as participation in the northern connectivity working group facilitated by NSW DCCEE. There has been no direct involvement with the Connectivity Expert Panel.
- WaterNSW reviewed the draft report and has gone back on multiple occasions to answer further questions on how river operations work. Summary of operational considerations/recommendations relevant to WaterNSW presented and discussed.
- The final report will be presented to the Minister in July. The Government will review all recommendations in the final report, and then determine next steps.
- Members highlighted a number of concerns with the panel's report, stating the panel has ignored input.
- WaterNSW will continue to participate in the working group to provide operational advice and work with NSW DCCEE on operation-related matters. Any policy changes will be considered by NSW DCCEE through a process associated with amending relevant WSPs.
- Further information is available at [Connectivity Expert Panel | Water \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

2.5 Regional Valleys Drought Management Approach (B Maher)

- WaterNSW has developed an approach to managing drought in regulated valleys, including development of valley-based Drought Contingency Plans and a drought management and framework plan. Input from CAG members and stakeholders during online workshops May-August 2023 was considered.
- WaterNSW is now better prepared for the next drought, with enhanced understanding of valley-specific issues and contingency options. We will continue to work with customers and relevant agencies in managing water in NSW during drought.
- A more detailed presentation on our drought management plans will be provided at the October/November CAG meeting if the CAG would like more information.

3. PRICING ENGAGEMENT:

3.1 Engagement on 2025 Pricing Proposal

- Discussion and actions in this session have been recorded by SEC Newgate (summary attached).
- More information on WaterNSW's 2025-2030 pricing proposal, including Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports, are available on our website at <https://engagement.waternsw.com.au/WaterNSW-Pricing-Proposal-2025-2030>
- Customers can sign up for IPART updates at <https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/Home/Reviews/Have-Your-Say>

4. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

4.1 Customer Services update (B Arabin)

- WaterNSW provided an update on recent developments in the Customer Services space, including water order to delivery project review (including definition of a water order), third party consent for temporary groundwater trades, face-to-face application assistance trial (BLR bores), status of DQP enquiries and telemetry rebate update.
- WaterNSW has finalised the internal review of a water order definition, based on 'what is a water order' and how they are managed in practice by customers and WaterNSW. There is no proposed change to rules, however this will provide a consistent definition and understanding for all customers across the State. Draft definition presented and discussed (feedback can be provided to ben.arabin@waternsw.com.au). The water order period is 8am-8am (24-hour period), with releases made from 9am.
- A new third-party consent process for groundwater temporary trades came into effect on 1 July 2024 (where there is an impact on a neighbouring bore due to trade). WaterNSW will provide direction to guide the applicant in identifying third-party bores. Where third-party consent cannot be obtained, applications may be refused, or a reduced volume offered. [FAQs Groundwater temporary trades 71T Dealings\(waternsw.com.au\)](#)
- A face-to-face application assistance trial for BLR bores is live at our Tamworth office to assist customers with poor internet or those not comfortable submitting a digital application. There are plans to extend to other application types and locations if successful. A paper-based form is still offered where there is no other option, however this will eventually be phased out.
- As requested in March 2024 by some CAGs, WaterNSW now includes customers into relevant communications with DQPs so they get the same information that is sent to their DQP. Seventy-three percent of DQP enquiries are resolved within 9 days; 50% of open enquiries are sitting with the DQP for action.
- The Government telemetry rebate, previously available for customers who installed telemetry on their LID, ceased on 30 June 2024. All installs registered in the portal by midnight on 30 June will be honoured.
- Members commented that when contacting the customer service centre, it is difficult to reach the right person to help with their enquiry. WaterNSW advised the phone system licence has been extended to licensing and billing and to tier 2 and tier 3 to ensure the customer is in contact with the

right person. We have seen a big improvement in call resolution since doing this and we will provide updates at the next CAG as this is rolled out.

4.2 Metering Q&A / Workshop (M Brooks/C Shaw)

- The Non-Urban Metering Reform review commissioned by the Minister in 2023 is near finalisation and it is expected to be made public in the next few weeks. Until the review goes through, the current regulations remain in place.

4.3 Floodplain Harvesting Measurement update (D Andersen – NSW DCCEEW)

- The compliance date for the Gwydir has passed. At 30 June 2024, 18.3% of storages in the Gwydir had primary metering equipment in place, with another 30% on the way.
- The [Metering Equipment Standards 2024](#) and [Survey Benchmark Guideline](#) for floodplain harvesting measurement have been updated.
- Customers are encouraged to ensure your storages are compliant by either metering the storage; marking the storage inactive (if not using FPH); or seeking an exemption if you physically cannot comply.
- Members sought an update on the Omnibus review. NSW DCCEEW advised they are seeking options that would allow irrigation during a floodplain harvesting event.
- NSW DCCEEW advised there is also an amendment going through that should address the issue around subdivision of FPH works approvals in Zone A and Zone B so can reconnect to 'children' works approval.
- Members queried if there are any further insights into Goanna meters that were approved as secondary meters and questioned the probability of those meters being accepted as primary meters. NSW DCCEEW advised that the regulations stipulate a 5-year requirement, however the department is in conversation with Goanna to see if they can upgrade their systems.
- Members questioned if there has been any testing on events done as yet. WaterNSW advised that testing has been done in a test environment, there is only so much that can be done in a live environment and some process gaps that need to be addressed.
- Improvements to the DQP portal should be embedded by the end of the financial year. WaterNSW will work with customers to ensure they are able to take during an event and help with an audit trail.

Action GWY2407.02: WaterNSW to investigate if FPH compliance percentages can be framed by the percentage of FPH entitlement across the valley.

Responsibility: M Brooks

- Further information can be found at <https://www.waternsw.com.au/customer-services/water-licensing/floodplain-harvesting>

5. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

5.1 Future CAG Engagement (B Maher)

- As previously discussed with CAGs, WaterNSW is working on a shift in our approach to customer and community engagement to deliver on our strategic priority to be respected by the customers and communities we serve. Feedback was sought from CAG members via a survey in November 2023 and findings and further feedback sought at the March 2024 meeting.
- Changes to the WaterNSW Operating Licence around customer and stakeholder engagement came into effect 1 July 2024, which provides an opportunity for WaterNSW to make positive changes to our engagement with customers and CAGs to ensure they are getting the information they want when they need it.
- WaterNSW is proposing to move to two face-to-face CAG meetings per year with the option for an additional online meeting as required and two CAG Chairperson's meetings. Based on your feedback, we propose to implement workshops between WaterNSW staff and customers, present valley-specific information where possible, be clear on the purpose of each agenda item

(inform/educate/consult/workshop) and will look to separate other agency items from WaterNSW items.

- Additional customer and community engagement activities such as community drop-in sessions, river runs in the lead up to peak water use periods, attendance at field days, local dam visits and valley tours, online webinars and water user association and industry engagement is also proposed, which will broaden our reach with our customer base. This will be done in conjunction with CAG members.
- Members were supportive of WaterNSW's proposal, stating CAGs are a good model to keep people up to date and provide regular updates. Members want new and relevant information, not a repeat of previous presentations and like the idea of hosting workshops (eg WaterInsights and FPH) and field days.
- Feedback provided by the CAGs will be taken into consideration when developing plans for future engagement.

6. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

7. GENERAL BUSINESS:

7.1 Update on Raft (D Preston)

- D Preston advised there is still no determination of what can be done to fix the issue or a funding source and discussions are ongoing. The Biodiversity, Conservation and Science Group (NSW DCCEEW) and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder are pushing to progress and will continue to update the CAG.
- Members also noted that Moree Plains Shire Council has indicated that the raft is flooding the road and causing issues with access and commented that a practical solution is needed.

7.2 Pecuniary Interests

- Members stated it is important that interests are declared, particularly when IPART is being discussed (ie there are members in the room that would have a financial interest gains/losses in relation to putting a submission to IPART).

7.3 Pricing (D Preston)

- Members referred to the proposed deferral of fishways and CWP projects from Scenario 2 in the pricing presentation, stating the environment would not support this without an alternative funding solution and questioned if there would another meeting before the IPART deadline.
- WaterNSW advised that this is not being removed from the submission but is about looking for an alternative pathway for the funding. WaterNSW has been in discussions with both the State and Commonwealth environmental water holders on the alternative scenarios.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 22 October 2024

Meeting closed: 2.40pm

Gwydir Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 9 July 2024

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
GWY2407.01	Members to provide details of gauges believed to be inaccurate to WaterNSW for investigation.	D Preston	Complete. Response (attached) provided out of session.
GWY2407.02	WaterNSW to investigate if FPH compliance percentages can be framed by the percentage of FPH entitlement across the valley.	M Brooks	

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
GWY2311.01	NSW DCCEEW to follow up customer queries regarding instructions on how to use the trial FPH meters in the Gwydir.	D Andersen (NSW DCCEEW)	

Gwydir Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 9 July 2024

Per action GWY2407.01:

The Gwydir sites from 418004 Gwydir at Yarraman and downstream are managed by the Moree team and requirements are governed by the Water Monitoring Quality Management System.

As previously relayed the KPI for flow accuracy requires each team to have no more than 55 measurements that deviate from the rating by more than 10%. Rating changes by necessity are made retrospectively following flow measurements, so there will inevitably be periods of inaccuracy before rating tables are changed. Hydstra is not used as a tool to track site visitations so relying on this could give false indications of actual visit numbers to sites.

Between 1/7/2023 and 30/7/2024 the following visits and measurements have occurred;

418004 – 8 site visits and 5 flow measurements conducted with 4 of the 5 within 10% of the rating. The most recent gauging taken 26/6/2024 with over 10% deviation from the rating will be addressed shortly

418063 – 9 site visits and 8 flow measurements conducted all within 10% of the rating.

418053 – 6 site visits and 5 flow measurements conducted with all being within 10% of the rating.

418078 – 6 site visits and 5 flow measurements conducted with all being within 10% of the rating.

418066 – 2 site visits and 2 flow measurements conducted with all being within 10% of the rating.

It should be noted that 418066 has highly restricted access making entry extremely difficult hence the lower visit numbers. The Moree Team Leader has been trying to negotiate more reliable access. Visitation frequency is determined by numerous factors including the stability of the rating with teams aiming to measure flows over the range of the rating so visit frequency over a period can vary.

As for discrepancy between 418078 Gwydir at Allambie Bridge and 418066 Gwydir at Millewa, based on a comparison discharge plot over the past financial year 418078 fairly consistently records flows above that at 418066 and total volumes going through each site supports this as well. There could be discrepancy showing at very low flows but this is to be expected with the uncertainty of flows at these low levels, flow attenuation and access issues to Millewa with teams striving to get to sites to check these discrepancies when they arise. Peter has been trying to access Millewa but rain keeps stopping access.

