

Gwydir Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Social Co House, 167 Balo St, MOREE
Date: 22 October 2024
Time: 9.00am

Present: Jim Cush (Chair), Zeb Chapman, Chrissy Jeffries, David Preston, Nick Gillingham, Zeb Chapman, Lou Gall, Derek Pascoe and Natalie Young (observer, online).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Ken Gee, Martin Brooks, Partha Saha, Sam Stokes, Kate Masters (online), Tessa Hockly (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Russell Cocks, Tim Tanner, Kyra Beasley.

Agency and external staff for specific items: David Andersen (NSW DCCEEW), Kate Drinkwater and Mustak Shaikh (NSW DCCEEW, online).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

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

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 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 9 July 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [9 July 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.
Z Chapman/L Gall (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

2.1 Customer Services update (D Stockler)

- WaterNSW provided a Customer Services update, including water ordering and compliance, third party consent for groundwater temporary trades, customer experience improvements, new features in the water market system (customer portal) and IPART submission update.
- WaterNSW clarified that daily extractions impact **water delivery**, not **water order compliance**. How the volume is taken over the days specified in the water order (100ML over 10 days) has no bearing on compliance but **can impact** water delivery (end of system losses or delivery shortfalls) if the daily extraction is different to the water order.
- To ensure compliance, daily extractions in aggregate must not exceed the total order volume, however **customers are encouraged to be a good neighbour by ordering as you intend to take** to maximise the resource and minimise any third-party impact. This will also assist the Water Planning and Delivery team to effectively manage the system. Changes to water orders within lead time can still be made per the current process. Discussed.

- A new **third-party consent process** for groundwater temporary trades came into effect on 1 July 2024. Based on customer feedback, WaterNSW has updated documentation and is investigating options to make it easier for applicants whilst still managing our legal obligations (including an objections-style process or an optional fee for facilitation service (cost recovery) where WaterNSW will identify and seek consent on behalf of the applicant). Alternatively, the current consent process will remain in place for applicants who wish to complete the process themselves.
- Information on the triage and assessment process and FAQs on trading water can be found at [Trading water - WaterNSW](#) and [Groundwater temporary trades \(71T Dealings\)](#)
- Customer experience improvements include changes to the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system based on customer feedback; enhancement to features in iWAS (ML converter calculator tool and how-to videos); a free opt-in [recording and reporting SMS reminder service](#); and trialling customer outreach days in towns where we don't have a physical presence.
- Enhancements to the Water Market System (customer portal) presented and discussed, including future co-existence between WLS and WMS, allowing registered customers to view the details of their licences and approvals in one place.
- Members commented on the cost involved to implement enhancements. WaterNSW realises it is a significant investment however the existing systems were built in the 1980s and can't deliver what we need under the legacy systems.
- Members suggested it would be great to have an enhancement in iWAS (such as green light/red light system) that shows water users that everything is working as it should be or if any issues. In future, iWAS will fold into our Water Market System, where platforms will link.
- WaterNSW lodged its Rural and Greater Sydney Bulk Water pricing submissions and joint WAMC submission to IPART on 30 September. Due to time constraints, some WAMC items were not able to be discussed as part of the broader consultation process (metering, floodplain harvesting and consent transactions). WaterNSW will brief customers on these three functions once IPART begins the review process and prior to the public hearings via state-wide online sessions with CAG members and customers.

2.2 Non-Urban Metering Review update (D Andersen, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an update on the Non-Urban Metering (NUM) review. The purpose of the review was to identify ways to accelerate the implementation of the non-urban metering reforms by identifying practical changes to the rules that will help deliver the reform faster, create opportunities to reduce costs, make the rules easier to understand, implement, comply with and enforce, and make the system work more efficiently.
- Key recommendations of the review centre around reprioritising efforts towards larger water users (concentrating resources towards larger water users where they will have the greatest impact), increasing meter installation and validation rate (providing better support and training for the DQP workforce) and supporting integrity in water resource management (enabling more effective use of compliance and enforcement tools).
- Proposed key changes to the metering rules and implementation priorities presented and discussed. A DQP Concierge Program will be available in the coming months, offering tailored support to DQPs and customers by providing access to expert support, simplifying the compliance process and improving data management.
- Public consultation on regulation changes will occur in November 2024, a what we heard report to be released early 2025, changes by March 2025, then a disallowance period of 15 sitting days. Once the regulation is made, new conditions will take effect (current obligations exist until the rules are changed). Unintended works will be phased over 2025.
- Members queried when the telemetry review will be completed. NSW DCCEEW advised that it has been released to the market, with a decision expected by early next month and an outcome by mid-next year.

- Members requested that language around 'high risk' to reference larger users should be changed, noting because a water user has a large pumping capacity doesn't mean they are a higher risk of offending. Terminology should reference 'high use' not 'high risk'. Agreed.
- Members queried if proposed changes in the DQP space will make a difference. Results will be published and as changes are made the impact will be known. There are a number of changes that will make it easier for DQPs and results will be reviewed along the way to track improvements or otherwise.
- Proposed regulation amendments for floodplain harvesting (FPH) presented and discussed:
 - enabling irrigation to occur during a measurement period by specifying a nominated off-take point
 - remove the additional point of intake DQP validation requirement
 - clarification of the measurement period applying at the water supply work approval scale
 - clarifying when a measurement period starts (remove buffer zone trigger)
 - subdivision of water supply work approval to require controlling infrastructure
 - redefine buffer zone to clarify that buffer zones do not require addition to a water supply work approval
 - remove metering requirement for unintended works consistent with the NUM approach
- Floodplain harvesting status by storage data presented and discussed. As of 8 October in the Gwydir, 21.4% of primary meters have been installed; 26.6% of primary submitted in the system; and 45.6% survey benchmark submitted.
- Members stated that customers want to be proactive and expressed frustration with the time taken to implement the policies and lack of pathways for compliance, stating the system has been flawed from the start. Members are concerned about what will happen if a flood does occur and the ramifications for compliance, and formally requested a pathway for compliance be expedited. Customers have worked hard to fix issues and have done as much as they can do and are still not ready.
- WaterNSW advised any customers who are having issues or are not compliant to get in touch with WaterNSW who can provide advice on what they need to do. It was noted that all high-usage customers in the valley have already engaged a DQP or are on a pathway to compliance.

3. OPERATIONS:

3.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Gee)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Gwydir valley, including rainfall and outlook, recent actual and statistical inflows, overview of the Water Resource Monitoring Dashboard, current storage status, water availability and usage and 3-year rolling average supplementary roster.
- The season has commenced with environmental and consumptive water being released from Copeton Dam. Operations for the upcoming season will be order on demand.
- Channel capacity constraints may occur on the lower Gwydir below Tyreel during peak demand (late Jan/early Feb).
- The primary Water Planning & Delivery contact for the Gwydir valley is Sam Stokes who is based in Tamworth.

3.2 Regional Operations update (T Tanner)

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional projects and maintenance activities, including Copeton Dam fish passage offsets and Copeton Dam spillway electrical renewals.
- Winter maintenance at Copeton Dam is complete, which included dewatering main penstock for internal inspection, patch painting, replacement of minor valves on pipework for drains and interconnecting of penstocks and major service of fixed dispersion cone (FDC) valve.
- Members stated the gauge at Marshall Ponds is erratic. WaterNSW will advise the Water Monitoring team.

Action GWY2410.01: WaterNSW to look into accuracy of gauge at Marshall Ponds and report back to CAG.

Responsibility: B Maher

3.3 Unlocking the past and future with satellite remote sensing products and tools - Hydrometric Network and Remote Sensing Program (HNRS) (M Shaikh, NSW DCCEE)

- NSW DCCEE provided an overview of the HNRS program, delivered in collaboration with the NSW and Queensland state governments. The objective of the program was to improve transparency and accountability in water management; metering and measurement of water information to enable regulators to monitor compliance; and compliance outcomes.
- The focus was on the northern Murray-Darling Basin and work was undertaken in the Gwydir, Border Rivers, Namoi, Macquarie-Castlereagh and Barwon valleys. The team was responsible for delivering a number of milestones: on-farm water storage monitoring dataset; irrigated crop area dataset; Lidar acquisition; and piloting Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite system. An overview of each of the project areas was presented and discussed.
- The Department is in the process of publishing yearly irrigated crop statistics.

4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

4.1 Update on 2025 Pricing Proposal (B Maher/K Drinkwater, NSW DCCEE)

- WaterNSW lodged its Rural and Greater Sydney Bulk Water pricing submissions and joint WAMC submission to IPART on 30 September.
- IPART will publish submissions and release the issues paper on 1 November inviting feedback from the community, with public hearings to be held on 14 (Rural Valleys and Greater Sydney) and 21 November (WAMC). Customers are encouraged to make a submission to the issues papers and participate in the public hearings.
- Since we last presented, the numbers have remained consistent, and the scenarios presented to CAGs will be reflected in our submission. Valley fixed vs variable ratios have not changed.

4.2 Future CAG Engagement and Next Term of Office (B Maher)

- WaterNSW is taking a refreshed approach to CAGs in 2025 and has included feedback from CAG members to inform future engagement. We will move to 2 face-to-face meetings per year starting 2025, with the option of an additional online meeting as required or requested.
- Additional engagement opportunities for customers may include community drop-in centres, field days, tailored online information sessions, local dam visits for customers and community, river runs in the lead up to peak water use periods, online Water Planning and Delivery updates in times of need and potential for attendance at water user group meetings (as requested).
- WaterNSW is working on developing a new CAG format with NSW DCCEE's Water Group, considering the feedback that has been provided by the CAGs. The new format will take better coordination and efficiency of engagement into account and will be launched in 2025. NRAR will attend on an as-needs or as-requested basis.
- A new policy for engagement with customers and community is being developed (effective 1 July 2025). A draft version will be shared with CAG Chairs in February and with members at the next CAG meeting.
- Members felt March and September are good times to hold the face-to-face meetings around irrigation.

Next term of office:

- The current term of office ends 30 June 2025. WaterNSW will call for nominations ~April 2025 by writing to all current members and representative groups as well as advertising via media and social media. Current members are encouraged to reapply through their nominating representative group.
- WaterNSW invited members to bring along other members of their representative group and other eligible organisations to the next CAG meeting to see what the CAGs are about.
- Members stated the CAG meeting is one of their most important meetings and suggested holding a meeting at Copeton Dam if possible.

5. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

6. GENERAL BUSINESS:

6.1 Update on Raft (D Preston)

- D Preston advised that the Biodiversity, Conservation and Science Group (NSW DCCEEW) are investigating potential options and costs for remedial works to get water down the main channel from Tyreel to Teralba, as well as looking at what doing nothing will look like into the future. Quotes have been requested, however there is still no funding source and discussions are ongoing.
- Members thanked the environmental water holders and asked if there was anything the CAG could do as a group to support the work being done and progress the issue. This will be discussed further once options have been investigated and costing obtained.
- One issue is this does not fall under any legislation and there is no responsible Minister. The second issue is it is on private land, so unsure legally if anything can be done. 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.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 18 March 2025

Meeting closed: 11.50am

Gwydir Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 22 October 2024

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
GWY2410.01	WaterNSW to look into accuracy of gauge at Marshall Ponds and report back to CAG.	B Maher	<p>The Water Monitoring team has investigated the issues.</p> <p>The installation was silted up and has received damage from flood debris. The team gave the system a purge and checked the orifice which was moving around at different levels causing the variability.</p> <p>The flow was too much to do any more and plans have commenced for larger works to move the orifice line next year to alleviate the problems impacting the site. The team has been monitoring the site and the levels are more stable after the temporary fix.</p>

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
GWY2407.02	WaterNSW to investigate if FPH compliance percentages can be framed by the percentage of FPH entitlement across the valley.	M Brooks	<p>Complete.</p> <p>Reporting of compliance is a function that is undertaken by NRAR so we will be supporting them in the preparation of their compliance statistics and have passed this request onto NRAR. However, DCCEEW will be sharing some statistics during their session on FPH.</p> <p>Refer also to agenda item 2.1.</p>