

Lachlan Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Agriculture and Research Centre, Fifield Rd, CONDOBOLIN

Date: 16 July 2024

Time: 9.30am

Present: Ed Fagan (acting Chair), Gordon Turner, David Pengilly, Tim Bell, Glenn Daley, Madeline Clark (observer), Michael Payten (online), Hilary Johnson (online), Nathan McGrath (observer, online).

WaterNSW: Andrew George, Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Jonathan Belej, Col Hood, Ben Coffey, Tom Riley, Russell Cocks, Martin Brooks, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Geoff Watson, Rooban Roobavannan, Rob O'Neill, Ben Arabin, Michael Martinson.

Agency and external staff: Fiona Court (SEC Newgate), Daniela Hauri (SEC Newgate, online) and Shahadat Chowdhury (NSW DCCEEW).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: William Back, Tom Green, Mark Peters, Graeme Haley, Jock Coupland and Joanne Lenehan. Paul Devery from Cowra Council has resigned. No replacement has been nominated.

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

– To be carried over to the next meeting due to lack of quorum.

1.6 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 12 March 2024:

- Members requested the previous minutes state that the March 2024 resource assessment was incorrect by WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW. WaterNSW advised the March statement as published was correct, and the calculation was reconsidered for the April assessment.
- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [12 March 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

G Turner/G Daley (carried)

1.7 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. OPERATIONS:

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (J Belej)

– WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Lachlan and Belubula valleys, including storage and inflow update, dam operations, water availability and account balance, weather outlook and long-range forecast (July to October), operational surplus, comparison of inflows and storage forecast.

- A penstock outage is planned at Wyangala Dam for 4 weeks, commencing 29 July. There will be no restriction on releases. Maintenance work on Jemalong Weir has commenced and is expected to finish late July.
- The Lachlan Airspace Reference Panel (LARP) met on 26 June and agreed to an end of July storage target of 91%. A release plan was devised and will be adjusted to allow for any additional rainfall.
- Translucent delivery was triggered on 10 June and 2 July.
- Lake Cargelligo maximum capacity has been approved to 100% after a stepped and hold refilling plan with daily monitoring to ensure stability (see also agenda item 2.5).
- Lake Brewster weir flow is still curtailed to 5,000ML/day flow over the crest, the inlet to Lake Brewster channel has a maximum level of 2.525m (which allows for a flow rate of 600– 960ML/day depending on the Lake level). Lake Brewster Storage still under operational constraint of 79.5% (see also agenda item 2.4).

2.2 Allocations Update (S Chowdhury – NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided a summary of 23/24 and 24/25 allocations, and an overview of the Lachlan account reset process (the last reset was on 28 September 2022). The reset occurs when at the same time all storages are full, deemed full or will fill from flows already in the system. The process hasn't changed but the wording is now more explicit in the WSP. Discussed.

Action LAC2407.01: NSW DCCEEW to provide further information on the water account reset process.

Responsibility: S Chowdhury (NSW DCCEEW)

- The next allocation statement for the Lachlan is due to be published on 8 August <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/allocations-availability/allocations/water-allocation-statements>
- The water allocation guide for the Lachlan Regulated River Water Source can be found at <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/allocations-availability/allocations/how-water-is-allocated/resource-assessment-process>

2.3 Regional Operations update (B Coffey)

- WaterNSW provided an update on preventative maintenance and completed work orders. The team is sustaining a high level of preventative maintenance work across the board.
- An update on remaining works to repair flood damage at Lake Brewster Weir, inlet channel and storage was provided. A site meeting was held on 11 July to start the corrective works to refurbish the embankments to normal operating conditions.
- Repair works at Coocumber Weir to address erosion are now complete. Members were pleased with the work that has been done however noted there is still leakage through the weir, with water backing up and forcing overflow, stating the river is at risk of changing permanently. WaterNSW advised that staff will attend the site to investigate within the next month.

Action LAC2407.02: Members to send photographs and details of issues at Coocumber Weir to Ben Coffey.

Responsibility: G Daley/M Payten

- An overview of planned outages presented and discussed. The team will work closely with Water Planning and Delivery to ensure the correct time to undertake works.

2.4 Lake Brewster Weir Flood Recovery update (G Watson)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the flood repair works at Lake Brewster. WaterNSW has restricted flows from Wyangala Dam to minimise the risk of further damage to levees in the Lake Brewster area. This restriction reduces WaterNSW's ability to quickly create 'air space' for flood mitigation purposes in Wyangala Dam.
- WaterNSW provided the CAG with an update on the emergency works at Lake Brewster, which aim to remove this restriction. The bulk of flood recovery costs can be recovered through insurance, WaterNSW's target is to recover 80% of costs.

- Members commented that while it is great the work has commenced, it is disappointing that it was a result of customers raising their concerns. WaterNSW stated customer concerns have been noted and communication could have been better. This has been addressed for future communications.
- More information can be found at <https://www.waternsw.com.au/projects/lake-brewster-flood-recovery-works>.

2.5 Lake Cargelligo Embankment Upgrades (G Watson)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the Lake Cargelligo Embankment upgrade. The current contract scope has been reduced; a new commercial structure is being used for the remaining works; and regional contractors will be engaged to complete the project.
- Embankments are safe and controls are in place to ensure they remain that way. WaterNSW is committed to delivering value for money for our customers and an appropriate delivery window is being sought for the completion of the works.
- At July 2024, the current project forecast cost to complete is estimated at \$45M (to be further refined as opportunities are explored). Internal and independent project reviews are being finalised and we are assessing all sensible options for project completion. The design continues to be refined and assessed against alternatives.
- Members questioned where the approved budget came from, stating the only approved budget they were aware of is \$11M, with \$40-60M floated at the last CAG meeting.
- Members noted at the last CAG meeting that the cost of material and transport of materials to site (100km away) was a big factor in the increase and questioned if this was still the case. WaterNSW advised this is still a challenge, however is currently investigating sheet piling, which will drastically change the materials that are required. We think there are some alternatives that have merit and these are being investigated.
- Members stated that the amount that has been spent is a poor utilisation of money.

2.5 Rural 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.
- Members stated that Meridian Urban has been holding workshops with local councils in different towns along the catchment to come up with a Regional Drought Resilience Plan and suggested it would be worth reaching out to local councils to ensure there is no double-up. This could also be an opportunity for WaterNSW for broader engagement. WaterNSW will raise with the relevant internal team to ensure they are aware.

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/R Cocks)

- 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.
- 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. Members requested a breakdown of these numbers specific to the Lachlan valley in future presentations.

Action LAC2407.03: WaterNSW to provide a breakdown of current status of DQP enquiries (data) specific to the Lachlan valley for future CAG presentations.

Responsibility: B Arabin

- The Government telemetry rebate that was 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.

Lachlan evaporation calculation update:

- Feedback from Lachlan Valley Water highlighted that only usage reduces liability and having Carryover Evaporation Reduction (CER) traded liability remain with the seller requires them having to keep a small balance to meet their obligations.
- Meetings were held with NSW DCCEEW, Lachlan Valley Water and WaterNSW to discuss original intent of evaporation clause. Systems issues currently mean trades with a combination of carryover water and AWD water cannot be identified for the purpose of CER calculations.
- NSW DCCEEW proposed a change to the way CER is calculated, recognising the trade issue where the percentage is based on the volume of both high security and general security, calculated based on a customer’s balance on 30 June. Further discussions between the parties explored several options which NSW DCCEEW considered.
- NSW DCCEEW confirmed they will adjust the Water Sharing Plan (WSP) to reflect the new calculation methodology, to commence 2024/25 water year.

4.2 Metering Q&A (M Brooks/R Cocks)

- 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.

- Members stated the number of DAS alarms received is overwhelming and is becoming spam and the process for submitting S91i encourages non-compliance (eg replacement of new batteries sometimes takes 3 weeks due to DQP availability). WaterNSW accepts that alarms are a challenge and will discuss out of session with customer.
- Members stated iWAS is great and suggested there should have a logbook attached to it so customers don't have to keep a separate logbook.

5. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

5.1 WaterInsights – Current Development Approaches and Feedback (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](#).

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 engagement proposal, stating the opportunity to consult needs to be maintained. Members want to discuss local issues at CAGs, not the big issues.
- 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:

- Nil general business raised

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 14 October 2024

Meeting closed: 3.15pm

Lachlan Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 16 July 2024

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
LAC2407.01	NSW DCCEEW to provide further information on the water account reset process.	S Chowdhury (NSW DCCEEW)	<p>Complete.</p> <p>The reset conditions are better clarified in the plan after the amendment of December 2022. Wyangala, Lake Cargelligo and Lake Brewster are to be simultaneously full for the first time in six months (clause 45.3). There are two flexibilities on this regard explained in next two paragraphs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The department may deem a storage full at a lower level for structural or environmental reason only. An example of structural reason is the current repair work of Lake Brewster limiting its capacity to 79.5%. The environmental reason may include maintaining a level to complete a bird breeding event. The likely consideration of a lower storage is generally communicated early to remove uncertainty from the decision-making process. 2. The department may not wait until the day storages are full. This is the situation when the operator notifies that the storages will fill imminently from inflows already visible. Typically, Wyangala will be making flood mitigation release to reduce the flood peak rate at that time. This has been referred as 'wet pre release'. This was the case in 28/9/22 reset when Wyangala became full about 11 days later and the lakes were full all along. <p>Neither of the above 2 flexibilities matches the following situation. Wyangala is kept lower expecting a design inflow over coming months agreed by Lachlan Airspace Reference Panel. The corresponding release is referred as 'dry pre release'. This state does not satisfy the reset conditions.</p>
LAC2407.02	Members to send photographs and details of issues at Coochumber Weir to Ben Coffey.	G Daley / M Payten	Complete.
LAC2407.03	WaterNSW to provide a breakdown of current status of DQP enquiries (data) specific to the Lachlan valley for future CAG presentations.	B Arabin	To be provided at next meeting.

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
LAC2403.02	WaterNSW to organise a 'river run' in the Lachlan valley, in collaboration with Lachlan CAG members.	B Maher	WaterNSW is looking to do this as part of the future engagement process (refer to agenda item 5.1)