Murray-Lower Darling Customer Advisory Group - Minutes of Meeting



Location: MS Teams (online)

Date: 25 March 2024

Time: 9.00am

Present: Sally Dye (Chair), Michael Pisasale, Judith Damiani, Hilary Johnson, Louise Burge (part), Michael Chalmers, Rachel Strachan and Sophie Baldwin.

WaterNSW: Andrew George, Ronan Magaharan, Clair Cameron, David Stockler, Brendan Maher, Ben Coffey, Jonathan Belei, David Wood, Greg Whorlow, Sonia Townsend and Toni Hayes.

Agency and external staff: Brian Graham, David Andersen, Camila Ridoutt (DCCEEW); Tim Gilbert (NRAR); Amanda Johnson and Fiona Court (SEC Newgate).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am.

- 1. Welcome and Introduction
- 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country
- **1.2** Apologies: John Lolicato, Gordon Fox.

1.3 Confirmation of Agenda Items:

- Members advised that David Harris previously did a report for Murray Valley Private Diverters into supplementary water access and would like further discussion at the CAG (refer to action MLD2403.05 at agenda item 2.2).
- Members requested to receive copies of CAG presentations prior to meetings in future so more informed discussion can be had at the meeting.

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 Meetings, 12 July 2023 and 22 November 2023:

 Resolved the minutes of meeting held on <u>12 July 2023</u> be confirmed as a correct record (with amendment per below, as proposed at November 2023 meeting). Taken as read.

The following to be added to agenda item 2.2:

Members stated that stakeholders had made specific requests to the MDBA to utilise the airspace rule pre-flood to prevent catastrophic flooding, and this was not done.

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on <u>22 November 2023</u> be confirmed as a correct record.
 Taken as read.
- Members referred to action MLD2307.04 regarding management of Tocumwal gauge, which was marked complete. In the July 2023 minutes, WaterNSW advised that the Tocumwal gauge is an MDBA asset and is managed by Victoria. Members stated it is problematic if the two states (NSW and Victoria) have different processes for maintaining gauges, stating WaterNSW has the capacity and facilities to fix the gauge earlier, and suggested that WaterNSW take over management of the gauge from Victoria.
- Members commented that the Barmah-Millewa Feasibility Study updates are relevant to the pricing discussion, stating that they have heard about the 6 options, but nothing about the details (costs, what's involved, potential implications for and against, implications for WaterNSW (if there's a major



change in operations, how will it work?}, who is going to pay for it etc). Members requested information and an update be provided at the next meeting. WaterNSW noted this sits with the MBDA, however we can pass on the request to the MDBA for consideration.

Action MLD2403.01: WaterNSW to invite the MDBA to the next meeting to provide an update on the Barmah-Millewa Feasibility Study.

Responsibility: J Belej

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

See action sheet attached.

2. Operations:

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (J Belej)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations, including dam storage and inflows review,
 rainfall and temperature outlook, water availability and usage and weather and climate outlook.
- An overview of Murray and Lower Darling operations presented and discussed, including environmental water delivery and planned actions.
- Members queried if the dilution flow has been triggered and when. WaterNSW advised this sits with the MDBA and noted that since December there has been no need for additional flow. WaterNSW is not responsible for the ADF (additional dilution flow) however can take questions on notice to the MDBA. Members requested further discussion on the ADF be added as an agenda item for the next meeting due to the implications it poses on Murray-Lower Darling users.

Action MLD2403.02: WaterNSW to invite the MDBA to the next meeting to present on the ADF (additional dilution flow).

Responsibility: J Belej

- Members raised concerns (out of session) regarding Menindee inflows and subsequent water quality and high salinity (salt) on vegetable crops and noted the response provided did not answer the peak salt measurement. More information was requested, with members stating water quality information is pivotal and in the past alerts were sent via WaterNSW when a salt slug was coming through the system. WaterNSW advised the measurement, monitoring and reporting of salinity is the responsibility of the MDBA and DCCEEW, however some information can be found on <u>WaterInsights</u> (alarms can be set for trigger levels at certain sites).
- Members requested adding the breakdown of usage/availability above and below the Choke (zone 10 and zone 11), as well as HEW and S&D, into the presentation going forward and clearly note that the supplementary water amount is not accessible to anyone but the environment (in the Lower Darling only). WaterNSW will look to include this information going forward.

Murray operations:

- Recent rating table change for downstream Yarrawonga ('flow' increased but release/water level d/s did not). The MDBA is targeting d/s demand with Yarrawonga releasing ~8,000ML/day (@ 20 March).
- The MDBA is managing the system to target ~4000ML/day at Euston and managing Lake Victoria storage to meet operating rules. River Murray weekly reports are available at https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications-and-data/data-and-dashboards/river-murray-weekly-reports-0
- WaterNSW is assisting draft a Murray Shortfall Procedure in partnership with DCCEEW and providing feedback and what we're doing to support the shortfall procedure. Once a draft is finalised DCCEEW will communicate with relevant stakeholders before it becomes final.



- An overview on the Merran Creek and Bullatale Creek systems was provided (member request). River Murray flows are under direct control of the MDBA. WaterNSW is balancing NSW customer requirements and MBDA river operation rules to meet system demands. Ongoing discussions have been held with Bullatale Trust and Little Merran Creek Water Trust regarding supply via the Murray to their retrospective waterways to meet autumn demand.
- WaterNSW has no water allocation to underwrite higher flow requests. This has to be considered by DCCEEW and operational water socialised by all water users. Water users on these systems should consider their risks associated with potential inability for water to be provided from the Murray under lower flow conditions and consider options.
- Members appreciate WaterNSW working with landholders to recognise needs and noted concerns that Basin Plan implementation should not have third party impacts, stating WaterNSW should stress to the MDBA the need to maintain water at levels that enable landholders to function. WaterNSW advised we have limited options available to ensure delivery under current operating rules, however we do express the interests of water users and their needs for meeting irrigation demands and will continue to communicate customer concerns.

Lower Darling operations:

- WaterNSW Operations Base flow requirements at W32 as per WSP (Jan-Mar = 350 ML/d) for Lower Darling. Additional water is being delivered by environmental entitlement (EWA and HEW) to manage water quality in the W32 weir pool. This has resulted in higher than 'standard' operational flow requirements downstream of W32 to the Murray River.
- Average Operating flow of ~800ML/d (inc. 750ML/d from Pamamaroo) has been utilised to target suitable water quality (dissolved oxygen) through the weir pool over the past few months.
- The operations and release patterns are currently being guided by advice from the DCCEEW and other NSW and Commonwealth partner agencies, including the MDBA.
- WaterNSW has ongoing participation on the Water Quality Working Group, providing operational context and scenario planning.
- 150GL has entered the Lakes since start of 2024 (to mid-March). Estimated a further 40-60GL to arrive by end April (very high evaporation and ongoing releases has resulted in decrease in storage volume over the reporting period).
- The CEWO advised the water used in the Lower Darling River is a mix of environmental water under the Water Sharing Plan and has no protection mechanisms. Once it hits the Murray it is resocialised. The other water is HEW and has the ability to have a portion of flow protected into the Murray and continue to South Australia. Returned flow provisions have been applied to that use. All CEWO water used to date in the Lower Darling has been down the Lower Darling anabranch.
- The CEWO advised it was underwriting delivery of operational water down the anabranch. Members stated it is important that we are able to deliver operational water out of Cawndilla and questioned if this has been progressed through BOC or other avenues. The CEWO advised it was initially done as a trial, managed by the MDBA.

Action MLD2403.03: WaterNSW to contact the MDBA and ask if they can provide an update on the trial of releases with return flow to the Murray via the Great Darling Anabranch.

Responsibility: J Belej

Members highlighted concerns about blue-green algae and how this has been alerted to the
public around the Lakes, stating that in the past signage has been put up for campers etc to make
them aware of what is going on. Members questioned who is responsible for alerting the wider



- community about these issues. WaterNSW confirmed that signs have been erected at relevant sites advising of the water quality issues.
- Operational releases are currently being made into 3 Mile Creek. These releases are being made
 to replenish water holes within the creek system for Stock and Domestic license holders in line with
 the operational rules for this system.
- Great Darling Anabranch (GDA) has maintained continued release at ~400ML/day, using mainly HEW (56GL of NSW entitlement to mid-March).
- Delivery of Operational water via GDA trialed by MDBA during Dec-Jan 2023/24 (aligned with W32 release). Expected continued flow for environmental to GDA through the remainder of the water year, potentially at reduced rates (at discretion of eWater managers).
- Members questioned if once flows hit 480GL will that water be held in Cawndilla. WaterNSW is discussing with the MDBA regarding shared resource and where they'd like water. As operators, we can see all water coming in is being held in the top 2 lakes (Pamamaroo and Wetherell). No changes until a need or requirement to do otherwise.
- Members asked if WaterNSW has any information or reports on salinity management over a long period of time for NSW, noting there are a lot of salt interception schemes on the NSW side.
 WaterNSW will reach out to the MDBA and put them in touch with Western Murray Irrigation.

Action MLD2403.04: WaterNSW to send contact details for historical salinity management data to Western Murray Irrigation.

Responsibility: J Belei

Customers and stakeholders can visit WaterNSW's <u>WaterInsights</u> portal for up-to-date operational information.

2.2 Accounting of Losses in Resource Assessment Process (B Graham - DCCEEW)

- DCCEEW provided an overview of how losses are accounted for in the resource assessment process, per action MLD2311.01, including context, river losses, resource assessment, basic components of a regulated river, annual budget, budget vs actual (example), savings vs budget, additional losses vs budget and NSW Murray resource distribution for 2023/24 (refer to presentation).
- The annual river loss budget is established and distributed monthly over the year and adjusted as conditions become known. At each assessment, any unused part of the monthly budget is released. River losses are only one part of the many complex interactions in the resource assessment.
- Members questioned if WaterNSW measures flows and DCCEEW determines water losses in the Barwon Darling/Lower Darling/Menindee. DCCEEW advised that water losses are determined by water balance (measurement of flows, take). Water balance is part of the calculation that WaterNSW does, and the losses are a 'grab bag' of what is left in the assessment. As we go through the year, measurables are measured and the losses are what is left over (is not a matter of determining the losses, is a sum of the calculation that is done). The MDBA does the resource assessment and the losses for the southern connected system (using WaterNSW instrumentation and information as well).
- For the Lower Darling resource assessment, DCCEEW does the assessment and makes the allocation announcement. WaterNSW does a lot of the number crunching and DCCEEW makes the call.
- DCCEEW confirmed the draft Murray Shortfall Procedure will be shared with stakeholders once finalised, stating feedback from water users will be key. DCCEEW is working with NRAR to ensure the compliance framework and direct engagement with water users will be done as soon as the detail is finalised.



- Members stated that when demand exceeds supply, that is when flow shares kick in and questioned what happens on the NSW side when it comes to extraction. DCCEEW advised there hasn't been a need to invest in that level of management. Seventy-plus percent of water usage is u/s of the Choke, which has no delivery risk from u/s storages. NSW only has a lesser exposure to delivery risk d/s of the Choke. The NSW risk is much less than Victoria and their procedures are commensurate with their exposure.
- Members advised that David Harris did a report some time ago on behalf of Murray Valley Private
 Diverters on supplementary water access and requested discussion with DCCEEW, either in the
 CAG or at another time, particularly around underuse.

Action MLD2403.05: Sally Dye to forward a copy of the supplementary water access paper done by David Harris on behalf of Murray Valley Private Diverters to Brian Graham to arrange follow up discussion with the association.

Responsibility: S Dye/B Graham

2.3 Regional Operations (B Coffey)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the Regional Operations operating model. Under the new model, WaterNSW has brought diverse teams (water monitoring, asset maintenance and field services) together under the Area Managers and established Regional Project Delivery Teams (south, north, metro).
- There have been many immediate benefits of sharing resources (staff, plant, equipment) across valleys and throughout the region, including a more consistent approach across the business. Future efficiencies are being explored, including consolidating offices and workshop facilities (not consolidating different sites, just locations where we have both a workshop and an office, if feasible), working with Dam Safety to reduce dam surveillance, potential to self-deliver some regional projects, a review of existing water monitoring runs etc.
- Members questioned if relocation of the Buronga office will still be located in the local area.
 WaterNSW confirmed this and stated we are looking at a location that makes most sense, as well as balancing efficiency and cost. It is still being investigated.
- An overview of the Groundwater IoT (telemetered meters) program was provided. WaterNSW is converting 630 sites from manual to telemetered to provide cost savings and non-financial benefits (safety risk reduction, CO2 emission reduction), as well as providing a significant increase of data for customers.
- WaterNSW provided an update on progress of preventative and corrective maintenance activities and planned outages. The Hume Dam FDCV No 1 re-lining project is underway and on track. There will be no effect on water delivery, due to multiple outlet options and spillway gates if required.
- The remedial works for structural movement at Koondrook-Pericoota offtake regulator (as discussed at the last meeting) have been put on hold until late 2025 to get further understanding and timeframes to ensure we are doing in most prudent and cost-effective way. Investigation teams are looking into this.
- Members questioned why Goulburn Murray Water maintains Mildura Weir and not WaterNSW.
 Taken on notice.

Action MLD2403.06: WaterNSW to advise why Mildura Weir is not maintained by WaterNSW (Goulburn Murray Water).

Responsibility: B Coffey

 Members questioned if the cost of maintenance and repairs at Koondrook-Pericoota regulator is attributed to irrigators or the Federal government. Taken on notice.



Action MLD2403.07: WaterNSW to confirm who pays for the maintenance and repair of Koondrook-Pericoota regulator.

Responsibility: B Coffey

3. Customer Services:

3.1 Customer Services update/Q&A (D Stockler)

- An update on what's happening in the Customer Services space was provided, including meter revalidation, current status of DQP enquiries, hints and tips for DAS alarms, water order to delivery review, debtor management process, improvements and new transaction types now available in the customer portal and a digital roadmap for the Water Market System (WMS).
- WaterNSW provided a response to action MLD2311.03 (refer action sheet) regarding replacement of government-owned meters at end of life as discussed at the last meeting, including overview of historical messaging and costs and what is included in the meter service charge. WaterNSW confirmed there has been no accrual for end-of-life replacement. A modest amount was collected along the way, of which the majority was spent on 75 meter replacements during the period. End-of-life renewal and replacement options discussed at agenda item 4.1.
- Members expressed disappointment, stating it was their understanding from the start that end-of-life replacement costs were to be included.
- WaterNSW is responsible for maintenance and compliance (including revalidation) of government-owned meters. NRAR is aware of this and will engage directly with WaterNSW prior to visiting a site.
 Customers can refer NRAR to WaterNSW if they are approached about a government-owned meter. Compliance certificates are available on request.
- For revalidation of private meters, water users should engage a DQP. Visit DCCEEW's website for further information <u>In-situ meter accuracy procedures guide (nsw.gov.au)</u>.
- WaterNSW is reviewing the definition and understanding of 'what a water order is' and how they are managed, to help ensure the ongoing compliance of all aspects of the process and remove ambiguity in this space. More detailed information will be provided at the July meeting to ensure customers are engaged throughout the process and have an opportunity to discuss any proposed changes.
- Members questioned if the water order window for supplementary orders is still on an 8am-8am basis and all other orders are 12am-12am, stating customers have been asking for years for the process to be defined/unified. WaterNSW noted there is some ambiguity around the definition of a day and will clarify this.

Action MLD2403.08: WaterNSW to clarify the timeframe/window for supplementary and other orders (what constitutes a day?).

Responsibility: D Stockler

- Enhancements to the WMS (customer portal) include screen sharing tools, guided product selector, in-application support, third party access, a regional office support trial and verification and fact sheets. In the next 6 months, existing customers will be able to view all current Approvals and Licences (May) and make enhancements to registration and management of business details (October). iWAS is a separate platform which will be integrated into the portal within the next 3 years.
- New transaction types becoming available include applications for Water Supply Works, Water Use or Combined Approvals and application tracking (May) and making works active/inactive (June).
- The Water Market System is being co-developed and is co-invested by the three water agencies (WaterNSW, DCCEEW and NRAR) into one platform.



 Discussion and actions for the pricing component of the Customer Services session have been recorded by SEC Newgate (attached).

3.2 Flood Work Approvals (F Guest/T Morrison – DCCEEW)

- Per action MLD2311.02, WaterNSW to invite DPE-Water to attend the next meeting to present with WaterNSW on the rules and process for licensing of historical flood works.
- Presentation to be provided out of session (online) as DCCEEW were unavailable to attend today.

3.3 Update on Non-Urban Metering Review (C Ridoutt – DCCEEW)

- DCCEEW provided an update on the review of the Non-Urban Metering Reforms (as presented at the last meeting). The purpose of the review was to look at how to remove barriers to implementation and identify practical changes to the rules to improve compliance.
- An issues and options paper was released last year, which confirmed issues identified and general support for improving metering and measurement of water across the state. Submissions and a What We Heard report have been published on DCCEEW's website. https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/water/nsw-non-urban-water-metering/review-of-the-non-urban-metering-rules#what-we-heard-during-consultation
- The review is now complete and DCCEEW will provide feedback and final recommendations to the Minister for consideration. Once considered, the Minister will be looking to advise and provide certainty on the way forward.
- Further information on the non-urban metering review can be found on <u>DCCEEW's website</u>.

4. Pricing Engagement:

4.1 Engagement on 2025 Pricing Proposal (WaterNSW/NRAR/DCCEEW)

Discussion and actions in this session have been recorded by SEC Newgate (attached).

Customer Advisory Group presentations (attached) in March 2024 sought customer input as planning commences for the price proposal submissions. WaterNSW, DCCEEW and NRAR sought thoughts and feedback on an approach to cost sharing and charges, and the valley-to-valley costs to deliver water with all required regulatory and policy projects included.

Discussion included:

- The cost drivers, and wider value, of NRAR services to achieve compliance with the rules, including
 a gauge of acceptable levels of compliance across NSW within the context of investment levels.
- A high-level discussion on potential price caps on the increase in WAMC charges, illustrated by high level 'persona' scenarios of customers of different conditions, water entitlements, usage, and valley locations.
- The revenue requirement of WaterNSW for bulk water delivery driven by partially controllable and partly uncontrollable cost increases. This included a discussion of a set of scenario options that could reduce the base case cost increase to customer bills in 2025-2030. The scenarios also outlined the risks to WaterNSW.
- An ongoing discussion on the potential introduction of a Revenue Cap, with modelling demonstrating how the options of a revenue cap or price cap (with varying levels of fixed cost to variable cost ratios) would have worked with the same real water volumes that have occurred over the past 10 years, shown valley by valley.
- A capital expenditure discussion outlining the "must do", "should do", and "could do" projects that
 pertain to individual valleys, seeking feedback on customer appetite for these projects, including
 discussions on who should foot the bill for projects with different direct business relevance to
 customers and community.



- The question of Government-Owned Meters (for relevant valleys), including a potential transition to customer ownership at their end of life, ideas on customer and/or government funding of renewal and replacement, and testing some options with customers who have Government-Owned Meters.
- Further discussion on the proposed investment in 2025-2030 in the customer portal (with an associated lift in the data management and IT systems), that result in the replacement of a legacy customer service systems with newer, more adaptable, and higher capacity system that can meet future customer and water sector needs.

5. Presentations/Consultation:

5.1 CAG Survey Results (B Maher)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of the results of the CAG Survey conducted in December 2023 (provided with business papers), including state-wide and valley-specific results. The purpose of the survey is to help us better understand how the CAG process is working for customers (what works well, what doesn't work, suggestions for future meetings etc).
- Further input and feedback was sought from CAG members on proposed engagement into the future.

Feedback/discussion:

- o focus on the most effective way to engage with customers.
- o field days/dam tours etc is just general consultation. For those who want to engage more and have deeper conversations, the CAG is needed. Could target 2 CAGs (operational) and one AGM-style (all combined F2F/online, needs good connectivity).
- o congratulations to WaterNSW. The amount of effort you put in to the CAGs is very good. They are well-structured and well-organised. The effort you make to have an informed meeting and get the right people in the room is great.
- o ideally shorter meetings would be preferable (today was very long). Good effort to get the right people involved is great. Would you also include other organisations to join the CAG?
- o always so much happening in the water space if you have less meetings, makes for longer meetings and people tune out. Still inclined to have 3-4 meetings and shorter. Online is good.
- o going back to CSC days, we had all departments in the room. The idea for a WaterNSW session in the morning and a Departmental session in the afternoon is a good one.
- o any less than 3 meetings, people would start getting concerns about transparency. A 2-hour shorter 4th meeting online would be really good (December). Statewide, not sure. If AGM is focussed on issues in this area would be handy. Appreciate how much work goes into getting these meetings together.
- The survey will be re-opened and the link re-sent to all members to provide opportunity to those who have not yet contributed. We want to hear from all members, primary and alternate, including those who have not attended a meeting in some time.
- WaterNSW will provide some options to CAG members for input prior to the next meeting.

6. Business Papers:

Noted and taken as read.

7. General Business:

Nil new items raised.

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: 31 July 2024 Meeting closed: 3.45pm



Murray-Lower Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 25 March 2024

Carried forward actions						
Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status			
MLD2311.02	WaterNSW to invite DPE-Water to attend the next meeting to present with WaterNSW on the rules and process for licensing of historical flood works.		DCCEEW unavailable to attend March 2024 meeting. Members requested the presentation be given to members out of session (online). WaterNSW to follow up with DCCEEW to arrange (T Hayes).			

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
MLD2403.01	WaterNSW to invite the MDBA to the next meeting to provide an update on the Barmah-Millewa Feasibility Study.	J Belej	Complete. To be added to the agenda when confirmed.
MLD2403.02	WaterNSW to invite the MDBA to the next meeting to present on the ADF (additional dilution flow).	J Belej	Complete. To be added to the agenda when confirmed.
MLD2403.03	WaterNSW to contact the MDBA and ask if they can provide an update on the trial of releases with return flow to the Murray via the Great Darling Anabranch.	J Belej	The MDBA is currently completing a review and information will be available in due course.
MLD2403.04	WaterNSW to send contact details for historical salinity management data to Western Murray Irrigation.	J Belej	Complete.
MLD2403.05	Sally Dye to forward a copy of the supplementary water access paper done by David Harris on behalf of Murray Valley Private Diverters to Brian Graham to arrange follow up discussion with the association		
MLD2403.06	WaterNSW to advise why Mildura Weir is not maintained by WaterNSW (Goulburn Murray Water).	B Coffey	Complete. Goulburn Murray Weir is the state constructing authority (SCA) that originally constructed Mildura Weir (including Dartmouth and Torrumbarry Weir) and they are responsible under the MDBA agreement to maintain and operate. Similarly, the MDBA agreement sets WaterNSW's obligation for our Assets such as Hume, Lock 10&15 etc.
MLD2403.07	WaterNSW to confirm who pays for the maintenance and repair of Koondrook-Pericoota regulator.	B Coffey	Complete. Under the MDBA SCA funding agreements, the MDBA pays WaterNSW to maintain and operate Koondrook-Pericoota.

Contact us



			The MDBA funding agreements will set each State's contribution of funding for the maintenance and repair of Koondrook-Pericoota regulator.
MLD2403.08	WaterNSW to clarify the timeframe/window for supplementary and other orders (what constitutes a day?).	D Stockler	To be discussed at the next meeting.