

Macquarie-Cudgegong Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Dubbo RSL, Brisbane St, DUBBO

Date: 17 July 2024

Time: 9.30am

Present: Tim Gainsford (Chair), Frank McKillop, Greg Murie, Lyn Davies, Tim Hosking, Stewart Denston, Michael Sutherland, Peter Schuster (online), Michael Drum (online) and Hayley White (observer, online).

WaterNSW: Andrew George, Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Mahmood Khan (online), Kate Masters, Michelle Yeaman, Tom Riley, Jason Luichareonkit, Karen Isbester, Martin Brooks, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: Ben Arabin, Rob O'Neill, Michael Martinson (online), Gavin Armstrong, Lip Ban Soh.

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

Meeting Opened: 9.30am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: Glen Whittaker, Clair Cam, David Walker, David Ramsay, Rick Reid, David Frith, Julian Geddes.

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

– Tim Gainsford was nominated by Lyn Davies, seconded by Greg Murie. Nil other nominations received.

– Accepted and carried.

1.6 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 13 March 2024:

– Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [13 March 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

G Murie/T Gainsford
carried

1.7 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. OPERATIONS:

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (M Khan)

– WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Macquarie and Cudgegong valleys, including recent rainfall and BOM rainfall outlook, observed vs statistical inflows, comparison of drought inflows, water resource monitoring dashboard, storage status, 2024-25 water availability, water usage and balance summary, dam operations, S&D replenishment, 2024-25 operations and update on plans for a bulk water transfer (per action MC2403.01).

– The plan for the 2024-25 season will be order on demand. WaterNSW is expecting a similar environmental and irrigation demand as the last season.

- The translucent period commenced 15 March and ends 30 November.
- The planned outage currently at Burrendong Dam for penstock inspection and painting is going to plan (10 June to mid-August). The bypass valve is available during this period with a maximum release capacity of ~260ML/day.
- An update on the bulk water transfer (BWT) was provided. Based on the July resource assessment and current inflows, a BWT will not be required until January 2025. There is potential for 208GL to be transferred, leaving 70GL in Windamere Dam. Irrigation and environmental demand for 2024/25 can be supplied with the resource available in Burrendong.

2.2 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional operations and maintenance (refurbishment of ring follower gate valve and patch painting penstock) and NSW DCCEEW's Hydrometric Network Remote Sensing (HNRS) program.
- 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 the project presented at the next meeting, the team is happy to attend. CAG members would like an update on LiDAR and if it will be made publicly available.
- Members questioned if there is any contingency for customers to order/use carryover if the outlook changed and the dam spilled before the penstock maintenance was complete. WaterNSW advised that we have been unable to secure the ability to defer the WSP rule and are working on a solution with NSW DCCEEW. Customers still have to the end of August to pump carryover if the maintenance is completed on time. Water Planning and Delivery and Asset Maintenance are working together to complete the work.
- The Biodiversity, Conservation & Science Group (NSW DCCEEW) requested to be advised about the outages of the penstock as they are actively monitoring this in terms of environmental plans.

Action MC2407.01: WaterNSW to provide updates to Biodiversity, Conservation & Science Group (NSW DCCEEW) on any outages of the penstock at Burrendong Dam.

Responsibility: M Khan

2.3 WaterNSW update on Connectivity Expert Panel (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 DCCEEW. 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.

- WaterNSW will continue to participate in the working group to provide operational advice and work with NSW DCCEEW on operation-related matters. Any policy changes will be considered by NSW DCCEEW through a process associated with amending relevant WSPs.
- Further information is available at [Connectivity Expert Panel | Water \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)
- Members raised concerns that the Macquarie in-valley targets will change to meet flow targets at the border, stating the Macquarie is a closed system the targets should not be linked. WaterNSW advised that it only operates according to the WSP.
- Members questioned if WaterNSW has communicated to the Minister and NSW DCCEEW how complicated this will be for WaterNSW to do and not put growers at risk. WaterNSW advised this is a fundamental change for us from what is required from a forecasting perspective and would require significant investment. This has been communicated to the Minister and WaterNSW is having detailed conversations with NSW DCCEEW on the policy framework.

2.4 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](#).

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.

4.2 Metering Q&A / Workshop (M Brooks)

- 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.
- As of today, there are approximately 123 active DQPs across the state. The review will also address how to bring more DQPs into the market.

4.3 Floodplain Harvesting Measurement update (D Andersen - DCCEE)

- The compliance date for the Macquarie has passed. At 30 June 2024, only 4.4% of storages in the Macquarie had primary metering equipment in place, with another 14.4% 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.

Action MC2407.02: WaterNSW to investigate if FPH compliance percentages can be framed by the percentage of FPH entitlement across the valley.

Responsibility: M Brooks

4.4 Drought Response Planning (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.

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 alignment of CAGs with pre- and post-season would be good, with the option of an online in-between meeting if needed (as long as it does not replace existing meetings).
- 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: 16 October 2024

Meeting closed: 3.20pm

Macquarie-Cudgegong Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 17 July 2024

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
MC2407.01	WaterNSW to provide updates to Biodiversity, Conservation & Science Group (NSW DCCEEW) on any outages of the penstock at Burrendong Dam.	M Khan	Ongoing.
MC2407.02	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
MC1705.03	WaterNSW to look at costing of re-routing channel at Bulgeraga Creek.	R Magaharan	Action complete, works ongoing.
MC1809.04	WaterNSW to advise if there are any long-term plans to address issues at Gin Gin weir which affect customers in low flow conditions.	R Magaharan	<p>Action complete, works ongoing.</p> <p>There are plans in place to block the lower scour valve when water levels permit. This should keep the weir pool at a higher-level during periods of low flows.</p> <p>July 2024 update:</p> <p>There is no change since the previous update, with water still over the crest. Work to commence once access to the crest is available.</p> <p>The future of the weir will form part of the Macquarie-Wambuul Water Security Project (formerly Macquarie-Re-Regulating Storage Project) https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/water-infrastructure-nsw/regional-projects/macquarie-wambuul-water-security-project</p>