

Macquarie-Cudgegong Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Dubbo RSL, Brisbane St, DUBBO

Date: 16 October 2024

Time: 9.30am

Present: Tim Gainsford (Chair), Glen Whittaker, David Ramsay, David Walker, Michael Drum, Mike Sutherland (online), Debbie Love (observer).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Mahmood Khan, Shivani Ram, Joson Lam, Jack Finch, Kristen Carter, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Russell Cocks, Michelle Yeaman, Kate Masters, Gavin Armstrong, Kyra Beasley, Justin Cairns.

Agency and external staff for specific items: Dan Connor (NSW DCCEEW) and Azeem Khan (NSW DCCEEW, online).

Meeting Opened: 9.30am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: Lyn Davies, Tim Hosking, Frank McKillop, Rick Reid, Stewart Denston, Claire Cam, Julian Geddes, Paul Keyte.

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, 17 July 2024:

– Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [17 July 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.
T Gainsford/M Sutherland (carried)

1.6 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, storage status, water availability, water usage and balance summary, dam operations, tributary flows, S&D replenishment and operations plan for 2024-25.
- The BOM has indicated rainfall November-January is likely 60-80% chance to be above average for much of southern and eastern Australia - <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/outlooks/#/rainfall/summary>
- Macquarie Valley water resource monitoring dashboard presented. The valley is currently tracking to normal conditions with the dam at 67% today.
- The penstock outage at Burrendong Dam is now complete (inspection and painting). The system has been fully operational from 10 August. There will be refurbishment of the bypass valve at Burrendong Dam over the next 3 months which will have no impact to water delivery.

- Releases from the dam for the coming season will be made to meet downstream demand. WaterNSW is expecting a similar environmental and irrigation demand. Releases for the environment have commenced from Windamere Dam. The Water Planning and Delivery team will liaise frequently with irrigators during the season to minimise shortfalls and operational surplus.
- The translucent period commenced 15 March and ends 30 November. If translucency conditions trigger, releases will be made if there is enough balance in the translucent sub account.
- An update on the bulk water transfer (BWT) was provided. Based on the August resource assessment and current inflows, a BWT will not be required until March 2025. A potential 204GL could be transferred, leaving 70GL in Windamere Dam. Irrigation and environmental demand for 2024/25 can be supplied with the resource available in Burrendong. Historical BWT data presented and discussed.
- Statistical inflow trend lines, observed inflows and forecast inflows discussed. In the resources assessment process, WaterNSW always plans for minimum inflows (99%ile - plan for the worst, hope for the best). Members commented that a dam spill can represent a significant loss to an irrigator as much as a drought and there is a lost opportunity for irrigators if they lose carryover. WaterNSW advised the Drought Flood Risk Index (DFRI) tool will indicate if moving towards wet conditions and if this is the case the Water Planning and Delivery team will liaise with irrigators.
- S&D replenishment discussed. WaterNSW advised that we assess current conditions before making releases - what is in the system, how much surplus and for how many days, plus recent rainfall and inflows.

2.2 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional projects (Windamere fixed cone dispersion valve renewal, Burrendong officers' quarters renewal, Burrendong fitters' room) and maintenance activities.
- Outage period for the Windamere fixed cone dispersion valve renewal will be done in consultation with the Water Planning and Delivery team (March-October 2025) and will have no impact on water delivery.
- All 7 radial spillway gates at Burrendong Dam have recently had major maintenance completed, installation of upstream ring follower valve is complete as well as replacement of hollow jet valve indicator wire tubes.
- Inspection and patch painting of main and bypass bulkhead gates at Windamere Dam is complete.

2.3 Unlocking the past and future with satellite remote sensing products and tools - Hydrometric Network and Remote Sensing Program (HNRS) (A Khan, 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.
- Members commented the technology is great but raised concerns about what the data will be used for, stating the model is inaccurate and concerned that incorrect data will be used by NRAR to prosecute irrigators. NSW DCCEE advised the tool is not used as a direct measurement of storage volume. NRAR will use it as one data point, but it is not the only source of data they use. As part of any investigation, NRAR will also speak to landholders.
- NSW DCCEE is using the tool to collect data and the information is publicly available (excluding storage volumes). Members questioned if there is a disclaimer indicating the data is inaccurate. NSW DCCEE advised that when estimating the data set they advise NRAR that it may be uncertain for xyz reasons.

2.4 Gin Gin Weir condition update (G Watson)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the condition of Gin Gin Weir. The weir is an important asset and as such is regularly inspected and monitored by WaterNSW. An engineering consultant was engaged by WaterNSW in September 2023 to complete a condition assessment. The weir was found to be in a satisfactory condition with no evidence of instability. Geotechnical and structural engineers were engaged to complete a peer review in July 2024 and determined that there is no evidence of scour or instability with the weir, which has 80-100 years life expectancy remaining.
- Members stated that landholders and schemes who use the existing weir pool have been raising issues for some time in relation to the decline of the existing structure and questioned the accuracy of the life expectancy, particularly with larger flooding events with shorter duration, and requested supporting information be provided to support this statement (condition assessments, engineering reports etc). Taken on notice.

Action MC2410.01: WaterNSW to investigate if condition assessment and engineering reports on Gin Gin Weir can be provided to the CAG.

Responsibility: G Watson

- WaterNSW advised that our requirement is to maintain capability and is confident the condition of the existing asset is sufficient to maintain capability.
- Members questioned why money is being invested to design a new structure if the existing structure is sound and queried whether WaterNSW is providing feedback to NSW DCCEEW on the business case. Yes, WaterNSW provides feedback to NSW DCCEEW.
- Members questioned if future augmentation of the weir to include fishways has been taken into consideration in the structural assessment. Taken on notice. Members are concerned the statement is based on broad parameters and is not taking into account additional concerns (is only saying if we do nothing, we'll get another 80-100 years out of it).

Action MC2410.02: WaterNSW to confirm if future fishways have been taken into consideration in the structural assessment of Gin Gin Weir.

Responsibility: G Watson

- Members are of the understanding the business case is going to the Minister prior to Christmas and would like to see what feedback has been provided.

2.5 Macquarie-Wambουλ Water Security Project update (P Fague, NSW DCCEEW)

- An overview of the project was provided by NSW DCCEEW. The project aims to improve water security and reliability and support a healthy river environment with the aim to improve town water security, more efficiently deliver water for high priority needs, maintain environmental flows (including to the Macquarie Marshes) and improve drought resilience. The NSW and Australian governments are jointly funding \$9.35M to deliver a final business case for the project.
- NSW DCCEEW is investigating options identified in the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy (RWS) and will leverage information that has been provided during previous studies, including engagement with WaterNSW. The final business case will assess the economic, social and environmental costs and benefits of the shortlisted options and will be developed in close consultation with the community.
- As part of the final business case options analysis, NSW DCCEEW is researching and gaining stakeholder feedback relating to Gin Gin Weir, including a new weir to potentially replace the current weir. Sub-options include a reregulating weir, including a fish passage, and equivalent weir replacement, including fish passage. NSW DCCEEW has heard customer feedback and concerns about the life of the weir and no decisions have been made to date.
- Members questioned how much influence WaterNSW feedback will have on the assessment of the viability of the weir in the shortlisting phase. NSW DCCEEW advised it is one of the inputs, not the only data point. Customer concerns will also be provided to the panel as well as independent reports.

- Members stated if the current structure can't provide adequate fish passage, facilitate environmental benefits or deliver downstream outcomes, replacement of the weir should be shortlisted as soon as possible. This feedback will be passed on to the project team.
- Stakeholder input will be invited from September 2024, with shortlisted options provided for input early-mid 2025. Recommendations in the draft business case will be available for input mid-late 2025 with a final business case submitted late 2025-early 2026.

3. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

3.1 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.
- Discussion occurred around the implications of customers taking more water than what is in the system on a particular day. Members questioned if rules can be changed to specify a certain tolerance when taking water different to the water order (eg +/- percentage). WaterNSW advised the definition of a water order sits with WaterNSW, however compliance does not. WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW will discuss customer feedback to see if there is demand for new or different rules and report back to the CAG at the next meeting.

Action MC2410.03: NSW DCCEEW and WaterNSW to discuss customer feedback around the rules for water ordering if taking water different to a water order (eg if +/- tolerance can be factored in).

Responsibility: D Connor (NSW DCCEEW) and D Stockler

- 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.
- Members offered to provide feedback on the process out of session to provide customer perspective. WaterNSW will liaise with the customer out of session.
- 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.
- 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.

3.2 Non-Urban Metering Reforms review update (D Connor, 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.
- 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 Macquarie, 11% of primary meters have been installed; 14.4% of primary submitted in the system; and 32% survey benchmark submitted. In terms of % of water take, 47% of entitlement has taken action towards getting compliant metering equipment installed.
- Members asked if it was possible to use a FPH storage meter to measure general security water take. NSW DCCEEW advised that a FPH storage meter can't be used to measure general security water take (needs to be a meter that takes from that water source).
- Members questioned if flooding occurs and customers have used their FPH allocation, but they have general security allocation that they can't access through their normal pumps, can they take it through FPH works instead. NSW DCCEEW advised that the review foreshadowed potential changes to the S91i rules. There will be an opportunity to look at these rules towards the end of 2025.

4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

4.1 Renewable Energy Storage Program update (J Cairns)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of the Renewable Energy Storage Program (RESP) in which WaterNSW sought private investment to unlock suitable land and assets to develop commercially viable, large-scale renewable energy and storage projects. Following a competitive tender process, WaterNSW granted selected developers (ACEN, UHH, ZEN) the right to investigate agreed sections of WaterNSW land.
- All development and construction activities and costs associated with the projects, including property engagement and environmental (EIS) approvals, will be borne by the developer. Project timeline presented and discussed.

- ACEN Australia has been awarded the tender for an 800MW 12-hour storage pumped hydro scheme on land adjacent to Lake Burrendong, which will utilise purpose-built upper and lower reservoirs. Planning assessment has started with target construction 2026. WaterNSW will continue to update the CAG as the project progresses.
- Members questioned how much storage capacity will be in the upper reservoir. WaterNSW advised initially 8 hours but hoping to increase to 12 hours (15,000GL). No water has been allocated, they will need to get it from the market.
- Into the future, WaterNSW is aspiring to bring 2GW of additional shovel-ready pumped hydro energy storage projects to market by leveraging our land and assets. As a first step, WaterNSW will soon start Government-led pumped hydro feasibility studies to identify suitable locations. If the projects progress, they could supply electricity to up to two million homes.
- WaterNSW is exploring how it can build on the success of the RESP, and whether more sites across regional NSW could also host pumped hydro energy storage projects. We hope to start delivering this next phase from late 2024 and will keep customers updated as work progresses.
- More information on the program is available at [Renewable Energy and Storage Program - WaterNSW](#)

4.2 Town Water Risk Reduction Program (J Lam)

- WaterNSW is working collaboratively with Mid-Western Council and other local councils and water utilities across regional NSW as part of a program to reduce risks to water quality and dam safety and help build the resilience of communities. One of the learnings from the last drought is that better coordination is needed during drought between agencies and local water utilities.
- The Town Water Risk Reduction Program (TWRRP) was established by NSW DCCEEW to identify long-term solutions and address some of the challenges facing local water utilities, including source water quality for regional towns, and the safety of regional dams.
- The NSW Government announced funding for the TWRRP so that WaterNSW can provide vital support to local water utilities in regional and remote areas to help improve water security, safety, reliability and quality.
- The program is a whole-of-government response that brings the strengths of the major entities in the water sector to local councils, who can choose to engage with the skills and knowledge that will best assist them.
- An overview of the program with Mid-Western Council was presented and discussed.

4.3 Update on 2025 Pricing Proposal (B Maher and K Drinkwater, NSW DCCEEW)

- 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.

4.4 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 DCCEEW'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 stated that farm visits would be a good opportunity for WaterNSW to learn more about on-farm practices.
- Further feedback/suggestions can be provided through toni.hayes@waternsw.com.au.

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.

5. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

6. GENERAL BUSINESS:

- Nil general business raised.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 9 April 2025

Meeting closed: 1.25pm

Macquarie-Cudgegong Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 16 October 2024

New actions

| Action number | Action | Person responsible | Status |
|---------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| MC2410.01 | WaterNSW to investigate if condition assessment and engineering reports on Gin Gin Weir can be provided to the CAG. | G Watson | An online meeting with CAG members has been scheduled for 16 January 2025. |
| MC2410.02 | WaterNSW to confirm if future fishways have been taken into consideration in the structural assessment of Gin Gin Weir. | G Watson | An online meeting with CAG members has been scheduled for 16 January 2025. |
| MC2410.03 | NSW DCCEEW and WaterNSW to discuss customer feedback around the rules for water ordering if taking water different to a water order (eg if +/- tolerance can be factored in). | D Connor (NSW DCCEEW) and D Stockler | |

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.</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-Wambool Water Security Project (formerly Macquarie-Re-Regulating Storage Project) https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/water-</p> |

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|------------------|--|----------|---|
| | | | infrastructure-nsw/regional-projects/macquarie-wambuil-water-security-project |
| MC2407.01 | WaterNSW to provide updates to Biodiversity, Conservation & Science Group (NSW DCCEEW) on any outages of the penstock at Burrendong Dam. | M Khan | Complete. |
| MC2407.02 | WaterNSW to investigate if FPH compliance percentages can be framed by the percentage of FPH entitlement across the valley. | M Brooks | Complete. 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. Refer also agenda item 3.1- 3.3. |