

Namoi-Peel Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting



Location: Mackellar Motel, Gunnedah

Date: 21 March 2024

Time: 9.30am

Present: David Gowing (Chair), Ian Coxhead, Bruce Logan, Mick Coffey, Dianne Hockey, Chrissy Jeffries, Ildu Monticone, Dirk Jol, Huw Morgan, Marcus Finn (observer).

WaterNSW: Clair Cameron, Ronan Magaharan, Brendan Maher, Ken Gee, Kate Masters, Jon Hocking and Chris Bath; and for specific items online: Ken Gee, David Stocker, Martin Brooks, Michelle Yeaman.

Agency and external staff: David Andersen, Sarah Boyd, Kate Drinkwater, Amanda Chadwick (DCCEEW/online); Keeley Reynolds, Scott Carpenter (NRAR/online); Isabel Thompson and Jackson Streeter (SEC Newgate).

Meeting Opened: 9.30am.

1. Welcome and Introduction

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: David Gee, Nat Groves, Eloise Chaplain, John Richards, Patrick Purtle, Todd Farrar, Mike Boyle, Nick Lennon

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.
- David Gowing declared he had received a grant from DCCEEW.

1.5 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 16 November 2023:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [16 November 2023](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*D Hockey/M Coffey
carried*

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- See action sheet attached.

Action NP2403.01: WaterNSW to re-send information on biodiversity works from Chaffey Dam, per action NP2311.01 (emailed to CAG members 7 December 2023).

Responsibility: T Hayes

2. Operations:

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Gee)

- WaterNSW provided a review of recent operations in the Namoi and Peel valleys, including rainfall forecast and temperature outlook, dam inflows and current storage status, water availability and usage, winter maintenance and operations.
- Operations will continue to be order on demand. Under worst case conditions, a Bulk Water Transfer (BWT) may be required in November 2024.

Contact us

Call us on **1300 662 077**

Visit us at waternsw.com.au

Follow us on Twitter [@WaterNSW](https://twitter.com/WaterNSW)

waternsw.com.au

- Members questioned what drives delivery losses. WaterNSW advised the conditions drive losses. There was a new benchmark for low delivery losses this year. No supplementary events in the Namoi, very wet finish to 2023 and good flows coming down Peel to keep losses down.
- Members sought detail on what water on demand looks like for next 12 months. WaterNSW advised business as usual for next 12 months is expected. It should be fairly quiet except for some sporadic ad hoc orders. Expect more water on demand orders in September if dry, may push out to Oct-Nov with some inflows. Will keep Keepit Dam above 101GL in order to be able to use gates to release water Oct-Nov, as valves can't meet demand for Lower Namoi if below 101GL.
- Upper Namoi and Peel will be business as usual for water on demand.
- WaterNSW thanked customers on the Gunidgera/Pian system for working with WaterNSW throughout spring and summer to ensure timely and efficient water delivery. This helped greatly to minimise disruption and scheduling required on the Gunidgera/Pian system during the peak demand period.
- The Drought Flood Risk Index tool provides WaterNSW with an indication of where we are heading (normal conditions/drought conditions/wet conditions). The tool takes into account a number of parameters and factors and based on this information an index is provided. Drought stages are declared by DCCEEW.
- Members asked if DCCEEW uses the same data to declare 'approaching drought conditions'. WaterNSW advised WaterNSW uses different systems to the NSW Government as we are mainly based around rivers and storages. The NSW Government considers different/more factors.
- Members questions if there is any concern for Tamworth (local water utility). WaterNSW advised the new pipeline is operational to mitigate drought conditions and ease concerns for Tamworth Council.
- Contact details for operations staff in the Namoi and Peel – email WPD.Peel@watensw.com.au or WPD.Namoi@watensw.com.au

2.2 Regional Operations update (R Magaharan)

- 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, working with Dam Safety to reduce dam surveillance, potential to self-deliver some regional projects, a review of existing water monitoring runs etc.
- 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.
- Members queried whether the sites need to be upgraded from 3G. WaterNSW advised that all surface water sites have been upgraded and some groundwater sites are being converted from 3G.
- An update on current projects was provided (Gunidgera Weir raising, Mollee Weir electrical upgrade, Keepit Dam coating, Chaffey Dam offsets – snagging, pump screening and monitoring).

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 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).
- Members questioned if WaterNSW has confidence the metering review will stimulate the market to increase coverage and give greater and quicker service to customers. WaterNSW stated the review is genuine and will improve operational issues. One of the proposals in the review is to de-couple metering from the LID (87% of issues are to do with LIDs, not meter installation) and other intervention that will potentially help.
- 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.
- 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).
- 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).
- Members queried the estimated turnaround from application to approval for works. WaterNSW advised it depends on the type of application (eg BLRs are turned around in 3 business days, median 11 days without referral for hydrological assessment). We have seen some significant change but some can take longer depending on the circumstance.
- The Water Market System is being co-developed and is co-invested by the three water agencies (WaterNSW, DCCEE 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 Update on Metering Review (Camila Ridoutt – DCCEE)

- DCCEE 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 DCCEE'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 DCCEE 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 [DCCEE's website](#).

3.3 Floodplain Harvesting Measurement update (D Andersen – DCCEEW)

- DCCEEW provided an update on floodplain harvesting measurement, including how to nominate your measurement period in iWAS, an overview of the DAS dashboard, registering storage curves, exemptions, device and installation availability and programs to support measurement.
- The compliance date for installation of primary metering equipment in the Namoi is yet to be advised. Water users have 12 months from the first time their FPH access licences is credited to install primary metering equipment.
- NRAR is currently verifying the compliance status of storages in the Gwydir, Border Rivers and Macquarie valleys. Satellites and other monitoring techniques will be used to identify water users who are capturing water from the floodplains.
- It is expected that any water user intending to take water from the floodplain will have primary metering equipment installed. NRAR is aware of the challenges and barriers in the market with DQPs and availability of equipment and will consider these factors, however those who take water without primary metering equipment in place may face enforcement in line with regulatory policy, regardless of the barriers.
- In the lead up to a wet weather event, NRAR will use the media and direct engagement with stakeholders to ensure NRAR's position is known.
- More information is available at <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/plans-and-programs/floodplain-management/floodplain-harvesting-measurement> or emailing metering.reform@dpie.nsw.gov.au

4. Pricing Engagement:

4.1 Engagement on 2025-30 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 appears that CAG members come for specific information - can we give that information more priority, at start of session?
 - o Great ideas. Definitely scope for industry-specific engagement, but important to hear each other's perspectives in the same room, that is critical.
 - o Suggest WaterNSW compares ideas to CAG Charter to see if still fit for purpose.
 - o Agree with (first point), can put things forward multiple times and not get an appropriate response – hearing the same thing we heard 2 years ago and has lost relevance and thus lose people and interest.
 - o unregulated vs regulated – process has been great for education but not all relevant to who I represent. Would like to see or have a specific forum for more discussion on how unregulated is managed, or groundwater etc. How do I bring my issues from my area and reps to an appropriate forum because the CAGs are too broad, not enough focus on my specific region.
 - o Members noted WaterNSW is the most accessible water agency. Would be improved if other agencies are here in person with the appropriate departmental people to get decent answers. CAGs are doing the right thing coming out to customers but need more representation from Department and NRAR.
 - o I get a lot out of the CAG, would help if we could get a dot point summary of meeting that we could pick out the items specific to our valleys/regions to take back to people we represent and take back to our meetings.
 - o the true value is talking to people before, after and at lunch etc. Recommend the value of face-to-face and wouldn't want to see that interaction reduced.
- 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.
- Members questioned the lack of expenditure against the Drought Operations line item in the Capex report (\$24.4M) for the Peel valley and sought further detail.

Action NP2403.02: WaterNSW to provide further detail on the Drought Operations line item in the Capex report.
Responsibility: R Magaharan

7. General Business:

- Specific issues raised by customers prior to the meeting were resolved out of session directly with the customers.
- D Gowing noted that he has been unable to complete a grant form/approval and is aware of others in a similar situation. Was given a timeframe of 45 days, which is approaching expiry.
- Members stated it would be valuable to have more videos or tutorial opportunities for water users to understand how the WaterInsights portal works and capability.
- D Gowing sent an email to WaterNSW on 2 March 2024, which was forwarded by request to CAG members out of session, regarding Treasury using water users as a revenue stream and stated this should not continue. Suggested if CAG members agree, a letter should be sent from the CAG to IPART for review. Members stated this should not come from the CAG, but from individuals, as not all members may agree. Would need to have consent from all members prior to being sent from the CAG.

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: 11 July 2024

Meeting closed: 3.00pm

Namoi-Peel Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 21 March 2024

Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
NP2311.02	WaterNSW to contact Ian Coxhead out of session to discuss concerns around refitting of meters due to changes to rules around plumbing.	M Brooks	Complete. The customer has been contacted by WaterNSW.

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
NP2403.01	WaterNSW to re-send information on biodiversity works from Chaffey Dam, per action NP2311.01 (emailed to CAG members 7 December 2023).	T Hayes	Complete. Emailed 7/5/24.
NP2403.02	WaterNSW to provide further detail on the Drought Operations line item in the Capex report.	R Magaharan	Complete. These projects have been transferred to Water Infrastructure NSW/DCCEEW. IPART assigned a 100% government cost share for drought projects, as discussed in Chapter 8 of the IPART Final Report. Therefore, IPART assigned all of WaterNSW's drought capital costs to the government share in the RAB. IPART stated that WaterNSW will be able to recover its capital costs for drought projects (if any) from the NSW Government over time, including an appropriate return on assets. No spend will be incurred to the end of the determination period.

Contact us

Call us on **1300 662 077**

Visit us at waternsw.com.au

Follow us on Twitter [@WaterNSW](https://twitter.com/WaterNSW)