

# Namoi-Peel Customer Advisory Group

## Minutes of Meeting

**Location:** Mackellar Motel, 342 Conadilly St, GUNNEDAH

**Date:** 24 October 2024

**Time:** 9.30am

**Present:** David Gowing (Chair), Bruce Logan, Mick Coffey, Dianne Hockey, Ildu Monticone and Chrissy Jeffries.

**WaterNSW:** Brendan Maher, Duncan Wallace, Sonia Townsend (online), Chris Bath and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Ken Gee, Kate Masters, Russell Cocks.

**Agency and external staff for specific items:** David Andersen and Vaibhav Gupta (NSW DCCEEW, online).

**Meeting Opened:** 9.30am

### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

#### 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

**1.2 Apologies:** John Richards, Ian Coxhead, Paul Keyte, Matt Miles, Dirk Jol, Todd Farrer, Nick Lennon, Michael Boyle, Nat Groves.

#### 1.3 Confirmation of Agenda Items:

- Members would like Northern Basin Connectivity to be a standing agenda item at each CAG meeting going forward.

#### 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.
- Di Hockey advised that she has been appointed to NSW Conservation and Natural Resources Committee.

#### 1.5 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 11 July 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [11 July 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.  
M Coffey/D Hockey (carried)

#### 1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

### 2. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

#### 2.1 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. Changes to water orders within lead time can still be made per the current process.

- 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 queried what effect this process will have on the timeframe for a temporary transfer. WaterNSW advised the time will be dependent on how many impacted parties are involved, noting the challenge for WaterNSW is the process. Previously applicants were only required to tick a box, however WaterNSW has had to strengthen the process and will continue to improve. Once all customers are registered with updated details in the WMS, the process will be quicker.
- Members questioned how WaterNSW will deal with a non-response from an impacted party. WaterNSW advised this detail hasn't been finalised. We are looking at the objections-style process first as this process is already in place for other things. Updates will be provided to the CAG as this progresses.
- 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.
- Members stated the new features and functions are great but questioned if this will expedite applications. WaterNSW advised one of the major hold ups is with incomplete applications or missing information and eliminating that will improve timeframes. Once customers are registered online, the application process will not progress until all required information has been submitted (there are many checks in the digital environment which allow or stop an application from progressing).
- 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.
- Members queried what scenario has been put to IPART. WaterNSW explained that all scenarios and a base case were submitted to IPART for consideration. Members stated they are not supportive of the base case as is an unsustainable burden to customers.

## 2.2 Non-Urban Metering Review update (D Andersen, 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.
- Members stated the number of accredited DQPs has declined, with many concerned about liability. Members were advised that under the new regulations many customers will not require a DQP. For those who do, the concierge service will alleviate a lot of the issues and barriers for DQPs. Changes will also allow other people to become DQPs, so may create other opportunities, and there is a commitment to put more resources into this area.
- 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

### **3. OPERATIONS:**

#### **3.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Gee)**

- WaterNSW provided a review of recent operations in the Namoi and Peel valleys, including recent rainfall and BOM rainfall forecast outlook, recent actual and statistical inflows, current storage volumes, overview of the water resource monitoring dashboard, water availability and usage and forward operations.

#### **Peel operations:**

- Chaffey Dam is full and spilling and will slowly recede with no inflows.
- The 2024/25 season will be order on demand. With the increase to 100% for general security accounts, uncontrolled flow access will not be available this water year. Any previous uncontrolled flow access in this water year is now debited against account balances

#### **Upper Namoi operations:**

- The 2024/25 season will be order on demand.
- Bulk Water Transfer (BWT) – with lower volumes of water available in Keepit Dam, water allocated to Lower Namoi users and transferred from the Upper to Lower Namoi will be required to be sourced from Split Rock Dam.
- An initial late winter pulse of 7.7GL commenced in the last week August with a peak discharge of 3000ML/day. WaterNSW reduced the main BWT peak to 2,500ML/day based on feedback received.
- The main BWT is to commence in November 2024. A total of up to 195GL may be required under worst case scenario. This has reduced from initial forecasts of up to 274GL due to better than minimum inflow conditions over the past 6 months. The total volume transferred will be determined by Lower Namoi demand and loss to supply.
- Use in the Lower Namoi is expected to be 230-250GL. Loss is highly variable and dependent on conditions with a forecast range of 49-117GL based on past years with similar demand (2023/2024 and 2013/2014).
- More communications will be released later in the year on release plans.

## **Lower Namoi operations:**

- The 2024/25 season will be order on demand. With significant volumes of water expected to be delivered in the Lower Namoi, channel capacity constraints are forecast to occur on the Gunidgera Pian Creek system. Customers are encouraged to take this into consideration when planning water orders.
- The BWT from Split Rock Dam will commence in November 2024 and may be required throughout the remainder of 2024 into 2025 to deliver water in the Lower Namoi. This is not forecast to cause any disruption to Lower Namoi supply at this time.
- Up to date operational information is available on WaterNSW's [WaterInsights platform](#).

## **3.2 Regional Operations update (taken as read, provided in business papers)**

- An update on regional projects and maintenance, including Gunidgera Weir raising, Keepit Dam fish passage offsets, Mollee fishway remediation works, Moller Weir electrical renewals and Chaffey Pipeline EIS, was provided in the business papers.

## **3.3 Unlocking the past and future with satellite remote sensing products and tools - Hydrometric Network and Remote Sensing Program (HNRS) (V Gupta, NSW DCCEEW)**

- NSW DCCEEW 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 questioned if the satellite imagery provided for irrigated cropping areas has been ground-truthed, stating the data has not been accurate in the past. NSW DCCEEW advised methodologies for detection of irrigated cropping is improving and goes through a 3-stage criteria check. With advances in technology and higher resolutions estimates will continue to improve, however acknowledge there is no replacement to ground-truthing. The data provided is purely based on remote sensing measures and compared to data sets.

## **4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:**

### **4.1 Update on 2025 Pricing Proposal (B Maher/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.

### **4.2 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.
- Discussion occurred around WaterNSW's proposal to separate the Namoi and Peel valleys into two separate CAGs. Members supported this, stating each valley has separate issues and tailoring the presentations to each catchment will be beneficial.
- Questions arose around minimum attendance with members stating there should be a minimum attendance rate for meetings to go ahead. WaterNSW will take this into consideration going forward.
- Members stated the new groups should follow a similar charter to the current CAGs, with primarily customer involvement and a need for a minimum level of water literacy, stating the integrity of the current CAGs should be maintained and not diluted by other stakeholders. There was a suggestion that the third online meeting could involve external stakeholders.

## **5. BUSINESS PAPERS:**

- Taken as read.

## **6. GENERAL BUSINESS:**

### **6.1 Northern Connectivity Panel**

- Members requested this be a standing CAG agenda item until finished and questioned what, if any, consultation has come back. Members raised concerns with the ability to deliver what is in the report, stating the recommendations are unviable, unachievable and premature and could collapse small communities.

### **Meeting review and close:**

**Next meeting:** 20 March 2025

**Meeting closed:** 12.20pm

## Namoi-Peel Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 24 October 2024

### New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil new actions.		

### Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
<b>NP2407.01</b>	WaterNSW to meet with Split Rock WUA to discuss the bulk water transfer (BWT) prior to commencement.	K Gee	<b>Complete.</b>
<b>NP2407.02</b>	WaterNSW to provide information on forecast of Split Rock Dam volume under minimum inflow sequences to Split Rock WUA.	K Gee	<b>Complete.</b>