

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Griffith Exies Club, 6-12 Jondaryn St, GRIFFITH

Date: 31 October 2024

Time: 9.00am

Present: Peter Sheppard (Chair), Nick Maynard, Justin Sutherland, Luke Tedesco, Trevor Clark, Chris Palmer, Andrea Wilson, Tanya Thompson (online) and Jenny McLeod (online for part of the meeting).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Jonathan Belej, Shaun Gleeson, David Wood, Ben Matthews, Rod Emerson, Tracie Scarfone, Kristen Carter, Sonia Townsend and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Russell Cocks, Martin Brooks, Greg Whorlow, Mark Jackson.

Agency and external staff for specific items: David Andersen and Andrew Cooper (NSW DCCEE, online).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: Glenn Lok, Jackie Kruger, James Maguire, David Webb, Jenna Bell, Jenny McLeod, Rex Conallin, Jack Terblanche.

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, 1 August 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [1 August 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

Moved: T Clark (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.

- Members commented Irrigation Organisations (IOs) have more access in iWAS to amend orders outside of lead time than individuals, whereas creek pumpers need to go through the Customer Helpdesk, which is 'clunky' and time consuming. Members stated until there is a standard approach, customers are more likely to over order. WaterNSW advised that all users have the same capability in iWAS to make changes, however the way IOs place orders is different to other users (managed orders).
- 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.
- 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.
- Members raised concerns out of session around the Murrumbidgee Floodplain Management Plan (FMP) and how WaterNSW will manage the anticipated volume of flood works applications. WaterNSW has built capacity within the Assessment and Approvals team to manage the volume of applications and staff have been upskilled to become state-wide experts, with interchangeable north and south teams. Some issues in the past have been around incomplete applications which hold up the process, sometimes for many years. Going forward, incomplete applications cannot be submitted.
- Members stated the draft Billabong Creek FMP is causing anguish amongst landholders as it is based on the 2022 flood (levels which were unprecedented) rather than the 2012 flood (per Murrumbidgee FMP). Conflicting information has been given by NSW DCCEEW, with landholders unsure of what needs to be licensed and concerned around the potential cost involved. Members stated there is not enough information available for landholders to make informed decisions and there is limited opportunity to provide feedback into the process.

2.2 Non-Urban Metering Reform (NUMR) 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.
- Members questioned if a customer who has a bore with no entitlement but an extraction licence with a zero WAL, do they require a meter. NSW DCCEEW advised that under the proposed amended Access Licence Dealing Principles, if a licence is connected to a pump/works approval, it will need a meter to temporarily trade irrespective of size. If a licence is sitting by itself and not connected to a works approval, it will not be required to be metered.
- 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.

3. OPERATIONS:

3.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (S Gleeson)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Murrumbidgee, including storage and inflow review, rainfall and temperature outlook, system inflows, operational surplus vs system losses, water use summary, [IVT account summary](#), eWater summary, weather outlook, water availability, dam storages scenarios and valley operations.
- Operational surplus to October is around 4GL. eWater holders reduced the volume by using 20GL of surplus for a fish pulse between valleys. Members suggested eWater holders should promote this more in the valley.
- Discussion occurred around the volume of rejected orders, which is tracking high compared to previous years, mainly due to customers over ordering and not taking the volume. The Water Planning and Delivery team do what they can to capture surplus and reregulate and use eWater opportunities where available.
- The IVT is open as at 23 October, triggered by a trade event.

3.2 Regional Operations update (G Whorlow)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of preventative maintenance plan, corrective maintenance work orders and current issues.
- An update on progress of works to repair erosion damage at Beavers Creek Weir (tree removal, erosion repair design, rock works and fishway desilting complete), Coonancoocabil Regulator (design 90% complete, including block bank; works planned for June 2025) and Hay Weir (final design complete; awaiting rock supply quotes).
- An overview of planned outages at Burrinjuck Dam, Berembed Regulator and Yanco Old Weir was provided.

4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

4.1 Renewable Energy Storage Program (M Jackson)

- 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. No water has been allocated and will need to be sourced from the market. There should be no impact on allocation or operations. Project timeline presented and discussed.
- 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 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.
- Members stated the timeline for the final determination to be released leaves very little time for IOs to notify their customers of any, price changes, stating it should be released no later than May.
- NSW DCCEEW advised the draft determination will be released in March which will give an indication of what the prices will be and there will be an opportunity for customers to make submissions.

4.3 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 suggested if only having two face-to-face CAG meetings WaterNSW should allow for a full day to make it worthwhile and add value.

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. Members agreed to this approach, stating it would be good to increase membership and get a wider spread of the valley.

5. NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (NSW DCCEEW) items

5.1 Reconnecting River Country Program (RRCP) update (A Cooper, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an overview of the program, including current status, frequency of proposed environmental flows, and key dates, timeline and major work packages. The program has been extended to December 2026 with the Murrumbidgee Final Business Case by February 2025.

- Members queried the objectives of the constraints roadmap and what it entails. NSW DCCEEW advised the roadmap is trying to bring the jurisdictions together and map out a pathway to achieving constraints (led by MDBA). There is no change in the fundamental objectives, it is more about how to get to the outcomes.
- NSW DCCEEW stated it is important to note that the RRCP is still in development, no flows have ever been delivered under the program and no decision has been made on a flow option. Three options are being assessed.
- It is acknowledged the draft Landholder Negotiation Scheme (LNS) Regulation is creating a lot of tension for those who will be directly affected. NSW DCCEEW held information sessions with landholders in Wagga Wagga and Darlington Point this week to provide more information.
- NSW DCCEEW advised the LNS regulation does not have a compulsory acquisition component and participation is voluntary. If agreement can't be made, an assessment will be required to verify that an easement is required and will need Ministerial agreement. This will be done on a case-by-case basis.
- Members stated the culmination of RRCP, SDLAM, buy backs, LNS and FMPs is causing a lot of angst to landholders, with flow on effects to the community and uncertainty about the future.
- The public exhibition of the draft LNS Regulation process is open to 24 November and NSW DCCEEW welcomes and feedback from landholders.
- More information can be found at [Reconnecting River Country Program](#) and [Landholder Negotiation Scheme Regulation](#).

6. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

7. GENERAL BUSINESS:

- Nil general business raised.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 13 March 2025

Meeting closed: 12.15pm

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 31 October 2024

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil new actions.		

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		