

Coastal-Hunter Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting



Location: Cliftons, Margaret St, Sydney

Date: 5 March 2024

Time: 9.30am

Present: Julia Wokes (Chair), Shane Gee, David Williams, Ken Bray, Chris Rooney, David Frith, Molly Walker, Wayne Clarke (online), Melissa Balas (online).

WaterNSW: Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Mahmood Khan, Rooban Roobavannan, Michelle Yeaman, Russell Cocks, Jon Hocking, Mark Jackson, Justin Cairns, Toni Hayes and online: Jonathan Belej, Kate Masters, David Stockler, Andrew George, Sonia Townsend, Steven Bowman.

Agency and external staff (for specific agenda items): Ria Pryce, David Andersen, Kate Drinkwater and Amanda Chadwick (DCCEEW/online); Tim Gilbert (NRAR); Karim Ezzeldin and Jackson Streeter (SEC Newgate).

Meeting Opened: 9.30am.

1. Introduction

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 **Apologies:** Nick Cook, Will Russell.

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, 31 October 2023:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [31 October 2023](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*K Bray/S Gee
carried*

- Per discussion at the last meeting (not recorded in the minutes), members stated they do not have contact details of members within their water user groups so are unable to share information received in the CAG with their constituents. Members would like to be effective in communicating relevant information to the wider customer base and sought help from WaterNSW.
- WaterNSW advised personal customer contact details cannot be shared without permission however will look at what more we can do to help publicise water user groups and what they do (eg profile WUA in the Customer Newsletter, run targeted customer campaigns etc). Members noted the subscriber rate to the Customer Newsletter is low.

Action CVH2403.01: WaterNSW to review opportunities for promoting water user groups via the Customer Newsletter, targeted customer campaigns etc).

Responsibility: B Maher

1.6 Actions arising from minutes:

- See action sheet attached.

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2. Operations:

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (M Khan/R Roobavannan)

- WaterNSW presented a review of operations in the Hunter, North Coast and South Coast valleys, including rainfall, current storages status, dam operations, water allocation summary 2023-24, water usage and balance, inflow comparison and storage forecast.
- A comparison of statistical vs observed inflows at Glenbawn and Glennies Creek dams over 36 months was presented. WaterNSW can compare how inflows are tracking against other droughts of record. 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.
- Customers are reminded that regulated river water orders are required to be placed prior to taking any water. This ensures WaterNSW can make releases to meet demand and minimise shortfalls and operational surplus. The easiest way to place a water order is via our 24/7 [online water accounting system](#) (iWAS).
- Customers and stakeholders can visit WaterNSW's [WaterInsights](#) portal for up to date operational updates and register to the [Early Warning Network](#) (EWN) for flood updates and dam and supply activities.

2.2 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- 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.
- An update on operations and maintenance activities in the Hunter and North Coast was provided.

3. Customer Services:

3.1 Customer Services update (D Stockler/online)

- An update on what's been 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).
- 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.

- Members stated there are delays in getting basic contact information up to date, such as change of address. WaterNSW is aware of the issue and explained the complexities. Data is kept on a licence basis, not a customer basis, so if data is updated on one licence it doesn't necessarily update across all licences unless those details have been provided. There are processes being put in place in the new WMS to address this into the future.
- 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).
- The Water Market System is being co-developed and is co-invested by the three water agencies (WaterNSW, DCCEEW and NRAR) into one platform.
- **Discussion and actions for the pricing component of this session have been recorded by SEC Newgate (attached).**

3.2 Non-Urban Metering Reforms update (R Cocks)

- WaterNSW reminded customers' of their ongoing [recording and reporting obligations](#) under the metering reforms once compliant, including faulty equipment, maintenance and re-validation requirements and what customers need to do and need to consider to become compliant.
- Customers should use the online [NSW Metering Guidance Tool](#) to see if and how the rules apply to them.
- If customers' **contact details have changed**, please visit our website at www.waternsw.com.au/managedetails to update your details or contact WaterNSW on 1300 662 077.
- An overview of the [S91i](#) (faulty metering equipment) process was provided. Faulty metering equipment **must be reported within 24 hours** of becoming aware of an issue. If you apply for an S91i and realise you need to replace your meter, the request for an S91i extension will be referred to NRAR for approval.
- To book **a one-on-one meeting** to discuss your metering requirements or to find out more about how the metering rules apply to you, please visit WaterNSW's website at www.waternsw.com.au/metering.

3.3 Update on Non-Urban Metering Review (R Pryce – DCCEEW/online)

- DCCEEW 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 DCCEEW'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 DCCEEW 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.

- The compliance date for Coastal valleys is December 2024 and advice has been provided to extend this date. DCCEEW will provide the outcome of this asap.
- Members questioned if there will be a consultation process prior to recommendation to the Minister, with concerns that customers won't get any feedback on the process. Advice is expected to be provided to the Minister by the end of March. Certain elements will be straightforward but there are other elements that will require further consultation before final changes are confirmed.
- The government is committed to the 'no meter, no pump' principle and this will underpin the review.
- Further information on the non-urban metering review can be found on [DCCEEW's website](#).

4. Pricing Engagement

4.1 Engagement on 2025-30 Pricing Proposal (WaterNSW, DCCEEW and NRAR)

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 the last 2-3 meetings have been more meaningful. Discussion is more meaningful. The real problem is we are only a small group of people.
- o the 3 agencies need to work more closely – needs to be more cohesion between the agencies, not just at management level.
- 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.

5.2 Upper Hunter Hydro projects (J Cairns)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of the Upper Hunter Hydro Projects, including how pumped hydro works, what the renewable energy and storage program is and why it was developed, the process involved in awarding contracts, what is involved in the agreement and WaterNSW's role.
- The project is an agreement between WaterNSW and Upper Hunter Hydro (UHH) to investigate and develop two projects, one each at Glenbawn and Glennies Creek reservoirs (if successful). WaterNSW provides access to the land around the dam for the projects and UHH is the developer and owner of the projects. If the development is successful, WaterNSW will receive land lease payments and a portion of the dividend from the operation of the projects.
- The projects are in the very early stages of project development (will take several years before any work takes place, if successful). UHH will need to conduct appropriate engineering and environmental investigations to confirm what can be built (including confirming the capacity of the projects).
- Members questioned if UHH will be required to buy a licence. WaterNSW advised that they will need to go through the normal application process to get a licence (there is no allocation for them, they will have to go to market).
- Members commented there should be coordination with the Lostock to Glennies Creek Pipeline project as they could end up starting at the same time.
- Members stated the tender has been out since 2018 and has never been mentioned at CAGs or other customer forums and many CAG members found out about the projects via the media. WaterNSW is committed to providing ongoing updates on the projects going forward.
- Discussion occurred around the availability of water, licence type, charges, how water will be allocated.
- More information can be found on WaterNSW's website at <https://www.watarnsw.com.au/water-services/renewable-energy-and-storage-program/upper-hunter-hydro-projects>

6. Business Papers:

- Noted and taken as read.

7. General Business:

7.1 Water Insights training for customer (M Balas)

- Members noted that water users would like training on the Water Insights tool to get the most out of the system, stating it is not as user-friendly as the Water Live app. Some people are questioning the functionality of the tool, which may be linked to an understanding of how it works.

- If possible, some online training for customers would be highly valued.

Action CVH2403.02: Send email to WaterNSW requesting training be provided to customers on the Water Insights portal.

Responsibility: Melissa Balas

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: 2 July 2024

Meeting closed: 4.00pm

Coastal-Hunter Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 5 March 2024

Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
CVH2403.01	WaterNSW to review opportunities for promoting water user groups via the Customer Newsletter, targeted customer campaigns etc).	B Maher	In progress.
CVH2403.02	Send email to WaterNSW requesting training be provided to customers on the Water Insights portal.	M Balas	Complete.

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