

Gwydir Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting



Location: Town & Country Club, Moree

Date: 19 March 2024

Time: 9.00am

Present: Jim Cush (Chair), Zeb Chapman, Mark Winter, David Preston, Chrissy Jeffries, Lou Gall, Daryl Albertson (online) and Lila-Jane Fisher (online).

WaterNSW: Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Jon Hocking, Ken Gee, Tim Tanner, Kate Masters, Chris Bath and Toni Hayes; and for specific items online: David Stocker, Michelle Yeaman, Andrew George.

Agency and external staff: David Andersen, Camila Ridoutt (DCCEEW/online); Brett Bates, Scott Carpenter (NRAR), Isabel Thompson and Jackson Streeter (SEC Newgate).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am.

1. Welcome and Introduction

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: Chris Robinson, Nick Gillingham.

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, 14 November 2023:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [14 November 2023](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*M Winter/Z Chapman
carried*

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- See action sheet attached.
- Members noted the pricing actions from the last meeting were not recorded in the minutes. WaterNSW advised that the pricing discussion (including actions) was recorded by SEC Newgate and distributed to members with the November 2023 minutes – copy available on request.

2. Operations:

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Gee)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Gwydir valley, including rainfall and forecast, recent actual vs statistical inflows, overview of the Water Resource Monitoring Dashboard, current storage status and water availability and usage.
- 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.
- We are currently going into drier conditions, potentially in emerging drought already. Average carryover in general security accounts is 89%, so allocations are quite high.

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- Deliveries and usage this season were less than expected, with final deliveries almost complete.
- Environmental deliveries discussed, noting gauge readings d/s of Combadello were overreading and underreading, which had a big impact to the environment. WaterNSW advised the low reading was highly unusual and not expected to happen often.
- Members questioned how the rivers will run going forward. WaterNSW advised if there are no releases the river will run dry. WaterNSW will push flows where available but won't be releasing water out of Copeton Dam if no orders. The environmental water holder advised it may look to do an environmental release into the Barwon in autumn, depending on what the river is doing (dry/wet) and will work with the Water Planning and Delivery team on timing etc.
- WaterNSW advised Sam Stokes is the new primary Water Planning and Delivery Officer for the Gwydir valley, based in Tamworth; Adam Schubert is the new Customer Field Officer for the Gwydir, based in Moree.
- Annual winter maintenance on d/s structures will occur and advice will be provided when dates are scheduled (generally will be short outages up to a week).
- Discussion occurred on the raft d/s of Tyreel Weir. There has been no progress on the issue to date. The rafts are a major limiting factor to getting water to the wetlands and the ability to deliver water. There has been very slow progress on a solution/options to address, with no one taking ownership. The Gwydir EWAG will be writing to DCCEEW on the issue, however needs concurrence from the Ministers to progress. GVIA advised it has engaged with the Minister for Water on this as well. The issue affects everyone from water users, landholders, the environment and local council.
- Customers and stakeholders can visit WaterNSW's [WaterInsights](#) portal for up-to-date operational information.

2.2 Regional Operations update (T Tanner)

- 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.

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).
- 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).
- 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 the Customer Services session have been recorded by SEC Newgate (attached).**

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. Metering:

5.1 Update on Metering Review (C Ridoutt – DCCEEW)

- 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.
- DCCEEW advised there is an existing telemetry exemption for sites requiring a satellite solution or that cannot physically comply with the metering equipment rules. New LIDs are coming on board and as soon as there is a solution that meets specifications DCCEEW will notify water users. If water users can demonstrate they have no coverage on ground, they should apply via the S233 exemption <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/nsw-non-urban-water-metering/what-water-users-need-to-know/telemetry-coverage-exemption>
- Further information on the non-urban metering review can be found on [DCCEEW's website](#).

5.2 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 Gwydir valley passed on 15 August 2023, so water take can only occur if primary metering is in place. If a meter is broken, submit a S91i application and use secondary 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.
- Members sought an update on progress on proposed changes to allow irrigation while FPH. DCCEEW advised the policy team is planning to consult with peak industry stakeholders within the next month to see whether a proposed solution will meet requirements. The Minister will need to sign off on any regulatory amendment however the aim is to align this with any non-urban metering review amendments.
- Discussion occurred around sub-dividing a FPH works and sought advice on implications for water users. DCCEEW advised that as part of the consultation with peak industry stakeholders above,

DCCEEW will also consult on a measurement period guideline, which will include explanation of how subdivision rules apply.

- 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

6. Presentations/Consultation:

6.1 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:

- Keep NRAR separate – there are a lot of frustrations in the valley with NRAR
- We come for Water Planning & Delivery – that's what gets us here.
- Was good to have CEO join today
- There is a lot of content provided at the meeting. People are busy but might like to have that information if it was available through another stream (ie podcast). Metering, finances etc – provide as podcast to associations to distribute – then come to meetings with questions etc. People can then review before the meeting.
- If using a podcast customers wouldn't have the opportunity to ask relevant questions – need the live answers and conversation. Might work for some things, but not everything.
- Site visits are very constructive.
- Not interested in industry specific engagement – we like having everyone in the room. Do local rather than industry.
- Comment - might not have many people in the room, but you do have a lot of coverage of the valley represented by the people in the room.
- 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.

7. Business Papers:

- Noted and taken as read.

8. General Business:

8.1 Incident alert by DCCEEW on department travel to Moree (J Cush)

- Members referred to an incident alert by DCCEEW on 14 February 2024 directing staff not to stay in Moree. Members stated it was disrespectful to staff and customers who live here, noting the issues are not isolated to Moree.

8.2 Dam Safety Upgrades/Fish Passage Offsets (D Preston)

- Members sought information on where the dam safety upgrade fish passage offset is up to, stating the environment can deliver managed flows but there is still no passage between structures.
- Per Project Status Report (in meeting papers), following completion of the Strategic Fishway Optimisation Program for fishway design and construction methodology, Tyreel Weir fishway will be constructed following the construction of the 3 pilot fishways in the Lachlan, Macquarie and Namoi valleys. Detailed design for the remaining Gwydir fishways will be completed within the FY22-25 regulatory period.

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: 9 July 2024

Meeting closed: 3.10pm

Gwydir Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 19 March 2024

Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
GWY2311.01	DCCEEW to follow up customer queries regarding instructions on how to use the trial FPH meters in the Gwydir.	D Andersen (DCCEEW)	

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
	Nil new actions.		

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