

# Murray-Lower Darling Customer Advisory Group

## Minutes of Meeting

**Location:** Deniliquin RSL Club, Deniliquin

**Date:** 31 July 2024

**Time:** 9.00am

**Present:** Sally Dye (Chair), Michael Pisasale, Anthony Wilson, John Lolicato, Peter Hamilton, Louise Burge, Sophie Baldwin, Judith Damiani (online), Nerida Healy (online), Michael Chalmers (online), Josh Bode (observer) and Geoff Mann (observer).

**WaterNSW:** Andrew George, Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Ashley Webb, Jonathan Belej, David Wood, Ben Coffey, Tom Riley, Sonia Townsend (online), Tessa Hockly (online), Lip Ban Soh (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: Rob O'Neill, Jon Hocking, Michael Martinson, David Stockler, Ben Arabin, Martin Brooks.

**Agency and external staff:** Shahadat Chowdury and Allan Raine (NSW DCCEE), Tyson Milne (online), Jacqui Hickey and Joseph Davis (MDBA), Fiona Court (SEC Newgate) and Daniela Hauri (SEC Newgate, online).

**Meeting Opened:** 9.00am

### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

#### 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

**1.2 Apologies:** Gordon Fox, Rachel Strachan, Howard Jones, Hilary Johnson, Paul Childs.

#### 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 Election of Chairperson

– To be carried over to next meeting.

#### 1.6 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 25 March 2024:

– Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [25 March 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

M Pisasale/S Dye (carried)

#### 1.7 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

### 2. OPERATIONS:

#### 2.1 WaterInsights – Current Development Approaches and Feedback – workshop/discussion (T Riley)

– WaterNSW provided an update on the [WaterInsights platform](#), including background and design intent, key functions and relation to real time data (RTD), recent updates, future planning and roadmap for future development.

– WaterInsights is WaterNSW's interactive online tool that provides information about how water is managed by WaterNSW. The data on WaterInsights is the fastest and most up to date data available.

– WaterNSW is planning for the next pricing determination and sought feedback from members on what is working/not working for them, what information they would like included etc, to ensure customers have access to the information they need.

- A live demonstration of the WaterInsights platform and key features presented and discussed. Customers can view water availability, allocation, account balances, water quality data, storage volumes, river flows and levels, historical data on dam and stream levels and rules and conditions that govern water management, and more.
- Customers also have the option to register for an account and log in to the platform. While not a requirement, the benefits of logging in are that flow alerts can be set for specific gauges, salinity levels, flows etc. Customers can also register to receive notifications and be alerted via SMS or email.
- Members provided valuable feedback which will be consolidated and considered by the WaterInsights team for future improvements and inclusion where appropriate. Customers can also provide feedback direct to the WaterInsights teams via the feedback tab on the WaterInsights page.
- Short instructional videos that explain how to use the main features of WaterInsights, including navigation, registering for an account, setting river gauge and water source alerts etc, can be found at the bottom of the [WaterInsights](#) landing page and [WaterInsights - YouTube](#).

## 2.2 Water Planning and Delivery update (J Belej)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Murray and Lower Darling valleys, including dam storage and inflows review, rainfall and temperature outlook, water use summary (including e-water and releases), water allocations and availability, weather and climate outlook and an overview of Murray and Lower Darling operations.
- Members requested future presentations include the differentiation between types of environmental water (high security or general security). WaterNSW advised that some of this information is available in WaterInsights (link above).
- Members highlighted concerns around the ability for high security water to be parked on general security accounts at the end of the water year then carried over, stating high security does not have carryover rights but is being transferred into a product that allows carryover, which has consequences for general security reliability. NSW DCCEEW advised this is an unintended consequence under the current rules and can't be prevented.
- Members requested a breakdown of general security carryover, including volume of high security 'parked' on general security accounts. NSW DCCEEW advised this is included in the 15 July allocation statement.

**Action MLD2407.01:** NSW DCCEEW to provide breakdown of general security carryover, including volume of high security 'parked' on general security accounts.

**Responsibility:** S Chowdhury (NSW DCCEEW)

**Action MLD2407.02:** NSW DCCEEW to review the unintended consequence that allows for high security water to be parked on general security accounts, thus providing the ability for carry over.

**Responsibility:** A Raine (NSW DCCEEW)

**Action MLD2407.03:** WaterNSW to send link for Pre-requisite Policy Measures (PPM) to CAG members.

**Responsibility:** T Hayes

An overview of Murray and Lower Darling operations was presented and discussed, including environmental water delivery and planned actions.

### Murray operations:

- Irrigation demand is starting with major irrigation companies commencing system refill and starting to resume services. Demand and usage for the 2024-25 season is expected to be similar or higher compared to last year. High demand on the Edward River Escape is expected (supporting Operations and Environment).
- The MDBA is expected to publish its [Annual Operating Outlook \(A00\)](#) for 2024-25 next week. Provides indication on potential demand on water across climate scenarios, best advice on expected Murray

flows and MDBA's requirement to move water down the system (including Lower Darling). The MDBA also publishes [River Murray weekly reports](#) including operations, river flows, salinity data etc.

- Environmental water delivery: currently Murray River winter base flow is 4,000–4,500 ML/day downstream of Yarrawonga; Goulburn winter pulse has ceased; deliveries through Yallakool-Colligen-Wakool commencing shortly (~August 2024); Murray River Winter-Spring Hume multi-site delivery due to commence during August 2024, with expected flows up to 15,000ML/day downstream Yarrawonga, and consequently higher flow downstream, Edward-Wakool, unregulated tributaries and Barmah/Millewa forest inundation.
- WaterNSW is working with e-water holders and major irrigation companies to understand coming season demands.

### **Lower Darling operations:**

- 581 GL has entered the Lakes since the start of 2024, with an estimated further 40-60GL to arrive in the next 2 months (as at 22/07/2024). Inflows are currently being managed to maintain top lakes at full supply and water surplus to this requirement is being shifted to Lake Menindee (and Cawndilla).
- Base flow requirements at Weir 32 as per WSP is 200ML/day (May-Oct). Additional water delivered by the environmental managers to target ~400ML/day has resulted in higher than 'standard' flow requirements downstream of Weir 32 to the Murray River.
- Operations and release patterns have been guided by advice from NSW DCCEEW and other NSW and Commonwealth partner agencies including the MDBA. The MDBA is responsible for management of the shared resource and accounting. WaterNSW conducts operational requests and onsite operations.
- WaterNSW will continue to work with agencies (MDBA, NSW DCCEEW, NSW Fisheries etc) to understand future operational requirements.
- Discussion occurred around the cumulative effects of operational decisions and changes to policy that are impacting people's rights and access to water (customers and riparian), particularly in relation to changing patterns of water use by the environment and reduced river flows. The MDBA agreed to review the issue and report back to the CAG.

**Action MLD2407.04:** MDBA to review concerns and issues around changing patterns of water use and reduced river flows (in conjunction with NSW DCCEEW) and report back to the CAG.

**Responsibility:** J Hickey (MDBA)

- Customers and stakeholders can visit WaterNSW's [WaterInsights](#) portal for up-to-date operational information.

### **2.3 Additional Dilution Flows to South Australia (T Milne – MDBA)**

- The MDBA presented an overview of additional dilution flows (ADF), per action MLD2403.02. ADF is an increase in South Australia's dilution and loss entitlement under certain conditions to mitigate salinity. Over the last 20 years, ADF has been triggered ~23% of the time and is met by unregulated flows most of the time.
- The ADF is only provided when the storage volumes in the Menindee Lakes exceed nominated trigger points (total above 1,650GL in June/July, 1,500GL in August or 1,300GL from September to May), **AND** the combined storage volume of Hume and Dartmouth Reservoirs also exceed nominated triggers (above 2,000GL).
- South Australia's entitlement is set out in the MDB Agreement (clause 88). When ADF is triggered, the entitlement is increased by 3000ML/day. Victoria and NSW each supply half of South Australia's entitlement flows, including ADF.
- Specific Objective & Outcome (SO&O) 12.3 (set by Basin Officials Committee) sets out the rules for ADF and how they are applied <https://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/2023-review-objectives-and-outcomes-of-the-river-murray.pdf>
- Discussion occurred around salinity triggers, with members stating no salinity target has been modelled, therefore it makes no sense to have salinity as a trigger. Members stated there is no logical

reason for the ADF to remain in place, stating the rules that set it and stop it don't make sense, and questioned what it is achieving.

- The MDBA advised that the ADF currently sits in the agreement and agreed it needs to be looked at. Work is being done to review the ADF in this system and discuss with all three governments (is the ADF achieving what it was meant to achieve, how is it used, is there a better model etc).

#### **2.4 Capacity and Shortfall update (J Davis – MDBA)**

- The MDBA provided a summary of capacity and shortfall in the system. An overview of the 6 shortlisted options to reinstate lost capacity as part of the Barmah-Millewa Feasibility Study was presented and discussed.
- Four agreed options are progressing to the next stage of investigation, development and consultation, while the remaining two are proposed to undergo a revision of scope for a more wholistic approach to meet stakeholder feedback and concerns.
- Key milestones and timelines were presented, with members stating that for every decision made there will be potential ramifications.

#### **2.5 Regional Operations update (B Coffey)**

- WaterNSW provided an overview of preventative maintenance plan, corrective maintenance work orders and current issues.
- There was an issue at Hume Dam, with doubling over of the lifting chain on spillway gate number 11, which caused the chain to become jammed in the guide chute. The gate was temporarily inoperable at a level of 4.75 meters, allowing 200ML/day to flow over the spillway. The MDBA and other stakeholders were alerted. The gate was able to be fully closed approximately 10 hours after jamming. A detailed incident investigation was undertaken, with a number of recommendations.
- An overview of planned outages at Hume Dam, Edward River Offtake and Gulpa Creek Offtake Regulator was provided.
- Members questioned who is responsible for upgrade works at the Neimur and Tumudgery Regulators. The MDBA advised that an opportunity to fund this has been looked at as part of SDLAM. These are MDBA RMO funded assets.

### **3. PRICING ENGAGEMENT:**

#### **3.1 Engagement on 2025 Pricing Proposal**

- Discussion and actions in this session have been recorded by SEC Newgate (summary attached).
- More information on WaterNSW's 2025-2030 pricing proposal, including Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports, are available on our website at <https://engagement.waternsw.com.au/WaterNSW-Pricing-Proposal-2025-2030>
- Customers can sign up for IPART updates at <https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/Home/Reviews/Have-Your-Say>

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

#### **4.1 Regional Valleys Drought Management Approach (B Maher)**

- WaterNSW has developed an approach to managing drought in regulated valleys, including development of valley-based Drought Contingency Plans and a drought management and framework plan. Input from CAG members and stakeholders during online workshops May-August 2023 was considered.
- WaterNSW is now better prepared for the next drought, with enhanced understanding of valley-specific issues and contingency options. We will continue to work with customers and relevant agencies in managing water in NSW during drought.
- A more detailed presentation on our drought management plans will be provided at the October/November CAG meeting if the CAG would like more information.

#### **4.2 WaterNSW update on Connectivity Expert Panel (A Webb)**

- The panel was established to provide the Minister for Water with independent advice on potential changes to flow targets in water sharing plans that could help improve connectivity across the northern NSW Murray-Darling Basin. The panel's interim findings and recommendations report was released in April.
- Summary of proposed key recommendations/rule changes to increase connectivity presented and discussed.
- WaterNSW's involvement included presentation to the panel on how forecasting works and limitations/considerations, as well as participation in the northern connectivity working group facilitated by NSW DCCEEW. There has been no direct involvement with the Connectivity Expert Panel.
- WaterNSW reviewed the draft report and has gone back on multiple occasions to answer further questions on how river operations work. Summary of operational considerations/recommendations relevant to WaterNSW presented.
- The final report was provided to the Minister and was released 29 July. The Government will review all recommendations in the final report, and then determine next steps.
- WaterNSW will continue to participate in the working group to provide operational advice and work with NSW DCCEEW on operation-related matters. Any policy changes will be considered by NSW DCCEEW through a process associated with amending relevant WSPs.
- Discussion occurred around potential changes to Menindee and the impacts. NSW DCCEEW stated there are a lot of moving parts on how Menindee is operated, and all options would need to be looked at. The first step is for the Government to respond to the independent panel's report. The timeframe for anything to happen would be at least 2 years away (optimistic).
- Further information is available at [Connectivity Expert Panel | Water \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/connectivity-expert-panel)

### 4.3 Customer Services update (B Arabin)

- WaterNSW provided an update on recent developments in the Customer Services space, including water order to delivery project review (including definition of a water order), third party consent for temporary groundwater trades, face-to-face application assistance trial (BLR bores), status of DQP enquiries and telemetry rebate update.
- WaterNSW has finalised the internal review of a water order definition, based on 'what is a water order' and how they are managed in practice by customers and WaterNSW. There is no proposed change to rules or the current process in the Murray, however this will provide a consistent definition and understanding for all customers across the State. Draft definition presented and discussed (feedback can be provided to [ben.arabin@waterNSW.com.au](mailto:ben.arabin@waterNSW.com.au)). The water order period is 8am-8am (24-hour period), with releases made from 9am.

**Action MLD2407.05:** WaterNSW to confirm timing of accounting for water orders.

**Responsibility:** B Arabin

- A new third-party consent process for groundwater temporary trades came into effect on 1 July 2024 (where there is an impact on a neighbouring bore due to trade). WaterNSW will provide direction to guide the applicant in identifying third-party bores. Where third-party consent cannot be obtained, applications may be refused, or a reduced volume offered. [FAQs Groundwater temporary trades 71T Dealings \(waterNSW.com.au\)](https://www.waterNSW.com.au/FAQs-Groundwater-temporary-trades-71T-Dealings).
- Discussed. The onus is on the applicant to provide proof of consent and WaterNSW can guide the applicant in identifying who a third-party might be, however cannot provide any personal information.

**Action MLD2407.06:** WaterNSW to contact the Chair out of session to discuss concerns and provide further details around the third-party consent process.

**Responsibility:** B Arabin

- A face-to-face application assistance trial for BLR bores is live at our Tamworth office to assist customers with poor internet or those not comfortable submitting a digital application. There are plans to extend to other application types and locations if successful.

- WaterNSW conducted consultation with CAG members at the last meeting on options for meter replacement at end-of-life for Government-owned meters (for the next pricing determination). At that meeting, members suggested further consultation with a broader cross-section of customers. A paper is being prepared for the Minister on options to progress, including more extensive engagement with customers. 99% of Government-owned meters are fully compliant in the south, with 15 remaining.
- As requested in March 2024 by some CAGs, WaterNSW now includes customers into relevant communications with DQPs so they get the same information that is sent to their DQP. Seventy-three percent of DQP enquiries are resolved within 9 days; 50% of open enquiries are sitting with the DQP for action.
- The Government telemetry rebate, previously available for customers who installed telemetry on their LID, ceased on 30 June 2024. All installs registered in the portal by midnight on 30 June will be honoured.

#### **4.4 Reconnecting River Country Program update (NSW DCCEEW)**

- NSW DCCEEW has advised that a Reconnecting River Country Program update cannot be presented to the CAG at this stage. The program is currently awaiting a funding announcement. Once this is released NSW DCCEEW will reach out to stakeholders to provide an update and share next steps.

#### **4.5 Metering Q&A / Workshop (M Brooks)**

- The Non-Urban Metering Reform review commissioned by the Minister in 2023 is near finalisation and it is expected to be made public in the next few weeks. Until the review goes through, the current regulations remain in place.

#### **4.6 Future CAG Engagement (B Maher)**

- As previously discussed with CAGs, WaterNSW is working on a shift in our approach to customer and community engagement to deliver on our Strategic Priority to be respected by the customers and communities we serve. Feedback was sought from CAG members via a survey in November 2023 and findings and further feedback sought at the March 2024 meeting.
- Changes to the WaterNSW Operating Licence around customer and stakeholder engagement came into effect 1 July 2024, which provides an opportunity for WaterNSW to make positive changes to our engagement with customers and CAGs to ensure they are getting the information they want when they need it.
- WaterNSW is proposing to move to two face-to-face CAG meetings per year with the option for an additional online meeting as required and two CAG Chairperson's meetings. Based on your feedback, we propose to implement workshops between WaterNSW staff and customers, present valley-specific information where possible, be clear on the purpose of each agenda item (inform/educate/consult/workshop) and will look to separate other agency items from WaterNSW items.
- Additional customer and community engagement activities such as community drop-in sessions, river runs in the lead up to peak water use periods, attendance at field days, local dam visits and valley tours, online webinars and water user association and industry engagement is also proposed, which will broaden our reach with our customer base. This will be done in conjunction with CAG members.
- Members were supportive bringing all agencies together on the same day (including MDBA and NSW DCCEEW).
- Members felt 3 meetings per year work better, suggesting holding 2 face-to-face and one online.
- Feedback provided by the CAGs will be taken into consideration when developing plans for future engagement.

### **5. BUSINESS PAPERS:**

- Taken as read.

## **6. GENERAL BUSINESS:**

### **6.1 Items for next meeting**

- Members suggested inviting the MDBA to the next meeting to talk about the Basin Plan review (what the process is, whether they are consulting on it, etc).
- Members requested that NSW DCCEEW also attend to discuss their position.

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

**Next meeting:** 30 October 2024

**Meeting closed:** 4.40pm

## Murray-Lower Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 31 July 2024

### New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
MLD2407.01	NSW DCCEEW to provide breakdown of general security carryover, including volume of high security 'parked' on general security accounts.	S Chowdhury (NSW DCCEEW)	<b>Complete.</b> GS users carried over 672.3GL on 1/7/2024. The total volume traded into GS from HS & Conv over WY23/24 was 75.3GL, of which 16.4GL was traded in in June. Accordingly, we can infer that 16.4GL of 672.3GL (or 2.4%) was traded to avoid forfeitures across water year.
MLD2407.02	NSW DCCEEW to review the unintended consequence that allows for high security water to be parked on general security accounts, thus providing the ability for carry over.	A Raine (NSW DCCEEW)	
MLD2407.03	WaterNSW to send link for Pre-requisite Policy Measures (PPM) to CAG members.	T Hayes	<b>Complete.</b> <a href="https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/projects-and-programs/environmental-water-management-in-nsw/what-we-are-working-on-now/pre-requisite-policy-measures">Pre-requisite policy measures   Water (nsw.gov.au)</a> <a href="https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/projects-and-programs/environmental-water-management-in-nsw/what-we-are-working-on-now/pre-requisite-policy-measures">https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/projects-and-programs/environmental-water-management-in-nsw/what-we-are-working-on-now/pre-requisite-policy-measures</a>
MLD2407.04	MDBA to review concerns and issues around changing patterns of water use and reduced river flows (in conjunction with NSW DCCEEW) and report back to the CAG.	J Hickey (MDBA)	
MLD2407.05	WaterNSW to confirm timing of accounting for water orders.	B Arabin	
MLD2407.06	WaterNSW to contact the Chair out of session to discuss concerns and provide further details around the third-party consent process	B Arabin	<b>Meeting scheduled for 9 September.</b>

### Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
MLD2311.02	WaterNSW to invite NSW DCCEEW to attend the next meeting to present with WaterNSW on the rules and process for licensing of historical flood works.	<del>B Stockler</del> / NSW DCCEEW	<b>Request to present at the October 2024 meeting.</b>



<b>MLD2403.01</b>	WaterNSW to invite the MDBA to the next meeting to provide an update on the Barmah-Millewa Feasibility Study.	J Belej	<b>Complete.</b> Refer to agenda item 2.4
<b>MLD2403.02</b>	WaterNSW to invite the MDBA to the next meeting to present on the ADF (additional dilution flow).	J Belej	<b>Complete.</b> Refer to agenda item 2.3
<b>MLD2403.03</b>	WaterNSW to contact the MDBA and ask if they can provide an update on the trial of releases with return flow to the Murray via the Great Darling Anabranch.	J Belej	The MDBA is currently completing a review and information will be available in due course.
<b>MLD2403.05</b>	Sally Dye to forward a copy of the supplementary water access paper done by David Harriss on behalf of Murray Valley Private Diverters to Brian Graham to arrange follow up discussion with the association.	S Dye / B Graham	<b>Complete.</b>
<b>MLD2403.08</b>	WaterNSW to clarify the timeframe/window for supplementary and other orders (what constitutes a day?).	D Stockler	<b>Complete.</b> Refer to agenda item 4.3.