

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Griffith Exies, 6-12 Jondaryn Ave, Griffith

Date: 1 August 2024

Time: 9.00am

Present: Peter Sheppard (Chair), Tanya Thompson, Chris Palmer, Nick Maynard, Luke Tedesco, Jenna Bell, Jeff King, Jim Maguire (online), David Webb (online), Trevor Clark, Troy van Berkel (online), Julian Speed (observer), Stephanie Clarke, Jenny McLeod (online), Erin Lenon (observer, online).

WaterNSW: Andrew George, Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Ashley Webb, Jonathan Belej, Shaun Gleeson, David Wood, Leeanne Chau, Tom Riley, Jason Luichareonkit, Sonia Townsend (online), Tessa Hockly (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: Greg Whorlow, Rob O'Neill, Jon Hocking, Michael Martinson, David Stockler, Ben Arabin, Martin Brooks.

Agency and external staff: Shahadat Chowdhury (NSW DCCEEW), Fiona Court (SEC Newgate) and Jackson Streeter (SEC Newgate, online).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: Jackie Kruger, Justin Sutherland, Chris Morshead, Hilary Johnson.

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

– Peter Sheppard was nominated by Tanya Thompson, seconded by Nick Maynard. Nil other nominations received.

– Accepted and carried.

1.6 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 27 March 2024:

– Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [27 March 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

T Clark/N Maynard
carried

1.7 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. OPERATIONS:

2.1 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, cumulative system inflows, operational surplus review, summary of 2023-24 water use, [IVT account summary](#), eWater summary, weather outlook, water availability, dam storages scenarios and valley operations.

- An explanation of the difference between system losses and operational surplus was provided. Losses are calculated via loss through sections of the river; surplus is the daily cumulative excess volume that ends up at the end of the system (less the minimum required flow). A review of operational surplus for 2023/24 and key findings was presented and discussed.
- Members questioned how the 3% efficiency target is calculated. WaterNSW advised the 3% is on a 24-month rolling average (IVT not included). There has been no requirement to call on IVT in the last few years. WaterNSW works closely with the MDBA (weekly) to discuss forecast etc.
- Members stated it would be good to see the percentage of customer order rejections (operational surplus review) shown as a percentage of the volume, as would likely be lower for river pumpers. WaterNSW advised this is only calculated as a performance measure.
- Members commented the current water ordering system is counterintuitive for a customer to amend an order and the way the rules are structured leads river pumpers to place a higher water order to ensure compliance before pumping. Members suggested an IT solution be implemented so users can easily make amendments. WaterNSW advised this is challenging and complicated as licence conditions, including lead times, need to be factored in. The river operator needs to find the right balance and make a judgement call on customer behaviour.
- Going forward, WaterNSW will maintain harmony releases between Blowering and Burrinjuck dams to avoid risk of spill in both dams. The Murrumbidgee Airspace Reference Panel will be consulted on start of season storage levels and WaterNSW will engage with customers to assess start of season and spring/summer irrigation demand.

2.2 Regional Operations update (G Whorlow)

- WaterNSW provided an update on progress of works to repair erosion damage at Beavers Creek (tree removal and erosion repair design complete; rock delivery commenced), Coonancoocabil Regulator (design 90% complete, including block bank) and Hay Weir (final design complete; awaiting rock supply quotes).
- An overview of upcoming planned outages at Burrinjuck Dam, Berembed Regulator and Yanco Old Weir was provided.
- Members thanked WaterNSW for the tour of Burrinjuck Dam in April, stating it was great to see the assets and how they work.
- Members sought an update on the work on the cableway at Burrinjuck Dam. WaterNSW advised the project is still underway. It is an old asset and works are progressing however we don't have a timeline at the moment.

2.3 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 held 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.

2.4 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 and discussed.
- 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.
- Further information is available at [Connectivity Expert Panel | Water \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/connectivity-expert-panel)

2.5 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 functions 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, flow, river height etc. Customers can also register to receive notifications and be alerted via SMS or email.
- Members stated WaterInsights is a great resource and 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](#).

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 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, 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). The water order period is 8am–8am (24-hour period), with releases made from 9am.
- 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). The onus is on the applicant to obtain consent and 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 \(waternsw.com.au\)](#). Members raised concerns this may create issues between neighbours.
- 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.

4.2 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.

5. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

5.1 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.

5.2 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 of the proposal to move to 2 face-to-face CAG meetings per year with the option of a third online meeting as required, dates to be determined in consultation with CAG members.
- Feedback provided by the CAGs will be taken into consideration when developing plans for future engagement.

6. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.
- Members queried what the line item “internal” relates to in the Opex and Capex reports and why there is an underspend. WaterNSW advised this is due to underspend in our general Digital capital program (Capex) and Digital WAVE program costs lower than budgeted (Opex).

7. GENERAL BUSINESS:

- Nil general business raised.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 31 October 2024

Meeting closed: 3.30pm

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 1 August 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.		