

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Back O’Bourke Function Centre, Kidman Way, BOURKE

Date: 18 July 2024

Time: 9.30am

Present: Ian Cole (Chair), Leonie Brown, Justin McClure, Megan Dixon, Matt Miles (online), Greg Hill (online), Bruce Coward (online), Jon Carter (observer) and Jane Humphries (online, observer).

WaterNSW: Kate Masters; and online Brendan Maher, Partha Saha, Michelle Yeaman, Tom Riley, Ben Arabin, Rob O’Neill, Jon Hocking and Toni Hayes. WaterNSW staff attended online due to flight delays caused by fog.

Agency and external staff online: Eugene Moore, William Hawkins, David Andersen and Scott Fletcher (DCCEEW).

Meeting Opened: 9.30am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: Joe Robinson, David Walker, Cr Jane Keir, David Miller, Cr Greg Rummery.

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

– Ian Cole was nominated by Leonie Brown, seconded by Justin McClure. Nil other nominations received.
– Accepted and carried.

1.6 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 14 March 2024:

– Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [14 March 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

M Miles/I Cole (carried)

1.7 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. OPERATIONS:

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (P Saha)

– WaterNSW provided a review of recent operations in the Barwon-Darling, including recent rainfall and comparison, BOM rainfall outlook, measured flows, tributary inflows, current flows, active management and managing EOIs.

– Above average rainfall has been observed over the last 3 months with inflows from all tributaries. The flow at Bourke peaked over 14,500ML/day during May, resulting in a peak at Wilcannia of over 13,000ML/day late May.

– WaterNSW is currently publishing daily announcements on weekdays, with multiple announcements published on Fridays to cover weekends. Inflows from different tributaries provided good access for all zones. Around 400ML of active environmental water arrived from the Border Rivers during this period

and a further 20ML arrived from the Macquarie valley. Over 30,000ML was protected through EOI during this period.

- Account balances in iWAS are not updated for extractive licence holders until meter readings are entered. Licence holders should ensure that, if they leave an enduring EOI in place therefore continue to receive announcements to take water, they do not exceed their legal take for the year.
- The process/steps for managing EOIs to minimise impacts on other water users in the same management zone was presented and discussed (per below). WaterNSW reiterated the need to enter accurate EOIs to accurately reflect your intention to take water. If you don't take it, you are impacting access within your zone.
 - If you **intend** to pump...and want to pump **any** available water: set the minimum EOI to "0" and maximum to your full IDEC volume (this will allow system to distribute any available water);
 - If you **intend** to pump...but are not interested to pump below a certain volume (eg 20ML/day, for operational suitability): set the minimum EOI to "20" and maximum to your full IDEC volume. If available volume is less than 20ML/day, distribution for that licence will be 0ML/day and that volume will be distributed to other customers;
 - If you **intend** to pump...but have an IDEC greater than your daily pumping capacity: set your minimum as per 1 or 2 above and set your maximum as your daily pumping capacity (this will allow system to distribute unallocated water to other licences within the same management zone);
 - If you **don't intend to pump**: no need to submit EOI **or** set your minimum and maximum EOI to "0".

2.2 Active Management review update (E Moore – NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an update on the *Active Management Annual Evaluation and Review 2022-23*, an update on the intersecting streams accounting arrangement and the northern basin connectivity trial (refer to presentation).
- The review is due to be published in the near future (will be shared with the CAG) and includes protected events in the Barwon-Darling and Macquarie-Bogan, review of issues raised by stakeholders, update on existing issues and recommendations and evaluation of procedures. NSW DCCEEW will consult with customers on significant changes to procedures.
- New issues considered in the review relevant to Barwon-Darling (EOI equity of volume distribution and impacts; confidence in active management system and water users input into review; feedback on existing recommendations; automatic EOI reminder; model accuracy and attenuation of active environmental water (AEW); WaterNSW missed announcements) and an update on existing issues and recommendations relevant to Barwon-Darling (sub-daily announcements; temporary trade of IDECs; investigation and implementation of measures to protect AEW in Barwon-Darling backflows from extraction in the Macquarie) were presented and discussed.

Action BD2407.01: NSW DCCEEW to contact Justin McClure out of session to discuss equity of access in different zones (relating to issue *1.06, equity of volume distribution and impacts*).

Responsibility: E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)

Action BD2407.02: NSW DCCEEW to contact Barwon-Darling Water to discuss their submission to the *Active Management Annual Evaluation and Review 2022-23*.

Responsibility: E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW is working on an accounting arrangement to protect QLD held environmental water (HEW) inflows from Intersecting Streams into the Barwon-Darling. Once in place, these flows will be protected under the active management procedures (currently available for extraction in NSW), to commence in the 2024/25 water year. Members stated they do not have confidence in the numbers provided by QLD. Further consultation with customers will occur once the arrangement is drafted and more information will be provided on how the numbers are determined.

- NSW DCCEEW is working with the MDBA on a trial to protect active environmental inflows through Menindee Lakes. Inflows that were previously unprotected, are reshared once arriving in Lake Wetherell. The trial aims to recognise and protect the AEW so that it can be used for connectivity to the southern basin and for other environmental purposes. There should be no impact on Barwon–Darling water users. Members stated this water is being protected in the Barwon–Darling however users past Menindee can extract it and highlighted concerns that more water may be called on to get the environmental water further. Feedback will be passed on.

2.3 Metering Calibration update (W Hawkins – NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided a verbal update. The consultants who were hired to identify pumps and meters and help work out adjustments to entitlement have come to the end of their analysis. The mechanics and physics are known, but the issue is that the data alone is not consistent or predictable enough to enable progress forward.
- NSW DCCEEW will work with licence holders in the Barwon–Darling to work towards a conclusion. It is probable that an interim position may be required while data is collected to ensure a robust recommendation.
- Members expressed frustration and deep dissatisfaction that the original agreement was signed in 2006/07 and nothing has progressed, stating this is critical to hydrological reporting in the Barwon–Darling, impacts on the WSP and will impact the WRP that is currently with the Minister.
- Members believe the data that has already been obtained is as reliable as it will ever be and should be used and questioned what more data can be provided in order to progress.
- NSW DCCEEW advised that the Barwon–Darling WSP is up for renewal on 1 July 2025 and the department is working to make the changes required and dealing with issues that arise. A public exhibition will happen towards the end of the year. Members stated there can't be a new WSP without recalibration of the meters, which will involve rule changes, and 10 months is not enough time for proper consultation.
- Member feedback and comments will be provided back through NSW DCCEEW.

2.4 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- WaterNSW provided an update on NSW DCCEEW's Hydrometric Network Remote Sensing (HNRS) program. The HNRS program is a collaborative program of four projects funded by the Australian Government to enhance the quality, availability and transparency of water monitoring and information for the Northern Murray–Darling Basin. If the CAG would like more detailed information on the project presented at the next meeting, please provide feedback via toni.hayes@waternsw.com.au
- WaterNSW was engaged by NSW DCCEEW under the program to deliver 20 new or upgraded sites across the network. Selection of stations was done with a technical working group, including WaterNSW staff, to work out where the optimal location for sites would be (utility, accessibility, usability).
- Discussion occurred around previous requests for the volumetric capacity of the weir pools along the Barwon–Darling, with members of the opinion that LiDAR would be able to provide this. WaterNSW advised that to do this with any level of confidence would require a combination of LiDAR and bathymetry surveys. There is no funding to do the bathymetry surveys that would be required to get below water measurements, then would need to be integrated with LiDAR. LiDAR alone would not provide enough data to be meaningful.
- WaterNSW advised that some historic data may be available for larger weirs however would be dated and not fully accurate. Will investigate what information is available and provide if appropriate.

Action BD2407.03: WaterNSW to share available data of weir pool capacity.

Responsibility: P Saha

- Over the coming year WaterNSW will be installing 30 new water quality sensors to meet the requirements under the new Operating Licence in relation to Local Water Utilities. Currently focussing on installing on the existing sites to the extent we can.

- WaterNSW provided an overview maintenance and calibration of dissolved oxygen sensors installed in the Barwon-Darling. For the ones WaterNSW installs and maintains, an annual calibration is done and Water Monitoring Teams visit and clean 6 times per year.

2.5 WaterNSW update on Connectivity Expert Panel (K Masters)

- 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 DCCEE. 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.
- Some members highlighted concerns around the lack of hydrological work of any substance and no modelling of economic impacts, as well as the potential for WaterNSW's inability to manage requirements on a timely basis, stating there has been no peer review of the report.
- Some members noted that any additional connectivity is a positive should be embraced, stating if science backs up connectivity to give Wilcannia more water in peak demand periods, it will be a good outcome, noting a lot of work to validate data is still required.
- The final report will be presented to the Minister in 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 DCCEE on operation-related matters. Any policy changes will be considered by NSW DCCEE through a process associated with amending relevant WSPs.
- Further information is available at [Connectivity Expert Panel | Water \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.water.nsw.gov.au/connectivity-expert-panel)
- The Connectivity Panel was tasked with reviewing the adequacy of the current triggers in the Interim North West Flow Plan based on the Alluvium's hydrologic analysis in this report https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0011/494057/review-of-the-interim-unregulated-flow-management-plan-for-the-north-west-.pdf

3. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

3.1 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. Customers can submit EOI for next day by 9am in the Barwon-Darling (IDECs are 9am-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). 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 questioned if Great Artesian Basin water is included. Taken on notice.

Action BD2407.04: WaterNSW to confirm if the Great Artesian Basin (GAB) groundwater source is included in the new third-party consent procedures.

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. A paper-based form is still offered where there is no other option, however this will eventually be phased out.
- 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 that was 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 Floodplain Harvesting Measurement update (D Andersen – NSW DCCEEW)

- The compliance date for the Barwon-Darling has passed. At 30 June 2024, 1.2% of storages in the Barwon-Darling had primary metering equipment installed and less than 5% had survey benchmarks submitted. Customers were strongly encouraged to engage a DQP as soon as possible, if they have not done so already; register storage curves; install survey benchmarks; and install metering equipment.
- The [Metering Equipment Standards 2024](#) and [Survey Benchmark Guideline](#) for floodplain harvesting measurement have been updated.
- To ensure storages are compliant customers must either metering the storage; mark the storage inactive (if not using FPH); or seek an exemption if you physically cannot comply.
- Further information can be found at <https://www.waternsw.com.au/customer-services/water-licensing/floodplain-harvesting>
- Customers can also email metering.reform@dpie.nsw.gov.au if they have any metering enquiries or concerns.

3.4 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 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](#).

4. PRICING ENGAGEMENT:

4.1 Engagement on 2025 Pricing Proposal

- The WAMC proposal is with now Cabinet in Confidence and therefore detail cannot be shared.
- WaterNSW's rural bulk water pricing submission is due to go to IPART by 30 September. IPART will then release an issues paper for comment.
- IPART has completed its end of term review of WaterNSW's Operating Licence 2022-24 with recommendations submitted to the Minister. The new licence came into effect on 1 July 2024 for a period of 4 years. An overview of key changes was presented and discussed (see also agenda item 5.2).

5. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

5.1 Fish Passage: Reconnecting the Northern Basin Project update (S Fletcher – NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided a verbal update. Based on community feedback, a principal design partner has been engaged to look at design and installation of an isolation system. NSW DCCEEW anticipates discussing the revised design with the community late August-early September, then will progress with isolation design features for all phase 1 sites.
- The isolation system is part of the overall fishway program. The department is still going with what has been presented, but with the addition of an isolation system. This allows, when in times of concern around water availability and security, the gates to close preserving water in the weir pool.
- Members questioned what consultation will be done with the community around operation of the gates, stating they would like more information around operations and controls, when will the isolation system be active vs inactive etc. NSW DCCEEW will discuss the operational framework with the community when consulting on the final design, in partnership with WaterNSW as the river operator.

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.

- Discussion occurred around NSW DCCEEW's involvement in the CAG, with members stating it is imperative they commit to and attend each meeting to discuss policy issues. A clear lead agency should be identified to improve the process into the future.
- WaterNSW is open to doing what is best for the valley and the customers in the valley and will be discussing future involvement and how this might look with NSW DCCEEW. Feedback will be provided at the next meeting.
- Members were supportive of moving to two face-to-face meetings per year, with the option for a third online if required.
- Feedback provided by the CAGs will be taken into consideration when developing plans for future engagement.

5.3 Water Quality update (T Fulford)

- There are currently no alerts in the Barwon-Darling. Current river and weather conditions have not been favourable for algal growth, with conditions in the system likely to be enough to restrict algal development until spring. Similarly, EC levels in the system have been very low over the past 6 months.
- NSW DCCEEW commenced a flush on 29 May from the upper Menindee Lakes through the lower Darling-Baaka River to help clear infestation of blue-green algae impacting local communities.
- Algal alert information can be found on WaterNSW's [Algae Alerts page](#).
- Members questioned why NSW continues to flush the Lower Darling through Menindee when there are good inflows coming in, stating the problem area is u/s of Weir 32 and releases should be made through the main weir to reinvigorate the Weir 32 weir pool. WaterNSW stated these decisions are made by a working group and concerns would need to be raised there. WaterNSW is not the decision maker. The 16 July community update states "water for the environment is being used to maintain a flow target of 400ML/day at Weir 32".
- Weekly community updates for Menindee can be found at <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/menindee/community-updates-and-frequently-asked-questions>

6. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

7. GENERAL BUSINESS:

- Nil general business raised.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 17 October 2024

Meeting closed: 2.40pm

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 18 July 2024

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BD2407.01	NSW DCCEEW to contact Justin McClure out of session to discuss equity of access in different zones (relating to issue <i>1.06, equity of volume distribution and impacts</i>).	E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)	
BD2407.02	NSW DCCEEW to contact Barwon-Darling Water to discuss their submission to the <i>Active Management Annual Evaluation and Review 2022-23</i> .	E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)	In progress.
BD2407.03	WaterNSW to share available data of weir pool capacity.	P Saha	
BD2407.04	WaterNSW to confirm if the Great Artesian Basin (GAB) groundwater source is included in the new third-party consent procedures.	B Arabin	<p>Complete.</p> <p>The triage applies and the GAB specific rules are applied where it goes for impact assessment.</p> <p>GAB has specific groundwater dependant ecosystems (GDEs) that must be considered, ie. dependant on the proximity of an individual bore to such a GDE, also the impact on aquifer criteria is applicable to flowing and no flowing conditions in the GAB.</p> <p>This is outlined in the WaterNSW FAQ document, located here.</p>

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BD2307.02	WaterNSW to investigate if an automated reminder can be sent to customers in the Barwon-Darling advising when an EOI is about to expire.	B Maher	<p>Complete.</p> <p>This is being bundled into a larger program of works. WaterNSW is planning to combine this upgrade with future IT upgrades to implement this change. Planning to do every day when sending out an announcement and will be added if your EOI is about to expire within 3-4 days. iWAS currently shows when an EOI is about to expire.</p>