

# Namoi-Peel Customer Advisory Group

## Minutes of Meeting

**Location:** Mackellar Motel, Conadilly St, GUNNEDAH  
**Date:** 11 July 2024  
**Time:** 9.30am

**Present:** David Gowing (Chair), Mick Coffey, Todd Farrar, David Gee, Dianne Hockey, Ian Coxhead, John Richards, Stewart Eykamp (observer) and Nerida Sloane (observer, online).

**WaterNSW:** Andrew George, Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Ken Gee, Ashley Webb, Kate Masters, Michelle Yeaman, Tom Riley, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Ben Arabin, Martin Brooks, Alexandra Spink, Jon Hocking, Michael Martinson.

**Agency and external staff:** SEC Newgate (Fiona Court and Daniela Hauri (online)).

**Meeting Opened:** 9.00am

### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

#### 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

**1.2 Apologies:** Bruce Logan, Eloise Chaplain, Nat Groves, Paul Keyte, Chrissy Jeffries, Matt Miles, Michelle Coll, Dirk Jol, Michael Boyle.

#### 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

– David Gowing was nominated by Ian Coxhead, seconded by John Richards. Nil other nominations received.  
– Accepted and carried.

#### 1.6 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 21 March 2024:

– Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [21 March 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

I Coxhead/D Hockey (carried)

#### 1.7 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

### 2. OPERATIONS:

#### 2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Gee)

– WaterNSW provided a review of recent operations in the Namoi and Peel valleys, including recent rainfall and BOM rainfall forecast outlook, recent actual and statistical inflows, current storage volumes, overview of the water resource monitoring dashboard, water availability and usage and forward operations.

- **Peel operations** for the 24/25 season will be order on demand. Uncontrolled flow (UCF) access will remain available when trigger levels are met and the AWD is less than 100% (customers can access up to the difference between AWD and 100% with debit against account balance during announced periods - access licence holders can never access more than a total of 100% of unit shares in a water year). WaterNSW provided an explanation of the different environmental water (PEW/HEW/ECA) and how utilised. The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) availability is 754.2ML (60% of 1275ML).
- **Upper Namoi operations** for the 24/25 season will be order on demand. A bulk water transfer (BWT) from Split Rock to Keepit is forecast to be required starting in November. To help minimise adverse environmental outcomes, an initial pulse starting the last week of August (2500ML/day for 7-8 days) to encourage platypus to select and dig nesting burrows higher up the bank will be conducted. WaterNSW will continue to provide advice on expected release patterns and heights.
- It is estimated 230-250GL may be required for the BWT based on worst case scenario, with the Lower Namoi expecting a full production year. The total volume will be determined by demand and delivery loss. Split Rock Water Users highlighted consequences of the change in rules for the last 10% in Split Rock Dam, with concerns the irrigator share will not be deliverable and the 10% unlikely. Members requested a meeting with WaterNSW prior to the BWT to discuss the forecast and an outline of what is expected to happen with the last 10% in Split Rock Dam.
- Members requested an outline of the plan (forecast) for next year when carryover from the Lower Namoi comes head-to-head with Upper Namoi carryover. WaterNSW advised a forecast of Split Rock volume under minimum inflow sequences can be provided noting it is a 24-month forecast and information should be used with caution and treated as *forecast* data and small changes can provide a positive or negative outlook. In relation to how the last volumes available in Split Rock Dam are utilised, this will depend on NSW DCCEEW's approach. WaterNSW advised that concerns around policy and changes to carryover rules should be directed to NSW DCCEEW.

**Action NP2407.01:** WaterNSW to meet with Split Rock WUA to discuss the bulk water transfer (BWT) prior to commencement.

**Responsibility:** K Gee

**Action NP2407.02:** WaterNSW to provide information on forecast of Split Rock Dam volume under minimum inflow sequences to Split Rock WUA.

**Responsibility:** K Gee

- **Lower Namoi operations** for the 24/25 season will be order on demand. With significant volumes of water expected to be delivered in the Lower Namoi, channel capacity constraints are forecast to occur on the Gunidgera-Pian Creek system. Customers are encouraged to take this into consideration when planning water orders. The November BWT is not forecast to cause any disruption to Lower Namoi supply at this time.
- Winter maintenance at Mollee and Gunidgera Weirs is complete.

## 2.2 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional operations and maintenance (Split Rock 600mm Gate Valve overhauls x3) and NSW DCCEEW's Hydrometric Network Remote Sensing (HNRS) program.
- Members requested an agenda item on dissolved oxygen (DO) sensors, asking if WaterNSW is charged with cleaning of dissolved oxygen (DO) sensors at monitoring sites and if so, what the maintenance schedule is. WaterNSW does not have any registered in-situ DO sensors deployed in the Namoi or Peel systems. There were sensors in place during the Peel Drought project, however these were removed when the project ceased.
- WaterNSW is responsible for cleaning DO sensors that we operate at our monitoring sites. The cleaning regime is usually carried out during Water Monitoring Officer site visits (typically 6 times/year), however if data looks incorrect additional visits are undertaken.

- WaterNSW advised the oxygenation trial at Menindee is complete, with a report currently being developed. Anecdotally the results have supported increased oxygenation. WaterNSW has also installed an additional number of DO sensors in that area, with more to come.

**Action NP2407.03:** WaterNSW to advise how many additional DO sensors have been installed at Menindee, and how many new installations are coming.

**Responsibility:** M Yeaman

- 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.
- WaterNSW was engaged by NSW DCCEEW under the program to deliver 20 new or upgraded sites across the network. Selection of stations done with a technical working group, including WaterNSW staff, to work out where the optimal location for sites would be (utility, accessibility, usability). The data is now available on [WaterInsights](#), however new gauges will take some time to validate rating tables.
- If the CAG would like more detailed information on any of the projects presented at the next meeting, please provide feedback via [toni.hayes@waternsw.com.au](mailto:toni.hayes@waternsw.com.au)

### **2.3 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.
- 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.
- Members stated the panel did not give WaterNSW enough credit for their work and knowledge of the systems, leading people to make assumptions that WaterNSW do not how to run a river, and highlighted concerns that any decisions made will have implications far greater than just the irrigation industry.
- Members stated the recommendations undermine floodplain harvesting and could also claw back general security allocation if there is not enough end of flow connectivity.
- 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 DCCEEW on operation-related matters. Any policy changes will be considered by NSW DCCEEW through a process associated with amending relevant WSPs.
- Members stated the lines of communication must stay open between WaterNSW and irrigators to ensure transparency and suggested this remain on the CAG agenda.
- Further information is available at [Connectivity Expert Panel | Water \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)
- Members queried where the Water Resource Plan is up to, stating it went to the MDBA then was withdrawn. WaterNSW advised there is a secondary issue with the WSP, which is why it was rejected. The Namoi WSP is up for replacement in 2026 and more than likely will be an extension. The NRC will undertake the normal review process and WaterNSW will be closely involved.

## 2.4 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.
- The Namoi-Peel CAG very interested to discuss further at the next meeting.

## 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. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

### 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](mailto: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 applicable 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 stated the process for users in the area, who do a lot of groundwater trading, is vague and there is not a lot of information or guidance on the process or who/how it may impact a third-party. The process makes it difficult for people with businesses to run, not knowing what is happening in the next 6 months. Namoi Water has received a number of enquiries on this.
- WaterNSW advised it has been hard to deliver the message to the people who need it. There is not a lot of data on BLR (riparian) bores, however moving into the digital landscape we should have access to this information in future. Information is available on WaterNSW's [website](#) and was also included in the [Customer e-Newsletter \(June 2024\)](#). Customers are encouraged to [subscribe](#) to receive regular updates (please share).

**Action NP2407.04:** Namoi Water to liaise with WaterNSW out of session to discuss concerns around third-party consent process for groundwater temporary trades.

**Responsibility:** M Coffey

- 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.
- 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. Members questioned why they should be penalised due to lack of availability of DQPs through no fault of their own. WaterNSW advised that if the LID has been ordered and is in the portal the rebate is likely to be honoured. Irrigators must be able to show they have made genuine efforts.

#### **4.2 Metering Q&A (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.

#### **4.3 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](#).

### **5. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:**

#### **5.1 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 the potential to split this CAG into two separate CAGs (Namoi and Peel), with many issues discussed not relevant to both valleys. Namoi members were supportive of a separate Namoi CAG, stating there would be more attendance if engagement was targeted and issues were valley specific and time could be better utilised to discuss more local issues.
- Peel members were open to the possibility, however indicated they are still keen to hear what is happening in the Namoi valley. Discussed the possibility of an online option for interested members to join each CAG or a joint meeting online for any cross-over issues (eg WSP).
- Members were supportive of moving to two face-to-face meetings per year, with the option of a third online meeting as required. Inclusion of other engagement activities as presented was supported, as was the proposal to separate agency issues.
- Members suggested the Cotton Conference would be a great opportunity for WaterNSW to present on WaterInsights.
- Feedback provided by the CAGs will be taken into consideration when developing plans for future engagement.

#### **6. BUSINESS PAPERS:**

- Taken as read.

#### **7. GENERAL BUSINESS:**

- Nil general business raised.

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

**Next meeting:** 24 October 2024

**Meeting closed:** 3.00pm



## Namoi-Peel Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 11 July 2024

### New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
NP2407.01	WaterNSW to meet with Split Rock WUA to discuss the bulk water transfer (BWT) prior to commencement.	K Gee	
NP2407.02	WaterNSW to provide information on forecast of Split Rock Dam volume under minimum inflow sequences to Split Rock WUA.	K Gee	
NP2407.03	WaterNSW to advise how many additional DO sensors have been installed at Menindee, and how many new installations are coming.	M Yeaman	<b>Complete.</b> Information provided out of session and attached below.
NP2407.04	Namoi Water to liaise with WaterNSW out of session to discuss concerns around third-party consent process for groundwater temporary trades.	M Coffey	<b>Complete.</b>

### Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		

## Namoi-Peel Customer Advisory Group – Action NP2407.03 – response

Two temporary DO monitoring buoys were installed at Menindee in December 2023 which measure DO at multiple depths in the river. We are currently developing a scope to replace these buoys with a permanent infrastructure solution.

Additionally, we are currently working on a project to install DO monitoring at up to 40 existing water monitoring sites across NSW. The project has been split into two ‘tranches’ with the first 20 sites listed below. These sites should be installed by the end of the year, with the remaining 20 sites to be completed in 2025.

Team	Site Code	Site Name
DENILIQN	409006	Murray River at Gulpa
LEETON	410021	Murrumbidgee River at Darlington Point
LEETON	41000281	Murrumbidgee River at Carrathool Bridge
DENILIQN	410134	Billabong Creek at Darlot
DENILIQN	410168	Billabong DS Hartwood Weir
LEETON	410169	Yanco Creek at Yanco Bridge
MOREE	416001	Barwon River at Mungindi
ARMIDALE	416047	Macintyre River at Terrehwah
MOREE	418001	Gwydir River at Pallamallawa
NARRABRI	419003	Narrabri Creek at Narrabri
NARRABRI	419021	Namoi River at Bugilbone (Riverview)
UPORANGE	421019	Cudgegong River at Yamble Bridge
DUBBO	421090	Macquarie River d/s Marebone Weir
DUBBO	421006	Macquarie River at Narromine
DUBBO	421900	Macquarie River at Wollombi (Geurie)
LEETON	410005	Murrumbidgee River at Narrandera
BURONGA	425005	Darling River at Pooncarie
DENILIQN	41010810	Billabong Creek at Wanganella
DUBBO	425059	Darling River at Trevallyn
BURONGA	425060	Darling River at Nelia Gaari