

Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Gateway to Training, 15-21 Russell St, GOONDIWINDI

Date: 10 July 2024

Time: 9.00am

Present: John Shannon (Chair), Angelo Saccon, John Appleby, Greg Ringwood, David Preston (online), David Coulton and Lila-Jane Fisher (online).

WaterNSW: Andrew George, Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Ken Gee, Kate Masters, Michelle Yeaman, Tom Riley, Al King, Chris Shaw, Sonia Townsend (online), Chris Bath (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: Shivani Ram, Ben Arabin, Alexandra Spink, Jon Hocking, Michael Martinson, Martin Brooks.

Agency and external staff: David Andersen (NSW DCCEE, online), Fiona Court (SEC Newgate) and Jackson Streeter (SEC Newgate, online).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

.2 **Apologies:** Michael Owen.

.3 Confirmation of Agenda Items:

.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.

.5 Election of Chairperson

– John Shannon was nominated by John Appleby, seconded by David Coulton.
– Nil other nominations received. Accepted and carried.

.6 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 20 March 2024:

– Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [20 March 2024](#) and [2 August 2023](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

J Appleby/A Saccon (carried)

.7 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. PRICING ENGAGEMENT:

2.1 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>

Action BR2407.01: WaterNSW to provide additional information on regionally based pricing out of session.
Responsibility: C Cameron

3. OPERATIONS:

3.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Gee)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Border Rivers, including recent rainfall and BOM rainfall outlook, inflows and storage status, overview of the Drought Flood Risk Index and Water Resource Monitoring Dashboard, water allocations and usage, review of 2023/24 operations and overview of 2024/25 operations.
- The 2024/25 season will be delivery on demand. If condition turns dry, some drought measures may be considered. It is anticipated it will be a big delivery season.
- Winter maintenance work is ongoing at Pindari Dam (scheduled to finish by end of July). There will be no impact to customers.
- Based on bathymetry survey, some maintenance work will be required downstream of the Boggabilla weir pool (details of the work and timing to be confirmed with Sunwater, who anticipate a 7-10 day outage). WaterNSW has highlighted the work needs to be completed by end of September.
- 2024-25 allocations presented and discussed. 100% allocation for all licence categories, except GS B (0%) and GS A (10%). No embargos anticipated in foreseeable future.

3.2 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional operations and maintenance and DCCEE's Hydrometric Network Remote Sensing (HNRS) program.
- WaterNSW is in the process of overhauling the high level 610mm valve at Pindari Dam. The majority of the work has been undertaken in-house by our projects and maintenance teams and should be ready to install next week.
- WaterNSW is undertaking work for the DBBRC on groundwater monitoring in the Border Rivers, with 25 bores read 4 times/year. As part of the operational restructure, CFOs are assisting the water monitoring teams and we are using opportunities where appropriate to utilise local staff, resulting in reduced travel and cost. In future there is potential to telemeter the bores.
- 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 DCCEE 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

3.3 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 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.

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

3.4 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.
- Members noted this would be of benefit to Councils and Local Water Utilities.

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). The water order period is 8am-8am (24-hour period), with releases made from 9am.

Action BR2407.02: WaterNSW to send a copy of the draft water order definition to John Shannon (BRFF) for distribution.

Responsibility: B Arabin

- Members questioned if daylight savings (not in QLD) effects time of orders over summer. No, orders are 8am to 8am (local time). WaterNSW assumes pumping will begin at 8am; take of water is calculated midnight to midnight. Telemetry will reconcile orders and dam wall debiting will pick up and overs/unders.
- 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)

Action BR2407.03: WaterNSW to send information on new third-party consent process to John Shannon (BRFF).

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.
- 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/C Shaw)

- 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.
- Members queried if there is a procedure being developed in relation to the process for revalidation of meters. WaterNSW advised this is part of the review. More information will be provided once the review is finalised as the requirements may have changed.
- Members questioned if there are any exemptions on regulated rivers for metering. DCCEEW advised there are two exemptions that customers can apply for if they meet the eligibility criteria (telemetry blackspot exemption and if physically unable to install a meter). More information regarding exemptions can be found on the [NSW DCCEEW website](#).
- Pump threshold discussed. Under the **rules of today**, 100mm and above are required to meter. If under, still required to order water and must record and report their take monthly. This may change once the review is released.
- Customers should use the [NSW Metering Guidance Tool](#) to find out if and what rules apply to them.

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

- The compliance date for the Border Rivers has passed. At 30 June 2024, 46% of storages in the Border Rivers had primary metering equipment in place.
- The [Metering Equipment Standards 2024](#) and [Survey Benchmark Guideline](#) for floodplain harvesting measurement have been updated.
- Customers are encouraged to ensure your storages are compliant by either metering the storage; marking the storage inactive (if not using FPH); or seeking an exemption if you physically cannot comply.

5. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

5.1 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 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](#).

5.2 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 supported the proposal of 2 face-to-face CAG meetings per year with the option to have a third meeting online. Face-to-face meetings are preferred, and customers appreciate the investment WaterNSW makes to attend CAG meetings. Inclusion of other engagement activities as presented was supported, as was the proposal to separate agency issues.
- Members stated field days are a great opportunity for WaterNSW to increase their profile and showcase the competencies of WaterNSW staff.
- Members want valley-specific, relevant information as much as possible and suggested updates from Sunwater be included as a standing agenda item, stating what happens in Queensland is important and relevant to members.
- Discussion occurred around the need to get more people involved and attending meetings.
- 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:

7.1 WaterNSW - Resourcing

- Members asked WaterNSW where it is placed regarding resourcing (are you where you need to be; do you have staff in the right places?).
- Andrew George advised he is confident WaterNSW has the resources where they need to be. Under the new operating model, FTEs in senior management has reduced however the workforce has increased from 700 FTE to close to 1000 FTE. The workforce is reviewed every year and if there is a need/demand to put more resources somewhere (eg Water Planning & Delivery) we will do that. WaterNSW is also starting to foster apprenticeships and cadetships.
- A lot of employees will be reaching retirement age in the next few years. We are also investing in technology where there may not be a need to replace staff (ie the Groundwater IoT), but the technology needs to be in place and efficiencies will come in time.

7.2 Processing of Applications (J Shannon)

- Members noted the time taken to process applications and provided feedback that generic addresses are not trusted for submitting applications (unsure if they've been registered), suggesting a dedicated contact/case manager would be more suitable to see an issue to resolution and avoid things getting dragged out.
- WaterNSW advised all emails are actively managed and some complex cases are assigned a dedicated case manager, however we will take feedback on board and continue to work on improvements.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 23 October 2024

Meeting closed: 2.50pm

Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 10 July 2024

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BR2407.01	WaterNSW to provide additional information on regionally based pricing out of session.	C Cameron	Complete. Sent with minutes.
BR2407.02	WaterNSW to send a copy of the draft water order definition to John Shannon (BRFF) for distribution.	B Arabin	Complete. Emailed to all CAG members on 11/7/24 in the CAG presentation pack.
BR2407.03	WaterNSW to send information on new third-party consent process to John Shannon (BRFF).	B Arabin	Complete.

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		