

# Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group

## Minutes of Meeting

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

**Date:** 23 October 2024

**Time:** 9.00am

**Present:** John Shannon (Chair), Angelo Saccon, John Appleby, Greg Ringwood, David Preston, Will Carrigan, Zeb Chapman.

**WaterNSW:** Brendan Maher, Partha Saha, Martin Brooks, Al King, Damien Ashlin (online), Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Ben Arabin, Russell Cocks, Tracey Lawson, Kate Masters and Tim Tanner.

**Agency and external staff for specific items:** David Towner (Sunwater), David Andersen (NSW DCCEEW) and Yi Lu and Thomas Clay (NSW DCCEEW, online).

**Meeting Opened:** 9.00am

### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

#### 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 **Apologies:** Michael Owen.

#### 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 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 10 July 2024:

– Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [10 July 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.  
J Appleby/A Saccon (carried)

#### 1.6 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

### 2. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

#### 2.1 Customer Services update (D Stockler)

– WaterNSW provided a Customer Services update, including water ordering and compliance, third party consent for groundwater temporary trades, customer experience improvements, new features in the water market system (customer portal) and IPART submission update.

– WaterNSW clarified that daily extractions impact **water delivery**, not **water order compliance**. How the volume is taken over the days specified in the water order (100ML over 10 days) has no bearing on compliance but **can impact** water delivery (end of system losses or delivery shortfalls) if the daily extraction is different to the water order.

– To ensure compliance, daily extractions in aggregate must not exceed the total order volume, however **customers are encouraged to be a good neighbour by ordering as you intend to take** to maximise the resource and minimise any third-party impact. This will also assist the Water Planning and Delivery team to effectively manage the system.

– Members do not support customers exceeding the daily volume of their prescribed water order. WaterNSW reiterated from a compliance perspective customers would not be in breach, however WaterNSW wants customers to comply with their water order due to the impact on others.

- A new **third-party consent process** for groundwater temporary trades came into effect on 1 July 2024. Based on customer feedback, WaterNSW has updated documentation and is investigating options to make it easier for applicants whilst still managing our legal obligations (including an objections-style process or an optional fee for facilitation service (cost recovery) where WaterNSW will identify and seek consent on behalf of the applicant). Alternatively, the current consent process will remain in place for applicants who wish to complete the process themselves.
- Information on the triage and assessment process and FAQs on trading water can be found at [Trading water - WaterNSW](#) and [Groundwater temporary trades \(71T Dealings\)](#)
- Customer experience improvements include changes to the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system based on customer feedback; enhancement to features in iWAS (ML converter calculator tool and how-to videos); a free opt-in [recording and reporting SMS reminder service](#); and trialling customer outreach days in towns where we don't have a physical presence (including Goondiwindi). Customers are encouraged to book to ensure the right people are in the room to support customers.
- Enhancements to the Water Market System (customer portal) presented and discussed, including future co-existence between WLS and WMS, allowing registered customers to view the details of their licences and approvals in one place.
- WaterNSW lodged its Rural and Greater Sydney Bulk Water pricing submissions and joint WAMC submission to IPART on 30 September. Due to time constraints, some WAMC items were not able to be discussed as part of the broader consultation process (metering, floodplain harvesting and consent transactions). WaterNSW will brief customers on these three functions once IPART begins the review process and prior to the public hearings via state-wide online sessions with CAG members and customers.

## **2.2 Non-Urban Metering Review update (D Andersen, NSW DCCEEW)**

- NSW DCCEEW provided an update on the Non-Urban Metering (NUM) review. The purpose of the review was to identify ways to accelerate the implementation of the non-urban metering reforms by identifying practical changes to the rules that will help deliver the reform faster, create opportunities to reduce costs, make the rules easier to understand, implement, comply with and enforce, and make the system work more efficiently.
- Key recommendations of the review centre around reprioritising efforts towards larger water users (concentrating resources towards larger water users where they will have the greatest impact), increasing meter installation and validation rate (providing better support and training for the DQP workforce) and supporting integrity in water resource management (enabling more effective use of compliance and enforcement tools).
- Proposed key changes to the metering rules and implementation priorities presented and discussed. A DQP Concierge Program will be available in the coming months, offering tailored support to DQPs and customers by providing access to expert support, simplifying the compliance process and improving data management.
- Members stated feedback from DQPs is they feel under-resourced, and the process is slow to get an approval through. NSW DCCEEW advised that one of the difficulties is information in the licensing system is different to what is on site (doesn't match). The concierge service will help resolve this and the error rate will reduce. WaterNSW already has customer data officers who look at all the information at the hold points. Once a DQP advises they will work with a specific customer the concierge service will activate. There is still work to be done but there should be improvement over the next 6 months.
- Public consultation on regulation changes will occur in November 2024, a what we heard report to be released early 2025, changes by March 2025, then a disallowance period of 15 sitting days. Once the regulation is made, new conditions will take effect (current obligations exist until the rules are changed). Unintended works will be phased over 2025.
- Proposed regulation amendments for floodplain harvesting (FPH) presented and discussed:
  - enabling irrigation to occur during a measurement period by specifying a nominated off-take point
  - remove the additional point of intake DQP validation requirement
  - clarification of the measurement period applying at the water supply work approval scale
  - clarifying when a measurement period starts (remove buffer zone trigger)

- subdivision of water supply work approval to require controlling infrastructure
- redefine buffer zone to clarify that buffer zones do not require addition to a water supply work approval
- remove metering requirement for unintended works consistent with the NUM approach
- Floodplain harvesting status by storage data presented and discussed. At 8 October in the Border Rivers, 47.3% of primary meters have been installed and are operational and compliant; 37.3% of primary submitted in the system (total 84.5%); and 60.9% survey benchmark submitted.
- Discussion occurred around the inclusion of inactive storages in the compliance data, with customers stating that if these were excluded compliance rates would be higher.
- Members questioned if a sleeper licence can trade water out without a meter. NSW DCCEEW advised that under the proposed amended Access Licence Dealing Principles if a licence is connected to a pump/works approval, it will need a meter to temporarily trade irrespective of size. If a licence is sitting by itself and not connected to a works approval, it will not be required to be metered.

### **3. OPERATIONS:**

#### **3.1 Regional Operations update (T Tanner)**

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional operations and maintenance in the valley. Detailed design has commenced on the Pindari Dam Bubble Plume Aeration System with completion scheduled October 2024. The project is fully funded by NSW Fisheries and is part of WaterNSW's Cold Water Pollution strategy. Construction will be dependent on further funding approval from NSW Fisheries. No impact to service delivery is anticipated.

#### **3.2 Unlocking the past and future with satellite remote sensing products and tools - Hydrometric Network and Remote Sensing Program (HNRS) (Y Lu, NSW DCCEEW)**

- NSW DCCEEW provided an overview of the HNRS program, delivered in collaboration with the NSW and Queensland state governments. The objective of the program was to improve transparency and accountability in water management; metering and measurement of water information to enable regulators to monitor compliance; and compliance outcomes.
- The focus was on the northern Murray-Darling Basin and work was undertaken in the Gwydir, Border Rivers, Namoi, Macquarie-Castlereagh and Barwon valleys. The team was responsible for delivering a number of milestones: on-farm water storage monitoring dataset; irrigated crop area dataset; Lidar acquisition; and piloting Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite system. An overview of each of the project areas was presented and discussed.
- Discussion occurred around the catchment scale analysis data, with customers stating that on-farm capacity has significantly changed since 1988 (first data point). Members will review slides and come back to NSW DCCEEW out of session with any questions.

#### **3.3 Water Planning and Delivery update (P Saha)**

- 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, overview of operations and 2024/25 allocation and usage to 30 September.
- The irrigation season has commenced, with operations being delivery on demand. Demand is still low compared to this time last year however the forecast is for a reasonable season. Current general security account balance is 131GL.
- Discussion occurred around customers being asked by WaterNSW to delay or reduce pumping rates after orders have been placed. This could become a big issue, particularly when there is a long lead time or a hot summer. Members stated if a customer orders water, they need what has been ordered. Is problematic for irrigators if they don't have an on-farm storage buffer to make up the difference. WaterNSW advised we do our best to supply based on demand and will work with customers to ensure orders are supplied on time.
- Discussion occurred around gauge readings at Boggabilla, with members questioning how this could be more efficient and if another gauge is required (with the next gauge being 3-4 days away). WaterNSW

advised finding another site is difficult, however WaterNSW and Sunwater regularly communicate about what is taken from each state. Difficulties arise when take is different to what has been ordered. Based on bathymetry survey, Sunwater is doing further modelling to identify required work downstream of Boggabilla Weir.

- Sunwater advised they are conducting a Total Scheme Visibility Project and doing some work in the field around meter validation. From this they will get an oversight of what's happening and with that comes metering and real time improvements on visibility.
- Winter maintenance work has been completed at Pindari Dam.

### **3.4 Border Rivers Commission and Interstate Operations (P Saha/D Towner, Sunwater)**

- WaterNSW provided an overview of the Dumaresq-Barwon Border Rivers Commission (BRC), including purpose, constitution, operational area of responsibility and governance. The BRC was established by the NSW and Queensland governments to operate and maintain jointly 'owned' water infrastructure and implement agreed water sharing arrangements in the Queensland-NSW border region.
- WaterNSW's contract with the BRC includes river flow management service, NSW stream flow network management and NSW Border Rivers water quality project. Other activities include instructing Sunwater to insert or remove drop boards at Newinga Regulator when required, liaising with Boomi River Trust regarding Boomi replenishment flow, liaising with environmental managers for any environmental delivery, monthly resource assessments and providing data and operations reports to the BRC.
- Sunwater operates and maintains Queensland assets on behalf of the Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water (DRDMW) and BRC and includes operations and maintenance, emergency response planning and operations, environmental management and risk and quality management.
- Sunwater provides the BRC with an annual planned maintenance program making recommendations on major periodic maintenance, renewals and capital works as well as annual dam safety and 5-yearly comprehensive inspections with civil, electrical and mechanical engineering teams to provide advice into the renewals and maintenance programs.
- Sunwater also completes work on behalf of DRDMW including metering and maintenance from Glenlyon Dam to Mungindi, liaising with WaterNSW on dam and weir releases, interstate transfers, inter-scheme transfer from Coolmunda Dam to Border Rivers and quarterly and monthly reporting.
- Members sought an update on Cunningham Weir. Sunwater advised they are revisiting the strategy of Run to Fail on Cunningham Weir and have tried to make it safer to the public in terms of access, signage and fencing. The strategy is still in place but probably not for much longer.
- Sunwater advised for Greenup there are options around leave as is, full replacement/refurbishment or looking at a sheet pile fill type set up. They are also reincorporating the ability to regulate through the weir as well.
- Members noted they have written to Sunwater with a recommendation for Goondiwindi Weir regarding siltation. Sunwater confirmed this has been received and will be looked at.

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

### **4.1 Update on 2025 Pricing Proposal (B Maher/T Clay, NSW DCCEEW)**

- WaterNSW lodged its Rural and Greater Sydney Bulk Water pricing submissions and joint WAMC submission to IPART on 30 September.
- IPART will publish submissions and release the issues paper on 1 November inviting feedback from the community, with public hearings to be held on 14 (Rural Valleys and Greater Sydney) and 21 November (WAMC). Customers are encouraged to make a submission to the issues papers and participate in the public hearings.
- Since we last presented, the numbers have remained consistent, and the scenarios presented to CAGs will be reflected in our submission. Valley fixed vs variable ratios have not changed.

#### **4.2 Future CAG Engagement and Next Term of Office (B Maher)**

- WaterNSW is taking a refreshed approach to CAGs in 2025 and has included feedback from CAG members to inform future engagement. We will move to 2 face-to-face meetings per year starting 2025, with the option of an additional online meeting as required or requested.
- Additional engagement opportunities for customers may include community drop-in centres, field days, tailored online information sessions, local dam visits for customers and community, river runs in the lead up to peak water use periods, online Water Planning and Delivery updates in times of need and potential for attendance at water user group meetings (as requested).
- WaterNSW is working on developing a new CAG format with NSW DCCEE's Water Group, considering the feedback that has been provided by the CAGs. The new format will take better coordination and efficiency of engagement into account and will be launched in 2025. NRAR will attend on an as-needs or as-requested basis.
- A new policy for engagement with customers and community is being developed (effective 1 July 2025). A draft version will be shared with CAG Chairs in February and with members at the next CAG meeting.
- Members felt March and September are good times to hold the face-to-face meetings around irrigation.

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

- Taken as read.

#### **6. GENERAL BUSINESS:**

- Members commented it was of value to have Sunwater at the meeting as an operator of a shared/joint river system with WaterNSW. Sunwater offered to run a tour of Glenlyon Dam if customers are interested.

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

**Next meeting:** 19 March 2025

**Meeting closed:** 11.50am

## Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 23 October 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.		