

# Coastal-Hunter Customer Advisory Group

## Minutes of Meeting

**Location:** Tocal Agricultural College, PATERSON  
**Date:** 4 December 2024  
**Time:** 9.30am

**Present:** Julia Wokes (Chair), Shane Gee, David Williams, Chris Rooney, Wayne Clarke (online), Molly Walker (online), Geoff Seccombe and Ken Bray.

**WaterNSW:** Brendan Maher, Mahmood Khan (online), Gavin Armstrong, Simon He, Lachlan Browne, Tessa Hockly, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: Rooban Roobavannan, David Stockler, Ben Arabin, Jack Finch, Justin Cairns.

**Agency and external staff:** Dan Connor (NSW DCCEEW).

**Meeting Opened:** 9.30am

### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

#### 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

**1.2 Apologies:** David Frith, Phillip Rudd.

#### 1.3 Confirmation of Agenda Items:

- Drought Management Planning (raised at the July meeting) will be on the agenda for the March 2025 meeting. Members commented that the ROSCCos worked very well in the last drought.
- Members questioned if there have been any developments out of the Wentworth Report in relation to water quality issues and monitoring of the health of the river in the Murray Darling. NSW DCCEEW stated this would likely feed into the Basin Plan Review. In the Hunter, water quality monitoring falls under the water quality science team in NSW DCCEEW and is attached to the Water Sharing Plan (WSP).

**Action CVH2412.01:** NSW DCCEEW to provide information on water quality studies and external impacts in the wider Hunter catchment.

**Responsibility:** M Walker (NSW DCCEEW)

#### 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, 2 July 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [2 July 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.  
D Williams/S Gee (carried)

#### 1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

### 2. OPERATIONS:

#### 2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (G Armstrong/M Khan/R Roobavannan)

- WaterNSW presented a review of operations in the Hunter, North Coast and South Coast valleys, including recent rainfall, current storages status, dam operations, water allocation summary 2024-25, water usage and balance, inflow comparison and rainfall outlook.
- Storages are above 95% and accounts in the Hunter and Paterson have received 100% allocation.

- Discussion occurred around land use changes (new urban developments) and impacts on operations and demand for irrigation, with members questioning how much of WaterNSW's planning looks at land use changes. WaterNSW advised this is not taken into account in our planning however it is captured in the modelling for WSPs (when estimating minimum inflow sequence etc).
- Members stated it is important to consider, with new developments changing the way the water gets to customers and affecting water quality, with the community assuming it is due to irrigation rather than domestic use/changes.
- NSW DCCEEW advised they are aware of the gap in this area and have done extensive work on the link between land use and water under the Better Integrated Land Use Planning and Water Management Project, which looks at the gap and covers all aspects of water including for drinking and irrigation. Results have not yet been made public.

**Action CVH2412.02:** NSW DCCEEW to provide information and outcomes from the Better Integrated Land Use Planning and Water Management Project when available.

**Responsibility:** M Walker (NSW DCCEEW)

- The on-call number for the Water Planning and Delivery team in the Hunter and Richmond valleys is 02 9685 4346 or email [WPD.Hunter@waternsw.com.au](mailto:WPD.Hunter@waternsw.com.au) or [WPD.Richmond@waternsw.com.au](mailto:WPD.Richmond@waternsw.com.au). Changes to water orders must be made via the Customer Helpdesk on 1300 662 077.

## 2.2 Regional Operations update (S He)

- An overview of Hunter and Coastal valleys regional operations area was presented, including Glennies Creek Rock Fall and Table Drains Project, Hunter Roads Remediation Project (Glenbawn and Lostock Dam) and an overview of maintenance works undertaken or underway.
- WaterNSW advised that there was no damage to any of our sites or structures as a result of recent earthquakes.

## 3. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

### 3.1 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. If the intention to take is different to the water order, customers should contact the Customer Helpdesk on 1300 662 077. Discussed.
- Discussion occurred around the volume of smaller water users not placing water orders, with NRAR only targeting higher volume users. Members stated there needs to be more awareness to ensure all customers place water orders as per their requirements, noting a higher rate of water ordering would deliver better outcomes for all water users. WaterNSW is aware of the issue and impact of smaller users not placing an order and is looking at options for overall improvement to water ordering.
- 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.

- Members questioned how many coastal licences are trading groundwater. Taken on notice, noting there will be growth in this area in the next few years.

**Action CVH2412.03:** WaterNSW to advise how many coastal licence holders are trading in groundwater and report to the CAG.

**Responsibility:** D Stockler

- 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. Members congratulated WaterNSW on this initiative.
- 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. NSW DCCEEW is coinvested in the platform. Data is being cleansed as much as possible during the verification process, and linking can also be done. If there are known errors, please contact WaterNSW to action.
- Members again raised the issue of not having contact details of their water user group members and sought help from WaterNSW. As previously advised, WaterNSW cannot provide customer contact details due to privacy, however we do have the ability to target a particular audience when sending correspondence (eg mailouts, newsletters) to customers. We are not able to send correspondence on behalf of water user groups but may be able to highlight water user groups in communications to specific areas.
- 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) so WaterNSW briefed customers on these three functions via state-wide online sessions on 12 November once IPART made the submissions public and prior to the public hearings.
- Members stated 15% year on year price rise in the IPART submission was a shock to customers. WaterNSW advised the 15% was one scenario, not a recommendation that WaterNSW is advocating to IPART. We were required to submit a compliant tender and submitted various scenarios. CAGs were originally presented with all 6 scenarios, including this. IPART will look at affordability and what is prudent and efficient, and customers are encouraged to take part in the submission process.

### **3.2 Non-Urban Metering Reforms review update (D Connor, 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. It is proposed the deadline for coastal water users to become compliant with the AS4747 standards be extended to December 2026 (all works nominated by total entitlement  $\geq 100\text{ML}$ , unless otherwise exempt), and all works nominated by total entitlements of  $>15\text{ML}$  and  $<100\text{ML}$  (unless otherwise exempt) be extended until 1 December 2027 or by renewal of work approval, whichever is later.

- There are no changes proposed for water users with  $\geq 500$ mm pumps and inland water users with cumulative entitlements  $\geq 100$ ML (unless otherwise exempt) – **if not compliant, ACT NOW.**
- **Current obligations exist until the rules are changed.**
- 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.
- NSW DCCEEW will undertake a targeted education and engagement campaign for water users in coastal NSW and work in collaboration with WaterNSW and NRAR to reach a broad audience and are open to feedback on the best ways to engage.
- Members were satisfied with the recommendation presented and stated the changes are largely very good for water users, with practical changes that will help address key issues.
- To subscribe to NSW DCCEEW non-urban metering updates – [www.watergroup.dpie.nsw.gov.au/non-urban-metering-subscribe](http://www.watergroup.dpie.nsw.gov.au/non-urban-metering-subscribe)

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

##### **4.1 Update on 2025 Pricing Proposal (B Maher)**

- WaterNSW lodged its Rural and Greater Sydney Bulk Water pricing submissions and joint WAMC submission to IPART on 30 September.
- IPART has published submissions and released the issues paper on 1 November inviting feedback from the community. Public hearings were 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 process.
- Since we last presented, the numbers have remained consistent, and the scenarios presented to CAGs have been reflected in our submission. Valley fixed vs variable ratios have not changed.
- Members commented that the timing of IPART's process is the busiest time of the year for farmers.

##### **Joint WAMC Proposal:**

- IPART's consultant is now forensically reviewing the proposal to test whether proposed costs are efficient.
- WAMC's prices are currently set well below the level needed to fully recover the efficient costs of delivering water management services in NSW.
- In the 2025 determination period, costs of water management will be higher than IPART allowed last time, due to:
  - Greater volume, scope and complexity of statutory planning compared to IPART's allowance due to requirements to address climate change and our legal obligations
  - Higher costs of NRAR's compliance and enforcement services to meet public and customer expectations
  - Investment in digital solutions to improve customer experience, data quality and availability, metering data availability and compliance management.
- WAMC is proposing caps on price increases to transition to prices that reflect the efficient user share of costs, while managing price shocks.
- If IPART adopts the WAMC pricing proposal:
  - **Prices for the smallest customers who pay the minimum annual charge will continue the current rate of increase of 2.5% per year (plus inflation)**
  - **All other water management prices will increase by 15% per year (plus inflation)**
- This means that over the next price determination period, **customers will pay 42% of costs** and we will seek the remainder from Government.

- IPART has released an issues paper – submissions due 9 December.
- There will be another opportunity to provide feedback when IPART releases its draft report and determination in March 2025.

#### **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 hold 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.
- North coast members commented that Tocal is too far to travel for north and south coast members to attend in person. WaterNSW stated we can continue to have one in Sydney and one in the Hunter to allow attendance for all members.

#### **Next term of office:**

- The current term of office ends 30 June 2025. WaterNSW will call for nominations ~April 2025 by writing to all current members and representative groups as well as advertising via media and social media. Current members are encouraged to reapply through their nominating representative group.
- WaterNSW invited members to bring along other members of their representative group and other eligible organisations to the next CAG meeting to see what the CAGs are about.

#### **4.3 Renewable Energy Storage Program update (J Cairns)**

- WaterNSW provided an overview of the Renewable Energy Storage Program (RESP) in which WaterNSW sought private investment to unlock suitable land and assets to develop commercially viable, large-scale renewable energy and storage projects. Following a competitive tender process, WaterNSW granted selected developers (ACEN, UHH, ZEN) the right to investigate agreed sections of WaterNSW land.
- All development and construction activities and costs associated with the projects, including property engagement and environmental (EIS) approvals, will be borne by the developer. Project timeline presented and discussed.
- WaterNSW has awarded an agreement with Upper Hunter Hydro, following a competitive tender process, to identify the feasibility of two renewable energy projects on WaterNSW-owned land at Glenbawn Dam and Glennies Creek Dam. The projects would include a 770MW 10-hour storage pumped hydro scheme at Glenbawn Dam, with a potential co-located wind farm, and a 623MW 10-hour storage pumped hydro scheme at Glennies Creek Dam. Planning assessment has started, and the project is on track to be operational by early 2030's, pending program delivery. WaterNSW will continue to update the CAG as the project progresses
- Into the future, WaterNSW is aspiring to bring 2GW of additional shovel-ready pumped hydro energy storage projects to market by leveraging our land and assets. As a first step, WaterNSW will soon start Government-led pumped hydro feasibility studies to identify suitable locations. If the projects progress, they could supply electricity to up to two million homes.

- WaterNSW is exploring how it can build on the success of the RESP to identify whether there are opportunities for more sites across regional NSW for long duration pumped hydro energy storage projects.
- WaterNSW expects to have more information on this next program in mid-2025 and will host community drop-in sessions and a Feedback Survey to better understand local communities' views before we embark on the next phase.
- More information on the program is available at [Renewable Energy and Storage Program - WaterNSW](#)

**5. BUSINESS PAPERS:**

- Taken as read.

**6. GENERAL BUSINESS:**

- Nil general business raised.

**Meeting review and close:**

**Next meeting:** 27 March 2025

**Meeting closed:** 1.00pm

## Coastal-Hunter Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 4 December 2024

### New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
<b>CVH2412.01</b>	NSW DCCEEW to provide information on water quality studies and external impacts in the wider Hunter catchment.	M Walker (NSW DCCEEW)	
<b>CVH2412.02</b>	NSW DCCEEW to provide information and outcomes from the Better Integrated Land Use Planning and Water Management Project when available.	M Walker (NSW DCCEEW)	
<b>CVH2412.03</b>	WaterNSW to advise how many coastal licence holders are trading in groundwater and report to the CAG.	D Stockler	

### Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
<b>CVH2407.01</b>	WaterNSW to investigate increased salinity levels in the Hunter and report findings to CAG at the next meeting.	M Khan	<b>Complete.</b>
<b>CVH2407.02</b>	WaterNSW to investigate why alerts aren't working for some customers. W Clark to email specifics for investigation.	W Clark/T Riley	<b>Complete.</b>
<b>CVH2407.03</b>	WaterNSW to share links to WaterInsights tutorial videos with CAG members.	T Hayes	<b>Complete.</b> Links emailed to CAG members 4/7/24 and included in July minutes at agenda item 4.3.