

Murray-Lower Darling Customer Advisory Group - Minutes of Meeting



Location: Big4 Holiday Park, DENILIQUIN

Date: 27 March 2019

Time: 9.00am

Present: Sally Dye (Chair), Gordon Fox, Judith Damiani, Louise Burge, Michael Telford, Luke Barlow, Paul Childs, Hilton Taylor, Michael Chalmers, Dennis Gleeson, Katharine McBride (Skype), Alan Mathers (observer), Kevin Watson (observer), Andrew Hicks (observer), Michael Pisasale (observer), David Stockler, Jonathan Dickson, Adrian Langdon, Vince Kelly, Eddy Taylor, Enrico Proietti, Sonia Townsend and Toni Hayes (minutes).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am.

1. Welcome and introductions:

1.1 Confirmation of Agenda Items

- Nil new items tabled.

1.2 Apologies

- Rachel Strachan.

1.3 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.

1.4 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 20 September 2018

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on 20 September 2018 be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.
- Customers questioned if supply for orders on the Billabong from Finley Escape is debited from the IVT. WaterNSW advised that it is not.
- Customers questioned if there has been any progress on meters being transferred to private ownership and the need for validation every 5 years for underground meters. WaterNSW advised that the process for handback has not been finalised and whether there is an opt/in, opt/out hasn't been resolved. Differences between validation and verification explained. Discussed. If customers have any issues they should report to NRAR.
- Customers questioned if the block banks in the Lower Darling are paid for by the NSW Government. Yes, that is correct. They are paid for under emergency drought funding.

1.5 Actions arising from minutes

- See action sheet attached.

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2. Water Delivery:

2.1 Water System Operations Report (V Kelly)

- WaterNSW presented the operations plan for the Murray and Lower Darling, including water availability, resource assessment distribution, inflows, operational surplus and storage forecast. The plan is publicly available on WaterNSW's website at waternsw.com.au/customer-service/news/operations.

Murray

- Dartmouth to Hume transfers commenced mid-August and ceased in mid-March.
- Hume Dam is at 24% and falling, currently holding 734GL. NSW share of this water is approximately 49%. Release through February averaged approximately 11,750 ML/d. Releases from Hume are likely to continue but at a lower rate to meet irrigation, environmental and system demands.
- Lake Victoria is currently holding about 289GL or 43% of active capacity. The flow to South Australia is about 7,800 ML/d.
- Flows at Balranald are currently about 380ML/day and are likely to remain around 400ML/day into early April, with 200ML/day of environmental water being delivered at Balranald. This is likely to cease in early April and flows may fall to the WSP target of 180ML/day. The May flow target is 297ML/day.
- Hume Dam and Menindee Lakes are currently on amber alert for blue green algae, with some downstream sites on red alert. Customers noted that blue green algae notifications were not timely when changing from amber to red and customers were hearing it from Victoria first. Caused a lot of confusion with one state saying one thing and the other saying nothing. WaterNSW noted there are some difference between triggers, however customers concerns were noted.
- Operation of Menindee Lakes discussed (refer also agenda item 2.2).
- Water availability presented and discussed. Usage has been low with low water availability. High security usage is trending towards the highest we have seen in 15-20 years.
- Carryover and need for transparency discussed. Customers sought information on number of licence holders with carryover, who holds the carryover etc.

Action MLD1903.01: WaterNSW to provide customers with a breakdown of carryover on licences at the next meeting.

Responsibility: V Kelly

- NSW Murray general security water users can carryover a maximum account balance of 50% of their entitlement into the following water year. The account limit is 110 % of entitlement, meaning that account credits from allocation and/or carryover cannot exceed 110% of entitlement in any water year. The limit does not include allocation trade.
- Outages: painting of the super structure at Stevens Weir (winter). The works process is planned to utilise a bulk head for gate painting. To facilitate use of the bulk head, the weir pool will only experience a small drawdown in the order of 0.5-1m.

Lower Darling

- Forecast is for resources in Copi Hollow to be exhausted by mid-May 2019, and Wetherell by mid-September 2019, assuming releases are only made to maintain the Weir 32 weir pool and meet Essential Water demands.

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- Inflows over the past 12 months have totalled 10GL. This is lowest on record compared to the previous worst of 24GL. The 24-month inflows totalled 119GL, which is also lowest on record compared to previous record of 171GL.
- As per the NSW Extreme Events Policy, the Lower Darling regulated river water source is assessed to be in Stage 4. A temporary water restriction came into effect on 4 December 2018 limiting the take of water to; town water, domestic and stock, permanent plantings, and, from Copi Hollow, high security licences.
- Pan evaporation rates over summer months have been 13.1mm/day. Based on field data the average daily pan evaporation rate was the highest recorded for the months of Dec to Feb, this follows on from highest recorded rates of 12.9mm/day.
- Block bank regulators were closed during last week of January.

2.2 Operational Drought Update (A Langdon)

- DoW's extreme events stages and hierarchy of water priorities presented.
- Water sources drought status update presented for NSW water sources. Southern valleys are operating to WSP rules (stage 1, normal operations) however going into winter months will start moving into drought planning. Lower Darling is now operating under stage 4 (critical drought). Northern valleys are operating under drought stages 2-4 (emerging drought to critical drought).
- **Southern Valleys situation:** Murray, Murrumbidgee and Lachlan system inflows vs water allocations graphs for the last 10 years presented and discussed.
- **Northern Valleys situation:** Border Rivers, Gwydir, Namoi, Macquarie-Cudgegong system inflows vs water allocations for the last 10 years; Balonne flows upstream of St George; Barwon-Darling extraction vs inflows graphs presented and discussed.
- The message WaterNSW is emphasising is that this is a six-year drought, not a two-year drought. Extractive users in the north have been allocated minimal water during this time.
- **Situation at Menindee:** presented and discussed Barwon-Darling vs Menindee Lakes inflows graphs; northern valley storages vs Menindee Lakes graphs (Menindee is filling in the same pattern as the northern storages); water losses July 2016-January 2019; Darling Rivers flows and Menindee Lakes storage operations and volumes 2016/19; and distribution of water 2016-19.
- Floodplain harvesting discussed at length. Customers queried if there has been any assessment on flow impact if there was a cap on floodplain harvesting. WaterNSW noted that it is hard to manage something that can't be measured. Until volume is known, floodplain harvesting cannot be accounted for. Is a policy issue and DoW is working on a definition of what constitutes floodplain harvesting.
- Customers stated that it is important to understand how the north and south are connected. Issues in the north have a huge effect on the Murray. Agreed, however the north has been in drought for 6 years. If they didn't have a few years of big inflows, tributaries in the north would already be dry. Water that has been delivered in the last 2 years is carryover from the 16/17 flood. There has been no allocation for irrigators in the north for the last 2 years.
- **Why are we in this situation:** NSW rainfall and temperature graphs and comparison of drought inflows (Burrinjuck, Blowering, Wyangala, Glenlyon, Pindari, Copeton, Keepit, Split Rock and Burrendong dams) presented. New droughts of record are being seen in the northern valleys.
- Critical Water Advisory Panels (CWAP) have been established in the northern inland regulated river valleys and the Barwon-Darling/Lower Darling to advise on appropriate management actions in extreme events. Will commence in southern valleys in due course.

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- To support local input for the CWAP meetings, WaterNSW intends to form local steering groups by valley, for local operational and drought input. As drought continues, this group will make recommendations and provide advice to WaterNSW for DoIW as to how inflows should be shared/distributed etc and provide valuable input to the CWAP. WaterNSW will establish these groups based on the severity of conditions, as drought extends through the state.
- Further information is available on WaterNSW's website at waternsw.com.au/supply/drought-information

2.3 Water Insight Portal (A Langdon)

- Preparation is underway of a valley by valley website which will be a single, interactive dashboard for customers to use to aid on-farm decisions, including storage, water quality, allocation, distribution, inter-valley trade, tributary flow, rainfall, news/updates. Expected to be available by end of 2019 (noting that work with MDBA was required).
- Customers provided the following suggestions for inclusion: totals for Victoria/NSW; water through MIL escapes; mid-Murray tributaries; updated usage on carryover; eWater in the flows; include South Australia; supplementary flow announcement (via SMS); supplementary flow notifications.
- Feedback and suggestions can be provided to Toni.Hayes@waternsw.com.au.

2.4 Operational Loss Update (A Langdon)

- During the last round of CAGs, customers requested WaterNSW present a breakdown of operational and system losses in Operations Plans going forward.
- A project has commenced to investigate this, however the detail required by valley is significant and complex. This will be a longer-term project.
- Overview of project and progress provided. Updates will be provided to the CAG as the project develops.
- Customers queried how water going over the barrages is measured and how it equates within the 1850GL entitlement flow. The CEWO advised that it works closely with South Australia. Water going over the barrages is accounted for as environmental water and there is a rolling process to account for the water. The CEWO has worked hard on transparency and accounting for environmental water. The 1850GL is the CEWO's water to use as they see fit.
- WaterNSW advised we want to be as transparent as possible. Murray will be more complicated for us working with the MDBA but we have been working with other agencies to get on the same page.
- Customers questioned if water traded over the border is tracked. Taken as a question on notice.

Action MLD1903.02: WaterNSW to advise if water traded over the border is tracked.

Responsibility: R Cocks

- The MDBA report on losses has not yet been released, due soon.

Action MLD1903.03: Forward a copy of the MDBA report on losses to CAG members when it is released.

Responsibility: A Langdon

2.5 Drought Response (J Dickson)

- Critical Water Advisory Panels (CWAP) have commenced in the north, with the south to follow in due course.

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- WaterNSW has heightened its communications to customers on the drought, including publishing valley-specific information on drought; weekly commentary on greatest impacted valleys and critical issues commentary. We have also increased engagement with other water agencies.
- Customers can subscribe to weekly updates at waternsw.com.au/customer-service/news/subscribe.

3. Assets

3.1 Asset Maintenance and Services Update (E Taylor)

- Asset performance and maintenance in the Murray and Lower Darling valleys presented and discussed, including safety improvements, asset performance, maintenance delivery 2018/19, breakdown/defects and other items of note.
- Customers questioned if the works on the Murray are contracted to WaterNSW and paid for by the MDBA and if the cost will come back to customers. WaterNSW advised that it has been contracted to do the work and customers will not be charged twice.

4. Presentations/Consultation

4.1 Compliance (J Dickson)

- At the request of members during the last CAG round, the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) will meet with CAG members after the CAG meeting today to discuss its strategic priorities and direction.
- Customers requested information on compliance activities across the state. WaterNSW advised that compliance is the responsibility of NRAR and information is published on its website at industry.nsw.gov.au/natural-resources-access-regulator/compliance-and-enforcement

4.2 NSW Government Fixed Fee Rebate Update (J Dickson)

- A total of 34,114 customers have received rebates to date as well as customers of eight irrigation corporations. Rebates will continue to be issued for the balance of this water year.
- For **regulated** customers, the rebate will be applied equally over four bills, commencing Q4 of the last water year.
- For **unregulated** and **groundwater** customers, the rebate will be applied to the next bill (covering 2017/18 charges).
- High Security and Government Agencies are excluded from the rebate.
- Go to dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/droughthub for more information.

4.3 Regulatory Update (J Dickson)

Reform Update

- WaterNSW provided an update on water reform, including work in progress on metering and telemetry, Duly Qualified Person (DQP) framework and inactive works. It is intended that by 1 April 2019, all elements will be in place to allow customers to understand if and how meter regulations will apply to them.
- **Metering:** the Task Force and MDBA have released a list of current pattern approved (and potential pattern approved) meters mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/pubs/pattern-approved-non-urban-water-meters.pdf

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- **Telemetry:** single framework to be owned by DoIW, equipment to be owned by individuals; cloud-based solution; intent for customers to have access to the data; Data Acquisition Service (DAS) tender underway; intent that all water agencies will access the data.
- **Still to come:** Reasonable Use Guidelines, meter ownership discussion, reporting on non-telemetered meters, DoIW/Task Force engagement.
- Customers questioned if WaterNSW will replace the 8-10 government-owned meters in the valley that are not compliant. Will depend on the metering framework and if mandatory or not, opt in/opt out, etc. Still in discussion.
- For fact sheets and information on the metering framework, please refer to the DoI website at industry.nsw.gov.au/water-reform/metering-framework

IPART Cost Share Review

- IPART issued its final report in February 2019. There was no substantial change from the October 2018 draft.
- Findings follow the impactor pays framework. Any increase in Rural and WAMC charges will be worked through the coming Determinations.

4.4 Regulatory Economics – Pricing Determination Engagement Plans (J Dickson)

WAMC Determination

- The current WAMC determination runs 2016-2020, with functions split between DoIW, NRAR and WaterNSW. On the current timetable, new pricing submissions are due by 30 June 2019 by each agency.
- WRAP recommendations delayed separation of duties and responsibilities, however outline of division of duties between agencies has now been agreed.
- Formal engagement on pricing options is planned for May 2019 and WaterNSW proposes to engage with customers in each valley throughout May.

Rural Valleys Determination

- The Rural Valleys Determination runs from 2017-2021, with submissions due to IPART 30 June 2020.
- WaterNSW will be seeking customer involvement in price modelling in early 2019. Engagement will follow the CAG format, with additions as required.

4.5 iWAS Update (J Dickson)

iWAS Improvements

- Coming soon: apportioning usage by Licence/Works; easier access to iWAS information for customers; carryover forecast by account; amending water orders within lead times.

Carryover Campaign

- WaterNSW's carryover campaign was a huge success last year with strong customer feedback on saving them on forfeiture. WaterNSW will run the campaign again this year, with new functionality in iWAS showing potential carryover.

Ordering water – amending orders within lead time

- An issue was identified with iWAS only allowing users to order, amend or cancel a water order during business hours. There is an opportunity within iWAS to enable users to amend orders out of hours **within lead time** window to ensure water take has a compliant order. This will be trialled in the Lachlan valley and if successful will be rolled out to all valleys.

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4.6 Your WaterNSW Bill (J Dickson)

- In response to customer feedback, WaterNSW has updated the look and feel of our bill (invoice). We have sought to make understanding invoices easier and summarised charges on one page.
- Customers suggested that BPay/payment details be on the front of the invoice with the account summary details to make it easier for customers when making a payment.
- **New on our website:** you can now access Algal Alerts, operational update notices and supplementary notices from our website homepage. Customers can register to receive specific alerts at waternsw.com.au/supply/regional-nsw/alerts-and-updates

4.7 CAG Term of Office (J Dickson)

- The current term of office for all CAGs expires on 30 June 2019. WaterNSW is calling for nominations for the 2019-22 term during February and March 2019.
- If you wish to continue your representation on the CAG, please liaise with your nominating organisation to register your interest. Nominations close **29 March 2019** and a nomination form has been sent to your nominating organisation.

5. Business Papers:

- Noted and taken as read.

6. General Business

- Nil new general business raised.

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting : Wednesday 31 July 2019

Meeting closed: 1.30pm

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Murray-Lower Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 27 March 2019

Carried forward actions			
Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
MLD1708.06	WNSW to confirm advice on stakeholder involvement in MDBA review process for airspace and capacity issues.	V Kelly	Ongoing. WaterNSW will consult with our customers through the CAG at the appropriate time.
MLD1809.01	WaterNSW to provide a breakdown of operational losses in Operations Plans going forward.	M Barratt	Complete (project ongoing). Refer to agenda item 2.4.
MLD1809.02	WaterNSW to provide detail on end of system flow targets out of the end of the Murrumbidgee (actual flows vs target) at next meeting.	V Kelly	Complete. Refer to agenda item 2.1.
MLD1809.03	WaterNSW to seek direction from Regulator/NRAR if customers will be in breach of conditions if they accessed groundwater but an allocation is received later in the season.	D Stockler	In progress. Awaiting response from NRAR.
MLD1809.04	WaterNSW to plan an additional LOS workshop for the Murray-Lower Darling prior to February 2019.	A Fraser	In progress (delayed).
MLD1809.06	WaterNSW to contact L Burge out of session to discuss environmental water delivery to the 18 indicator sites under the Basin Plan (as per agenda item 10.2).	V Kelly	Ongoing.
MLD1809.07	WaterNSW to advise DoI Water of customer concerns in relation to channel capacity constraints and channel sharing and request they issue a statement in relation to same.	A Langdon	Complete. The issue has been raised with DoI Water but no statement from NSW has been issued. Customers queried where channel sharing and capacity constraints is up to and WaterNSW's position. NSW has no plans to move from 50/50, however Victoria has different ideas. Has been escalated to Minister level.

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			<p>Customers queried where WaterNSW sees constraints in the 50/50 share and is there risk for others? Will WaterNSW prioritise customers?</p> <p>With 50/50 sharing, there is still potential for us to grow the market downstream on NSW side. Would still have reasonably good capacity downstream if that was to occur. No talk of prioritising water. Most discussion has been around bigger users who need permanent security. Would be put back to customers to use on-farm storages.</p> <p>Discussion on how to manage potential constraints is ongoing.</p>
MLD1811.01	WaterNSW to look at wording in first paragraph of Lower Darling Operations Plan (highlights) and amend as appropriate.	V Kelly	Complete.
MLD1811.02	WaterNSW to confirm if it can provide customers with a copy of the contract on the metering project in the southern basin between WaterNSW and the government.	J Dickson	Complete. WaterNSW in unable to provide details of the Southern Basin Metering Project contract as it was a contract between the NSW government and the Commonwealth.

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
MLD1903.01	WaterNSW to provide customers with a breakdown of carryover on licences at the next meeting.	V Kelly	
MLD1903.02	WaterNSW to advise if water traded over the border is tracked.	R Cocks	
MLD1903.03	Forward a copy of the MDBA report on losses to CAG members when it is released.	A Langdon	

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