

**Location:** Teleconference

**Date:** 8 August 2019

**Time:** 1.00pm

**Present:** Alan Whyte, Katherine McBride, Sarah Jardine, Brian Graham, Rachael Strachan, John Coffey, Paula DSantos, Barb Arnold, David Straccioni, Dan Berry, Nerida Healy, Joe Pera, Tracey Schultz (Minutes)

**Apologies:** Alice Jarrett, Wayne Smith, Andrew Wall.

**Meeting commenced:** 1.00pm

Vince greeted the meeting and gave an outline of the meeting purpose. Overview of

### 1. Terms of reference of ROSCCo's

1.1. The Terms of Reference document was distributed and discussed/presented to the meeting attendees.

It was suggested that members review the Terms of Reference document and provide any feedback to Tracey. The current focus is on the drought and could include other river operations issues such as flood at a later stage.

**Action: Members to review the Terms of Reference document and make suggested changes.**

### 2. Drought Status and Operations in 2019-20

Vince Kelly (WaterNSW) gave a presentation to the meeting (emailed prior to the meeting) on the Drought Status & Operations in 2019-20:

- 2.1 Current Storage Levels and predictions under various scenarios
- 2.2 Critical water needs in 2019-20
- 2.3 S & D Replenishment flows
- 2.4 Treatment of tributary inflows

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- 2.5 Potential infrastructure options or other actions for managing the drought
- 2.6 Groundwater issues and water quality issues

### 3. Discussion by Stakeholders & Recommendations

- The Lower Darling region is on stage 4 (critical drought) and has been for an extended period of time
- Lake Wetherill is currently at 9,880ML, Lake Pamamaroo at 7ML, Copi Hollow at 4,768ML with the other lakes remaining at 0ML of available storage
- Environmental water release from Glenlyon Dam did not make to Collarenebri as hoped, it made it through to upstream of the Bourke weir pool. Releases from Copeton Dam made it past Brewarrina.
- Wilcannia is now at cease to flow. Flows are trending to the minimum over the past 12 months, the previous 24 months is the lowest on record.
- Rainfall has been minimal for the last few weeks
- Menindee lakes Inflow – comparison of drought inflows at Wilcannia – It was noted that there was an inflow error on the legend – needs to be corrected. It was also noted that there are fairly significant policy differences around the management of extractions upstream over some of those years.

#### **Action : addition wording required for explanation**

- As flow past Wilcannia will not make the storage, the 3GL that passed over Wilcannia weir will be attributed to losses.
- It was requested that some analysis and estimations be undertaken on the impact of the Toorale infrastructure. The community believes this to be a very significant issue, and the works undertaken have had a significant impact. The impact has given the potential for no inflows through to Summer and are considered significant, with any inflow providing flexibility and options to manage risks for stock and domestic supplies and the elevated risk of fish deaths.

#### **Action : WaterNSW to undertake analysis of the Toorale banks removal**

- DPIE – Environment responded - Structures were operated in open mode – if specific questions can be taken on notice and answers will be provided. Report required on the impact of the release. Was it a lost opportunity? Could it have reduced the fish kill in

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the summer? What is the Impact of not having the release at Menindee, need to look at not only the human community but the fish community as well?

- **Action : DPIE – Environment - Report on the impact of the release**

- Despite regulators being fully open, the capacity of the structures reduced the peak flow and as such in the view of the community reduced the flow potential. The water was pushed out to the flood plains instead, which under natural conditions, would have stayed in channel.
- How is the Commonwealth environmental water managed in the Toorale National Park?

- **Action : David Straccione/Paula Dsantos to provide a response.**

- DPIE – Environment are holding a meeting at Wilcannia or Menindee on 5<sup>th</sup> September. Expressions of interest requested. There is potential DPIE to have a telephone link from the Buronga office to assist interested persons participate in the meeting.

- **Action : Expressions of interest to be sent to Tracey Schultz for onforwarding.**

- The climate outlook is not optimistic, temperatures are forecast to exceed median temperatures over the next 3 months. Indicators for El Nino and La Nina are trending neutral, although the 3-month rainfall outlook showing below average chance of exceeding median rainfall totals.
- Water availability usage summary from last year should be now finalised.
- General security carryover has increased from 2018-19 to 2019-20. It is higher due to trade from high security to general security licences during the year. General Security was at 12GL last year with this year being at 14.7GL. While water was allocated to high security licences, the use was limited by temporary water restrictions. In addition, the allocation or access is dependent on water being available to customers. The Department made allocations so that account water was available, noting that access would be limited.
- Proposal to extract water from account for evaporation. It is not uncommon to put water into accounts even though it can't be delivered. These amounts will be ready for the next inflow rather than waiting for the next storm event and making allocations then.
- Discussion needed for stakeholders on Lower Darling so it is understood by all and the general public. The issue gets lost in SAP as not a major issue for those in the Murray.

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- Need discussion with impactees - need all departments, so it is all understood by the general public. Clearly justifiable rather than repeating themselves.
- The role of the Menindee lakes project working committee is to see what works for the department as well as those who need water on the ground.
- No environmental releases have been issued since September 2017.
- Restrictions in place for general security but evaporation still occurring.
- More discussion as impacts are very real. Going forward, openly discuss with the impacted people and weigh up all the pros and cons, at the moment it is a great frustration to many parties.
- Copi Hollow – End of May cease to pump around 30ML left in accounts. These have been transferred to carryover with the expectation of use in 19/20 water year. If this is lost, it will be a massive issue for businesses.

***Propose action - co-ordinate statement of issues and processes with the department involved. May advocate Lower Darling for specific conversations as it gets lost in the bigger Murray group. Serious consultation is required with stakeholders / Tracey Barton – needs to be open and frank discussion.***

- Status of old Broken Hill water licence – is it still current? – It is intended that the licence will be reduced with Broken Hill supply now being made from the Murray through the pipeline. A residual volume will be required for Menindee township and other commitments that Essential Water need to meet.
- Water accounting system full volume still being seen, needs to revisit the actual number. Some coordination/response required from DPI (Brian Graham).
- Block banks still in place.
- Essential water supply - Managing levels in Copi for the township. Access to bores should be still available. Aim to remain on Copi for as long as they can. Copi supply should last till October 2019, Lake Wetherill weir pool should last until January 2020. All other water reservoirs are empty.
- Block banks are currently at a gauge height of 1.1m. 700mm – Half of the pipe is out of the water - could get another 300mm through the pipes and can siphon if necessary.
- Wine grapes have been abandoned, citrus is being abandoned as the harvest progresses. Should only have water for the next 6 weeks to 2 months. The bank has worked well.

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- Block banks – document short term benefits for future drought decisions as well as shortfalls and approval times. All to provide information on how it has made a difference to all who have used the banks.

**Action : All to provide information to Tracey for consolidation**

- Working with Fisheries in defining critical refuge sites for fish. Once completed, WaterNSW in conjunction with Fisheries will be developing a monitoring program and investigating aeration options.
- 240-volt power would be very beneficial and would change options available. Contact Jeff Finch who would know where all the current 240-volt power is available for the priority sites.
- Mapping of the deeper holes is being undertaken– copies of the charts are available. Some are very deep 20 – 30 feet deep. Local knowledge of the deep holes is available.

**Action : Joe to work with local knowledge to identify critical habitat and suitable power supply sites for management of critical habitat.**

- What to do with inflows, setting aside or releasing – position connectivity of system seems to be the No.1 position. Stock and domestic respite for all is still the current position.
- Structure of works for drought – request for funding for bores – not commenced as yet. The next Critical Advisory Panel Meeting is coming up. Apart from the bore issue, are there any other potential options in the current situation.
  - A higher standard of engagement is required . Recent ground water WSP and metering reform meeting at Pooncarie was substandard – Ground water was good, but metering reform left people confused. Given the level of stress in communities, clear and timely engagement is critical. This message needs to be passed to all of government.

**Action : Pass these comments onto Critical Advisory Panel.**

- Question of tanks and plumbing required – any chance to get compensated? It was identified that the area around Menindee had received rebates for tank infrastructure and plumbing costs. Many landholders in the Lower Darling have incurred similar costs but without government support – could the rebate be extended to a larger area? Menindee residents were given access to funds to pay for tanks (rebate). Should these

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rebates be applicable for Lower Darling as well? Funding took a bit of time to get through – transporting of tanks have occurred, but not being paid for (May/June).

**Action :Critical Water Advisory Panel**

### **General business**

Metering – suggest WaterNSW sold themselves down on the issue .

- Technical advice required on water meters – loggers are not up to scratch (meeting felt incorrect, they are far superior technically – other agendas operating in other areas which are counterproductive).
- Private ownership handback is absurd
- Logger quality is of a higher standard than is being proposed.

**Next meeting** – continue monthly – suggestions of out of sessions

### **Meeting Review and Close**

**Next meeting: 12 September 2019 1.00pm**

**Meeting Closed at 2.15pm**

Presentation is available on the internet [Lower Darling ROSCCo Presentation](#) and is also attached.

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### New actions

Action number	Action	Resp.	Status
1.7.1	Menindee lakes Inflow – comparison of drought inflows at Wilcannia – It was noted that there was an inflow error on the legend – wording around graph needs to be added	Vince Kelly	
1.7.2	WaterNSW to undertake analysis of the Toorale banks removal	Partha Saha (WNSW)	
1.7.3	DPIE – Environment - Report on the impact of the release at Toorale	DPIE Environment	
1.7.4	How is the Commonwealth environmental water managed in the Toorale National Park?	David Straccione/ Paula Dsantos	Response provided via email 8/8/19
1.7.5	DPIE – Environment are holding a meeting at Wilcannia or Menindee on 5th September. EOI requested. There is potential DPIE to have a telephone link from the Buronga office to assist interested persons participate in the meeting.	EOI to be sent to Tracey for onforwarding	
1.7.6	Carryover of losses - Co-ordinate statement of issues and processes, may advocate Lower Darling for specific conversations as it gets lost in the wider Murray group. Consultation/open & frank discussion is required with stakeholders/Tracey Barton	Tracey Schultz to be in contact with Tracey Barton to organise	
1.7.7	Document short term benefits of Block banks for future drought decision making - shortfalls and approval times also. All to provide information on how it has made a difference to all who have used the banks	Tracey Schultz/All	

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1.7.8	Joe to work with local knowledge to identify critical habitat and suitable power supply sites for management of critical habitat	Joe Pera	
1.7.9	A higher standard of engagement is required . Recent ground water WSP and metering reform meeting at Pooncarie was substandard – Ground water was good, but metering reform left people confused. Given the level of stress in communities, clear and timely engagement is critical. This message needs to be passed to all of government. - Pass these comments onto Critical Advisory Panel	Tracey Schultz	
1.7.10	Menindee had received rebates for tank infrastructure and plumbing costs. Many landholders in the Lower Darling have incurred similar costs but without government support – could the rebate be extended to a larger area? Menindee residents were given access to funds to pay for tanks (rebate). Should these rebates be applicable for Lower Darling as well? Action :Critical Water Advisory Panel	Critical Advisory Panel/ Tracey Schultz	

**Carried forward actions**

Action number	Action	Resp.	Status

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