

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Video Conference

Date: 28 July 2021

Time: 9.00am

Present: Tanya Thompson (Chair), Peter Sheppard, Iva Quarisa, James Maguire, Justin Sutherland, Nick Maynard, Bede Spannagle, Jenny McLeod (observer), Erin Lenon (observer), Paul Maytom (part), Jonathan Dickson, Enrico Proietti, Sonia Townsend, Sarah Boyd and Toni Hayes.

The following attended for specific agenda items: B Mayhew, D Swift-Hoadley, S Lykos, G Abood, G White, S Flowers, P Gidney, L Castro, A Fraser.

Meeting Opened: 9.00am.

1. Introduction and Acknowledgement of Country:

1.1 Welcome and introductions

1.2 Apologies: Hilton Taylor, Hilary Johnson, Bruce Campbell, Glenn Lok, Matt Toscan.

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 Meetings, 29 April 2021:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [29 April 2021](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*P Sheppard/B Spannagle
carried*

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- See action sheet attached.

1.7 Election of Chairperson

- Tanya Thompson was nominated and elected Chairperson unopposed.

*P Sheppard/J Maguire
carried*

2. Assets:

2.1 Asset Maintenance update (B Mayhew)

- Asset performance and maintenance in the Murrumbidgee and Lowbidgee valleys presented and discussed, including routine preventative and corrective maintenance delivery at Burrinjuck Dam, Gogeldrie Weir, Berembed Weir, Yanco Weir, Tombullen Storage, Inlet and Outlet Regulators, Spillers Regulator, Hay Weir, Wanganella Swamp Regulator, Maude Weir, Nimmie Creek offtake regulator Redbank Weir, North Redbank system and Balranald Weir.
- Burrinjuck Dam has started to spill. From a maintenance point of view, we won't need to go into full flood operations mode at this point. Blowering Dam is also poised to spill.
- Customers questioned how much water is going over the spillway and how is it measured. WaterNSW advised the volume is measured a few ways – ratings curves (calibrated curves where we can identify based on water levels in the storage) and also the downstream gauging stations which measure what

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is going down river. Currently the flow is 18,000ML d/s of Burrinjuck and the gauge at Glendale is 20,300ML. Customers can view updated gauge heights, storage levels and flows at [WaterInsights](#).

- Customers questioned if construction of the bulkhead at Yanco Weir has commenced and will this be money well-spent if there is a possibility of changes due to SDLAM projects in that area. WaterNSW advised we have received final draft design drawings, which are being verified and finalised, however fabrication has not yet commenced. Broader options will be taken into consideration (eg SDLAM) prior to work being done.
- Customers questioned if there is opportunity maintenance occurring at Yanco Weir while the gates are raised for an extended period. WaterNSW advised that we are using this opportunity to do what can confidently fit into the time window without running any risk of delay or operational impediment. Some examples include pressure cleaning gates to remove scum and grit, greasing hoisting equipment and rollers and inspection of the main gear box crown wheel.

2.2 Major Projects update (J Dickson)

- As part of broader reforms of the NSW Water Sector, a new water infrastructure agency, Water Infrastructure NSW (WIN) has been established within DPIE-Water. Progressively from 1 July 2021, WIN will now lead the planning and delivery of Government-funded water infrastructure projects in NSW, including the transfer of 8 projects previously led by WaterNSW.
- The majority of project staff have moved to WIN with the projects. WaterNSW and WIN are working together to ensure the transition is a swift and seamless process.
- WaterNSW will retain a role in the projects as owner and operator or existing land and assets for some projects and service provided to existing and future customers.
- Project updates going forward will be provided by WIN and can be found on WIN's website at <https://water.nsw.gov.au/water-infrastructure-nsw>
- Customers questioned how future operations and maintenance costs for these projects will be met, where is this captured in the IPART framework and how will it impact customers. WaterNSW advised the costs are not included in the current determination, however as part of the project handover there will be consideration around willingness and ability to pay, user/government share etc, which will be assessed by IPART for future determinations as the projects are completed.

3. Presentations/Consultation:

3.1 Water Reform Implementation Plan (WRIP) Update (D Swift-Hoadley)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the non-urban metering reforms, including a recap on the roll out dates, conditions that apply now for all water users and pathways to compliance.
- If you are not using your water supply works you can make the works **inactive**, which then exempts those works only from the new metering rules. Once inactive, you will not be able to use the works to take any water (including BLR) and will be billed on a one-part tariff (full entitlement charge). To make a works active again, licence holder will need to submit an application, pay the application fee and provide evidence that the works adheres to the metering regulations. For more information visit our website at www.watensw.com.au/amendapproval
- There are currently 15 pattern approved meters [listed on the MDBA website](#), ranging 25mm-1800mm. A list of compatible data logging and telemetry devices and solutions are listed on [DPIE's website](#). Customers are encouraged to speak to their DQP in relation to appropriate fit for purpose equipment.
- The NSW Government recently announced \$23.6M to assist and encourage water users in the northern MDB in transitioning to telemetry-based metering, including an \$18M rebate available per meter as a \$975 credit applied to customer bills (refer below). Government-owned meters are not eligible.

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- Customers questioned how they can check if their works have been signed off in the DQP Portal. WaterNSW advised that validation certificates should be provided by the DQP. There are also plans to give customers access to this information via iWAS, but this functionality is not ready yet.
- Landholders with government-owned meters (GOM) are not required to do anything at this stage. WaterNSW will do the work to make meters compliant and will contact landholders once work is complete. There will be more communication in advance of the future rollout dates.
- Customers questioned if landholders with GOM are required to verify that the works on ground match the work approval. WaterNSW advised that NRAR has stated that the size on your Work Approval **MUST** match what is on ground, is absolute. If they don't match, landholders are required to either amend what is installed or amend their work approval to match (*refer also agenda item 3.2*). Application fees will apply.

Non-Urban Metering Rules Update (S Lykos – DPIE-Water)

- The NSW and Australian Governments have committed to fund a \$36.1M suite of metering programs, to commence in the 2021-22 financial year, including:
 - \$18M telemetry rebate, for those who have installed telemetry (both mandatory and voluntary), applied retrospectively for all accounts in the DAS
 - \$14.6M government-owned meter capital upgrade program
 - \$1M program First Nations metering traineeship program
 - \$2.5M field program
- Many water users were captured by the rules in the 1 December 2020 rollout simply because their approval details did not reflect what is 'on ground' (eg installed smaller works or inactive works). What is on your approval **MUST** match what is on ground, is absolute. The key message to water users is to ensure details are up to date. This can be the difference between being captured by the rules or not. Contact WaterNSW to make any changes.
- The DQP portal is the central source of information about the steps water users are taking to become compliant. WaterNSW is upgrading the portal to allow more steps to be recorded and to improve access for water users.
- Upcoming communication and engagement activities for the 1 December 2021 rollout include: mailout to all affected water users in June-July 2021; outbound phone calls to all affected water users in July-August 2021; metering roadshow planned for September 2021; and a second mailout in October-November 2021.
- Works solely used to take water for domestic and stock under a basic landholder right (BLR) are exempt from the metering rules. The exemption **does not** capture water taken under a domestic and stock access licence.
- The Department has extended timeframes for **some water users** to comply with **existing metering conditions** in five water sharing plans (Hunter, Richmond, Lachlan, Murrumbidgee and Murray-Lower Darling). The extended timeframes affect water users in these WSPs with an existing condition (**MW2452-00001**) on their works approval, to install AS4747 compliant meters - [click here for more information and to see if this affects you](#). The extension does not affect existing [regional roll out dates](#).
- Under the extension, affected water users who have already installed a meter will have until their [regional rollout date](#) to ensure their meter meets the [standards](#) under the non-urban metering rules. In the meantime, they must ensure their meter is operating properly and is accurate. Affected water users who have not already installed a meter will have until 1 December 2021 to install metering equipment that meets the standards under the new rules.

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- DPIE has written to affected water users to inform them of the extended timeframes, with people already likely to know they are affected by the exemption. Water users must take active steps to ensure they are familiar with the conditions on their licenses and works approvals. NRAR will determine, independently of the department, how it responds to any breaches that occurred before the extension was granted.
- DPIE and NRAR have a number of resources available to help water users understand the new metering rules, including a [Metering Guidance Tool](#), [Non-Urban Water Metering In NSW: what water users need to know leaflet](#) and [compliance fact sheets](#).

3.2 Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR)

Update on Metering Compliance Campaign – tranche 1 (G Abood)

- NRAR provided an update on tranche 1 compliance rates for affected works under the non-urban water metering framework, including state-wide statistics and regional breakdown for the Murrumbidgee. NRAR has conducted a number of programs looking at water users through targeted sampling via desktop assessments, phone calls and site inspections. Results were then ground-truthed by NRAR site visits.
- NRAR's compliance approach is simple: to be compliant, water users must have accurate, tamper-proof and approved meters installed; should have those meters validated by a DQP; and could be connected to the DAS. The on-ground installation must exactly match the work approval. NRAR will focus efforts on those users who have not progressed far through the compliance pathway (who have the most ground to cover).
- Tranche 1 covered 1126 affected works in the system (active works that have the ability to pump water). There were 715 works remaining after exclusions (including active investigations, government owned meters and COVID restrictions), half of which were either smaller than 500mm or inactive, therefore not subject to the regulation.
- Results showed that state-wide, 23% of affected works are fully compliant; 32% are on the pathway to compliance, having made reasonable efforts to comply; and 45% of affected works are non-compliant and subject to enforcement action.
- For the Murrumbidgee, 59% are fully compliant; 38% are on the pathway to compliance and 3% are non-compliant (29 works). There were 58 works inspected, with 29 identified as inactive or undersize.
- Tranche 2 water users must act now. If water is taken in the Macquarie, Gwydir, Namoi, Border Rivers and Barwon-Darling users may need to comply by 1 December 2021. Customers should review their licence and approval details on the [NSW Water Register](#) and use the [NSW Metering Guidance Tool](#) to confirm if this applies to them and then engage a DQP to commence work.
- Customers noted that NRAR states wanting to show gratitude and congratulate those near the finish line and questioned how this will be done asking will it be made public. NRAR advised that this is currently in the early stages of investigating innovative and broader ways to do this, but in the first instance NRAR will contact the water users directly.
- Customers commented that it would be good to see some positive media from NRAR instead of constant negativity. All public focus appears to be negative and against water users. NRAR stated their media release did lead with a positive, however the media took a different angle.
- The southern basin is in tranche 3.

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Introduction to NRAR's Quarterly Reporting Tool (G White)

- NRAR has released results of its campaigns to help water users understand what they do and to build public confidence that water is being regulated fairly in NSW. [Quarterly Compliance Reports](#) are an easily accessible summary of NRAR's activities for water users and the community and are publicly available on NRAR's website.
- Key activities and non-compliance trends across the state presented (Jan-Mar 2021), including [regional compliance breakdown](#) for the Murrumbidgee.
- NRAR has recently released its [regulatory priorities for 2021-22](#) for water metering and DQPs, irrigated agriculture, overdrawn accounts and extraction limits in at risk water sources, which will be focus over the coming months, as well as enduring priorities.
- [Subscribe to NRAR's newsletter here.](#)
- Customers questioned what is meant by unauthorised works on the floodplain, noting there are only a small number of floodplains in the Murrumbidgee, which are not captured by floodplain management plans comprehensively. Unauthorised works are defined as not lawful, something that is against the law or WMA without authorisation.
- NRAR stated it is only interested when someone is doing something outside of the law and/or if there is a risk to the environment, other water users or people in some way. It is acknowledged the same focus in the south hasn't been applied as in the north and understood that DPIE is seeking funding to do floodplain management work in the south.
- Customers noted NRAR's priorities relate to overdrawn accounts and users complying with extraction limits and questioned where the overlap is with WaterNSW in communicating with water users about compliance. NRAR advised that if something is against licence conditions it will always be a compliance issue. NRAR and WaterNSW have access to shared information, communicate and work together to encourage water users to do the right thing. The key message is that the onus is on the water user to operate their business lawfully, knowing what is on their approval (including extraction limits) and working to that.
- NRAR will look at all issues on a case by case basis (including historical issues/rules/conditions) with the same consideration – is it lawful, is it creating significant harm, does it need to be rectified. There is no blanket answer.

3.3 Regulatory Economics – Pricing Determination Engagement (J Dickson)

- IPART has decided to defer the release of its final reports on WaterNSW's rural bulk water and WAMC's water management prices by 3 months in order to assess WaterNSW's non-urban metering proposal and consult on draft metering prices.
- This decision means the current prices will continue to apply from 1 July to 30 September 2021, with new prices to apply from 1 October 2021.
- Submissions to IPART's supplementary reports close on 23 July 2021. For more information and to view reports, submissions, proposals and consultation, visit [IPART's website](#).

Metering

- IPART's [Supplementary Draft Report on Metering](#) was released on 22 June 2021, seeking customer and stakeholder feedback by 23 July 2021. The report sets out the draft maximum charges that WaterNSW can recover for implementing the NSW Government's metering reforms over the next four years.

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- WaterNSW will introduce new charges to recover the costs of metering, including a scheme management charge (annual fee per licence); a telemetry charge (annual fee per meter); a non-telemetry charge (annual fee per meter); and two additional meter service charges will apply to customers with government owned meters.
- Obligations for compliance to the non-urban metering reforms is the responsibility of the work approval holder. There are ongoing obligations for the majority of all works in terms of recording and reporting and for metered works and regular maintenance to ensure the equipment is working accurately.
- IPART will consider all feedback provided in submissions when making its final decision to be published in September 2021.
- Customers sought further explanation on the statement “*our ability to support water users as we had planned and priced in our submission is contingent on funding*”. WaterNSW proposed levels of service to IPART that require additional funding (new functions we are required to perform under the reforms). The service levels appear to be supported by IPART in its draft report, with the final report due for release in September.

3.4 Engagement Landscape (J Dickson)

IPART Customer Engagement

- IPART is reviewing the way it regulates water utilities and how it sets prices and licence conditions for the monopoly businesses it regulates. Three sessions on future water assessments have been held, including customer engagement, where all NSW water utilities provided input.
- Stakeholder feedback on [Discussion Paper 2 – Promoting A Customer Focus](#) was due on 20 July 2021.

Customer Conversations

- WaterNSW is taking a new approach to customer engagement on future water and services pricing to ensure that what we propose in terms of investment reflects our customers' views. newDemocracy has been engaged to start a conversation, which will inform WaterNSW's submission to the regulator for the 2025 Rural Pricing Determination.
- newDemocracy will work with WaterNSW to deliver three key pieces of community engagement: Kitchen Table Discussions; Paired Conversations; and Concise Themes. These projects will take place throughout 2021 and ultimately lead into a deeper engagement process that addresses the question: “how can we best meet our need for water? And, what is a fair way to pay for it?”.
- CAG members were sent a copy of the Kitchen Table Discussion Kit in June, inviting them and their water user group to take part, with feedback due by 30 August 2021. Engagement is open to all stakeholders who have an interest in water.
- For more information or to download a copy of the Kitchen Table Discussion Kit, please visit <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/water/>

3.5 Town Water Risk Reduction Program (P Gidney – DPIE-Water)

- DPIE provided an overview of the Town Water Risk Reduction Program, which is exclusive to local water utilities (LWU). The program is a 2-year reform program with a dedicated team and resources with the objective to establish a new partnership approach to work with the sector and to design and implement long-term solutions to the key barriers LWUs face in managing risk to town water and sewerage services.

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- The scope of the project is to identify opportunities where risk can be significantly reduced by enabling LWUs to draw on the scale or skills in State Government entities and pilot these new support models to build a case for potential future change.
- The program will focus on improving the regulatory framework, reviewing skills shortages across the sector, encouraging greater collaboration between utilities, investigating alternative funding models and facilitation of greater State Government support.
- DPIE will host an online workshop on 2 August. For those LWUs interested in getting involved in the program, please email regional.town.water@dpie.nsw.gov.au

3.6 Levels of Service Refresh (L Castro/A Fraser) – Action MBG2104.05

- WaterNSW provided a recap on the Levels of Service (LOS) project and presented the 6 preferred options discussed and agreed to at the Cycle 2 LOS workshop held with Murrumbidgee CAG members in November 2019.
- From these workshops, WaterNSW developed a 20-Year Infrastructure Options Study (20YIOS) for the state's regulated river valleys to address customers service needs and to guide long term planning. The study explored customer-supported preferred schemes for further studies OR implementation.
- WaterNSW has now ceased work on the 20YIOS and DPIE has taken on this work in the form of the Regional Water Strategy (RWS). Findings from the 20YIOS have been passed on to DPIE for incorporation into the RWS, which will be released for public exhibition later this year.
- Customers questioned where Eucumbene Dam sits in WaterNSW's storage strategy, given it is a large storage which is not being used for irrigation. WaterNSW noted this is a Snowy Hydro asset and is quite complex as it has a power generation component. WaterNSW only explored options that we have control over (modifications to existing assets). The RWS would have a broader scope to expand investigation to other solutions.
- Customers stated the Murrumbidgee has not had the opportunity to participate in the RWS discussion to date and are concerned they will have no input prior to decisions being made. WaterNSW noted the RWS process in the Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys is in the very early stages however WaterNSW will pass on customer concerns to DPIE that no industry discussions have taken place and they would like to be involved.

3.7 IVT Paper Update (J Dickson)

- An online meeting was held with Murray and Murrumbidgee CAGs on 29 June 2021. The paper presented has been updated based on feedback at that meeting and will be released publicly in the next week.
- Customers voiced concerns that many people were unaware of the draft paper and questioned who has been targeted to receive the information on this. WaterNSW advised that the paper hasn't been formally released as yet, the draft was only sent to Murrumbidgee and Murray-Lower Darling CAG members for feedback prior to formal release. The paper only relates to those elements which WaterNSW is responsible for – triggers for opening and closing and our responsible actions – and is about how to operate under the current rules to better facilitate transfer of water between valleys.
- Formal communication on the release of the paper will be sent to all parties who have [subscribed to receive IVT notifications](#) from WaterNSW, Murray and Murrumbidgee CAGs and interested parties via a media release. Relevant information will be uploaded to the [Murrumbidgee IVT Account Status](#) page on WaterNSW's website.

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- Customers commented that this is a good initiative by WaterNSW to get input from CAGs and questioned the timeframe to provide submissions and if any changes will apply in the new calendar year. Taken on notice.

Action MBG2107.01: WaterNSW to advise closing date for submission on the Murrumbidgee IVT paper and clarify if any changes will apply in the new calendar year.

Responsibility: J Dickson.

4. Business Papers:

- Noted and taken as read.

5. General Business:

5.1 Feedback to NRAR on Presentation

- Customers voiced concerns with NRAR's response to customer feedback about negative media and felt they spoke down to CAG members, stating they have been aggressive in their responses and also in their written communications to water users. There is a dichotomy in their claim of collaboration to get water users doing the right thing – what they are saying today about assisting with compliance and what they are doing on ground are not the same. Comments noted. WaterNSW will pass on this feedback to NRAR.

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: Tuesday 26 October 2021

Meeting closed: 12.15pm

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Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 28 July 2021

Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
MBG2104.05	WaterNSW to present a refresh of Murrumbidgee options discussed and agreed to at the November 2019 Level of Service workshop at the next meeting.	A Fraser	Complete. Refer to agenda item 3.6

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
MBG2107.01	WaterNSW to advise closing date for submission on the Murrumbidgee IVT paper and clarify if any changes will apply in the new calendar year.	J Dickson	Complete. Submissions close on 23 August. Click here to read the IVT Issues and Options Paper.

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