

Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group - Minutes of Meeting



Location: Video Conference

Date: 22 July 2020

Time: 9.00am

Present: Brett Corish (Chair), Ian Saunders, Lindsay White, Matthew Miles, Tim Napier, Anub Nair, Michael Owen, Jane Humphries (observer), Fiona Smith, Anne-Maree Burke, Jonathan Dickson, Toni Hayes, Sonia Townsend, Enrico Proietti, Anne-Maree Burke.

The following staff attended for specific agenda items: A Fisher (2.2), D Swift-Hoadley (2.4), B Mayhew (3.1), C Braddock (3.2).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am.

1. Introduction:

1.1 Welcome and introductions

1.2 Apologies: David Coulton.

1.3 Confirmation of Agenda Items

- The annual election of Chairperson will be carried over to the next face-to-face meeting.

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, 18 March 2020:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on 18 March 2020 be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*T Napier/J Humphries
carried*

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- See action sheet attached.

2. Presentations/Consultation:

2.1 Regulatory Economics – Pricing Determination Engagement (J Dickson)

Rural Determination:

- As discussed at previous meetings, members supported WaterNSW's proposal of a 2-year determination, locking in WaterNSW revenues at 20/21 levels (noting inflation), deferral of Customer Juries and adjusting the 20-year rolling average and IPART cost shares.
- The only change to these proposed principles in the Final Draft submitted to IPART is the change from a 2-year determination to a 1-year determination. During preparations with IPART it became clear a 2-year deferral would not be supported.

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WAMC (Water Administration Ministerial Corporation) Determination:

- WaterNSW has heard broad consistency from customers on the key messages proposed around transparency (understanding what you are paying for across Agencies), cost reflectivity (paying a fair price reflective of the costs to deliver) and value for money (to provide least cost solutions).
- There is no change to these proposed principles in the Final Draft, which was submitted to IPART on 30 June 2020.
- NRAR and DPIE will make a joint submission to IPART, however there will be a single determination made for all Agencies.
- WaterNSW's submissions will be published as part of IPART's review process at www.ipart.nsw.gov.au
- Members questioned WaterNSW's role in educating water users in how the pricing submission process works, options of what different results/different determinations might mean etc as is very detailed. Moving forward into the next determination, WaterNSW will be diving into the detail with customers, as has been done in the past. We want customers to be involved as much as possible as the customer voice is important and strong and the best outcome for WaterNSW is to have a customer supported submission.
- Members noted that using interfaces such as the CAG are great and closest to getting broad customer exposure on the process. WaterNSW will continue to liaise with the CAG throughout the pricing determination process. The paused Customer Jury process, once restarted, will also go to this detail.
- Customers are encouraged to also write their own submissions to IPART.

2.2 Major Projects Update (A Fisher)

- As previously advised, in October 2019 the Prime Minister and NSW Premier announced the planning and delivery of three new or augmented dams in NSW (Wyangala Dam raising, and construction of new dams on the Mole River and Dungowan Creek). The projects have been identified as Critical State Significant Infrastructure (CSSI) projects in the *Water Supply (Critical Needs) Act 2019*.
- The projects are focussed around drought resilience to provide significant improvement in water security and reliability, flood mitigation improvements downstream of Wyangala Dam and potential benefits to the Barwon-Darling system from Mole River Dam.
- Delivery timelines, project delivery models, current status, program challenges, key delivery milestones and community and stakeholder engagement presented and discussed.
- The Mole River Dam delivery model is a commitment for funding a final business case only. There will be more detailed consultation with CAGs and community groups as the projects progress.
- The project team is driving to have the final business case for Mole River Dam developed by mid-2021. We have been speaking with potentially impacted landholders and will continue to engage with them as the project progresses.
- Members noted that the environmental benefits to the Barwon-Darling system are yet to be proven. WaterNSW advised that we are not claiming benefits, but we are investigating how it might work for the whole system. The project is for a strategic business case and we are working with Fisheries and EES to get input in the development.

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- Members questioned where Aboriginal community engagement is up to. WaterNSW advised this has been occurring for some time, with a call out to registered parties to participate. Some have come in late, however we will continue to engage throughout the process. Field walks are about to commence, and regular meetings are being held with relevant parties.

Western Weirs Program (A Fisher)

- The NSW Government has committed to funding the development of a strategic business case to look at holistic management and operation of the weirs in the Barwon-Darling unregulated and Lower Darling regulated systems to support remote community water supplies and environmental and other benefits.
- The program has been identified as a CSSI Project (per previous agenda item) and is in the very early stages. Current status and key project delivery milestones presented and discussed.
- Members stated that the history of the Barwon-Darling system shows there were a number of natural rock reefs that were dynamited to allow boats to travel down the river and questioned if these will be reinstated to take the river back to its natural state. WaterNSW advised that the project is more about trying to strike the right balance for town water supply, fishways, environmental water etc however will take comments on board to investigate.
- Members commented there are challenges with doing a lot of work in parallel. WaterNSW advised that the Western Weirs program is not a fast-tracked delivery program, is only for a strategic business case. A lot of investigation is required, and we will continue to engage with key stakeholders for input to get it right. Still a long way to go for Western Weirs.

2.3 CAG/ROSCCo Update (J Dickson)

- During the last CAG round, members questioned the background of the ROSCCOs and why WaterNSW was holding 2 meetings when members previously gained the information they valued in the one meeting.
- Recent Government reports indicated that finding information on operational water issues is not easy for many community members. In response, WaterNSW has adapted the drought format of ROSCCOs as a means of reaching a wider audience, including local irrigators, large employers and water related businesses.
- WaterNSW surveyed ROSCCo attendees in recent meetings for feedback. There was broad acceptance that the ROSCCo is a useful forum to communicate river operations and education, incorporating broader community participation.
- WaterNSW has agreed that where possible, ROSCCo meetings will follow immediately after a CAG, however there will be times when they will not align due to operational requirements. When not aligned, a water operations update will be provided at the CAG.
- Members supportive of the ROSCCo format including a wider stakeholder base and happy with current format of ROSCCo following CAG.
- Members value the importance of the ROSCCo and stated more general awareness in the community education is important. The ROSCCo is a good opportunity to engage with more people however need to ensure the importance of the CAG is not undervalued and the role it plays in terms of water delivery.

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

Metering update:

- The Water Renewal Taskforce was disbanded on 30 June 2020 with WaterNSW overseeing the operational implementation of the reform.
- Irrigation Australia has a list of certified meter installers on its website www.irrigationaustralia.com.au/ and WaterNSW has developed a DQP portal for Duly Qualified Persons to enter validation certification.
- There is a list of compatible data logging and telemetry devices (LIDs) and solutions on DPIE's website at <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/metering/telemetry/list-of-compatible-data-logging-and-telemetry-devices-and-solutions>. WaterNSW's DAS (data acquisition service) is a cloud-based system to securely collect and store water usage data.
- WaterNSW advised that there has been a vendor delay with LIDs. There are currently 3 on the approved list which will be available by the vendor. DQPs will be able to order through the DQP portal from mid-July. It is estimated there will be 1200 sites requiring this for 1 December.
- New reporting and recording obligations are being introduced and updated work approval and licence conditions are being mailed out (refer agenda item 2.6).
- Customers should be aware that start dates for metering compliance still apply. Existing licence and approval conditions apply until the new dates come into effect.
- To be compliant, customers need to be aware of their compliance dates, understand their approval and obligation, engage a DQP to discuss options and lodge relevant certificates and understand their recording and reporting obligations.
- Members noted MACE's withdrawal from seeking pattern approval for its meters and highlighted concerns that the industry may not have the capacity to supply alternatives in the required timeframes. WaterNSW and DPIE are aware of this and the challenge it creates for customers. DQPs can provide assistance with a pathway to compliance. At this point in time there are no plans to alter the current due dates.
- Members highlighted the potential for mass non-compliance in the northern basin due to the number of MACE meters in the area, with many not able to meet certification requirements as serial numbers are not available.
- Members also stated that getting sign off from DQPs is proving difficult, with limited availability of DQPs in the area and those already being heavily booked (service QLD as well). Cross-border differences also make the process more complex.
- WaterNSW will share members feedback with relevant agencies and customers are also encouraged to continue to raise/highlight concerns with DPIE as well.

2.5 Fixed Fee Rebate update (E Proietti)

- The NSW Government has confirmed the fixed fee rebate will again be applied to WaterNSW invoices for approved users. WaterNSW continues to advocate for further rebates to assist those with no access to water.
- The rebate will be applied quarterly to bills for 2020/21, up to \$1000 per quarter for regulated, and on the annual bill for those customers applicable for unregulated and groundwater. Customers do not need to do anything in order to receive the rebate.
- For more information go to www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/droughthub

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2.6 WSP Conditions Notice (J Dickson)

- Conditions notifications are being prepared with DPIE to send notifications over the next few months (timeline presented).
- Formal notification is the trigger for the additional conditions to come into effect.

3. Assets:

3.1 Asset Maintenance Update (B Mayhew)

- Asset performance and maintenance in the Border Rivers presented and discussed, including routine preventative and corrective maintenance delivery.
- Small flow regulator replacement at Pindari Dam is now ready for install, waiting contractor availability.

3.2 Rural Pricing Submissions: FY22 & FY23-26 Capital Plans (C Braddock)

- As discussed at agenda item 2.1, IPART has indicated that a 1-year deferral is required, so there will be a 1-year Pricing Submission for FY22 (due 30 June 2020) followed by a 4-year Pricing Submission for FY23-26 (due 30 June 2021).
- The capital budget for the Border Rivers FY22 Pricing Submission will be increased to include renewals and replacement (\$0.2M/pa) given there are multiple assets requiring renewal activities (eg valve refurbishments).

4. Business Papers:

- Noted and taken as read.

5. General Business:

5.1 Video Conference format

- Members were happy to see additional WaterNSW staff attend the CAG via the video conferencing platform.
- Members noted that consultation during COVID-19 has been difficult, with some people indicating they are not being properly consulted. Some people don't adapt to change as well, so something for WaterNSW to be mindful of going forward. WaterNSW is aware that the platform is not for everyone however is a balancing act with getting the right level of engagement and doing the engagement. We appreciate the sentiment and we will continue to monitor and review processes along the way.

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: Wednesday 11 November 2020

Meeting closed: 10.45am

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Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 22 July 2020

Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
	Nil new actions.		

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