

Lachlan Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting



Location: Video Conference

Date: 16 March 2022

Time: 9.00am

Present: Ed Fagan (Chair), Michael Payten, Tim Bell, Gordon Turner, Nick Turner, Mary Ewing, Tom Green, Gavin Rhodes, Joanne Lenehan, Damian McRae (observer), David Stockler, Jonathan Dickson, Ashley Webb, Ajantha Prathab, Shaun Mills, Paul McManus, Ben Arabin, Genine Somers (DPE), Zoe Williams (NRAR), Enrico Proietti, Sonia Townsend and Toni Hayes.

The following attended for specific agenda items: Brian Mayhew, Lindy Zaw, Abraham Vedamonickam, Hank Hochfaerber, Russell Cocks, David Swift-Hoadley, Jess Douglas, Alastair McKenzie-McHarg, Hannah Grogan, Kaia Hodge, Ryan Lynn, Irene Zinger, Mark Hamstead, Andrew Richardson.

Meeting Opened: 9.00am.

1. Introduction and Acknowledgement of Country:

1.1 Welcome and introductions:

1.2 Apologies: Jock Coupland, Andrew Stalley, Bruce Campbell.

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 Meeting, 19 October 2021:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [19 October 2021](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*Ed Fagan/Gordon Turner
carried*

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- See action sheet attached.

2. Assets:

2.1 Asset Maintenance update (B Mayhew)

- Asset performance and maintenance in the Lachlan valley presented and discussed, including routine preventative and corrective maintenance delivery at Wyangala and Carcoar dams, Jemalong Weir, Lake Cargelligo, Lake Brewster, Willandra Creek Regulator and Woolshed Weir.
- WaterNSW completed 360 preventative maintenance work orders and 102 corrective maintenance works orders from December to February.
- Customers questioned if seepage at Lake Cargelligo has worsened with current inflows and if there is any information on when a decision will be made to proceed with the project. WaterNSW advised that it has been successful at reducing seepage through the embankment however is not a long-term solution. A preferred contractor has been selected and final negotiations are taking place. The final cost is to be determined and a Final Business Case is expected in the near future.
- Customers questioned if Gonowlia Weir is still being maintained. Taken on notice, to be discussed out of session.

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Action LAC2203.01: WaterNSW to contact Joanne Lenehan out of session to discuss Gonowlia Weir.

Responsibility: B Mayhew

- Customers questioned if WaterNSW has identified any damage to infrastructure due to recent flooding that will need maintenance. WaterNSW there is no noticeable damage to any infrastructure. Damage is usually to drainage and access roads that need cleaning up.

3. Water System Operations:

3.1 Operations update (A Prathab)

- WaterNSW presented an update on recent rainfall, climate outlook, Wyangala Dam operations, storage status at Wyangala dam, Lake Cargelligo and Lake Brewster, water availability, water account summary, flood operations, S&D replenishment and planned outages.
- An airspace reference panel was established in April 2021, with 15 meetings held to date. Panel input guides Wyangala Dam airspace targets and consultation has provided WaterNSW with local perspective into balancing the dual priorities of maximising water security while providing flood mitigation where possible.
- Customers questioned how WaterNSW will estimate inflows to maintain the dam at 98%. WaterNSW advised that after the last reference panel meeting, they are working on a 7-day rainfall forecast and will draw down if large inflows expected.
- Storage spill and reset discussed. WaterNSW discussed the DPE announcement of 8 March 2022 indicating that there will be a spill and account reset soon after 21 March 2022 (https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/500265/WAS-Lachlan-20220308.pdf).
- Customers questioned what happens with orders submitted between now and when the storage resets – do they come off accounts before the reset? WaterNSW advised that this is the first reset since November and we will work with customers to assist where we can.
- Unaware of the DPE announcement, customers raised concerns that information of the release is new, and should be publicly announced, rather than a small few gaining benefit.
- WaterNSW advised that DPE made a public announcement on 8 March 2022 regarding the reset. Customers questioned if the reset on 21 March 2022 is definite. WaterNSW referred to the DPE announcement noting the specific wording says “likely there will be a reset after 21 March” – it does not explicitly say that it will definitely happen.
- Additional operational information will be presented at the Lachlan ROSCCo, to be held following the CAG meeting. Please visit the [ROSCCo page](#) on WaterNSW's website for more information.

4. Presentations/Consultation:

4.1 Water Reform Implementation Plan (WRIP) update

Non-Urban Metering Reform update – WaterNSW (R Cocks)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the non-urban metering reforms, including a recap on the roll out dates, metering requirements for surface, groundwater and at-risk groundwater sources and what water users need to do to get meter ready.
- Water users **are strongly encouraged to check the mandatory conditions** on work approvals as they supersede the requirements in the regulations. Use the online [Metering Guidance Tool](#) to see if and how the rules apply to you.
- Customers can choose to **make an authorised work inactive** to be exempt from the metering rules. Customers must complete the [application form](#) and pay an administration fee. Once inactive, customers will not be able to use their work to take any water, including basic landholder rights. Unregulated and groundwater customers will be billed on a one-part tariff (full entitlement charge).

To **make a work active again**, customers will need to submit a new application and provide evidence that the work adheres to the metering regulations, **noting that works in 'at-risk' water sources may not be re-approved**.

- **All works captured by the metering rules** will need to be fitted with a pattern-approved meter by the regional rollout date. It may be possible to keep an existing meter if it was installed before 1 April 2019. For more information, please refer to the DPE leaflet [Non-Urban Water Metering in NSW: what water users need to know](#).
- Irrigation Australia has a full list of AS4747 pattern-approved meters on its website at <https://www.irrigationaustralia.com.au/certification/as4747-pattern-approved-meters> as well as a list of DQPs in NSW <https://www.irrigationaustralia.com.au/certification/certified-meter-installer-validator>
- If it is **past your rollout date** and you have not yet started the process, it is vital you begin immediately. If you have taken **some action** but are still not yet compliant, you must keep records of all communication with your DQP and equipment providers.
- All licensed water users in **at-risk groundwater sources** must meter all usage regardless of the size of your bore. There is a potential regulation change that would allow water users to make a work inactive (exempt from rules) but still take water for BLR. For more information, please refer to the [At-risk Groundwater Sources](#) fact sheet.
- Water users who connect to telemetry (mandatory and voluntary) will receive a **telemetry rebate** of \$975 which is credited against the telemetry fee that is applied to your bill over the next 4 years (the IPART annual telemetry charge is \$182-\$226 per year). This does not apply to water users with Government-owned meters.
- Customers questioned why it takes 4 years to get the total telemetry rebate. WaterNSW advised that the yearly telemetry fee is between \$182-\$226, so it is credited off the customers' bill when it is charged until the credit is used up, which is anticipated to be four plus years.
- Customers questioned if there is a secondary form that is required to be submitted for grandfathering of meters as there is confusion on what paperwork is required. Taken on notice.

Action LAC2203.02: WaterNSW to clarify paperwork/forms required for grandfathering of meters.

Responsibility: R Cocks

- Recording and reporting requirements presented and discussed.
- WaterNSW will continue to manage the compliance and ongoing maintenance of government-owned meters, including ensuring compliance by the relevant rollout dates. There is an option to transition meters to private ownership if landholders wish to do so. For more information on opting out, please visit <https://comms.watersw.com.au/GOM-optout>
- WaterNSW is developing a process for customers to inform us if the work installed is smaller than what is specified on your work approval, without the cost of amending the approval (subject to regulatory approval). To see what is listed on your work approval, visit the [NSW Water Register](#).
- **Faulty metering equipment** must be reported within 24 hours by completing the online s91i form at www.watersw.com.au/s91i
- There are a number of metering resources available on WaterNSW and DPE's websites to help customers identify their metering requirements to ensure they are meter ready. Please visit www.watersw.com.au/metering and <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/nsw-non-urban-water-metering>.
- Customers stated that for **existing metering conditions applying over the threshold**, it is important this is highlighted to customers and valleys this applies to as many people are missing the detail. This also applies to customers **inactivating in at-risk water sources** – it needs to be highlighted that there is a risk they may not be able to reactivate or gain a new approval. Noted.

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Non-Urban Metering Reform update – DPE (J Douglas)

- There are currently 15 compliant meters available, 5 compatible telemetry devices and over 160 DQPs across NSW (refer <https://www.irrigationaustralia.com.au/>).
- There are five exemptions that may be applied to non-urban water metering – works solely used to take water under BLR; works that have been made inactive; works that cannot physically comply with the non-urban metering rules; works that are not nominated against an access licence; and small, low-risk works used solely to take water under a licensed S&D access licence. Customers should use the online [NSW Metering Guidance Tool](#) to see if exemptions apply to them.
- The Minister has granted a **temporary exemption (233)** from the non-urban metering rules for works that are required to connect to telemetry but cannot because they are in a site that does not receive IOT network coverage (note this is not the mobile network). For more information, please visit <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/nsw-non-urban-water-metering/what-water-users-need-to-know/telemetry-coverage-exemption>
- DPE has developed a Metering and Measurement virtual marketplace tool which connects water users, meter installers and suppliers and includes non-urban and floodplain harvesting (to go live in May). Customers questioned if issues around security of data have been looked at. DPE stated that work has been done from feedback provided to ensure data is protected and is secure. Registration has been increased to ensure water users are aware of what information they are providing to whom and that they are aware how data provided would be used.
- **Floodplain Harvesting** regulatory amendments were made in December 2021 however were subsequently disallowed on 24 February 2022. The disallowance means that implementation dates for floodplain harvesting remain uncertain. The department remains committed to the regulation of floodplain harvesting to legal limits set out in NSW water sharing plans and the Basin Plan. For enquiries, please email floodplain.harvesting@dpie.nsw.gov.au
- Customers questioned if there is any clarity around the exemption relating to use of tail water return. DPE advised that all regulations were disallowed as a package. DPE is now looking at how they can bring FPH into effect, which is in parallel to tail water return. Options without regulation are more complex, however it is being considered.

4.2 NRAR Compliance update

Regulatory Priorities 2021-22 (I Zinger)

- A principal objective of NRAR is to ensure effective, efficient, transparent and accountable compliance and enforcement measures to support natural resources management legislation. NRAR's regulatory priorities are published to show how and where efforts are focussed to build and maintain public confidence in water management in NSW.
- Enduring and annual priorities presented and discussed, including unauthorised flood works program. There will be a state-wide focus on metering and overdrawn accounts and targeted focus on irrigated agriculture and extraction limits in at-risk water sources in some valleys.
- Bore audits are scheduled to begin in April for the Lachlan, Lower Murrumbidgee and Namoi valleys and will include Hillston, Forbes, Hay, Coleambally, Tamworth, Gunnedah and Narrabri. Work approval holders in these areas have been contacted by mail with a reminder to check the conditions of their work approvals, ensure their bore is fitted with an accurate meter to record water take.
- To view NRAR's Regulatory Priorities 2021-22, please visit https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/387902/nrar-regulatory-priorities-2021-22.pdf

Metering Compliance (R Lynn)

- NRAR presented statistics on tranche 1 (Dec 2020) compliance rates and its compliance approach for tranche 2 (Dec 2021) and tranche 3 (Dec 2022) for affected works under the non-urban water metering framework, including state-wide and Lachlan comparisons. Compliance is reported on active works that are in scope, within the metering threshold for the tranche.
- Tranche 1 compliance in the Lachlan has increased to 77% (69% state-wide)
- NRAR will visit high volume water users in tranche 2 in early 2022. Each case will be considered on its own merit. There is an expectation that all water users have at least entered into a formal arrangement with a meter installer before their deadline. Alternative pathways will be recognised.
- Tranche 3 compliance involves WaterNSW, DPE Water and NRAR working to ensure widespread awareness with the new rules. Communication channels including advertising, social media and hosting information events will be part of this.
- NRAR has developed an e-tool< NRAR Assist, to help customers find answers to common compliance questions. Please visit nrar.nsw.gov.au/nrar-assist
- Customers questioned where the responsibility lies for irrigation properties that are leased out – is it the landowner or the tenant? NRAR advised that the accountable party for installation and operation is the person who holds the water supply approval. If it is a licensing matter, the responsibility is with the licence holder. Water users should become very familiar with their work approvals and terms and conditions.
- Customers questioned the way NRAR presented the statistics. By saying only 13% of irrigators are compliant implies 87% are crooks. Irrigators in the Lachlan have always been metered, not just 13% of them. The messaging comes across as though only a small proportion have meters, when this is not the case. Comments noted. NRAR stated that it is reported as 13% of “active pumps” – this narrative has been consistent. Will provide more narrative in future so the message is not misleading.
- Lachlan Valley Water advised that there have been requests from customers from the metering field days for hard copies of presentations to be made available as there is a lot of details to get across and would be useful to have going forward. Taken on notice.

Action LAC2203.03: WaterNSW to provide hard copies to Lachlan Valley Water of presentations given at Lachlan valley field days.

Responsibility: M Brooks/D Swift Hoadley

- Customers questioned what the framework will be to determine how successful the Metering Reform program has been - what are the measurable outcomes and how are savings going to be calculated? WaterNSW advised the initiative was not a pay-back for water saved, the driver was to lift overall compliance and measurement across the state. Accurate metering helps for better accounting, planning and measurement of take.
- Customers questioned how the 'savings' will be quantified, from start to finish. DPE stated that from a first principles perspective, if the original method is inaccurate there is no base line for comparison. The reforms ensure irrigators are accountable and that take is accurate.
- DPE noted that not all benefits will be measurable in terms of quantum of water. For water users, the reforms give certainty that data is accurate and water take is fair. Customer comments and sentiment is accepted however the reforms are not a water saving initiative but about confidence of accurate water take.
- Customers requested further data be supplied at the next meeting. WaterNSW/DPE agreed to consider out of session what might be relevant in responding to this sentiment.

Action LAC2203.04: WaterNSW and DPE to discuss out of session what information may be relevant to share with the CAG regarding the reasoning behind the non-urban metering reforms.

Responsibility: D Stockler/K Hodge

4.3 Regional Water Strategies update (M Simons)

- DPE is preparing 12 Regional Water Strategies across NSW to identify current and future regional water security challenges with priorities and actions for town and communities, industry, Aboriginal people and the environment. Approach to developing the Lachlan Regional Water Strategy presented and discussed.
- DPE has heavily invested in ground-breaking climate science, which underpins the strategies. Data and graphs on what the new climate data is showing presented.
- Feedback from public consultation on the Lachlan Region Draft Regional Water Strategy presented and discussed.
- The exhibition period will take place mid-2022 with a final strategy to be released end-2022. Engagement sessions are yet to be confirmed.
- Customers noted that during the consultation period DPE stated there was not a lot of funding available for the priorities and questioned if there is more information on how the RWS will affect the provision of Government funding for projects. DPE noted there is also a State Water Strategy in place. Each strategy will go to Cabinet with a plan. Some projects will be funded when triggers are met however all are subject to funding and business case processes through Water Infrastructure NSW.
- Customers questioned the timeframe for review and updates and how the long-listed and short-listed options will be determined with existing commitments that were included in the draft. DPE advised that a monitoring and evaluation program is being developed with the intent to review every 5 years.

4.4 Cold Water Pollution update (A Richardson)

- WaterNSW is required to address cold water pollution (CWP) under some work approvals subject to funding being provided. WaterNSW high priority CWP sites that require mitigation options funding are Copeton, Keepit, Wyangala and Blowering dams.
- WaterNSW sought funding for a CWP mitigation options study for works to improve temperature monitoring in its rural pricing submission to IPART. Funding was approved for 3 high priority sites (Copeton, Blowering and Keepit) and 3 temperature monitoring sites (Toonumbar, Lostock and Carcoar).
- The CWP mitigation options studies on the three dams will commence March 2022 through to June 2023 with expected outcomes being a robust assessment process, identification of the best CWP solution with the greatest environmental benefit at least whole-life cost and a benchmark to apply to lower priority dams. The CWP temperature monitoring works will occur in FY22-FY24.
- The current Wyangala Dam structure has been considered and information has been passed on to the Water Infrastructure NSW team working on the business case. More work needs to be done on what the work might entail and assess benefits.
- Customers asked WaterNSW to clarify what success looks like in terms of CWP. WaterNSW advised there are guidelines that we are required to meet however it is a trade-off with algae in the storage.

4.5 Regulatory Economics – Pricing Determination Engagement update (J Dickson)

Customer Conversations:

- Feedback from the Kitchen Table Kit provided insights that will inform future engagement, with key themes of pricing (including water availability, postage stamp pricing, tariff structure, water accounting), regulatory complexity and licensing (minimum invoice amounts, fees for sleeper licences).

- Future engagement is intended to align with the IPART Engagement Framework and themes received will be used in the next phase. Starting engagement earlier than in the past remains a focus of WaterNSW.
- Customers reiterated they still want to look at the 80:20 scenario in the Lachlan valley and want to open dialogue with WaterNSW. Any assistance WaterNSW can provide will be greatly appreciated. WaterNSW advised the regulatory team is aware of this request and we will pass on to the team again to pursue.
- Lachlan Valley Water will send through calculations to WaterNSW for pricing team to confirm, noting WaterNSW can only comment on the WaterNSW component of WAMC.

Action LAC2203.05: Lachlan Valley Water to send tariff structure calculations to WaterNSW for the pricing team to confirm.

Responsibility: M Ewing

Increasing Transparency:

- Based on customer feedback, WaterNSW is improving the description and breakdown of charges on your bill. Pass-through charges collected by WaterNSW on behalf of MDBA and DBBRC are now listed separately as "other pass-through charges". This change does not impact the overall fees and charges levied against a water licence, only separated to improve transparency. All pass-through charges are determined by IPART.

ACCC Consultation:

- The nine MDB valleys and rural customers in the Fish River Water Supply (FRWS) scheme have been regulated by IPART under the Water Charge (Infrastructure) Rules 2010 (WCIR). The Coastal valleys and urban FRWS customers are regulated by IPART under the IPART Act.
- Following the ACCC review of the WCIR, the Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources accepted the ACCC's advice to return the regulation of bulk water infrastructure charges back to the basin states, which resulted in several amendments to the WCIR in 2020.
- Following these changes, WaterNSW has notified the ACCC that it has been made aware of a matter that may result in WaterNSW ceasing to be subject to Commonwealth legislation. If approved, this would allow IPART to regulate all of WaterNSW's water services under the IPART Act. If not approved, regulation of the MDB valleys will revert to the ACCC for the 2025 Determination.
- Details of the review can be found at <https://www.accc.gov.au/regulated-infrastructure/water/water-projects/waternsw-decisions-under-part-6-of-the-water-charge-rules-2010/waternsw-ceasing-to-be-a-part-6-operator-consultation>

4.6 CAG Term of Office (S Townsend)

- WaterNSW made specific mention and thanks to all current members and alternates who have contributed to CAGs over the current term, noting the efforts and service of the Chair. We do appreciate the time and effort made by many to attend and provide feedback on the services provided by WaterNSW.
- The current term of office for WaterNSW CAGs expires on 30 June 2022, with a new term commencing 1 July 2022. Letters have been sent to your nominating organisations inviting nominations for the 2022-25 term.
- If you are considering renominating as a member of the CAG, please contact your nominating organisation to complete your nomination. Nominations close on 14 April 2022.

4.7 WAVE update (J Dickson)

WAVE – Pilot Coming Soon:

- WaterNSW continues to renew core systems to improve and streamline the way customers transact. A pilot for our new customer portal will launch soon to test functionality with new customers, prior to being extended to existing customers.
- The customer portal will provide customers with choices on how they transact with WaterNSW. New functionality will enable customers to access our services at anytime from anywhere, with the opportunity to manage water needs in one place. The portal will be progressively launched throughout 2022, with the first stage being rolled out in March allowing customers to submit new basic landholder rights (BLR) bore applications via the portal.
- Additional functionality being introduced over the next 12 months includes WAL applications, ordering and trading water, viewing water account balances, meter reads, other licensing application types and paying your WaterNSW bills.
- For more information, please visit <https://www.watersw.com.au/customerportal>

4.8 What's New (J Dickson)

Controlled Allocation Order Update

- A new Controlled Allocation Order has been made under section 65 of the WMA 2000, with registrations of interest open from 18 March–18 April 2022.
- A controlled allocation provides a right to acquire a water access licence for a specified water source by auction, tender or other mean specified in an order published in the Government Gazette.
- For more information, or to register your interest, please visit <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/controlled>

5. Business Papers:

- Customers requested WaterNSW add an additional column in the OPEX report so actual expenditure can be tracked against budget expenditure. WaterNSW will take on notice for consideration, however advised there is a challenge with this in relation to assets in that works can change or be delayed due to unforeseen issues (ie flood operations not budgeted for or other delays with asset work) making reports hard to understand. Reports were previously provided in this vein and creating confusion and significant perceived budget underspend in a year, while Determination funding over the four-year period was still in line.
- Noted and taken as read.

6. General Business:

6.1 Lake Cargelligo Embankment Upgrade (video for information)

- For your information, WaterNSW has released a community engagement video for the Lake Cargelligo Embankment Upgrade - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpWJU8OyEBk>

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: 13 July 2022

Meeting closed: 12.15pm

Lachlan Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 16 March 2022

Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
LAC2107.05	NRAR and WaterNSW to discuss and provide clarity on where water order activity sits in relation to legislation and how users in the Lachlan should work with the water order process.	S Sritharan / G White	System Operations has prepared a draft operational proposal to put forward to DPE and NRAR for approval. Awaiting DPE comment.

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
LAC2203.01	WaterNSW to contact Joanne Lenehan out of session to discuss Gonowlia Weir.	B Mayhew	Complete. WaterNSW had removed the broken board and reinstated the panels as needed last year. The only ongoing issue we have with Gonowlia Weir is the water/flow gets too high/fast and puts too much pressure on the boards to make changes.
LAC2203.02	WaterNSW to clarify paperwork/forms required for grandfathering of meters.	R Cocks	Complete. A DQP is required to lodge the appropriate forms via the DQP Portal.
LAC2203.03	WaterNSW to provide hard copies to Lachlan Valley Water of presentations given at Lachlan valley field days.	M Brooks/D Swift-Hoadley	
LAC2203.04	WaterNSW and DPE to discuss out of session what information may be relevant to share with the CAG regarding the reasoning behind the non-urban metering reforms.	D Stockler/K Hodge	Complete. See attached from Kaia Hodge, DPE, regarding the purpose of the non-urban metering reforms.
LAC2203.05	Lachlan Valley Water to send tariff structure calculations to WaterNSW for the pricing team to confirm.	M Ewing	

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Metering is in the interests of all rural industries and the broader community

Meters required to manage increasing risk to water sources across NSW

- Increasing frequency and severity of drought across all regions - increasing demand, reducing access
- Salinity in coastal systems, overallocation and depletion of groundwater
- Population growth, subdivision and regional industry creates demand and changes who has access to water
- Managing interaction between surface and groundwater take

Protects water users' social licence to operate

- Builds community confidence in agriculture
- Re establish trust in major irrigators, and upstream users
- Protect trust between neighbours, and amongst industry types
- Provide evidence of actual take vs normal/unusual climate and flow cycles
- Evidence that actual take is within legal and sustainable limits for each valley

Better data, modelling and water planning

- Less reliance on estimates and assumptions for water planning and sharing
- Improve efficiency of use and allocation
- Provides options to actively manage flows, volumes and salinity in real time at local and regional level

Effective compliance

- Accurate and timely data enables fair, well targeted and efficient enforcement
- Accounting for all take will reduce the adverse impact of available water determinations
- Enables allegations of illegal take to be assessed at first point of contact
- Faster and more effective action can be taken against water theft with stronger evidence