

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group - Minutes of Meeting



Location: WaterNSW, Blueridge Business Park, DUBBO

Date: 31 October 2019

Time: 9.00am

Present: Ian Cole (Chair), Bruce Coward, David Miller, Tim Hosking, Justin McClure, Bill Murray, Raju Ranjit, Jonathan Dickson, Dan Berry, Emma Oates and Toni Hayes (minutes).

A Langdon attended for agenda items 1.0-2.3.

A Scott, T Fulford and P Saha attended via Skype for agenda items 2.1-2.3.

Meeting Opened: 9.15am.

1. Welcome and introductions

1.1 Apologies

- Jeff Sowiak, Reece Wilson, Greg Hill, Greg Ingham, Ross Earl, Peter Brown.

1.2 Confirmation of Agenda Items

- Nil additional items tabled.

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, 4 July 2019:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on 4 July 2019 be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*J McClure/B Coward
carried*

1.5 Actions arising from minutes

- See action sheet attached.

2. Water Delivery:

2.1 Water System Operations Report (A Scott)

- WaterNSW presented the Annual Operations Plan for the Barwon-Darling which includes water availability, current drought conditions, Barwon-Darling inflows, northern valleys inflows and allocations, resource assessment in the northern regulated valleys and northern valleys storage status and breakdown as well as inflow scenarios and management outcomes. The plan is publicly available on WaterNSW's website at www.waternsw.com.au/customer-service/news/operations.
- The Barwon-Darling is currently in stage 4 (critical drought) of the extreme events stages policy.
- Members suggested adding information on usage to the northern valleys inflows/allocation chart as would be valuable to customers and would be more indicative for the general public (as use could be less than what is allocated). WaterNSW Operations team noted that usage vs allocation is blurred when carryover is in the equation.

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- Members questioned whether planned environmental/planned environmental-drought includes the suspended water in the Macquarie (where is the translucent water that was not put into drought reserves shown?).

Action BD1910.01: WaterNSW to clarify whether the translucent water that was not put into drought reserves is included in the Northern Valleys Storages breakdown chart on page 8 of the Annual Operations Plan.

Responsibility: D Berry

- Members noted the report states there are no emergency drought response projects being undertaken by WaterNSW in the Barwon-Darling region and queried if this will change with the Western Weirs Project. WaterNSW advised the Western Weirs Project is a long-term solution for the Barwon-Darling system, not specifically a drought project. Discussed.
- Members questioned what protections are in place in upstream valleys that supply 97% of water to the Barwon-Darling to ensure the water enters the system. WaterNSW advised that there is a decision matrix used to protect the flows. Each flow is assessed and if there are local critical needs under stress then protections are in place to issue a s324 order. There is a clear decision-making process and WaterNSW works very closely with affected communities.
- A s324 order was gazetted 30 October 2019. The order requires farmers upstream of Mungindi to use the domestic component of their stock and domestic and BLR water in line with existing town water restrictions. To read the order, visit <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/allocations-availability/temporary-water-restrictions>
- Water quality update provided by T Fulford. There are no red alerts in storages at the moment, some on amber. Currently the system is stable from an algae point of view.
- EC levels at Wilcannia discussed. Members requested data on EC levels for the past 18-24 months. Monthly EC data is collected through the State Water Monitoring Program (SWAMP) run by WaterNSW.

Action BD1910.02: WaterNSW to provide data on monthly EC levels at Wilcannia for the past 18-24 months.

Responsibility: T Fulford

2.2 Operational Drought Update (A Langdon)

- Overview of current drought situation across NSW regulated river valleys presented and discussed, including system inflows and water allocations, available water in accounts and drought contingency measures.
- Members noted that some of the BOM charts appear to be incorrect as major events are missed in the west (2 cyclones) and asked if Matthew Coulton from the BOM could attend a meeting to explain the BOM graphs/data? WaterNSW advised that we are working closely with the BOM and other agencies to minimise duplication of information.

Action BD1910.03: WaterNSW to liaise with Matthew Coulton (BOM) for a forecast to be presented at the next CAG meeting.

Responsibility: D Berry

- DPI Fisheries is looking at installing aerators in some weir pools and holes for fish refuge, currently prioritising for critical valleys. A lot of work has been done in the Namoi and Peel and will work through other valleys by criticality (refer also item 4.1).
- Data presented on previous drought of record inflows in comparison to last 24-month inflows for WaterNSW northern storages. The data shows we are now experiencing the new drought of record.
- Macquarie system scenarios if there was no Burrendong Dam presented and discussed.

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- Further information on the drought is available on WaterNSW's website at www.waternsw.com.au/supply/drought-information

2.3 Water Insights Portal update (A Langdon)

- Six valleys are currently live (Murrumbidgee, Macquarie, Lower Namoi, Peel, Gwydir and Border Rivers). Remaining valleys still progressing.
- Feedback was sought from customers on current source and availability of information. WaterNSW will use customer feedback to further develop the portal and expand to unregulated and groundwater systems.

3. Presentations/Consultation

3.1 Regulatory Economics (J Dickson)

Rural Valleys Determination:

- WaterNSW has requested a delay of one year to the submission of the Rural Pricing Determination due to the ongoing drought conditions. We believe this is in the best interests of our customers and anticipate hearing from IPART in the near future.
- WaterNSW will undertake a review in January 2020 to determine the appropriate start of engagement and will keep customers informed of the process.

Customer Juries:

- As previously advised, WaterNSW has engaged the services of newDemocracy to undertake consultation with customers to inform our submission to IPART on Rural and WAMC pricing.
- The plan is to bring representative samples of our customer base together as juries of 44 people meeting across three locations, comprising 5 concurrent weekend meetings and two joint meetings (132 jury members) to gain consensus. The CAG will be invited to directly participate in two of these meetings in addition to CAG Chairs being required at the two joint meetings.
- Recruitment and representation discussed. Customers believe the former-CSCs (and now CAGs) have been successful with engaging with customer groups in the past and believe the representation is already there. Concerns that jury representatives will be uninformed and not representative of water users.
- The Barwon-Darling CAG does not support the Customer Jury process.

WAMC (Water Administration Ministerial Corporation) Determination:

- The WAMC determination ends 30 June 2021, with a new determination to be in place from 1 July 2021. The current 2016 determination did not contemplate some of the former Department of Industry (Water) functions being transferred to WaterNSW and subsequently NRAR.
- WaterNSW is working with NRAR and DPIE-W to ensure new charging arrangements lead to increased transparency and improved cost reflectivity.
- Current charges framework, funding methodology, short comings and proposed principles for the future were presented and discussed.
- Input was sought from customers on the principles WaterNSW is following.

3.2 Water Reform Implementation Plan (WRIP) – metering update (E Oates)

- The Government has extended the deadlines for meters to be compliant under the NSW Government's *Water Reform Implementation Plan*. Revised dates can be found at <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water-reform/metering-framework/overview-of-the-non-urban-water-metering-framework#latest-updates>

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- In due course, the Government will release an initial list of compatible telemetry devices under the Telemetry Framework. The Government is planning to launch the new telemetry system and engage with customers by 31 March 2020.
- The anticipated process for meter transfer was discussed including the option to retain/remove; agree work required to meet compliance; telemetry/data logger options. A key principle of the scheme is that only compliant meters will be transferred.
- A NSW Government fact sheet is due for release in November 2019 and the DPIE Taskforce has a round table discussion planned for 8 November 2019 in Deniliquin.

3.3 Rural Mental Health (J Dickson)

- WaterNSW Customer and Community trialled a program for our frontline staff through the Rural and Mental Health Program (RAMHP), which was subsequently extended to all WaterNSW staff.
- If customer groups or the CAG would like WaterNSW to arrange facilitation of a session, please contact Toni Hayes.

3.4 Fixed Fee Rebate update (J Dickson)

- As previously advised, the government has repeated the rebate for the current water year. WaterNSW continues to advocate for further rebates to assist those with no access to water.
- For more information go to <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/climate-and-emergencies/drougthub>

4. General Business

4.1 Valley Technical Advisory Group - VTAG (T Hosking)

- Valley Technical Advisory Groups (VTAG) have been set up throughout all northern regulated river valleys. Committees in each river area will prioritise pools in the river in terms of depth, species that rely on pools etc with the purpose to try to track decline in quality and quantity so can use information in communication to the public (ie if a fish death can have data to back up). Data will also be used to intervene where appropriate - if there are tributary flows, can use monitoring to justify a s324 to push flows through (information will justify action).
- Started in Macquarie and Namoi and slowly moving out to Gwydir, Border and Barwon-Darling. Feedback from landholders so far has been very positive and looking to involve landholders where possible.
- Part of this is trialling treatments and aerators. Hopefully will get results soon from the Macquarie so can progress/roll out if successful. Fisheries has been mapping the rivers over the last few years with information on pools and depth.
- Customers keen to be informed/involved, education and understanding is important. Will have better success if communities know what is going on. Communities in relevant valleys will be engaged when getting ready to roll out.

4.2 Wilcannia Weir (J McClure)

- Customers noted there needs to be a regulated structure at Wilcannia and questioned whether this will be part of the Western Weirs project. WaterNSW advised that this will be looked at in project planning for the project.

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: Thursday 27 February 2020

Meeting closed: 12.40pm

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Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 31 October 2019

Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
BD1907.01	WaterNSW to review location/height of electrical conductivity sensor at Brewarrina Weir and consider lowering for more accurate results.	D Berry	<p>Complete.</p> <p>The EC/temp sensor is already sitting 300–400mm below the crest of the weir and the lowering of the sensor would not cover the problem of stratification of the stagnant water in the pool. The purpose of this sensor is to collect EC/temp for long term salt loading in normal flow conditions, as per the requirements of the client. It is not practical to drop the sensor without major works.</p> <p>If this is still required and the Council is prepared to cover the costs; we could possibly install a lower temporary line, but this would have implications for when the flow conditions return to normal as the sensor would need to be returned to its current location in order to be representative of the stream conditions.</p>
BD1907.02	WaterNSW to take customer concerns in relation to capacity of Toorale's infrastructure to deliver essential water requirements to the CWAP for discussion.	D Berry	<p>Complete.</p> <p>For more information on <i>the Toorale Water Infrastructure Project</i>, please visit https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/water/water-for-the-environment/planning-and-reporting/toorale-water-infrastructure-project.</p>
BD1907.03	WaterNSW to distribute previous CAG presentations on IPART Cost Share Review to all members.	T Hayes	Complete , sent with minutes (attachment 2).

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New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
BD1910.01	WaterNSW to clarify whether the translucent water that was not put into drought reserves is included in the Northern Valleys Storages breakdown chart on page 8 of the Annual Operations Plan.	D Berry	
BD1910.02	WaterNSW to provide data on monthly EC levels at Wilcannia for the past 18-24 months.	T Fulford	COMPLETE. Provided with minutes.
BD1910.03	WaterNSW to liaise with Matthew Coulton (BOM) for a forecast to be presented at the next CAG meeting.	D Berry	

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