

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Back O'Bourke Function Centre, Kidman Way, BOURKE

Date: 10 April 2025

Time: 9.45am

Present: Ian Cole (Chair), Bruce Coward, Leonie Brown, David Miller, Joe Robinson, Matt Miles (online), Greg Hill (online), Jane Keir (online), David Walker (online) and Tony Thompson (observer).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Partha Saha, Andrew Richardson, Tony Webber, Joanna Linehan, Kristen Carter, Kate Masters (online), Michelle Yeaman (online), Martin Prendergast (online), Tracy Fulford (online), Yarraan Doyle (online), John Cooper (online), Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Russell Cocks and Himali Hadungoda.

Agency and external staff: David Andersen, Eugene Moore, Allan Raine, Anna Bailey, Amy Halliday and Eva Kokkelmans (online)(NSW DCCEEW).

Meeting Opened: 9.30am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: nil.

1.3 Confirmation of Agenda Items:

- The Chairperson stated that a metering calibration update should be an agenda item at all meetings until resolved. Feedback will be passed on to NSW DCCEEW.

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, 17 October 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [17 October 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

L Brown/B Coward (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

2.1 Customer Services update (D Stockler)

- WaterNSW provided an update on Customer Services, including customer experience and billing (credit card surcharges, warm handovers, staff training and third-party consent), metering (S91i analysis, compliance and DQP concierge update), assessment and approvals (processing trends and insights), customer outreach days and service improvements (recording and reporting SMS service).
- At the last round of CAGs, WaterNSW discussed the potential of offering an objections style process for third party consent on [temporary groundwater trades](#), based on feedback around challenges for applicants to seek/obtain consent from impacted landholders. WaterNSW is working with an applicant to trial the new process, and pending the trial, WaterNSW may offer this on a 'fee for service' basis.

- A summary of [S91i](#) (faulty metering equipment) statistics was presented. There has been a steady increase since 2020 in the number of S91i applications lodged as customers become more aware of their obligations.
- A state-wide overview of compliance statistics in the DQP portal was presented and discussed. Over 5000 meters are now compliant and set up in the DAS ([Data Acquisition Service](#)). WaterNSW can track the progress of every certificate in the portal to assist water users with their compliance. Many of the delays were due to basic information missing. Our focus is now working with DQPs during the validation stage to increase the number of forms that pass first time.
- As previously discussed, WaterNSW has set up a dedicated [DQP concierge service](#) to support DQPs across all facets of the compliance process, including submitting the right data and assisting with any roadblocks. Benefits are being realised as 89% of initial registrations pass first time as data submitted is correct.
- Members were reminded that **water supply work and/or water use approvals** are granted for a set term 2-10 years, after which they expire, however approval holders can apply for an extension (see [FAQs](#)). WaterNSW issues notices to approval holders ~60 days before an approval expires, providing options on how to apply to [extend the approval](#). Based on customer feedback, WaterNSW is working to improve customer experience in this area and will continue to explore options with NSW DCCEEW (Water) to simplify the process, including investigating system changes to simplify and improve the online self-service options, improve targeted communications and explore alternate payment methods.
- WaterNSW advised that in the coming months customers will be able to register for the [Customer Portal](#) to update their contact details online, view all current licence and approvals, and apply for new water supply and water use approvals. Additional features (including mapping) will be added to the portal over time. Currently BLR bore applications and amendments to BLR bore approvals can be done in the portal.
- Members suggested sending the link to the portal to all customers via direct mailout, with a simple message indicating it is to their benefit to update their details. WaterNSW will send information to all CAG members to share with their networks and encourage customers to update their details when this function becomes available.
- Members were reminded that customers can [subscribe to a free SMS reminder service](#) for annual or monthly **recording and reporting requirements**.
- A customer advised of an issue he has been trying to progress for a number of months after contacting the customer helpdesk, stating the staff member is not familiar with the valley and has been unable to resolve. WaterNSW will contact the customer out of session to discuss and progress.

Action BD25054.01: WaterNSW to contact T Thompson to discuss issues raised at the CAG with a view to progress.

Responsibility: B Maher

- Discussion occurred around the customer helpdesk and frustration of not having access to staff who are familiar with the Barwon-Darling system and rules. Members suggested a system be implemented where customers can speak directly with valley specialists to resolve issues, such as options to select your valley when phoning the helpdesk. Feedback noted.

2.2 Metering (D Andersen, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an update on the Non-Urban Metering (NUM) review including new metering requirements, implementation progress, ongoing implementation work, telemetry uplift program, floodplain harvesting measurement changes and key messages.
- The Australian government has funded a [Telemetry Uplift Program](#) which aims to assist eligible water users in the Murray-Darling Basin with compliance to the metering rules. By opting-in to the program, eligible water users will be offered free telemetry devices, including a local intelligence device (LID) and data logger. Priority will be given to groundwater sites, however works that take surface water may also be considered. Registration closes 31 March 2025.
- An overview of floodplain harvesting (FPH) measurement changes was provided. Unregulated river access licence holders can use storage metering to measure overland flow; metered storage water can

be used during FPH if an outflow meter is installed; the start of a measurement period for overland flow has been clarified; DQP criteria for point-of-intake measurement has been refined; and FPH measurement rules now apply to all water supply works.

- For more information on changes to the metering rules, exemptions, key documents and tools and to subscribe for metering updates, go to <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/nsw-non-urban-water-metering>.

3. OPERATIONS:

3.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (P Saha)

- WaterNSW provided a review of recent operations in the Barwon-Darling, including recent rainfall and comparison, rainfall outlook, tributary inflows, current flows, measured inflows, active management and managing EOLs.
- Members queried how much floodwater will flow into the Barwon-Darling from the Paroo. WaterNSW is analysing the data, this is the biggest peak we've observed in the Paroo in recent years (2010 peak was 100GL), so it's unknown at this stage.
- Based on WaterNSW's forecast, it will be nowhere near the 2022 event. The Paroo flow will be a volume joining over 2-3 months, possibly ~2GL/day. Currently the flow at Walgett 58GL, rising over the next 2-3 days. The flow from Walgett to Bourke will take 2-3 weeks, with the Culgoa still rising. The timing of it all joining together will determine the Bourke peak. WaterNSW will provide further updates as flows progress through the river. Members requested an online update be provided to the CAG in one week as it is important for customers to have an understanding of estimate of flows for business decisions.

Action BD25054.02: WaterNSW to arrange an online update on estimate of flows with CAG members in one week to discuss flows in the Barwon-Darling.

Responsibility: B Maher

- Members stated the Namoi gauge at Walgett is not working and hasn't been for some time. Taken on notice.

Action BD25054.03: WaterNSW to follow up if the Namoi gauge at Walgett is working correctly and respond to the CAG.

Responsibility: P Saha

- Members requested WaterNSW consider installing electronic gauges and Enngonia and Wanaaring, stating it is a priority for Bourke Council and the community. The SES has approached WaterNSW to install temporary gauges on the Paroo below Wanaaring to respond to incoming flows. WaterNSW will work with NSW DCCEEW to see if there is any additional funding under HNRS to get more permanent gauges installed.

Action BD25054.04: WaterNSW to liaise with NSW DCCEEW to consider installing electronic gauging stations at Wanaaring and Enngonia as part of the HNRS project.

Responsibility: M Yeaman

- WaterNSW is currently publishing daily announcements for active management. Significant inflows are arriving from the Border, Moonie, Gwydir, Namoi and Culgoa. Access is available in all zones.
- Around 19.6GL of active environmental water arrived from the Border, Gwydir and Macquarie during October 2024 and March 2025. Around 32.8GL was protected through EOI during this period.
- The process for managing EOLs to minimise impacts on other water users in the same management zone was presented and discussed. WaterNSW reiterated the need to enter accurate EOLs to accurately reflect your intention to take water. If you don't take it, you are impacting access within your zone.

3.2 Active Management update (E Moore, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an update on the active management review, MDBA's northern to southern basin connectivity trial and intersecting streams (HEW extraction risk assessment and accounting arrangement).

- The Active Management Annual Evaluation and Review 2023-24 report is due to be published in April/May. There are no new recommendations in the report, but it will include a status update on existing recommendations. The Procedures Manual update is still to come, with direct engagement planned with stakeholders later in 2025 before changes are made to address recommendations and update procedures. NSW DCCEEW will arrange engagement with Barwon-Darling water users.

Action BD2504.05: NSW DCCEEW to liaise with Barwon-Darling Water regarding attendance at their AGM in August.

Responsibility: E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)

- Currently active environmental water (AEW) inflows to Menindee are reshared 50:50 to NSW and Victoria. The MDBA is leading a trial to protect AEW through Menindee Lakes. One release of AEW from the Lower Darling occurred in May/June 2024.
- There are currently no licences or planned environmental water accounts to credit AEW inflows to Menindee. The Water Group is creating a licence for the Commonwealth and a planned environmental water account for NSW and is also seeking to have any enduring arrangements recognised in the rescoped Menindee SDLAM project.
- Members are frustrated that there has been no further information on the pump recalibration project, stating nothing has been done for over 6 months and there has been no report and no targeted consultation as promised. Members commented that there has been no attention from NSW DCCEEW on issues affecting customers on the river (including temporary trade of IDECs). NSW DCCEEW acknowledged customer frustrations with lack of progress and will pass feedback to the planning team and seek an update (refer to action BD2504.08).
- An update on accounting for protection of HEW that flows from Queensland to intersecting streams was provided. Currently water flowing into the Barwon-Darling from Queensland is not protected, so is available for extraction. NSW DCCEEW is working to get this water protected per other HEW and has developed a draft accounting arrangement with WaterNSW which includes loss rates and travel times based on historical flows and a risk management approach for change in extraction.
- We are at a point where we're ready to consult with Barwon-Darling stakeholders and looking at dedicated engagement in April/May 2025 on how the accounting arrangement will be implemented, with accounting in place by 1 July.
- Members stated they want to see the modelling and technical information on what the impact is. NSW DCCEEW advised this is water that has already been recovered, flowing into the Barwon-Darling. It will become extra recovery under the Basin Plan, which benefits NSW.

Action BD2504.06: NSW DCCEEW to liaise with Barwon-Darling Water to make arrangements for engagement on intersecting streams/HEW accounting.

Responsibility: E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)

3.3 Northern Basin Connectivity Program – WaterNSW update (K Masters/A Raine NSW DCCEEW)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the Northern Basin Connectivity Program, including an overview of the Connectivity Panel work and report, recommended changes to increase connectivity, WaterNSW's role and operational considerations and next steps (led by NSW DCCEEW Water).
- An overview of the panel's recommended changes, including proposed targets and triggers, preliminary impacts and operational considerations for WaterNSW, was presented and discussed.
- WaterNSW is working with the BOM on any e-water coming through the system and is heavily scrutinising the methodology that has been put up for intersecting streams/HEW.
- Discussion occurred around the proposed triggers and lifting targets (noting some significant changes) and how the rules will work in practice. Feedback from Mungindi Water Users around proposed lifting targets will be taken back to the department.

- NSW DCCEEW advised the rules aren't hard and fast. The department's role is to look at the modelling, preliminary impacts and options to reduce impacts while meeting the ecological benefits of the panel, then provide public reports to the community.
- Members questioned how the proposed changes will deliver more than what has occurred naturally over the past 5 years (well above what is proposed), stating this has delivered no recorded environmental benefit.
- Members expressed frustration at how decisions can be made without accurate data available, stating the department has not finished calibrating the meters on the Barwon-Darling. NSW DCCEEW stated this is in progress however there are no consistent readings to show a pattern of over or under use to come up with an adjustment factor. Members stated at the Barwon-Darling Water AGM meeting Peter Hyde discussed what he thinks the underreading and potential adjustment factor would be. Taken on notice (refer to action BD2504.08).
- Members stated this is pointless for long term outcomes until complementary measures are taken seriously. In the meantime, irrigators are being punished with changes to flow rules as an easy way out.
- WaterNSW is undertaking modelling to assess what the impacts might be and how we will operate and is actively participating in conversations with the working group around assumptions and forecasting as subject matter experts, providing technical input, data and analysis.
- It is expected the panel's report and modelling will be released in July and WaterNSW will update the CAG as this progresses.
- Further information is available at [Northern Basin Connectivity Program](#)
- Members noted that in the meantime a new wetland has been created in the Gwydir which is impacting the river as supplementary water is being diverted to the wetland by the CEWH and irrigators are missing the flow, stating it is hard to reconcile why new flow triggers are required that reduce access to irrigators because end of system flows are required when the CEWH has created something new/invalid.
- Impacts of carp discussed. NSW DCCEEW advised there has been some progress with the national carp eradication program and will provide information to the CAG out of session.

Action BD2504.07: NSW DCCEEW to provide information to the CAG out of session on the national carp eradication program.

Responsibility: A Raine (NSW DCCEEW)

3.4 WaterNSW Drought Management Approach (A Richardson)

- WaterNSW introduced its drought management approach for the Barwon-Darling Unregulated Valley, including key elements of the drought contingency plan, what we heard and what we learned from previous droughts, an overview of drought stages, what happened in the last drought and key measures implemented, how we work together with other agencies, drought preparedness, potential drought contingency measures for consideration, and engagement with CAGs, customers and the community.
- Feedback from customers during drought workshops held in 2023 highlighted the need for improved communication, increased transparency regarding our approach and intergovernmental decision making and clarification of agency roles and responsibilities.
- An overview of what happened in the Barwon-Darling during the last drought was presented and discussed, including key actions that were taken during various stages of drought. A snapshot of the 2017-2020 drought in the Barwon-Darling can be found [here](#).
- WaterNSW's drought management approach has three key focus areas: condition monitoring and early warning; collaboration with agencies and customers; and drought response actions (as required), which are direct outcomes from lessons learned.
- WaterNSW has developed a framework to assess drought indicators to provide early warning to customers and communicate with other agencies. We update NSW DCCEEW with our intel, that informs announcement of any changes to the drought stages. The Department of Primary Industries and

Regional Development (DPIRD) is responsible for overall drought management across regional NSW and NSW DCCEEW is responsible for water resource management.

- The options and tools WaterNSW has developed for drought preparedness will help:
 - continuous monitoring and provide early warning
 - enable proactive and collaborative work with the relevant government agencies and customers
 - maintain WaterNSW's business continuity in performing our principal functions
 - guide WaterNSW operations to optimise the management of water resources in drought
 - clarify roles and responsibilities and support timely decision-making
 - manage drought in alignment with NSW government rules and policies.
- WaterNSW presented drought response actions (WaterNSW led) and potential contingency measures for consideration, specific to the valley, that could be implemented during the stages of drought. These responses may vary according to the conditions and severity of drought and will be reviewed as the drought unfolds. The options are a guide, not a process, and will be worked through in consultation with the department and stakeholders as the need arises.
- Discussion occurred around the inclusion of S324 orders as potential contingency measures. NSW DCCEEW advised that once the connectivity rules are in place there will be no need for S324 orders and would be seeking to remove this from the drought contingency measures. S324 orders would only come into play in an unplanned circumstance (eg water quality) and is at the discretion of the Minister on recommendation from NSW DCCEEW.
- Discussion occurred around engagement principles and how we will engage with customers and the community in times of drought. Feedback was sought from members on how best to engage with CAGs, noting each valley is different therefore tailormade engagement will be essential.

4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

4.1 Revised prescribed wetlands maps for draft unregulated WSPs (A Halliday, NSW DCCEEW)

- In response to a Natural Resources Commission (NRC) recommendation to improve protection for significant wetlands when unregulated inland WSPs are replaced, a revised approach to water supply works and trade rules is being proposed to protect internationally (Ramsar), nationally and regionally important wetlands with the plan areas.
- Following community feedback, the NSW Government has updated the maps of proposed prescribed wetlands areas in 6 draft unregulated inland WSPs. To accompany map changes, there is a proposal to introduce off-river pool rules to restrict new works and trades in areas where they don't currently apply, and trade rule exceptions only in specific circumstances.
- NSW DCCEEW released revised maps and approach on 4 March 2025 for a 3 week period of comment, which included a webinar and fact sheets. Feedback was taken on board, and the approach was updated as announced 9 April (overview provided).
- Discussion occurred around Zone D/SP wetlands. While consulted on for FMP zone purposes, feedback warrants further consultation for this purpose. The intention is to review and add anywhere appropriate. The process for determining this is in development.
- Members raised the pump recalibration project and questioned where it is up to and when can customers expect consultation. NSW DCCEEW advised the consultant's report is imminent with a draft expected in the next week. The department will review then will schedule consultation. Members stated at the Barwon-Darling Water AGM Peter Hyde discussed potential of 20% adjustment factor to be socialised and applied across the valley and customers agreed. Taken on notice.

Action BD2504.08: NSW DCCEEW to provide update to the CAG out of session on the Barwon-Darling pump recalibration project.

Responsibility: A Bailey (NSW DCCEEW)

- The draft rules relate to water access (water supply works and trade) under the WMA Act, they do not change land use or land zoning and don't impact cultivation consents. Existing works are not affected.

- For more information <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/plans-and-strategies/water-sharing-plans/inland-unregulated-water-sharing-plan-prescribedwetlands>

4.2 Water Quality update (T Fulford)

- WaterNSW provided a review of water quality, including current algal conditions, algal monitoring and algal forecast.
- The latest results indicate that cyanobacteria concentrations are very low in the system. Recent rainfall across the upper northern catchments has generated flooding flows which are expected to inhibit algal growth by increasing turbidity and reducing water residence times. The onset of cooler weather and shorter daylight hours will further reduce the likelihood of algal blooms developing the Barwon-Darling river system.
- An overview of the DBBRC Border Rivers and Intersecting Streams Water Quality Projects was provided.

4.3 CAG Engagement with NSW DCCEEW (Water)(B Maher / E Kokkelmans, NSW DCCEEW)

- WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW outlined a refreshed approach to CAGs to improve regionally focussed engagement into the next term of office.
- CAG meetings will be held in person twice per year per CAG, with the option of additional online meetings as required, initiated by customers or WaterNSW, and two CAG Chairpersons meetings per year.
- WaterNSW-specific content will be presented in a morning session, with NSW DCCEEW and other agency content in the afternoon, with the afternoon session open to broader stakeholders. Members will be asked to provide input on proposed agenda items in advance to ensure the right people are available to discuss relevant matters.
- NSW DCCEEW provided an overview of how their sessions will be managed, including providing a high-level forward-looking engagement calendar to give customers a clear line of site as to what is coming up. NSW DCCEEW is also working to provide more regionally focussed information, with implementation of a regional dashboard on their website, and is working with other agencies to coordinate engagement where possible.
- Members suggested that NSW DCCEEW items be first on the agenda as the main issues in the valley relate to policy and decision making (calibration of meters, implementation of IDECs, changes with connectivity review, etc).
- Discussed potential for out of session community engagement sessions with NSW DCCEEW. To be discussed with Chair out of session.

4.3 CAG Recruitment and Next Term of Office (B Maher)

- The current CAG term of office ends on 30 June 2025 and nominations are now being sought from water user groups and industry organisations for the next term, commencing 1 July.
- Nominations close on 17 April and members are encouraged to liaise with their water user group/organisation if they wish to renominate.

4.4 Stakeholder Engagement (B Maher/K Carter)

- An overview of WaterNSW's Stakeholder Engagement Policy was provided, including our engagement approach and commitment to customers and the community.
- A state-wide and valley-specific stakeholder list was presented and feedback sought from members on key groups or organisations not included on the lists. Feedback and additional stakeholder information can be provided at any time via engagement@waternsw.com.au
- Members stated WaterNSW's core objective is to capture, store and deliver water and questioned where this is in the policy. WaterNSW advised this is in our Strategic Priorities; this is just the Stakeholder Engagement Policy.

- Members referred to the statement “putting customers at the centre of our decision-making” and referred to the example discussed in the Customer Services session, stating if staff cannot provide a reasonable resolution in an appropriate timeframe the issue should be escalated.

5. GENERAL BUSINESS:

- Members requested discussion on weirs between Collarenebri and Walgett be added to the agenda for the next meeting.
- Wilcannia Weir update: D Walker advised the Geoff Wise review is ongoing. An interim report was provided to Minister Jackson a few days ago and she wants it to go back to the community.
- The Chair acknowledged the recent passing of Tony Hall, former Manager North and Senior Licensing Officer with NSW DCCEEW, stating Tony was very much involved in licensing and policy development on the Barwon-Darling for many years and recognised his contribution to the valley.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 25 September 2025

Meeting closed: 3.00pm

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 10 April 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BD2504.01	WaterNSW to contact T Thompson to discuss issues raised at the CAG with a view to progress.	B Maher	Complete.
BD2504.02	WaterNSW to arrange an online update on estimate of flows with CAG members in one week to discuss flows in the Barwon-Darling.	B Maher	Complete.
BD2504.03	WaterNSW to follow up if the Namoi gauge at Walgett is working correctly and respond to the CAG.	P Saha	Complete. Walgett Weir was raised a few years ago which drowned out the controls of the two lowest flow sites on the Barwon (Tara 422025) and Namoi (U/s Walgett 419091) respectively. Flow data was stopped back in July 2020 once the impacts on the rating were recognised. No suitable location was found for a replacement for 419091 on the Namoi as backwater impacts at full storage were believed to extend a long way upstream on the Namoi. Consequently, the outcome was that Goangra became the end of system flow site and effectively replaced 419091. The instruments were removed from the gauges in January this year. Therefore, no data available after January.
BD2504.04	WaterNSW to liaise with NSW DCCEEW to consider installing electronic gauging stations at Wanaaring and Enngonia as part of the HNRS project.	M Yeaman	In progress.
BD2504.05	NSW DCCEEW to liaise with Barwon-Darling Water regarding attendance at their AGM in August.	E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)	
BD2504.06	NSW DCCEEW to liaise with Barwon-Darling Water to make arrangements for engagement on intersecting streams/HEW accounting.	E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)	
BD2504.07	NSW DCCEEW to provide information to the CAG out of session on the national carp eradication program.	A Raine (NSW DCCEEW)	
BD2504.08	NSW DCCEEW to provide update to the CAG out of session on the Barwon-Darling pump recalibration project.	A Bailey (NSW DCCEEW)	

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BD2410.01	NSW DCCEEW to provide information on how boundaries for WSPs are determined (in relation to intersecting streams).	E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)	Complete. Refer to agenda item 3.2