

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Back O'Bourke Function Centre, Bourke
Date: 24 September 2026
Time: 9.00am

Present: Ian Cole (Chair), Bernie George, Tony Thompson, David Miller, Bruce Coward, Jane Keir, Leonie Brown, Suzie Lamb (online), Justin McClure, David Walker, Joe Robinson (online), Matt Roetteler (online) and John Sevil (observer).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Kate Masters, Partha Saha, Damian Ashlin, Abram Duffy and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Rob O'Neill, Amanda Fuller, Geoff Watson and Vikrant Malik.

External agency staff: Peter Hyde and Peter Hansen (NSW DCCEEW)

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: Reece Wilson, Matthew Miles.

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 Barwon-Darling CAG Meeting, 26 March 2026

- Resolved the minutes of the meeting held on [26 March 2026](#) be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting. Taken as read.

B George/B Coward (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

1.7 Election of Chairperson

- Ian Cole was nominated by David Miller, seconded by Bruce Coward. Nil other nominations received. Accepted and carried.

2. WATERNSW UPDATE:

2.1 WaterNSW Executive update (R O'Neill)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of its new Corporate Strategy, focused on strengthening core operations, diversifying revenue and modernising the organisation to improve efficiency, customer outcomes and long-term affordability.
- Key organisational challenges were noted, including ageing infrastructure, climate variability, reform uncertainty and increasing costs.
- A significant focus is being placed on delivering capital works, including accelerated infrastructure investment, fishway projects, cold water pollution (CWP) initiatives and ongoing asset renewals and investment.
- Diversifying revenue sources is a key strategic priority to help reduce reliance on traditional revenue streams. As the fourth largest landholder in NSW, WaterNSW is exploring opportunities to generate

additional revenue from its land holdings, including carbon market opportunities, pumped hydro and long-duration energy storage projects, including potential partnerships with energy providers.

- WaterNSW highlighted opportunities to leverage artificial intelligence, technology and data to improve business processes and customer service, supported by ongoing investment in workforce capability and digital skills.
- Members questioned who funds WaterNSW activities that benefit broader community, environmental and policy outcomes, rather than regulated customers alone. WaterNSW advised that IPART has recognised some government policy implementation functions within the current determination and government funding has been secured for the current financial year only. WaterNSW is continuing to advocate for this funding to continue for the remainder of the determination period.
- WaterNSW advised its Board has adopted a position that activities outside the IPART determination should be fully funded by the relevant beneficiary or government agency, and that WaterNSW will no longer absorb the cost of unfunded work.
- WaterNSW advised that its new Chair supports a more proactive and advocacy-focused approach on policy and strategic issues where WaterNSW has traditionally remained neutral.
- In addition to the items presented by WaterNSW, top of mind items for customers in the valley include calibration of meters and IDECs, Wilcannia Weir, fish passage projects, water security, water quality, water infrastructure and upgrade of weirs.
- NSW DCCEEW advised that the Border Rivers has entered Stage 2 drought conditions under the Extreme Events Policy, with no allocation expected.
- Members noted that approximately 250ML/day was entering the Marshes from the Macquarie system.

2.2 WaterNSW's Financial Performance (V Malik)

- WaterNSW is committed to improving transparency, accountability and customer engagement under the Rural Valleys determination. A high-level overview of financial performance was presented, including unaudited FY26 results, the FY27 business plan outlook following IPART's final determinations, and key financial risks, assumptions and future considerations.
- WaterNSW highlighted improved financial sustainability following the organisational transformation program and final IPART determinations. Financial performance has improved substantially, with Rural Valley finances more sustainable than previously forecast. Government affordability contributions remain important to future sustainability and infrastructure investment remains a high priority.
- The determination strengthens WaterNSW's financial position, supporting ongoing service delivery, infrastructure investment and access to funding.
- Members questioned the rationale for WaterNSW paying land tax to the NSW Government, noting that the State ultimately owns the corporation and receives the tax revenue. WaterNSW advised that, as a State Owned Corporation, it is subject to land tax on eligible land under the NSW taxation framework, despite being owned by the NSW Government. WaterNSW actively reviews its land holdings and assessments to ensure it pays only the tax required and pursues available exemptions and concessions where applicable. This helps minimise costs for customers.
- Members were pleased to see that improving operational efficiency is a primary focus and that maintaining and investing in assets and infrastructure is high on the list, stating this delivers value for customers.

3. OPERATIONS:

3.1 Water Planning and Delivery (P Saha)

- WaterNSW presented a review of operations in the Barwon-Darling, including storages update, weather outlook, dam operations, an overview of the water resource monitoring dashboard, water availability and usage, water account balances, comparison of inflow scenarios and storage forecast.
- Below average rainfall was received across the catchment between March and August 2026, resulting in low inflows and receding river flows across the system. The BOM outlook indicates an increased

likelihood of above average rainfall for much of the west and central regions during October and December 2026.

- Environmental water deliveries continued to support flows, with ongoing deliveries from the Namoi to end of September and the Macquarie expected to continue through December. Current flows are below pumping thresholds.
- The temporary water restriction order under section 324 is turned back on as active volumes in the upper Menindee lakes falls below 250GL. The order was temporarily lifted when the volume was above 250GL.
- No A Class access has been available since July 2026 and daily flow class announcements remain paused until flow conditions improve.
- There are no tributary inflows arriving in the Barwon-Darling other than e-water delivery from the Namoi and Macquarie. Around 30FL of active environmental water arrived from the Gwydir, Namoi, Culgoa and Bokhara during March-September 2025. A total of 1.7GL was protected through EOI during March-August 2026.
- Resumption of flow triggers continue to be monitored, with a potential trigger expected mid-November should low-flow conditions continue (based on Bourke flow below trigger for 120 days). Resumption of flow is actual; lifting is based on predicted flows.
- WaterNSW sought customer feedback on reinstating SMS notifications for daily announcements, noting texts are costly if not valued by customers. Members suggested updates for multiple entitlements be combined into a single email rather than multiple SMS announcements. WaterNSW will investigate to see if this is an option.

Action BD2609.01: WaterNSW to investigate feasibility of daily announcement updates for multiple entitlements being combined into a single email.

Responsibility: K Masters

- Members also suggested that if an EOI is expiring that a dedicated email be sent advising customers prior to the due date, rather than rolling it into other correspondence where it often gets overlooked.
- Members suggested a review of the current EOI system and discussed the differences between the current EOI/IDEC process and the previous customer-managed roster system. Members noted that where EOIs are not cancelled under the current process, water passes through the system that could have been extracted by other users.
- NSW DCCEEW advised that permitting customers to develop and operate their own rostering arrangements would present challenges under the current legislative and regulatory framework.
- Operational updates are available at [WaterInsights](#).

3.3 Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Project Upgrade (G Watson)

- WaterNSW advised that the MDBA and Basin Officials Committee have agreed on the inflow management framework for the project, including decision-making processes and cost-sharing arrangements associated with temporary works.
- Procurement is progressing through a three-stage process. Expressions of Interest have been completed, Stage 2 tender submissions closed on 17 August 2026, and a Request for Tender will be issued to the three shortlisted proponents in late September 2026. Development of the final Business Case is continuing alongside procurement activities.
- Subject to lake conditions and unforeseen events, site mobilisation is expected to commence in January 2027, with construction scheduled for completion by November 2027. Final site handover is anticipated in January 2028.
- Members questioned how much dead storage will be saved on completion of the works. WaterNSW advised that once complete, operational restrictions will be removed, which will improve efficiency of the system.

- Current operations require water levels in Pamamaroo and Wetherell to be operated to constraints to manage head pressure and protect the structure until repair works are completed. A key benefit is supporting the maintenance and management of the 250GL reserve.

4. CUSTOMER OPERATIONS AND EXPERIENCE:

4.1 Customer Assessments and Approvals (A Fuller)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of customer service standards, and updates on classifying works, end of water year trade submissions and third party consent for temporary trades.
- Application processing times have increased in some areas due to resources being redirected to support the statewide works classification program. WaterNSW has engaged additional temporary staff and improvements are expected by October 2026.

Floodplain Strikeforce

- WaterNSW provided an update on the work of the Floodplain Strikeforce, including customer education initiatives, updated guidance materials, historical works review, publication of flood work application data and improved pre-application processes.
- A draft [Floodplain Strikeforce Interagency Action Plan](#) was released in March for consultation and feedback, and a dedicated working group has been established to review feedback and identify key barriers and potential solutions. The action plan and accompanying What We Heard report is available on our website [here](#).
- A [guide to applying for a flood work approval](#) has been developed by WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW to assist landowners understand what a flood work is, when an approval is required and what is required to apply for a flood work approval.
- A separate flood work approval is no longer required where an existing work is specifically nominated under a Water Supply Work Approval (or combined approval) and its primary purpose is water supply.
- Key stakeholders will be invited to participate in an online Strikeforce meeting where historical works and related matters will be discussed in greater detail. The meeting date is yet to be confirmed.
- Members expressed concern that the flood works approval process can be lengthy, costly and frustrating, and suggested greater use of face-to-face engagement with customers. WaterNSW advised staff are available for [pre-application and face-to-face meetings](#) and encouraged customers to raise any concerns where this support is not being provided.
- WaterNSW acknowledged customer frustrations with the current process and advised that improvements are underway, including greater engagement with applicants before any refusal decisions are made and collaboration with NSW DCCEEW to streamline the approval processes.
- WaterNSW noted that the Strikeforce is actively working through issues and that significant improvements are expected, particularly for longstanding applications.
- Members sought guidance for applications currently in progress while broader floodplain management reforms are being considered. WaterNSW advised discussions are underway regarding potential extensions to existing approval timeframes to provide certainty while the Strikeforce completes its work.
- Members welcomed the establishment of the Strikeforce, recognising the complexity and importance of flood works management. WaterNSW advised it would review the current application backlog and consider opportunities to pause some applications while process improvements are implemented.

Works Classification Program

- An update on the [works classification program](#) and improvements made in response to customer feedback was provided, including additional guidance materials and support through the WaterNSW website. Customers can also [book an appointment](#) with WaterNSW staff for assistance throughout the classification process.
- Feedback on the [Customer Portal](#) has been shared with our technology teams and improvements are being prioritised based on customer needs.

- Customers are encouraged to review the details of works listed on their approvals and contact WaterNSW if updates are required prior to classifying works.
- The fee free period for customers to classify their works has been extended to 1 December 2026.

Temporary Trades

- WaterNSW advised that the earlier end-of-water-year temporary trade submission deadline introduced this year improved processing outcomes and is expected to remain in place for future years and will be proactively communicated to customers going forward.
- June is the highest volume month in the water year, and a new approach was needed to ensure all applications could be processed in time without increasing operational and financial pressures.

5. BUSINESS PAPERS (taken as read):

- Taken as read.

6. GENERAL BUSINESS:

6.1 H5N1 Avian Influenza (R O'Neill)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the detection of H5 avian influenza in wild birds across multiple Australian states.
- WaterNSW is working with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) to monitor the situation and ensure appropriate preparedness measures are in place. DPIRD is the lead response agency in NSW.
- WaterNSW has developed operational response protocols, identified higher-risk sites and is assessing potential impacts on water quality and water supply operations and is collaborating with DCCEEW on management strategies for priority wildlife locations, including Lake Brewster and the Menindee Lakes.

6.2 Town Water Risk Reduction Program (B Maher)

- WaterNSW is supporting Local Water Utilities (LWUs) across regional NSW to strengthen raw water quality risk management through the Town Water Risk Reduction Program (TWRRP). Funded by NSW DCCEEW, the program supports regional communities in managing water quality risks and building long-term drinking water resilience.
- WaterNSW leads the source water component of the program, focusing on identifying raw water quality risks and supporting local water utilities to proactively manage those risks at the source, recognising source water protection as the first and most effective barrier to safe drinking water.
- To learn more about TWRRP, please visit our [website](#) or email info.TWRRP@watersw.com.au

6.3 Floodplain Harvesting

- A member proposed that floodplain harvesting (FPH) measurement arrangements could potentially be improved by allowing floodplain harvesting entitlements to be accessed through existing compliant metered river pumps during specified flood events, stating that river pumps are generally fitted with more accurate and reliable, compliant metering equipment than floodplain harvesting storage measurement methods.
- This would not increase the volume of FPH water available to licence holders but would instead provide a compliant alternative means of taking water already accounted for within the existing licensing and MDBA framework. Members believe that such an approach could improve measurement accuracy, reduce complexity and provide greater confidence and reliability in compliance outcomes.
- Members suggested that floodplain harvesting opportunities could be linked to defined river flow or height triggers, with existing pump intake locations potentially used to identify and monitor extraction points.
- NSW DCCEEW acknowledged the potential merits of the concept and agreed to consider it further. While noting there may be challenges associated with aligning trigger levels for different licence and

entitlement types, NSW DCCEEW advised the proposal appeared worthy of further investigation. Several members supported the idea, citing potential operational and compliance benefits. WaterNSW offered to work with the Department to look at how this could work from an operational perspective.

6.3 Feedback from MDBA Roundtable

- Members provided feedback from a recent MDBA Roundtable, where discussion included the Basin Plan review, the future of Wilcannia Weir, and proposals relating to Weir 32 and the Menindee Lakes system.
- Concerns were raised regarding some of the environmental data being used to inform Basin planning and legislative decisions. Members noted that this information does not always align with local observations and lived experience, particularly in relation to wetland inundation and ecological outcomes.
- Members emphasised the importance of incorporating local knowledge and on-ground experience into decision-making processes, noting concerns that some planning assumptions may not accurately reflect conditions within the Basin.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: date TBC, Bourke

Meeting closed: 11.45am

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 24 September 2026

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BD2609.01	WaterNSW to investigate feasibility of daily announcement updates for multiple entitlements being combined into a single email.	K Masters	

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		