

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Back O'Bourke Exhibition and Function Centre, Bourke
Date: 26 March 2026
Time: 9.00am

Present: Joe Robinson (Chair), Ian Cole, Reece Wilson, Peter Brown, Bruce Coward, Matt Miles, Tony Thompson, Bernie George, Justin McClure, Tom Coward (observer), Jack Harris (observer), David Miller (online), Jane Keir (online), Sam Schoofs (online).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Partha Saha, Chris Shaw, Abram Duffy and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Rob O'Neill, Amanda Fuller, Tracey Lawson, Geoff Watson, Ken Gee.

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: Leonie Brown, Matt Roetteler, David Walker.

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, 25 September 2025

– Resolved the minutes of the meeting held on [25 September 2025](#) be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting. Taken as read.

B George/T Thompson (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

– Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. WaterNSW update:

2.1 WaterNSW update and Land & Water Operations overview (R O'Neill)

– WaterNSW provided an update on its new operating model and status of the business transformation program. The labour reduction process has concluded with approximately 280 FTE roles removed, primarily affecting metropolitan areas, senior and middle management, and corporate functions.

– The Land and Water Operations portfolio structure was outlined, with priorities including improving end-to-end collaboration and process improvements, strengthening consistency in customer engagement, maintaining service levels despite resourcing changes, embedding teams and supporting team morale.

– Top of mind items for the Barwon-Darling CAG for our team were discussed, including floodplain harvesting, water accounting and metering and Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator.

– Members raised concerns about customer service and issues experienced when contacting the helpdesk prior to an approval expiry. No clear guidance was provided and there was no further contact made by WaterNSW, resulting in the approval expiring and additional costs to renew. The customer saw no evidence of triage and has opted to use a private consultant for future queries.

– Members emphasised the need for clarity on points of contact, recommending a clearly communicated pathway (e.g. helpdesk first, then engagement lead) to be circulated to all customers. Longstanding

frustrations stem from being directed to staff unable to resolve issues, causing delays. If the helpdesk cannot answer a query, it should escalate directly to someone who can. Customers are making genuine efforts to comply but experiencing little progress.

- WaterNSW acknowledged the feedback and advised improvements are underway for handling complex enquiries, including providing some direct contact options through valley engagement leads. It was noted that 80% of enquiries are resolved through the helpdesk, with 20% being more complex. The offer of direct contacts was welcomed, with acknowledgement that clarity on who those contacts are is essential.

Action BD2603.01: WaterNSW to contact T Thompson out of session for more detail on issues raised and follow up internally.

Responsibility: T Hayes

- WaterNSW outlined plans to develop a “pathway to compliance” for NRAR, so it is factored into their risk management approach, rather than just compliant/non-compliant, though this is still in development.
- Members raised concerns about the need for end-to-end collaboration and processing improvements, highlighting issues with the flood work approval process. Several applications in the Barwon-Darling are stalled, and there is limited understanding of approval requirements. Repeated modelling for Zone C works was cited as inefficient and confusing. Refer to agenda item 3.4 for more information on flood work approvals.
- WaterNSW advised that improvements are expected as part of the current rationalisation process. There is a commitment to improving engagement, acting on customer feedback, and working collaboratively with customers so they can see tangible improvements.

3. Customer Services:

3.1 Water Accounting & Metering (A Duffy)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of iWAS, highlighting its key functions, including how customers can manage their water accounts, view meter data, and enter meter reads. An outline of the Data Acquisition Service (DAS) dashboard and its reporting capabilities was also provided.
- [iWAS](#) is WaterNSW's online water accounting platform, giving regulated, unregulated and groundwater customers easy, anytime access to their water accounts. A range of instructional videos and user guides is available on the WaterNSW website.
- Telemetered data is confirmed on 1st and 15th of each month. If customers want meter reads in between this timeframe, they can manually enter and confirm for their account balance to be updated.
- The [DAS](#) provides customers with real-time visibility of their water usage. It allows users to view meter reads in hourly increments, monitor telemetry battery health, view alarms, and export their own data. As a result of customer feedback, the DAS is now accessible directly through iWAS.
- To create a DAS account, please reach out to customer.helpdesk@waternsw.com.au for assistance in setting up your account.

3.2 Floodplain Harvesting Engagement (C Shaw)

- An overview of the floodplain harvesting (FPH) processes and challenges to date was provided, including classification of works, naming conventions and identifying correct works/storages. WaterNSW has commenced an audit of licences that have been issued and approved and is working with DQPs, surveyors and customers to ensure all data is correct in the first instance.
- Data is being provided to NRAR on customers WaterNSW has engaged with, so they are identified as being on a pathway to compliance.
- Discussion occurred around issues with floodplain harvesting (FPH) works and pump sites, with members questioning if sites can be changed once registered (eg if a pump collapses or requires rebuilding). WaterNSW is looking into this issue and will work on options with customers, including potential upgrades.

- Members raised concerns about NRAR reporting low compliance (5%) for FPH licences in the Barwon-Darling, which was considered inaccurate. WaterNSW advised that data is being provided to NRAR on customers WaterNSW has engaged with, so they are identified as being on a pathway to compliance.
- While WaterNSW cannot confirm whether a customer is compliant, it can advise NRAR where a customer is on the pathway to compliance by identifying key steps completed. Further work is needed to clarify how WaterNSW and NRAR interface around the final compliance decision (the “green tick”).
- Members asked how customers can be confident they are compliant. WaterNSW explained that early in the process there was a simple step in the DQP portal that was not done, which affected compliance status. DQPs can now update records to ‘set to install’, which is taking compliance rates up. Customers can check their compliance status in iWAS.
- WaterNSW recognises the challenges customers face in becoming compliant and is committed to providing tailored support. WaterNSW proposes to visit each valley to engage directly with customers to help them understand the FPH policy and requirements, identify and classify FPH works, understand the DAS and iWAS, nominate FPH measurement periods and liaise with DQPs and surveyors.
- Members stated the option to amend the classification of a work in the [Customer Portal](#) to “not taking licensed water” (ie inactive) is very helpful, stating the process, with some tutoring, could work well for irrigators. It is intended this will be included in the face to face engagement. See also [Classification of Work Status Fact Sheet](#).
- Further information will be provided once dates are confirmed.

3.3 Customer Assessments & Approvals (A Fuller)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of agency roles within the water sector, customer service standards (actual vs target) for applications and approvals, a proposal to change the end-of-year final submission date for temporary trades, and consultation on a proposal to discontinue the third-party consent process for temporary groundwater trades.
- WaterNSW continues to meet or exceed customer service standards for applications and approvals in most areas, with performance standards monitored monthly.
- WaterNSW is working with NSW DCCEEW on a proposal to change the final submission date to lodge end of year temporary trades to 20 June and sought feedback from members. Customers will be notified in advance if the change occurs. Members were also reminded that the customer service standard for temporary trades is 90% processed within 5 business days.
- From a customer point of view, most people ‘should’ be able to submit trades by 20 June, however not always. Members stated that if a trade is submitted on 22 June and rejected then they would strongly object to the change.

Action BD2603.02: WaterNSW to confirm if the date of a temporary trade is the application date or the approval date.

Responsibility: A Fuller

- WaterNSW provided an overview on a proposal to discontinue the groundwater temporary trade third-party consent process, which was reinstated on 1 July 2024. Since reintroduction, WaterNSW has only approved 8 temporary trades (<0.2%) where a third party has consented to potential impacts on their water take.
- WaterNSW has received numerous complaints about the process, including concerns from customers who are reluctant to contact potentially impacted bore holders and from bore holders who lack the expertise to determine whether they should consent. There is also ambiguity under the *Water Management Act* regarding whether WaterNSW is lawfully permitted to seek consent in this way.
- Feedback on the proposal to discontinue can be provided via email to engagement@waternsw.com.au.

3.4 Flood Works, Floodplain Management Plans and Strikeforce (R O'Neill)

- An explanation of a flood work, [flood work approvals](#) and Floodplain Management Plans (FMP) was provided, including what constitutes a flood work and when a flood study is required. An outline of the recently established Floodplain Strikeforce (between WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW) was also provided.
- WaterNSW acknowledged the complexity of this area and reaffirmed its commitment to supporting customers through the process. This includes offering optional pre-application meetings to discuss proposed works, provide general guidance on assessment requirements, and help determine whether a flood study is needed before an application is lodged and fees are paid.
- An interagency working group between WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW has been formed to address stakeholder concerns and strengthen implementation of FMPs. A [Floodplain Strikeforce Interagency Action Plan](#) has been developed for consultation, proposing eight theme areas and 37 agreed actions aimed at improving processes, guidance, systems and tools to assist landholders with flood work approval applications and assessments.
- Members stated the main issues with flood studies are timing and cost – models are expensive and hard to obtain. WaterNSW advised it generally allows 90 days to provide flood studies, however the process changed last year to require modelling up front. At pre-application meetings, applicants are advised whether a flood study is required (mainly in Zone B). The intention is that applicants complete the flood study first, then lodge the application, to improve outcomes for both customers and WaterNSW.
- Members stated that additional modelling is often requested, which can be frustrating. WaterNSW advised this is often due to incomplete studies. WaterNSW welcomes feedback and acknowledges the challenges, noting there is a fine line between requesting more information and instructing applicants on how to achieve compliance.
- WaterNSW is trying to refine and improve the process. Around 10 actions from a Gwydir/Border Rivers field trip are included in the Action Plan based directly on customer feedback. These focus on improving transparency, meeting with applicants before refusals are issued, clearly defining impacts and clarifying when dual-purpose works trigger the need for a flood work approval.
- Members stated refusal letters lack the detail to help customers resolve issues (eg 'less than minimal harm'). WaterNSW acknowledges this and is working toward providing more constructive and actionable feedback when applications are non-compliant.
- Feedback on the Action Plan can be submitted to engagement@waternsw.com.au by 24 April.
- In partnership with NSW DCCEEW, WaterNSW has developed a Flood Work Implementation Guideline which will provide additional information on the FMP, what constitutes a flood work, how to apply, the assessment process and free mapping tools. It is anticipated this will be published in May 2026.
- WaterNSW will also publish monthly data on flood work application volumes, determination outcomes and the number of outstanding applications on a dedicated online dashboard.
- Outstanding applications currently sits at 25, the lowest backlog in the flood work space in many years, with 8 of these applications prior to 2025. In the last 14 months, 78% of flood work applications have been granted.
- For more information go to <https://www.waternsw.com.au/customer-services/water-licensing/flood-work-approvals>

4. OPERATIONS:

4.1 Water Planning & Delivery (P Saha)

- WaterNSW presented a review of operations in the Barwon-Darling, including recent rainfall and BoM outlook, tributary inflows, measured inflows, current flows and active management.
- Below average rainfall was observed during the September 2025 to February 2026 period. Some inflow continued from Namoi and Border Rivers during September, however no significant inflows arrived after that.

- Environmental water delivery commenced late December from Border Rivers (Glenlyon Dam) and Gwydir (Copeton Dam) to create connectivity along the Barwon-Darling. Water started to arrive at Barwon during early January. A temporary water restriction order was issued under section 324 to protect environmental water.
- A new [Water Sharing Plan for the Barwon-Darling Unregulated River Water Source](#) was approved on 25 February 2026.
- Environmental water delivery from Namoi (Keepit Dam) has commenced, with flows expected to reach Dangar Bridge in the last week of March. Members noted this is the first time they have heard of the delivery and said it would be helpful to know in advance. M Miles advised the CEWH regularly undertakes these releases, which primarily target in-valley (Namoi) outcomes, though there can be flow on benefits for the Barwon-Darling.
- Flows are occurring upstream of the Culgoa River, with some expected to be protected QLD environmental water. Under active management, QLD advises how much environmental water is crossing the border and a loss ratio is applied for intersecting streams. An estimated 30-50GL may reach Bourke, though as this is the first time QLD water is being protected in this way, the volume is not yet known. Once the water reaches the Barwon-Darling flows will be re-regulated, and depending on volume, may trigger a B class event. Further information is expected in the coming weeks.

Action BD2603.03: WaterNSW to provide information to the CAG on Culgoa River flows when available.

Responsibility: P Saha

4.2 Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator (PIR) Project update (G Watson)

- WaterNSW provided an overview and update on the project, including project drivers, benefits and objectives, key issues and long-term solutions, remedial works, temporary and permanent works approach, water management and project timeline.
- Adverse conditions have caused significant movement and cracking of the Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator structure over many years, which could lead to failure of the structure if normal operations continue.
- Remedial work includes installing temporary coffer dams, new deeper sheet piling and concrete, structural work on the inlet regulator and the surrounding surfaces and will ensure the regulator remains serviceable and protect it from further damage, so that normal operations can continue.
- The structure is currently operating under restrictions including reduced operational measures to limit differential water levels and increased surveillance and monitoring as a short-term measure to reduce the risk of failure.
- Members stated the priority is the surcharge and should be policy as the effects on upstream take and active storage should be used to set parameters, not to reclassify water downstream.
- Members questioned if the current threshold (250GL) will go back down to 195GL once the project is complete. The MDBA is undertaking a review of Menindee operations and there will be some recommendations, including the threshold.
- WaterNSW advised the in-valley lifting targets that allow water take have not changed. You'd switch off based on a Menindee volume and you'd switch on based on a flow in your valley. Every valley has different triggers based on when the rule was put into WSP.
- It is expected work will commence mid-2026, with 3 months to construct the temporary works and 6-8 months to complete permanent works (weather dependent). RL59.87 at Wetherell has been selected as the trigger level to commence work as that level allows airspace in Wetherell to capture flows in the system. The ability to manage water becomes prohibitive above that level and if unable to divert those flows into the Menindee system it becomes a potential lost resource to the south. It won't affect the resource in the north.

5. Presentations/Consultation:

5.1 WaterNSW WaterInsights app (P Glastonbury)

- WaterNSW has released its new WaterInsights app, available for Android users in the Google store (Apple to come). The app was tested by ~50 users, including some CAG members, and has the same functionality as the previous Water Live app. It is the fastest platform for real-time data.
- An overview of the key features was presented and discussed. The app is built from the website, and data for most sites is produced every 15 minutes.
- The WaterLive App will eventually be retired, scheduled for late 2026, once customers have had an opportunity to download and adopt the new WaterInsights App.
- The Real Time Data (RTD) website and the WaterInsights online portal will continue to operate as they do today, providing reliable access to water data and information.
- The daily river report in RTD is available on the WaterInsights website (almost identical) and WaterNSW is looking to incorporate into the app.

6. BUSINESS PAPERS (taken as read):

- Taken as read.

7. GENERAL BUSINESS:

7.1 CAG Survey Results (B Maher)

- The CAG survey at the end of the last round provided positive results, with ~50 members responding:
 - separating WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW agenda items was valuable, with positive feedback received;
 - presenting online is suitable for short presentations (up to 20 minutes) however in person presentations are valued by customers where possible and provide better outcomes, understanding and discussion;
 - discussion of proposed policy and current policy are vital for both users and implementors;
 - it is important for NSW DCCEEW to host an afternoon session and that should continue; the separation will help clarify the roles of WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW.
- WaterNSW reiterated that additional online CAG meetings are available to members at any time throughout the year as required, provided 50% of members agree.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 24 September 2026, Bourke

Meeting closed: 12.30pm

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 26 March 2026

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BD2603.01	WaterNSW to contact T Thompson out of session for more detail on issues raised and follow up internally.	T Hayes	Complete. The Licensing Operations Manager has also been in touch with the customer.
BD2603.02	WaterNSW to confirm if the date of a temporary trade is the application date or the approval date.	A Fuller	Complete. Water is credited to or debited from an account on the date of approval (not the application date).
BD2603.03	WaterNSW to provide information to the CAG on Culgoa flows when available.	P Saha	Complete. Emailed to members 8/4/26 and available on WaterInsights Barwon-Darling Unregulated River - WaterInsights - WaterNSW

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil carried forward actions		