

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Back O'Bourke Function Centre, Bourke
Date: 25 September 2025
Time: 9.00am

Present: Joe Robinson, David Miller, Tony Thompson, Leonie Brown, Bernie George, Justin McClure, Bruce Coward (online), Greg Hill (online), Zarni Bear (online), Matt Miles (online), Jane Keir (online).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Kate Masters, Martin Prendergast, Gavin Armstrong, Kristen Carter, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Andrew George, Russell Cocks, Amanda Fuller, Michelle Yeaman, Hetal Parmar.

NSW DCCEE staff: Ryan Potts and Peter Hyde.

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: Ian Cole, David Kirby.

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, 9 April 2025

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [9 April 2025](#) be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting. Taken as read.

D Miller/L Brown (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. INTRODUCTION TO CAGs:

2.1 Election of Chairperson

- Joe Robinson was nominated by David Miller. Nil other nominations received. Accepted and carried.

2.2 Overview of Customer Advisory Groups (B Maher)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of Customer Advisory Groups, including agency roles in the water sector, CAG member roles and responsibilities, standard agenda items and CAG format and schedule. An overview of the [CAG Charter](#) and [CAG Code of Conduct](#) was also provided.
- CAG members represent WaterNSW customers in their valley. Input should be representative of members of your nominating organisation and reflect a broader contribution of all customers you represent. Members have an obligation to provide regular feedback to the water users they represent.
- Meetings will be in person twice per year (March/April and August/September) with the option of additional meetings online if required or requested. Schedules may alter to accommodate other engagement needs as required.

- WaterNSW will hold the CAG meeting in a morning session, focusing on WaterNSW agenda items and customer issues, followed by an afternoon session led by NSW DCCEE, focusing on policy, programs and emerging priorities. Members are encouraged to suggest relevant agenda topics for consideration for both sessions via the Chairperson.

3. WATERNSW UPDATE:

3.1 Chief Executive Officer (CEO) update (A George)

- Following the IPART determinations for Rural Valleys and Greater Sydney and WAMC, WaterNSW is in a financial position that requires a fundamental reset of the business. IPART's pricing decision means WaterNSW faces a significant revenue shortfall and insufficient operating cost (opex) allowance to cover our current cost base and obligations. Without significant action, the business risks insolvency within 18 months.
- An overview of WaterNSW's cost drivers was presented and discussed, including numerous non-commercial functions (fishways, environmental flows, water quality monitoring, land management), a small and shrinking customer base and complex regulatory obligations. A number of non-commercial programs have been paused given the lack of funding (eg fishways). It is recognised we have obligations, however there is no funding to undertake the work if it is not a core function.
- The Board has approved a business restructure to maintain financial sustainability and solvency, which includes a reduction of approximately 300 employees. Teams will be consolidated, and several functions will be centralised or discontinued to streamline how we work and to reduce duplication. Formal consultation is underway with our people and their representatives about the proposed changes.
- An overview of the proposed future state operating model was presented and discussed. It is proposed to move to the new structure in early September, with employee impacts and changes expected to conclude by the end of October. WaterNSW is focussed on maintaining a regional presence.
- WaterNSW will work hard to limit customer impacts throughout the transition period, however we may be unable to continue delivering some of our current functions, activities and projects in the same way. The most noticeable impact will be on planned capital projects, not front-line services, however if customers notice a decline in levels of service we want to know.
- Discussion occurred around additional unfunded obligations and requirements placed on WaterNSW that are not core business (water delivery vs public good), with members stating water users should not be funding non-commercial outcomes and costs should not be passed on. Members agreed a review is required to confirm WaterNSW's role in the water sector in NSW.
- A large part of WaterNSW's revenue is customer share, but there is also a government share. WaterNSW has said to IPART they need to form a view on how much should be paid by government and not borne by water users however they did not undertake the prudency and efficiency review or provide advice to government on what they should pay for. They have given themselves an extension to do this and a review is underway, with IPART to restart consultation with water users in the next few months. Customers are strongly encouraged to take part and provide input and feedback.
- As part of the restructure, WaterNSW is organising the business to be more focussed on what is our commercial business and what isn't. Internally we are starting to ring fence, so it is clearly identified. Members stated they are supportive of public good projects that are funded correctly, not if only funded by water users.
- WaterNSW is increasing its risk tolerance and has written to a number of Deputy Secretaries informing them we will no longer be performing functions that are unfunded, such as fishways and Operating Licence obligations that are not core business and we are seeking relief until funded. Customers are supportive of this.
- WaterNSW advised the biggest impact will be in capital projects, however if there is a need to invest in an asset to prevent a failure or to ensure our ability to deliver water, we will make the investment. If customers see a drop in service levels, we want to know.

- Members queried if environmental water holders contribute as much revenue as extractive water users. WaterNSW advised they are charged the same way as any other general security entitlement holder. The issue for WaterNSW is their pattern of water use, which is different to extractive users (held for longer or used at different times of the year), which introduces more volatility. It is more pronounced in the south than the north.
- Members questioned if customers will still have the ability to resolve issues locally with regionally based staff at WaterNSW offices. WaterNSW advised this will still be the case. We are cross-training staff with the aim to have a more capable water-versed workforce to support customers and support WaterNSW.
- Members stated it is disappointing that WaterNSW spent the money and put a lot of time into the pricing consultation and IPART did not do their job.
- WaterNSW's response to IPART's information paper can be found on IPART's website [here](#).

4. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

4.1 Customer Services update (R Cocks/A Fuller)

- WaterNSW provided an update on works classifications for metering and the Water Market System (WMS).
- A number of years ago, NSW DCCEEW undertook a review of the Non-Urban Metering Regulations. One of the key outcomes was that **only works actively taking water** are required to be metered and works not actively taking licensed water ('unintended work') would be exempt from the metering requirements.
- An 'unintended work' refers to a water supply work that is authorised, and under the *Water Management Act 2000* does not take, or is not capable of taking, water from a water source. There are a number of [categories that constitute an unintended work](#).
- WaterNSW has developed a series of communications for customers, including notification via letter or email, with follow up notifications via SMS to ensure they are aware of their options to classify works. To gain the unintended work exemption, water users must [amend the classification of their work approval](#) to categorise it as not taking licensed water, which can be done online via WaterNSW's [Customer Portal](#) (refer to our [how-to-guide](#) to register).
- WaterNSW will attempt to contact landholders multiple times and if a response is not received, WaterNSW will assume the landholder agrees with the current classification and this will be the basis of compliance on that work approval going forward.
- Where a work is active, constructed or takes water from a water source, and you do not have an exemption, you are required to comply with metering or reporting obligations. Customers can view the non-urban metering requirements on our [website](#).
- An overview of features now available in the Customer Portal was provided. Registered customers can amend their contact details, view their existing approvals and licences and track the progress of any applications lodged through the portal. Customers can also apply for a BLR and subdivide, surrender and decommission BLR bores and update work status. In-application support is also available.
- Members questioned if flood works approvals can be done in the portal. WaterNSW advised this will be incorporated over time but is not yet currently available in the portal. Eventually the old platform will be shut down and the portal will be the single source of truth for everything.

5. OPERATIONS:

5.1 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- In response to IPART's interim outcomes for the Rural Valleys determination, WaterNSW has adopted a risk-based prioritisation approach for capital investment, strategically balancing risk mitigation with cost efficiency and operational and commercial risks directly related to delivering water and operating infrastructure. Medium to low risk projects have mostly been deferred. Non-commercial projects have also been deferred (eg fishways and CWP projects).
- The WAMC determination is yet to be released so we don't know where we've landed in terms of that funding source for capex.

- During the flood event in April/May 2025, WaterNSW installed gauges on the Paroo River (2x manual, 1x telemetered) and Talyawalka Creek (2x telemetered) to help track any additional inflow gains from outside of the main Darling Baaka River. The telemetered gauges were installed to implement the Flood Review recommendations (Menindee flood events May 2022-Feb 2023) and the manual gauges were installed at the request of SES and readings taken by local landowners.
- An overview of the closure of gauge 419091, Namoi u/s of Walgett (production of flow data stopped when the weir was raised), and installation of a new site on the Barwon River at Walgett Weir (422036) was provided. This new site is a suitable alternative and correlation.
- The Goangra gauge (419026) is now the end of system flow site for the Namoi and the closest Namoi site to Walgett.
- Members stated the Caloola gauge (422035) has no significance for the Namoi. Agreed, the Caloola gauge replaces the Walgett gauge for use in the Barwon. See further discussion in general business.

5.2 Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator update (H Parmar)

- WaterNSW continues to progress the Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Project (PIR), aimed at repairing known problems and restoring full functionality of the asset to improve flow control and water management within the Menindee Lakes system. While early planning and design milestones have been achieved, the project has encountered several challenges that have impacted delivery timelines.
- An overview of project benefits, an explanation of how the project impacts the triggers in the WSPs in the northern catchments and why it is a significant issue was provided.
- Project delays presented and discussed, including physical access (high water levels due to significant rainfall), operational constraints (repairs requiring temporary isolation) and funding shortfall following the IPART determination. WaterNSW is reviewing project scopes and timelines and will prioritise works to ensure critical infrastructure is delivered within available funding and will provide further updates as information becomes available.
- WaterNSW remains committed to delivering this project in a safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible manner. We are currently revising the project delivery schedule and will provide further updates as information becomes available.
- Members stated the Lakes haven't been surcharged for some time with many excuses as to why and questioned when the works will be prioritised, stating it is imperative to have the ability to store 277GL in the top lake.
- Members emphasised the urgency of completing the works, stating restricting access is also restricting income for WaterNSW. Members accept it is a difficult project however requested WaterNSW to revisit to see how the work can be completed in a shorter timeframe. WaterNSW stated high storage levels have impacted mobility on site however we are looking at a number of options to do the work under high conditions and also optimise the timeframe for completion. Will take customer feedback to the project team.
- The primary risk is related to structural stability. We are currently operating Lake Pamamaroo at full supply level. There is an operational constraint that we are balancing between Lake Pamamaroo and Lake Wetherell.
- Members questioned the intent of the works and asked to see the scope of works. WaterNSW advised the scope of work is installing the sheet pile to reinforce abutments (reducing risk of piping failure); and replacement of u/s concrete apron to address the risk to stability of the structure.
- Members would like further engagement on the project to get a better understanding of what is happening and the impacts. It was suggested a sub-committee of the CAG be set up to discuss the project further and report back to the CAG. Once the project commences WaterNSW will provide out of session updates to key stakeholders (including CAG members) as well as regular updates at the CAG meeting.

Action BD2509.01: WaterNSW to provide updates on the Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Project to CAG members as available, prior to commencement of the project.

Responsibility: T Hayes

- Members suggested adding a project tile on the WaterNSW website would help with communication.

Action BD2509.02: WaterNSW to send a copy of the latest the Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Project fact sheet to members (complete).

Responsibility: T Hayes

5.3 Water Planning and Delivery update (G Armstrong)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Barwon-Darling, including recent rainfall, comparison and outlook, tributary inflows, measured inflows, current flows and active management.
- Above average rainfall was observed during March to August, and rainfall is expected to exceed the median range for October to December.
- Bourke flow peaked at nearly 40GL/day during April from combined inflows from different valleys and resulted in a peak close to 26GL/day at Wilcannia during May.
- Due to multiple supplementary access in recent times, irrigation deliveries from regulated valleys are expected to start late this season. Tributary inflows are continuing.
- With no Water Sharing Plan in place from 1 July 2025, there is no mechanism for active management to be implemented. The CEWH advised they are unable to use their licences while the issues are being worked through and are trying to find solutions. Members stated under current conditions (wet) there is currently no negative impact to the environment. Agreed, however there is no line of sight of irrigation water use. There is also an impact to WaterNSW's revenue.
- Members questioned why the previous plan does not continue until a new one is in place. NSW DCCEEW advised there is no mechanism in the Act to extend the plan any further than 12 years (10 year plan, plus 2 year extension).
- Discussion occurred around how the inflow from the Warrego is calculated and members queried how the calculation works on water diverted onto the western floodplain. WaterNSW advised we can't see what's happening until the water hits a river (response in the Darling) and can't predict the losses. Members want certainty that the calculation is applied correctly.

Action BD2509.03: WaterNSW to confirm how the inflow from the Warrego is calculated.

Responsibility: M Prendergast/P Saha

6. GENERAL BUSINESS:

- Member questioned why WaterNSW is running the floodplain management process. WaterNSW advised that NSW DCCEEW makes the rules, and our Assessment and Approvals team do the approvals.
- Members questioned WaterNSW's involvement in the Louth and Tilpa Weir projects. WaterNSW advised this is part of the Northern Basin Toolkit Program which is run by NSW DCCEEW. The weir may end up under the control of WaterNSW in the future, however currently this is a NSW DCCEEW project.
- Further discussion occurred around the removal of the gauge at Walgett, with members stating Walgett Council would like it replaced. WaterNSW advised readings are impacted by the weir pool. The water is unable to be measured correctly, and accurate readings cannot be done. An explanation of how the gauges in the system work with river flow and height etc was provided.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 26 March 2026, Bourke

Meeting closed: 11.30am

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 25 September 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BD2509.01	WaterNSW to provide updates on the Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Project to CAG members as available, prior to commencement of the project.	T Hayes	Ongoing.
BD2509.02	WaterNSW to send a copy of the latest the Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Project fact sheet to members.	T Hayes	Complete.
BD2309.03	WaterNSW to confirm how the inflow from the Warrego is calculated.	M Prendergast / P Saha	Dicks Dam (423007) is the last gauge of Warrego River before joining with Darling River. Barwon Darling model uses the flow of that gauge to calculate the inflow from Warrego to Barwon Darling. The model considers a small loss between Dick Dam and Darling Junction.

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BD2504.02	WaterNSW to contact T Thompson to discuss issues raised at the CAG with a view to progress.	B Maher	Complete.
BD2504.03	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.
BD2504.04	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.

			Refer also to agenda item 5.1.
BD2504.05	WaterNSW to liaise with NSW DCCEEW to consider installing electronic gauging stations at Wanaaring and Enngonia as part of the HNRS project.	M Yeaman	Complete. Requests for new gauges should be raised with NSW DCCEEW, noting the WAMC Determination reduced CAPEX (asset renewals only, no new installs) and OPEX provisions. If two new gauges were to be installed, WaterNSW would need to work with NSW DCCEEW to determine funding options (eg whether to remove other gauges).
BD2504.06	NSW DCCEEW to liaise with Barwon-Darling Water regarding attendance at their AGM in August.	E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)	
BD2504.07	NSW DCCEEW to liaise with Barwon-Darling Water to make arrangements for engagement on intersecting streams/HEW accounting.	E Moore (NSW DCCEEW)	Complete.
BD2504.08	NSW DCCEEW to provide information to the CAG out of session on the national carp eradication program.	A Raine (NSW DCCEEW)	Provided by NSW Fisheries: we agree Carp are a serious pest fish in freshwater systems, modifying environments and leading to significant declines in water quality and habitat for native fish. They are the dominant fish species throughout most of the Murray-Darling Basin, exhibiting large fluctuations in relative numbers and biomass due to fluctuating drought and flood conditions. There are still a range of issues being worked through as part of the National Carp Control Plan, including issues such as: · Susceptibility on non-target species, and · Impacts on threatened species, communities, and other Matters of National Environmental Significance (MNES) (including regulatory considerations), along with ecosystem risks to river systems. The NSW Government continues to encourage the Commonwealth to undertake implementation planning for the release of the virus, noting that some issues are still being worked through.
BD2504.09	NSW DCCEEW to provide update to the CAG out of session on the Barwon-Darling pump recalibration project.	A Bailey (NSW DCCEEW)	Complete. Presented in NSW DCCEEW's afternoon session.