

Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Gateway to Training, 15-21 Russell St, GOONDIWINDI
Date: 19 March 2025
Time: 9.00am

Present: Angelo Saccon, John Appleby, Greg Ringwood and Will Carrigan. Lila-Jane Fisher joined online from 10.45am.

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Partha Saha, Kate Masters, Al King, Michelle Yeaman, Andrew Richardson, Daniel Kemp, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Russell Cocks, Martin Brooks, Stephanie Kermode, Luigi Castro.

Agency and external staff for specific items: David Towner (Sunwater), Dan Connor (NSW DCCEEW) and Catherine Parker (online)(NSW DCCEEW).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: John Shannon, Michael Owen, David Preston.

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, 23 October 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [23 October 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

W Carrigan/J Appleby (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. OPERATIONS

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (P Saha)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Border Rivers, including recent rainfall and outlook, inflows and storage status, overview of the Drought Flood Risk Index and Water Resource Monitoring Dashboard, water allocations and usage, overview of operations and 2024/25 allocation and usage (to end February).
- There has been very little inflow into storages in the past six months, however neutral to positive outlook for the next three months.
- The irrigation season has finished, with around 71GL General Security (A and B class) water used and 6.7GL of supplementary water used from one event for d/s of Newinga customers.
- Boomi replenishment flow was delivered during February 2025 from Pindari Dam releases.
- Pindari Dam Low Level Outlet rectification work is expected to finish before winter.

2.2 Northern Basin Connectivity Program – WaterNSW update (K Masters)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the Northern Basin Connectivity Program, including the Connectivity Panel work and report, recommended changes to increase connectivity, WaterNSW's role and operational considerations and next steps (led by NSW DCCEE 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.
- There is potential for a 6% impact to general security access in the Border Rivers.
- Members highlighted concerns around state shares and the opportunity for NSW customers to take supplementary water if the recommendations go through, as well as the effects on the watercourse. It is likely Queensland customers will get access to supplementary water but not NSW. WaterNSW has raised this and our concerns about how this will work.
- 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](#)

2.3 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional operations and maintenance in the valley.
- Kel Durant (Customer Field Officer) has left WaterNSW. Currently Adam Schubert, who is based in Moree, is servicing both valleys. We have not advertised for a dedicated position in the Border Rivers as yet until a review of the impacts of the non-urban metering reforms is done and future requirements for manual reads etc is known.

2.4 Cold Water Pollution Mitigation Project (D Kemp)

- An update on the Cold Water Pollution (CWP) Mitigation Project at Pindari Dam was presented and discussed, including an overview of the project, impacts and project objectives.
- The Australian Government has provided a \$26.2 million investment for the project that will support native fish and other aquatic life downstream of the dam. WaterNSW, in partnership with DPI Fisheries, will install a bubble plume system at the dam to destratify the reservoir and mitigate CWP. The project is fully funded by the State and Commonwealth governments.
- Bubble plume technology employs large compressors to deliver air to diffusers located near the reservoir bottom. The resultant bubble plume creates circulation 'gyres' that destratify the reservoir, resulting in consistent warmer temperatures throughout the water column. Modelling assessments estimate that the Pindari bubble plume should increase bottom water temperatures in the dam by more than 10°C in summer, thereby mitigating CWP downstream.
- Benefits of the project include improved native fish health, water quality, recreational opportunities and enhanced ecological outcomes. Key dates and milestones presented.
- Members noted there are issues with dam algae at the top of the Dumaresq, noticeable when dam releases increase to 1000ML/day, stating it was a big problem in the last drought. Discussed. WaterNSW will liaise with landholder out of session on releases and get feedback when this occurs.

2.5 WaterNSW Drought Management Approach (A Richardson/S Kermode)

- WaterNSW introduced its drought management approach for the NSW Border Rivers Regulated 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 the Border Rivers 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 Border Rivers 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 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.
- Members highlighted the complexities in the Border Rivers with Queensland involvement, stating engagement needs to involve all water users at the same time with broad engagement from the top of the system to the bottom, including groundwater.

3. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

3.1 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.
- Information on the triage and assessment process and FAQs on trading water can be found at [Trading water - WaterNSW](#) and [Groundwater temporary trades \(71T Dealings\)](#).
- 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 administrative errors and basic information missing. WaterNSW is proactively working with DQPs during the validation stage to eliminate the ability to input incorrect information and 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. Submitting the right data at the beginning of the process reduces delays, reduces costs and speeds up compliance.
- Members raised concerns about discrepancies in water accounting during a recent floodplain harvesting event, stating three different totals were reported across the DAS, a secondary measurement device and the floodplain harvesting portal. Members questioned if benchmark surveys have been correctly uploaded to the DAS and if the accounting system is accurate. Taken on notice.
- Members expressed frustration with ongoing telemetry issues following the 3G shutdown, stating costs associated with rectifying issues are adding up after spending considerable money on installation and hardware. Customers are now faced with additional costs out of their control arising from policy changes, faulty equipment and long processes. Devices were fully functional and compliant prior to the 3G shutdown.

Action BR2503.01: WaterNSW to contact John Appleby to discuss floodplain harvesting accounting anomalies and issues experienced with 3G network shutdown.

Responsibility: M Brooks

- 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 DCCEE (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 were reminded that customers can [subscribe to a free SMS reminder service](#) for annual or monthly **recording and reporting requirements**.

3.2 Non-Urban Metering Review update (D Connor, NSW DCCEE)

- NSW DCCEE 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.
- An overview of the new metering and measuring requirements was presented and discussed, including compliance dates. There are 2 new categories that eliminate the requirement for a DQP and LID/telemetry:
 - users with **>15ML but <100ML of total entitlement** must install a pattern-approved meter (unless exempt) by 1 December 2027 or next approval renewal date (whichever is later);
 - works nominated by **total entitlement of ≤15ML** do not require a meter unless trading allocations (excludes ≥500mm surface water pumps) and must be compliant by 1 December 2027;
 - all licensed water users have mandatory recording and reporting requirements, regardless of size of works or total entitlement.
- **Inland users with ≥100ML total entitlement and/or pumps ≥500mm** must already be compliant with a pattern-approved meter, local intelligence device (LID) and telemetry.
- 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.

- NSW DCCEEW is aware of the barriers to compliance however urged customers to keep records to show they have taken all steps to become compliant.
- 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>

4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

4.1 CAG Engagement with NSW DCCEEW (Water Group) (B Maher/C Parker, NSW DCCEEW)

- WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW (Water) 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 (Water) 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 (Water) 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 sight as to what is coming up. NSW DCCEEW (Water) 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 stated there needs to be more face to face consultation when there are changes to plans and policies and this is a step in the right direction, however if it doesn't work will need to look at alternatives.

4.2 CAG Next Term of Office and Recruitment (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.

4.3 Stakeholder Engagement (B Maher/C Bath)

- 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

5. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

6. GENERAL BUSINESS:

6.1 Pricing Submission update (B Maher)

- Consultants from IPART are currently reviewing WaterNSW's proposal and WaterNSW has provided additional information as requested. We are not aware when the draft determination will be released, however we will endeavour to advise CAG members as soon as known. Customers are encouraged to sign up to IPART's website to be notified when the draft determination is released and provide a submission.
- IPART is required to provide a minimum 28 days for stakeholders to make submissions once the draft determination is released.

Meeting review and close:

Next in person meeting: 5 September 2025

Meeting closed: 12.50pm

Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 19 March 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
BR2503.01	WaterNSW to contact John Appleby to discuss floodplain harvesting accounting anomalies and issues experienced with 3G network shutdown.	M Brooks	Complete.

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		