

# Coastal-Hunter Customer Advisory Group

## Minutes of Meeting

**Location:** Tocal Agricultural College, PATERSON  
**Date:** 26 March 2025  
**Time:** 9.00am

**Present:** Julia Wokes (Chair), Shane Gee, David Williams, Chris Rooney, Ken Bray, Melissa Balas (online) and Wayne Clarke (online).

**WaterNSW:** Brendan Maher, Mahmood Khan, Gavin Armstrong, Partha Saha, Andrew Richardson, Lachlan Welsman, Teegan Hayward, Shelby Tiffin (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: Jonathan Belej, Rooban Roobavannan, David Stockler, Stephanie Kermode.

**Agency and external staff:** David Andersen, Allan Raine and Eva Kokkelmans (online, NSW DCCEEW).

**Meeting Opened:** 9.00am

### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

#### 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

#### 1.2 Apologies: David Frith, Phillip Rudd, Geoff Seccombe, Ainslie Downes, Will Russell.

#### 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, 4 December 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [4 December 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

J Wokes/D Williams (carried)

- Members sought an update on the Hunter EWAG and where it is up to, stating the process to apply was very involved (full police check, passport information, recruitment agency) and came at a very bad time for irrigators. M Walker provided the following information during the meeting - referee checks have been completed, and the final package has been drafted for Ministers approval to appoint Hunter-Paterson EWAG members and alternates.

#### 1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

### 2. OPERATIONS:

#### 2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (G Armstrong//M Khan/R Roobavannan)

- WaterNSW presented a review of operations in the Hunter, North Coast and South Coast valleys, including recent rainfall, current storages status, dam operations, water allocation summary, water usage and balance 2024-25, inflow comparison and rainfall outlook.
- All storages are currently full and spilling or close to spilling. Members commented that the Early Warning Network (EWN) is a great system. For more information and to register for dam alerts and notifications, go to [Early Warning Network - WaterNSW](#)

- Members stated that more education and communication is required to ensure irrigators place water orders, noting there is a gap.
- Members provided feedback on WaterInsights, stating that receiving an SMS advising there is an update is frustrating. In order to get the update, customers must login to WaterInsights and find it. It doesn't work if you are not sitting at a desk all day. WaterNSW acknowledged that WaterInsights is clunky and not mobile friendly.
- Members highlighted an issue with water ordering over Christmas, stating WaterNSW asked some customers to turn off pumps so water could flow down the river. Members stated it takes 6 hours to restart 30 pumps. The Water Planning and Delivery team is unaware of this and will follow up out of session with staff and customers.
- The on-call number for the Water Planning and Delivery team in the Hunter and Richmond valleys is 02 9685 4346 or email [WPD.Hunter@waterNSW.com.au](mailto:WPD.Hunter@waterNSW.com.au) or [WPD.Richmond@waterNSW.com.au](mailto:WPD.Richmond@waterNSW.com.au). Changes to water orders must be made via the Customer Helpdesk on 1300 662 077.

## 2.2 WaterNSW Drought Management Approach (L Welsman/A Richardson/S Kermode)

- WaterNSW introduced its drought management approach for the Coastal and Hunter regulated valleys, 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 Hunter (\*[excluding Lstock and Paterson](#)), Richmond and Bega-Brogo valleys 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 each valley can be found by clicking the relevant valley: [Hunter](#) / [Richmond](#) / [Bega-Brogo](#).

**\*Note:** no drought snapshot was developed for the Paterson.

- An explanation of planning and allocation announcements (how done) was provided, noting water can't be held back for 3-4 years (restrictions) thinking a drought will come. The resource needs to be allocated to customers.
- Members commented if restrictions were put in place earlier on the south coast, critical emergency status may have been avoided. By waiting, town water supply was put at risk. Members urged WaterNSW to communicate early and often.
- 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 DCCEE 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 DCCEE 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 various 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.
- Members noted a potential contingency measure in the Richmond at stage 3 is a pulse release, stating stakeholders have already provided feedback on this (in relation to sand levels), so it is disappointing to see this included. South Coast members stated an option for a pulse release is alarming for the Brogo as well as it will take out the sand barrage and salt will move further upstream. Taken on notice.
- 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 agreed more frequent, valley-specific meetings are required during drought, with additional stakeholders invited. Concerns raised about unregulated water users and how they will be engaged.
- Members would like this item to remain on the agenda for the next meeting so more information and comments can be provided.

### **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 commented that with the roll back of the coastal compliance date many DQPs have let their qualifications lapse. WaterNSW advised that DQP constraints in the market were recognised in the review and some issues have been addressed in the regulatory amendments with changes that reduce the need for DQPs.
- 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 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 questioned how accurate WaterNSW's data is on ownership against approval. WaterNSW advised we only have valid emails/phone numbers for around 30% of customers. When a customer contacts us to update approvals, we now ask for updated details. With the new Water Market System (WMS), we have ability to store the data and communication can be segmented to particular customers and particular valleys.
- Discussion occurred around water user groups' lack of contact details for customers in the valley and queried if there was an opportunity in the future for WaterNSW to pass on information on behalf of water user groups. WaterNSW doesn't have this system in place as yet. As part of data collection, we must tell customers why we are collecting their details, what we are using it for, who it will be shared with etc and get their consent. As we get better data we can look at geographical mailouts etc.
- Members were reminded that customers can [subscribe to a free SMS reminder service](#) for annual or monthly **recording and reporting requirements**.
- WaterNSW advised we are experiencing a cyclical increase in payment plans after annual billing, with a high proportion (~50%) initiated by customers on the coast. Licences will be suspended after a period of time, but the debt will remain and accrue interest. It is important to remind customers to speak to WaterNSW about a payment plan.
- Members sought an update on when IPART is likely to release its draft determination. WaterNSW advised we have provided our feedback to the draft consultant's report and provided additional information as requested. Once this feedback is reviewed, IPART will assess and make a decision on when they are likely to make a draft determination. When the draft report is released, IPART is required to provide a minimum 28 days for stakeholders to make submissions. WaterNSW will advise customers when we know more, however customers are encouraged to sign up to IPART alerts.

### 3.2 Non-Urban Metering Reforms review update (D Andersen, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an update on the Non-Urban Metering (NUM) review including new metering requirements and implementation dates, implementation progress, ongoing implementation work, telemetry uplift program and key messages.
- There are 2 new categories that eliminate the requirement for a DQP and LID/telemetry and encompass a large number of coastal users. All licensed water users have mandatory recording and reporting requirements, regardless of size of works or total entitlement:
  - 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.
- Coastal users with **≥100ML total entitlement** must install a pattern-approved meter, local intelligence device (LID) and telemetry by 1 December 2026.
- Water users with pre-existing conditions on work approvals should already be compliant. There are a small number of users in the Hunter that are affected and need to be metered.
- Engagement with coastal water users on the changes is underway with attendance at upcoming field days (Tocal and Primex), a customer outreach centre in Woolgoolga 2-3 April, targeted web content, newsletters, webinars, staged engagement, print and radio advertising and social media and digital advertising.

- In the coming weeks, letters will be sent to ~400 approval holders with 100ML or more of entitlement to inform them of their obligations and includes details of a webinar planned for late April/early May.
- A webinar will also be held in June (in collaboration with WaterNSW and NRAR) to inform water users about the non-urban metering rules.
- 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>
- To subscribe to NSW DCCEEW non-urban metering updates – [www.watergroup.dpie.nsw.gov.au/non-urban-metering-subscribe](http://www.watergroup.dpie.nsw.gov.au/non-urban-metering-subscribe)

#### **4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:**

##### **4.1 Regional Operations update (M Miller)**

- An overview of Hunter regional projects was presented.
- Members questioned if there are any historical issues at Glennies Creek Dam in relation to the spillway. WaterNSW confirmed there are no issues with the spillways at any of the dams in the Hunter.

##### **4.2 CAG Engagement with NSW DCCEEW (Water Group) (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 stated an issue for this CAG is the geographical spread of the Coastal and Hunter valleys, suggesting the concept would need to be different for this CAG. Discussed.
- Members stated that CAG members are volunteers and don't have the mechanism to get information to the wider irrigation community. With so much consultation happening at once it is a fine line with keeping up to speed and overloading customers. NSW DCCEEW acknowledged that recent engagement has been overwhelming for customers.
- One member stated meetings are already long and extending the time of the meeting into the afternoon will make it difficult for some members to attend. NSW DCCEEW and WaterNSW will take feedback on board and are happy to hear suggestions on other ways to engage and reach stakeholders.
- Members stated having NSW DCCEEW at the CAG meeting gives customers an opportunity to engage and provide feedback.

##### **4.3 CAG Next Term of Office & 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.
- Members welcomed WaterNSW proposal for Lower Nepean Hawkesbury Water Users to join the Coastal-Hunter CAG.

- Going forward, one meeting will be held in the Hunter valley and one meeting will be held in Sydney to provide opportunity for coastal water users to attend in person.

#### **4.4 Stakeholder Engagement (B Maher)**

- 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](mailto:engagement@waternsw.com.au)
- Members suggested adding Health Services to the stakeholder lists (eg Hunter-New England Health), particularly for algal and water quality issues.

#### **5. BUSINESS PAPERS:**

- Taken as read.

#### **6. GENERAL BUSINESS:**

##### **6.1 Upper Hunter Hydro Projects (J Wokes)**

- Members questioned if there were any updates on the Upper Hunter Hydro Projects, stating there are concerns around water quality and salinity.
- Information on the project can be found on [WaterNSW's website](#) or the [Upper Hunter Hydro](#) webpage.

#### **Meeting review and close:**

**Next face to face meeting:** 17 September 2025

**Meeting closed:** 1.15pm

## Coastal-Hunter Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 26 March 2025

### New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil new actions.		

### Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
CVH2412.03	WaterNSW to advise how many coastal licence holders are trading in groundwater and report to the CAG.	D Stockler	<b>Complete.</b> Refer to agenda item 3.1