

Lachlan Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Agriculture and Research Centre, Fifield Rd, CONDOBOLIN

Date: 9 April 2025

Time: 9.30am

Present: Gordon Turner (Chair), Michael Payten, Bryan Goldsmith, Glenn Daley, Tom Green, Madeline Clark, Andrew Stalley, Andrea Wilson (online), Joanne Lenehan (online), Paul Doyle (observer).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Jonathan Belej, Rooban Roobavannan, Ben Coffey, Himali Hadungoda, Kristen Carter, Sonia Townsend (online), Shelby Tiffin (online), John Cooper (online), Yarraan Doyle (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Russell Cocks, Martin Brooks, Jonathan Belej, Geoff Watson.

Agency and external staff for specific items: David Andersen, Shahadat Chowdhury, Eva Kokkelmans and Amy Halliday (NSW DCCEEW, online).

Meeting Opened: 9.30am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: Jock Coupland, Bill Back, Charlie Harris, Tim Bell, Ed Fagan, Michael Storrier.

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, 16 October 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [16 October 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

B Goldsmith/M Clark (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

2.1 Customer Services (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.
- Members queried what drives the impact area and if it is a result of the hydrological review. WaterNSW confirmed this is the case, however not all applications require a hydrological review (refer to triage assessment process link below). An application may be refused or a lower volume offered.

- Members sought clarification on the model the hydrologists use to assess impact to other users (is it a geographical area?). WaterNSW advised there are a number of other considerations such as cumulative impact, pressure on the water source etc, as well as a geographical location. Taken on notice.

Action LAC2504.01: WaterNSW to provide information on the hydrological review/criteria used to assess temporary groundwater trades when looking at third-party impacts.

Responsibility: D Stockler

- Members expressed frustration at lack of feedback when an application is declined, as well as time taken for decisions to be made (one member stated it took 2.5 years for a new bore application due to 2 objections). Members feel the interface is lost with no dedicated groundwater team and customers unable to speak to anyone on an appropriate pathway. Taken on notice, WaterNSW will pass on feedback to NSW DCCEEW.

Action LAC2504.02: WaterNSW to pass on CAG feedback to NSW DCCEEW regarding lack of feedback around assessment of bore applications, especially when they have been declined.

Responsibility: D Stockler

- Members questioned if there is opportunity to broaden the trial to other areas, with Lachlan Valley Water interested in taking part. WaterNSW is keen for other customers to participate in the trial and will liaise with Lachlan Valley Water.
- 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 basic information missing ([administrative](#)). Our focus is now working with DQPs during the validation stage to 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 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.
- Discussion occurred around anticipated increase in work approval adjustments as new Floodplain Management Plans come into effect and questioned if there a pathway to show customers are trying to comply when barriers present. WaterNSW advised that evidence of correspondence should be adequate.
- 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 if there is an opportunity in the next 12-18 months to hold outreach/information sessions in the valley so customers can interface with WaterNSW on issues with approvals etc. WaterNSW advised there are sessions planned in the Murrumbidgee and will progress to other areas if

customers are interested. Customers will be encouraged to make appointments as well as having drop ins.

Action LAC2504.03: WaterNSW to arrange an outreach/information session in the Lachlan valley so customers can interface with WaterNSW on issues with work approvals etc.

Responsibility: B Maher / K Carter

- Members were reminded that customers can [subscribe to a free SMS reminder service](#) for annual or monthly **recording and reporting requirements**.
- An update on the Lachlan Carryover Evaporation Reduction was provided. NSW DCCEEW updated the WSP on 4 October to reflect the new calculation methodology (clause 45 (2)). The calculation for the first quarter of 24/25 was made using the old methodology and has been applied. The first deduction using the new method will be applied at end of the financial year for last 3 quarters of 24/25. In future years, a single deduction will be applied once a year at the end of the water year, however the evaporation deduction percentage will still be calculated quarterly. Correspondence will be sent to licence holders explaining the change. Discussed.
- Members sought an update on WaterNSW's pricing submission. 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.

2.2 Metering (D Andersen, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an update on the Non-Urban Metering (NUM) review including new metering requirements, implementation progress, ongoing implementation work, telemetry uplift program 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. If customers have already installed telemetry and the unit has failed, they may be eligible to participate in the program and are encouraged to submit an expression of interest.
- Members stated that people who got in early and did the right thing by installing telemetry are now disadvantaged with the government paying for telemetry, stating the value of the rebate previously applied does not equate.
- Discussion occurred around simple meter issues that currently require DQP validation (if >100ML). As part of the telemetry review, NSW DCCEEW is working to make the rules easier (eg battery replacement and revalidation) and is expecting work to be completed mid-year.

- NSW DCCEEW confirmed that once an S9li has been submitted and an alternative measurement approved, customers can remove the meter and take to the DQP, however if >100ML will require a DQP to reinstall.
- 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>.

3. OPERATIONS:

3.1 Water Planning and Delivery (R Roobavannan)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Lachlan and Belubula valleys, including storage and inflow update, dam operations, water availability and account balance, weather outlook and long-range forecast, operational surplus summary, orders vs take, comparison of inflows since 2022 flood and storage forecast.
- A summary of operational surplus was provided. WaterNSW's operational surplus target is 3%, with current operations well below this (around 2.3%).
- Total orders for Q1 and Q2 were 135GL vs total usage 115GL, therefore 20GL was passed downstream. This was able to be captured in Lake Brewster or Lake Cargelligo however is not ideal due to evaporation and transmission losses. Discussion occurred around ordering behaviour and the effects and impacts of overordering, with the key message to customers to cancel orders ASAP if they don't intend to use so the volume can be reallocated to other orders. If outside of lead time, orders can be cancelled in iWAS; if within lead time, customers should phone WaterNSW.
- Members stated overordering is a result of NRAR's communications and tolerance levels around overordering, which encourages people to overorder. WaterNSW advised that river operators try to maximise surplus where possible however as we approach dry conditions the reserve will become more critical, and it is important to work together to maximise what we can now for the future.
- WaterNSW is currently working with NSW DCCEEW on Lachlan WSP review.
- The Lachlan Airspace Review Panel (LARP) will reconvene during April to discuss airspace operations.
- Members congratulated the Water Planning and Delivery team on excellent operation of the Belubula system and also Lake Brewster (recent algae issue), stating it was a proactive approach and very well managed.

3.2 Allocations update (S Chowdhury, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an update on water allocations, including water allocation methods and key inputs, current allocation, explanation of operational losses and clarification of water account reset (per action LAC2410.02).
- An explanation of the account reset process was presented. A reset only occurs when all 3 storages are full, deemed full or will fill from immediate flow. All balances in remaining general security accounts, conveyance accounts and spillable high security sub-accounts are withdrawn. After withdrawal of existing balances, all general security accounts are equalised and given a new allocation based on a resource assessment at the time. The last reset was September 2022. Customers disputed this, saying the last reset was May 2023.
- Members stated on 11 June 2024 the system was 22GL short of a spill reset however by 24 June this was exceeded and WaterNSW recommended a reset to the department. Members questioned why the reset never happened in June, stating there was ample system flow to indicate the storages 'will fill'.
- WaterNSW advised the system is managed daily and regular information is passed on to the department. An early assessment was made that there was potential for a spill, however after further reassessment and review it was deemed as not a spill. Other things to consider is what is happening in the valley (airspace targets, restrictions at Lake Brewster, Wyangala Dam). WaterNSW has to manage the system within the rules but also minimise potential of downstream flooding.

- The department publishes guides to water allocation methodologies for all major regulated river systems. The guide for the Lachlan River regulated river can be found at <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/allocations-availability/allocations/how-water-is-allocated/resource-assessment-process>

3.3 Regional Operations (B Coffey)

- WaterNSW provided an update on preventative maintenance (routine) and completed work orders in the valley and a summary of current issues and outage plans.
- WaterNSW is managing the airspace releases for Lake Brewster weir and storage to minimise probability of damage. There is still erosion damage to the main embankment which is covered in the flood recovery program.
- A program of repair work at Coocumber Weir is to commence in July 2025. Members sought support from WaterNSW to remove the bridge, stating if there is significant flooding in the Belubula it would flood the town, and the bridge will create a plug hole. Lachlan Valley Water provide further information and discuss with WaterNSW out of session for consideration.
- On overview of upcoming outages was provided. There will be no impacts to water delivery.
- WaterNSW provided an update on completed and remaining works to be done at Lake Brewster. Ninety percent of costs have been recovered through insurance.

3.4 Mid-Lachlan Creeks Weirs (B Coffey/J Morton (NSW DCCEE) (discussion)

- Members requested this issue be added to the agenda for discussion given the Mid-Lachlan Creek weirs are now mentioned in the Regional Water Strategy and have reached out to WaterNSW and NSW DCCEE to discuss how a way forward can be progressed.
- These weirs are privately-owned and in a state of disrepair. Members are concerned about the inefficiency of the river being run at 700ML/day to get water down the Mid-Lachlan Creeks and the costs for the valley if WaterNSW take on these structures.
- It was acknowledged there is no easy answer and Lachlan Valley Water is willing to facilitate meetings with landholders, WaterNSW and the department to find a way forward.
- NSW DCCEE recognises this is an important and complex action for the Lachlan valley and requires further investigation and will update the CAG at the next meeting (or prior if information is available). Members stated options should be explored (other than replacement or repairs) to see if there is something else that can achieve the same outcomes.

3.5 WaterNSW Drought Management Approach (H Hadungoda)

- WaterNSW introduced its drought management approach for the Lachlan 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. WaterNSW has mapped out options and will collaborate with stakeholders to understand impacts.
- An overview of what happened in the Lachlan valley 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 Lachlan valley 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 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 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. The options will be identified and based on the conditions at the time as to what needs to be done and when.
- 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 stated this approach is a step in the right direction and suggested keeping communication simple at this stage and manage as needed.

3.6 Lake Cargelligo Embankment Upgrade update (G Watson)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the project, stating tenders for a new contractor to complete the work are in the final stages. Aiming to award the contract and have site reestablishment in May, weather dependent. Once approved, this will trigger a drawdown of the lake to enable construction works to recommence in late May, with 'heavy works' in June. The work is likely to be completed over two winter drawdown periods in 2025 and 2026 (with the lake returning to between 50-70% in between).
- Can only do remaining works on levee B and C (A would need to be next year or at a later time).
- Discussion occurred around cost to complete with the forecast approximately \$27M.

4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

4.1 Works and trade rules in prescribed wetlands – revised and updated approach April 2025 (A Halliday and A Bailey, NSW DCCEEW)

- In response to a Natural Resources Commission (NRC) recommendation to improve protection for significant wetlands when unregulated inland WSPs are replaced, a revised approach to water supply works and trade rules is being proposed to protect internationally (Ramsar), nationally and regionally important wetlands with the plan areas.
- Following community feedback, the NSW Government has updated the maps of proposed prescribed wetlands areas in 6 draft unregulated inland WSPs. To accompany map changes, there is a proposal to introduce off-river pool rules to restrict new works and trades in areas where they don't currently apply, and trade rule exceptions only in specific circumstances.
- NSW DCCEEW released revised maps and approach on 4 March 2025 for a 3 week period of comment, which included a webinar and fact sheets. Feedback was taken on board, and the approach was updated as announced 9 April (overview provided).
- Members queried how off river pools are identified and questioned why they aren't on the maps. NSW DCCEEW advised that they weren't mapped in previous iterations so not included now. A determination about whether something is an off river pool will be made with an onsite assessment when an application is made. There are trade rules in the current WSP for off river pools, what is changing is the maps for prescribed wetlands.

- Discussion occurred around Lake Brewster, which is mapped as a prescribed wetland, and what effects this will have. NSW DCCEEW advised these changes are for unregulated WSPs. Lake Brewster is on a regulated system.
- The draft rules relate to water access (water supply works and trade) under the WMA Act, they do not change land use or land zoning and don't impact cultivation consents. Existing works are not affected.
- NSW DCCEEW stated the rules are about new or amended works and trade and advised if there is an instance where this will impact on what landholders are currently doing, they should contact the department.
- Members requested the department meet with Lachlan Valley Water for further discussion.
- For more information <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/plans-and-strategies/water-sharing-plans/inland-unregulated-water-sharing-plan-prescribedwetlands>

4.2 CAG Engagement with NSW DCCEEW (Water Group) (B Maher / E Kokkelmans, NSW DCCEEW)

- WaterNSW and NSW DCCEEW (Water) provided an overview of the refreshed approach to CAGs into the next term of office to improve regionally focussed engagement.
- CAG meetings will be held in person twice per year per CAG, with the option of additional online meetings as required or requested (by customers or WaterNSW), and two CAG Chairpersons meetings per year.
- It is proposed that WaterNSW-specific content will be in a morning session and NSW DCCEEW (Water) and other agency content in the afternoon, with the afternoon session open for additional stakeholders. Input on proposed agenda items will be required in advance from CAG members to ensure the right people can attend to discuss relevant matters.
- NSW DCCEEW (Water) discussed their proposal for how their sessions will be managed, including providing a forward-looking consultation agenda (high level for the year ahead) to give customers a clear line of site as to what is coming up.
- Members stated they want collaboration and engagement at the start of something, not part way through and requested issues be worked through throughout the process, not at the end.
- Members are supportive of the proposal, stating the department needs to provide adequate resources.

4.3 CAG Recruitment and Next Term of Office (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.

4.4 Stakeholder Engagement (B Maher/K Carter)

- 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
- Per action LAC2403.02, WaterNSW will work with customer to plan a 2-3 day tour of the valley as requested by customers. This will be an opportunity for WaterNSW staff to meet and hear from customers and gain local historical knowledge as well as an opportunity for customers to meet and hear from staff local to the area or those working on local projects or initiatives. WaterNSW will work with customers on a proposed itinerary.

5. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

6. GENERAL BUSINESS:

- A Stalley advised he is stepping down from the CAG after many years as an active member on the CAG and the CSC, stating this has been a great forum where everyone can have their say, and thanked WaterNSW for communications and information.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 23 September 2025

Meeting closed: 3.00pm

Lachlan Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 9 April 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
LAC2504.01	WaterNSW to provide information on the hydrological review/criteria used to assess temporary groundwater trades when looking at third-party impacts.	D Stockler	
LAC2504.02	WaterNSW to pass on CAG feedback to NSW DCCEEW regarding lack of feedback around assessment of bore applications, especially when they have been declined.	D Stockler	
LAC2504.03	WaterNSW to arrange an outreach/information session in the Lachlan valley so customers can interface with WaterNSW on issues with work approvals etc.	B Maher / K Carter	

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
LAC2403.02	WaterNSW to organise a 'river run' in the Lachlan valley, in collaboration with Lachlan CAG members.	B Maher	WaterNSW is looking to do this as part of the future engagement process (refer to agenda item 4.4)
LAC2410.01	NSW DCCEEW to provide information on the meter revalidation process when available and what is being done to ensure it can be done when the date comes around.	D Connor (NSW DCCEEW)	<p>Complete.</p> <p>The rules have now changed. Once a meter is installed by a DQP, in the first period there is no need for revalidation until the 10 year mark. After 10 years, there is a requirement for revalidation after 5 years.</p> <p>Also making changes to the maintenance specifications, which currently states the need for volumetric verification every 5 years. This will be replaced with a risk-based check.</p>