

Lachlan Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Agricultural Research Advisory Station, Fifield Rd, Condobolin
Date: 23 September 2025
Time: 9.00am

Present: Gordon Turner (Chair), Stuart Morrow, Tom Green, William Back, Andrea Wilson, Narelle Hall, Phil Greenhill, Glenn Daley, Danika McDonald, Michael Storrier, Betty Biggs (online).

WaterNSW: Andrew George, Brendan Maher, Kristen Carter, Rooban Roobavannan (online), Ben Coffey (online), Daniel Gamboa (online), Shelby Tiffin (online), Yarraan Doyle (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Russell Cocks, Amanda Fuller, Martin Brooks, Lachlan Browne, Daniel Gamboa.

External agency staff: Shahadat Chowdhury, Erwin Jeremiah and Ryan Potts (NSW DCCEEW).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: Ed Fagan, Michael Payten, Jock Coupland, Charlie Harris, Paul Doyle, Damien Byrne.

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.

T Green/G Turner (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. INTRODUCTION TO CAGs:

2.1 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 DCCEEW, focusing on policy, programs and emerging priorities. Members are encouraged to suggest relevant agenda topics for consideration for both sessions via the Chairperson.

2.2 Election of Chairperson

- Gordon Turner was nominated by Tom Green, seconded by Glenn Daley. Nil other nominations received. Accepted and carried.

3. OPERATIONS:

3.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (R Roobavannan)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Lachlan valley, including storage and inflow review, dam operations, comparison of inflows since last flood, weather outlook, long range forecast (October to December), water availability and usage, account balance, comparison of orders vs take, operational surplus summary, total sales vs essential requirements, S&D replenishment flow summary and future planning. Information can be found on [WaterInsights](#).
- Above average rainfall is expected across most of eastern Australia, with a 70-80% chance of exceeding median rainfall for the Lachlan valley.
- The Lachlan Airspace Reference Panel met on 9 September and agreed to target Wyangala Dam at 93% by the end of September.
- An overview of the water account balance 2024-25 was provided. Members requested the actual environmental high security balance be separated to segment the spillable amount for more clarity.
- Members questioned when the Q4 evaporation reduction is finalised. WaterNSW advised the account is finalised by 30 July however the evaporation reduction will be applied based on the account balance at 30 June. Members felt this could potentially create a loophole for water users. To be discussed with NSW DCCEE later today.
- Operational surplus was discussed. Customers should contact WaterNSW if an order needs to be amended/cancelled due to pump failure etc, so orders can be reallocated, if possible, to reduce operational surplus.
- The 2025 irrigation season started approximately a month earlier than previously expected due to reduced rainfall across the Lachlan valley. A major environmental water delivery started in transit on 19 August, as part of an environmental flow event designed to support Murray Cod spawning and nesting in the lower Lachlan River.
- Translucent delivery was triggered on 14 September after the required 250,000ML of inflows and ran for 3 days, releasing 14.5GL. Flow is currently passing through the Lake Cargelligo area.
- Lake Cargelligo is being held at 50% to support the Lake Cargelligo Embankment Project. Stage 1 works are due to be completed by late October. Depending on progress, there may be constraints on translucent releases from Wyangala Dam.

3.2 Lake Cargelligo Embankment Upgrade update (D Gamboa)

- A contract for Stage 2 of the project has been awarded to A1 Earthworx (regionally based) who successfully completed a trial embankment at West Wyalong. Mobilisation is complete and site works are in progress, largely focused on Embankment B which is the largest component of the works.
- Procurement of materials is progressing well with significant stockpiles on site and regular deliveries daily. Accelerated program, 7 days/week to take advantage of the current drawdown.
- The arborist and ecologist are continuing to work through identified trees to be removed, with positive feedback. There has been some community concern around habitat breeding season and regular updates are being provided to address concerns.
- Community engagement with impacted landholders is ongoing as well as 1:1 discussion with the project team.

- Lake levels likely to be steady at 50% until the end of October. It is proposed to progress critical works while Lake is at 50% to allow completion works to continue post October at 70%. Key stakeholders have been notified of the proposed drawdown period.
- Additional work fronts commencing this week on Embankments C1, C2 and C3 in September 2025; non-critical works (70% level) will progress November 2025–March 2026 to completion.
- Embankment A (separable portion) proposed to commence during drawdown in April 2026 (subject to access and drawdown approval). WaterNSW will reach out to the landholder again for access.
- Members questioned what the budget is to complete. WaterNSW advised Phase 2 remains at \$27M as reported at the last meeting and the forecast to complete remains under budget. The cost to date is ~\$36M, with the overall budget for Stage 1 & 2 ~\$59.8M. Members stated this is different to what is reported in the capex report (\$68M).
- Members questioned how quickly the restriction to hold the Lake at 50% can be lifted if required by the Water Planning and Delivery (WPD) team. The project team, WPD team and the contractor are meeting tomorrow to work through scenarios around the impact, risks and time requirements if there is a requirement to lift it. The safety of the structure is paramount.
- Members appreciate the difficulty in coming up with a trigger however want confidence that a decision will be made when required. A further update will be provided out of session after the above meeting.

Action LAC2509.01: WaterNSW to review the total budget for Lake Cargelligo (as reported in the capex report) and confirm.

Responsibility: D Gamboa

- WaterNSW is committed to continuing to provide updates on the project to the CAG out of session if members would like updates.

4. WATERNSW UPDATE:

4.1 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.
- To restore financial sustainability, WaterNSW needs to become leaner, smaller and more focused, ensuring we can continue to deliver water when and where it matters. It's not expected that we will continue to deliver the same volume of work as we do today.
- 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 (regulated as 41 separate price-regulated segments). 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. WaterNSW moved 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.

- Members questioned why the government isn't contributing. WaterNSW advised that IPART didn't complete its review on prudence and efficiency of WaterNSW's expenditure and because of this, the government has said they don't have an independent position on our costs. WaterNSW is regulated by IPART as 41 separate price-regulated businesses and there is no cross subsidisation.
- Treasury has commenced a review to be able to give advice to Ministers on options for regulatory reform.
- Members stated that previous restructures been detrimental to the Lachlan valley and corporate knowledge and regionally based staff are consistently lost.
- Members expressed frustration that issues were raised early in the pricing consultation process and customers were not listened to (eg Lake Cargelligo), stating the way data was collected was misleading and consultants misconstrued information and feedback.
- Members questioned what the future for WaterNSW will look like in rural valleys if the business is running at a loss and the ability to spread costs is limited. WaterNSW stated these are issues the government needs to address; does it want WaterNSW remain a SOC. To remain a financially sustainable business, we can't be doing things that should be funded by other entities, noting our additional regulatory obligations are unfunded.
- 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. We are seeking relief from our Operating Licence obligations until funded.
- Customers are encouraged to participate in IPART's consultation sessions.
- Members questioned what the impact to customers will be, stating WaterNSW needs to ensure it has the resources to deliver (eg licensing/approvals). WaterNSW advised that the main changes will be to capital projects and back end functions rather than customer services, 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 (refer to agenda item 5.1).
- Members requested details of relevant staff who they can contact for local issues, out of hours/emergencies etc and suggested upgrading iWAS to cater for out of hours issues (eg ability to amend an order), stating the technology is there, customers have access, so it should be utilised.

5. REGIONAL OPERATIONS:

5.1 Regional Operations update (B Coffey)

- 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. Medium to low risk projects have mostly been deferred (eg compliance and provisions related to crane safety, fleet, plant and equipment).
- The top 10 projects prioritised for the Lachlan valley were presented and discussed, as well as examples of some of the projects that have been deferred.

Action LAC2509.02: WaterNSW to contact Gordon Turner to discuss Torrigan Weir.

Responsibility: B Coffey

- Members questioned if Carcoar Dam will be unmanned under the new structure. WaterNSW is still working through the restructure process, and the design is yet to be finalised. We are working closely with our teams to see where we can find efficiencies, comply with our regulatory requirements and minimise risk. An update can be provided to the CAG on the new structure once finalised, if majority of members are interested.
- WaterNSW provided an overview of the preventative maintenance plan, corrective maintenance work orders, current issues and outage plans.

- Flood damage repairs to Levee C at Lake Brewster have been completed. Works to storage embankment, inflow wetland embankment and main embankment to be initiated under the flood recovery program, with dates to be confirmed.
- Repair works to Coocumber Weir have been delayed due to water levels and will be completed when opportune.
- Members questioned if there has been any movement on the mid-Lachlan weirs. Currently there is no funding so it is unlikely anything will progress.

6. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

6.1 Customer Services update (R Cocks/M Brooks/A Fuller/L Browne)

- WaterNSW provided an update on Customer Services, including the third party consent trial for temporary groundwater trade, water market reform, IVT engagement, metering and the Water Market System (WMS).
- Based on customer feedback around the challenges of obtaining consent from impacted third-party landholders for proposed groundwater trades, WaterNSW has trialled an objection-style pathway on behalf of two applicants. These both resulted in objections to the application, which then resulted in a smaller volume being offered or the trade being rejected. WaterNSW is continuing to trial this process, and pending outcomes, may offer this service on a 'fee for service' basis to applicants in future. Applicants will still have the option to get their own approval from impacted parties. Refer to our [FAQs](#) for more information. Discussed.
- Members stated it is important to implement a system that works and removes the roadblocks. WaterNSW will continue the trial, assess the effectiveness of the process and look for opportunities to simplify before this is made available.
- A number of years ago, NSW DCCEE 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. Works can be reclassified at any time.
- 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 raised concerns about discrepancies between DAS readings and meter reads in iWAS, which may result in over-reporting of water usage. WaterNSW explained that pulse meters and LIDs collect usage data from pulses and do not reflect the in-field meter read. If the meter and LID were installed at different times, discrepancies are expected. An offset is applied in the system to account for this, but it only works when the DAS total is lower than the meter read. WaterNSW also noted that incorrect scaling factors during installation can cause over-reporting for example, configuring 1 pulse to equal 1ML instead of 100KL. Desktop reviews are conducted to identify affected sites with water users

contacted to advise them of the issue and recommend they contact their DQP for LID. Members expressed concern that these discrepancies may be viewed by NRAR as breaches of licence conditions.

Action LAC2509.03: CAG members to send examples of water accounting issues to WaterNSW (Lachlan.Browne@watarnsw.com.au) for further investigation.

Responsibility: T Green/W Back/M Storrier

- Members suggested adding a DAS button to iWAS to make it easier for customers to login. WaterNSW to investigate.

Action LAC2509.04: WaterNSW to explore feasibility of adding a DAS login button to iWAS.

Responsibility: B Maher

7. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

8. GENERAL BUSINESS:

- Nil raised.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 24 March 2026, Condobolin

Meeting closed: 12.45pm

Lachlan Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 23 September 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
LAC2509.01	WaterNSW to review the total budget for Lake Cargelligo (as reported in the capex report) and confirm discrepancy.	D Gamboa	WaterNSW confirmed the total budget for this project is indeed \$59.8M. The figures provided in the Capex report include the corporate overhead allowance, which is not part of the project budget. WaterNSW is working on improving our reporting and aims to have the new and improved report ready for the next meeting.
LAC2509.02	WaterNSW to contact Gordon Turner to discuss Torrigan Weir.	B Coffey	Complete.
LAC2509.03	CAG members to send examples of water accounting issues to WaterNSW (Lachlan.Browne@waterNSW.com.au) for further investigation.	T Green/M Storrer/W Back	
LAC2509.04	WaterNSW to explore feasibility of adding a DAS login button to iWAS.	B Maher	

Carried forward 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	