

Macquarie-Cudgegong Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Dubbo RSL, Brisbane St, DUBBO

Date: 4 March 2025

Time: 9.30am

Present: Tim Gainsford (Chair), Peter Schuster, Rick Reid, Greg Murie, Michael Sutherland, Tim Hosking, Lyn Davies, Michael Drum, David Ramsay, Fergus Job (observer, online).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Kate Masters, Mahmood Khan, Damien Ashlin, Himali Hadungoda, Chris Bath, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Russell Cocks, Jack Finch, Mat Miller, Justin Cairns.

Agency and external staff for specific items: David Andersen, Allan Raine (online) and Peter Hyde (online) – NSW DCCEEW.

Meeting Opened: 9.30am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: Stewart Denston, Frank McKillop, Clare Cam, Julian Geddes, David Walker, David Frith.

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.

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 commended WaterNSW's efforts, however commented this may be a potential point of conflict in regional communities. WaterNSW noted this and advised the objections-style process is in place.
- 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.

- Members stated that a lot of equipment installed 2-3 years ago is inexplicably failing prematurely and providers are not warranting the equipment or have gone out of business. The rectification process is delayed due to availability and access to DQPs (some are a 12 month wait) and customers are wearing the high costs of failure. There is a lot of frustration around this and the S9li process, however members noted WaterNSW staff have been excellent.

Action MC2503.01: WaterNSW to provide an analysis of S9li equipment failure (make/model) to see if there is a trend/theme and report findings back to the CAG.

Responsibility: D Stockler

- 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 were reminded that **water supply work and/or water use approvals** are granted for a set term ranging from 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 (Water) to simplify the process.
- WaterNSW advised customers can check what is registered on their work approval via the [Customer Portal](#), where work approval and licence information is in the one place. Additional features (including mapping) will be added to the portal over time and customers are encouraged to register. Currently BLR bore applications and amendments 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**.
- At the last CAG meeting, some customers indicated a desire for daily extraction volumes (as part of a valid water order) to be subject to NRAR compliance. Currently only total order volume is subject to NRAR compliance. WaterNSW consulted with DCCEEW and based on NRAR input to our Water Order review and definition, daily extractions are currently not an area of compliance focus. Customers are deemed compliant as long as they do not exceed the water order volume, however WaterNSW would like customers to take their daily volume per the water order. If this changes, customers should contact WaterNSW to adjust daily volumes as releases are based on this.

2.2 Metering update (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, 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.
- Members stated this is good news, however is frustrating for those who have been proactive and installed LIDs early who are now disadvantaged due to shifting goal posts. NSW DCCEEW noted there was previously a telemetry rebate of \$975 credit which was applied to accounts.
- 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.
- Discussion occurred around general frustration and issues with the non-urban metering reforms, with members highlighting issues with supply of equipment, servicing, warranty, accountability, unrealistic timeframes and compliance.
- 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 update (M Khan)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Macquarie and Cudgegong valleys, including recent rainfall and BOM rainfall and temperature outlook, observed vs statistical inflows, comparison of drought inflows, storage status, water availability, water usage and balance summary, dam operations, tributary flows, S&D replenishment, operations plan for 2024-25 and Bulk Water Transfer (BWT).
- Releases from the dam will be made to meet downstream demand. It is expected the irrigation demand will be finished by mid-March. Minimal environmental and irrigation demand is anticipated for the rest of 2024-25.
- Members stated that the 3% efficiency target is not realistic in a big irrigation season and questioned if WaterNSW could look at this (ie drop efficiency when lower demand/winter and increase during a high irrigation season). WaterNSW advised this is not a straight line, the 3% is an overall average across the year.
- Members queried if there is policy WaterNSW can look at implementing during peak irrigation periods around the timing of water orders (those with short delivery timeframes who order at the last minute) to ensure downstream users are not disadvantaged. WaterNSW advised there is no policy, however operationally there is a buffer if this occurs.
- The translucency period starts 15 March to 30 November. Supplementary access will be provided when triggers are met, and all stock and domestic replenishment flows are delivered.
- Under current conditions a bulk water transfer (BWT) will not be required until July 2025 (for planning purposes), with supply for irrigation and environmental demand for 2024-25 available in Burrendong Dam. Members questioned if Cudgegong customers were aware of this and urged WaterNSW to start the conversation with them early.

Action MC2503.02: WaterNSW to liaise with Cudgegong customers regarding the Bulk Water Transfer.

Responsibility: M Khan/B Maher

3.2 Regional Operations update (M Miller)

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional projects (Burrendong Dam 750mm DS RFG & HJ valve refurbishment and Windamere Dam 610 & 1220mm FCD valves overhaul) and maintenance activities (Marebone Weir desilting, Marra Creek channel vegetation control, Warren Weir workshop/office replacement).
- The Bulgeraga Channel realignment is on hold pending cultural heritage assessment and investigation.
- Options for the North Macquarie Marsh bypass channel are currently with the project team for investigation of best options as to how we proceed.

3.3 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.
- 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. Members stated it is critical to be kept up to date.
- Members stated they don't want to see a precautionary approach for delivery targets taken any further and questioned the likelihood of this being taken further (outside this program). WaterNSW advised that the data is very clear for the Macquarie, and this is more about ensuring we get it right when we forecast to allow the take.
- Discussion occurred around QLD's contribution with concerns raised whether NSW will be required to supplement what QLD takes out of the system. WaterNSW advised the Border Rivers is jointly operated under an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA). When it comes to northern connectivity, the Border Rivers, Gwydir and Namoi would be most impacted.
- Further information is available at [Northern Basin Connectivity Program](#)

3.4 WaterNSW Drought Management Approach (H Hadungoda / S Kermod and A Raine online)

- WaterNSW introduced its drought management approach for the Macquarie-Cudgegong 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 Macquarie 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 Macquarie 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 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.
- 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 that service level have to increase during drought and times of crises, stating increased engagement, consultation and opportunity for input is important and needs to ensure the right people are engaged at the right time. A focus on recovery after drought should also be included.

4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

4.1 Revised prescribed wetlands maps for draft unregulated WSPs (P Hyde, NSW DCCEE)

- 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.
- An overview of the revised approach was presented, including what was heard (2023/24) and how NSW DCCEE responded, what is included in the revised approach (2025) and proposed next steps.
- 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.
- 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 DCCEE noted that Buddah Lake (regulated), if still a prescribed wetland, would be exempt from trade rules and stated there is a difference between prescribed wetlands and Ramsar. Only internationally recognised Ramsar wetlands have the 'within 3km upstream' rule.
- Members stated there is a lot of conjecture about the accuracy of FMP (zone D) and questioned if any ground truthing will be done before being included in the WSPs. NSW DCCEE advised there is no ability/resources to ground truth.
- Discussion occurred around the accuracy of the mapping, with members stating this should be stripped out of the WSPs and have its own process. NSW DCCEE acknowledged the original mapping was incorrect and is now seeking feedback on the revised proposal.
- Feedback is invited by 23 March, prior to finalising the WSPs later this year.
- For more information see [Revised protections for inland NSW wetlands – March 2025](#) and [Revised approach to water supply works and trade rules for inland NSW wetlands](#)

4.2 Phoenix Pumped Hydro (Burrendong Dam) Project update (J Cairns)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the Phoenix Pumped Hydro project at Burrendong Dam, including project timeline and activities (complete, current and future).
- WaterNSW noted there is no special allocation of water for the project, ACEN will be required to get water under the Water Management Act the same as anyone else (from the market). Will take a first fill to fill the reservoir (~15GL) then looking at topping up once every 2 years (partial top up ~2GL).
- Customers can subscribe to ACEN's regular project updates at <https://acenrenewables.com.au/project/phoenix-pumped-hydro>. There will be opportunities to provide input during the formal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process.

4.3 CAG Engagement with NSW DCCEEW (B Maher & E Kokkelmans NSW DCCEEW (Water))

- 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 site 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 highlighted that timing of engagement and reviews is essential, stating putting plans on exhibition and inviting feedback on issues during peak harvest and irrigation season (Nov-Feb) doesn't work.

4.4 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.

4.6 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 Avian Bird Flu (H5N1)

- Customers raised concerns about the potential of Avian Bird Flu reaching Australia and questioned if WaterNSW is prepared for the impact this could cause at our storages in relation to water quality and social amenity. Taken on notice.

Action MC2503.03: WaterNSW to provide information on any plans in place for potential impact of Avian Bird Flu at our storages.

Responsibility: B Maher

6.2 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 meeting: 24 September 2025

Meeting closed: 2.50pm

Macquarie-Cudgegong Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 4 March 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
MC2503.01	WaterNSW to provide an analysis of S91i equipment failure (make/model) to see if there is a trend/theme and report findings back to the CAG.	D Stockler	
MC2503.02	WaterNSW to liaise with Cudgegong customers regarding the Bulk Water Transfer.	M Khan/B Maher	In progress.
MC2503.03	WaterNSW to provide information on any plans in place for potential impact of Avian Bird Flu at our storages.	B Maher	To be presented at next meeting.

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
MC2410.03	NSW DCCEEW and WaterNSW to discuss customer feedback around the rules for water ordering if taking water different to a water order (eg if +/- tolerance can be factored in).	D Connor (NSW DCCEEW) and D Stockler	Complete. Refer to agenda item 2.1