

Macquarie-Cudgegong Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Dubbo RSL Club, Brisbane St, Dubbo

Date: 24 September 2025

Time: 9.00am

Present: Tim Gainsford (Chair), Peter Schuster, Stewart Denston, Tim Hosking, Francoise Pieltain, Greg Murie, Matt Seccombe, Michael Sutherland, Michael Drum, David Walker, David Ramsay.

WaterNSW: Andrew George, Brendan Maher, Mahmood Khan, Damien Ashlin, Martin Prendergast, Gavin Armstrong, Nathan Adams, Tony Webber, Kristen Carter, Kate Masters (online), Yarraan Doyle (online), Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Michelle Yeaman, Russell Cocks, Martin Brooks, Lachlan Browne, Amanda Fuller.

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: Gus O'Brien, Sam Maroulis, Frank McKillop.

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 March 2025

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [4 March 2025](#) be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting. Taken as read.

T Gainsford/D Ramsay (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. INTRODUCTION TO CAGs:

2.1 Election of Chairperson

- Tim Gainsford was nominated by Stewart Denston, seconded by David Ramsay. Nil other nominations received. Accepted and carried.

2.2 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 DCCEE, focusing on policy, programs and emerging priorities. Members are encouraged to suggest relevant agenda topics for consideration for both sessions via the Chairperson.
- Members queried Aboriginal representation on the CAG, stating there are Aboriginal entitlement holders/cultural water licences in the valley. WaterNSW reached out to eligible Local Aboriginal Land Councils as part of the CAG recruitment process however did not receive any nominations. If members are aware of eligible groups interested in joining the CAG, please reach out to us with details.

3. WATERNSW UPDATE:

3.1 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 how a shrinking customer base changes the revenue, when entitlement is the same. WaterNSW explained this is due to a shift in where entitlement sits and different patterns of water use behaviour, particularly in the south, driven by Commonwealth water buy backs. This translates to lower water sales and fewer individual customers to spread costs over.
- Members questioned if WaterNSW has reached out to the government for financial assistance. WaterNSW advised this has been done and we have been told to restore our balance sheet and reduce our costs; there will be no additional equity.
- IPART did not 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. IPART made an independent decision on what is required to run the business and the prices we can charge. They have now given themselves an extension to undertake the review.
- WaterNSW advised 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 4.1).

- Policy changes have contributed to increased regulatory obligations, which are unfunded. WaterNSW is charged with operationalising the rules and there is a cost to do this. Members stated customers have had good support from WaterNSW in relation to constant regulatory changes.
- Discussion occurred around additional obligations and cost to customers in relation to the Non-Urban Metering Reforms and the challenges of the new requirements.
- Members requested an update at the next meeting and invited the CEO to attend.

4. OPERATIONS:

4.1 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- 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 Macquarie-Cudgegong valley were presented and discussed, as well as examples of some of the projects that have been deferred.
- WaterNSW provided an overview of current projects underway at Windemere and Burrendong dams, Marra Creek Channel and Marebone Weir.
- Members stated there are rumours that the silt is being dropped over the wall at Marebone. WaterNSW is not aware of this and follows standard environmental procedures however will look into.

Action MC2509.01: WaterNSW to confirm how sediment is disposed of at Marebone Weir as part of the desilting project (complete, refer to action sheet).

Responsibility: M Yeaman

4.2 Water Planning and Delivery update (M Khan)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Macquarie and Cudgegong valleys, including rainfall and temperature outlook, dam operations, tributary flows, water usage, observed and statistical inflows, drought inflow comparison and water resource monitoring dashboard, water availability 25/26, storage status, overview of tributary and replenishment flows, bulk water transfer and water quality. Detailed information and updates can be found on [WaterInsights](#).
- Above average rainfall is expected in the next three months, and conditions for the catchment is forecast as 'normal'.
- Irrigation and environmental orders have commenced for the season.
- Projected Burrendong Dam storage volume presented and discussed. The current resource assessment indicates a bulk water transfer (BWT) will not be required until July 2026 with 188GL of water available if required, for 10 months. Irrigation and environmental demand for 2025-26 can be supplied with the resource available. A BWT is always in the plan and is adjusted based on inflows, and the 188GL is accounted for when the resource assessment is done.
- Members queried if the BWT can commence earlier. WaterNSW advised the water is only called for when required. If brought forward, Burrendong Dam has a high chance of filling and spilling, so any inflow would be lost.
- Operations plan for the next three months; releases from the dam will be made to meet downstream demand, with irrigation and environmental demand similar to 2024-25; the translucent period commenced on 15 March and will end on 30 November; delivery of S&D replenishment is underway; ongoing active management of environmental water in the lower Macquarie; supplementary access will be provided when triggers are met. No major outages planned, full release capacity is available to utilise.
- WaterNSW is committed to working closely with water users to minimise shortfalls and operational surplus and will commence fortnightly meetings next week.

- Discussion occurred around the Oxley gauge, with members stating the river stopped running last year but the gauge said it was running at 72GL. WaterNSW advised this was during the November/December period during rainfall events where we had to release water from the dam. Catch up issues always occur, which is why WaterNSW works closely with industry to ensure the water is there when required. The hydrometrics team measure gauges regularly and set ratings to ensure accurate information.

4.3 Operational Communications (B Maher)

- WaterNSW sought member feedback on the recently implemented Macquarie-Cudgegong monthly operational snapshot (per business papers), which goes to ~650 customers in the Macquarie and Cudgegong valleys. The information is aimed at passive users to educate and inform.
- Members stated the information is useful and would like to see this continue.
- Members questioned when mobile functionality will be available for WaterInsights. WaterNSW advised this is still in development.
- Members suggested adding an algae risk indicator for recreational users of the river. Member feedback will be passed on to working group.

5. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

5.1 Customer Services update (R Cocks/L Browne/A Fuller)

- WaterNSW provided an update on Customer Services, including the third party consent trial for temporary groundwater trade, water market reform, 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.
- A number of years ago, NSW DCCEEW 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.
- 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.

6. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

7. GENERAL BUSINESS:

- Nil raised.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 25 March 2026, Dubbo

Meeting closed: 12.30pm

Macquarie-Cudgegong Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 24 September 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
MC2509.01	WaterNSW to confirm how sediment is disposed of at Marebone Weir as part of the desilting project.	M Yeaman	All works performed are to an approved Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Work will involve installation of silt boom upstream of work area, silt control downstream will be controlled by keeping weir gates fully closed and all water releases managed via the fishway control gates. Removed silt will be placed into Moxy dump truck and taken to identified area for stockpiling that will allow it to dry out, the stockpile will be surrounded by a silt fence upon completion of removal. Once dry it will then be spread out and seeded with native grass seed.

Carried forward 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	Ongoing, as required.
MC2503.03	WaterNSW to provide information on any plans in place for potential impact of Avian Bird Flu at our storages.	B Maher	WaterNSW is aware of the issue and potential to affect storages and is monitoring in coordination with DPI and biosecurity agencies. Members stated the government reporting threshold is 5 dead birds, so must be reported. The disease has the potential to become a significant issue, with risk to humans and anything that might eat dead or sick birds.