

Murray-Lower Darling Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Deniliquin RSL Club, 72 End St, Deniliquin

Date: 18 August 2026

Time: 9.00am

Present: Sally Dye, Cameron Sandral, Judith Damiani, Mark King, Louise Burge, Philip Baird, Steven Fawns, Luca Ferla, Nerida Healy, Tom Douglas, Luca Ferla, Sophie Baldwin, James Dyer, Ken Bates (observer).

WaterNSW: Rob O'Neill, Jerome Douziech, Brendan Maher, Jonathan Belej, David Wood, Lachlan Browne, Paul Backo, Ben Coffey, Kristen Gemmell, Daniel Bailey and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Amanda Fuller, Daniel Kemp

Agency and external staff: Tom Zouch and Joe Davis (MDBA).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: Ross Berry, Rachel Strachan, Troy Mauger, Peter Hamilton, Linda Christesen, Hilary Johnson.

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, 10 March 2026

- Resolved the minutes of meetings held on [10 March 2026](#), be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting, with amendment per below.
- Amendment: page 4, last paragraph should be zone B (not zone D).
M King/S Dye (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

1.7 Election of Chairperson

- Rachel Strachan was nominated as Chairperson by Sally Dye, seconded by Louise Burge. Accepted and carried. No other nominations received.
- Sally Dye was nominated as Deputy Chairperson by Mark King, accepted and carried. No other nominations received.

2. WATERNSW UPDATE:

2.1 WaterNSW Executive update (R O'Neill/J Douziech)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of its new Corporate Strategy, focused on strengthening core operations, diversifying revenue and modernising the organisation to improve efficiency, customer outcomes and long-term affordability.
- Key organisational challenges were noted, including ageing infrastructure, climate variability, reform uncertainty and increasing costs.

- A significant focus is being placed on delivering capital works, including accelerated infrastructure investment, fishway projects, cold water pollution (CWP) initiatives and ongoing asset renewals and investment.
- Members asked about WaterNSW's strategy for ageing infrastructure. WaterNSW advised that planning occurs across three horizons: short-term risk-based planning; ten-year investment planning; and long-term master planning extending from 20-100 years. WaterNSW continues to assess asset condition and prioritise investment to maintain safety and reliability.
- Diversifying revenue sources is a key strategic priority to help reduce reliance on traditional revenue streams. Discussion occurred regarding WaterNSW's significant land holdings (WaterNSW is the fourth largest landholder in NSW) and opportunities for alternative revenue sources. WaterNSW confirmed it is exploring opportunities, including selling carbon credits for offsets to other businesses, environmental rehabilitation, leasing arrangements and other commercial uses of its freehold land.
- Members noted potential unintended consequences of carbon projects and encouraged WaterNSW to carefully consider impacts on land values and water resources.
- WaterNSW highlighted opportunities to leverage artificial intelligence, technology and data to improve business processes and customer service, supported by ongoing investment in workforce capability and digital skills.
- Members raised concerns about future demand from AI data centres and other large users (pumped hydro), particularly in rural areas, and the potential impact on existing water users. WaterNSW advised the issue is being monitored across the water sector and Government policy would ultimately determine future development settings. In Greater Sydney, data centres are expected to rely on recycled water rather than consumptive water supplies.
- Members questioned WaterNSW's position on options being considered under the Menindee Review. WaterNSW reiterated that its role is to provide operational advice and practical implementation considerations. The review remains a multi-jurisdictional process involving all Basin states and agencies.
- Members queried cyber security risks associated with increased automation. WaterNSW advised that critical operational functions will continue to retain human oversight and that cyber security remains a key consideration as technology systems evolve.

2.2 WaterNSW's Financial Performance (P Backo)

- WaterNSW is committed to improving transparency, accountability and customer engagement under the Rural Valleys determination. A high-level overview of financial performance was presented, including unaudited FY26 results, the FY27 business plan outlook following IPART's final determinations, and key financial risks, assumptions and future considerations. Valley-specific information was also provided.
- WaterNSW highlighted improved financial sustainability following the organisational transformation program and final IPART determinations. Financial performance has improved substantially, with Rural Valley finances more sustainable than previously forecast. Government affordability contributions remain important to future sustainability and infrastructure investment remains a high priority.
- The determination strengthens WaterNSW's financial position, supporting ongoing service delivery, infrastructure investment and access to funding.
- Discussion occurred around Commonwealth-funded SDLAM projects, who is responsible for cost overrun and if this has any financial impact on WaterNSW. WaterNSW advised that SDLAM funding sits outside the IPART pricing determination process. WaterNSW is the delivery component and questions around project funding would need to be raised with NSW DCCEE.
- WaterNSW advised that annual land tax obligations are approximately \$10-12 million. Members questioned if WaterNSW has considered getting the land reclassified, so it is exempt from land tax. WaterNSW advised it is exploring opportunities to maximise our land use.

- Greater Sydney is the largest contributor to WaterNSW's financial performance. It supports overall earnings and financial stability.
- Valley-specific financial performance was presented and discussed.
- Under the new IPART model, a volatility mechanism provides some protection against extreme reductions in water demand.
- Members congratulated WaterNSW on the financial improvements achieved following organisational restructuring.

3. OPERATIONS:

3.1 Regional Operations (B Coffey)

- WaterNSW provided an update on regional operations, the FY27-29 Capital Works Program, including priority and deferred projects in the valley, and an overview of SDLAM projects in the Murray.
- The Victorian gauge at Wentworth (425017) has now been incorporated into WaterInsights following previous customer feedback, however customers advised it is not providing the information they require. WaterNSW will look into submitting a funding application for a water quality site at Pomona.

Action MLD2608.01: Investigate feasibility of installing a water quality monitoring site at Pomona.

Responsibility: B Coffey

- Members sought information on the Koondrook-Perricoota project, including where it is up to and who is paying for it. WaterNSW can arrange an out of session meeting in collaboration with the MDBA to update CAG members.

Action MLD2608.02: Provide CAG members with an update on the Koondrook-Perricoota project.

Responsibility: B Coffey

- WaterNSW outlined the Murray Valley FY27-FY29 capital program. Key projects include Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Long Term Works, Menindee infrastructure renewals, Stevens Weir upgrades, Yallakool and Colligen Creek electrical renewals and dam safety initiatives
- Members questioned if any of these works will have an impact on customers access to water. WaterNSW advised that Pamamaroo may have an impact however we are working to determine the best window to do the work. Contingency has also been factored into the design.
- Members questioned if the estimated cost for Lake Menindee staff accommodation is correct. Taken on notice.

Action MLD2608.03: Confirm cost estimates for Lake Menindee staff accommodation.

Responsibility: B Coffey

- Members continue to advocate for additional monitoring between Deniliquin and Moulamein. WaterNSW will investigate to see if this is viable/valuable, noting that because Stevens Weir is downstream there is a backwater effect which makes it hard to measure.

Action MLD2608.04: Investigate feasibility of an additional gauge between Deniliquin and Moulamein.

Responsibility: B Coffey

- Members noted inconsistent salinity reporting units used between agencies and asked if WaterNSW could provide both measurement units for reporting salinity.

Action MLD2608.05: Investigate options for reporting salinity in both EC and dS/m units.

Responsibility: B Coffey

- Members highlighted a discrepancy with the gauge at Curlwa. WaterNSW will investigate.

Action MLD2608.06: Investigate discrepancies with the gauge at Curlwa.

Responsibility: B Coffey

- An overview of Murray SDLAM projects was provided including works in Millewa Forest, Koondrook-Perricoota and Werai Forest. WaterNSW confirmed that long-term maintenance responsibility remains with the relevant asset owner.

3.2 Water Planning and Delivery (D Wood)

- WaterNSW presented a review of operations across the Murray and Lower Darling valleys, including storage update and inflow review, weather and climate outlook, inflows and releases, 2026-27 allocations, drought flood risk index, overview of Murray and Lower Darling operations and water use summary 2025-26.
- Members requested clearer explanations of supplementary water, uncontrolled flows, unregulated flows and related terminology to improve customer understanding of what it is and how to use it.

Action MLD2608.07: Provide clearer customer communication and definitions regarding supplementary water, uncontrolled flows and related terminology.

Responsibility: D Wood

Murray operations

- Murray operations focused on annual maintenance activities, flow management and seasonal water availability. Stevens Weir pool levels were lowered to facilitate maintenance works before being restored in late June/July. Recent rainfall and downstream inflows led to the operation of forest regulators at Millewa and Werai, supporting the passage of higher flows. Ongoing access to supplementary and uncontrolled flows benefited early-season water users, while strong tributary inflows reduced the need for dam releases, increased reserves, improved allocations and reduced demand for environmental water delivery.
- Members discussed recent legislative changes relating to environmental water management and sought clarification on future river operating arrangements below Yarrawonga and the Millewa Choke following completion of SDLAM works. The MDBA advised that the current operating benchmark of 15,000 ML/day remains unchanged, with no plans to routinely operate above that level. Any future changes would be subject to government and stakeholder consultation.
- WaterNSW advised that, as river operator, its role is to assess potential impacts, notify affected landholders in good faith where inundation risks are identified, and implement operational decisions in accordance with established environmental watering planning processes.
- Members reiterated concerns that local knowledge is not being sufficiently incorporated into environmental watering decisions and emphasised the need for earlier stakeholder engagement to identify practical solutions and minimise impacts. WaterNSW noted these concerns and encouraged members to raise policy-related matters with NSW DCCEEW.
- WaterNSW continues to support SDLAM and other projects and is working with the MDBA to understand southern basin demands.

Lower Darling operations

- Lower Darling operations were focused on managing declining inflows and preparing for potential drought conditions. Reduced inflows and a dry northern Basin outlook are expected to bring Menindee Lakes to key operational triggers during September and October. Environmental water has continued to supplement flows at W32 above minimum Water Sharing Plan requirements, while water has been transferred to Lake Pamamaroo to improve operational efficiency and reduce evaporation losses.
- WaterNSW is continuing to work closely with NSW DCCEEW on drought preparedness and advised that additional stakeholder meetings can be convened if conditions deteriorate.

Water Use Summary 2025-26 (L Browne)

- A summary of Murray and Lower Darling water use was presented. Members requested further analysis separating carryover volumes associated with production enterprises and detached water entitlement holdings.

Action MLD2608.08: Investigate options to provide further analysis of carryover holdings and unlinked water access licences.

Responsibility: L Browne

3.3 Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Project Upgrade (D Kemp)

- WaterNSW advised that the MDBA and Basin Officials Committee have agreed on the inflow management framework for the project, including decision-making processes and cost-sharing arrangements associated with temporary works.
- Procurement is progressing through a three-stage process. Expressions of Interest have been completed, Stage 2 tender submissions closed on 17 August 2026, and a Request for Tender will be issued to the three shortlisted proponents in late September 2026. Development of the final Business Case is continuing alongside procurement activities.
- Subject to lake conditions and unforeseen events, site mobilisation is expected to commence in January 2027, with construction scheduled for completion by November 2027. Final site handover is anticipated in January 2028.

4. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND OPERATIONS:

4.1 Customer Assessments and Approvals (A Fuller)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of customer service standards, and updates on classifying works, end of water year trade submissions and third party consent for temporary trades.
- Application processing times have increased in some areas due to resources being redirected to support the statewide works classification program. WaterNSW has engaged additional temporary staff and improvements are expected by October 2026.

Floodplain Strikeforce

- WaterNSW provided an update on the work of the Floodplain Strikeforce, including customer education initiatives, updated guidance materials, historical works review, publication of flood work application data and improved pre-application processes.
- A draft Floodplain Strikeforce Interagency Action Plan was released in March for consultation and feedback, and a dedicated working group has been established to review feedback and identify key barriers and potential solutions. The action plan and accompanying What We Heard report is available on our website [here](#).
- A separate flood work approval is no longer required where an existing work is specifically nominated under a Water Supply Work Approval (or combined approval) and its primary purpose is water supply. A use approval (lot and DP) authorises the use of water at a particular location, whereas a work approval authorises the physical works associated with taking water.
- Members discussed the requirement to document historical irrigation infrastructure within works approvals and expressed concerns that existing infrastructure may now require a greater level of detail and supporting documentation than was previously required.

Action MLD2608.09: Investigate requirements for documenting historical irrigation infrastructure within works approvals and provide feedback to the CAG.

Responsibility: A Fuller

- Members expressed continuing frustration that existing approvals often contain insufficient details and the process may create significant additional cost and administrative burden for irrigators.
- Discussion occurred regarding joint flood works that extend across multiple properties. WaterNSW advised that guidance material is being developed to assist landholders considering joint schemes. Any arrangements regarding responsibility for the works, maintenance obligations or property ownership changes must be agreed between the affected landholders and are not administered by WaterNSW.
- WaterNSW acknowledged customer concerns and advised that discussions continue with DCCEEW regarding treatment of historical works. No final policy position has been reached on historical works. Dual works have been progressed separately to historical works. Members stated that timelines should be extended if this is the case.

Works Classification Program

- An update on the works classification program and improvements made in response to customer feedback was provided, including additional guidance materials and support through the WaterNSW website. Customers can also book appointments with WaterNSW staff for assistance throughout the classification process.
- Feedback on the Customer Portal has been shared with our technology teams and improvements are being prioritised based on customer needs.
- Customers are encouraged to review the details of works listed on their approvals and contact WaterNSW if updates are required prior to classifying works.
- Members commented that many customers did not understand the significance of classifying works and what they needed to do, especially with government-owned meters (GOMs), and the process has not been easy.
- Members raised concerns regarding works classifications being inaccurate in the system, customer difficulties using the portal, limited visibility of future questions in the online process and the need for hard-copy options and additional support.
- WaterNSW advised that portal improvements are being progressed and one-on-one assistance remains available to customers requiring support and paper-based forms can be provided on request.

Temporary Trades

- WaterNSW advised that the earlier end-of-water-year temporary trade submission deadline introduced this year improved processing outcomes and is expected to remain in place for future years and will be proactively communicated to customers going forward.
- Members reported ongoing delays at NSW Land Registry Services affecting completion of permanent trades despite improvements in WaterNSW processing times. This has implications for Irrigation Infrastructure Organisations (IIOs) as they have to continue charging usage fees until the licence is changed. WaterNSW agreed to raise these concerns with LRS.

Action MLD2608.10: Raise customer concerns regarding permanent trade processing delays with NSW Land Registry Services.

Responsibility: A Fuller

Third-Party Consent

- No final decision has yet been made regarding potential discontinuation of temporary trade third-party consent, as discussed at the previous meeting. Any future changes would be supported by a comprehensive communications and implementation process.

5. BUSINESS PAPERS (taken as read):

- Taken as read.

6. GENERAL BUSINESS:

6.1 H5N1 Avian Influenza (R O'Neill)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the detection of H5 avian influenza in wild birds across multiple Australian states.
- WaterNSW is working with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) to monitor the situation and ensure appropriate preparedness measures are in place. DPIRD is the lead response agency in NSW.
- WaterNSW has developed operational response protocols, identified higher-risk sites and is assessing potential impacts on water quality and water supply operations and is collaborating with DCCEEW on management strategies for priority wildlife locations, including Lake Brewster and the Menindee Lakes.

6.2 Town Water Risk Reduction Program (B Maher)

- WaterNSW is supporting Local Water Utilities (LWUs) across regional NSW to strengthen raw water quality risk management through the Town Water Risk Reduction Program (TWRRP). Funded by NSW DCCEE, the program supports regional communities in managing water quality risks and building long-term drinking water resilience.
- WaterNSW leads the source water component of the program, focusing on identifying raw water quality risks and supporting local water utilities to proactively manage those risks at the source, recognising source water protection as the first and most effective barrier to safe drinking water.
- To learn more about TWRRP, please visit our [website](#) or email info.TWRRP@waternsw.com.au

7. MDBA UPDATE

7.1 MDBA River Murray Operations (T Zouch, MDBA):

- The MDBA provided an operational update for the River Murray System, including rainfall, inflows, operations and allocation price trends.
- An Additional Dilution Flow (ADF) release was triggered October/November 2025 – 75 days at 3GL/day (225GL).
- Members highlighted that Murray Irrigation (MI) is doing work at Wakool under SDLAM project (last-minute project) and questioned what will happen if they can't meet the delivery deadline of 31 December. The project is on track for completion and the MDBA advised they will work with MI to ensure delivery.
- Members requested EC levels be included in MDBA reporting.
- Members requested project updates on Koondrook-Perricoota.
- The MDBA encouraged members to continue providing feedback on communication needs and information products.

Meeting review and close:

Next in person meeting: TBC (Wentworth)

Meeting closed: 1.50pm

Murray-Lower Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 18 August 2026

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
MLD2608.01	Investigate feasibility of installing a water quality monitoring site at Pomona.	B Coffey	
MLD2608.02	Provide CAG members with an update on the Koondrook-Perricoota project.	B Coffey	The latest information, including community updates (the latest being July 2026), can be found on our webpage here - Koondrook-Perricoota inlet regulator repairs - WaterNSW .
MLD2608.03	Confirm cost estimates for Lake Menindee staff accommodation.	B Coffey	
MLD2608.04	Investigate feasibility of an additional gauge between Deniliquin and Moulamein.	B Coffey	
MLD2608.05	WaterNSW to investigate options for reporting salinity in both EC and dS/m units.	B Coffey	
MLD2608.06	WaterNSW to investigate discrepancies with the gauge at Curlwa.	B Coffey	
MLD2608.07	Provide clearer customer communication and definitions regarding supplementary water, uncontrolled flows and related terminology.	D Wood	
MLD2608.08	Investigate options to provide further analysis of carryover holdings and unlinked water access licences.	L Browne	
MLD2608.09	Investigate requirements for documenting historical irrigation infrastructure within works approvals and provide feedback to the CAG.	A Fuller	
MLD2608.10	Raise customer concerns regarding permanent trade processing delays with NSW Land Registry Services.	A Fuller	Complete. LRS has advised that they are currently processing dealings within their 20 day Customer Service Standard. At present, their average turnaround time for general dealings is approximately 15 business days.

			They are happy to review any specific examples, as delays beyond their standard processing times generally occur only when documents have not been correctly executed by the customer or where additional information has been included that does not align with the original instructions provided by us. More complex dealings, such as WAL corrections, surrenders, and cancellations, may require additional processing time. However, general dealings continue to be completed within their Customer Service Standard.
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Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
MLD2608.03	WaterNSW to discuss with NSW DCCEEW request from CAG members for an out of session meeting with both agencies to discuss the state's position on the Menindee Review.	J Belej	MDBA presented in NSW DCCEEW's afternoon session. CAG members to liaise with WaterNSW if a further meeting is required.