

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Griffith Exies Sporties Club, 33 Speirs St, GRIFFITH

Date: 20 August 2025

Time: 9.00am

Present: Peter Sheppard (Chair), Tanya Thompson, Justin Sutherland, Chris Palmer, Jeff King, Jenna Bell (online), Luke Tedesco, James Maguire, Ingrid Eyding, Andrea Wilson, Troy van Berkel (online), Jenny McLeod, Trevor Clark, Ben Elwin, Glenn Jolliffe, Michele Groat (observer) and Annabel Burge (observer).

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Jonathan Belej, Shaun Gleeson, David Wood, Tom Riley, Nachi Nachiappan, Yarraan Doyle, Kristen Carter, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Andrew George, Ben Coffey, Russell Cocks, Ben Arabin, Kim Garside, Martin Brooks, Lachlan Browne and Jon Hocking.

Agency and external staff: Peter Hansen and Shahadat Chowdhury (NSW DCCEEW).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: Nick Maynard.

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, 13 March 2025

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [13 March 2025](#) be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting. Taken as read.

J Sutherland/L Tedesco (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. INTRODUCTION TO CAGs:

2.1 Election of Chairperson

- Peter Sheppard was nominated by Tanya Thompson, seconded by Jeff King. 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.
- Scheduling of the next meeting discussed. Members requested early March, prior to rice harvest. Noted.

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.
- 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. 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. Whether or not WaterNSW should be performing WAMC functions is also a question that has been raised.
- 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. It is proposed to move 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.
- Members stated they are concerned that WaterNSW's status as a State-Owned Corporation could be at risk if the government chooses to privatise the business. WaterNSW confirmed this would not be the case. WaterNSW's focus is managing infrastructure so we can deliver water when and where it matters.
- Members raised concerns about the loss of organisational knowledge that will occur due to staff cuts and redundancies and questioned what strategies WaterNSW will put in place to backfill the human knowledge base. WaterNSW advised that the knowledge is in the business; we have management systems and processes are documented to ensure business knowledge is retained. Risk is managed as best we can while recognising that experiential knowledge is difficult to retain.
- Members noted high land tax and dividend payments and questioned if the corporate structure is wrong. WaterNSW stated this is not unusual, there is just a smaller customer base to spread the costs over.
- Members questioned if there will be noticeable difference in licensing, works approvals and customer service areas. WaterNSW advised the main difference will be capital project delivery; what was planned and what we can and can't do now. If we have opportunities for efficiencies, we will explore those, however customers shouldn't notice much difference in processing times when conditions are normal.
- Members questioned if the Roy Butler Parliamentary Act will have any impact on WaterNSW. None that we are aware of.

- Members noted the current interim determination is for one year and questioned what is required of WaterNSW by IPART to progress into 2027 and beyond. IPART has taken a 12 month extension to review the submission, undertake a prudence and efficiency review and review the cost shares, which had not been done. The current proposal is still on the table and there is nothing additional required of WaterNSW.
- Members highlighted that a large amount of additional work and resources will be required of WaterNSW when the new Floodplain Management Plans are introduced. WaterNSW is aware of this.

3.2 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 Murrumbidgee and top 7 projects for the Lowbidgee were presented and discussed, as well as examples of some of the projects that have been deferred.
- WaterNSW provided an overview of the preventative maintenance plan, corrective maintenance work orders, current issues and outage plans.
- Current maintenance includes work on Burrinjuck Dam HLO gates 1 and 2 (sealing issue and oil leak), Blowering Dam emergency coaster gate (major inspection and condition assessment), repairing erosion damage at Hay Weir and Coonancoocabil Regulator and repairs to vertical lift gates and guides at Berembid Weir.

4. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

4.1 Customer Services update (R Cocks/B Arabin/K Garside)

- 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.
- Members stated there has been a few customers impacted by this with orders being rejected pending third party consent and questioned if there is a trigger level they should be aware of when processing orders. WaterNSW advised that 50% of the share component (unless from an at-risk water source) is what triggers it. Refer to our [FAQs](#) for more information.
- WaterNSW and DEECA (Victoria) are working together on a project to improve efficiency and equity of access to trade opportunities (IVT) between zones in the southern Murray-Darling basin, with an initial focus on the Murrumbidgee to Murray and Goulburn to Murray IVT accounts and the Barmah Narrows. An overview of types of options to be considered and next steps was presented and discussed. Consultation on the draft assessment framework is now closed and WaterNSW will work with DEECA to assess feedback, combine themes and develop a final assessment framework. Further public consultation is planned for early 2026 and contingent upon funding, implementation of the recommendations will commence in June 2026.
- Members questioned how scale is dealt with in the randomisation process to avoid some applicants taking up the whole volume. WaterNSW advised this was a bigger issue with first in, first serve. With the rules around randomisation, landholders could submit many applications, but the total couldn't exceed the trade limit. We are seeing smaller parcels of water with randomisation.

- 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](#).
- Members questioned the purpose and intent of this process, stating it creates a huge administration burden on both WaterNSW and landholders. WaterNSW advised it is designed to identify which works on your work approval must be made compliant and lets agencies know which works are not taking water from the water source and only focus on water users who are required to be compliant.
- Members suggested the process could be made simpler for some customers who are not computer-literate by including a tick box and return the form. WaterNSW advised that we want it done through the Customer Portal so registration and customer details are correct, however feedback is noted.
- An overview of the groundwater over-read issue in the Murrumbidgee was presented and discussed. The issue came about because a meter with a pulse LID was installed with an incorrect scaling factor which meant the data transmitted to the Water Accounting System was over-reading by a factor of 100. WaterNSW is looking to amend the data validation rule to ensure this doesn't happen again.
- Members stated this was only picked up because it was a large volume, and questioned what quality assurance measure will be in place to ensure it doesn't happen again. WaterNSW advised there will be desktop reviews and if required field staff will check the meter read. Where an issue is identified the onus will be on the water user to work through the issue with their DQP. Members thanked WaterNSW for looking into the issue and resolving quickly.
- 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 queried if NRAR has access to the data in the portal. NRAR has access to the existing data through the Water Licensing System (WLS) and can also access the portal.

5. OPERATIONS:

5.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (S Gleeson)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Murrumbidgee, including storage and inflow review, system loss and operational surplus, eWater deliveries, water use summary [IVT account summary](#), overview of valley operations and weather outlook.
- Storages are well balanced for the start of the irrigation season.
- A definition of system losses vs operational surplus was provided. Both represent very different things and both are adjusted and accounted for in resource assessments and allocations fortnightly over the water year. The key message is if water users have an order in and know they are not going to use it all, they need to let WaterNSW know so we can make decisions accordingly or reallocate/reregulate.

- Members questioned if all customers have the same access to amend orders (ie river pumpers and IIOs). WaterNSW works very closely with IIOs to reduce surplus (large volumes). River pumpers need to contact the call centre to amend orders.
- Members stated eWater has been nothing but positive for the valley and thanked the environmental water holders for their efforts.

Action MBG2508.01: WaterNSW to clarify what “miscellaneous transfer” refers to on the 2024/25 water use summary (complete, refer to action sheet).

Responsibility: S Townsend

5.2 Operational Communications (T Riley)

- WaterNSW sought member feedback on the recently implemented Murrumbidgee valley monthly operational snapshot (per business papers).

Feedback:

- Members have been pushing people to use [WaterInsights](#), with most people using their phones. Most just want to know what the allocations are, however requires downloading a pdf (and often don't have the service to do it). It would be helpful to have something simpler. WaterNSW advised there is an [allocations tab](#) in WaterInsights where water users can view allocations in a list rather than downloading a pdf (per NSW DCCEEW).
- Water users can also [subscribe to NSW DCCEEW](#) to receive water allocation and other updates (in pdf form). Allocations data on WaterInsights is the next day.
- A customer tried to provide feedback through the portal however had a character limit so gave up. Details to be provided to WaterNSW to make contact.
- Members stated the Monthly Snapshot is a good overview of what is happening in the valley however most water users just want to know allocations.
- Many customers are still using Real Time Data.
- WaterInsights is a great system, is a bit clunky but once you work out how to use it it's great.
- WaterNSW is working on enhancements to the WaterInsights mobile website and is developing an app to support this. The first iteration will be about the gauge information as that is what people are predominantly looking for and we are looking at storage information as well.
- Murrumbidgee Irrigation advised they use the WaterInsights system overview daily and it is a great tool for forecasting. Great overview to view the system as a whole and is a benefit for us. One suggestion – inflow data stops at the dam; being able to see tributary inflow in the system summary would be good.

6. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

7. GENERAL BUSINESS:

7.1 Long Duration Storage (B Maher)

- Sites near you are among several still under consideration as part of WaterNSW's Long Duration Storage Program. The program is WaterNSW's next step to identify and develop long-duration pumped hydro energy storage projects across NSW, building on progress of our Renewable Energy and Storage Program (RESP).
- Shortlisted dam sites under consideration will be formally announced shortly with final sites expected to be confirmed from 2026, followed by a commercial tender process to select potential private project developers.
- No decisions have been made, and like the RESP projects, any future development would involve detailed studies, community consultation, and formal approvals before proceeding.
- Any projects, should they progress, would be owned and funded by the private sector, not WaterNSW or the NSW Government. All land would continue to be owned by WaterNSW, and any development would not affect water entitlements to customers or water security for communities and the environment.

6.2 CEWH/eWater

- Customers sought comment on the recent decision by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) to pause all Commonwealth watering actions in NSW until there is better understanding of how held environmental water is interpreted under a range of water sharing and policy frameworks.
- The CEWH is working as fast as they can to understand the issues and get things moving however there is no timeline on the pause at the moment.
- NSW DCCEEW (CPHR Group) advised they are in a similar position however are able to undertake some watering actions that are not affected and where there is no risk.
- The environmental water holders are working through the actions to determine what can be done to achieve outcomes.
- Members questioned if this will have the same ramifications for TLM (The Living Murray) water. Yes, there will be the same impacts and the same potential use of water (ie reduced flow).

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: March 2026 (date to be advised)

Meeting closed: 12.50pm

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 20 August 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Responsibility	Status
MBG2508.01	WaterNSW to clarify what “miscellaneous transfer” refers to on the 2024/25 water use summary.	S Townsend	This is a historical Miscellaneous water access licence which was created specifically to account for environmental water delivered in the Murrumbidgee Valley prior to any dedicated environmental licences being established.

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Responsibility	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		