

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Griffith Exies Club, 6-12 Jondaryn St, GRIFFITH

Date: 13 March 2025

Time: 9.00am

Present: Peter Sheppard (Chair), Nick Maynard, Justin Sutherland, Luke Tedesco, Trevor Clark, Jeff King, Andrea Wilson, Jenna Bell, Tanya Thompson, Ian Lugsdin, Jenny McLeod and James Maguire (online). Janelle Ruggeri and Michelle Groat (observers).

WaterNSW: Ronan Magaharan, Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Jonathan Belej, Shaun Gleeson, Ben Coffey, Andrew Richardson, Yarraan Doyle, Shelby Tiffin (online), Kristen Carter and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: David Stockler, Russell Cocks, Ben Dale, Rod Emerson, Luigi Castro, Stephanie Kermode.

Agency and external staff for specific items: Shahadat Chowdhury, Peter Hyde (online), Neeraj Maini (online), and Eva Kokklemans (online) (NSW DCCEEW).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: David Webb, Troy van Berkel, Chris Palmer, Ben Elwin.

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.
- Ian Lugsdin advised his car dealership sells and services vehicles for WaterNSW.

1.5 Minutes of Previous Meeting, 31 October 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [31 October 2025](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

T Thompson (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

2.1 Customer Services update (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 queried if WaterNSW can deem consent if an objection is not made. WaterNSW advised that, as part of the trial, we are looking into the legalities of whether using an objections style process, similar

to works approvals, can be applied in this instance (can we invite objections or do we have to get consent).

- Concerns were raised around the timeframe for trades to occur if consent is required from multiple users. Information on the triage and assessment process and FAQs on trading water can be found at [Trading water - WaterNSW](#) and [Groundwater temporary trades \(71T Deals\)](#)
- Members questioned if WaterNSW could send a letter to all groundwater licence holders seeking consent to share their information (opt in/opt out) for future applications. Currently, when collecting customer details, WaterNSW must disclose why information is being collected, what it will be used for and who it is shared with. This may be something we can look to do in future, however, cannot be done at this time.
- 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. About 20% of applications are associated with LIDs.
- 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 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, including investigating system changes to simplify and improve the online self-service options, improve targeted communications and explore alternate payment methods.
- WaterNSW advised that in the coming months customers will be able to register for the [Customer Portal](#) to update their contact details online, view all current licence and approvals, and apply for new water supply and water use approvals. Additional features (including mapping) will be added to the portal over time. Currently BLR bore applications and amendments to BLR bore approvals can be done in the portal.
- Discussion occurred around the additional workload for WaterNSW that will come with the new floodplain management strategy. WaterNSW is working together with the department, who have funded 1-2 positions to help with anticipated demand.
- Members stated many landholders don't understand their obligations in relation to flood work approvals or what they need to do, and they don't understand the language on the forms, which is causing a huge amount of angst. WaterNSW advised this is the first time we've received this feedback and is keen to contact those specific customers to see what is happening. WaterNSW reminded members that face-to-face and online meetings are available to discuss licensing and approvals and can be booked via our website at <https://www.waternsw.com.au/customer-services/help-and-support/customer-assistance>
- Members stated there is an information and communication gap between legislation and what people need to do to get flood works approved, stating people who have never been impacted in the past are now affected. WaterNSW will look at organising dedicated outreach events in the area (Murrumbidgee and Billabong Creek) to help customers understand their obligations.

Action MBG2503.01: WaterNSW to organise a dedicated outreach event in the Murrumbidgee and Billabong Creek areas to help customers understand their obligations in relation to flood work approvals.

Responsibility: D Stockler/B Maher

- Members were reminded that customers can [subscribe to a free SMS reminder service](#) for annual or monthly **recording and reporting requirements**.
- WaterNSW and Victoria are proposing to use a combined 'single queue' and randomisation process for trade applications for the 1 July 2025 Barmah trade opportunity, with eligibility criteria. This will remove the 'fastest finger first' advantage. Market participants will be kept up to date as this progresses.
- Members stated that the WaterInsights SMS announcements are often late/delayed. Members also provided feedback that alerts only tell you there's an update, so you still have to go to WaterInsights and look for it. WaterNSW is aware of this feedback and is looking into it.

3. OPERATIONS:

3.1 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, shortfall review, [IVT account summary](#), eWater summary and current delivery, water availability, dam storage scenarios, overview of valley operations, water use summary and weather outlook.
- A definition of system losses vs operational surplus and a comparison of 2023/24 and 2024/25 surplus was provided. An overview of operational surplus and impact on water delivery was presented and discussed, with operational surplus increasing to 95GL. This volume was reduced with the environmental water holders taking a significant portion of the surplus, which reduced the losses.
- The Water Planning and Delivery team manages delivery risks to the valley on a daily basis, including the risk of shortfall (under ordering), surplus (over ordering) and spill. Compliance discussed.
- A review of Irrigation Corporations shortfall was provided, as requested by CAG members.
- Members thanked WaterNSW for the information provided in the presentation, stating it is great information and very useful.

3.2 Allocations update (S Chowdhury, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an overview of water allocations in the Murrumbidgee regulated river valley, including the allocation process, allocation history and a review of the March 2025 allocation statement.
- Members stated they would like to receive allocations as early as possible in the season as July/August/September is too late to make cropping decisions. NSW DCCEEW understands the need for customers to balance/calculate risk and allocates as much as available.
- NSW DCCEEW works with Snowy Hydro and their inflows are calculated in the announcements.
- Allocation statements for the Murrumbidgee are published on the 1st and 15th calendar day of the month (or next working day if a public holiday). The next water allocation statement will be published on 17 March, available at [Water allocation statements | NSW Government Water](#)
- [To receive email updates on water allocation and availability, subscribe at Water Group - Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water - Subscribe to email updates](#)

3.3 eWater Actions and Outcomes (A Wilson, CEWH)

- The Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) provided an overview of environmental watering actions in the Murrumbidgee, including an overview of planning for 2024/25 and key watering actions and outcomes to date, as requested by CAG members.
- The CEWH works in cooperation and partnership with NSW DCCEEW, WaterNSW, YACTAC, first nations and landholders to achieve the best outcomes.

3.4 Regional Operations update (B Coffey)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of preventative maintenance plan, current maintenance (Burrinjuck Dam sector gates 1 & 2 and Gogeldrie Weir baulk installation), current issues (Berembled Weir, Cooncancoobil Regulator and Hay Weir) and planned outages (Berembled Regulator).
- An overview of current issues at Berembled Weir was provided. There is material loss on the vertical lift gates and guides, with risk of gate failure and loss of the weir pool. Investigation of the gates and guides has been completed and the Emergency Action Plans are being reviewed. WaterNSW has prioritised operations to reduce the frequency of the gate movement and there are ongoing investigations of options for temporary repairs to the gate. An outage has been planned for 1-30 July 2025 for long term remedial works.
- Members stated that at Hay Weir the concrete structure is moving/separating (8-10 inches) and questioned if WaterNSW is planning any bracing of the structure. WaterNSW advised the team is aware and is monitoring and measuring monthly.
- Members queried if refurbishment of the Balranald Weir fishlock is scheduled for this year. WaterNSW advised it is anticipated to be completed by the end of this year.

3.5 WaterNSW Drought Management Approach (A Richardson)

- WaterNSW introduced its drought management approach for the Murrumbidgee 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 Murrumbidgee 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 Murrumbidgee 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. 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. Members complimented WaterNSW on this process.

- Members queried if WaterNSW has considered the drought reserves in the Snowy scheme in this planning. WaterNSW advised that we work in consultation with NSW DCCEEW, and this would be taken into consideration when water is allocated.
- Questions were raised around the hierarchy of priority of water (high security vs general security). WaterNSW advised that rules exist to protect high priority water (critical human needs, town water etc). Members stated there needs to be proactive and continual education in the community around drought and how it works in relation to allocation of resources etc.
- 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 encouraged WaterNSW to engage early and often.

4. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

4.1 Revised Prescribed Wetlands maps for draft unregulated WSPs (P Hyde, NSW DCCEEW)

- 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 DCCEEW responded, what is included in the revised approach (2025) and proposed next steps. NSW DCCEEW acknowledged that timing of the original approach during harvest was not ideal and has extended the public exhibition.
- 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.
- Feedback is invited by 23 March, prior to finalising the WSPs later this year. [View the updated maps and factsheet](#)
- Members stated they cannot comment by the due date when they don't know how they will be impacted, stating the Billabong FMP is only in stage 1 and nothing raised by landholders to date has been included so they feel like they are not being heard. NSW DCCEEW advised that more consultation with landholders will be done prior to amending the plan to include any potential wetlands along the Billabong and the department will undertake more consultation during stage 2 of the Billabong mapping. Feedback is being sought on the current mapping.
- Members advised that the pressure being put on landholders to provide feedback and submissions on multiple things at the same time is significant.
- For more information [Revised protections for inland NSW wetlands – March 2025](#) and [Revised approach to water supply works and trade rules for inland NSW wetlands](#)

4.2 Proposed Amendments to Murrumbidgee Regulated River WSP (P Hyde, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an overview of proposed amendments to the Murrumbidgee Regulated WSP. There are two amendments that the Department is looking to progress: establishing a trade framework between NSW and the ACT; and issuing a specific purpose access licence (SPAL) for Wagga Wagga's town water supply.
- The trade framework will enable an additional 6.36GL of environmental water (including HEW) from the ACT to be released into the Murrumbidgee River in NSW through Burrinjuck Dam to be delivered for the environment. Facilitating this trade allows NSW to enter negotiations with the ACT to secure town water supply for NSW towns located near the ACT (including Yass and Bungendore) to meet future

urban growth requirements. The trade is anticipated to result in a <0.5% average reduction in available water determinations for general security licence holders.

- A specific purpose access licence (SPAL) for Wagga Wagga's town water supply will provide an alternate water supply for Wagga Wagga when groundwater is contaminated with PFAS and is a proactive measure to ensure continuity of supply should conditions eventuate. It is expected that the additional entitlement granted under the SPAL would have less than 1% impact on other licence holders.
- <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/plans-and-strategies/water-sharing-plans/status/murrumbidgee-region#murrumbidgee-regulated-river-water-source-2016>

4.3 Snowy Water Licence update (N Maini, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an overview of the Snowy Water Initiative Outcomes Implementation Deed (SWIOID) review. The Deed is a 2002 agreement between the Australian Government, NSW and Victoria and sets the framework for environmental flows released from the Snowy Scheme, including flows into the upper Murrumbidgee River. The Deed has not been reviewed since its establishment in 2002.
- The review will look for opportunities to contemporise the water management arrangements in the Snowy Scheme to improve the health of the upper Murrumbidgee.
- NSW will be advocating for exploration of carryover for SMRIF and SRIFs as well as increased volumes of flows released to the Snowy and Upper Murrumbidgee Rivers, and extensive consultation throughout the review process.
- A decision package of draft variations to licence arrangements that address the Snowy licence review actions, is under consideration by the WCLC, which includes three trials for alternative operating arrangements for the western river releases, a workplan to continue investigating delivery of environmental water from Mowamba Weir and a workplan to continue investigation flexible management of environmental water deliveries.
- All parties other than Snowy Hydro have endorsed the decision package. Public consultation on the final package will occur once agreed.
- Members are concerned about reduction of reliability and potential trade-offs and stated that NSW DCCEEW should be advocating strongly for customer interests and increasing volumes. NSW DCCEEW assured customers that NSW is very much interested in improving the health and environmental objectives of the upper Murrumbidgee with no impact. All water release obligations are being met.
- More information on the Australian Government's Upper Murrumbidgee Strategy can be found at <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/water/policy/programs/water-reform/improving-health-upper-murrumbidgee>

4.4 CAG Engagement with NSW DCCEEW (Water Group) (B Maher/E Kokkelmans, NSW DCCEEW)

- 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.

- NSW DCCEE (Water) acknowledged customer feedback around multiple consultations/submissions occurring at the same time, putting pressure on customers and making it difficult to provide meaningful input and is working to get the balance right.
- Members provided feedback that webinars do not work as customers can only ask questions via typing into the chat with no ability for discussion and stated only a small percentage of questions get answered. Customers would like more in-person engagement and workshops with the department.

4.5 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/K Carter)

- 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
- Members suggested EWAGs should be included in the valley stakeholder lists.

5. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

6. GENERAL BUSINESS:

6.1 Balranald Weir upgrade

- Members asked (via online chat) if WaterNSW will be progressing the Balranald Weir upgrade (new weir and 1.5m raising) eg requesting business case funding from Commonwealth should there be another round of SDL-type funding post December 2026. Taken on notice.

Action MBG2503.02: WaterNSW to advise if the Balranald Weir upgrade will be progressing.

Responsibility: B Coffey

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: 20 August 2025

Meeting closed: 2.25pm

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 13 March 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
MBG2503.01	WaterNSW to organise a dedicated outreach event in the Murrumbidgee and Billabong Creek areas to help customers understand their obligations in relation to flood work approvals.	D Stockler/B Maher	Complete. Online session held 30 April 2025.
MBG2503.02	WaterNSW to advise if the Balranald Weir upgrade will be progressing.	B Coffey	

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		