

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

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

Date: 19 August 2026

Time: 9.00am

Present: Peter Sheppard (Chair), Justin Sutherland, Chris Palmer, Jeff King, Jenna Bell, Luke Tedesco, James Maguire (online), Tanya Thompson, Jenny McLeod, Greg Packer (online), Nick Maynard, Ian Lugsdin, Ingrid Eyding (online), Erin Lenon (online), Andrew Pasquetti (observer), Annabel Burge (observer) and Tom Mannes (observer).

WaterNSW: Rob O'Neill, Jerome Douziech, Joe Pizzinga, Brendan Maher, Jonathan Belej, Shaun Gleeson, David Wood, Lachlan Browne, Ben Coffey, Sonia Townsend, Kristen Gemmell and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Amanda Fuller.

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: Troy van Berkel and Trevor Clark.

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, 12 March 2026

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [12 March 2026](#) be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting. Taken as read.

J Bell/C Palmer (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

1.7 Election of Chairperson

- Peter Sheppard was nominated by Tanya Thompson, seconded by Nick Maynard. No other nominations received. Accepted and carried.

2. WATERNSW UPDATE:

2.1 WaterNSW Executive update (R O'Neill)

- 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.

- Diversifying revenue sources is a key strategic priority to help reduce reliance on traditional revenue streams. As the fourth largest landholder in NSW, WaterNSW is exploring opportunities to generate additional revenue from its land holdings, including carbon market opportunities, pumped hydro and long-duration energy storage projects, including potential partnerships with energy providers.
- 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 sought clarification on ageing infrastructure and assets approaching end of life, including funding arrangements for replacement and renewal. WaterNSW advised this will be discussed further at agenda item 3.1. WaterNSW noted that asset condition assessments are undertaken and considered alongside criticality and key operational risks to inform investment priorities.
- WaterNSW advised it is closely monitoring expenditure and remains committed to operating within regulatory pricing allowances while continuing to pursue efficiency opportunities.
- Discussion focussed on customer affordability, long-term infrastructure funding and cost-sharing arrangements. Members raised concerns regarding whether future IPART funding determinations would adequately support infrastructure investment and questioned whether additional engagement with government was occurring to address funding challenges.
- WaterNSW advised that efficiency initiatives remain a key priority and new non-core revenue streams are intended to reduce pressure on customer charges by spreading overhead costs. Engagement with government is continuing regarding water reform, governance arrangements and long-term funding solutions, particularly for ageing infrastructure.
- WaterNSW acknowledged that customer affordability has been a longstanding concern and noted that planning beyond the next ten years remains an ongoing challenge.
- Members highlighted a shift occurring within the customer base, noting that government policy measures such as cultural water allocations and water buybacks may reduce the volume of chargeable water over time and potentially impact WaterNSW's future revenue base.
- WaterNSW advised that IPART has identified the need to review tariff structures and that future determinations are expected to apply greater scrutiny to how WaterNSW costs are allocated, including consideration of community service and government-funded components. It was noted that held environmental water (HEW) has the same fees and charges as other licences.
- Members sought clarification regarding metering requirements for environmental water holders. WaterNSW confirmed that the same metering regulations apply to environmental water holders as they do to other water users.
- Further discussion occurred regarding environmental water delivered through the river system and the treatment of transmission losses. WaterNSW explained that environmental watering events are measured and managed using WaterNSW's gauging network. Losses associated with environmental watering events are calculated by WaterNSW and debited from environmental water accounts. Unlike consumptive water losses, which are socialised across users, losses associated with environmental water are generally borne by environmental water holders.
- WaterNSW invited feedback from members regarding customer pain points and areas requiring improvement. Feedback included ongoing frustration with the pace of digital improvements and the need for greater usability across WaterNSW platforms, including iWAS and DAS.
- Members stated that WaterInsights has improved significantly and delivers value to customers.
- Members emphasised the importance of engaging customers early in project planning, design and scoping to ensure solutions meet customer needs and expectations.

2.2 WaterNSW's Financial Performance (J Pizzinga)

- 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.
- Members queried whether lower interest rates would influence pricing outcomes during the current determination period. WaterNSW advised that any changes would generally be considered as part of the next IPART determination process.
- WaterNSW advised that financial performance in the Murrumbidgee is forecast to continue improving and is expected to return to profit from FY27, supported by continued revenue growth and a reduction in operating costs following the FY26 organisational restructure.
- WaterNSW's dividend payments provide government with a modest return on investment compared to government contributions.
- One member noted they would value future reporting that links financial performance to broader community outcomes, such as food production, communities supported and social benefits delivered through water services. WaterNSW agreed to consider this suggestion.
- A member expressed surprise at the comparatively weaker financial performance of the Murrumbidgee relative to other valleys, specifically the Lachlan. WaterNSW advised that Lachlan water volumes are approximately 120% of the IPART 20-year rolling average, whereas Murrumbidgee volumes are projected at approximately 90%. As a result, Lachlan benefits from significantly higher variable revenue and has a high usage charge (\$45/ML compared to \$7.18/ML in the Murrumbidgee).
- Members welcomed the increased level of financial transparency and the detail provided.

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 Murrumbidgee valley.
- Discussion occurred on the Balranald Weir refurbishment and replacement project with members seeking an update on project status. WaterNSW advised the project is currently in execution phase but is being reassessed. The reassessment is considering the most efficient and cost-effective delivery approach and investigations are examining whether the current design remains suitable in light of proposed changes to flow management arrangements.
- Members raised concerns about potential WSP amendments that may alter seasonal flow patterns and increase summer flows at Balranald. The NSW environmental water holder clarified that proposed changes would involve redistribution of existing annual flow volumes rather than increasing total annual flows (ie shifting the water between months so there is a higher flow in summer). There will be no increase in peak flows due to end of system flow targets and flow assumptions are being considered as part of the assessment process.
- Members expressed support to explore options for construction of a new weir at Balranald to improve water delivery into Yanga National Park, stating that Fisheries, Council, the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder (CEWH) and local stakeholders are also supportive of this. The proposal has been raised with WaterNSW and flagged with the Commonwealth through the Basin Plan Review process. Potential benefits may include water savings and improved delivery efficiency.

- WaterNSW will discuss further with the NSW environmental water holder in its monthly meeting and update the CAG at the next meeting, noting that project assessment must balance operational risk, performance outcomes, costs and any broader benefits.

Action MBG2608.01: WaterNSW and NSW environmental water holder to discuss feasibility of a new weir at Balranald to improve water delivery into Yanga National Park and provide an update on options and benefits to the CAG at the next meeting.

Responsibility: B Coffey

- WaterNSW provided an update on SDLAM projects in the Murrumbidgee valley and the implications of completed assets transitioning to WaterNSW ownership. Assets funded by government are not included within WaterNSW's regulatory asset base (RAB). Upon transfer, SDLAM-funded assets enter WaterNSW's asset portfolio at a zero value. Customer impacts are expected to arise primarily through ongoing operations and maintenance costs rather than asset capital costs and would be picked up in future WAMC pricing determinations.
- A member queried the status of 4 hydrometric stations that were previously included as SDLAM projects. Taken on notice.

Action MBG2608.02: WaterNSW to provide information on the status of the four hydrometric stations in the Murrumbidgee that were previously identified as SDLAM projects.

Responsibility: B Coffey

- Members questioned the potential for in-stream hydroelectric generation at weirs. It was noted that hydroelectric generation at Hay Weir was found to be inefficient and not commercially viable.

3.2 Water Planning and Delivery (S Gleeson)

- WaterNSW presented a review of operations in the Murrumbidgee, including storage and inflow review (including cumulative inflows, system inflows ranking), system losses and operational surplus, e-water deliveries, water use summary 25/26, allocations 26/27, IVT account summary 26/27, operations, drought flood risk indicator dashboard, end of year planning, current dam storage scenarios and weather and climate outlook and long range forecast.
- An update on management of operational surplus and system losses was provided. Discussion focused on customer ordering behaviours and opportunities to improve system efficiency. WaterNSW advised that current behaviours are similar to those experienced several years ago and highlighted the importance of customers providing timely information regarding intended water use. Early notification of changes to water orders assists WaterNSW in operating the system more efficiently and reducing surplus management issues.
- Members noted that existing processes can make it difficult for river pumpers to amend orders or advise of changing requirement and additional education and awareness would assist customers to better understand system requirements and operational impacts.
- Members discussed behaviours contributing to surplus and shortfall events, along with the effectiveness of existing management processes, customer communications and compliance arrangements.
- Members noted there was a feature in WaterInsights many years ago that showed flows and location of excess water within the Murrumbidgee system. Members stated this information could assist customers in making more informed water ordering decisions.

Action MBG2608.03: WaterNSW to investigate the feasibility of activating the mapping feature in WaterInsights showing the location of excess water within the Murrumbidgee system.

Responsibility: K Gemmell

- Members questioned if there are consequences for repeat non-compliance when an order is not amended. WaterNSW advised that NRAR has access to relevant compliance data and is focused on education, while also retaining enforcement powers where required.
- WaterNSW provided an update on environmental watering deliveries, including the supplementary fish pulse event at Redbank with positive feedback received from both Commonwealth and NSW environmental water holders.

- Discussion occurred regarding customer feedback around communication of operational decisions and delivery arrangements. WaterNSW advised it would review communications associated with supplementary events to identify opportunities for improvement.
- Members noted the importance of environmental watering activities and acknowledged increasing community awareness of the broader benefits delivered.
- Members acknowledged that staff regularly demonstrate a proactive approach, balancing competing operational demands and working collaboratively to achieve beneficial outcomes for customers and environmental water holders.
- Operational updates are available at [WaterInsights](#).

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.
- Members sought an update on commitments raised at previous meetings, including publication of monthly flood work application data and Flood Work Implementation Guidelines that were expected to be available by May. Members stated the delay in publishing supporting materials contributes to customer uncertainty and reduced confidence in the approval process. WaterNSW advised that the implementation guidelines are nearing completion but have not yet been published.
- Members expressed concerns regarding the accessibility and usability of current flood work application processes, stating that the application process remains difficult for customers to navigate, lack of clear guidance and supporting systems may be discouraging applications from being submitted and customers require greater certainty and confidence before proceeding with applications.
- Discussion occurred regarding the three-year application period for existing works. Members suggested that the commencement of the compliance timeframe should be reconsidered, given that supporting systems were not fully established when the legislative requirements commenced. WaterNSW advised that the legislative timeframe was set by the Department, which is currently considering whether any reset or adjustment of timeframes is appropriate.
- Members expressed concern that industry representatives are not directly involved in the Floodplain Strikeforce, despite the substantial operational knowledge held within the irrigation sector that could speed up the process. WaterNSW clarified that industry participation had not been ruled out. The current focus is on achieving alignment between participating agencies and establishing a clear understanding of key issues before broader stakeholder engagement occurs.
- WaterNSW acknowledged the importance of future industry involvement and advised that customers and industry representatives would be invited to contribute once options and priorities have been developed.

- Members stated that low application numbers may be influenced by the fact that the process is still being developed.

Action MBG2608.04: WaterNSW to provide information on the number of open flood work applications in the Murrumbidgee.

Responsibility: A Fuller

- A question was raised regarding the qualitative assessment of connectivity for Zone A applications and how determinations are made if a formal flood study has not been undertaken. Taken on notice.

Action MBG2608.05: WaterNSW to provide further information on the assessment methodology for qualitative assessment of connectivity for Zone A applications where a flood study is not required.

Responsibility: A Fuller

- Members welcomed progress made but emphasised the need for timely delivery of guidance materials, improved customer confidence in application processes and greater industry involvement as the program moves into implementation.

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.
- WaterNSW acknowledged that the works classification process has been complex and confusing for customers and that one-on-one support is available for customers requiring assistance.
- Latitude and longitude details required as part of the classification process relate to the location of the work itself. Supporting information is available through fact sheets published on [WaterNSW's website](#).
- Members provided feedback regarding customer communications and accessibility of the process, stating that correspondence should be written in plain language and avoid technical terminology wherever possible, recognising that many customers may not be familiar with regulatory or administrative terms.
- Members also raised concerns regarding perceptions in the community that updating information within a works approval may automatically trigger compliance action or an inspection by NRAR. WaterNSW confirmed this is not the case.
- Members noted that some customers continue to experience difficulties accessing the online portal, particularly at the login stage and that existing instructional videos are outdated. WaterNSW advised that portal improvements are being progressed and support remains available for customers experiencing difficulties. Paper-based forms can be provided on request.
- Members raised concerns regarding classification notices issued to customers, stating some letters were dated 1 May but not received until later in the month, reducing the available timeframe for action. Given the complexity of the process, members considered the original timeframe insufficient. WaterNSW advised the fee-free classification period has been extended to 30 September.

Action MBG2608.06: WaterNSW to advise the fee for classifying works after the fee-free period ends.

Responsibility: A Fuller

- WaterNSW advised that initial correspondence has already been revised following customer feedback that the first letters were difficult to understand due to the use of technical language rather than plain English. Additional follow-up communications, including letters and SMS notifications, are planned to further support customers.

- WaterNSW encouraged customers experiencing difficulties with the process to utilise available support options.
- Members stated the metering classification letter process caused significant stress for customers, noting that some infrastructure that had been operational for 20–30 years was incorrectly identified as "not constructed" and infrastructure that had been inspected by DQPs was listed incorrectly in the letter sent to WaterNSW customers, which caused significant confusion. Members stated the process was not adequately designed, tested, or verified before implementation.

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.

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.
- Members questioned whether support for discontinuing third-party consent was primarily coming from customers in the northern or southern regions. Taken on notice.

Action MBG2608.07: WaterNSW to advise if there is a regional trend (northern, southern, mixed) among customers supporting the discontinuation of temporary trade third-party consent.

Responsibility: A Fuller

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 DCCEEW, 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

6.3 Additional CAG meeting online

- Members questioned that given NSW DCCEEW won't be attending the March 2027 meeting due to the State elections, is it worth holding a third online CAG meeting in November. Discussed.
- Members to contact WaterNSW if a third meeting is wanted.

Meeting review and close:

Next in person meeting: TBC (Griffith)

Meeting closed: 1.00pm

Murrumbidgee Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 19 August 2026

New actions

Action number	Action	Responsibility	Status
MBG2608.01	WaterNSW and NSW environmental water holder to discuss feasibility of a new weir at Balranald to improve water delivery into Yanga National Park and provide an update on options and benefits to the CAG at the next meeting.	B Coffey	
MBG2608.02	WaterNSW to provide information on the status of the four hydrometric stations in the Murrumbidgee that were previously identified as SDLAM projects.	B Coffey	
MBG2608.03	WaterNSW to investigate the feasibility of activating the mapping feature in WaterInsights showing the location of excess water within the Murrumbidgee system.	K Gemmell	In progress.
MBG2608.04	Provide information on the number of open flood work applications in the Murrumbidgee.	A Fuller	There is one Murrumbidgee application outstanding as at end July 2026. One application was received in the last 3 months, which was granted (amending an existing flood work application).
MBG2608.05	WaterNSW to provide further information on the assessment methodology for qualitative assessment of connectivity for Zone A applications where a flood study is not required.	A Fuller	
MBG2608.06	WaterNSW to advise the fee for classifying works after the fee-free period ends.	A Fuller	The fee for classifying works (after the fee-free period ends on 30 September) is \$111.93 (down from \$650).
MBG2608.07	WaterNSW to advise if there is a regional trend (northern, southern, mixed) among customers supporting the discontinuation of temporary trade third-party consent.	A Fuller	

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Responsibility	Status
MBG2603.02	WaterNSW to seek advice from NSW DCCEEW on flood work applications for landholders that sit within Irrigation Infrastructure Organisations (IIOs).	T Lawson	Complete. Structures that are within the MI area of operation that are potentially impacted by an MI work may not meet the definition of a flood work as they may not impact the flow or distribution of floodwater in times of flood. There are some instances where MI works are siphoned/subwayed to allow flood flow through the structures or the MI may not completely divert flood water and landholder's property is still inundated with flood water in certain circumstances/flood events. These will be looked at by WaterNSW in the pre-application meetings with the applicants and/or their consultant, and in circumstances where an MI work may be impacting a landholder's property, WaterNSW will refer to DCCEEW for advice. 19 August 2026 discussion: WaterNSW advised that MI flood work applications are assessed by the Department; individuals within IIOs are assessed by WaterNSW. Customers questioned if they still need a flood work approval if they are within the MI system. WaterNSW advised that this is a possibility. To be discussed out of session and confirmed.