

Namoi-Peel Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: Mackellar Motel, 342 Conadilly St, GUNNEDAH

Date: 20 March 2025

Time: 9.45am

Present: David Gowing (Chair), Bruce Logan, Mick Coffey, Dianne Hockey, Ildu Monticone, Todd Farrer, Ian Coxhead, Paul Keyte and Chrissy Jeffries. Kathryn Stanislawski (observer, online)

WaterNSW: Brendan Maher, Ronan Magaharan, Kate Masters, Ken Gee, Martin Prendergast, Duncan Wallace, Michelle Yeaman, Yarraan Doyle (online), Sonia Townsend (online), Chris Bath and Toni Hayes. Joining online for specific agenda items: Stephanie Kermode, David Stockler, Russell Cocks, Martin Brooks, Lachlan Browne.

Agency and external staff for specific items: Dan Connor, Allan Raine (online), Shahadat Chowdhury (online), Peter Hyde (online), Luke Curtain (online), Phillipa Fague (online), Emma Brindley-Hawke (online) and Catherine Parker (online) (NSW DCCEEW).

Meeting Opened: 9.45am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country:

1.2 Apologies: John Richards, Nick Lennon, Michael Boyle, Nat Groves.

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, 23 October 2024:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [23 October 2024](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

M Coffey/B Logan (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. OPERATIONS:

2.1 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Gee)

- WaterNSW provided a review of recent operations in the Namoi and Peel valleys, including recent rainfall and outlook, recent actual and statistical inflows, current storage volumes, overview of the water resource monitoring dashboards, water availability and usage and forward operations.
- Overall, it has been a relatively dry summer in both the Peel and Namoi valleys, with below average rainfall.
- **Peel operations** for the 2024/25 season are forecast to remain as order on demand with starting allocations forecast to be lower than 100%. Access to uncontrolled flow will be sought from NSW DCCEEW should allocation be less than 100% and flow triggers are reached.

- Members sought an explanation of proposed changes to the Peel WSP to allow more access to water for Tamworth Regional Council. B Logan advised that currently, when NSW DCCEE does the AWD they put aside 100% TRC entitlement in the first year and 75% in the second year. The proposal is to allow 100% in the first year and 100% in the second year. A carryover will also be introduced to address issues with environmental water. See also agenda item 3.2.
- **Upper Namoi operations** for the 2025/26 season will be order on demand. A bulk water transfer to supply remaining Lower Namoi account volumes will be required under most inflow sequence forecasts, with volume and timing to be determined in the coming months. There is a possibility of another transfer later this year if conditions remain very dry.
- **Lower Namoi operations** for the 2025/26 season will be order on demand and WaterNSW is expecting a big season with water likely to be drawn from Split Rock. Environmental deliveries may commence in autumn. End of system flows are required with Split Rock plus Keepit combined stored volume above 120GL.
- Up to date operational information is available on WaterNSW's [WaterInsights platform](#).

2.2 WaterNSW Drought Management Approach (A Richardson)

- WaterNSW introduced its drought management approach for the Namoi and Peel regulated valleys, 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 Namoi and Peel valleys 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 each valley can be found by clicking the relevant valley: [Namoi](#) / [Peel](#).
- 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. These 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 if/when the need arises.
- 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 questioned where unregulated water users fit into WaterNSW's strategy. WaterNSW advised that outside of the regulated system there is a limit to what can be done. In a drought, NSW DCCEEW would lead this conversation.
- Members stated that WaterNSW should step up engagement in a drought, not step back and let the department lead, commenting the CAG is an ideal forum for discussion.
- As far as drought communications, members believe there needs to be more education in the community around what water is available in the dam and who owns it (ie is not just for irrigators, but also for critical human needs, the environment etc).
- Members stated that what WaterNSW is proposing is a good start and as drought continues, frequency of engagement needs to increase. NSW DCCEEW also needs to be involved so customers understand the rules and implications if a rule change is required.

2.3 Northern Basin Connectivity Program – WaterNSW update (K Masters)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the Northern Basin Connectivity Program, including the Connectivity Panel work and report, recommended changes to increase connectivity, WaterNSW's role and operational considerations and next steps (led by NSW DCCEEW Water).
- An overview of the panel's recommended changes, including proposed targets and triggers, preliminary impacts and operational considerations for WaterNSW, was presented and discussed.
- Members highlighted that while the Peel is not currently mentioned, there is potential for it to come in. Members' opinion is that removing supplementary and floodplain harvesting access periods will bring on drought sooner and be slower to get out of and it is important that Peel customers are aware of the concept behind this.
- Members raised concerns around supplementary flow access in NSW and lack of involvement from Queensland.
- Customers stated the report has been rushed and errors and issues around hydrological modelling with no ground truthing will have massive impacts on water users, with flow on effects for small towns and livelihoods.
- WaterNSW is undertaking modelling to assess what the impacts might be and how we will operate and is actively participating in conversations with the working group around assumptions and forecasting as subject matter experts, providing technical input, data and analysis.
- It is expected the panel's report and modelling will be released in July and WaterNSW will update the CAG as this progresses, noting that a lot of things need to happen before anything is operationalised.
- Members requested it be recorded in the minutes that they reject the proposal.
- Further information is available at [Northern Basin Connectivity Program](#)

2.4 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- WaterNSW provided an update on valley-specific projects and maintenance activities, including intake tower crane refurbishment at Split Rock Dam, radial gate painting project and electric motor rewire and annual maintenance of high voltage electrical infrastructure at Keepit Dam.

3. PRESENTATIONS/CONSULTATION:

3.1 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.
- 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.
- Members stated there are 11 remaining areas in the Namoi that landholders disagree with and questioned if these landholders have been contacted. NSW DCCEEW advised they are aware of this, and emails have been acknowledged and as part of the ongoing process they will be contacted.
- Members questioned if there is a review proposed for updating Floodplain Management Plans (FMP). NSW DCCEEW advised that there is a regulatory requirement to review and remake FMPs every 10 years (Namoi due 2029) and as part of the regulatory process the Namoi would likely start around 2026. There will be a consultation process on the remake.
- Feedback is invited by 23 March, prior to finalising the WSPs later this year. [View the updated maps and factsheet](#)
- 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](#)

3.2 Short and long term water initiatives for Namoi-Peel (L Curtain & P Hyde, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an overview of short and long term options for Tamworth town water security projects and measures. Two long-term projects are proposed as well as a short-term proposal to increase the Chaffey Dam town water supply reserve.

Advanced Water Treatment Plant Project (full business case):

- This project is in the planning stage and aims to improve water security in the region, provide sustainable environmental outcomes and support a growing regional economy.
- The project will address water security by recycling up to 12ML/day of wastewater from major industrial users, reducing town water reliance by up to 25%.
- A full business case is required to further refine the project scope, benefits and cost, regulatory pathway and its benefits.
- NSW DCCEEW (Water) is working in collaboration with Tamworth Regional Council, who completed a preliminary business case in August 2022 and recommended further analysis. NSW DCCEEW (Water) will lead this analysis and integrate stakeholder consultation to ensure preferred options are identified and progressed.
- The NSW and Australian Governments are jointly funding \$6 million to develop a full business case for the project, which is expected to be submitted mid-2025.
- The infrastructure required to support the proposed project would include:
 - a water treatment plant
 - brine concentration process and brine/salt lagoons
 - purified water reservoirs
 - pipeline and pump stations
 - power supply upgrade
- Further information can be found at [Tamworth Advanced Water Treatment Plant](#).

Tamworth Intervalley Pipelines and Off-River Storages Project (preliminary business case):

- This project is funded by the NSW Government and involves the delivery of a preliminary business case to identify and assess options such as intervalley pipelines and off-river storages to improve Tamworth region's water security and support a growing regional economy.
- A preliminary business case will inform funding decisions for further investigations and narrow down options to a shortlist for a full business case.
- Short-listed options being considered for further investigation include:

- construction of a new smaller off-river storage (between 1-10GL) upstream of Tamworth. Water will be extracted from the Peel River at Paradise Weir, with a pump station and a pipeline capacity of 100ML/day for transfers to and from the storage
 - construction of a new pipeline and pump stations to transfer water from Manning River catchment to Chaffey Dam, including a weir on the Barnard River
 - construction of a new pipeline and pump stations to transfer water from Keepit Dam to Calala Water Treatment Plant
 - construction of a new pipeline and pump stations to transfer water from Split Rock Dam to Calala Water Treatment Plant.
- These options are aligned with the Tamworth Water Security Plan being developed by the Tamworth Regional Council and the Namoi Regional Water Strategy.
 - Discussion occurred on the above options, with members supportive of further exploration of option 2 (pipeline to transfer water from the Manning River catchment). Members stated this would be a great pilot program and introduces water from outside the Murray-Darling Basin.
 - Options 3 and 4 were not supported as will impact water licence holders in the Namoi region and potentially impact the environment. Members are not supportive of degradation of reliability in any of the dams.
 - More information can be found at [Tamworth Intervallley Pipelines and Off-River Storages Project](#).

Proposed amendment to the Peel Regulated River Water Sharing Plan (short term):

- To improve Tamworth short term water security and ensure the town is more prepared for a severe drought, NSW DCCEE (Water) is seeking to implement a temporary increase to the water set aside in Chaffey Dam for town water needs. This amendment will help reduce the time Tamworth spends in water restrictions as well as extend the duration of water supplies in an extreme event.
- The Water Sharing Plan for the Peel Regulated River Water Source 2022 requires town water to be set aside in Chaffey Dam on a two-year rolling basis. This means, in average non drought years, at the start of a water year 100% of town water needs is held for year 1 and 70% is held for following year 2. Once other high security water needs are met, the remaining 30% of the town water supply is allocated and then lower security water, including general security licences, is allocated based on what remains in the dam.
- A 7.1 GL increase would effectively mean holding 100% of Tamworth entitlement in the dam for two consecutive years at the start of each water year, significantly reducing the amount of time Tamworth spends in water restrictions.
- The department has undertaken modelling analysis to understand the optimal reserve increase settings to support short term water security whilst limiting impacts on the environment and other user groups.
- Potential impact and proposed offsets for general security reliability (decrease in AWD) and EWA (ability to carry over) discussed. Members felt it is inequitable that the environment is able to carry over and other customers can't. NSW DCCEE (Water) advised that it is a Basin requirement to maintain a volume of environmental water. This proposal is an interim, short term measure until the long term plans are implemented.
- Members raised concerns that changes to the WSP are being proposed without any consultation with stakeholders who will be most affected. NSW DCCEE (Water) advised that increasing Tamworth reserves was an option flagged in the Regional Water Strategy as a short term measure and was out for consultation. Two webinars have also been held as well as a stall in local shopping centres. Emails were sent to all licence holders in the Peel and a number of emails were sent to Peel Valley Water Users Association, which included changes to the WSP. The department is also meeting with Peel irrigators in Tamworth tonight.
- A fact sheet on the proposed amendments can be found [here](#).

4. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

4.1 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 cited an example of a recent application in the Namoi of a customer with a bore next to a village with a lot of stock and domestic bores and questioned if there is an anomalies process that can be implemented for vacant or absent landholders. WaterNSW is aware of this case and advised the application needs to be assessed on what people are doing and what is happening in the water source. There is no exception provision/channel other than potentially applying for a lower volume. Namoi Water advised discussions are ongoing.
- Members questioned if there is any measurement of effects of trade on groundwater quality. Taken on notice.

Action NP2503.01: WaterNSW to advise if hydrologists look at water quality as well as quantity when reviewing applications for temporary trade of groundwater.

Responsibility: D Stockler

- Information on the triage and assessment process and FAQs on trading water can be found at [Trading water - WaterNSW](#) and [Groundwater temporary trades \(71T Dealings\)](#).
- 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.
- 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.
- Members questioned if WaterNSW has a map showing geographical analysis of areas that are under/over performing or struggling with compliance (S91i applications). Taken on notice.

Action NP2503.02: Members requested a geographical analysis of 91i applications be presented at the next meeting if available.

Responsibility: D Stockler

- 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 DCCEE (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.
- Members were reminded that customers can [subscribe to a free SMS reminder service](#) for annual or monthly **recording and reporting requirements**.
- Members sought an update on when IPART is likely to release its draft determination. WaterNSW advised we have provided our feedback to the draft consultant's report and provided additional information as requested. Once this feedback is reviewed, IPART will assess and make a decision on when they are likely to make a draft determination. When the draft report is released, IPART is required to provide a minimum 28 days for stakeholders to make submissions. WaterNSW will advise customers when we know more, however customers are encouraged to sign up to IPART alerts.

4.2 Non-Urban Metering Review update (D Connor, NSW DCCEEW)

- NSW DCCEEW provided an update on the Non-Urban Metering (NUM) review including new metering requirements, implementation progress, ongoing implementation work, telemetry uplift program, floodplain harvesting measurement changes and key messages.
- An overview of the new metering and measuring requirements was presented and discussed, including compliance dates. There are 2 new categories that eliminate the requirement for a DQP and LID/telemetry:
 - users with **>15ML but <100ML of total entitlement** must install a pattern-approved meter (unless exempt) by 1 December 2027 or next approval renewal date (whichever is later);
 - works nominated by **total entitlement of ≤15ML** do not require a meter unless trading allocations (excludes ≥500mm surface water pumps) and must be compliant by 1 December 2027;
 - all licensed water users have mandatory recording and reporting requirements, regardless of size of works or total entitlement.
- **Inland users with ≥100ML total entitlement and/or pumps ≥500mm** must already be compliant with a pattern-approved meter, local intelligence device (LID) and telemetry.
- The Australian government has funded a [Telemetry Uplift Program](#) which aims to assist eligible water users in the Murray-Darling Basin with compliance to the metering rules. By opting-in to the program, eligible water users will be offered free telemetry devices, including a local intelligence device (LID) and data logger. Priority will be given to groundwater sites, however works that take surface water may also be considered. Registration closes 31 March 2025.
- Members stated the program has come out after the compliance date in the north has passed and customers who have already purchased and installed telemetry are disadvantaged. This was acknowledged however a state-funded telemetry rebate was automatically applied for customers who installed telemetry early.
- Members expressed frustration around the ongoing costs and challenges to become and remain compliant, stating a lot of money has been spent on componentry that isn't working and is not fit for purpose. Lack of availability of DQPs to resolve issues compounds this. Customers agree that water take should be transparent, however remaining compliant is becoming very difficult and costly.
- NSW DCCEEW advised that NRAR is aware of the issues, limitations and challenges for customers around compliance. It is important that customers are able to demonstrate pathway to compliance and urged customers to ensure all records are in the DQP portal as this is evidence you are taking the steps you need to.
- An overview of floodplain harvesting (FPH) measurement changes was provided. Unregulated river access licence holders can use storage metering to measure overland flow; metered storage water can be used during FPH if an outflow meter is installed; the start of a measurement period for overland flow has been clarified; DQP criteria for point-of-intake measurement has been refined; and FPH measurement rules now apply to all water supply works.

- For more information on changes to the metering rules, exemptions, key documents and tools and to subscribe for metering updates, go to <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/nsw-non-urban-water-metering>

5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:

5.1 CAG Engagement with NSW DCCEEW Water Group (B Maher/C Parker, 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 sight 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 where possible.
- Members support a greater presence from NSW DCCEEW at CAG meetings, stating CAGs are an opportunity for all stakeholders to get together and having the relevant agencies in the room is beneficial for customers.

5.2 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.

5.3 Stakeholder Engagement (B Maher/C Bath)

- 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 adding the Local Emergency Management Committee (made up of all the different emergency groups) and local fishing clubs.

5. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

6. GENERAL BUSINESS:

6.1 Thank you (D Gowing)

- David Gowing advised members this is his last face to face meeting and thanked members for their support and assistance while he has been Chairperson.

Meeting review and close:

Next face to face meetings: Peel - 2 September 2025
Namoi - 3 September 2025

Meeting closed: 2.55pm

Namoi-Peel Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 20 March 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
NP2503.01	WaterNSW to advise if hydrologists look at water quality as well as quantity when reviewing applications for temporary trade of groundwater.	D Stockler	Complete. Water quality is a consideration for assessment of groundwater trades.
NP2503.02	Members requested a geographical analysis of 91i applications be presented at the next meeting if available.	D Stockler	

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		