

Namoi Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting

Location: WaterNSW, 3 Caroline Way, Narrabri

Date: 9 September 2025

Time: 9.00am

Present: Richard Wright, James Hall, Liam Schwager, Steven Phelps, Jacob Hawley, Paul Flewitt, Wal Friend, Dianne Hockey, Todd Farrer, Mick Coffey, Ben Swansbra, Duncan Barnes, Paul Keyte (online), James Hockey (observer), Chrissy Stannard (observer).

WaterNSW: Andrew George, Brendan Maher, Kate Masters, Ken Gee, Michelle Yeaman, Chris Bath, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Hetal Parmar, Russell Cocks, Ben Arabin, Kim Garside.

Meeting Opened: 9.00am

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 Apologies: Nerida Sloane, Julia Eather, Dirk Jol, Bruce Logan, Stewart Eykamp.

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 Namoi-Peel CAG Meeting, 20 March 2025

- Resolved the minutes of the Namoi-Peel CAG meeting held on [20 March 2025](#) be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting. Taken as read.

M Coffey/T Farrer (carried)

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

2. INTRODUCTION TO CAGs:

2.1 Election of Chairperson

- Mick Coffey was nominated by Todd Farrer, seconded by Dianne Hockey. 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.

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 (eg fishways, environmental flow infrastructure, water quality monitoring, land management, education obligations and a range of 'conferred' functions from the Minister in administering licensing and water take), 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.
- 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. WaterNSW moved 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 (refer to agenda item 4.2).
- Members were pleased to hear WaterNSW's focus is back on core delivery of water and questioned if WaterNSW has looked at how regulatory changes have impacted the business, noting changes to supplementary access has impacted customers' businesses leading to less revenue for WaterNSW. As part of its submission, WaterNSW included an analysis of the impact of overall reduction of water use and changes in water use behaviour across the basin. Due to being a fixed cost business, 60% of our revenue is generated through fixed charges and 40% is generated from the volume of water delivered. WaterNSW suggested environmental water holders move to 100% fixed costs to avoid some risk however this was not supported by IPART.
- Members stated costs for any environmental outcomes should be shared. WaterNSW noted that customers represented this very loudly to IPART throughout the year, hence why those programs and projects have not received revenue. The National Water Initiative states that 'beneficiary pays', which IPART has determined as 'impactor pays' (ie irrigators). WaterNSW is asking the same questions of IPART and government.
- An explanation of the difference between a State-Owned Corporation (SOC) and a government entity was provided. WaterNSW is not funded by central consolidated revenue but is an investment of the State government who want to see a return on their investment, which they get through dividends. The dividend paid is not a reflection of how profitable the business is. One of the perverse outcomes is that if we don't pay dividends our status as a SOC is at risk.
- Members questioned how WaterNSW will prioritise capital works. WaterNSW has taken a risk-based approach (refer to agenda item 4.2). We are trying to minimise longer-term multi-year projects in the short term and trying to reduce borrowings to reduce interest costs.

- The government recognises the need to invest and the need for a radical change in the way infrastructure is funded.
- Members questioned if it would make a difference if land tax was not required to be paid to the government. The current land tax is \$18-20M and WaterNSW has sought multiple times to get a dispensation from paying this however has been denied. Another option is to transfer land back to the government.
- Members stated there is a revenue opportunity for unused land for foreshores to be leased and questioned if anything is happening in this space (raised during consultation with Water Working Groups). WaterNSW advised this is not currently progressing however if we are to remain commercial, we want to leverage those opportunities. We have submitted a grant for seed funding to explore opportunities such as this (feasibility). Members suggested WaterNSW should start speaking to business who may be future lease holders.

4. OPERATIONS:

4.1 Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Project update (H Parmar)

- WaterNSW continues to progress the Pamamaroo Inlet Regulator Project (PIR), aimed at repairing known problems and restoring full functionality of the asset to improve flow control and water management within the Menindee Lakes system. While early planning and design milestones have been achieved, the project has encountered several challenges that have impacted delivery timelines.
- An overview of project benefits, an explanation of how the project impacts the triggers in the WSPs in the northern catchments and why it is a significant issue was provided.
- Project delays presented and discussed, including physical access (high water levels due to significant rainfall), operational constraints (repairs requiring temporary isolation) and funding shortfall following the IPART determination. WaterNSW is reviewing project scopes and timelines and will prioritise works to ensure critical infrastructure is delivered within available funding and will provide further updates as information becomes available.
- Members stated the changes to the WSP triggers were not consulted on and not agreed to and there has been no consultation or engagement with customers on the impacts to them. There have been different messages from WaterNSW, NSW DCCEEW and the Minister. Members suggested establishing a working group to progress.
- Currently the Namoi is the only valley with the trigger changes, however other northern valleys will also be impacted, and members are concerned that once the trigger is in the WSP it cannot be changed.
- The environmental water representative queried if there has been communication with the CEWH for connectivity deliveries and oversight of watering plans to avoid exacerbation. Namoi Water advised it has asked how environmental water will be factored and was told it was not considered. C Stannard will discuss with the CEWH and highlight potential risk factors.

4.2 Regional Operations update (M Yeaman)

- 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 Namoi were presented and discussed, as well as examples of some of the projects that have been deferred.
- Gunidgera Weir Raising has already been deferred however WaterNSW is able to deliver requirements in conjunction with water users along the system and will continue to manage deliveries without the need to go to a rostering system in the short term.
- Members questioned what the funding drop is from the last determination (currently \$1.3M allocated). WaterNSW has done a comparison against the previous determination and what we asked for vs what we are currently working to. In a number of cases there is a spike due to fishways and cold water pollution (CWP), which have been deferred until the regulatory review takes place.

- Members raised concerns about the risk of cost blow out, and potential for regulation changes that may increase costs, by deferring projects that have already started, both in and out of valley (eg Gunidgera Weir, Pamamaroo, EIS lapsing).
- WaterNSW provided an overview of the preventative maintenance plan, corrective maintenance work orders, current issues and outage plans.
- An update and overview of the closure of the gauge at Namoi River u/s Walgett (419091) was presented and discussed, including background and substitute site at the weir pool in the Barwon (422036). The Goangra gauge (419026) is now the end-of system flow site for the Namoi, and the closest Namoi site to Walgett.
- As part of WaterNSW's more efficient ways of working and providing greater resilience and surge capability across critical activities, WaterNSW is training staff across different operational areas to undertake dam surveillance and flood operations to assist in critical times.

4.3 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Gee)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Namoi valley, including rainfall and outlook, recent actual and statistical inflows (Keepit and Split Rock dams), water resource monitoring dashboard (drought flood risk index), storage status, water availability and usage and overview of flood operations at Keepit Dam.
- The Namoi catchment has received 100-150% of average rainfall in the last 3 months, and high rainfall forecast for the next 3 months, with more flooding expected. Members were reminded that the dams in the Namoi valley are not flood mitigation dams but purely used for storage of water, although WaterNSW has some levers that can be used.
- Discussion occurred around water that is being temporarily transferred by account holders from lower Namoi to upper Namoi accounts by reducing the balance below the 200% maximum account limit in the lower Namoi, creating potential equity issues. There is no intention of using the water in the upper Namoi and once usage has occurred in the lower Namoi the water is transferred back into lower Namoi accounts. Members questioned if there is an opportunity to change the rules to prevent this from happening (as is currently allowed in the WSP). WaterNSW advised this issue would need to be raised with NSW DCCEEW.
- Upper Namoi operations for the coming season will be order on demand. It is extremely unlikely there will be a bulk water transfer this year, however under dry conditions WaterNSW may do a spring pulse later in year.
- Lower Namoi operations for the coming season will be order on demand. The Gunidgera Pian system may reach channel capacity constraints if water users hold off taking water until later in the season. End of system flows will be required with Split Rock plus Keepit combined stored volume above 120GL. There is still 27ML of available supplementary water sitting in Lower Namoi accounts.
- An overview of the two Keepit Dam flood operations events was presented and discussed.

5. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

5.1 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. If WaterNSW doesn't receive objections within the 10 day period, we will assume no objection and process the trade.

- 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](#).
- A geographical analysis of S91i applications in 2023-25 (per action NP2503.02) was presented and discussed. Members questioned if the data can be used to concentrate on more education for DQPs in those areas. This is one of the tools WaterNSW uses to inform the department, however much of the focus is on compliance rather than faulty meters.
- 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. As functionality of the portal increases, iWAS will be integrated into this system (next determination).

6. BUSINESS PAPERS:

- Taken as read.

7. GENERAL BUSINESS:

7.1 Real Time Data / WaterInsights

- The [WaterInsights portal](#) is WaterNSW's interactive webtool, covering more than 800 water sources in NSW. It provides easy access to everything you need to know about water resources and how water is managed by WaterNSW.
- WaterInsights is easy to use and provides information on:
 - water availability, allocations, and balances
 - water quality alerts
 - volumes in storages
 - water trades
 - river flow and levels
 - forecast rainfall
 - operational updates including temporary restrictions and flow announcements
 - historical data on storages, water allocations and usage
 - rules and conditions for water management
- WaterInsights also has direct links to all Water Sharing Plans, the Access Licence Register, the Water Register and iWAS.

- WaterInsights offers comprehensive data from our own systems as well as from the Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau), the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) and the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (NSW DCCEEW).
- WaterInsights is designed to replace the Real Time Data (RTD) application and Water Live. This information is already in WaterInsights, including historical flow data.
- View our [fact sheet](#) for more information.

Meeting review and close:

Next meeting: 17 March 2026, Narrabri

Meeting closed: 12.30pm

Namoi Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 9 September 2025

New actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	Nil		

Carried forward actions

Action number	Action	Person responsible	Status
	N/A		