

# Peel Customer Advisory Group

## Minutes of Meeting

**Location:** WaterNSW, 33 Gunnedah Rd, Taminda  
**Date:** 8 September 2025  
**Time:** 9.00am

**Present:** John Richards, Ian Coxhead, Tom Chaffey, Bruce Logan, Michelle Coll (online), Paul Keyte (online) and Chrissy Stannard (observer).

**WaterNSW:** Andrew George, Brendan Maher, Kate Masters, Martin Prendergast, Michelle Yeaman, Chris Bath, Sonia Townsend (online) and Toni Hayes. Online for specific agenda items: Russell Cocks, Ben Arabin, Kim Garside, Lachlan Browne.

**Meeting Opened:** 10.00am

### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

#### 1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

#### 1.2 Apologies: Nerida Sloane, Stuart Garland.

#### 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.

B Logan/I Coxhead (carried)

#### 1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Refer to action sheet (attached).

### 2. INTRODUCTION TO CAGs:

#### 2.1 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.

## 2.2 Election of Chairperson

- Tom Chaffey was nominated by Ian Coxhead. Nomination declined.
- John Richards was nominated by Tom Chaffey, seconded by Ian Coxhead. Accepted and carried.

## 3. CUSTOMER SERVICES:

### 3.1 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, 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 landholders. Refer to our [FAQs](#) for more information.
- Members queried if the timeframe to process the trade will take longer if WaterNSW seeks approval on behalf of applicants. WaterNSW advised this would depend on the number of impacted landholders, however, with an objections-style process there can be an end date for objections, and if nothing is received within that timeframe we will assume there are no objections, meaning it could be processed more quickly.
- Members questioned how WaterNSW determines who may be impacted. WaterNSW advised it is based on a desktop hydrological assessment and is distance-based.
- A number of years ago, NSW DCCEEW undertook a review of the Non-Urban Metering Regulations. One of the key outcomes was that **only works actively taking water** are required to be metered and works not actively taking licensed water ('unintended work') would be exempt from the metering requirements.
- An 'unintended work' refers to a water supply work that is authorised, and under the *Water Management Act 2000*, does not take, or is not capable of taking, water from a water source. There are a number of [categories that constitute an unintended work](#).
- WaterNSW has developed a series of communications for customers, including notification via letter or email, with follow up notifications via SMS to ensure they are aware of their options to classify works. To gain the unintended work exemption, water users must [amend the classification of their work approval](#) to categorise it as not taking licensed water, which can be done online via WaterNSW's [Customer Portal](#) (refer to our [how-to-guide](#) to register).
- WaterNSW will attempt to contact landholders multiple times, and if a response is not received WaterNSW will assume the landholder agrees with the current classification, and this will be the basis of compliance on that work approval going forward.
- Where a work is active, constructed or takes water from a water source, and you do not have an exemption, you are required to comply with metering or reporting obligations. Customers can view the non-urban metering requirements on our [website](#).
- Members stated there was previously a fee to change a work classification to inactive and questioned if this is still the case, and if there will be any barriers to reactivate the work in the future. WaterNSW advised the Peel will be in the second round of notifications and there won't be a fee while the program is being rolled out (over 18 months). There may be a minimal fee in the future.
- The first tranche will be digital only (reclassification to be done online) however there will be an alternative for those who don't have access to technology (to be determined, however may be a call to the Customer Service Centre and a form completed and returned).
- An overview of features now available in the Customer Portal was provided. Registered customers can amend their contact details, view their existing approvals and licences and track the progress of any

applications lodged through the portal. Customers can also apply for a BLR and subdivide, surrender and decommission BLR bores and update work status. In-application support is also available.

- Members queried if there is a plan to integrate iWAS into the Customer Portal. WaterNSW advised that there will be 2 platforms in the short term, however as functionality of the customer portal increases, iWAS will be integrated. The customer portal is designed to be the customer facing entry to WaterNSW.

#### **4. WATERNSW UPDATE:**

##### **4.1 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, etc), 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 5.1).
- Members inquired what will happen if WaterNSW is unable to fund essential capital works and maintenance on infrastructure. WaterNSW advised it will take a risk-based approach and essential work will be completed. It is noted the government is reviewing the current funding model to ensure WaterNSW is sustainable. Members stated there doesn't appear to be any real strategy or plan, which is concerning as a water user and resident.
- Members questioned what percentage of total current employees will be impacted. WaterNSW advised there will be a 25% reduction of staff, which will be equivalent to the number of employees we had in 2021. An increase in regulatory obligations led to the increase in staff during this period.
- Members questioned if there is a risk that funding will be moved elsewhere if WaterNSW no longer undertakes the additional regulatory obligations. WaterNSW advised this will be a policy decision for the government and the functions will require funding.
- Members believe the declining customer base is due to restrictions imposed on water users from policy and government requirements (eg metering) and pricing and stated WaterNSW's non-essential functions should be transferred so that WaterNSW is a service provider, not just a customer-funded entity.
- Members questioned if there is a requirement for WaterNSW to pay dividends. Under the current framework there is; if we are not paying dividends and making a profit, we lose our classification as a State-Owned Corporation (SOC). We borrow to pay the dividends (currently unfunded debt).

- The government expected IPART to undertake a prudency and efficiency review of our costs, which they did not do, so an interim decision was made. IPART has now given themselves an extension to finish the review.
- Members questioned where WaterNSW will be in 3 years' time, if IPART comes out with a price path for recovery. WaterNSW stated it is too early to say however noted there likely won't be much change to their financial decision given the timeframe for the next state election.
- Members questioned if there will be balance of regional and metropolitan in the shedding of staff. WaterNSW advised it is too early to know and will depend on what areas staff currently resource (eg some head office staff service regional NSW), however if customers are seeing impacts to service delivery, we encourage you to let us know.
- Members appreciated the effort and thanked the CEO for speaking to customers face to face on this topic.

## **5. OPERATIONS:**

### **5.1 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 prioritised projects for the Peel Valley were presented and discussed, as well as examples of some of the projects that have been deferred.
- The Chaffey Pipeline EIS is not in the prioritised projects list and falls in the deferred projects. The available budget from IPART was insufficient to complete the EIS and in lieu of this, four other high-risk projects were listed to proceed. Members questioned the implication of not having the EIS completed, stating the closer Chaffey Dam gets to 20% the more significant and urgent it will become. The government did not support Tamworth Regional Council's (TRC) view that it should be able to be used at any time required and determined it would be an emergency pipeline only. WaterNSW is continuing conversations with TRC and will continue to look at modelling and wait to see the IPART outcomes, however if there is a dramatic change we will escalate.
- As part of our 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.

### **5.2 Water Planning and Delivery update (K Masters)**

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Peel valley, including rainfall and weather outlook, recent actual and statistical inflows (6 and 24 month), Chaffey Dam storage volume, water resource monitoring dashboard (drought flood risk index), water usage and availability (water YTD), water availability and usage and operations.
- There has been 111GL inflows for Chaffey in the last 6 months (5<sup>th</sup> percentile), very much in contrast to what was presented at the last CAG meeting.
- Chaffey Dam's most recent spill commenced 29 March 2025 (163 days to today; 100,460ML spilled, close to 100% of Chaffey's capacity [102,868ML]).
- Operations in the Peel for the upcoming irrigation season will be order on demand. With the increase to 100% for general security accounts uncontrolled flow access is not available this water year.
- Regulated conditions are unlikely until mid-November at the earliest. The concern will be with full dam and spill.
- It is important to note that Chaffey Dam is not a flood mitigation dam. With a fixed crest spillway the dam naturally discharges and mitigates flood to a degree.

- Members questioned if there are any available usage reports for the unregulated section of the Peel, stating policy decisions have been made with no supporting information on usage. WaterNSW noted unregulated reads are not as frequent as regulated meter reads (only once per year), however there may be historical annual usage figures that can be provided.

**Action PE2509.01:** WaterNSW to investigate if there are historical annual usage figures for the unregulated section of the Peel River (Cockburn) and provide to CAG members if available (complete, refer to action sheet).

**Responsibility:** S Townsend

**6. BUSINESS PAPERS:**

- Taken as read.

**7. GENERAL BUSINESS:**

- Members requested future CAG meetings are not held on the third Thursday of the month.

**Meeting review and close:**

**Next meeting:** 16 March 2026, Tamworth

**Meeting closed:** 12.40pm

## Peel Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 8 September 2025

### New actions

| Action number | Action                                                                                                                                                      | Person responsible | Status                                               |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| PE2509.01     | WaterNSW to investigate if there are historical annual usage figures for the unregulated section of the Peel River and provide to CAG members if available. | S Townsend         | <b>Complete</b> , emailed to members 3 October 2025. |

### Carried forward actions

| Action number | Action | Person responsible | Status |
|---------------|--------|--------------------|--------|
|               | N/A    |                    |        |