

Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting



Location: Gateway to Training, Goondiwindi

Date: 20 March 2024

Time: 9.00am

Present: John Shannon (Chair), John Appleby, Angelo Saccon, Ben Warby, Michael Owen, Greg Ringwood, Lachlan Ogden, Marcus Finn (observer) and Lila-Jane Fisher (online).

WaterNSW: Clair Cameron, Brendan Maher, Partha Saha, Al King, Ken Gee, Kel Durrant, Tim Tanner, Jon Hocking and Toni Hayes; and online David Stockler, Joe Pizzinga, Kate Masters.

Agency and external staff: David Andersen, Sarah Boyd, Bart Waters, Amanda Kelshaw (DCCEEW/online); Keeley Reynolds, Scott Carpenter (NRAR/online); Isabel Thompson and Jackson Streefer (SEC Newgate).

Meeting Opened: 9.00am.

1. Welcome and Introduction

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 **Apologies:** David Preston.

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, 14-15 November 2023:

Action BR2403.01: Minutes of 2 August 2023 to be circulated with papers for next meeting, to be confirmed as a true and correct record.

Responsibility: T Hayes

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [14-15 November 2023](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*J Appleby/G Ringwood
carried*

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- Nil carried forward actions.

2. Operations:

Water Planning and Delivery update (P Saha)

- WaterNSW presented a review of recent operations in the Border Rivers, including rainfall and forecast, inflows and storage status, water availability and usage and operations.
- The irrigation season is almost finished, with significant volumes of water delivered from Pindari and Glenlyon dams. A supplementary flow was announced on 2 occasions for customer d/s of Newinga Break due to tributary inflows from the Weir River.
- Recent outlook indicating possibility of below average rainfall over Border catchment during next three months.
- WaterNSW introduced Kel Durrant, Customer Field Officer, based in Goondiwindi.
- Customers and stakeholders can visit WaterNSW's [WaterInsights](#) portal for up-to-date operational information.

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2.2 Regional Operations update (T Tanner)

- WaterNSW advised that Pindari Dam turns 55 on 21 March 2023.
- WaterNSW provided an update on the Regional Operations operating model. Under the new model, WaterNSW has brought diverse teams (water monitoring, asset maintenance and field services) together under the Area Managers and established Regional Project Delivery Teams (south, north, metro).
- There have been many immediate benefits of sharing resources (staff, plant, equipment) across valleys and throughout the region, including a more consistent approach across the business. Future efficiencies are being explored, including consolidating offices and workshop facilities, working with Dam Safety to reduce dam surveillance, potential to self-deliver some regional projects, a review of existing water monitoring runs etc.
- An overview of the Groundwater IoT (telemetered meters) program was provided. WaterNSW is converting 630 sites from manual to telemetered to provide cost savings and non-financial benefits (safety risk reduction, CO2 emission reduction), as well as providing a significant increase of data for customers.
- Members noted that during drought there were issues with replacing the valves at the bottom of Pindari and questioned if this work was done when the dam was full. WaterNSW advised that 2 low level FDC valves were replaced and some minor work was done around the hydraulic system. We have no alternative once we get down to 40% to release the water.
- Members queried work done at Boggabilla Weir. WaterNSW advised that Sunwater has the contract with Border Rivers Commission (BRC) for maintenance of Boggabilla and Goondiwindi weirs and they undertake annual inspections. There was some work done last winter at Boggabilla, however had difficulty getting a window to do work due to high flows. Under current conditions and forecast there should be no issues getting into Boggabilla. There is unlikely to be any disruption to flow. Will start filling August (1 month prior to season).

3. Customer Services:

3.1 Customer Services update/Q&A (D Stockler)

- An update on what's happening in the Customer Services space was provided, including current status of DQP enquiries, hints and tips for DAS alarms, water order to delivery review, debtor management process, improvements and new transaction types now available in the customer portal and a digital roadmap for the Water Market System (WMS).
- An idea being considered as part of the non-urban metering review (refer agenda item 3.2) to unblock supply chain issues is separating LID installation from meter installation. 87% of issues are to do with LIDs, not meter installation.
- Members highlighted issues in relation to meter validation/recertification if changing a battery or doing maintenance (feedback from DQP); DAS alarms (20-30/day); FPH measurement period (issues with close and confirm). WaterNSW advised that a majority of faults are sitting with DQPs to resolve.

Action BR2403.02: WaterNSW to contact John Appleby out of session to discuss metering issues/concerns.

Responsibility: M Brooks

- WaterNSW is reviewing the definition and understanding of 'what a water order is' and how they are managed, to help ensure the ongoing compliance of all aspects of the process and remove ambiguity in this space. More detailed information will be provided at the July meeting to ensure customers are engaged throughout the process and have an opportunity to discuss any proposed changes.

- Enhancements to the WMS (customer portal) include screen sharing tools, guided product selector, in-application support, third party access, a regional office support trial and verification and fact sheets. In the next 6 months, existing customers will be able to view all current Approvals and Licences (May) and make enhancements to registration and management of business details (October).
- New transaction types becoming available include applications for Water Supply Works, Water Use or Combined Approvals and application tracking (May) and making works active/inactive (June).
- The Water Market System is being co-developed and is co-invested by the three water agencies (WaterNSW, DCCEEW and NRAR) into one platform.

Discussion and actions for the pricing component of the Customer Services session have been recorded by SEC Newgate (attached).

3.2 Update on Metering Review (D Andersen – DCCEEW)

- DCCEEW provided an update on the review of the Non-Urban Metering Reforms (as presented at the last meeting). The purpose of the review was to look at how to remove barriers to implementation and identify practical changes to the rules to improve compliance.
- An issues and options paper was released last year, which confirmed issues identified and general support for improving metering and measurement of water across the state. Submissions and a What We Heard report have been published on DCCEEW's website. <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/water/nsw-non-urban-water-metering/review-of-the-non-urban-metering-rules#what-we-heard-during-consultation>
- The review is now complete and DCCEEW will provide feedback and final recommendations to the Minister for consideration. Once considered, the Minister will be looking to advise and provide certainty on the way forward.
- Further information on the non-urban metering review can be found on [DCCEEW's website](#).

3.3 Floodplain Harvesting Measurement update (D Andersen – DCCEEW)

- DCCEEW provided an update on floodplain harvesting (FPH) measurement, including how to nominate your measurement period in iWAS, an overview of the DAS dashboard, registering storage curves, exemptions, device and installation availability and programs to support measurement.
- The compliance date for installation of primary metering equipment in the Border Rivers passed on 15 August 2023, so water take can only occur if primary metering is in place. If a meter is broken, submit a S91i application and use secondary metering equipment.
- NRAR is currently verifying the compliance status of storages in the Gwydir, Border Rivers and Macquarie valleys. Satellites and other monitoring techniques will be used to identify water users who are capturing water from the floodplains.
- It is expected that any water user intending to take water from the floodplain will have primary metering equipment installed. NRAR is aware of the challenges and barriers in the market with DQPs and availability of equipment and will consider these factors, however those who take water without primary metering equipment in place may face enforcement in line with regulatory policy, regardless of the barriers.
- In the lead up to a wet weather event, NRAR will use the media and direct engagement with stakeholders to ensure NRAR's position is known.
- DCCEEW advised the policy team is planning to consult with peak industry stakeholders within the next month on alternatives to allow irrigation whilst FPH. The Minister will need to sign off on any regulatory amendment however the aim is to align this with any non-urban metering review amendments.

- More information is available at <https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/plans-and-programs/floodplain-management/floodplain-harvesting-measurement> or emailing metering.reform@dpie.nsw.gov.au

4. Pricing Engagement:

4.1 Engagement on 2025-30 Pricing Proposal (WaterNSW/NRAR/DCCEEW)

Discussion and actions in this session have been recorded by SEC Newgate (attached).

Customer Advisory Group presentations (attached) in March 2024 sought customer input as planning commences for the price proposal submissions. WaterNSW, DCCEEW and NRAR sought thoughts and feedback on an approach to cost sharing and charges, and the valley-to-valley costs to deliver water with all required regulatory and policy projects included.

Discussion included:

- The cost drivers, and wider value, of NRAR services to achieve compliance with the rules, including a gauge of acceptable levels of compliance across NSW within the context of investment levels.
- A high-level discussion on potential price caps on the increase in WAMC charges, illustrated by high level 'persona' scenarios of customers of different conditions, water entitlements, usage, and valley locations.
- The revenue requirement of WaterNSW for bulk water delivery - driven by partially controllable and partly uncontrollable cost increases. This included a discussion of a set of scenario options that could reduce the base case cost increase to customer bills in 2025-2030. The scenarios also outlined the risks to WaterNSW.
- An ongoing discussion on the potential introduction of a revenue cap, with modelling demonstrating how the options of a revenue cap or price cap (with varying levels of fixed cost to variable cost ratios) would have worked with the same real water volumes that have occurred over the past 10 years, shown valley by valley.
- A capital expenditure discussion outlining the "must do", "should do", and "could do" projects that pertain to individual valleys, seeking feedback on customer appetite for these projects, including discussions on who should foot the bill for projects with different direct business relevance to customers and community.
- The question of Government-Owned Meters (for relevant valleys), including a potential transition to customer ownership at their end of life, ideas on customer and/or government funding of renewal and replacement, and testing some options with customers who have Government-Owned Meters.
- Further discussion on the proposed investment in 2025-2030 in the customer portal (with an associated lift in the data management and IT systems), that result in the replacement of a legacy customer service systems with newer, more adaptable, and higher capacity system that can meet future customer and water sector needs.

5. Presentations/Consultation:

5.1 CAG Survey Results (B Maher)

- WaterNSW provided an overview of the results of the CAG Survey conducted in December 2023 (provided with business papers), including state-wide and valley-specific results. The purpose of the survey is to help us better understand how the CAG process is working for customers (what works well, what doesn't work, suggestions for future meetings etc).
- Further input and feedback was sought from CAG members on proposed engagement into the future.

Feedback/discussion:

- Timing of meetings works – just if works or doesn't work on the day – can be weather dependent.
 - I stopped coming as they were just informative; needs to be relevant to irrigators. I don't want to hear about CWP or what you're doing (maintenance); town water information is irrelevant to irrigators.
 - We want to hear about the river updates. We don't want our time wasted – needs to be relevant. BRFF updates with Ken have been what we need to hear.
 - time/cost/efficiency – dependent on what is on the agenda and what is going to help irrigators – what is important that we will leave farm/work to come to the meeting.
 - we don't get any direct information for our area (small area and groundwater); other interests involved with surface water. Hard when nothing on QLD side is represented, only NSW. Would be good to have QLD side of the information included.
 - The information in the CAG is useful as I don't get it in other ways.
 - We want valley-specific information, not just downloads – needs to be relevant. We are a border river system so a lot of what happens in QLD is relevant. Even if you only have interests in NSW, what happens in QLD affects what happens in NSW. We're only talking about half the slice of the pie.
 - Industry-specific is useful (to the CEWO) but would miss a lot of the other information about the valley. This forum is good because we can sit here as a water user/licence holder.
- WaterNSW provided an overview of how the valley works as a border river valley. WaterNSW doesn't have authority to talk to what happens in QLD (we can provide dam levels etc) and operates the valley under contract to the Border Rivers Commission. They oversee, but they don't have operational staff like the MDBA. Sunwater operates under instruction from us.
 - The survey will be re-opened and the link re-sent to all members to provide opportunity to those who have not yet contributed. We want to hear from all members, primary and alternate, including those who have not attended a meeting in some time.
 - WaterNSW will provide some options to CAG members for input prior to the next meeting.

6. Business Papers:

- Members sought more information on the drought operations line item in the Capex report (underspend of \$26.4M).

Action BR2403.03: WaterNSW to provide details of the underspend in the Drought Operations line item in the Capex report.

Responsibility: T Hayes

7. General Business:

- Nil general business raised.

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: 10 July 2024

Meeting closed: 2.00pm

Border Rivers Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 20 March 2024

Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
	Nil carried forward actions.		

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
BR2403.01	Minutes of 2 August 2023 to be circulated with papers for next meeting, to be confirmed as a true and correct record.	T Hayes	
BR2403.02	WaterNSW to contact John Appleby out of session to discuss issues with DAS alarms, FPH measurement period (close and confirm); meter validation certification.	M Brooks	Complete. The customer has been contacted and actions in progress.
BR2403.03	WaterNSW to provide details of the underspend in the Drought Operations line item in the Capex report.	T Hayes	Complete. These projects have been transferred to Water Infrastructure NSW/DCCEEW. IPART assigned a 100% government cost share for drought projects, as discussed in Chapter 8 of the IPART Final Report. Therefore, IPART assigned all of WaterNSW's drought capital costs to the government share in the RAB. IPART stated that WaterNSW will be able to recover its capital costs for drought projects (if any) from the NSW Government over time, including an appropriate return on assets. No spend will be incurred to the end of the determination period.

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