

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group

Minutes of Meeting



Location: The Exchange, Dubbo

Date: 14 March 2024

Time: 9.30am

Present: Ian Cole (Chair), Bruce Coward, David Miller, Matthew Miles, David Walker, Greg Hill, Leonie Brown, Joe Robinson (online), Justin McClure (online), Jane Keir (online), Marcus Finn (observer).

WaterNSW: Clair Cameron, Ronan Magaharan, Brendan Maher, Mahmood Khan, Michelle Yeaman, Toni Hayes and online: Partha Saha, Kate Masters, David Stockler, Daniel Bailey.

Agency and external presenters: Eugene Moore, David Andersen, Ria Pryce, Thomas Clay, Amanda Kelshaw, Amanda Chadwick (DCCEEW/online); Keeley Reynolds and Scott Carpenter (NRAR) and Daniela Hauri (SEC Newgate/online).

Meeting Opened: 9.30am.

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 Acknowledgement of Country

1.2 **Apologies:** Michael Allen, Peter Hyde (DCCEEW).

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, 9 November 2023:

- Resolved the minutes of meeting held on [9 November 2023](#) be confirmed as a correct record. Taken as read.

*D Walker/B Coward
carried*

1.6 Actions arising from minutes

- See action sheet attached.

2. Operations:

2.1 Barwon-Darling Water Quality Review (T Fulford)

- WaterNSW provided an update on the current algal levels in the Barwon-Darling system, including EC (electrical conductivity) levels, cyanobacterial biovolumes and satellite imagery.
- The latest results indicate the cyanobacteria concentrations remain steady. There is sample evidence of high levels of green algae (non-toxic) in the lower end of the system, around Louth, which may make the water appear green.
- The Darling River at Wilcannia and at Weir 32 are on Amber Alert.
- Members asked if Menindee updates could be included on Barwon-Darling CAG agendas going forward. WaterNSW advised weekly updates are provided by DCCEEW and customers should email water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au requesting to receive Menindee updates.
- WaterNSW is conducting a trial on behalf of the NSW Government which involves releasing highly oxygenated water from a submerged outlet to increase dissolved oxygen levels in the Darling River

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at Menindee and address one of the leading causes of large-scale fish deaths. The trial will run for 2-4 months and WaterNSW will sample and continue to monitor to see if there has been any impact.

- Members stated the latest fish death around golden perch is not a result of dissolved oxygen but parasites. It is important for people to understand how the water goes past and ends up in Menindee Lakes.
- The latest algae alert information can be found on WaterNSW's [Algae Alerts page](#).
- Members highlighted the high content of carp in the river, noting it is a big issue that is not being addressed.
- The CEWO advised the [National Carp Control Plan](#) published an assessment report in September 2022 based on the first phase of research. The report highlighted uncertainties about effectiveness and feasibility of the virus. In October 2023, the Agriculture Ministers agreed to progress research work for the remaining critical priority actions identified in the plan. This is expected to take a number of years.
- More information on the National Carp Control Plan can be found on the [Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry](#) website or by emailing carp@aff.gov.au

2.2 Water Planning and Delivery update (M Khan)

- WaterNSW provided a review of recent operations in the Barwon-Darling, including rainfall, measured flows, annual average tributary flows, current flows, active management and managing EOIs.
- The Border, Moonie and Culgoa provided some inflow during the last three months. The peak flow from Moonie and Culgoa arrived at Bourke during late February and generated a peak of around 7250ML/day. The flow is now passing Tilpa and expected to reach Wilcannia between 11-14 March.
- Active Management announcements stopped mid-October with no flow, however resumed on 22 November 2023 when access became available and WaterNSW is currently publishing daily announcements. As the flow recedes and there is no opportunity to make announcements we will stop and restart when there is an opportunity.
- If there are any missed announcements (technology, operator error etc) the previous days' announcement is still valid.
- Discussion occurred around the process for submitting an EOI and ambiguity of wording in the presentation. WaterNSW will amend the presentation prior to distributing to members (as per below process).
- Customers are reminded to **submit an EOI** as far in advance as possible:
 - If you intend to pump **ANY available water**, set the minimum EOI to zero and maximum to your full IDEC volume (this will allow the system to distribute any available water);
 - If you intend to pump, but **only above a certain volume** (eg 20ML/day), set the minimum EOI to 20 and maximum to full IDEC capacity (if available volume is <20ML/day, distribution for that licence will be 0ML/day and the volume distributed to other customers);
 - If you intend to pump but have an **IDEC greater than your daily pumping capacity**, set minimum as per steps above and maximum as your daily pumping capacity (this will allow the system to distribute unallocated water to other licences within the same management zone);
 - If you have **no intention** to take water, no need to submit an EOI, or the **maximum EOI** should be set to zero or notify WaterNSW so additional volumes can be reallocated to other users within the zone.

Action BD2403.01: WaterNSW to provide details of how much water could have been redistributed at major locations due to EOI being more than the actual pumped volume.

Responsibility: P Saha

- Key messages for accessing water in the Barwon-Darling: pump in accordance with announcements; have an EOI in place so that you have a share of any available water; do not use gauge readings to make decisions about pumping.
- Current gauge readings, flow rates, levels (m) and DO levels can be found on [WaterInsights](#) (customers can select [system view](#), [volumetric view](#) or [list view](#)).
- Members raised concerns about the 2020 distribution rules for IDECs, stating the new rules are not fair and reasonable and allow larger water users to increase pumping capacity and take higher volumes than they were able to in the past. The previous distribution rules were agreed to with irrigators by the Department to put a limit on daily pumping capacity and were based on geography. The current ruleset allows for growth-in-take of pump capacity that affects users downstream.
- Barwon-Darling Water has written to the Minister calling for a change to the rules/regulations. Customers want to go back to the previous distribution with adjustments to trade (that has happened since) and updated for meter recalibration (refer also to discussion at agenda item 2.3).

2.3 Active Management Review update (E Moore - DCCEEW)

- DCCEEW provided an update on the Active Management Annual Evaluation and Review 2022-23; IDECs (temporary trade, sharing of flows) and impact of inaccurate EOIs that don't reflect intention to take.
- DCCEEW attended the November 2023 CAG meeting seeking customer feedback on the annual review process (submissions were open to all). The Department is considering feedback and issues raised and is working with WaterNSW to develop solutions/recommendations to issues. A report will be published in April/May 2024. DCCEEW will come to the next meeting to present the key recommendations and responses to submissions. WaterNSW will include the link to provide feedback in the daily announcements.
- As discussed at agenda item 2.2, IDECs were distributed based on access licence share components, within each licence class and across the whole water source. DCCEEW and WaterNSW are working to implement temporary trade of IDECs. Water users currently have the option to permanently trade an IDEC if less than pump capacity.
- Barwon-Darling Water does not accept trade being the solution. The ability to temporary trade is a good addition and may alleviate the issues but won't fix the problem. Members stated there needs to be an embargo on any more pump capacity along the river and an amendment to the rules to change the distribution from licence volume to pump capacity (based on the original intent).
- DCCEEW acknowledged members' concerns and will report Barwon-Darling Water's position on the way IDECs were originally distributed back to DCCEEW for further discussion. An update will be provided at the next meeting.
- Discussion occurred around the IDEC and distribution of flows. Members queried if a water user has a bigger IDEC and places an EOI less than their IDEC and there is competition for the water in a zone, is that user disadvantaged by not placing an EOI equal to the IDEC. DCCEEW advised that the available distribution is based on pro rata of the IDEC as a percentage, not the EOI, so no disadvantage (scenarios presented and discussed).
- Impact of inaccurate EOIs presented and discussed. Water users should submit an EOI based on actual intention to take, otherwise other water users will be disadvantaged. DCCEEW will look at

the impact following the annual review and can present analysis at next CAG. Members requested the information be provided prior to the next meeting.

Action BD2403.02: DCCEEW to provide analysis of impact of inaccurate EOIs to the Barwon-Darling CAG when available.

Responsibility: E Moore (DCCEEW)

- Water users can provide feedback into the 2023-24 active management review by 30 September 2024 - [Feedback form for water users on active management rules for environmental water \(qualtrics.com\)](https://qualtrics.com)

2.4 Metering Calibration (E Moore – DCCEEW)

- Consultants will be providing DCCEEW with analysis in the next few weeks, which will be reviewed before formulating a proposed approach. The Department will work with licence holders to ensure records are consistent. Still working to the June 2024 deadline as outlined by Peter Hyde at the November 2023 CAG meeting.

2.5 Regional Operations (M Yeaman)

- 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.
- All sites are in the far west, with the strategy focussed on biggest bang for buck. Targeted sites are predominantly in the Barwon-Darling.

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).
- 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 Non-Urban Metering Review (R Pryce – 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 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 Barwon-Darling is 1 April 2024, 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.
- 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. Presentations/Consultation:

4.1 Engagement on 2025-30 Pricing Proposal – WAMC

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.
- 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. Presentation/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:

- we are often interested in policy - when it comes to active management, how it's put into place operationally (WaterNSW) and also policy (DCCEEW)
- we need an avenue to speak directly to the department about policy matters. Also weirs, town water supply, carp, Wilcannia Weir (not sure if the CAG is the best place to do that)
- Water Quality update is always good, but we don't need to be taken through the presentation, especially if no issues
- we want valley-specific information related to the Barwon-Darling
- meeting location – good to meet on the river and in the communities we are talking about
- local field days – getting out on the ground after a meeting is good to give a different perspective
- Separating local water utilities from other water users isn't a good idea – we all belong to Barwon-Darling Water and are all water users, so good to be together. We would like to keep the community of water users together.
- if we're all in Dubbo or elsewhere, would be nice to have a meal together – we don't get together often
- also appreciate you are speaking to the converted – we are turning up at the CAG, are an educated audience, we are au-fait with the rules
- shouldn't eliminate the option to attend online.
- 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. General Business:

6.1 Wilcannia Weir (members)

- Members highlighted concerns with changes to the proposal for the Wilcannia Weir project and lack of community consultation on the changes. The original proposal and consultation done by

WaterNSW had community consensus across the board, then was changed by DCCEEW without consultation. This has caused great angst in the community.

- Central Darling Council stated they will be meeting with the Minister to reject the proposal, indicating the proposal is not what was originally consulted on with the community.
- WaterNSW advised that DCCEEW has plans to go back to the community with more consultation on the proposal.

Meeting Review and Close

Next Meeting: 18 July 2024

Meeting closed: 3.00pm

Barwon-Darling Customer Advisory Group – Actions – 14 March 2024

Carried forward actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
BD2307.02	WaterNSW to investigate if an automated reminder can be sent to customers in the Barwon-Darling advising when an EOI is about to expire.	B Maher	<p>In progress.</p> <p>The Water Delivery and Planning team has discussed this issue with development team and currently exploring the options to set up an automated reminder in the Barwon-Darling active management system regarding expiration of EOI.</p> <p>March 2024 update:</p> <p>The idea is feasible, however it is unclear how we are going to send messages via SMS (technical issues). WaterNSW will continue to work on a solution and provide an update at the next meeting.</p>
BD2307.04	DPE to liaise with WaterNSW to confirm if Storage Capacity tables can be created for Walgett, Brewarrina and Bourke weir pools.	R Boynton (DPE)	<p>WaterNSW reported to the HNRS Technical working group that there is insufficient data to produce a robust volume rating table for the Walgett, Brewarrina and Bourke weir pools.</p> <p>March 2024 discussion:</p> <p>Members would like an indication of capacity in the weir pools. WaterNSW advised that bathymetric surveys would need to be done to validate the information. We can look to see what historical/previous information is available, however would require work to do a bathymetric survey. To be discussed further in the pricing session to include in the next pricing determination if required.</p>

New actions

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
BD2403.01	WaterNSW to provide details of how much water could have been redistributed at major locations due to EOI being more than the actual pumped volume.	P Saha	
BD2403.02	DCCEEW to provide analysis of impact of inaccurate EOIs to the Barwon-Darling CAG when available.	E Moore	

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