

Daly River water advisory committee: Meeting 2 Summary

Date and Time: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm Wednesday 05 March 2025
8:30 am – 12:00 pm Thursday 06 March 2025

Location: Contour Hotel, 9 Cyprus Street, Katherine or online via Microsoft Teams

Attendance			
Initials	Name	Position and representation	
Chair	Rod Marsh	Independent chair	
SC	Simone Cameron	Member, Agriculture	
DC	David Ciaravolo	Member, Recreational fishing	
AD	Andrew Dalglish	Member, Agriculture	
WD	Whitney Dollemore	Member, Agriculture	
RD	Russell Draper - online	Member, Tourism	
JH	Joshua Hunter	Member, Aboriginal	
ML	Mona Liddy	Member, Aboriginal	
SM	Sam McBean	Member, Cattle and Agriculture	
DN	Daniel Niceforo	Member, Agriculture	
AR	Alison Ross	Member, Community	
Initials	Department (DLPE) staff and presenters		
JC	Jo Challis	Acting Senior Regulation Advisor	
KE	Kavina Eksteen – Day 1 online	Water Planner	
CH	Carly Hibble	Assistant Director Water Management	
PH	Phillipa Hunter	Director Water Management	
RH	Rodney Hassett – Day 1	Acting Operations Manager	
ER	Eric Rooke – Day 1	Manager Groundwater Assessments	
AS	Aless Smith	Boards Engagement Officer	
Not in attendance			
Initials	Name	Position and representation	Notes
AA	Alister Andrews	Member, Aboriginal	Apology
JC	(Elna) Joy Cardona	Member, Aboriginal	Apology

Day One: Wednesday 5th March 2025

Meeting opened at 9:05 am

1. Meeting opening and governance

1.1 Welcome, Acknowledgement of Country, and meeting purpose

JH acknowledged the Dagoman, Jawoyn and Wardaman people at commencement of the meeting.

The purpose of the meeting was for the Department to inform the committee about water management in the Katherine Tindall Limestone Aquifer water allocation plan (the Katherine plan) area, including the water science, monitoring program and the recovery of water. The Chair noted that the remaining meetings of the committee for this year would focus on the committee providing advice and feedback to the Department.

1.2 Attendance and introduction, evaluation nominee and confirm previous meeting summary

The committee confirmed the summary of the previous meeting.

Members nominated a committee member to complete the meeting evaluation.

Members confirmed no new conflicts of interests had arisen since the previous meeting, noting one member has applied for a water licence outside of the Daly River catchment.

2. Matters for discussion

2.1 Presentation: Water Management in the Northern Territory

Water Resources Division (PH) presented an overview of water management in the Northern Territory (NT). The presentation highlighted the purpose and process of water allocation plans (water plans), the role of a water advisory committee and the need for a water plan for the Katherine region. PH noted the potential for a future Daly River water plan that incorporates the Katherine plan.

Key summary points

The committee discussed the potential for the Katherine plan to become part of the Daly River catchment, noting the connectivity between water resources in the catchment. Water Resources Division noted that a number of questions remain about how a whole of Daly catchment plan would be established.

The committee noted the timeframe for completing the Katherine plan is ambitious and determined to consider this matter again at its August meeting, on seeing the proposed draft plan from the department. Several committee members requested Water Resources Division review the timeline and consider if advice to the Minister on an extension might be appropriate.

The committee emphasised its role to identify knowledge gaps and priorities (including research priorities), and the value the committee could add in advising on implementation actions for the plan through their recommendations to the Minister.

The committee discussed the importance of consultation and communication for the plan, particularly with Aboriginal communities. The Department committed to further engaging with Aboriginal members of the committee about broader Aboriginal community engagement.

2.2 Paper and Presentation: Water Science in the Katherine Region

Water Resources Division (ER) presented the water science relevant to the plan area. The presentation provided a geological overview of the Daly Basin and explained the connectivity between the Katherine River and the groundwater system (including the Tindall Limestone aquifer). The presentation provided evidence that current rates of water extraction are not having a regional scale impact, and that natural variation had a greater impact on the water system. The presentation included commentary on climate change risk and water quality risk (including contamination), and the use of management tools in the Katherine Plan (Announced Allocations and groundwater protection zones).

Key summary points

The committee discussed the challenges presented by the use of geological basin boundaries for the Katherine plan area when the public is used to catchment based boundaries.

The committee explored the relationships between rainfall and aquifer recharge, with a particular focus on the ways recharge is dependent on the duration, location, and intensity of rainfall. The committee discussed the significance of interannual variability in rainfall and recharge including time lags between rainfall changes and river flow changes.

The committee highlighted the importance of the Division's finding that there is no evidence current rates of use have regional impacts, although they can have localised impacts.

The committee sought clarification on how climate change was incorporated into water plans, including working with the considerable uncertainty in climate projections for Northern Australia. The committee highlighted the importance of Water Resources Division investigating and modelling the impacts of multiple consecutive very dry years to contribute to the committee's deliberations on risk management in the plan.

The committee also discussed the need to increase public awareness that scientific information about the Northern Territory's water resources is available online, including information on PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) reported by the Commonwealth Government.

**This presentation included a 30-minute break for morning tea
Break for lunch from 12:30 pm to 1:15 pm**

2.3 Paper and Presentation: Monitoring program in the Katherine/Daly region

Water Resources Division (RH) provided an overview of the water monitoring program in the Northern Territory. The presentation included a focus on water monitoring trends in the Katherine/Daly region and a demonstration on how to use and find the Water Data Portal.

Key summary points

The committee acknowledged the value the monitoring program adds to the management of the water resource through the collection of real-world data.

The committee discussed the potential for all water users and other stakeholders to contribute to data collection.

The committee discussed potential for large scale earthworks to impact on water use and flows. PH confirmed that the plan could provide guidance on this issue.

2.4 Paper and Presentation: Water Recovery in the Katherine Region

Water Resource Division (JC and PH) presented on the recovery of unused water in the Katherine Plan area. Recovery of unused water was identified as a significant and important management action identified by the current Katherine plan. The presentation included an overview of outcomes and lessons learnt from the 2024 recovery.

Key summary points

The lack of clear guidelines and definite rules for water recovery and how that will be practically implemented in conjunction with the WAP was identified by the committee as a significant business risk and concern for licence holders in the plan area.

The committee noted challenges with water trading in the Katherine region as related to recovery and underuse of water. Challenges for trading raised by members included:

- Lack of awareness of the ability to trade
- Limited term of licences
- Lack of public information or market to understand the values of water
- Interaction with the recovery of unused water policy which treats trade as under-use after three years.

The committee agreed that as it moves towards renewing the Katherine plan, the committee needs clarification on key terms relating to values.

Day 1 of meeting closed at 3:57 pm

Day Two – Thursday 6th March 2025

Meeting opened at 8:35 am

1. Meeting opening and governance

The purpose of the meeting was to inform the committee on the water resource and seek feedback on the Katherine State of the Resource Report, communication and engagement for the draft plan, and the announced allocation process.

2. Matters for discussion

2.1 State of the Resource Report Katherine Plan

Water Resources Division presented the current State of the Water Resources Report for the Katherine Plan (2023-24) to obtain feedback from the committee.

Key summary points

The committee was positive about the State of the Water resource report for the Katherine plan area and praised the report's clear presentation of useful information on the state of the water resource in the Katherine region.

The committee agreed that a one-page document would not suffice to provide enough context or relevant data and emphasised the importance of presenting consistent and factual information to ensure the overall accuracy of the document.

The committee suggested having easy, graphics-based content using proportions and round numbers at the start of the document and adding an appendix for specific data.

Drawing on the water science presentation from Day 1, the committee recommended that information about natural variability be made more prominent in the report and be used to provide essential context for the presentation of the annual state of the resource and the impact of current management and extraction levels.

Several editorial recommendations were made by the committee including ensuring legible text and colour schemes are used on figures and that units are used next to all numbers.

The committee discussed the best platforms to engage stakeholders about the upcoming Katherine plan review. This included the need to translate content into Kriol, use traditional media rather than social media alone (print and radio), and making information available at locations frequented by people with a water interest (e.g. tackle shops, recreation areas) using QR codes to direct people to the report from posters or A5 cards.

The committee noted the importance of more general education around PFAS in the Katherine.

Break for morning tea 10:45 am to 11:15 am

2.2 Announced Allocations process/procedures – current Katherine Plan

Water Resources Division (JC) presented on the processes and procedures involved for undertaking Announced Allocations, one of the NT's adaptive management tools. A case study from the Katherine region in 2020 was provided to illustrate the process.

Key summary points

The committee acknowledged there has been overall improvement in the department's transparency of decisions, their efforts in water regulation and the way they consult and gather feedback from stakeholders.

Members of the committee raised concerns about Announced Allocations in the context of higher water use in the Katherine plan area (only about 30% of water entitlements are currently used). Members also discussed the proportionality of the Announced Allocations process, including the differential impacts on large and small businesses, and the removal of Security Levels from water licences. The committee expressed that no individual water user or class of water users should be at very high risk of water insecurity.

The committee raised issues with policy interactions in the practical application of Announced Allocations and other water management policies, such as the recovery of unused water policy, and recommended Water Resources Division consider the risk of policy conflict and misalignment.

2.3 Meeting evaluation

Led by the nominated member, the group completed the evaluation together.

Evaluation checklist			
Questions	Yes	No	N/A
Papers for the meeting were sent allowing enough time for members to read a familiarise themselves with agenda items prior to the meeting	✓		
Members arrived on time and stayed until the end of the meeting	✓		
Members were provided with the opportunity to speak	✓		
Members did not speak over others or dominate the discussion	✓		
Members felt able to ask questions without being discouraged or frowned upon	✓		
Committee issues are being dealt with at the meeting, not externally	✓		
Any potential conflicts of interest that were advised by members were dealt with appropriately	✓		

2.4 Next steps

The committee decided on meeting dates for the remainder of the year.

- Meeting 3 - 20th and 21st May 2025 (Katherine)
- Meeting 4 - 12th and 13th August 2025 (Location TBD)
- Meeting 5 - 25th and 26th November 2025 (Location TBD)

The Chair proposed that the May meeting integrate the work on values with a focus on risk management and DLPE's proposals for the scope of the review and priorities and main issues for the revised plan to allow the committee to begin to provide guidance on key issues.

2.5 Key summary points of the meeting

The department summarised the key messages and events of the meeting, allowing the committee to provide clarification.

Meeting closed at 12:15 pm