

Adelaide River water advisory committee: summary of meeting #8

Date: Wednesday 10 June and Thursday 11 June 2026

Time: 09.15am-4.10pm and 09.15am-3.30pm

Location: Tanami Room, Goyder Centre, Palmerston

Attendance		
Name	Position and representation	Notes
Darryl Day	Independent Chair	
Cherrian Luxton	Member, Community, Environment	
Christine Jenner	Member, Aboriginal, Community, Environment	
David Ciaravolo	Member, Community, Tourism or Recreation	
David Gray	Member, Agriculture, Community	
Peter Shaphert	Member, Agriculture, Tourism or Recreation	
DLPE staff and Presenters		Attendance
Rod Marsh	Marsh Eco	Presenter Day 1 item 2.3
Alison King	CSIRO, Chair of Scientific Ecohydrological Technical Advisory Panel	Presenter Day 1 item 2.4
Nerida Beard	Executive Director, Water Resources	Day 1 item 2.3 & 2.4
Jo Ellis	Director, Water Management	Day 1 all day Day 2 item 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, & 2.3
Carly Hibble	Assistant Director Water Management	
Chris Parker	Engagement Officer	
Hannah Small	Committees Project Officer	
Abbe Damrow	Acting Executive Director Office of Water Security	Day 1 item 2.4
Apologies		
Name	Position and representation	Notes
Selena Perrett	Member, Aboriginal, Environment, Community, Tourism	Apology
Tarizma Kenyon	Member, Aboriginal, Environment, Community, Tourism	Apology
Phillip Goodman	Member, Aboriginal, Community	Apology

1. Day 1 Meeting opening and attendance

Meeting commenced at 9.15am.

1.1 Welcome, acknowledgement of country, meeting purpose and evaluation nominee

Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and thanked everyone for attending and noted the apologies.

Chair acknowledged country and traditional custodians.

The Committee nominated a member to complete the meeting evaluation.

1.2 Formalities

The Chair confirmed and clarified the agenda and provided context on the committee's progress relative to the original water planning timeline. It was noted that by Meeting 8 the committee was initially expected to be contributing to plan implementation; however, the extended timeline has allowed for improved understanding of key catchment challenges.

The Chair outlined progress of workstreams informing the plan and the committee's involvement to date. The Cultural values assessment is ongoing. Additional modelling has been undertaken to assess potential impacts of the Adelaide River Off-Stream Water Storage (AROWS), noting this is likely the only major development (seeking a wet season surface water extraction) within the life of the plan.

There were no conflicts of interest or confidentiality matters declared.

The committee confirmed the previous meeting summary (previously released on the website).

The Chair reviewed the actions register and the Department provided updates. Updated actions will be circulated post-meeting.

Key discussion points

- Members requested dedicated committee-only discussion time; the Chair committed to scheduling this on Day 2
- Members raised concerns that committee membership may not adequately represent the range of Aboriginal groups in the catchment; however, members acknowledged practical constraints in adding new members at this stage and the Department's engagement with Aboriginal interests.

Action 1: WRD to circulate digital actions register to committee members

Action 2: WRD to provide an overview of changes to committee membership in 2025 at the next meeting

2. Matters for noting and discussion

2.1 Overview of status of the plan

Water Resources Division presented an overview of the current status of the Adelaide River Water Allocation Plan, including progress across four ongoing workstreams: ecohydrological risk assessment, cultural values assessment, water planning and engagement and communication. The presentation confirmed these workstreams remain unchanged since the previous meeting and outlined progress against the timeline, including completion of the ecohydrological risk assessment (pending final edits), cultural values assessment nearing completion, ongoing development of water planning settings, and continued engagement activities. The timing for delivery of the draft plan is being extended, with implications for future committee meetings and consultation, to be discussed further on Day 2 of the meeting.

Key discussion points:

- The committee discussed concerns with community awareness of basic information regarding the AROWS project (including location), and their views on the stakeholder engagement of the project.
- Members suggested an “Adelaide River story” outlining the current state of the catchment would be a useful supporting tool to support engagement on the plan
- The committee agreed that it would be important to capture why the plan is for surface water and doesn’t include ground water, as well as the benefits and risks of the planned AROWS project in the plan.

2.2 Overview data availability and modelling’s role

Water Resources Division provided a pre-recorded presentation outlining the purpose and role of hydrological modelling in informing the Adelaide River water allocation plan. The presentation reinforced that the Committee has previously considered modelling outputs, and that *the most recent modelling* addressing key questions from the Technical Advisory Panel and the proposed AROWS development would be presented later in the day. It highlighted how modelling supports planning by filling data gaps, estimating flows and enabling comparison of development scenarios, noting that while results are indicative, the approach gives a reliable basis for decision making.

Break 10.10am morning tea, restarted 10.35am

2.3 Modelling Overview

Rod Marsh (Marsh Eco) presented the modelling completed for the Adelaide River catchment, building on the earlier overview to demonstrate how the model has been applied to assess potential impacts of different AROWS development scenarios as the largest potential water user in the catchment. The presentation outlined the use of multiple model configurations and datasets to address uncertainty and respond to specific questions from the Technical Advisory Panel, with a focus on changes to flow regimes across a highly variable catchment. The modelling indicated that impacts are generally small and difficult to detect against natural variability; he further noted that the most restrictive rules sets tested had negative outcomes for the potential AROWS water storage. Mr Marsh highlighted that associated risks to ecological and floodplain values were key considerations for the Technical Advisory Panel.

Key discussion points:

- The committee discussed the implications of interannual variability and climate scenarios and the inherent uncertainty of wet season conditions, noting that outcomes are not known until after the season has occurred.
- The committee considered and discussed the range of factors influencing potential impacts, noting the complexity of system dynamics and AROWS engineering choices. Members noted the challenge of balancing between setting precautionary rules now and allowing flexibility to improve understanding over time and adapt to new information.
- The committee considered how management rules should be applied, noting that a single rule is unlikely to be sufficient and that a series of rules or triggers may be required.

- Members agreed that high catchment variability remains a key issue and should be explored further in subsequent discussions.

Break 12.15pm lunch, restarted 1.00pm

2.4 Tap Outcomes

Dr Alison King (CSIRO), Chair of the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP), presented the outcomes of the ecohydrological risk assessment, outlining the methodology used to assess risks to ecological assets under different flow conditions. The assessment referenced the modelling undertaken by Marsh Eco, and had been provided with supplementary modelling to support the risk assessment. Dr King discussed the 17 ecological assets assessed (a range of species of significance, functional groups, habitats and ecosystem processes) for risks by each TAP member. Dr King described that the assessment focused on testing outcomes under the driest wet-season conditions and lowest flow scenarios, where risk is greatest, and relied on a prioritised set of ecological indicators from the Marsh Eco modelling report. She outlined the differences in risk ratings between scenarios. Recommendations for water planning were outlined, including targeted monitoring, research and adaptive management. Dr King noted that the final ecohydrological risk assessment report is undergoing final updates and will be made available in due course.

The presentation was recorded to enable members not present to hear the presentation and questions/answers.

Key discussion points:

- The committee queried the medium–low confidence ratings and what additional data or evidence would be required to improve confidence. Dr King acknowledged a general tendency for ecologists to be precautionary and rank risk higher in the absence of data and highlighted that uncertainty does not necessarily preclude decisions being made. She reiterated the range of research and monitoring recommendations made by the TAP.
- Members discussed and queried differences between the interpretation of modelling outputs from a hydrological perspective (Marsh Eco) and an ecological perspective (TAP). In particular, the committee sought Dr King's views on modelling findings regarding the impacts of management rules on the AROWS project. Dr King advised that while the TAP considered these findings in detail, they were ultimately outside its scope, which focused on assessing ecological risks. She noted that, overall, the TAP found more restrictive scenarios result in lower environmental risk.
- The committee sought clarification on limitations in transferring knowledge from other catchments (e.g. the Daly) to the Adelaide River catchment. Dr King noted some unique features of the Adelaide River catchment that make extrapolation challenging (channel shape, location/extent of in stream features) and noted that a National Environmental Science Program (NESP) report¹ "was used to guide how relevant out-of-catchment information may be to informing ecological risks in the Adelaide River catchment".

Action 3: *Provide the committee with a rating curve for Dirty Lagoon which shows the relationship between river flows and river height.*

¹ Kennard, M.J. et al. (2023). *Environmental flows synthesis to support uptake of environmental flows research in northern Australia*. National Environmental Science Program (NESP) at <https://nesplandscapes.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Environmental-flows-synthesis-final-report.pdf>

Break 2.50pm afternoon tea, restarted 3.20pm

2.5 & 2.6 Key Findings and wrap up

The Chair facilitated a discussion to understand the Committee's perspectives on the Day 1 presentations and their implications for Day 2. A range of priority themes were identified for further discussion, including the Technical Advisory Panel findings, how uncertainty should inform decision-making, trade-offs between environmental outcomes and water use, and the implications of catchment dynamics for management rules. The Committee also identified a need to further consider governance arrangements, AROWS design and operation, alignment with Water Advisory Committee values, and the role of the plan in guiding future AROWS decisions.

Day 1 Meeting closed at 4.10pm

1. Day 2 Meeting opening and attendance

Meeting commenced at 9.15am in a Level 1 meeting room due to access issues to the ground floor meeting room.

1.1 Welcome, acknowledgement of country, meeting purpose and evaluation nominee

Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and thanked everyone for attending and noted the apologies.

Chair confirmed the agenda and the Chair requested the Department depart the meeting for a period after lunch prior to the terms of reference agenda item.

The meeting was paused at 9.20am and moved back to the bigger meeting room on the ground floor, with the access issues resolved. The Department and the Chair expressed their thanks to the committee for their patience with the unexpected room issue. The meeting recommenced at 9.25am.

2. Matters for noting and discussion

2.1 Recap from day 1

The Committee was provided an opportunity for open discussion on key issues and questions arising from Day 1, to inform subsequent discussions on Estimated Sustainable Yield and management settings. The discussion focused priority themes identified during the Day 1 wrap-up. New themes and committee feedback included ensuring the water plan accounts for all water users in the catchment and integrating cultural information into the plan.

Break 10.55am morning tea, restarted 11.30am

2.2 ESY and Management Workshop

Building on the committee's earlier discussion, a group workshop was held to consolidate Committee views on Estimated Sustainable Yield (ESY) and management rules, and to identify what further information is required before the WAC can provide advice on the draft Plan. The Committee provided views across five key themes:

- principles for the ESY and management rules
- trade-offs
- governance and implementation
- uncertainty
- the Committee's information needs

Key discussion points

- The WAC values statement provides a strong foundation for understanding members' key areas of concern and interest
- The Committee wants the plan to set ESY and management rules that are responsive to system dynamics, reflect realistic development potential, and work for all users
- There is a generally low appetite for negative environmental, social and economic consequences arising from the plan
- Members expressed interest in accommodating small volumes of take (separate to AROWS), with a willingness to accept simplified rules and some uncertainty to support this
- The WAC advised that plan settings should acknowledge uncertainty and allow for refinement as knowledge improves
- Committee members identified additional information they felt were important before providing advice on a draft plan

- The Committee noted that uncertainty in the water planning context is influencing views, including risk tolerance, monitoring expectations, and the number and complexity of flow rules that they expect.

Break 1.05pm lunch, restarted 1.50pm

Members and Chair discussion

The Chair facilitated a session where Department staff left the meeting to allow the Committee to discuss matters privately.

Department staff returned at 2:45 pm and the Committee provided feedback on:

- Adelaide River water advisory committee membership and remuneration
- AROWS project

The Department has noted the Committees feedback.

2.3 Terms of Reference review

The Chair facilitated a discussion on the Terms of Reference review, noting that this is a routine requirement undertaken every 24 months. The Department clarified that no substantial changes to the role or purpose of the committee was proposed through the routine review, but that administrative and procedural matters could be clarified based on lessons learnt.

Key discussion points

- Members raised that remuneration rates may act as a barrier to participation and do not necessarily reflect the level of commitment required. The department advised that remuneration is set by the Administrator and guided by the committees classification level, but that feedback can be passed on to the administering agency.
- Members suggested that some content (e.g. Appendix A) may be more appropriate as supporting material (e.g. for EOI) rather than being included within the Terms of Reference itself
- The Committee supported maintaining the current expectations for paper circulation (2 weeks ahead of meeting) and confirmed that short briefs or summaries of longer documents (around 6 pages) were reasonable for normal meeting preparation.
- Members noted that the evaluation process could provide deeper insights into how meetings are functioning and how processes could be improved, suggestions included both more open-ended questions and discussion and anonymous/behind closed doors feedback surveys.

Action 4: WRD to provide feedback to the Boards and Committees team on current rates of remuneration and classification of the water advisory committee.

2.4 Wrap Up

The Chair facilitated a wrap-up of Day 2, confirming next steps and upcoming meeting arrangements. It was noted that Meeting 9 had previously been proposed as the draft plan meeting; however, there is a possibility that the draft Plan may not be ready for consideration by August. The Committee agreed to

retain the next meeting dates for 11–12 August 2026 (with the potential to condense to one day), with 30 September–1 October 2026 identified as backup dates.

Action 5: WRD to send calendar placeholders to members for 30 September – 1 October 2026

2.4 Meeting evaluation

The meeting evaluation completed and checklist items were mostly satisfactory met. The evaluator commented that the timeliness of the agenda was a minor issue as sessions ran late both days of the meeting, however they noted that the sessions and extended opportunity for Q/A were valuable. It was also noted that although unavoidable late access to the meeting room on Thursday was not ideal.

Closing comments

The chair thanked everyone for their contribution across the two days.

Meeting closed at 3.30pm

Meeting summary

Actions register			
No.	Action	Action officer	Due date
1	WRD to circulate digital actions register to committee members	WRD	
2	WRD to provide an overview of changes to committee membership in 2025 at the next meeting	WRD	
3	Provide the committee with a rating curve for Dirty Lagoon which shows the relationship between river flows and river height.	WRD	
4	WRD to provide feedback to the Boards and Committees team on current rates of remuneration and classification of the water advisory committee.	WRD	
5	WRD to send calendar placeholders to members for 30 September – 1 October 2026	WRD	