

# Mataranka water advisory committee: summary of meeting 17

Date: Wednesday, 31 July 2024

Time: 8.40 am to 4.20 pm

Location: Conference Room, 32 Giles Street, Katherine

Attendance	
Name	Position and representation
Rebecca Mohr-Bell	Chair, Independent
Jenny Davis	Member, Environmental interests
Rohan Sullivan	Member, Pastoral interests
Vincent Lange	Member, Irrigated agriculture and Aboriginal economic development interests
Julian Martin	Member, Irrigated agriculture interests
Clair O'Brien	Member, Pastoral and Regenerative agriculture interests
David Ciaravolo	Member, Recreational fishing interest
Ian Angus	Proxy for Sarah Kerin, Member (ex-officio), Tourism and environmental interest
DEPWS staff	
Phillipa Hunter	Director Water Management
Simon Cruickshank	Director Water Projects
Dale Cobban	Manager Water Resources Modelling
Missy Frey	Senior Project Manager
Other attendees	
Maddison Clonan	Consultant, GHD Pty Ltd

## 1. Meeting opening and attendance

Meeting commenced at 8.40 am

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

Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked everyone for attending and acknowledged the work that everyone has done to date.

David confirmed that he would lead the evaluation with the committee at the end of the meeting.

### 1.2 Attendance, conflicts of interest and confidentiality and agenda

Meeting quorum confirmed.

Rohan Sullivan declared a conflict of interest.

Chair confirmed the agenda and members confirmed they had received and reviewed committee papers.

### 1.3 Previous minutes

The committee noted that the previous minutes were loaded on the website.

## 1.4 Actions register

Review of register and updates on items provided. A copy of the register is attached to the meeting summary.

## 2. Matters for noting and discussion

### 2.1 Presentation by GHD Pty Ltd on Consultation Summary

The committee were provided with a copy of the consultation summary and schedules prior to the meeting. Maddison Clonan from GHD Pty Ltd provided an overview of the consultation summary to the committee.

Key messages included:

- 972 submissions were received during the public comments period via Have your Say or by email to Water Resources. 930 submissions were campaign templates
- submissions were reviewed with key comments grouped and themed
- eight themes were identified:
  1. science underpinning the plan
  2. plan development
  3. how water is shared
  4. stakeholder consultation
  5. ecological values
  6. cultural values
  7. social and economic values
  8. application of the plan
- GHD provided a further breakdown of the eight areas into sub themes.

The committee noted the consultation summary and schedules. Key items discussed by the committee included:

- campaign templates and submissions received during public consultation being made available for public viewing. The committee noted that some commenters selected to have their submission remain private
- the committee noted that Amateur Fishermen's Association of the Northern Territory (AFANT) would like their submission to be made publicly available
- the difference between Aboriginal cultural values and general cultural values and how these should be captured separately in the themes. This will ensure that Aboriginal cultural values are categorised and summarised appropriately
- data on how many times the water allocation plan, background report, implementation actions and key messages were downloaded during the public comments period
- submissions received from outside the Northern Territory and if they were identified in the consultation summary

GHD advised that locality data was not captured in the consultation summary as a majority of submissions were campaign templates and did not identify the location of users.

The committee thanked GHD for the presentation and developing the consultation summary. It was noted that the consultation summary and schedules will be released to the public once the plan is declared.

**Action 17.1:** Department to provide the committee with a copy of the three campaign templates and a link to view the public submissions.

**Action 17.2:** Department will ensure that AFANT submission is available for public viewing.

**Action 17.3:** Department will provide the committee downloading data during the public comments period.

## 2.2 Departments response to public comments

The Director Water Projects discussed the claims received in submissions through the public comments period.

Claim 1: Separation of an interconnected system into zones

- Plan misrepresents the groundwater system, failing to treat it as a single, interconnected aquifer.
- Separation of the plan area into zones and use of different methods to calculate estimated sustainable yield (ESY) in each, is inconsistent with sound groundwater management principles.

Claim 2: Impact on groundwater levels and discharge to the Roper River

- An ESY of 62.5 GL/year is excessive and that extraction in the South Mataranka zone has been causing declines in groundwater levels near the springs and the aquifer sustaining them.
- Groundwater extraction in Larrimah and South Mataranka may lead to a reversal in groundwater flow direction.
- Groundwater extraction in Larrimah may impact regional groundwater flow to Mataranka Springs and the Roper River.

**Break 10.15 am morning tea, meeting restarted 10.45 am**

## Continuation of departments' response to public comments

Claim 3: Plan objectives and management arrangements

- The Plan's objectives are too narrowly defined, and its proposed management actions are based on inadequate understanding of the water requirements of ecological and cultural values of significance.
- It does not include sufficient measurable targets and thresholds for the protection of these values, and information critical to evaluating water use impacts is yet to be collected.
- The use of Announced Allocations addresses only short term climatic variability, not long term cumulative impacts.

Claim 4: Aboriginal Water Reserve

- The plan is unable to fully provision the Strategic Aboriginal Water Reserve and to do so from unused water licences may place the Roper River and associated GDEs at further risk.

The department provided a response to these claims as follows:

- the campaign letters
  - do not recognise that the plan restricts the water available for use
  - selectively uses only limited data and information in the plan
  - doesn't fairly reflect extensive peer reviewed science, monitoring and understanding, especially over the last 15 years
- the understanding of the resource is consistent with CSIRO climate modelling and eco-hydrological modelling

- water resources are dynamic and continuous monitoring and adjustment (improvement) is most effective way to manage impacts of development
- in the absence of a plan, there can be no Aboriginal water reserve. In the draft plan, the Aboriginal water reserve for North and South Mataranka is deliberately not fully provisioned to avoid allocating water above the ESY with Larrimah fully provisioned.

In relation to the water allocation plan:

- North Mataranka zone
  - ESY protect 97% flow to springs
  - additional restrictions placed over the Roper Discharge Zone.
- South Mataranka zone
  - ESY protect 88% dry season flow to the Roper
  - additional restrictions placed over the Roper Discharge Zone
  - some Aboriginal economic development.
- Larrimah zone
  - ESY highest to provide economic development, where groundwater deeper and connectivity to the river and springs is <1%

The committee discussed the department's response and the water allocation plan. Members agreed that the department provided sound information which is based on science. The committee agree that public consultation could have been undertaken more effectively and would like the department to develop range of resources that explain water management in the plan area. These resources should be in plain English and provided to the public by multiple means, for example, short social media films, fact sheets, podcasts, snapshots etc. This reflects the complexity of water resources and water management in the area and the need for sufficient resourcing to ensure management is done correctly and that all community members have the chance to understand.

The resources should cover:

- the estimated sustainable yield represents the water that is available for use
- pie graphs that show the water resource as a recharge resource and display how much water is allocated from the recharge
- while the resource is interconnected, the zones in the plan area work in different ways

The committee discussed the submission from Matthew Currell and Sue Jackson and supported the department responding to the submission with a scientific report. The committee suggested that the department's scientific report be made publicly available.

The committee recommended that a technically advisory committee be established to support the implementation of the plan.

**Action 17.4:** Department to develop resources that inform and educate the public on water management in the plan area.

**Break 12.00 pm lunch, meeting restarted 12.45 pm**

## 2.3 Preparing advice for the Minister

The committee decided that there is a far greater risk going forward of not having a plan in place and the plan should be implemented as soon as possible. Further, if the plan is not implemented as stated in the implementation actions the committee do not support the plan and especially the ESY in the plan.

The committee provide the following key messages to address the themes in the consultation summary.

### **Science underpinning the plan**

Key messages included:

- ecological and cultural values captured in the implementation actions
- staged licensing approach
- consideration of the Groundwater Discharge Zone
- impacts the Protected Environmental Area around the Roper River environmental and development perspective
- balancing the environment with ecological values
- limiting effect on future development
- impacts on future development for stakeholders.

### **Approach in the plan**

Key messages included:

- information provided by the department for the ESY is thorough
- the ESY in the plan is more precautionary than the framework
- water resource is an interconnected system
- ongoing improvement of water resource models
- support legislation updates
- improving the input of Aboriginal people.

A majority of members felt that the ESY should not change. Vincent and Jenny felt that the ESY should be reduced in the North and South as the risk is too high. Vincent would like the ESY reduced by 20-30 per cent in the North and Jenny believes that the ESY the South is not precautionary enough.

The committee understand that the management zones are designed as an interconnected system for the purpose of management zones tailored to each zone.

The committee workshopped cultural values and appreciate the input of Aboriginal people in the process. Members recognise the department's efforts to improve this but would like to see further engagement undertaken during the implementation of the plan with the development of resources to better inform and education.

### **How water is shared**

Key messages included:

- Aboriginal water reserve (AWR) is supported
- recognise importance to balance the AWR with the requirements of the environment
- plan to be implemented with other policies, for example staged water licences, recovery of water.

### **How people were engaged**

Key messages included:

- encourage engagement to be done in different ways
- important to have a diversity of groups represented and improve Aboriginal membership on the committee

- support a science and technical advisory committee
- process has identified the need for the department to engaged with the wider community
- engagement should be undertaken during the next 5 years and prior to the mid term review
- resources to be invested to ensure thorough communication on the plan
- adequate resourcing should of been provided to the committee to achieve what was required in a timely manner.

The committee is grateful for the community engagement and thank the community for participating in activities. Members acknowledged that there was a lot of information provided to the community which may have been overwhelming.

The committee recognise that the plan is the first of its kind and feedback identified the complexity of the plan and the need to invest in community engagement with appropriate educational material in the future.

### **Protection of ecological values**

Key messages included:

- strengthening monitoring reporting
- ground penetration to map area
- recognise the implementation of the plan will allow for resources to become available to better understand groundwater dependent ecosystems.

The committee recognise that implementing the plan will allow for further science to be undertaken which will provide a better understanding of the water resource.

### **Reflection of Aboriginal cultural values**

The committee is comfortable with how Aboriginal cultural values is captured in the plan and supports the further work to be undertaken as outlined in the implementation actions.

### **Understanding of social and economic values**

Drinking water has been at the forefront of the committees mind especially drinking water in Ngukurr, this was a focus in the committees planning.

The committee would like the plan enacted straight away as there is a great risk to not having a plan in place.

### **Management of the resource**

Key messages included:

- plan needs to be in force for the plan to achieve its objectives
- implementations and application of Announced Allocations
- requirement of legislation to have a mid term review
- mid term review to be overseen by a committee with diverse representation.

The committee noted that the last time members saw the water allocation plan, background report and implementation actions was when the documents were made available for public comment.

Members felt that the section regarding the 'summary of feedback and resolution' in the consultation summary captures the changes which will be undertaken in the plan documents before the plan is finalised.

## **2.4 Next steps**

The committee noted that it would be dispersed once the plan was declared. This will allow the committee to be refreshed to ensure that membership continued to reflect the diversity of values and opinions relevant to water management in this area.

## **2.5 Meeting evaluation**

Meeting evaluation completed and all checklist items were satisfactory met.

## **Closing comments**

The committee noted that this would be their last meeting. The chair thanked everyone for their contribution and committee members thanked the chair for her ongoing management and support to the committee.

**Meeting closed at 4.20 pm**

## Action register

No.	Action item	Officer	Status
17.1	Department will provide the committee with a copy of the three campaign templates and a link to view the public submissions	Missy Frey	
17.2	Department will ensure that AFANT submission is available for public viewing	Missy Frey	
17.3	Department will provide the committee downloading data during the public comments period	Missy Frey	
17.4	Department to develop resources that inform and educate the public on water management in the plan area	Phillipa Hunter	
<b>Completed actions</b>			
No.	Action item	Officer	Status
16.2	Committee to advise on proposed ecological monitoring and water requirement studies in the draft Implementation Actions document (section 4.1)	Jenny Davis	
16.3	Department to clarify how existing ecological water requirement studies (Jayne Brim Box work) has been incorporated into the draft plan documents	Abbe Damrow/ Michelle Rodrigo	Department provided Jayne Brim Box work to Jenny Davis for expert review. (email of 23 November 2023)
16.4	Department to provide reference to the selection of conservative recharge values in other water allocation plans.	Simon Cruickshank	Completed Extract from draft Georgina Wiso plan emailed to all on 24 October 2023
16.5	a) Department to ensure that clear and simple factsheets are available to support community consultations b) Members to suggest any specific topics for factsheet development c) Jenny Davis to share a paper with conceptual models as a useful example for factsheets.	a) Michelle Rodrigo b) All members c) Jenny Davis	a) Plan on a page developed and key messages transcribed into language b) Some members provided advice c) Reference emailed to all on 23 October 2023 (thanks, Jenny!)
16.6	a) Department to provide a communication plan for the public consultation process to the WAC for advice and a schedule of remaining activities up to plan declaration. b) All members to provide suggestions for specific groups and community meetings where the department could provide briefings on the draft plan.	a) Michelle Rodrigo b) All members	Completed a) Emailed to all on 13 December 2023 and 18 January 2024 b) Some members provided advice
13.1	The Chair will resend members a copy of the Controller's response to her email regarding the AWR	Rebecca Mohr-Bell	Complete Reported in meeting 14 minutes



No.	Action item	Officer	Status
13.2	Provide members with a copy of the CSIRO paper	Pru Ducey	Complete Reported in meeting 14 minutes
13.3	Report back at meeting 14 whether it is feasible to prepare an ecohydrological model in time for the draft plan	Amy Dysart	Complete Response provided during meeting 14 (see minutes s1.09) – external modelling not available till late 2023; internal modelling completed and considered in the draft WAP presented at meeting 15
13.4	ED Water Resources will circulate or provide additional information about what considerations are made in renewing a licence	Amy Dysart	Complete Addressed in session during meeting 14
13.5	Water Planner (Adrian Tomlinson) to check whether Minyerri is in the plan area	Adrian Tomlinson	Complete Confirmation provided (meeting 14) that Minyerri is not taking water from the Tindall Limestone Aquifer
13.6	Progress a paper on operationalising a precautionary principle in defining the estimated sustainable yield and circulate a discussion paper to the committee for discussion at the next meeting	Adrian Tomlinson Rebecca Mohr-Bell	Complete Topic was discussed in session during meeting 14 in lieu of preparation of a paper
11.9	Run agreed model scenarios and provide a report	Water Assessment & Water Planning	Complete Numerous model scenarios run - outcomes summarised in draft Mataranka Background Report
11.10	Provide a summary of the previous work done by the Committee and key decisions	Water Planning	Status uncertain List of WAC decisions provided 16 February 2022 Check with WAC at meeting 15 whether further detail is still required