

Adelaide River water advisory committee: Meeting 3 summary

Date: Monday and Tuesday. 9 and 10 December 2024

Time: 9.12am to 4.07 pm

Location: Tanami Conference Room, Goyder Building Ground Floor-25 Chung Wah Tce, Palmerston 0830

Attendance			
Initial	Name	Position and representation	
Chair	Darryl Day	Independent chair	
CT	Christine Thomsen	Member, Aboriginal	
CL	Cherrian Luxton	Member, Community	
DC	David Ciaravolo	Member, Community, Tourism or Recreation	
DGY	David George Yates	Member, Aboriginal	
DG	David Gray	Member, Agriculture, Community	
DY	Denzel Yates	Member, Aboriginal, Community, Environment	
PS	Peter Shappert	Member, Agriculture, Tourism or Recreation	
PY	Petrina Yates - Day 2	Member, Aboriginal	
PhY	Phillip Yates - Day 1	Member, Aboriginal	
MT	Mark Thompson - Day 1	Observer	
Initial	Department (DLPE) staff and presenters		
PH	Phillipa Hunter	Director Water Management	
TT	Toni Thomson	Committees & Engagement Officer	
CP	Chris Parker	Engagement Officer	
Not in attendance			
Initials	Name	Position and representation	Notes
CJ	Christine Jenner	Member, Aboriginal, Community, Environment	Apology
PG	Phillip Goodman	Member, Aboriginal	Apology
JMG	Jacqueline Maria Goodman	Member, Aboriginal	Apology - Day 1 Non-attendance - Day 2
KT	Kathleen Thomsen	Member, Aboriginal	Non-attendance
JH	Jeffrey Huddleston	Member, Aboriginal, Agriculture, Community, Environment	Non-attendance
TK	Tarizma Kenyon	Member, Aboriginal	Non-attendance

Day 1: Monday 9 December

1. Meeting opening and governance

Meeting commenced at 9.12 am, delayed by 42 minutes to accommodate members still travelling.

1.1 Welcome

Chair welcomed members and acknowledged county.

1.2 Attendance and introduction

The chair confirmed attendance, and David Gray nominated to provide an evaluation for the two day meeting.

2. Matters for discussion

2.1 AROWS EIS referral

The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure provided a presentation on the Environmental Impact Statement Referral for the Adelaide River Off-Stream Water Storage Project (AROWS). The Referral has been lodged with the NT Environment Protection Authority, as the first stage of the AROWS project getting approval under the *NT Environment Protection Act 2019*. The presentation identified that the public comment period on the EIS would occur in January 2025.

Actions arising included:

- the latest possible publication date in January will be requested on behalf of the committee.
- an update on Manton dam water releases will be provided at the next meeting.
- a proposed EIS summary document will be distributed to the committee.
- an update and link to the EIS referral consultation will be provided.
- an update on the AROWS concept design will be provided at the next meeting.

The Committee determined that members may comment on the EIS referral on an individual basis, no comment will be made by the Committee.

Break for morning tea from 10.40 am to 11.00 am.

2.2 Presentation: Water Allocation Policy

The Water Resources Division presented on policies that apply to determine water availability outside of plans (NT Water Allocation Planning Framework, and Surface Water Take Wet Season Flow Policy).

Information videos were played to explain more about the Planning Framework ([Water Management in the Northern Territory \(ENGLISH\) - YouTube](#)) and Wet Season Flows Policy ([Surface Water Take - Wet Season Flows Policy](#)).

The development of the Wet Season Flow Policy was discussed. This included that a broad reference group had provided input into the policy (including AFANT, NLC, ECNT, NT Farmers and CDU), and that the allocation rule was based on maintaining wild rivers in the NT, with secondary consideration of ensuring a relatively high reliability of annual water allocations.

The committee discussed how the policies might be used as a starting point in the planning process, but that an alternative volume may be appropriate for allocations in the Water Allocation Plan.

2.3 Presentation: Water Allocation Plans

The Water Resources Division presented an overview of water allocation plans in the NT, and key dates for the planning process.

The presentation discussed the purpose of plans to manage competition for water. It outlined that water is allocated in order of priorities, consistently across all plans, in order of:

- Water for the environment
- Water for drinking (including domestic and grazing stock, and public water supply)
- Water for Aboriginal economic development (through Aboriginal Water Reserves)
- Water or other economic development

Water plans include three documents:

- Background report: providing information and the process that informed the plan.
- Water Allocation Plan: statutory document setting out how water is shared, management arrangements, and review requirements. The plan is declared by the Minister.
- Implementation actions: identifying a continuous program to manage risks and monitoring the resource in the life of the plan.

Announced allocations were discussed as a common management tool in plans. They are a process that can be used by the Controller of Water Resources in the life of the plan to periodically adjust water entitlements in response to climate.

Timing for the plan development was outlined: Mid-2025 drafting process, Late-2025 public consultation, April 2026 Plan declaration.

2.4 Paper and Presentation: Economic Water Use

The Water Resources Division presented on water in the Top End economy, providing a broad overview of economic values and context in the NT.

Break for lunch from 12.15 pm to 1.00 pm.

2.5 Presentation: Tourism Top End

The General Manager of Tourism Top End provided a presentation on tourism, highlighting the importance of wildlife, nature and cultural tourism for the NT, and the importance of the catchment as a tourism location within 1 hour of Darwin.

The committee asked questions and discussed the topic, including potential tourism opportunities in the catchment, the importance of water to tourism, and positive benefits of spreading out tourism to reduce pressure on popular spots (Litchfield).

2.6 Presentation: NT Farmers

The deputy CEO of NT Farmers presented on the value of horticulture to the NT and the flow on benefits of improving infrastructure in a region.

The committee asked questions and discussed the potential demand for additional water for agriculture in the catchment, particularly for Lambells Lagoon.

2.7 Presentation: Office of Water Security

The Office of Water Security (OWS) presented on the role of OWS to engage with the community and across government on water, and the importance of trust and confidence in water management.

The committee asked questions and discussed how changes in water security can be monitored and measured, and how water efficiency and liveability can be taken into account.

Afternoon tea break from 2.15 pm to 2.40 pm

2.8 Presentation: Northern Land Council

Staff from the Northern Land Council provided a presentation to the committee. NLC was invited to present on the NLC's cultural values assessment project which is underway to support the plan, and because of the NLC's role to provide advocacy for Aboriginal people more generally.

Northern Land Council presented on challenges and opportunities for producing cultural values report as part of the plan and clarified that a preliminary report will be prepared in February followed by a final report in July 2025.

2.9 Key Messages

The Chair provided a wrap up of the day and the committee agrees key messages from the day's discussions.

Meeting closed at 4.07 pm.

Day 2: Tuesday 10 December

1. Meeting opening and governance.

Meeting commenced at 8.43 am.

1.1 Welcome and meeting purpose/recap from previous day

Chair welcomed members and acknowledged county. The Chair prompted discussion on some subjects raised through presentations on day one.

Broad options for a water allocation plan

1. The system is overallocated – and the plan focusses on reducing use.
2. The system is fully allocated – and the plan focusses on maintaining current levels of use.
3. The system is not fully allocated – and the plan makes water available for use.

Water allocations and entitlements

- The Committee discussed the difference between water allocations set in a plan, and water entitlements.
- **Water allocations:** are the amount of water that is suitable for use. Water is allocated to different beneficial uses to manage competing demands (e.g. a certain volume can be allocated as public water supply, this prevents it from being licence for commercial activities).
- **Water entitlements:** are a lawful right to take water, for a licence it is the volume of water that can be taken under the licence. Entitlements are used to access the water set aside in an allocation.

Role of the committee and scope of the plan

- The Committee discussed the role of the committee and that the Water Allocation Plan is to consider water coming out of the Adelaide River Catchment (e.g. for AROWS), not the detail of what happens to that water afterwards.
- It was clarified that the committee considers general rules through a plan, not individual licences or entitlements.
- The group discussed that there are different issues around salt water and fresh water, and that they may need to be treated differently using management zones.

2. Matters for discussion

2.1 Update of science studies: Presentation

The Water Resources Division presented an update on ecosystem mapping and classification on behalf of Charles Darwin University. A second section provided an overview of water quality work.

The ecosystem mapping presentation included an overview of the purpose and approach to ecosystem mapping. Some findings of the work so far, including that Savannah Floodplains have been found to be common upstream of Dirty Lagoon, and that the mapping is showing good accuracy (89%).

The Water Quality presentation included that a more systematic approach to monitoring is being implemented as part of planning. Results so far indicate there has not been significant water quality impacts in the catchment, but that work will continue to understand tidal movements and potential contamination issues.

2.2 Facilitated Values mapping.

The group undertook a facilitated workshop with True-North Strategic Communications focussed on understanding and mapping values of the catchment.

The results of the workshop will be summarised and reported on by True-North. The Committee will be provided an opportunity to review and provide feedback on the report.

The workshop time included a break for lunch.

3. Meeting Evaluation

The nominated committee member provided verbal feedback on the meeting, raising concern about documents being provided later than 2 weeks prior to the meeting (as agreed in the Committee's Terms of Reference).

The Division re-committed to ensure any large papers are provided a minimum of 2 weeks ahead of the meeting. The Chair supported providing smaller papers a minimum of 1 week ahead of the meeting.

Committee confirmed that 8.30am start was suitable.

Committee noted preference for presentation slides to being available as one slide per A4 page (to ensure readability and ease for note taking).

4. Next steps

The next committee meeting on 11/12 March 2025 was confirmed.

While the original plan was for the meeting to focus on presenting the science, some delays in scientific reporting meaning the agenda is less certain. The Division will be able to provide more clarity in the new year.

Committee members raised that change to meeting dates and schedules was significant. Changes to be flagged early, and as a priority if this needs to occur in the future.

Items for the March meeting were decided to include:

- Hydrodynamic modelling results
- AROWS concept design (including fish screens)
- Water quality and sediment testing results
- Update on water releases from Manton Dam

5. Key messages

Agreeing key meeting messages and recapping on actions arising was completed as a wrap-up of the values facilitation.

The minutes and meeting summary are provided to the committee for verification following the meeting, to ensure key messages and actions captured by the Division are accurate.

Meeting closed at 2.30 pm.