

# Mataranka Tindall Water Advisory Committee

## Meeting 16 Minutes

Date: Monday 23 October 2023

Meeting no: 16

Time: 10.00 am to 12.30 pm

Location: Teams meeting (video)

Present	
Name	Position and representation
Rebecca Mohr-Bell	Chair, Independent
Jenny Davis	Member, Environmental interests
Rohan Sullivan	Member, Pastoral interest
Vincent Lange	Member, Irrigated agriculture and Aboriginal economic development interests
Julian Martin	Member, Irrigated agriculture interests
Clair O'Brien	Member, Pastoral and regenerative agriculture
David Ciaravolo	Member, Recreational fishing interest
Sarah Kerin	Member (ex-officio), Tourism and environmental interest
Department Environment, Parks and Water Security staff:	
Abbe Damrow	Director Water Resources (DWR)
Simon Cruickshank	Director Water Planning (DWP)
Michelle Rodrigo	Senior Manager, Water Engagement (MWE)
Kavina Eksteen	Water Planner (Secretariat)

### 1. Meeting opening and attendance

Meeting commenced at 10.00 am

#### 1.1 Chair's welcome, attendance and acknowledgement of country

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that the member representing regional community water interests, Judy McFarlane, has resigned from the committee. The Chair asked the department to follow up with Ms McFarlane to understand the reasons for her resignation.

Member Sarah Kerin was unable to attend Meeting #15 and the Chair confirmed that she had been briefed by DWP on the previous meeting and the contents of the draft plan. Ms Kerin noted that she was happy with contents of the draft plan so far.

DWR acknowledged country and traditional elders, past and present.

The Chair confirmed the agenda and meeting quorum.

## 1.2 Conflicts of interest and confidentiality

None declared at meeting commencement.

## 1.3 Previous minutes

The draft minutes of Meeting #15 were sent out late last week. A typo related to 'sawfish' was noted.

**Action 16.1:** Members to provide comments on the draft minutes of meeting #15 by Mon 30 Oct.

## 1.4 Action register

Previous actions			
No.	Action	Action Officer	Status at meeting 16
15.1	The detailed statement provided by a member representing Aboriginal water interests at Meeting #14 in July 2022 will be included in full in those minutes before they are published.	DEPWS Water Engagement	Complete Minutes of Meeting 14 has been published on the committee webpage.
15.2	Once updated as per Action 15.1, the minutes are to be published to the <a href="#">DEPWS WAC webpage</a>	DEPWS Water Engagement	Complete Minutes of Meeting 14 has been published on the committee webpage.
15.3	The Department will prepare some additional information on the key topics identified during this meeting for consideration by the committee at the next meeting (teleconference).	DEPWS Water Planning	To be addressed in session during meeting 16
15.4	The Department will develop some fact sheets to address the key messages in the plan and clear, simple explanations of the more complex and contentious elements identified by the committee.	DEPWS Water Planning & Engagement	To be addressed in session during meeting 16

## 2. Matters for noting and discussion

### Agenda Item 2.1 (Supplementary information prepared to support the draft plan) and Item 2.2 (Release of draft plan for public consultation)

Papers provided for this discussion item were tabled and noted:

- Paper 1: Response to issues raised at Meeting #15
- Attach A: Draft Mataranka Plan Explanatory Note
- Attach B: Announced Allocations Case Study
- Paper 2: Impact of extraction plots

### 2.1 Supplementary information prepared to support the draft plan

#### DWP presented Paper 1 to clarify the issues raised in Meeting #15

- The draft plan recommends modelling scenario SC4 where the average reduction in flow is 12% for the modelling period and 18% during a three successive year dry period. The histogram showed that for the dry season days within the modelling period, the most frequent reduction in flow at Elsey Homestead is 5% to 10% less than natural flow, followed by 10% to 15% and a smaller amount of reduction between 0% to 5% and 15% to 20%. It is important to note that the modelling presented a range of scenarios and SC4 represents a worst case scenario because of all the assumptions that the model makes.

- Members noted that the histogram provides better clarity in being able to view the distribution of the flow reductions, as opposed to the annual average being expressed as a percentage. The frequency at which larger flow reductions are predicted to occur is smaller, justifying the conservative approach used.
- Members expressed concerns around the uncertainty of modelling and future climates. DWP explained that all models have a degree of uncertainty associated with them. This model is well correlated to flows at Eley Homestead and calibrated as such, providing a more accurate output.
- Members agreed that this level of detail (graph and explanatory note) is necessary in the Background Report to provide confidence in the model, as well as to cover a broader range of target audiences. The provision of detail supports transparency and builds trust. Committee suggested that the histogram and supporting explanation be included in the Background Report, noting that the histogram represents a reduction in flows prior to any other management arrangements being applied.

#### DWP presented Attachment A: Draft Mataranka Plan Explanatory Note

- The explanatory note facilitates understanding of the main areas of the plan; the content will be reflected in the Background Report.
- The note addresses questions around the ESY emphasising the combined ESY for North and South Mataranka being equivalent to 9 per cent of annual recharge and that the ESY for Larrimah is expected to reduce storage by less than 5 mm per year. At that proposed rate, it is estimated that it would take around 1,300 years of full extraction to revert groundwater levels to those of the 1960s, assuming recharge remains constant.
- The note explains how Aboriginal cultural values are considered in the plan. DWP acknowledges that feedback from Aboriginal partners on the draft plan documents has been limited. This will be addressed and hopefully rectified during the public consultation period.
- The committee reiterated the need to emphasise in the key messages that the ESY works together with the management actions (including announced allocations, flow thresholds and review mechanisms) to protect the resource and prevent breaches of minimum flow rates.
- A member raised a concern about the department's recent investigation of the environmental water requirements of key species and whether this has been adequately considered in the draft plan, highlighting the importance of understanding flow requirements in determining the ESY and designing an ecological monitoring program.
- DWP explained that the work has value and is referred to in the plan. More recent surface water studies demonstrate that flows have been highly variable since the 1960s, and that lower flows are not uncommon. The challenge lies in establishing flow thresholds that reflect climate and system variability. Management arrangements such as Announced Allocations allow flows to be managed within this natural variability. These ecological and hydrological studies are reflected in the Implementation Actions. Section 4.1 (IA)-protection of key environmental values, makes recommendations on what is necessary to build knowledge of environmental water requirements. Recent studies by CSIRO may also help to expand this knowledge base, when results are published.
  - Action 16.2:** The Committee's environmental water interests representative to advise on proposed ecological monitoring and water requirement studies in the draft Implementation Actions document (section 4.1).
  - Action 16.3:** Department to clarify how existing ecological water requirement studies have been incorporated into the draft plan documents.
- A member raised a concern about the precautions taken around determining the natural water balance and how the inputs are conservative.
- DWP confirmed that the explanatory notes cover the precautionary measures applied. The natural water balance uses the lowest recharge value from a range of sources and methods. More details on

the use of conservative recharge values can be seen in other plans. The model has used real data for various inputs to ensure accuracy, in addition to using a 50 year dataset.

**Action 16.4:** Department to provide reference to the selection of conservative recharge values in other water allocation plans. [Complete - information emailed to the Committee on 3 Oct 2023].

#### DWP presented Paper 2: Impact of extraction plots

- The graphs demonstrate the impact of extraction during 3 consecutive years of below average rainfall at Elsey Homestead. DWP used an example to illustrate how Announced Allocations (AA) and the flow condition threshold would work under these conditions.
- Members raised some concerns about the effects of climate change and lower rainfall and the implications thereof for licences. DWP used the dry year announced allocations case study, to explain this recognising that the highly variable flow rates are part of the natural cycle which occurred even before extraction commenced. The plan recognises that similar low flow rates may occur in the future, and includes management arrangements to protect flows if such a dry period returns. The proposed rule states that if the natural flow simulations are less than 2.1 cumecs (1 Nov), no more than 10% of flow can be taken, leaving 90% in the river.

#### DWP presented Attachment B: Announced Allocations (AA) Case Study

- This document shows how AAs are assessed each year. DWP explained the thresholds used to define each band of climate classification such as wet, average and dry (page 54 of Background Report).
- DWP explained the rules for applying AAs and how they are designed to replicate natural flow conditions.
- DWP described the 4 steps followed in the AA process to show how it works in the case study.
- DWP highlighted that flows at Elsey Homestead depend on both the volume and location of the take. Many model runs are conducted to check which licences are having the most impact. Larger licence holders closer to the protection zone have a bigger impact than smaller licence holders away from the protection zone.
- DWP advised that the AA process is only to manage flow on a seasonal basis while setting the ESY applies limits to extraction over the life of the plan. The ESY and management measures, including AAs, are designed to protect flows and the ecological and cultural values associated with them during anomaly/ dry rainfall years.
- Some members suggested the ESY should be reduced in the South Mataranka zone to be more precautionary for climate change effects and increased use by industry. It was suggested that a lower ESY should be considered as a starting point and then increased over time (using monitoring) instead of using AAs to limit extraction annually. It was suggested that the proposed ESY effectively creates more uncertainty for existing licence holders, whereas a lower ESY would improve certainty year on year.
- A member emphasised that the ESY is conservative and there are checks and balances in place. The proposed ESY is based on the best available science and model data, so strong justification (how much and why) is needed to support any reduction. Reducing the ESY could also trigger a review of the plan before the 5-year period, if 70% of the ESY threshold is reached. Further, Attachment A talks about the precautionary measures in the plan.
- DWP reiterated that the ESY is only one of several management measures (protected environmental area, recovery of unused water, restriction of trade within protected area) that would protect flows and move extraction away from the protected area. This is important because both the flows and where the extraction is occurring must be considered. All of the protective measures must be considered together; the management arrangements are as important as the ESY for achieving the plan's objectives.

## 2.2 Release of draft plan for public consultation

- A member again proposed a reduction of the ESY in South Mataranka. MWE clarified that the ESY in South Mataranka (24 GL) incorporates all current use, including downstream take. The figure doesn't allow for any increase in current water entitlements.
- Members noted that there should be more emphasis on the importance of all management measures, and how they work in combination with the ESY settings.
- Members emphasised a need to apply the precautionary principle when considering uncertainty associated with climate change and the model.
- Members noted that the risk of not having a plan in place is concerning.
- Member noted that the plan is very complex and requires good communication to make it accessible to the wider community. Also highlighted the importance of engaging Aboriginal communities.
- MWE explained what is proposed for community engagement on the draft plan. Written submissions can be received through the "Have your say" website. There will also be targeted stakeholder meetings, including engagement with the Northern Land Council and a series of on country meetings.

### Action 16.5:

- a) Department to prepare clear and simple factsheets to support community consultation
  - b) Members to suggest specific topics for factsheet development
  - c) Jenny Davis to share a paper on conceptual models as a useful example for factsheets.  
[Complete - emailed to committee and department 24 October 2023]
- The committee noted that public consultation affords the public a chance to provide informed comment on the draft plan and to raise issues and concerns that need to be addressed.
  - With the exception of one member (Vin Lange) representing irrigated agriculture and Aboriginal economic development interests, the committee endorsed the release of the draft plan for public consultation.
  - DWP proposes to release the plan for an extended public consultation period, likely November to February 2024, depending on the timing of the Minister's approval.
  - Comments received during the consultation period will be summarised in a consultation report, including categorisation of the issues raised and the department's response to these issues. Based on the feedback, some revisions may be made to the plan. The revised plan and consultation summary will be considered by the Committee in March, and the final plan submitted to the Minister in April 2024.

### Action 16.6:

- a) Department to provide a communication plan for the public consultation process to the Committee for advice, including a schedule of 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.

## 3. Meeting close

### Closing comments

The Chair conducted a group meeting evaluation and all checklist items were satisfactorily met.

DWR thanked the committee and staff for their active participation and advice in preparing the draft Mataranka plan.

The Chair reiterated a thank you to all members for their input throughout the process.

**Meeting closed at 12.23 pm**