

# Adelaide River Water Advisory Committee Meeting 5

Date: Tuesday and Wednesday, 27 and 28 May 2025

Location: Rydges Palmerston, 15 Maluka Dr Palmerston City

| Attendance |  |   |
|------------|--|---|
| Initials   | Name                                   | Position and representation                             |
| Chair      | Darryl Day                             | Independent chair                                       |
| CL         | Cherrian Luxton                        | Member, Community                                       |
| CJ         | Christine Jenner                       | Member, Aboriginal, community, environment              |
| DC         | David Ciaravolo                        | Member, Community, tourism or recreation                |
| DGY        | David George Yates                     | Member, Aboriginal                                      |
| DG         | David Gray                             | Member, Agriculture, community                          |
| JH         | Jeffrey Huddleston                     | Member, Aboriginal, agriculture, community, environment |
| PS         | Peter Shappert                         | Member, Agriculture, tourism or recreation              |
| PY         | Petrina Yates                          | Member, Aboriginal                                      |
| TK         | Tarizma Kenyon                         | Member, Aboriginal                                      |
| SP         | Selena Perrett                         | Observer  |
| Initials   | Department (DLPE) staff and presenters |   |
| PH         | Phillipa Hunter                        | Director, Water Management                              |
| CH         | Carly Hibble                           | Assistant Director, Water Management                    |
| CP         | Chris Parker                           | Engagement Officer                                      |
| TNT        | Toni Thomson                           | Engagement Officer                                      |
| Apologies  |  |   |
| Initials   | Name                                   | Notes   |
| CT         | Christine Thompson                     | Resigned prior to the meeting                           |
| DY         | Denzel Yates                           | Non-attendance  |
| JH         | Jeffrey Huddleston                     | Non-attendance Day 2                                    |
| JMG        | Jacqueline Maria Goodman               | Apology   |
| KT         | Kathleen Thomsen                       | Apology   |
| PG         | Phillip Goodman                        | Apology   |
| PhY        | Phillip Yates                          | Non-attendance  |
| TK         | Tarizma Kenyon                         | Apology Day 1   |

# Day One: Tuesday 27 May

## 1.1 Welcome

Chair welcomed members, acknowledged county and noted the relevance of reconciliation week.

## 1.2 Membership update

The Chair provided an update on the committee membership.

The Chair facilitated introductions for all members present, including their interest in the catchment.

Members raised queries about availability of positions on the Committee, and mechanisms to decide new appointments. The Department advised that broader expressions of interest for the committee were not being sought at this time, however negotiations on membership were continuing with Aboriginal interests in the catchment given that the term of the Committee extends beyond the declaration of the Water Plan. Members discussed the importance of keeping their own communities informed of the progress of the committee, noting the Water Management teams' availability to engage with the community at member's request.

## 1.3 Formalities

The committee acknowledged the meeting purpose was for the Department to gain feedback from the committee on management zones, the Estimated Sustainable Yield (ESY) and the risk assessment.

The committee confirmed the summary of the previous meeting.

The committee confirmed no new conflicts of interests had arisen since the previous meeting

The committee nominated a committee member to complete the meeting evaluation.

The Department provided an update on actions from the last meeting.

### **Key summary points:**

The committee advised that community members have questions about the role of the Territory Coordinator in the plan and AROWS project.

The committee advised that uncertainty in the design and approach for the AROWS project was causing community concern. The Chair clarified the role of the water advisory committee was to provide advice on the plan, not specifically the AROWS project which is subject to other community engagement processes and regulatory assessments including Environment Impact.

## 2. Matters for discussion

### 2.1 Overview of agenda

The Chair gave a brief overview of proposed presentations and workshop activities for the meeting. The update included a re-cap of key water resource management approaches (plan format, ESY, management arrangements, risk assessments, committees influence). The scope of the plan was clarified (wet season, surface water, 10 years). Key aspects of the committee terms of reference were highlighted, including limitations on sharing official information and protocols for engaging with the media.

### **Key summary points:**

The committee noted that while the plan would not manage groundwater, the declaration of a Water Control District increased controls on groundwater use in the catchment.

The committee queried how recommendations for licence decisions (volume, location and timing of water take) could be managed by the plan. The Department advised these kinds of recommendations could sit either in the statutory plan itself, or as contextual information in the background report.

## 2.2 Management zones - Presentation

The Department delivered a presentation on four management zones proposed for the catchment. The presentation included an overview of key monitoring sites, hydrological information about each zone, land use management data, findings of ecosystem mapping and water licensing data.

### Key summary points:

The Department discussed the potential role of management zones and emphasised zones are not a mandatory feature of plans but can be a useful management tool. The Department believes the zones will work but advised it is up to the members to consider the information provided moving forward and suggest changes.

The committee mentioned the draft values statement included in the presentation, noting the lack of emphasis on environment. Discussion was deferred to day two.

## 2.3 Management zones – Workshop activity

The Chair facilitated a workshop activity to look at the zones with a focus important social and cultural values for each zone.

### Key summary points:

The committee discussed the health and values associated with lower zones in the catchment and how they are influenced by what happens in higher zones in the catchment.

The committee discussed having more people in the community holding values in lower portions of the catchment that are accessed by a wider variety of people. The committee emphasised that this does not make the lower zones more valuable, as upper areas of the catchment have high value to the people that access them.

The committee were interested in understanding the zones during both wet and dry seasons.

The committee advised that the zones appeared straight forward. The committee noted clear messaging was needed about the nature of the changing salinity profiles in mid and lower Adelaide zones.

The committee concluded the workshop with general agreement that the zones had potential relevance from a water use, scientific or risk perspective, but that there was not a clear rationale for the division based on values of the catchment alone.

## 2.4 ESY and management arrangements - Presentation

The Department gave a presentation of the Estimated Sustainable Yield (ESY) and management arrangements along with the approach to setting 'test values' and modelling results. The Department clarified that the ESY is an annual (one wet season) value for the whole of the catchment. The Department outlined how the modelling approach had evolved since the previous water advisory committee meeting to ensure consistency with other water plans, and to adapt to observed results with respect to key themes raised at meeting 4. The presentation identified potential next steps including testing for higher volumes in very wet conditions, and how site specific modelling for AROWS would be taken into account at the licencing stage.

**Key summary points:**

The committee sought clarification on the approach to setting theoretical extraction locations. The Department explained that hydrodynamic modelling spread water take evenly across the catchment based on land area, noting that this highlighted particular sensitivity to inundation depth change around the Mid-Adelaide.

The committee questioned the use of averages rather than medians, as was initially discussed at meeting 4. The Department advised that applying averages was consistent with other plans across the Territory and was more intuitive to communicate. The small relative difference in applying average compared to median for test volumes was noted (average approximately 7% more than median).

The committee questioned the relevance of inundation depth and extent as reporting parameters, as this was the focus of the presentation. The Department advised that inundation depth and extent was displayed in the first instance as a way of understanding relative magnitude of change, and to visually identify areas of interest for the committee, noting that the modelled outputs include a significant amount of additional data which can be analysed by the Department and the Scientific Ecohydrological Technical Advisory Panel. Suggestions were made by the committee to report on duration of inundation.

The committee sought clarification on how take could be controlled in periods of low flow. The committee suggested that thresholds should be a physical 'height at a place' to enable the community to self-assess, and noted that thresholds should ensure connection between wetlands/billabongs and the river channel are not affected. The Department noted that a nominal '1/2 bank' height threshold for take had been incorporated into modelled scenarios, and that this could be reflected as a management rule in the plan.

## 2.5 ESY and management arrangements – Workshop/Discussion

The Chair conducted a workshop discussion on the estimates sustainable yield and management arrangements.

*An 80 minute workshop was proposed however, substantial discussion and clarification occurred during the presentation component, delaying the workshop to a shorter period after afternoon tea.*

**Key summary points:**

The committees discussion focussed on questions and challenge in interpreting the results presented and providing feedback. Key themes included:

- Understanding the significance of modelled outcomes, including questions about the role of the Technical Advisory Panel.
- Increasing complexity of information in "big jumps"
- The gap between the information available to support plan, and the ultimate water extraction licence decision for the AROWS project.

The committee raised questions about the level of scientific certainty required to deviate from the Surface Water Take Wet Season Flows Policy. The Department noted the significance of having a surface water model (and long term modelled climate data set), and a commitment from Government to undertake ongoing water monitoring and other implementation actions through a water allocation plan.

The committee had mixed reaction to model outputs, some noted that they had arrived with few expectations while others noted that the patterns of impact in the model aligned with what they expected.

The committee discussed relative magnitude of change observed in model outcomes. They concluded that while there was observable impact, overall, the volumes proposed are unlikely to change major river functions (e.g. if a flood occurs or not).

## 2.6 Questions / Discussions and 2.7 Key messages

*These agenda items were not completed to allow additional time to discuss the ESY (item 2.5)*

## Day 2: Wednesday 28 May

### 1.1 Welcome

Chair welcomed members and acknowledged county.

Chair moved straight into agenda item 2.1 revisiting matters from previous day.

### 1.2 Formalities

*This agenda item was not completed to allow additional time to discuss matters from the previous day.*

## 2. Matters for discussion

### 2.1 Revisiting matters from previous day

The Chair facilitated discussions on matters from the previous day including the ESY and management zones. The agenda was adapted as needed for the remainder of the meeting.

#### **Key summary points:**

The committee reiterated themes from day 1 with respect to the modelling scenarios, that increasingly complex of information being provided in “big jumps”.

The committee suggested that overlays relating the modelling to zones and ecology could be helpful to understand the implications of modelled results.

The committee generally agreed that higher volumes could be taken with little impact in wetter years.

The committee indicated interest in a visual trigger point (e.g. a river height in a certain place).

The committee agreed to a meeting to closer interrogate water modelling with modelling experts.

The committee noted its support for having four zones, to enable more detailed focus on the characteristics and risks.

### 2.3 Technical advisory panel update

Alison King (Chair of the Scientific Ecohydrological Technical Advisory Panel - TAP) provided an overview of the TAP and its proposed outputs. The presentation included a background on the panel including how it is maintaining its independence, the qualifications of its members, and procedural aspects of their assessments. The presentation clarified the scope of the TAP to review and assess the potential ecological risks of management measures for the plan, rather than to determine management measures. The presenter noted the complexities of the Adelaide River, including that flooding from the river channel is less common than flooding due to rainfall on the catchment.

#### **Key summary points:**

The committee questioned the potential relevance of zones in the catchment from an ecological perspective. The presenter noted that they see three to four distinct ecological areas in the catchment, but that the risk assessments will look at the whole of catchment scale.

The committee queried the relevance of social and cultural aspects to the TAP assessment. The presenter advised that social and cultural “flow on risks” from ecological harms were out of the panels scope

## 2.2 Values statement

The Chair re-introduced the concept of a committee values statement, and that it would build on the committee's work documented in two True North values reports. The chair facilitated a discussion to refine the values statement.

### Key summary points:

The committee noted that the environment has been the shared priority of the group and should be reflected in the values statement. The committee provided further feedback on phrasing and clarity of the statement.

The committee provided some targeted comments on the True North Values reports to ensure they were more specific to the Adelaide River including high natural variability.

After lunch the committee further refined the values statement to:

*We are committed to ensuring the Adelaide River Catchment remains healthy and abundant with life. Our healthy catchment enhances cultures, communities and economies.*

*We keep tomorrow in mind as we plan for water security and the enjoyment of future generations of Territorians.*

## 2.4 Communicating the plan

*This agenda item was not completed to allow additional time to discuss matters from the previous day and deferred to the next meeting.*

## 2.5 Aboriginal Water Reserve update

The Department provided an update to the committee on policies and legislation for the Aboriginal Water Reserve. Changes to the Water Act 1992 were noted, with the outcome that water is now easier to access.

## 2.6 Plan risk assessment - Presentation

The Department gave a presentation on the purpose and progress of the risk assessment for the plan. The Department noted that the focus of the risk assessment is on water plan objectives, A risk comparison was provided against the Mataranka risk assessment was provided for context, noting that risks were generally assessed as lower for the Adelaide River plan due to the development context.

## 2.7 Plan risk assessment – Workshop / Discussion

The Chair facilitated a workshop activity ranking consequences and likelihood of some risks identified in the draft risk assessment.

### Key Summary Points:

The committee workshoped the risk of reduction in surface water flows below acceptable levels, and resultant impacts on environmental values in detail.

- They noted the plan will be based on the first iteration of the model, with impact of take not tested.
- The committee discussed the consequence descriptors for ecological impacts in detail, noting that descriptions were more severe than they expected and may not reflect the NT context for water planning (relatively natural and intact systems).
- They noted that indicators for major impact for environmental values could include population scale change to a given species, change in the overall characteristics of a plan zone, change to linking across the system (e.g. billabongs and other networks), or change to climate driven cycles, which they do not expect to occur based on management approaches proposed.

The committee workshopped the risk of social and economic benefits of water use not being realised and resultant impacts on economic development for Aboriginal people in detail.

- The committee recommended that issues around land suitability are noted under “why it can happen”
- The committee discussed the moderate consequence level for socio-economic impacts, and its descriptor. The committee noted challenges ranking the consequence where industry is not already present. The committee noted the relevance of impacts on morale within the moderate description.

The committee workshopped the risk of social and economic benefits of water use not being realised and resultant impacts on economic development for region in detail.

- The committee recommended that the relevant area is clarified (i.e. is the Region greater Darwin, the plan area, the Top End etc.).
- The committee took into account development timeframes, and lack of current demand for water and lack of completion for groundwater. The committee considered that the consequence for lack of general economic development was relatively less, compared with a lack of aboriginal economic development.
- The committee noted that while the resultant risk would be low, maintaining allocations for economic development for the longer term was important.

## 2.8 Meeting evaluation

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

The following additional feedback was provided by the committee during evaluation:

- There was a noticeable drop off of members on and during day two.
- The Chair noted challenges and thanked the members for their tolerance of behaviour from some members
- Members at times unintentionally contribute more than others in workshops, noting smaller groups may help assist in balancing feedback.
- The meeting was all in good spirit and productively challenging
- Mixed views on the rhythm of presentation versus questions – noted lack of time

## 2.9 Next steps

The Chair facilitated discussion on next steps for the committee and the plan, noting that the July committee meeting will be review of draft plan documents. To prepare the committee for the draft plan, two out of session briefings will be provided:

- 18 June 2024: Modelling briefing, including an opportunity to ask questions of the Department’s technical staff
- Week of 7 July: Technical Advisory Panel risk assessment briefing and NLC Cultural Values assessment briefing including the opportunity to ask questions.

## 2.10 Key messages

The department provided an overview of key messages captured for the two day meeting.