

Daly River Water Advisory Committee: Meeting Summary 3

Date: Tuesday 20th May 2025, Wednesday 21st May 2025
Time: 8:30 am-5:00 pm (day 1), 8:30 am- 3:40 pm (day 2)

Location: Katherine Research Station, 449 Stuart Highway, Katherine 0850

Attendance			
Initials	Name	Position and representation	Notes
Chair	Rod Marsh	Independent chair	
AA	Alister Andrews	Member, Aboriginal	Absent day 2
SC	Simone Cameron	Member, Agriculture	
JC	(Elna) Joy Cardona	Member, Aboriginal	
DC	David Ciaravolo	Member, Recreational fishing	
AD	Andrew Dalglish	Member, Agriculture	
WD	Whitney Dollemore	Member, Agriculture	
ML	Mona Liddy	Member, Aboriginal	
DN	Daniel Niceforo	Member, Agriculture	
AR	Alison Ross	Member, Community	Online (day 1), in-person (day 2)
DLPE staff			
KE	Kavina Eksteen	Water Planner	
MF	Mark Flintoft	Hydrogeologist	
PH	Phillipa Hunter	Director, Water Management	
AS	Aless Smith	Project Officer	
Apologies			
Initials	Name	Position and representation	Notes
RD	Russell Draper	Member, Tourism	
JH	Joshua Hunter	Member, Aboriginal	Apology
SM	Sam McBean	Member, Cattle and Agriculture	Apology

Day One: Tuesday 20th May 2025

1. Meeting opening and attendance

Meeting commenced at 8:56 am and there was unanimous approval to record the meeting.

1.1 Welcome, acknowledgement of country, meeting purpose and conflicts of interest

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked everyone for attending and acknowledged Country and Traditional Owners.

The purpose of the meeting was for the Daly River Water Advisory Committee (the Committee) to advise Water Resources Division on its review of the Katherine Tindal Limestone Aquifer Water Allocation Plan 2024-2026 and on changes required for the development of the Katherine Water Allocation Plan 2026-2036.

Chair confirmed the agenda, noting that the order of items 2.2 and 2.3 would be reversed.

Members confirmed no new conflicts of interests had arisen since the previous meeting or from their original declarations as part of the Committee commencement paperwork

1.2 Attendance and introduction, evaluation nominee and confirm previous meeting summary

Members nominated a Committee member to complete the meeting evaluation.

The Committee confirmed the summary of the previous meeting.

2. Matters for discussion

2.1 Terms of Reference

The Committee agreed to changes to the terms of reference regarding the Chair's roles, timing of papers and Appendix A. The updated terms of reference will be uploaded to the department's website.

2.2 Setting the scene 2: proposed changes to the plan

Note this was originally item 2.3 in the agenda

Water Resources Division provided an overview of proposed changes to the Katherine Tindal Limestone Aquifer water allocation plan 2024-2026. This included three main changes; the spatial extent of the plan area, the announced allocations process and recovery of unused water and four minor changes; plan objectives, term of the plan, water subject to the plan and other management arrangements.

Key summary points

Water Resources Division aim to make to the plan Katherine specific and remove reference to NT wide policies to aid in simplifying the plan document.

The Committee voiced concerns on the management of the river flows and questioned the impact of these proposed changes on surface water and their contribution to the Katherine River. The Committee requested clarification on which water resources unmetered bores access water from.

The Committee emphasised that how water allocations are calculated needs to be clear to avoid confusion when totalling up the amount of water allocated between different beneficial uses. Water Resources Division explained the estimated sustainable yield (ESY) would remain the same despite the plan area decreasing due to location of the large majority of take and to account for Katherine's forecast population growth.

The Committee agreed with the proposed changes for the processes for announced allocations and recovery of unused water. The Water Resources Division has not finalised all changes to the water trading policies and will update Committee when more information is available. The Committee raised questions about the connectivity between aquifers and any impacts of proposed policy changes.

The Committee suggested that discussion of water quality precede discussion of water quantity in the new plan.

Committee members raised concerns about interference with cultural sites from roadworks installing bores and taking water. Water Resources Division noted that the Department of Infrastructure has a legislative exemption for water access for road construction.

The Committee asked for additional information on the rationale for the removal of the existing groundwater protection area from the proposed plan.

Break 10:35 am morning tea, restarted 11:05 am

2.3 Setting the scene 1: Review of requirements and science

Note: this was originally item 2.2 in the agenda

The Chair outlined the Committee's role in the review of water allocation plans. The Chair also presented long-term data on climate, river flow, aquifer take by land use and location, and aquifer levels for the Katherine region to provide background for the Committee's review of the water allocation plan (2019-2024).

Key summary points

The Chair presented an overview of long-term climatic and hydrological patterns in the Katherine region, highlighting the role of broader climate variability in shaping trends. He also presented long-term data on water use in the region by industry and location alongside long-term modelled and actual data on aquifer storage and levels. The departments' data suggest that water extraction from the Tindall Limestone aquifer in the plan area is not having any regional impacts. The Chair highlighted data gaps on extraction from unmetered bores and their concentration in the Katherine township.

The Committee commented that the system appeared robust and expressed confidence in the current management approach and ESY.

The Committee supported the use of announced allocations as a management tool in extreme dry years noting that it would be important to ensure bores close to the Katherine River also contributed to reducing usage during such periods. The Committee noted Katherine has a diverse range of water needs/beneficial uses, all should be managed equitably and communications and awareness campaigns would be important to help stock and domestic bore users contribute to protecting aquifer flows to the river in extreme dry periods.

The Committee identified the need to clearly communicate the rationale behind changes and decisions to the proposed plan and to emphasise the place of the Katherine water allocation plan in the management of the wider Daly Basin's water resources.

Break 1:15 pm lunch, restarted 2:07 pm

2.4 Setting the scene 3: Plan values, beneficial uses and objectives (workshop format)

The Committee examined the current plan's objectives and beneficial uses and workshopped a set of values, outcomes and objectives for water management to provide a basis for their review of the plan.

Meeting closed at 5:06 pm

Day Two: Wednesday 21st May 2025

1. Meeting opening and attendance

Meeting commenced at 8:50 am. The Chair confirmed the purpose of the second day of the meeting.

The Committee discussed the recent amendment to the Water Act – the Water Amendment (Aboriginal Water Reserves) Bill 2025 – regarding economic benefits for Aboriginal people to enable access to Aboriginal water reserves (AWR). Water Resources Division provided additional information on the changes to the Committee.

2. Matters for discussion

2.1 Day one summary

The Chair provided an overview of the Committee's work and conclusions of the previous day. The Committee emphasised that the current objectives are repetitive and generic. They recommended the outcomes and objectives be improved and made more specific for the next plan.

2.2 Looking back: Plan evaluation (workshop format)

The Committee worked through the risk assessment and management strategies of the Katherine Tindal Limestone Aquifer water allocation plan 2024-2026 to determine which risks and strategies needed to be carried over in the new plan, and which material risks were absent from the current plan and suggested mitigation strategies for these risks.

Water resources division committed to incorporating the Committee's advice into their development of the new plan.

This workshop had two short 15-minute breaks at 10:52 am and 12:30 pm.

Break 1:45 pm lunch, restarted 2:20 pm

2.3 Looking forward: Katherine Water Plan 2026-2036

The Committee reviewed the Chair's summary of the Committee's work on objectives and outcomes from day 1 and deliberated on options for restructure and improvement. The Committee deliberated on whether to group broad cultural values and Aboriginal values under one or two outcomes. The Chair agreed to provide two versions of the proposed objectives and outcomes for the new water allocation plan to the Committee for their review. The Committee will review these versions out of session and provide feedback at the next meeting.

2.4 Next steps and meeting dates

Note this item was scheduled in the agenda as item 2.3 on day three but bought forward by the Chair

The Chair thanked everyone for their contribution and noted that given the considerable work the Committee had done over the previous two days the third day was no longer be required.

The next meeting was moved to the 19th and 20th August 2025 to review the draft Katherine water plan.

2.5 Meeting evaluation

Note this item was scheduled in the agenda as item 2.4 on day three but bought forward by the Chair

Meeting evaluation completed and all checklist items were satisfactory met. Members did note there was some confusion with the start time.

Evaluation checklist			
Questions	Yes	No	N/A
Papers for the meeting were sent allowing enough time for members to read a familiarise themselves with agenda items prior to the meeting	✓		
Members arrived on time and stayed until the end of the meeting	✓		
Members were provided with the opportunity to speak	✓		
Members did not speak over others or dominate the discussion	✓		
Members felt able to ask questions without being discouraged for frowned upon	✓		
Committee issues are being dealt with at the meeting, not externally	✓		
Any potential conflicts of interest that were advised by members were dealt with appropriately	✓		

Meeting closed at 3:40 pm