

Macquarie-Cudgegong CAG – March 2026

Held: Wednesday 25 March 2026 – 12:30pm to 4:00pm

At: Dubbo RSL Memorial Club - Level 1 178 Brisbane Street, Dubbo, New South Wales, 2830

Meeting focus: provide updates on a range of Water Group water infrastructure, policy and planning projects being delivered across the Macquarie-Cudgegong region or statewide.

Chaired by: Peter Hansen

Attendees

NSW Department Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water:

- Peter Hansen, Engagement Team, Water Group - meeting facilitator
- Jenny Meehan, Senior Communications and Engagement Advisor
- Peter Hyde, Director Inland Water Planning
- Veronica Silberschneider, Acting/Director Planning Implementation (online)
- David Andersen, Manager Metering Implementation (online)
- Amanda Chimkievitch, Manager Investment Analysis
- Chloe Johnston, Project Manager Macquarie Wambul FBC
- Sally Anderson-Day, Senior Communications and Engagement Advisor
- Sarah Boyd, Principal Water Resource Analyst, Non-Urban Metering

External stakeholders:

- Macquarie-Cudgegong CAG members, Tim Gainsford (Chair)
- WaterNSW

Meeting notes

Meeting notes:

- **Macquarie Water Security project p:** The Macquarie Water Security Project's business case was presented, detailing the evaluation of multiple options for improving town water security, with Dubbo Regional Council's increased access to groundwater identified as the preferred option.

Participants raised questions about the assessment process, environmental impacts, modelling, and the exclusion of other towns.

- **Project objectives and funding:** The Macquarie Wambuul Water Security Project aims to improve water security and reliability for towns in the region, support a healthy river environment, and increase drought resilience, with funding from both the NSW and Australian Governments to prepare a final business case.
- **Options evaluated and shortlisting:** Five options were initially considered: a regional pipeline, use of the flood mitigation zone at Burrendong Dam, replacement of Gin Gin Weir, increasing groundwater access for Dubbo, and setting aside water in Burrendong Dam for critical needs; after assessment, only the Dubbo groundwater supply option was shortlisted for further evaluation due to its cost-effectiveness and alignment with project objectives.
- **Stakeholder feedback consultation:** The business case remains open for feedback.
- **Implications for other towns:** Participants asked about the project's impact on towns other than Dubbo, such as Narromine, Trangie, Warren, and Cobar. It was clarified that while other options were considered, only Dubbo's groundwater supply was economically viable, and other towns' needs may be addressed in future projects if viable options emerge.
- **Flood Mitigation zone and environmental water management:** Participants discussed the proposal to use the flood mitigation zone at Burrendong Dam, focusing on its environmental impacts, the legal definition of planned environmental water (PEW), hydrological modelling, and the reasons for not shortlisting this option, with requests for further information and clarification on modelling and departmental processes.
 - **Environmental impact assessment:** The environmental benefits and risks of retaining water in the flood mitigation zone, was discussed particularly regarding the timing and volume of releases affecting the Macquarie Marshes and compliance with the Basin Plan's no-loss-of-PEW test.
 - **Hydrological modelling and data:** The existence and validity of hydrological models used to estimate environmental impacts was discussed. Independent consultants used the best available river management model. Requests were made to provide details on the modelling, assumptions, and sources that informed this assessment.
 - **Definition of planned environmental water:** Requests were made for the legal and operational definitions of PEW as used in the Water Management Act, water sharing plans, and agreements with the MDBA. Will provide the relevant definitions and documentation to participants (action noted below).
- **Northern Basin Connectivity and Section 324 Orders:** The Northern Basin connectivity and the use of Section 324 temporary water restrictions was explained including the rationale, triggers, and expected impacts of these measures, with participants asking about rule interactions, relaxation triggers, and compliance monitoring.

- **Connectivity rule modelling:** The modelling of expert panel recommendations for managing connectivity in the Northern Basin was discussed, including rules for non-dry, transition, and dry periods, and the use of resumption of flow and environmental water allowances to improve outcomes in the Barwon-Darling system. The panel's recommendations are not government policy. The government is currently presenting the analysis to stakeholders, seeking feedback on both the recommendations and the modelling approach.
- **Section 324 temporary water restrictions:** Section 324 orders were explained. They are triggered when Menindee Lakes' active storage falls below 250 GL, to restrict supplementary and floodplain harvesting access, aiming to secure critical human and environmental needs and manage water quality risks such as fish deaths.
- **Relaxation triggers and licence classes:** Relaxation triggers for lifting restrictions was explained, including specific flow rates at key gauges, and which licence categories are affected. The exemptions for basic landholder rights and certain passive water movements was discussed.
- **Compliance and monitoring:** NRAR is responsible for monitoring compliance with Section 324 orders. It's important to keep accurate records of water taken during permitted events, and Water New South Wales is working to improve public access to real-time storage and trigger information.
- **Transition to permanent rules:** Connectivity and minimum flow rules are embedded in water sharing plans, the need for temporary Section 324 orders should be eliminated, with ongoing consultation and modelling to inform future rule changes.
- **Water Sharing Plan amendments and consultation:** An update on the process for extending and amending regulated water sharing plans, including the introduction of omnibus amendments, the rationale for certain rule changes (such as the 250 GL trigger), and the approach to stakeholder consultation, with participants questioning the process, review clauses, and the impact on asset values.
 - **Plan extension and amendment process:** The 6 major regulated water sharing plans are due for extension, with the Minister giving in-principle support for a two-year rollover, pending Natural Resources Commission reviews, and that omnibus amendments are being introduced to harmonise rules across valleys.
 - **Key rule changes and rationale:** The main substantive change is the increase of the Menindee Lakes trigger from 195 GL to 250 GL, justified by infrastructure constraints and the need to maintain water quality and supply; other amendments are primarily review clauses or harmonisation measures.
 - **Stakeholder consultation approach:** The department is conducting targeted consultation sessions seeking direct feedback from water user groups, councils, and environmental groups on proposed changes.

- **Review clauses and future revisions:** It was noted about the inclusion of explicit review clauses for major rule changes and acknowledged the concern and stated that reviews would occur following MDBA operational reviews, but not all changes currently include formal review clauses.
- **Metering compliance and floodplain harvesting measurement:** Metering compliance in the Macquarie Valley, was presented detailing current compliance rates, the classification of works, the process for declaring works as 'not taking', and the challenges of measuring water use during floodplain events, along with guidance on alternative measurement approaches.
 - **Current compliance status:** Approximately 38% of works in the Macquarie are compliant with metering requirements, with a further 13% expected to become compliant through improved classification of works. The majority of non-compliant works are smaller users or those inadvertently captured by previous regulations.
 - **Work classification and asset management:** New classification system, allowing approval holders to declare works as 'not taking' if not in use, which removes the immediate requirement for metering and preserves the asset for future use. Instructions were provided on how to update classifications in the Water Register.
 - **Floodplain Harvesting and measurement:** Participants raised accurately measuring general security water use during floodplain events, where traditional river meters may not function. It was clarified that alternative measurement methods may be approved by WaterNSW, and offered to provide a detailed response offline (action noted below).
 - **Telemetry and subsidy programmes:** Available subsidies for telemetry and metering upgrades, encouraging participants to take advantage of current offers to improve compliance and reporting accuracy. Peter Hansen to provide the Telemetry Uplift Program handout via email to the CAG chair.
 - **Future compliance timelines:** Smaller water users have until their approval or renewal date, or 2027 (whichever is sooner), to achieve compliance, with recording and reporting requirements commencing at the end of 2026.

Actions:

- **Definition of Planned Environmental Water (PEW):** Department to send the legal definition of PEW under Section Eight of the *Water Management Act*, the definition agreed with the MDBA, and the water resource and water sharing plan definitions to the group for review.
- **Modelling used for options assessment:** Department to provide details of the hydrological modelling used to assess the 5–7% (up to 10%) reduction in the Macquarie Marshes, including who conducted the modelling and where the results are published.
- **Environmental offset and infrastructure cost figures:** Request for the environmental offset figure included in the Burrendong Dam assessment and the total infrastructure cost and assumptions for the Dubbo groundwater option subject to confidentiality constraints.

- **Floodplain Harvesting and General Security Water Measurement:** Department to follow up offline with WaterNSW and provide a detailed answer regarding the use of storage meters to account for general security water during floodplain events in the Macquarie, including alternative measurement options.
- **Distribution of meeting materials:** Send a PDF version of the meeting presentation and relevant flyers (e.g., telemetry cashback information) to the CAG chair for distribution to all participants.