

Murrumbidgee CAG meeting notes – 12 March 2026

Held: Thursday 12 March 2026 – 1:00pm to 4:00pm

At: Griffith Exies Sports Club - 33 Speirs Street, Griffith, New South Wales, 2680

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

Chaired by: Peter Hansen

Attendees

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

- Peter Hansen, Engagement Team, Water Group - meeting facilitator
- Belinda Hanly, Communications & Engagement Advisor
- Peter Hyde, Director Inland Water Planning, Water Group
- Andrew Lavelle, Director Infrastructure Projects (online)
- Shahadat Chowdhury, Manager Water Allocations
- Sarah Boyd, Principal Water Resource Analyst, Non-urban Metering

External stakeholders:

- Murrumbidgee CAG members, Peter Sheppard (Chair)
- WaterNSW

Meeting notes

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- **Water Allocation status and risk management:** An update on the current water allocation status in the Murrumbidgee Regulated River, highlighting historically low inflows and storage, the calculation of available water, and the risks associated with meeting future allocation commitments, with explanations of the allocation process and risk mitigation strategies was provided.
 - **Current water storage and inflows:** Current storage volume and inflows in the Murrumbidgee Regulated River are at their lowest since 2019, with the end of February/start of March 2026 showing particularly low levels.
 - **Allocation calculation methodology:** The process for calculating available water was outlined, including the assessment of resource at hand, commitments for environmental water, domestic and stock, conveyance, high security, and budgeting for losses. The need to reserve sufficient water to meet opening allocation commitments on 1 July was emphasised, with a target of 220 GL required.
 - **Risk of not meeting allocation targets:** Discussion addressed the risk of not achieving the 220 GL target, explaining that if the reserve is insufficient, water may need to be drawn from carryover accounts, but this would require specific orders and is not the current intention. The process for adjusting targets based on updated inflow estimates from Snowy Hydro was also outlined.
 - **Allocation prioritisation :** Clarified the prioritisation of allocations, noting that high priority commitments are secured first, followed by high security allocations, with general security allocations only made if surplus is available.
- **Minimum inflows project and climate risk integration:** The Minimum Inflows Project, reviews inflow assumptions and storage reserves to ensure high priority water needs can be met under future climate scenarios, incorporating new long-term climate data and modelling to inform risk management and water sharing plan design.
 - **Project Objectives and Rationale:** The Minimum Inflows Project aims to review the amount of water expected to flow into dams during droughts and adjust storage reserves to ensure high priority requirements are met, particularly under future climate scenarios. The project responds to lessons from past droughts, which triggered emergency policies and plan suspensions.

- **Use of extended climate data:** The shift from relying solely on historical data (pre-2004) to incorporating 10,000 years of paleo-stochastic data and climate projections (NARClIM 2.0), allows for a more nuanced estimation of risk and better design of water sharing plans.

Risk assessment and policy implications: The new method enables the estimation of the likelihood of storage reserve failure under both historic and projected 2050 climate conditions, showing increased risk in the future. This informs decisions on reserve sizing and the frequency of extreme event policy triggers.

- **Stakeholder consultation and review:** The project underwent review by the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer, which endorsed the approach and provided recommendations. Ongoing consultation is planned, with webinars and targeted engagement to discuss modelling results and application of the method.
- **Wetlands protection and Water Sharing Plan Replacement:** It was outlined the ongoing review and replacement of water sharing plans (WSPs), focusing on strengthening wetlands protection, updating plan templates, and addressing operational and environmental issues, with a timeline for consultation and plan finalisation extending to 2028.
 - **Wetlands policy development:** The team is finalising a policy approach to protect wetlands across all inland unregulated plans by the end of 2026, including the development of a Minimal Harm Guideline and clear articulation of how WSPs protect different wetland areas.
 - **Plan replacement timeline and process:** Six inland regulated WSPs are due to expire in June 2026, with extensions supported until June 2028 to allow for comprehensive review and replacement. Plans are being batched to align with resource availability and inform project delivery.
 - **Scope of changes and consultation:** The scope of WSP changes includes maximising environmental outcomes, implementing Natural Resources Commission (NRC) recommendations, addressing operational issues, and updating information. Out-of-scope items include changes inconsistent with the Basin Plan or those reducing environmental protection. Targeted consultation is ongoing, with public exhibition of draft plans expected by late 2026.
 - **Specific issues under review:** Issues being addressed include simplifying environmental water rules, reviewing limits for Aboriginal Cultural Access Licences, and aligning water source boundaries. Some issues, such as the Minimum Inflows Program and climate change integration, are being handled at a statewide level.

- **Metering compliance and works classification update:** An update on metering compliance in the Murrumbidgee area, detailing current compliance rates, the classification of works, exemptions, and available subsidies, as well as steps for water users to achieve compliance and the impact of recent policy refinements was spoken about.
 - **Compliance status and targets:** The Murrumbidgee area has a compliance rate of approximately 48% for works requiring a DQP, with about 833 works still needing compliant metering. The target is to reach 95% compliance, with smaller water users given extensions for installation.
 - **Works classification and exemptions:** Works can be classified as constructed, non-taking, basic landholder rights only, not constructed, or decommissioned, with certain classifications exempting works from metering requirements. Recent policy changes have clarified these classifications and streamlined the process for users.
 - **Meter accuracy and upgrade requirements:** A significant proportion of meters in the valley are non-pattern-approved or inaccurate, with 21% needing updates. The process for self-installation and the importance of accurate metering for compliance and reporting was explained.
 - **Subsidies and support programs:** Subsidies for telemetry installation are available through the Telemetry Uplift Program, offering up to \$2,000 cashback for eligible users. The program aims to accelerate compliance and reduce costs for water users.
- **SDLAM Acceleration program:** Andrew Lavelle gave an update on the SDLAM Acceleration Program, covering the status of major construction projects, stakeholder engagement, and the integration of new infrastructure into WaterNSW systems, with timelines for completion and ongoing community consultation.
 - **Major construction projects:** Contracts have been awarded for the construction and replacement of key regulators and infrastructure, including the Wanganella and Hartwood weirs, Wilsons Anabranh Offtake, and McCrabbs Regulator, with practical completion targeted for December 2026.
 - **Hydrometric stations:** Two of 4 hydrometric stations have been completed to support automated system operations and metering requirements, with integration into WaterNSW's systems planned for post-construction.
 - **Stakeholder Engagement:** Extensive engagement activities have been conducted, including briefings for MPs, local councils, First Nations groups, and landholders, as

well as public communications through fact sheets, media releases, and drop-in sessions.

- **Next Steps:** Some projects, such as the Murrumbidgee Airspace Management, face delivery challenges and may be withdrawn if not completed by the deadline. Ongoing consultation and updates are planned, with contact details provided for further queries.

Actions:

- **Distribution of presentations:** Notify attendees when the meeting presentations are available online and provide the download link to CAG members on the list.
- **Access to Historical Water Allocation Statements:** Send water allocation statements from before 2019 to interested CAG members, upon request.
- **Consultation on Wetlands Policy:** Review the suggestion to use rates notices to reach landholders with wetlands who are not water users and consider implementing this method for future consultations.
- **Future meeting agenda suggestions:** Solicit suggestions and changes for the agenda of the next meeting from group members and coordinate with the CAG chair to incorporate these into the upcoming session.