

LOWER DARLING STAKEHOLDER MEETING TELECONFERENCE 09 April 2018

MINUTES/ACTIONS

Attendance: Katherine McBride, Alan Whyte, Andrew Wall, Brendan Barry, Tim Ellstone (Wentworth Shire Council), Michelle Kelly (Wentworth Shire Council), Rachel Strachan, John Coffey (Essential Water), Paula D'Santos (OEH), Ashraf El-Sherbini (DoI – Water)

WaterNSW: Vince Kelly, Jeff Finch, Dan Berry

Apologies: Adrian Langdon, Andrew Garrett (DoI – Water), Rohan McMahon

UPDATE ON LAKES

- Upstream flows:
 - Walgett 20 ML/d – on recession from peak of 1,600 ML/day on 21 March
 - Brewarrina ~ 150 ML/d – on recession from peak of ~1,000 ML/day 28 March

 - Bourke – 480 ML/d – on recession from peak of 1,800 ML/day on 28 March

 - Louth – 840 ML/d – on recession from peak of ~1,150 ML/day on 4 April
 - Tilpa – 490 ML/d – rising
 - Wilcannia – 0 ML/d

Storage totals:

- TOTAL STORAGE VOLUME – 252 GL – this is a reduction of 62 GL since the teleconference on 1 March 2018.
 - 480 GL was reached 15 December 2017
 - 307 GL in Wetherell + Pamamaroo
 - 172 GL in Menindee + Cawndilla
- Wetherell – 47 GL – 24% - Wetherell-Tandure block bank now in place and pumping underway.
- Pamamaroo – 159 GL – 57%
- TOTAL – 206 GL in top two storages – Active ~170 GL
- Menindee – 0 GL
- Cawndilla – 45 GL – 7%

Releases:

- Releases from Wetherell ceased on 1 November as the storage is now below 59.8m AHD. At this level water is no longer on the floodplain of Wetherell.
- Pamamaroo Outlet – 265 ML/day – fully closed and leakage only, awaiting installation of baulk head for control of leakage
- Menindee Outlet – 0 ML/day – ceased 15 November, storage now too low for releases to be made.
- Weir 32 target ~ 180 ML/day – in accordance with the WaterNSW operations plan.
- Releases from Cawndilla – currently 0ML/day – irrigation delivery now concluded.
- Since 1 March release totals have been: Cawndilla 6.7 GL; Menindee 0 GL; Weatherell 0 GL; Pamamaroo 11 GL; Total 17.7 GL. Flow over Weir 32 – 7.9 GL.

Downstream flows:

- Weir 32 - currently ~190 ML/d – averaging 197 ML/d for past 7 days
- Pooncarie – currently 107 ML/d – averaging 108 ML/d for past 7 days
- Burtundy – currently 77 ML/d – averaging 68 ML/d for past 7 days

FORECAST

- 2 scenarios – Base case; and Drought provided
- Key results:
 - Pumping to Copi forecast to commence end – August or early September 2018
 - Pumping from Tandure pumping has commenced
 - Forecast that block banks will need to be constructed by 1 July to allow for slow filling of banks
 - Cease to Lower Darling release forecast late December 2018
 - Broken Hill supply – to end August 2019.
 - The model results are very sensitive to:
 - Outlet capacity at Pamamaroo during the block bank filling
 - Release rate to fill block banks – higher than current forecast rates will result in a need to release from Weatherell which then has impact on Broken Hill forecast supply.

DISCUSSION

- Embargoes have played an important role in managing the small flow event in the Barwon-Darling that may now reach Wetherell.
- It was requested that the dates of the embargoes be provided. The WaterNSW website provides an update on the current status and links to latest media statements.
- It was recommended that earlier pumping to Copi would potentially provide better water quality for Broken Hill supply, and provide the opportunity for a top up pumping closer to the close of the pumping window. It was requested that the latest water quality results for Pamamaroo be provided to Essential Water and modelling be re-run to consider alternate options for pumping to Copi and potential benefits to water quality.
- Landholders also concerned that late filling of the block banks will result in water of poor quality being delivered to the banks for drought supplies.
- CWAP Discussion
 - Local representation discussed at CWAP – likely to add local government or representation for town water supply – Although DOI Water already have the town water supply policy representatives within the panel.
 - Essential Water need representation given the critical situation being faced by the Broken Hill township.
 - Customers again voiced a need for community representation on the CWAP. Council are a potential representative, however, it is councils preference for the representation to be a person who is impacted by the current critical water situation, representing all potentially impacted persons.
 - It was noted that the level of local knowledge has reduced significantly with the departure of key staff in recent years, this is a significant risk in the management of this process.
 - These points will be taken back to the CWAP
 - Works proposal
 - Pumping at Tandure moving forward.

- Copi Hollow – question of the timing of pumping to Copi Hollow as compared to the delivery timeline of the pipeline. There is the potential that commissioning of the pipeline coincide with the timing for when supply from Copi Hollow will be necessary. Planning is to deliver Copi bank and pumping as per the current forecast.
- There is a level of uncertainty in the delivery timeline which is to be reviewed early May with timeline revised based on the experience gained in the early stages of pipeline construction.
- Discussion needs to be more serious around the drought management actions with the potential for high salinity with any inflows.
- Plan for Copi use until March 2019 – so water quality should be managed until a return to Wetherell. All agree that salinity and water quality is an issue.
- Customer representatives expressed that the decision making process and timeframes were not good enough. Too long between meetings of CWAP and decisions being made that impact on customers and community. This is simply a repeat of past process in terms of past process.
- Block banks – two lower banks supported, the two banks upstream of Pooncarrie require more information relating to cost and consequence
- Customers view that the outcomes they provide will far outweigh the licenced water use. Bores are in place in some instances but the water quality was failing during their last use and with no recharge since there is concern about the viability of bores moving forward. There are approximately 80 families relying on the river upstream of Pooncarrie, and the use is small as compared to the number of stock reliant on the river for water – sheep are in the range of 250,000 although the number of goats and cattle has likely increased and sheep numbers decreased. Funding of private works is a major issue.
- Business losses in the past drought were in the range of \$2 million for some customers. The fat lamb industry has an estimated value of \$37 from this region.
- Planning has commence for the bottom 2 banks but the 1st hurdle of funding has not yet been cleared.
- Recommendation from Jeff Finch and customers to move the lowest bank to Ashvale or the original Belcatherine site. The location of the previous bank at Old Burtundy was of limited volume and did not cover all customers with permanent plantings in this area.
- There was support for an alternative location provided it can be delivered within the timeframes.
- Timeline of critical steps within the delivery process for block banks for implementation of 2 upper banks – ACTION.
- Significant concern over timeframes and use of Mike Erny should be considered
- Question raised about the cost of bank works - \$400,000 per bank.

COMMUNICATION

- Meeting proposed for April 24 – date to be confirmed by Wentworth Shire – focus on reconfiguration of Menindee

OTHER BUSINESS

- Embargoes have been a good demonstration of what small flow events can provide.
- Information about the progress of what is happening with drought actions is needed more than once per month. Aim is to provide a mid-month update of progress between teleconferences.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FOR CWAP

- Essential Water need representation given the critical situation being faced by the Broken Hill township.
- It is requested that the affected parties be represented on the CWAP.
- It was noted that the level of local knowledge has reduced significantly with the departure of key staff in recent years, this is a significant risk in the management of this process.
- In the view of the landholders it is a necessity to maintain supply to stock & domestic and high security water users during a cease to flow event. Customers are seeking the installation of 2 block banks downstream of Pooncarrie as per the past drought management process and at least one bank upstream of Pooncarrie which has not been provided for in the past.

ACTIONS ARISING FROM DISCUSSION

- Timeline of critical steps within the delivery process for block banks for implementation of 2 upper banks – ACTION.
- Assess ability to provide notification to community and customers regarding the water quality in the lower Darling and the issues this may present.
 - 2 gauging stations to be upgraded to include measurement and reporting of pH in the new year.
- Further consideration be given to the use of releases from Cawndilla
 - Did not receive support from CLaW or MDBA, but the door is ajar to discuss the institutional arrangement that are limiting the use of Cawndilla to deliver water to the Murray. The group agreed that this should be pursued to ensure future opportunities are not missed.
- Identify a location for block bank upstream of Pooncarrie in the event of cease to flow for lower Darling
 - Further information for justification of works upstream of Pooncarrie.
- Provide a copy of the draft operations plan for the Lower Darling to the group
 - Minster has approved and document is now available on the WaterNSW website – link to be emailed to all Lower Darling customers – revision of plan in progress.
- Investigate the opportunity to have a workshop of landholders and industry experts to help with the understanding and management of water quality issues.
- Provide bi-weekly updates of forecast system management – ongoing.
- Policy position required for supply to customers from Copi Hollow – post implementation of pumping to Copi Hollow.
 - To be taken to CWAP
- Timing of block bank implementation to be included with monthly modelling results
- Modelling be re-run to consider alternate options for pumping to Copi and potential benefits to water quality
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NEXT MEETING

Thursday 3 May 2018, 1-2pm (teleconference)