

LOWER DARLING STAKEHOLDER MEETING TELECONFERENCE 01 March 2018

MINUTES/ACTIONS

Attendance: Katherine McBride, Alan Whyte, Andrew Wall, Brendan Barry, Tim Ellstone (Wentworth Shire Council), Michelle Kelly (Wentworth Shire Council)

WaterNSW: Vince Kelly, Jeff Finch, Dan Berry, Adrian Langdon, Tony Webber

Apologies: Rachel Strachan, Andrew Garrett (CL&W), John Coffey (Essential Water), Simon Pradhan (Wentworth Shire Council)

UPDATE ON LAKES

- Upstream flows:
 - Walgett 210 ML/d – small rise
 - Brewarrina ~20 ML/d – steady

 - Bourke – 0 ML/d

 - Louth – 0 ML/d
 - Tilpa – 0 ML/d
 - Wilcannia – 0 ML/d

Storage totals:

- TOTAL STORAGE VOLUME – 314 GL – this is a reduction of 115 GL since the teleconference on 4 January 2018.
 - 480 GL was reached 15 December 2017
 - 307 GL in Wetherell + Pamamaroo
 - 172 GL in Menindee + Cawndilla
- Wetherell – 55 GL – 28%
- Pamamaroo – 181 GL – 65%
- TOTAL – 236 GL in top two storages – Active ~210 GL
- Menindee – 0 GL
- Cawndilla – 78 GL – 12%

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 – 300 ML/day
- Menindee Outlet – 0 ML/day – ceased 15 November, storage now too low for releases to be made.
- Weir 32 target ~ 200 ML/day – in accordance with the WaterNSW operations plan.
- Releases from Cawndilla – currently 330 ML/day – outlet capacity is a concern.
- Since 4 January release totals have been: Cawndilla 27.2 GL; Menindee 0 GL; Weatherell 0 GL; Pamamaroo 16 GL; Total 43.2 GL. Flow over Weir 32 – 12 GL.

Downstream flows:

- Weir 32 - currently 210 ML/d – averaging 199 ML/d for past 7 days
- Pooncarie – currently 80 ML/d – averaging 90 ML/d for past 7 days
- Burtundy – currently 35 ML/d – averaging 38 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 forecast to commence mid-March 2018
 - Model assumes that Tandure pumping will occur when the combined Wetherell-Tandure storage reaches approximately 50 GL. At this time, Wetherell storage as a storage cell is approximately 25 GL. The model then assumes that pumping will continue to occur and maintain Wetherell at 25 GL or the highest level possible, thereby reducing surface area for the volume stored.
 - Forecast that block banks will need to be constructed by 1 September to allow for slow filling of banks
 - Cease to Lower Darling release forecast late December 2018
 - Broken Hill supply – to mid September 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

- Concern raised that process of block banks and filling is being left too late and too much risk is being taken to fill as late as possible which could result in the banks not being filled. It is more efficient to fill the banks in the cooler months and overall given the situation we should be more conservative.
- Water quality need to also be factored into this equation of filling with the later filling process providing additional risk.
- The number of block banks also seems to be a point of contention. In the view of the landholders this is a necessity to maintain S&D supply during a cease to flow which has not been provided for in the past. **KEY POINT**
- WaterNSW informed customers that there is a need to take the proposal for block banks to the Critical Water Advisory Panel (CWAP) to secure funding for the works. The panel is in the process of being formed and will meet in the coming weeks (27 March 2018). WaterNSW will represent the views of the Lower Darling customers within this forum.
- It was requested that details of the membership of the CWAP are and when they shall meet.
- It is viewed that there needs to be a more formal process for identification of key points so that the customers have confidence that their message is being represented correctly.
- It was requested that the affected parties be represented on the CWAP. **KEY POINT**
- CWAP is a government advisory group to address many aspects of incident management, but the structure may provide the opportunity for local expertise.
- In the view of the customers, the Water Resource Plan (WRP) Stakeholder Advisory process has been put on hold due to the spat over the Basin Plan. At the all state WRP, there was recognition of the need to look at river connectivity. Water quality, base flows, high priority use are all identified in the hierarchy of the incident management guide and therefore should provide the basis for decision making.

- A CWAP is also being established for the Barwon-Darling system to look at the issue of connectivity.
- Confirmation was sort that a proposal for an increased number of block banks in the river blow Menindee is being made, with specific focus on bank upstream of Pooncarrie. A government decision on the issue of block banks is required and this will be a key point of discussion at the first CWAP meeting.
- Customers are frustrated with the lack of action given the discussion on block banks has been ongoing since September or October last year.
- Allocations for next water year are critical to business decisions for customers regarding account and risk management. It is expected that an indication of available allocations for the 2018-19 water year would be made by DOI-Water in their next announcement on 15 March – which was undertaken.
- An update on the pipeline progress was requested – wet commissioning is scheduled for December 2018 with full commissioning April 2018, WaterNSW has continued to plan for extending Broken Hill supply from Menindee to the greatest extent possible, so delays on this timeline while undesirable, should ensure no significant change to planned drought actions at this stage.
- The actions of pumping to Copi and supply to existing extractive customers in the most recent drought management phase resulted in a significant cost to one customer. These issues need to be resolved so that customer can make business decisions in the short term. **KEY POINT**
- Consultation I has been delayed to the disappointment of customers and it was reiterated the need for timely discussion on the drought management plan. WaterNSW is working with DOI-Water around upcoming consultation and will be in the area in coming weeks. The DOI-Water roadshow is not about Menindee SDL project but other important issues – subsequently identified as metering, environmental water and compliance relating to the outcome of resent inquiries.

COMMUNICATION

OTHER BUSINESS

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS FOR CWAP

- It was requested that the affected parties be represented on the CWAP.
- 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.
- Access to water from Copi Hollow and supply to existing extractive customers in the most recent drought management phase resulted in a significant cost to one customer. This issue need to be resolved so that customer can make business decisions in the short term.

ACTIONS ARISING FROM DISCUSSION

- 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
 - Some analysis, but no site selected, we are working on a timeframe for when this site will be needed
 - To be discussed at CWAP
- Provide a copy of the draft operations plan for the Lower Darling to the group
 - Minister has approved and document is now available on the WaterNSW website – link to be emailed to all Lower Darling customers.
- 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.
- Andrew Garrett to follow up on the creation of a report resulting from Mr Laurie visiting the area, and whether this will be available publically – complete response provided 1 March – summarised as – no formal report, but Mr Laurie happy to field questions regarding his visit to the area.
- 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

NEXT MEETING

Thursday 5 April 2018, 1-2pm (teleconference)