

Ooloo Water Advisory Committee  
*Meeting Record 7*

*22 May 2017 – 9.30am*  
*Paterson Room, Katherine Research Station*

**Members Present**

John Childs  
Kate Peake  
Tom Harris

Mona Liddy  
Eddie Webber  
Kylie Gracey

Alison King  
Rob Lindsay

Warren de With  
Dick Perry  
Peter Rix

Chair  
Regional Development Australia Northern Territory  
Proxy for Phil Howie  
Community Member, Water Extraction Licence holder  
Traditional Owner  
Community Member  
Proxy for Sam McBean  
NT Cattleman's Association representative  
Aquatic Ecologist  
Maddaingya Malak Malak Ranger Program  
Representative  
AFANT Representative  
Community Member, Water Extraction Licence Holder  
Proxy for Malcom Baker (present from 10.25am)  
Quintis, Water Extraction Licence Holder

**Members Absent**

Sam McBean

Simon Smith  
Peter Marks  
Lorrae McArthur

NT Cattleman's Association representative, Water  
Extraction Licence Holder  
NT Farmers Association representative  
Horticulturist, Water Extraction Licence holder  
Northern Land Council

**Advisors Present**

Mark Ashley  
Gabby Yates

A/Executive Director, Water Resources, DENR  
Water Planner, DENR

**Guests**

The Hon Lauren Moss  
Emma Young

Minister for Environment and Natural Resources  
Advisor to the Minister

**Observers**

Lizzie Sullivan  
Tahnee Thompson  
Pru Ducey

Traditional Owner  
Regional Manager, DENR Katherine  
DENR, Minutes

## 1. OPENING

(John Childs)

Meeting opened at 9.45am

### 1.1. Apologies

Sam McBean	NT Cattleman's Association representative Kiley Grayson present as proxy
Phil Howie	Community Member, Water Extraction Licence holder Tom Harris present as proxy
Trish Rigby	Northern Land Council representative, Proxy for Lorrae McArthur Arrangements had been made for Trish to participate in the meeting by teleconference, however technological issues prevented this from happening.

### 1.2. Introduction from the Chair

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and in particular, the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, Lauren Moss MLA, for attending.

## 2. PRESENTATION TO MINISTER MOSS

A presentation was given to provide Minister Moss with an overview of what the Committee has discussed, the progress of the Water Allocation Plan, and key perspectives from Committee members.

The role of the Committee is to provide advice to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in relation to the development of the water allocation plan for the Ooloo Dolostone Aquifer. The Committee has worked through a number of issues which community members and DENR water resource planners and managers consider need to be addressed by the Plan. The Plan is progressing well and the draft plan is expected to be completed by the end of July.

Members provided their comments and perspectives in relation to a number of areas as summarised below.

### *Allocation of Water to Beneficial uses*

- The importance of the non-consumptive pool, and maintaining sufficient environmental and cultural flows to protect something that is so unique in the Territory, the Daly River.
- In addition to protecting the non-consumptive pool it is also important to identify the consumptive pool and maximising its potential for human benefit.
- Important to understand what is needed for the non-consumptive pool as there is a misconception that the environment will reset itself over the wet season
- From a cultural perspective, the river system has changed over time as the catchment has become more developed for agriculture – e.g. some Committee members think that the water tastes different, some fishing places no longer exist, run off occurs where it has never been before. Surface water and changes to the landscape by producers need to be considered.

### *Security and Reliability*

- There are some fairly low reliability levels for some licence holders that will be producing in the future and how this impacts on commercial drivers is not known yet. There is still capacity to do further work on how reliability impacts on production, and how these reliabilities relate to economic realities.
- In a fully allocated system, returning unused water to the consumptive pool is important to maximise the potential economic benefit of those water entitlements.
- There is also a fair amount of high security water, so the focus should not just be on difficulties and look at the opportunities. One of our objectives is to have a plan that will maximise the benefits of water that is available for consumptive uses.
- Water use has to be sustainable from all perspectives.

### *Unused Water – use it or lose it*

- Minister Moss asked for Committee's position on this
- Committee members want a clear plan for water entitlements that are unused and have discussed what rules and guidance will be applied by the water allocation plan.
- In the best possible world, for regional development we would have all the environmental science in place to determine the consumptive pool and all that water will be used for the best possible economic outcomes. At this stage, we have a significant amount of water that is licensed, but is not being used.
- Need to make sure policy on use it or lose it encourages conditions under which businesses can grow
- One challenge is that use it or lose it is currently untested and this creates additional uncertainty for producers
- Use it or lose it is one mechanism to encourage allocation of water for maximum benefit, another mechanism is the water market. The Plan will also enable water trading in the Ooloo Aquifer.

### *Strategic Indigenous Reserve*

- Some Committee members would like SIR included in the Water Act
- Feedback from the consultation is that water assigned to the SIR should be for consumptive uses, not water for the environment (which should already be protected by allocating water to the non-consumptive pool)
- In a fully allocated system water can be assigned to the SIR using various mechanisms including use it or lose it (recouping and reallocating unused water) as well as other mechanisms.
- We also need to do be serious about monitoring and evaluation into the future, need to make sure that policy and principles are not only sound (Plan) but are also that they are working. We need to get better at this, every time we do it.

## **3. UPDATED PROJECT TIMELINE**

**(Gabby Yates, DENR)**

An updated timeline was provided.

- Typically the public comment period is 6 weeks
- It is hoped the Plan will be declared by the Minister by September
- The Committee would like to have a Meeting to review the full draft of the Plan before it goes out for Public Comment.
- ❖ *ACTION: Gabby Yates will redraft the timeline and email to Members.*

#### 4. MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee agreed the Minutes of Meeting 5 were a true and correct record.

The Committee agreed the Minutes of Meeting 6 were a true and correct record.

Noted the submission from the committee on SIR policy discussion paper was provided to DENR.

#### 5. FEEDBACK ON DISCUSSION DRAFT PLAN (Gabby Yates, DENR)

Members were provided with a draft of the Plan, which included the drafted sections of the Plan presented at previous meetings, updated based on previous guidance and questions from Committee members. The focus areas for feedback/decisions from the Committee were:

- Groundwater Discharge Protection Areas
- Drafting of Section 7.2.3.3, in particular rules for granting licences, use it or lose it and water trading
- Risk Assessment

##### ***Groundwater Discharge Protection Areas***

Information regarding the Erskine rules that protect environmental flows, and also Groundwater Discharge Protection Areas have been previously discussed. There are four distinct groundwater discharge areas from the Ooloo Dolostone Aquifer where the buffers should be applied: Katherine River Zone; Daly River – Stray Creek Zone; Daly River – Douglas Daly Zone; Stray Creek Zone. If the buffer areas are included in the Water Allocation Plan, the Plan will state that additional groundwater extraction points for licences (bores) cannot be located within the buffer area. The Plan will also state that bore construction permits will not be granted for bores within the buffer area. An exception to this rule has been proposed by the Ooloo Water Advisory Committee in the case where a bore is to be drilled for domestic water supply. Additional information was requested by the Committee: How many people likely to be affected by this?

- ❖ *ACTION: Gabby Yates to provide further information about the implications for existing water users by including the protection area in the Water Allocation Plan*

##### ***Additional water balance information***

Plan drafting previously provided to OWAC had 2 figures showing groundwater levels for two indicative monitoring bores and aquifer recharge and discharge. Over the long term, the recharge is less than the discharge. An additional graph was provided showing 'Change in Aquifer Storage'. This graph tells an important part of the water story of the Ooloo Dolostone Aquifer, showing that there are inter-decadal trends in groundwater recharge, groundwater levels and groundwater discharge and that above average rainfall years are really important for topping up the aquifer and maintaining groundwater levels and discharge during drier periods.

- ❖ *ACTION: Gabby Yates to change colours on discharge/recharge graph so they are not blue and red which are the colours used in the "Change in Aquifer Storage" graph and update the plan drafting*

### ***Mining***

- The Plan drafting has been updated with information about mining
  - The *Water Act* will be changed so that water extractions for mining or petroleum activities are licenced.
  - There are no petroleum or gas exploration licences over the Ooloo Aquifer.
  - There are 2 permits to explore for glauconite in the Florina formation.
  - There are permits for sand and gravel extraction and one mining lease for gold
- ❖ *ACTION: Gabby Yates to check the hectare area quoted in the table in the plan drafting*

### ***Trading and use it or lose it***

- Comment that 1 year for temporary trade is too short, committee suggested 5 years could be a more suitable period
- Clarification needed as to whether trading is deemed as having used your entitlement in regard of the unused water (use it or lose it) policy
- Both use it or lose it and trading are about creating mechanisms for water entitlements to move to best use. Ultimately it is about beneficial use of the water.
- SIR does not become subject to the use it lose it until it is licenced
- Trading rules – We do not want to adversely affect the rights of users when we manage trading. The southern zone has low reliabilities compared to the central and northern zones.
- Need information in the Plan about how SIR water entitlements may be traded
- Should there be minimum reliabilities stated in the water allocation plan? Are there performance indicators relating to reliability? What do reliabilities mean to producers? The Committee has discussed this previously and decided that we did not want to apply minimum reliabilities.
- In the future, during implementation of the Plan, should review what better information has become available to provide minimum reliability objectives.

### ***Risk Assessment***

- ❖ *ACTION: Gabby Yates to provide members with tables of the risk categories – likelihood, consequences, and confidence in risk rating.*
- Committee member stated that they think there are springs and seepages that used to flow and no longer do – Gabby Yates is to follow up.
- Committee member stated that the Plan could provide more information about cultural water sites and specific flow levels at these sites – Gabby Yates is to follow up.

## **6. PLAN OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES, AND APPROACH FOR SETTING MONITORING AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Deferred to next meeting due to time constraints

## **7. DRAFT FUTURE WORK RECOMMENDATIONS –STANDING ITEM**

No additions

**8. NEXT MEETING**

Date to be confirmed.

The Chair, John Childs is not available in July, and has asked Kate Peake to chair the meeting.

**Meeting Closed 3.10pm**