Western Davenport Water Advisory Committee
Meeting Record 1

21 September 2017 – 10.10am
AZRI complex, Alice Springs

Members Present
David Sweeny Public Water Supply, Power and Water Corporation
Ryan Roxas Horticulture, Australian Green Properties, Murray Downs Station
Paul McLaughlin Horticulture, NT Farmers
Peter Donohoe Central Land Council, Manager, Land Management
Jesse Carpenter Central Land Council, Regional Land Management Officer (proxy for Peter Donohoe)
Vin Lange Centrefarm CEO
Sam Miles Centrefarm Agronomist (proxy for Vin Lange)
Alex Read Arid Lands Environment Centre, Policy Officer
Stuart Smith Department of Primary Industries and Resources, A/Regional Manager
Peter Wood Horticulture, Fortune Agribusiness
Charlie Frith Neutral Junction Station

Members Absent
Mark Parsons Barkly Regional Council

Advisors Present
Sarah Fairhead Regional Director, DENR
Des Yin Foo Senior Manager Water Assessment, DENR
Dale Cobban Manager Water Resource Modelling, DENR

Observers
Liza Schenkel Community Engagement, DENR
Robbie Henderson Water Planner, DENR
Angus Duguid Wetland Scientist, DENR

1. OPENING (Sarah Fairhead)

Meeting opened at 10.10am
Sarah welcomed members attending in person and those by phone. Attendees were then invited to introduce themselves and share their interest in the water resources of the District.
Sarah outlined the plan for the meeting as per the agenda. In addition, flash drives would be provided to everyone at the end of the meeting containing relevant documents for the Committee, for example Terms of Reference, Water Act, Draft Plan, Knapton Report and departmental presentations.

2. **WHAT IS WATER PLANNING**

Sarah provided a short presentation outlining the following:
- Water Allocation Plans – set the rules for how water is shared between environment, cultural and consumptive uses. Remain in force for 10 years, are reviewed at intervals not longer than 5 years, define trading rules and allocate water within the estimated sustainable (or allowable) yield.
- Water Planning Cycle

3. **ROLE OF WATER ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Sarah discussed the Committee’s role as defined in the Water Act and then the functions of the Committee as it relates to their Terms of Reference.

4. **ELECT CHAIR**

Sarah invited Committee members to express interest in taking on the Chair role or if an independent Chair was preferred. A number of members indicated that they preferred the Department investigate getting an independent chair.

**ACTION:** Department to investigate the appointment of an independent Chairperson for the next meeting.

5. **DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS FORM**

Sarah informed the Committee of the conflict of interest form and advised members to consider this when discussing items for future meetings. Remuneration paperwork will be supplied on flash drives to committee members.

6. **SUMMARY OF WAP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS TO DATE**

Sarah provided a short summary of the review process to date:
- Review and consultations commenced in 2016.
- Alignment of the Plan to the NT Planning Framework.
- Realignment of management zones.
- Development of a groundwater model.
- Recognition of groundwater dependant ecosystems in determining the sustainable yield.
- Risk assessment
- Adaptive management approach
- Key research planned for the next 5 years to improve knowledge.

7. Feedback received on draft plan during public consultation
Sarah provided a short summary of the key issues raised by the community to date:
- Calculation of the consumptive pool.
- Staged allocations – very strong support for inclusion of this approach.
- First in first served vs expressions of interest – some support for abolition in favour of an EoI that clearly links water use with socio-economic outcomes for the region.
- NT Water Allocation Framework – strong feedback that the arid zone policy is incompatible with sustainability.
- Sustainable yield – very strong support for the inclusion of recharge with many arguing sustainable yield should be based on recharge, some arguing a combination of recharge and mining with strict conditions to protect environmental and cultural assets.
- Zones for groundwater dependent ecosystems – a requirement to clearly demarcate areas excluded from development.
- Questions about the exclusion of Hanson River Palaeochannel.
- Better recognition of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and involvement of traditional owners in monitoring.
- Inclusion of mining under the NT Water Act
- Prioritisation of public water supply over other beneficial uses
- Clearer monitoring program that assesses drawdown effects.

Committee questions and discussion:
Comment was made by Paul that by applying the NT Planning Framework to the Western Davenport Plan it was now “un-sustainable”.
Vin commented that there was risk with both the first in first served policy and EoI option however the first in first served has not served us well. Given licence applications were going in before the Plan review and the consumptive pool would likely be increased, Paul asked if this would become a legal issue. Both asked ‘how do we deal with this’ to be transparent around the process as everyone needs to know the consumptive pool and have an opportunity to apply for the available water.

Alex raised the un-certainty around climate change and the potential impacts on water availability for the future. The Plan needs to have more information included to deal with this issue.

Stuart asked about the Strategic Water Reserve and what it might look like? Sarah responded that the decision had not been made by Government yet.

8. Presentation: Des Yin Foo, Hydrogeology of the water control district
Des provided an overview of the water resources underlying the Western Davenport Water Control District.
- Provided an update on the Geoscience Australia work in the Region, where some airborne geophysical surveys have been conducted. Preliminary data should be provided to the Department by Christmas. However this will need to
be ground truthed through an on-ground drilling program which will occur in the 2018/19 financial year. The Department is also seeking assistance and advice from Geoscience Australia in relation to GDE mapping.

- Drilling in the 2018/19 financial year will also improve knowledge about the water resource and improve the monitoring bore network throughout the district.
- A regional vegetation mapping survey will be conducted by the Department.

9. PRESENTATION: DALE COBBAN, GROUNDWATER MODELLING

Dale provided a presentation on the groundwater model and groundwater dependent ecosystems of the Western Davenports.

- Understanding the water resource.
- Using the model to run scenarios and predict water use impacts.

Committee questions and discussion:
A number of members requested a copy of Dale’s presentation. Sarah responded that this would be provided on the flash drives provided at the meeting’s conclusion.

Peter W asked about what further work was going on in relation to groundwater dependent ecosystem identification. Dale and Sarah responded that field work had begun to ground truth potential GDEs in the District by Department staff and that the Department were getting specialist advice from Professors Cook and Eamus to guide our future work.

Alex asked how well the GDE’s and cultural sites align. Dale responded that some assessment has been done with by CLC/TOs and the Department.

Sarah advised that there was a reasonable correlation between the two however GDE sites needed to be verified first and the protection of cultural sites not related to GDEs may have a different management approach than those that are. Dale concluded that it was mostly likely that every GDE by default was a cultural site.

Charlie asked about accessing the Departments modelling work so licensees could use to work out the best locations for bore fields or do they meet one on one with the Department? Sarah responded that all the modelling information would be on the flash drives and welcomed members to discuss issues with Des and Dale.

Vin was interested in seeing all the modelled development scenarios and there impacts. Dale responded that there was still a lot of uncertainty and assumptions however once these issues had been finalised (ie. salinity, water quality, sustainable yield, strategic reserve volumes) the various scenarios would be available.

Alex was concerned about how the sustainable yield and water quality interrelate. Vin was comfortable with the methodology used to identify groundwater dependant ecosystems and using the model to predict impacts, he was concerned about current water use in the District or plains area and it increasing significantly.

Sarah commented that a staged allocation approach/policy is a high priority for this group. Peter W commented that it would take a number of years to develop, was supportive of a staged allocation and conditional licensing approach.
Vin wanted more focus on the 40-50km radius around the Wycliffe area where the development hot spot is. Dale advised that if bore fields were spread out more, then the drawdown impacts maybe reduced.

10. **CONFIRM ISSUES/TOPICS FOR NEXT MEETING**
   - A discussion paper will be prepared for the Committee to discuss the Sustainable Yield.
   - Staged allocation draft policy with examples of licence conditions.
   - Expression of Interest vs First in First Served draft policy
   - More information on management of GDE issue
   - Plan objectives - agreed purpose of the Plan and monitoring requirements.
   - Jo Townsend, A/Chief Executive Officer DENR will be attending the next meeting.

11. **CLOSING MATTERS**
    Sarah will contact all stakeholders who made a formal submission on the draft Plan to gain permission to circulate these to all members.
    Vin enquired if the Department would be making public the feedback received during the Strategic Reserve consultations.

    - **NEXT MEETING 26TH OCTOBER 2017**
    - **MEETING CLOSED 2:15PM**