

TI TREE WATER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Ti Tree WAC meeting # 31 of 14/08/06

held 8:40am at the NRETA Conference Room, Alice Springs

Introduction

Chairman Andrew O'Bree opened the meeting and welcomed those attending.

Present: Andrew O'Bree, Peter McKeand, Allan Cooney
NTG Staff: John Childs, Mark Pierson, Geoff Kenna, Daryl King, Dave Maynard
Visitors: Naomi Rea, Lucas Jordon, Linda Wirf, Tony Scrutton, Nathaniel Dixon, Craige Campbell
Apologies: Bob Millington, Neil Feazey, Trevor Sowman, Anthony Knapton

Agenda Item 1 – CDU Visitors (deferred)

Agenda Item 2 - Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of meeting #30 were circulated and are tabled.
- 2.2 Geoff Kenna asked that Agenda Item 4, paragraph 2 be struck from the record as there were no objections or any other matters arising an endorsement motion was put:

Motion

“That the minutes of meeting #30 held at DPIFM Research Station, Ti Tree at 9:30am on 15th May 2006 as amended be endorsed at this meeting”

Moved: Geoff Kenna Seconded: Allan Cooney Carried unanimously

Agenda Item 3 - Advertise EO Position

- 3.1 It was agreed that because of ongoing poor health Bob Millington was about to resign as EO to the Committee and that a replacement should be sought by way of advertising as soon as possible.
- 3.2 The Chairman agreed to ask Bob Millington to provide information on the duties and functions of the position for circulation to committee members so that the job description / expression of interest could be finalised and NRETA agreed to advertise the position in WAC Newsletter, Anmatjere News, Centralian Advocate and Alice Springs News.
- 3.3 The Chairman would be the point of contact for all enquiries in relation to the EO position.
- 3.4 The Chairman handed a letter to the Controller verifying that Executive Officer services had been delivered to a high degree of satisfaction during 2005-06.

Agenda Item 4 - Correspondence

The current correspondence was included in the agenda papers. Important and continuing items are included as individual agenda items. Other business arising from the correspondence:

Agenda Item 1- CDU Visitors (resumed)

Naomi Rea (Charles Darwin University – Anmatjere Cultural Values Project) talked about engaging with the Anmatjere on the implementation of the Ti Tree Water Resource Strategy leading up to the five-year review of the Strategy and inclusion of cultural values.

awareness → skills development → governance → livelihoods

access (e.g. education) → protocols (e.g. interpretation) → livelihoods (e.g. monitoring) → participation (e.g. WAC)

The focus of the presentation was on governance arrangements for water resource management in the Ti Tree region – what are good governance arrangements for Anmatjere representation?

Tony Scrutton asked for formal representation for Anmatjere people on WAC. Lucas Jordon said that traditional owners and managers required representation on the WAC.

The Chairman said that Don Campbell had originally been appointed to the WAC to represent Anmatjere Council which in turn represented Anmatjere people and that Neil Feazey currently occupies that position; Tony agreed that Anmatjere Council also represents Anmatjere people.

Mark Pierson said that the Minister appointed members from representative bodies like Central Land Council, Indigenous Horticulture Association, NT Cattleman’s Association and Anmatjere Council.

Tony said that language is the key and that those representative bodies did not necessarily speak with the people who live in the area. Tony said that “working together” was important and proposed three representatives from the Anmatjere people.

Mark Pierson asked whether a Native Title Representative Body or Prescribed Body Corporate would, in time, come to represent the interests of traditional owners and managers. Lucas Jordon said that those organisations might also come to be represented by non-indigenous managers.

John Childs said that the original intention behind having an Anmatjere Council representative was that it would be someone from the Council Board and not the Chief Executive Officer. The Chairman suggested that the opportunity for Anmatjere representation already exists and that the WAC would welcome an active contribution from a member of the Anmatjere Council Board.

Lucas Jordan suggested that the old system didn’t work and that a new model was needed – more than one representative would mean that one person would not be ‘set up for failure’. Naomi Rea suggested an equitable arrangement with the growers.

The Chairman suggested that Tony start coming to meetings regularly, as an observer or alternate to Neil Feazey to get an understanding of the role played by the WAC so that when Tony was ready Neil could take a step back Tony could step up. Nathaniel and Craige could come along as observers and later, they could possibly be given formalised status equivalent to the departmental representatives.

Geoff Kenna said that it sounded like the Anmatjere were interested in surface water but that the WAC hadn’t really been involved in surface water issues at this stage. John Childs suggested that it would be good if the WAC could take more of an integrated catchment management approach.

Naomi said that the Ti Tree Water Resource Strategy encompasses the entire Water Control District and that the WAC should hold workshops to deal with basin-wide issues like erosion.

Linda Wirf talked about the role of Anmatjere women in water resource management and suggested that “complimentary data” from men’s and women’s research would reveal a different set of cultural values for water in the Ti Tree region.

A short DVD movie was given to the Chairman and an update on the project – Cross-Cultural Governance in Resource Management at Ti Tree. John Childs asked whether a report would be forwarded to the WAC at the end of the project and whether a separate written request would be made for increasing the representation on the WAC.

Tony said that he was pleased to be involved in the project and that he would continue to press for representation on the WAC – through Anmatjere Council in the first instance. Naomi suggested that this arrangement would represent an iterative transition phase and that, through adaptive management, the outcomes could be further developed.

John Childs said that the Northern Territory Government was generally encouraging of greater Anmatjere involvement and that this could be achieved through an informal process in the first instance.

Naomi, Lucas, Linda, Tony, Nathaniel and Craige left the meeting at 10:20am

John Childs sought advice from the WAC on how to proceed with the CDU project. John said that an informal approach to greater Anmatjere involvement would be easy to apply and that a formal approach could also be adopted.

The Chairman said that Don Campbell had attended earlier meetings but that the WAC needed active members.

It was suggested that CDU researchers should be given a copy of the terms of reference for the Ti Tree WAC.

It was agreed to proceed with a formal process of replacing the Anmatjere Council representative on the WAC if and when a written request was received from Anmatjere Council. Meanwhile Tony Scrutton would be invited to attend WAC meetings as an informal observer.

Agenda Item 5 – Calibration of Meters

Mark Pierson reported on the trial of the Prosol Ultrasonic Flowmeter which resulted in +/- 10% in the field (+/- 1.5% in the lab). The results showed that most meters were reporting reasonably accurate results. Some meters were found to be not working at all. The error margin is not sufficiently accurate to put much reliance on the results, in terms of being able to calibrate every meter in Ti Tree to a single standard, so it can only really be used as a guide. More expensive meters may give better results in the field (one being used in Western Australia is rated at +/- 0.5% in the lab). WAC may want to pursue grant opportunities to pay for a more accurate device (which will still only really be useful as a guide).

Allan Cooney said that the NT Agriculture Association had applied to the National Water Commission for a grant to fund something similar.

The Chairman asked if its not all that accurate then is it what we really want – is it worth pursuing grant funding?

Peter McKeand said that, on the whole, meters are reasonably consistent – except for broken meters which we need to keep up with. He said that bores could be pumped and measured (L/s) once a year.

John Childs drew attention to the problem with meters. The Chairman responded by saying that procedures need to be in place to fix broken meters. John said that the National Metering Subcommittee were developing standards at the moment so regulatory framework will be improved after metering standards are in place.

It was suggested that the Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer undertake monitoring as an extension function. Geoff Kenna said that DPIFM were refining irrigation standards. Mark Pierson mentioned that the Department was in the process of recruiting at the T3 level and that there would be other constraints on that position.

The Ti Tree WAC recommends that the Department has an advisory, extension and enforcement presence in the Ti Tree region. The Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer should be responsible for visiting all licensees and, as an initial priority, making an inventory of pipes and meters.

Agenda Item 6 - Chemigation and Fertigation

John Childs gave an update on chemigation/fertigation backflow prevention and protection of groundwater quality. He said that the Department would like to see AS/NZS3500:2004 implemented in the Ti Tree region but that he was also aware that it would be a difficult standard for some to reach in the short term so that transitional (or grandfathering) arrangements were necessary. So unless a HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) system or some other similar risk reduction strategy is in place then AS/NZS3500:2004 will be necessary. The Controller will be writing to all licensees shortly to inform them of the new arrangements. There is a license condition already in place which means that chemigation/fertigation facilities need to be approved by the Controller.

Mark Pierson suggested that the Advisory Officer can assist in identifying the risks but it is the Controller who makes the decision as to what risk reduction measures are necessary in each case.

Peter McKeand said that his farm does have a HACCP as part of its farm management plan but that it really only says “meets license conditions” so it’s a bit of a circular argument. Mark Pierson suggested that standard operating procedures for pollution prevention could be included in the borefield management plan.

The WAC endorsed the approach proposed by the Controller of Water Resources in his letter to this meeting.

Agenda Item 7 – Health of the Basin

Mark Pierson gave a short summary of Anthony Knapton’s report. Main points were that the standing water levels appear to be lower than what the model would predict based on extraction reports (based on meter reading returns). There is a chance that saltier water is being sucked in to the “cone of depression” centred on the Ti Tree Farms area (which results from excessive drawdown) because one sample from a monitoring bore on the southern boundary suggests higher than usual electrical conductivity readings.

Geoff Kenna suggested that the “cone of depression” will only get worse because new plantings are coming on this season after significant pulling of root stock over the past 18 months.

John Childs suggested that we need better water quality monitoring both from NRETA monitoring bores but also from regular returns from growers. Mark Pierson said that he would highlight the relevant section on the standard returns form and send quarterly reminders to growers. He said that the issue could be highlighted in the WAC newsletter.

Geoff Kenna said that DPIFM had conducted regular EC monitoring in the past and had a meter that could be used quarterly if the growers brought their sample bottle to the DPIFM Research Station. It was pointed out that some sort of standard sampling procedure should be used to ensure consistent results across different farms.

Mark Pierson suggested that a shorter “plain English” summary of the annual Health of the Basin report could be presented as a four-page supplement in the WAC newsletter. It was agreed that next year the report would have a greater emphasis on water quality aspects.

Agenda Item 8 – WAC “Update” Newsletter

The Chairman thanked Mark Pierson for his efforts in reinstating the newsletter. There was some discussion about how often it should be produced – it was suggested that it would be produced as often as is necessary but at least once a year so that the Chairman’s Report and the annual crop summaries and water usage graphs could be included. John Childs suggested that it could be put on the NRETA website. The Chairman agreed to provide his annual report as soon as it is written. DPIFM agreed to provide annual crop statistics.

Agenda Item 9 – Other Issues from NRETA

- 9.1 Draft Monitoring Review - remains a work in progress. Recommendations include reducing monitoring requirement for TGG. TTF East was mainly monitoring Departmental bores so don't really need to monitor them. The Department needs to focus on streamlining the monitoring network and identifying new monitoring requirements including a greater emphasis on water quality.
- 9.2 The Controller invited input from the WAC regarding any other monitoring issues that they would like addressed in the short term.
- 9.3 Monthly Bore Returns – The Chairman stated that it was most important for growers to remember to submit monthly returns and that broken meters must be fixed. The WAC asked the Department to pursue outstanding returns vigorously. Mark Pierson said that the Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer will be tasked with sending out reminders. Standing water level and water quality readings are to be taken quarterly. Mark Pierson said that information on when to conduct monitoring would be included in the WAC newsletter.
- 9.4 Possible grant application (\$400,000 - \$500,000) to upgrade infrastructure in Ti Tree Region in line with National Water Commission's *Raising National Water Standards* program objectives. The project would be looking at standardising metering and borehead configuration together with the purchase of an accurate ultrasonic flowmeter and remote telemetry equipment. Letters of support will be required.
- 9.5 The WAC recommend that the Water Resource Planner, with the assistance of committee members, apply for Raising National Water Standards funds to standardise borehead configuration, metering and monitoring, in accordance with draft standards, across the Ti Tree region.
- 9.6 Mark Pierson will draft an application in collaboration with the Regional NRM Facilitator and WAC members, to be signed by the Chairman and endorsed by the Controller of Water Resources (Southern).
- 9.7 Strategic Work Plan – circulated to all members present. Detailed content and timing not discussed – needs feedback from growers to be advised at next WAC.
- 9.8 End of Year Report – WAC needs to provide the Controller with an end-of-financial-year report. Should include letter from Andrew O'Bree, crop areas from DPIFM, Health of the Basin Summary and water usage graphs from NRETA.
- 9.9 Annual Water Usage Graphs – Mark Pierson tabled the overall usage graphs, and distributed individual graphs to those licensees present. Mark Pierson to post out water usage graphs to licensees not in attendance.

Agenda Item 10- DPIF&M Quarterly Update

Geoff Kenna introduced Dave Maynard who will be working on the sustainable horticulture project and is available to help with developing environmental strategies. Dave said that he was currently working with Centrefarm on the Ali Curang project and would be working with AZRI SAT Reuse Scheme. Geoff reported that a new Indigenous (skills-based) apprentice had just started and that a PI would be appointed shortly. New plantings meant that overall crop area was now back up to 2000-01 levels. Bud burst in ti tree had come early because Dormex had been very effective at breaking the dormancy. More conversion of crowns to cones.

Employment and Training of Amajjere workers has been very successful with pruning and plan to move into planting. Geoff said that there were six FTE's and Mark Pierson mentioned that they made the Alice Springs News. Geoff Kenna said he would provide the photograph for inclusion in the WAC newsletter. They had been contracted out as a crew and their output appears to be as good as any over short contract periods providing that there is constant work and variability to help maintain interest.

Ian McLean (Farmbiz) has funding for irrigation scheduling workshops. A crop irrigation workshop could be held in Ti Tree with an external expert to facilitate best practise and minimum water wastage.

Agenda Item 11 - Centrefarm Update

Application to National Water Commission for \$34 million – should know one way or another in October. NT Agricultural association applied for 2 or 3 demonstration sites in Central Australia – possibly Ti Tree/Warrabri.

Warrabri – fencing complete, next stage electricity & Land Council Lease. Domestic bores only at this stage.

New blocks at Ti Tree – support flexible employment program (regional approach). Coordination & Continuity.

Willowra – NT Justice Department diversionary program (training facility) just west of Ti Tree.

Centrefarm is a resource management company not a horticulture company, focussing (in the short term) on predevelopment projects (e.g. NWC funding application for \$34 million).

Peter McKeand wanted to know what was happening at Pine Hill. Allan said they have a grower, an Aboriginal Corporation and a Proprietary Company – all they need is funding and title to be issued. NTG (DIP) may need to provide a road and that is currently being negotiated between Lands Administration and NT Land Corporation.

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday October 19 (tentative) at the DPIFM Research Station (Ti Tree).