

TI TREE WATER ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Minutes of the Ti Tree WAC Meeting # 33 of 15/02/07
Held at the NRETA Conference Room, Alice Springs

Chairman Andrew O'Bree opened the meeting at 1:10pm and welcomed those attending.

Present: Andrew O'Bree, Allan Cooney, Neil Feazey, Garry Dann
Apologies: Peter McKeand, Trevor Sowman, Bob Millington, Geoff Kenna
NTG Staff: John Childs, Matt Darcey, Mark Pierson, Max Rittner, Michelle Walker
Visitors: Tony Scrutton, Nathaniel Dixon, Craige Campbell, Nigel Cook, Mitchell Jones

Agenda Item 1 - Introduction

1.1 Andrew O'Bree acknowledged the Anmatjere Men - Tony, Nathaniel, Craige, Nigel and Mitch from Central Land Council.

Agenda Item 2 - Agenda & Minutes

2.1. Matt Darcey asked that the review of the DPIFM Ti Tree Research Farm be added to the General Business of the meeting – DPIFM is seeking a response from Ti Tree WAC.

2.2. Draft minutes of meeting were circulated prior to the meeting.

Motion

The draft minutes of meeting #32 held at DPIFM Research Farm, Ti Tree, at 9:35am on 2nd November 2006 are endorsed as a true and accurate account of proceedings.

Moved: Neil Feazey Seconded: Andrew O'Bree Carried: unanimously

Agenda Item 3 - Correspondence

3.1. Letter from Charles Darwin University (CDU) (requesting representation of the Anmatyerr people on the TTWAC). Andrew O'Bree asked advice as to what needs to happen for TTWAC membership to be altered. John Childs explained that the TTWAC needs to write a letter to the Controller (preferably) or the Minister requesting additional membership.

John Childs brought up the recent changes involving local government consolidation and asked whether the TTWAC should await final changes to Shire boundaries before making any new membership arrangements. Several comments indicated that the Committee should not wait for the Shire changes.

Neil Feazey discussed his resignation and indicated his replacement would require a nomination from Anmatjere Council. The TTWAC will await the outcome of Anmatjere Council meeting regarding Neil's replacement.

Action: *Nominate an Anmatjere Council representative to replace Neil Feazey on the TTWAC.*

Responsible Person: *Neil Feazey (TTWAC Anmatjere Council representative)*

Support Person: *Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)*

Andrew O'Bree said that he would respond formally to CDU regarding the letter with advice from John Childs and Mark Pierson.

Action: *Prepare a response to the CDU letter from the Ti Tree Water Advisory Committee.*

Responsible Person: *Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)*

Support Person: *John Childs (NRETA Controller of Water Resources)*

There was a general consensus that the Committee should remain small in size with representative (rather than individual) members. John Childs indicated that business of the meeting is open and that members of the public are welcome to attend meetings.

3.2. Mark Pierson outlined the negative response received from the National Water Commission in relation to the \$420,000 grant application. Mark said that this would mean some changes regarding the Review of the Ti Tree Region Water Resource Strategy as there will probably be fewer resources available to conduct a comprehensive review.

3.3. NTHA Best Practice for Sustainable Land Use Guidelines were circulated prior to the meeting.

Motion:

Correspondence for TTWAC meeting #33, as tabled, is accepted.

Moved: Garry Dann

Seconded: Alan Cooney

Carried: unanimously

Agenda Item 4 - NRETA Update

4.1. NRETA quarterly update from John Childs was circulated prior to the meeting. John introduced Michelle Walker, the new NRETA Water Conservation Officer.

4.2. John Childs explained that the Executive Officer position has traditionally been contracted through the NT Table Grape Producers Association Inc. (NTTGPA), however there is no one interested at present. John asked the WAC whether it would be possible to determine whether or not the NTTGPA want to retain this function of providing EO services to the Ti Tree WAC. Andrew O’Bree agreed to propose the continuance of the existing contractual arrangements at the next meeting of NTTGPA, assuming NTTGPA could find someone to fill the position.

Andrew O’Bree enquired as to whether the Anmatjere Council was in a position to provide an EO to the WAC however Neil Feazey indicated that they currently do not have the capacity for this to happen.

Action: Report on NTTGPA ability to provide Executive Officer services to the TTWAC.

Responsible Person: Andrew O’Bree (Central Zone Grower/NTTGPA member)

Support Person: Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

4.3. John Childs indicated that NRETA would take on board National Standards for Metering currently being developed, rather than inventing separate NT standards, however, metering calibration and the development of testing procedures would continue through the Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer.

Max Rittner delivered a short report on pipes and meters in the Ti Tree Water Control District. John Childs indicated that there are some licence requirements farmers and growers may have forgotten, for instance capping disused bores, chemical handling procedures around bores and positioning of sand filters. He enquired as to whether it would be useful to include this information in the Borefield Operational Plan. Andrew O’Bree agreed that this would be useful, particularly for new growers coming into the area.

Action: Prepare guidelines and fact sheets for inclusion in borefield operational plans.

Responsible Person: Max Rittner (Water Regulatory and Advisory Officer)

Support Person: Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

Matt Darcey asked whose responsibility it is to replace broken meters. John Childs indicated that it is the licence holder's responsibility and that the Department does not recommend any particular brand of meter, rather the licence says that the meters used should be to a standard that satisfies the Controller, meaning appropriate equipment is used and good procedures are in place. John indicated it is also important to recognise there will be costs associated with implementing the new National Standards for metering.

Matt Darcey asked whether or not the approach to growers is too 'soft', and that it may be more beneficial to the industry to take a stronger approach when enforcing the rules and regulations. Mark Pierson indicated that there were some general issues affecting the horticultural industry in the region and that they would be worked through in conjunction with the TTWAC. Andrew O'Bree explained that the TTWAC is only in a position to recommend options, whereas it is NRETA's role to regulate. Matt asked about more specific problems and specific actions. Mark said that there are some problems that need to be addressed; however these would need to be worked through on a case-by-case basis with the growers concerned.

Action: *Follow-up on specific issues arising from the Ti Tree Water Control District Borehead Infrastructure Survey.*

Responsible Person: *Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)*

Support Person: *Max Rittner (Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer)*

4.4. Andrew O'Bree asked whether, in addition to requiring compliance with AS/NZS3500.1 for change of ownership and/or licence renewals, that this also be a requirement on all new bores.

Action: *Identify new groundwater extraction licences, licence transfers and licence renewals requiring compliance with AS/NZS3500.1 as a standard condition.*

Responsible Person: *John Childs (NRETA Controller of Water Resources)*

Support Person: *Max Rittner (NRETA Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer)*

Andrew O'Bree enquired as to whether there is a strategy to deal with pollution spills in the Ti Tree region. John Childs indicated that there is not a strategy specific to Ti Tree however the general Emergency Response Plan would be implemented in the case of a pollution event. Neil Feazey indicated there is a Counter Disaster Plan (CDP) that applies to Ti Tree. John asked whether it is worth looking at strategies contained with the CDP relevant to chemical spills near aquifers. Neil Feazey will follow up on this within the Counter Disaster Committee.

Action: *Examine the Counter Disaster Plan highlighting specific risks associated with chemical spills near aquifers.*

Responsible Person: *Neil Feazey (Anmatjere Council)*

Support Person: *John Childs (Controller of Water Resources)*

Mark Pierson explained that Bob Millington wanted to draw up a Risk Management Plan for the entire Ti Tree Basin. There is possible scope for a Risk Analysis as part of the review of the Strategy and this may start by looking at potential hazards on farms. Mark indicated that if grant opportunities arise the WAC could look at including some sort of risk analysis in the Strategy review process.

Action: *Pursue grant funding opportunities for risk analysis to be incorporated into the Review of the Ti Tree Basin Water Resource Strategy.*

Responsible Person: *Mark Pierson (Water Resource Planner)*

Support Person: *Michelle Rodrigo (NRM Regional Facilitator)*

Matt Darcey discussed Freshcare accreditation; a market driven Food Safety Management System (FSMS) that applies to anyone who supplies fruit or vegetables to retailers. It relates to things such as the storage of chemicals and is important in maintaining the health standards of fresh foods. Matt expressed concern that some growers may not be following FSMSs. Andrew O'Bree explained that there are varying levels of accreditation, with Woolworths requiring the highest standard of its producers.

Mark Pierson said that Environmental Management Systems offered a better level of protection against environmental risks. Matt Darcey said that EMSs are not standard practise at present and there could be some resistance to implementing the NTHA guidelines. Mark Pierson indicated that now is probably a good time to start looking at developing Environmental Management Systems as the entire industry appears to be moving in that direction and it would help with things like pollution prevention.

John Childs indicated that Bob Millington wanted to find out who derives drinking water from which bores and that he would like to see a survey undertaken.

Action: *Identify which bores are used for drinking water supply.*

Responsible Person: *Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)*

Support Person: *Max Rittner (Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer)*

4.6. Chairman's report included in TTWAC 2005/06 newsletter. Crop area statistics not included in the annual report. Matt Darcey said that, in the past, information on crop areas was collected by Bob Millington and distributed to DPIFM. John Childs said that crop area information is required by the Controller under licence. Mark Pierson said that it was the Water Management Branch's responsibility to follow-up with individual growers.

Action: *Write to all growers asking for information in relation to crop type and area under planting in 2006-07.*

Responsible Person: *Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)*

Support Person: *Max Rittner (Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer)*

Alan Cooney enquired about adding people to the WAC newsletter mailing list for wider distribution. Please forward any additions to the TTWAC newsletter mailing list to Michelle Walker at MichelleL.Walker@nt.gov.au

Action: *Broaden newsletter distribution to include all stakeholders (not just TTWAC members) and put the newsletter on the NRETA website.*

Responsible Person: *Michelle Walker (Water Conservation Officer)*

Support Person: *Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)*

4.7. Monthly production bores returns – WAC EO to send out monthly reminders.

Action: *Send out reminders to growers to record monthly pumpage, quarterly standing water levels and quarterly water quality data.*

Responsible Person: *Max Rittner (Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer)*

Support Person: *Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)*

4.8. NRETA Land & Water Division had not finalised the report on the review of monitoring in the Ti Tree Basin. Mark Pierson asked if he could invite Ian Lancaster (Director – Water Management Branch) and Peter Jolly (Principle Engineer - NRETA Land & Water Division) to the next meeting of the TTWAC in May. There was general agreement amongst the Committee (see Item 5 – below).

Action: Invite Ian Lancaster and Peter Jolly to the next meeting of the TTWAC.

Responsible Person: Mark Pierson (Water Resource Planner)

Support Person: John Childs (NRETA Controller of Water Resources)

4.9. John Childs talked about notifying stakeholders before any consultation on the Review of the Water Resource Strategy and asked Mark Pierson if there was to be any consultation prior to the next meeting of the TTWAC. Mark said that the TTWAC Chairman had been invited to visit Anmatjere Country, including water holes and other areas of cultural significance. Mark sought approval to liaise with CDU and/or Anmatjere Council. The field trip would provide input into the review of the Strategy and has already been approved by Ian Lancaster, Director Water Management Branch, who would also like to attend, along with John Childs. NRETA will seek expressions of interest from members of the TTWAC and it was agreed by the group to invite relevant pastoralists to join the group whilst on their properties.

Action: Coordinate arrangements for tour of Anmatjere Country, including participation by Anmatjere people.

Responsible Person: Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

Support Person(s): Tony Scrutton, CDU Project Team, Max Rittner

Action: Seek expressions of interest from the TTWAC members to tour Anmatjere Country.

Responsible Person: Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

Support Person: Andrew O'Bree (Central Zone Grower/NTTGPA Member)

Action: Inform pastoralists that the TTWAC plans to enter pastoral land on a tour of Anmatjere Country and invite them to join the group whilst on their properties.

Responsible Person: Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

Support Person: Garry Dann (TTWAC NTCA Representative)

4.10. End-of-year reporting – TTWAC 2005/06 Newsletter to be posted on the NRETA website to fulfil public reporting requirements.

Agenda Item 5 - Review of monitoring requirements

5.1. NRETA Land & Water Division technical report not circulated for discussion (see Item 4 - above).

John Childs and Mark Pierson discussed quarterly water quality (electrical conductivity) monitoring. This can be undertaken at NRETA (Alice Springs) or at the DIPFM Research Farm at Ti Tree (with a meter donated by the Water Management Branch). Mark suggested that readings could be taken at quarterly WAC meetings, however not all growers attend meetings. Matt Darcey asked whether or not this monitoring was stipulated in the grower's groundwater licence. John Childs suggested that it is not stipulated in the licence but it is in the Ti Tree Water Resource Strategy (2002) Implementation Plan. Matt Darcey indicated he would follow up on procedures at the Research Farm for helping grower's to take these measurements.

Action: Identify options to assist growers measure water quality from production bores at Ti Tree.

Responsible Person: Matt Darcey (DPIFM Director Crops Forestry and Horticulture)

Support Person: Max Rittner (NRETA Water Advisory and Regulatory Officer)

Agenda Item 6 - Water Use Graphs

6.1. Summary graphs were distributed at the meeting. Individual farm water usage graphs will be distributed to growers not attending the meeting.

Agenda Item 7 - Borehead Infrastructure Report

7.1. NRETA Fieldwork Summary Report was circulated for discussion (see Item 4 – above).

Agenda Item 8 - Implementation of the Strategic Workplan

8.1. Review of the Ti Tree Basin Water Resource Strategy – Status Report circulated at last meeting. Draft Workplan for 2007-08 distributed prior to last meeting.

Agenda Item 9 - DPIF&M quarterly Update

9.1. Matt Darcey said that DIPFM is conducting a review of all research farms, including the Ti Tree Research station. Some people may assume that this means that the station will close but this is not necessarily the case. DIPFM are investigating whether or not they are getting good returns for their investment in the station. They are committed to Best Practice for such stations, and asked for input from the TTWAC regarding the usefulness of the station.

Allan Cooney (Centrefarm) said that Centrefarm plan to use the site as a training centre (conducting training in a similar format as the CLC training for the mining industry), for what is essentially a pre-employment program. Allan sees the site as a regional resource. He has also had several enquiries over the past several months regarding the use of the Station, indicating there may be an increased need for it in the future.

Neil Feazey (Anmatjere Council) said that Anmatjere people participate in horticultural training at the Research Farm. This training is limited and moving slowly, but it is still important.

Andrew O’Bree: On behalf of the TTWAC said that there is a need for training programs on water quality testing, water quality required for growing, the importance of looking after water resources, etc... The Research Farm is an appropriate venue to conduct such training.

Matt Darcey asked whether or not such training could be conducted elsewhere.

Mark Pierson indicated that, from an NRETA perspective, it is good that the NT government has a base in Ti Tree. The Research Farm is central, a good venue for TTWAC meetings and he would like to use it for workshops associated with the review of the Ti Tree Basin Water Resource Strategy.

Matt Darcey will write to all stakeholders seeking more feedback on the Ti Tree Research Farm.

Action: Write to all stakeholders seeking feedback on the future of the Ti Tree Research Farm.

Responsible Person: Matt Darcey (DPIFM Director Crops Forestry and Horticulture)

Support Person: Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

Matt Darcey announced that the new Chairman of the Horticultural Partnership Group is Peter Dallas.

Agenda Item 10 - Centrefarm Quarterly Update.

10.1. Allan Cooney announced that Centrefarm had recently added three new members to their board; Peter McBride a dairy farmer and orchardist originally from New Zealand and Director of Zespri Ltd; Damien Frawley Managing Director and Head of Distribution for BlackRock Investment Management (Australia), and Vin Lange who, until recently had been involved with the Horticultural Partnership Group. These members were added in anticipation of receiving funding from the National Water Commission however the application has not been approved yet

Centrefarm is waiting on the Commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Affairs to sign off on new lease arrangements on Warrabri Aboriginal Land Trust with five more leases pending in the Ti Tree area.

Centrefarm has also reapplied for funding from the Indigenous Coordination Centre to expand their operation in 2007-08.

Agenda Item 11 – General Business

11.1 Andrew O’Bree mentioned that Jabiru Grape Farm had been sold to Oolloo Farm Management Pty Ltd. and that Oolloo intend to grow mangoes and melons.

11.2 Mark Pierson highlighted the interest that some growers had shown in attending workshops on irrigation efficiency. Mark has been talking with Charles Darwin University and the Irrigation Association of Australia with a view to conducting some training in August or September in conjunction with the Strategy review.

Action: Continue to pursue training opportunities for growers where possible.

Responsible Person: Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

Support Person(s): Geoff Kenna (DPIFM Horticultural Officer)

11.3 Mark Pierson discussed possible funding opportunities for the TTWAC including; Envirofund, although this does not fit well with the TTWAC goals; NHT which will depend on what the INRM Board wants to fund in its Regional Investment Strategy 2007-10 (NHT applications will be opening in April 2007 for funding in 2007-08); and the National Landcare Program, open for the next 1 - 2 weeks, however NLP grants are not available to government agencies. Andrew O’Bree agreed to put forward the option of NLP grant funding to the NTTGPA.

Action: Continue to pursue grant funding opportunities where possible

Responsible Person: Mark Pierson (NRETA Water Resource Planner)

Support Person(s): Andrew O’Bree (Central Zone Grower/NTTGPA member)

11.4 John Childs indicated that he would endeavour to talk to the new owners of Jabiru Grape Farm before the next meeting of the TTWAC and ensure that any licence issued contains a requirement to adopt the appropriate current standards for backflow prevention as outlined in AS/NZS3500.1:2003.

Action: Introduce the new owners of Jabiru Grape Farm to the TTWAC.

Responsible Person: Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

Support Person: John Childs (NRETA Controller of Water Resources)

Andrew O’Bree asked about the TTWAC Terms of Reference and protocols for electing a new Chairman. John Childs indicated that replacement of a member requires Ministerial approval, whereas replacement of a Chairperson only requires WAC approval. John suggested that he may consider calling for expressions of interest from the broader community to fill the vacant membership position, as there is currently a lack of interest within the growers group. Mark Pierson suggested that the Chairperson and Executive Officer positions could be advertised together.

Andrew O’Bree agreed to talk to the NTTGPA regarding whether or not the new Chairperson should be a grower.

Action: Ask NTTGPA about possible changes to the TTWAC Terms of Reference

Responsible Person: Andrew O’Bree (Central Zone Grower/NTTGPA member)

Support Person(s): Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

11.5 Mark Pierson agreed to review the Terms of Reference in time for the next meeting and make one set of recommendations to the Minister after all of the pending membership changes had been confirmed (Central Zone Grower, Central Land Council and Anmatjere Council representative).

Action: Review the Ti Tree Water Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

Responsible Person: Mark Pierson (TTWAC Acting Executive Officer)

Support Person(s): Andrew O'Bree (Central Zone Grower/NTTGPA member)

11.6 Neil Feazey tabled his resignation from the TTWAC. Andrew O'Bree thanked Neil for his commitment to the TTWAC which has been greatly appreciated.

11.7 Andrew O'Bree tabled his letter of resignation and expressed thanks to John Childs and Mark Pierson for their knowledge and assistance with the TTWAC, and to Bob Millington for all his years of hard work.

11.8 John Childs extended a vote of thanks towards Andrew O'Bree and Neil Feazey for their time spent on the TTWAC and the useful roles they provided.

Close of Meeting: 3:00pm

Next meeting: 9:30am Thursday 3rd May 2007 @ DPIFM Research Farm – Ti Tree Farm