Ooloo Water Advisory Committee  
*Meeting Record 5*

24 February 2017 – 9.30am  
*Conference Room, 32 Giles Street, Katherine*

**Members Present**
- John Childs  
  Chair
- Peter Rix  
  Proxy for Malcom Baker  
  TFS Corporation, Water Extraction Licence Holder
- Sam McBean  
  NT Cattleman’s Association representative, Water Extraction Licence Holder
- Warren de With  
  AFANT Representative
- Rob Lindsay  
  Maddaingya Malak Malak Ranger Program Representative
- Kate Peake  
  Regional Development Australia Northern Territory
- Alison King  
  Aquatic Ecologist
- Dick Perry  
  Community Member, Water Extraction Licence Holder
- Phil Howie  
  Community Member, Water Extraction Licence holder  
  until 10:30 am
- Peter Marks  
  Horticulturist, Water Extraction Licence holder – present

**Members Absent**
- Eddie Webber  
  Community Member
- Simon Smith  
  NT Farmers Association representative
- Lorrae McArthur  
  Northern Land Council
- Mona Liddy  
  Traditional Owner
- Malcom Baker  
  TFS Corporation, Water Extraction Licence Holder  
  Andrew O’Bree present as proxy

**Advisors Present**
- Gabby Yates  
  Water Planner, DENR

**Observers**
- Jolene Challis  
  Minutes, DENR
1. OPENING

Meeting opened at 9.30am

1.1. Apologies

Trish Rigby Northern Land Council representative, proxy for Lorrae Macarthur
Mona Liddy Traditional Owner
Malcom Baker TFS Corporation, Water Extraction Licence Holder
Andrew O’Bree present as proxy
Simon Smith NT Farmers Association Representative

It was noted that there were no Traditional Owner representatives present at the meeting. The Chair and Gabby Yates will ensure that their views on the content presented at the meeting are sought.

1.2. Introduction from the Chair

The Chair thanked everyone for attending. To date, we have spent time getting to know the situation, information and one another. We will now be working on items to go in the Plan. Discussion topics today relate to sections of the Plan.

Peter Rix was introduced as now being the representative for TFS.

❖ **ACTION:** Gabby Yates will check whether and how Peter Rix should be appointed as the new member instead of Malcom Baker.

Committee was invited to provide any suggestions for engagement with stakeholder groups. Suggestions included:

- Holding a future committee meeting in Douglas-Daly
- Information Session prior to releasing the Plan for public comment - Invite growers from Katherine and Douglas-Daly
- Noted that each Committee member should be talking to their community throughout the planning process
- Media Release to update people on progress

❖ **ACTION:** Gabby Yates will draft up a list of proposed engagement activities with suggested content and dates, for the Committee’s consideration.

2. MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee agreed the Minutes of Meeting 4 were a true and correct record.

2.1. Action Items from previous meeting

The Chair met with Emma Young, the Minister’s Environmental Advisor to brief the advisor on the progress of the Plan. It is planned that the Minister will attend the
meeting of the Ooloo Water Advisory Committee scheduled for late May. We hope to have a draft Plan prepared by this meeting.

❖ **ACTION:** Chair to invite Minister to attend meeting in May.

❖ **ACTION:** John Childs will follow up on whether there is a review/summary paper about the findings of 10 years of fish and flows project.

Ongoing.

3. **Draft Plan Section Discussion Item – Summary of the Water Resource and the Consumptive Pool**

   (Gabby Yates)

Members were provided drafted sections of the Plan covering:

- Environmental Water Requirements
- Cultural Water Requirements
- Groundwater Management Zones
- Protecting groundwater discharge zones and springs
- Sustainable Yield
- Consumptive Pool

Questions and Discussion:

**General comments**

- It was agreed that issues of general importance will be discussed at the meeting, however, Committee members should speak with Gabby Yates about editorial comments.

**Environmental Water Requirements**

- Alison King suggested that the description of Environmental Values could be more comprehensive and volunteered to work with Gabby Yates to improve the drafting of the relevant Plan section.
- There was discussion about the Plan only covering the groundwater resources of the Ooloo Dolostone Aquifer and not surface water in the Daly River. It was noted that many different groups have recommended more integrated catchment water planning in this region during previous planning. Water resource assessment activities have considered the catchment as an integrated whole and any management rules will reflect the dependencies of water availability throughout the catchment. It is a big catchment. Water extractions and irrigated agricultural development is generally clustered in the Tindall Limestone Aquifer, Katherine and the Ooloo Dolostone Aquifer. At this stage we are working with separate planning areas that reflect the historically established hubs of water dependent developments. However in the future, an integrated Planning approach for the Daly River catchment could be considered.
- A Committee Member suggested that this is a message that the Ooloo Water Advisory Committee agrees on and conveys to the Minister.
• It was noted that the Oolloo Water Allocation Plan will focus on dry season flows in the Daly River because this is when groundwater extractions have the potential to cause significant changes in river flows. The potential for conjunctive water usage such as wet season harvesting and off-stream storage to change flows in the river may have very different timing and duration effects on water flows within the catchment which could require different management rules, e.g. ensuring that peak flows remain sufficient for billabongs and wetlands to fill.
• Committee members made suggestions to improve the map in the surface water – groundwater interactions section
• Committee members suggested further info on surface water flows required in the Plan including measured and modelled stream flow information.

❖ ACTION: Gabby Yates to follow up with Alison King re. drafting environmental values.
❖ ACTION: Gabby Yates sends the Committee a copy of the catchment health and the springs assessment report referenced by the Plan.

Cultural Values
• Discussion about Indigenous cultural water requirements were held over until the next meeting because no Traditional Owners were present.
• Committee members suggested approaching NT Tourism for up to date information about tourism value
• Warren De With noted the recreational fishers survey done a couple of years ago and will try to provide a copy to Gabby Yates.
• One member suggested that lifestyle values be described separately from tourism and recreational values.

Groundwater Management Zones
• Committee members would like more information about groundwater management zones. This section should potentially be moved elsewhere in the document.

❖ ACTION: Gabby Yates to provide more information about Groundwater Management Zones

Buffers
• Spring discharge buffers discussed as a means to protect local scale environmental and cultural assets (as opposed to the regional scale environmental protections provided by the Daly flow requirements). Committee requires further information.
• Committee would like to see a map of the stock and domestic bores in the Oolloo Dolostone Aquifer

❖ ACTION: Gabby Yates to liaise with Steve Tickell to prepare further information about buffers

Sustainable Yield
Definition: The volume of groundwater that can be extracted from an aquifer on a sustained basis without impairing water quality or causing environmental damage.
• Members agreed that using the longest period of streamflow record available for Dorisvale Crossing and Mount Nancar should define the period used to characterise the Sustainable Yield (1967 to current)
• Members recommended that all available data should be used into the future, i.e. not a moving 30 or 50 year window so that the Plan recognises variability in the climate and in the estimates of sustainable yield.

Consumptive Pool

Definition: The volume of water available for allocation to consumptive beneficial uses after considering the water requirements of the environment.

• The Committee identified 3 options for setting the volume of the Consumptive Pool:
  1. Find the average of the Sustainable Yield for 100 years calculated from modelled data alone, noting that there are low flow model calibration concerns at Dorisvale Crossing that could cause an overestimation of the Sustainable Yield calculated from modelled data alone.
  2. Find the average Sustainable Yield taken over the period for which there is adequate stream flow gauging data that can be used in the assessment of Sustainable Yield (1967 to 2015). This method uses a combination of modelled and measured data.
  3. Find the average Sustainable Yield taken over the most recent 30 year period. This method uses a combination of modelled and measured data.

• The Committee recommended that the Consumptive Pool should be defined as the average Sustainable Yield taken over the period for which there is adequate stream flow gauging data that can be used in the assessment of Sustainable Yield. For this Plan the period is 1967 to 2015. This approach ensures that the longest period of continuously measured streamflow data is used in the assessment, capturing more climate variability than if the last 30 years was used. And, it is ensured that there is confidence in the way the model data is used.

• The Committee noted that while they are recommending a fixed volume for the Consumptive Pool, the volume of water that can be extracted by licence holders will vary from year to year. This is because the Plan allocates water to the environment as a matter of priority. In some years, the volume of water that is available for consumptive use, determined after the needs of the environment have been met, will be less than the volume of the Consumptive Pool. The volume of water that can be extracted by licence holders each year will be set by an annual announced allocation. The likelihood of a water entitlement being subject to a less than 100% announced allocation is expressed by a number referred to as ‘Reliability’.

• This means that the risk associated with variability in the Sustainable Yield (the volume of groundwater that can be extracted from an aquifer without impairing water quality or causing environmental damage) is borne by licence holders rather than the environment.

Reliability

• Committee recommended that the Plan should include reliability values for each water allocation Security Level for each Groundwater Management
Zone based on the period used to estimate the average sustainable yield. For this Plan the period is 1967 to 2015.

- Committee noted that Reliability is one piece of information that the Plan provides so that licence holders can understand the level of risk associated with their water entitlement. The Plan sets out estimates of reliability and licence holders manage their water entitlements as they see fit, knowing that in some years, their entitlements may be reduced. Reliability will be one piece of information amongst many different pieces of information that are used by producers to make decisions about their farm plan.
- One Committee member commented that further economic analysis work to estimate the risk appetite for various types of producers is required to set minimum reliabilities. Committee members commented that this might be important future work. The Committee recommended that minimum reliabilities not be included in the Plan.

4. **DRAFT PLAN SECTION DISCUSSION ITEM – CURRENT AND FUTURE WATER REQUIREMENTS**
   (Gabby Yates)

Members were provided with drafted sections of the Plan covering:

- Current Water Requirements
- Future Water Requirements

Questions and Discussion:

- Committee generally thought that the information was accurate and complete
- Committee recommended some editorial changes to improve communication
- Committee recommended a section on current and future mining and petroleum water requirements should be included

5. **DRAFT PLAN SECTION DISCUSSION ITEM – WATER ALLOCATION RELIABILITY OBJECTIVES**
   (Gabby Yates)

Discussion about what information the Plan should include regarding water allocation reliability.

6. **DRAFT FUTURE WORK RECOMMENDATIONS – NEW STANDING ITEM**
   (Gabby Yates)

A new standing item has been created to capture ideas about any future work that is required to improve water resource management in the Ooloo Dolostone Aquifer and the Daly River catchment more broadly. A table of ideas will be built upon over the next meetings and will be considered when finalising any recommendations for future work. This will feed into sections of the Plan such as:

- Section 6.2 – Risk and uncertainty
- Section 7.3 – Risk Identification and Mitigation Strategies
- Section 8 – Plan implementation, monitoring and review
Identifying and undertaking future work and linking it into the planning framework is important so that management of the water resource can be adaptive to new knowledge.

### Recommended Future Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Updating knowledge about stock and domestic water use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updating knowledge about crop water use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Water Requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daly Model update</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Climate – estimating changes to rainfall, runoff, recharge and groundwater discharge in the Daly Catchment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic analysis work to estimate the risk appetite for water availability for various types of producers (reliability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards more integrated catchment water allocation planning for the Daly catchment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. **DISTRIBUTION OF STRATEGIC INDIGENOUS RESERVE POLICY DISCUSSION PAPER** (Gabby Yates)

The Department has been developing a Strategic Indigenous Reserve Policy. A policy discussion paper, *which has been approved by the Minister*, was distributed at the meeting and emailed out to all committee members following the meeting. The Department would like to receive feedback on the policy discussion paper and this will be considered in drafting the final SIR Policy. The Department has written to all WAC chairpersons to request that each Water Advisory Committee considers the discussion paper and is encouraged to provide feedback *by 13 April*.

This will be a key agenda item at our next meeting in March.

8. **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be in March, with the date to be advised.

The Committee would like an update about the progress of the repeal of the exemptions for mining and petroleum activities from licence requirements under the Water Act. *Repealing the exemptions is a significant task which will take time as it involves several government departments and will change the responsibilities and functions of various business units within the Departments. Work on the repeal of these exemptions is on-going.*

Members also asked for clarification on other exemptions applying to water extractions and licencing requirements in the Katherine region. The relevant exemptions will be provided to the Committee at the next meeting.

Meeting Closed 3.30pm