



MEETING MINUTES

Committee name	Stakeholder Advisory Forum
Date and time	Monday 13 October 2025, 9.30am-12noon
Location	Hunter Water's Honeysuckle Office (36 Honeysuckle Drive, Newcastle West)

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cr Brian Adamthwaite	Lake Macquarie City Council (Chair)
Ms Sue Johns	National Seniors Association
Cr Deahnna Richardson	City of Newcastle
Cr Mark Mason	Cessnock City Council
Cr Warrick Penfold	Maitland City Council
Cr Michael Dowling	Dungog Shire Council
Cr Peter Francis	Port Stephens Council
Dr Craig Evans	The University of Newcastle
Mr Douglas McCloskey	Public Interest Advocacy Centre
Mr Geoff Capelin	Hunter Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service
Mr Bob Doyle	
Ms Rosa Krillic	Energy and Water Ombudsman of NSW (EWON)
Mr Boris Novak	HunterNet
Ms Elizabeth York	Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) NSW

APOLOGIES

Ms Nicole Grgas	Hunter Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service
Ms Amy De Lore	Business Hunter
Mr Cameron Archer	Paterson Historical Society
Mr Lindsay Hardy	Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Darren Cleary	Managing Director
Mr Declan Clausen	Group Manager Strategy & External Affairs
Ms Jennifer Hayes	Incoming A/ CEO
Ms Laura Boland	Stakeholder and Government Relations Advisor (CCAG Secretary)
Mr Josh Isben	Sydney Water (observer)

WELCOME

The Chair opened the meeting at 9.30 am and provided an Acknowledgment of Country.

Apologies were received and noted.

Members introduced themselves and their interest in being part of the SAF.

OVERVIEW OF AGENDA AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

During the meeting, Mr Doyle raised the following potential conflicts of interest:

- Mr Doyle's son is indirectly engaged by Hunter Water in the management and land application of biosolids.
- Mr Doyle had previous involvement in the establishment of the Clarence Town and Karuah effluent reuse schemes, and
- Mr Doyle is directly engaged as part of the Four Valleys program run by Local Land Services and partially funded by Hunter Water.
- Mr Doyle is also a significant water licence holder on the Paterson Regulated River and so impacted by the proposed Lostock-Glennies Pipeline. He has declared his support for the Pipeline Project.

The Committee agreed to note these potential conflicts, and record them in the minutes.

HUNTER WATER OPERATIONAL UPDATE

- **Darren Cleary – Managing Director**

Welcome to new members

Mr Cleary introduced the SAF. The purpose and objectives of the Stakeholder Advisory Forum (SAF) were noted, and members were encouraged to raise questions and suggest future topics for discussion.

To welcome new members and provide context, Mr Cleary delivered an overview of Hunter Water's role and the services it provides to the community. These include the delivery of drinking water, wastewater, recycled water, development services, and some stormwater management.

Mr Cleary advised that water storages are currently in a healthy state, supported by significant rainfall across the region in recent months.

He also outlined several key challenges Hunter Water is currently addressing, including:

- delivering on customer outcomes as part of the 2025–2030 Pricing Proposal
- supporting regional growth
- maintaining and renewing ageing infrastructure, including managing water leaks, sewer breaks, and unplanned service interruptions
- addressing water security risks through the delivery of the Belmont Desalination Plant
- reducing leakage and promoting water conservation
- improving dam safety at Chichester and Grahamstown Dams.

Operational Updates

Mr Cleary provided updates on recent developments:

- Appointment of Ms Elizabeth Crouch AM as Hunter Water's new Chair.
 - Departure of Mr Darren Cleary as Managing Director, following his appointment as Managing Director of Sydney Water. The SAF was introduced to the incoming Acting CEO, Ms Jennifer Hayes, who participated in the meeting
 - Detection of blue-green algae in raw, untreated water in parts of Grahamstown Dam, and Hunter Water's response.
 - Ongoing community engagement regarding emergency preparedness for Chichester Dam.
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- Implementation of updated Australian Drinking Water Guidelines for PFAS (effective June 2025). Mr Cleary confirmed that Hunter Water's testing program verifies the safety and compliance of drinking water with the revised standards.
- Completion of stormwater upgrades in Waratah, Mayfield, and Georgetown. Mr Cleary expressed appreciation to the community for their patience during these works. Works in Station Street, Waratah, are now commencing.
- Early testing results of swimming water quality monitoring in Throsby Creek indicate highly variable water quality. Consistent with long-standing advice, the community is encouraged to exercise caution when swimming or recreating in urban waterways. Further results will be shared as the program progresses into 2026.

Discussion:

Following the presentation, members asked questions of Mr Cleary, which were addressed during the meeting.

Questions and responses are summarised below. Where useful, additional information has been included in these minutes to provide further context and clarity.

Use of Wastewater for Research

Q: Members asked if HMRI or other researchers could use markers found in sewer waste, such as those used to detect COVID-19 during the pandemic.

A: Hunter Water is open to collaboration, and presently participates in a range of public health monitoring programs. Typically, these are led by NSW Health and Hunter Water facilitates access to its treatment facilities to enable samples to be collected. Wastewater is a valuable resource, and we are happy to provide access to researchers interested in using it for scientific or public health purposes.

Indigenous Land Rights claim at Birubi Beach

Q: Members asked whether the recent Worimi Land Council land rights claim of land near Birubi Beach includes water rights, and if this could impact Hunter Water's access to water storages at Tomago or Anna Bay sand beds.

A: During the meeting, Hunter Water took this question on notice, and indicated that at the time we did not believe there are any impacts on Hunter Water's operations.

Since the meeting, a further review has been undertaken. Based on our understanding of the circumstances, the recent land rights claim by the Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council does not include water rights and is unlikely to affect Hunter Water's access to water storages at Tomago or Anna Bay.

The NSW Government recently granted the Worimi LALC ownership of over 12 hectares of Crown land near Birubi Beach, including sand dunes and urban bushland. These claims were made under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*, which allows Aboriginal Land Councils to claim Crown land that is not lawfully used or needed for public purposes. Water rights are not automatically included in land claims under this Act.

Water access in NSW is governed separately under the *Water Management Act 2000*. Hunter Water's access to water storages at Tomago and Anna Bay is regulated through water licences and infrastructure agreements, which remain unaffected by the land claim.

Lower Hunter Water Security Plan

Q: Members asked whether Hunter Water plans to update the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan to include additional water security options, such as constructing or re-visiting Tillegra Dam.

A: The NSW Government released the latest review of the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan in 2022. The review considered all options for future water sources for the region over a 40-year life span, including new dams. Following a rigorous short-listing process, two new dam options were assessed in detail (Upper Chichester Dam and Limeburners Creek Dam).

The review found that a new dam was not the preferred next water source, nor was it a part of the preferred program of actions over the 40-year life of the plan. This decision was informed by a rigorous, transparent assessment process that evaluated all options from an economic and financial perspective and considered criteria such as cost, environmental, social and cultural heritage impacts.

Dams have long lead-times to plan, construct and fill, and carry an elevated risk of triggering expensive drought response infrastructure in the interim. Dams already provide approximately 80% of the water supply to the Lower Hunter region, and given known and future risks, a diversification of sources and an increase in rainfall-independent supplies is important as we plan for a future with a more variable climate.

The Plan is underpinned by an adaptive approach and Hunter Water will continue to review and update the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan, to ensure it remains current and responds to changing circumstances, including population growth and changing industrial demand, identified dam safety risks, and changes in climate.

This topic will be considered for a future SAF agenda.

Chichester Dam Engagement Feedback

Q: Members noted that community feedback from the recent Chichester Dam safety engagement sessions has been positive. Some community members expressed relief after viewing the flood inundation map on display at the sessions. However, concerns remain around emergency communication. The community has requested improved mobile coverage, such as a new Telstra tower, to support communication during emergencies.

A: This is a priority for Hunter Water. In discussion with Dungog Shire Council, the SES and LEMC, Hunter Water continues to engage with the community and emergency services and are investigating options for improved communications. We will continue to work with residents and have further engagement sessions planned to support their planning and preparedness.

Groundwater Contamination at Tomago Sand Beds

Q: Members asked whether avoiding pumping from PFAS contaminated areas beneath the RAAF base in Williamtown is causing a buildup of groundwater in that area of the Tomago Sandbeds.

A: Hunter Water has implemented a proactive and precautionary approach to managing PFAS associated with RAAF Base Williamtown. An operational plan for the borefields has been developed and approved by the NSW PFAS Expert Panel, chaired by the NSW Chief Scientist. Since 2015, several bores closest to the RAAF Base have been placed under an operational embargo and are not used for drinking water supply. This decision was made to ensure the highest level of protection for public health and water quality.

The water table in the Williamtown area has always been quite shallow, so there isn't much scope for increased buildup of groundwater before it starts to drain away via surface drainage systems. The amount of surface runoff in the area may have increased marginally due to Hunter Water ceasing to operate Stations 7 and 9, but the buildup of groundwater would be minimal, and the maximum groundwater level reached during periods of extended rainfall would not have changed.

Hunter Water's extraction of groundwater represents a small fraction of water that exits the Tomago aquifer. The volume of water that enters the aquifer due to rainfall and the volume that exits as evapotranspiration (water use by trees and evaporation from wet ground) are much larger numbers than groundwater extraction.

Groundwater modelling undertaken by Hunter Water indicates that water in the Tomago Sandbeds generally flows in a southerly direction, away from the RAAF Base at Williamtown and towards Tilligerry Creek. This means that, over time, groundwater from the contaminated area is moving away from Hunter Water's drinking water bores.

For water that is extracted for drinking water purposes, Hunter Water has established a comprehensive groundwater monitoring program in the Tomago Sandbeds. This program includes regular sampling and testing of groundwater for PFAS and other potential contaminants. Results from this monitoring are shared publicly on Hunter Water's website.

The Department of Defence is leading the investigation and remediation of PFAS contamination in the Williamtown area. Hunter Water continues to work closely with the Department, NSW Health, and the EPA to ensure the ongoing safety and security of the region's drinking water.

Myall Road Cardiff Remediation

Members noted positive community feedback regarding past stormwater remediation works, which have improved flooding on Myall Road, Cardiff.

Mr Cleary's presentation is available on the [CCAG webpage](#).

RISK AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING AT HUNTER WATER

- **Angela Seidel – Group Manager Risk & Internal Audit**
- **Andrew Codrington – Operational Resilience and Risk Manager**

Risk Management Framework

Ms Seidel and Mr Codrington introduced Hunter Water's risk and contingency planning, exploring the strategies and frameworks we use to identify, assess and mitigate risks across our operations.

Hunter Water follows the ISO 31000 risk management framework, which provides a robust structure for continuous learning and improvement. Hunter Water's risk management framework emphasises learning from events rather than avoiding penalties.

We maintain risk appetite statements, which are shaped by the Board and acknowledges that risks can be both positive and negative.

The current approach prioritises prevention and pre-disruption, aiming to reduce disruptions and maintain operations as close as possible to business-as-usual.

Discussion:

Q: Can you give an example of a disruptive event?

A: Our response to extreme wet weather is an example, having improved through recent repetition. Flood alerts at Chichester Dam are another example, where crews are pre-staged and personnel have accommodation options to stay onsite during emergencies so that we always have personnel available. Hunter Water also works with Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs), and Ausgrid to maintain (and quickly restore) power and water services during emergencies.

Q: Where does telecommunications fit into emergency planning?

A: Hunter Water has scalable and multiple communication options available during emergencies, with redundancy and backups. While there still may be periods without communication, the use of multiple methods including mobile phone networks, satellite, and the Public Safety Network (PSN) radio network, limits the operational impacts.

Q: Members noted that Dungog does not have SES staff based there full-time.

A: Hunter Water acknowledges this and works closely with the SES Northern Zone. Hunter Water's Board Chair, Managing Director and Acting CEO recently met with the NSW SES Commissioner.

Q: Could Hunter Water explore a Starlink connection for areas near Chichester Dam to improve emergency communications?

A: Hunter Water is actively exploring solutions to improve communications in this area, and is working closely with the Dungog LEMC, SES and Council.

Q: Members raised concerns about costs and asked how Hunter Water shares resources with other organisations.

A: Hunter Water has numerous agreements in place with other organisations and is sharing resources more than ever, particularly around supporting critical customers and ensuring service continuity.

Q: What happens if power is lost at the Belmont Desalination Plant?

A: The Belmont Desalination Plant does not need to be continuously operating. Should power be lost, the facility would temporarily be taken offline, until energy is restored. During that period, water would be provided to customers from other sources.

Q: How many days of water supply are available if the Grahamstown Water Treatment Plant is taken offline in an adverse event?

A: This depends on weather conditions, particularly temperature. During peak demand, water supply could be restricted within 24 hours. However, Hunter Water can source water from the Central Coast, and the Belmont Desalination Plant will add resilience. Investment in the CTGM also strengthens system reliability, allowing water to be transferred from Chichester Dam.

Q: Does Hunter Water consider chemical warfare and pandemics in its risk assessments?

A: Yes. Risks such as terrorism and malicious actors are also considered. The federal *Security of Critical Infrastructure (SOCI) Act 2018* guides how sensitive information is managed to protect asset security, which also influences what information we can communicate with the community.

OTHER BUSINESS

Questions on Notice

The Chair highlighted that questions on notice are a valuable part of the SAF meetings, allowing for more detailed responses from Hunter Water. Members were invited to ask any further questions not already covered in the meeting.

Q: Is Hunter Water reminding the public about water conservation?

A: Yes. Current water conservation levels are at 10.5%, which is slightly higher than our target. This confirms that residents continue to 'Love Water'.

A new communication campaign will be launched soon to encourage conservation, particularly over the summer months. This campaign will commence on 19 October, coinciding with National Water Week, and will be running in Hunter-media over the coming months across TV, radio, digital on demand, socials, and retail and outdoor media.

The campaign concept is 'A good day to save water' and is designed to promote ongoing behaviour change and water conservation. The ads are available online [here](#) and [here](#).

Q: Is Hunter Water exploring integrated energy solutions?

A: Yes. We are generating significant amounts of renewable energy ourselves at some sites, and biogas may be a future option as part of wastewater treatment process upgrades.

However, Hunter Water's total energy consumption exceeds what we can produce ourselves, so full energy self-sufficiency may not be economically viable. We have a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) in place with AGL, to purchase energy we cannot produce onsite.

Q: Erosion along the Williams River – is Hunter Water involved in riverbank restoration?

A: Yes. Catchment management for erosion control is currently underway along the length of the Seaham Weir Pool. More information is available on the Hunter Water website: www.hunterwater.com.au/about/community/projects-in-your-area/seaham-weir-pool-erosion-management

Additional Requests and Notes:

Members requested a briefing between Hunter Water and Dungog Shire Councillors regarding Chichester Dam safety planning. Hunter Water will arrange for this to occur.

Members noted that Hunter Water has funded agricultural field days in the Lower Hunter, and this should be better promoted. Hunter Water agreed to take this on notice and explore ways to improve promotion of these events to the community.

Members Suggested Topics for Future SAF Meetings:

- Lower Hunter Water Security Plan update
- Four Valleys Program
- Growth forecasts and servicing plan and Connecting Asset Funding
- Wastewater treatment: anaerobic and aerobic digestion
- Nature-positive initiatives and offset credits

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the SAF will be scheduled for March 2026.