

Nogoa Mackenzie Customer Advisory Committee

Date: Thursday 12 March 2026

Time: 10:00am - 12:00pm

Location: St Lukes Anglican Church, 40 Theresa Street, EMERALD

Attendees:

Customer representatives: Leslie James Fluerty, Peter Galea, Robert Ingram, George Sypher, Carl Hunt Morawitz (Neek), Daniel Pymble (Fairbairn Irrigation Network (FIN)), Ross Burnett (FIN), Nathan Litzow (CHRC), Taylor Pressler (online).

Sunwater representatives: Colin Bendall (Executive General Manager – Operations), Craig Cahill (Regional General Manager – Fitzroy), Caley Pearce (Customer Engagement Advisor), Brodie Shepperd (Senior Project Manager, online), Rinesh Ram (Water Security and Policy Advisor, online).

Department representatives: Ariane Leyden (Online).

Apologies: Scott Stevens (DLGWV), Misha Grayson (FIN).

Minutes:

Agenda items		
Item no.	Item	Presenter
1	Meeting open	Craig Cahill
2	Previous meeting overview/ actions	Craig Cahill
3	Water Resources update	Rinesh Ram
4	Operations update	Craig Cahill
5	Customer benefits of Smart Schemes	Brodie Shepperd
6	Customer Systems Renewal	Colin Bendall
7	Customer Touchpoint Survey update	Caley Pearce
8	General business	Craig Cahill
8	Meeting close	Craig Cahill

1. Meeting open

Meeting opened at 10:04am. Introductions conducted.

2. Previous actions

Sunwater reviewed previous actions, including providing clarification on QRIDA eligibility for LMA/FIN customers, and investigating the outcomes from the Low Water Storage Working Group (LWSWG) working group.

- **Member discussion:** Members discussed the eligibility of LMA/FIN customer for the QRIDA rebate scheme. A member advised they had raised the matter with a Minister and requested it be noted that they consider the current eligibility criteria to be highly discriminatory against Queensland agricultural producers.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater acknowledged the concerns raised and advised these would be passed on to the relevant parties.
- **ACTION:** Sunwater to pass on CAC concerns regarding QRIDA rebate eligibility for LMA/FIN customers to the relevant parties.

3. Water Resources update

Sunwater delivered an update on water availability and forecasting. The update included current storage levels, announced allocations and the projected drawdown forecast. Sunwater noted the data presented reflected conditions on the day of the meeting and, due to recent high inflows, water was still entering the system.

- **Member question:** Member asked whether the pump operations referenced in the presentation related to the Weemah Channel.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater confirmed the slide related to the right bank tower, Weemah Channel and the river.
- **Member question:** Member asked if there was a post winter flow release required following the recent inflows.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised that a post winter flow could have been requested in January following the inflows; however, the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers (DLGWV) determined this was not required.
- **Member question:** Member enquired about the calculations for medium priority (MP) and high priority (HP) allocations given the recent inflows, and how announced allocations were determined for the next water year.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised that MP and HP allocations are currently at 100 per cent for the remainder of the water year. Indicative announced allocations for the next water year were included in the presentation and will be updated again at the next CAC meeting.
- **Member question:** Member thanked Sunwater for helping with converting water measurements and noted that different organisations report water information in different ways (e.g. percentage, megalitres and elevation).
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised that storage capacity tables are available for all storages, showing elevation levels and corresponding volumes to assist with converting between measurement types.
- **ACTION:** Sunwater to share storage capacity table for Fairbairn Dam with members.

4. Operations update

Sunwater provided an update on operations, including a 10-year storage trend chart. Sunwater also provided an organisational update, noting recruitment is ongoing for an Emerald-based Operations Manager, with Scott Farlow acting in the role in the interim.

Sunwater provided an update on the low-level pumping enabling works at Fairbairn Dam, which commenced in January. Sunwater noted that, due to recent inflows, the works will not be required in the short term; however, no work has been lost as the timing coincided with the January inflow period.

- **Member question:** Member asked if water supply will be interrupted during concreting works for the low-level pumping enabling works at Fairbairn Dam, and whether these works would form part of the planned maintenance shutdown.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised the concreting works are expected to take approximately four days and will occur on the right bank. Sunwater indicated a preference to complete the works prior to the planned shutdown and within the current financial year. Sunwater noted the works would interrupt supply to the Weemah Channel and the river. Sunwater explained the concrete is poured underwater and does not require the area to be dry. Sunwater further advised that divers installed starter bars and formwork in January, and the concrete needs to be poured soon to avoid rework on existing starter bars.
- **Member discussion:** Members reiterated concerns regarding the proposed four-week maintenance shutdown period and expressed a preference for a three-week shutdown. Members noted this issue is raised annually and requested greater flexibility in shutdown planning, including consideration of horticultural plantings that require water during the shutdown period and opportunities to complete works outside the shutdown window.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised it continues to target a three-week shutdown period where possible. Sunwater noted that works included in the current program are those that require a shutdown and acknowledged that the feasibility of a shorter shutdown depends on the scope of works. Sunwater advised that where a longer shutdown is required, appropriate notice and consultation will be provided.
- **Member statement (FIN):** FIN advised that a three-week maintenance program typically requires a four-week shutdown period to allow for drainage, carry-out works and refill, noting it generally takes approximately one week to drain the channel and one week to refill.
- **Member discussion:** FIN and members noted shutdown planning involves multiple stakeholders, including growers, FIN and Sunwater, and requires ongoing collaboration to balance differing needs. Members noted planning can be difficult due to changing conditions, including rainfall.
- **ACTION:** Sunwater to review the current shutdown works program, and target a three-week shutdown period, wherever possible.

5. Smart Schemes

Sunwater presented an overview of the Smart Schemes project proposed for the scheme, with early works expected to commence from mid-2027. Sunwater advised initial activities will focus on understanding the scheme, including LiDAR mapping, bathymetry surveys and identifying suitable locations for gauges. SCADA upgrades are expected to take approximately 18 months, with overall project implementation anticipated to take around two years.

- **Member question:** Member asked whether, given the number of small structures in the Nogoia River, Sunwater is confident the Smart Scheme will work in this scheme.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised it is confident the Smart Scheme will work in the Nogoia Mackenzie Water Supply Scheme. Sunwater explained that having more structures can improve accuracy, as they provide additional measurement points that feed into the operational model.
- **Member question:** Member asked whether the system would be automated, noting customers are located between five and fifty kilometres downstream of the outlet. The member asked whether the current practice of one water release per day would change under a Smart Scheme.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised the system will release water to meet orders, which could result in multiple releases per day as required. Sunwater explained the Smart Scheme uses more advanced SCADA systems, allowing operators to program releases based on customer orders, this enables more accurate delivery of water. Sunwater noted that customers ordering water will be

important as the system is implemented, as this data helps optimise releases. The system also considers factors such as weather conditions and soil moisture. Sunwater advised the entire system will be mapped using LiDAR to better understand storages, and the data will be used to inform and improve modelling accuracy.

- **Member question:** Member asked how the project is being funded.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater explained the Macintyre Brook project was a pilot funded by Sunwater and involved research and development, including testing and developing equipment and models. Sunwater advised it is proposing to roll out Smart Schemes across five schemes, including Nogoia Mackenzie under the current QCA price path. Sunwater explained over time, Smart Schemes are expected to provide operational efficiencies and reduce risks such as travel requirements for operations staff.
- **Member question:** Member asked who was delivering this project for Sunwater.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised the Smart Schemes concept and design is being delivered internally.
- **Member question:** Member asked how many meters in the scheme are not working, noting the success of Smart Schemes depends on meter performance.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised meters are critical to enabling Smart Schemes and ensuring they are operational is a priority. Sunwater noted dashboards are expected to be available in coming months, providing visibility of meter status, and advised the issue will be investigated.
- **ACTION:** Sunwater to investigate issues with meters in the scheme.
- **Member question:** Member asked about the total cost of the project to date, including the pilot, and how many staff are working on the project internally.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised the Macintyre Brook pilot cost approximately \$1.6 million, with an estimated cost of around \$1 million per scheme. Sunwater advised resourcing includes a full-time Project Manager, a part-time Business Analyst and Change Manager, and staff from the Water Resources team supporting modelling, equating to approximately 1.5 FTE.
- **Member question:** Member asked who would benefit from water savings generated by the Smart Scheme.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised the intention is to operate the scheme more efficiently and retain water higher in the system for announced allocations, which would benefit customers.
- **Member discussion:** Members and Sunwater discussed model accuracy, daily scheme losses, and differences between smaller and larger schemes. Sunwater explained these are measured through Estimated Unexplained Difference (EUD) and Actual Explained Difference (AED).
- **Member question:** Member asked whether Smart Scheme data would be used for forecasting peak usage, in the context of the QCA RAB based irrigation price review.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised the system is not intended to forecast demand, and water orders will continue to be relied upon.
- **Member question:** Member raised concerns regarding elevated salt levels in the Nogoia River during extended dry and low-flow periods, noting impacts on crop health and the need for flushing flows.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised it would work with customers to manage salt flushing and noted Electrical Conductivity monitoring could potentially be incorporated into the Smart Schemes project.
- **ACTION:** Sunwater to work with customers to understand salt management needs in the Nogoia River, including investigating environmental releases to flush salt.
- **Member question:** Member asked which schemes are included in the Smart Schemes rollout and requested further discussion regarding the Dawson Smart Scheme.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised the first five schemes include Macintyre Brook (pilot), Dawson Valley, Upper Condamine, Nogoia Mackenzie and Boyne River and Tarong. Sunwater agreed to speak with the member after the meeting regarding the Dawson Valley Smart Scheme.
- **ACTION:** Sunwater to contact member to discuss the Dawson Valley Smart Scheme project.

- **Member question:** Member asked whether the estimated \$1 million per scheme includes the cost of meter upgrades.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised the estimate includes the Point Orange component but does not include upgrades to customer flow meters.
- **Member question:** Member asked whether Sunwater has an operating philosophy for the scheme.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised operating parameters are set out in the Operations Manual and that Smart Schemes will assist operators to run the scheme more efficiently. Sunwater offered to share the ROL and OM with members.
- **ACTION:** Sunwater to send the ROL and OM to members.
- **Member question:** Member asked for an update on the timeline for the Central Queensland Regional Water Assessment (CQRWA), including a shortlist of projects for the Nogoia Mackenzie WSS.
- **Department response:** DLGWV advised it did not have an update at this time but offered to present at the next CAC meeting.
- **ACTION:** DLGWV to present on the CQRWA at the next meeting.

6. Customer Systems Update

Sunwater provided an update on Customer Systems, including the Orion Customer Authentication project, which will introduce multi-factor authentication (MFA) for the customer portal and mobile app. Sunwater also provided an update on the CASPr rebate and introduced the Customer Systems Renewal project, which will replace the current Orion system.

- **Member question:** Member asked whether the MFA project was the reason the Sunwater customer portal is currently offline.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised the customer portal is currently offline due to maintenance.
- **Member discussion:** Members raised concerns about the cost of Smart Schemes and questioned whether customers would benefit, noting concerns about project costs, meters, how costs are passed on to customers, ongoing maintenance requirements and the lifespan of electronic meters.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised propeller meters can no longer be replaced like for like, with electronic meters now the required standard. Sunwater noted the additional component is the Point Orange telemetry. Sunwater acknowledged electronic meters generally have a shorter lifespan than mechanical meters and advised it has raised concerns about this; however, Sunwater is required to comply with current standards.
- **Member question:** Member expressed concern regarding how the CASPr project was communicated to customers, stating benefits were mis-sold and customer feedback was not adequately considered.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater acknowledged mistakes were made in the delivery of CASPr and that customer engagement was insufficient. Sunwater advised it will work with customers on the Orion replacement before committing to further expenditure.
- **Member question:** Member asked about the role of the QCA and the Regulated Asset Base (RAB) methodology.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised that at successive irrigation pricing reviews, the QCA has expressed a view that the RAB methodology is superior to the annuity methodology. Sunwater supported this view and proposed a transition to the RAB based approach as part of the 2025 Irrigation Pricing Review. The QCA did not support the shift at the time, advising that further work was required on capitalisation.
Sunwater further advised in late 2025 the Queensland Government directed the QCA to conduct a focused review into the RAB approach. Sunwater (and Seqwater) was required to provide a proposal to the QCA in support of this review. Sunwater submitted its review in late February.
- **Member statement:** Member stated they had reviewed the RAB consultation document and expressed dissatisfaction with the analogies used to explain the differences between RAB and annuity methodologies, stating they were misleading. The member expressed a belief that Sunwater intends to move to a RAB methodology and is promoting this approach through its communications.

7. Customer Touchpoint Survey Update

Sunwater presented the findings from the 2025 Customer Touchpoint Survey.

- **Member question:** Member asked whether Sunwater intended to consider comments regarding the *Take or Pay* model that were captured in the Touchpoint Survey.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised that *Take or Pay* arrangements relate to specific commercial contracts with commercial customers. Sunwater noted these arrangements typically operate over longer-term contract periods (approximately four to ten years) and that a single survey comment would not, on its own, trigger a formal investigation.

8. General business

- **Member question:** Member asked who from Sunwater would be chairing and attending Nogoa Mackenzie CAC meetings once a new Operations Manager is appointed. The member noted that many issues discussed at the meeting have been raised previously without resolution.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised that Craig Cahill, as Chair, is committed to chairing the CAC meetings for the next couple of years. Sunwater advised that once appointed, the new Operations Manager will attend meetings and transition to the Chair role at a later stage.
- **Sunwater question:** Sunwater asked members whether they would prefer a Customer Representative Chair or a Sunwater Chair.
- **Member response:** Members advised they are comfortable with Sunwater chairing the meetings.
- **Discussion:** Sunwater and members discussed an asset tour previously raised at the last meeting. The group agreed to hold a CAC meeting and asset tour at Rookwood Weir. Members advised they would prefer to travel using their own vehicles or carpool. A member requested that additional council representatives be permitted to attend the tour.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised it could accommodate a small number of additional council representatives.
- **Member question:** Member asked whether ponded pastures have been approved in the Fairbairn Dam catchment, noting their understanding that there may be a government initiative relating to ponded pastures.
- **Sunwater response:** Sunwater advised it would investigate the matter.
- **ACTION:** Sunwater to investigate the ponded pastures initiative in the Fairbairn Dam catchment with government

9. Meeting close

Meeting closed at 12:40pm. Next meeting scheduled for late July/early August 2026.

10. Actions

Action item	Owner	Status
Sunwater to pass on CAC concerns regarding QRIDA rebate eligibility for LMA/FIN customers to the relevant parties.	Craig Cahill	In progress
Sunwater to share storage capacity table for Fairbairn Dam with members.	Rinesh Ram / Caley Pearce	Shared in email with DRAFT minutes
Sunwater to review the current shutdown works program and work with FIN to identify opportunities to shorten the shutdown period where possible.	Craig Cahill / Dan Pymble	In progress

Sunwater to investigate issues with meters in the scheme.	Craig Cahill	In progress
Sunwater to work with customers to understand salt management needs in the Nogoia River, including investigating environmental releases to flush salt.	Brodie Shepperd / Craig Cahill	In progress / on hold until Smart Schemes project is underway
Sunwater to contact member from council to discuss the Dawson Smart Scheme project.	Craig Cahill	In progress
Sunwater to send the ROL and OM to members.	Caley Pearce	Shared in email with DRAFT minutes
DLGWV to present on the CQRWA at the next meeting.	Ariane Leyden	In progress
Sunwater to investigate the ponded pastures initiative in the Fairbairn Dam catchment with government.	Craig Cahill	In progress

11. Approval and review

Chair:	Craig Cahill
Minutes:	Caley Pearce
Date:	12 March 2026

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