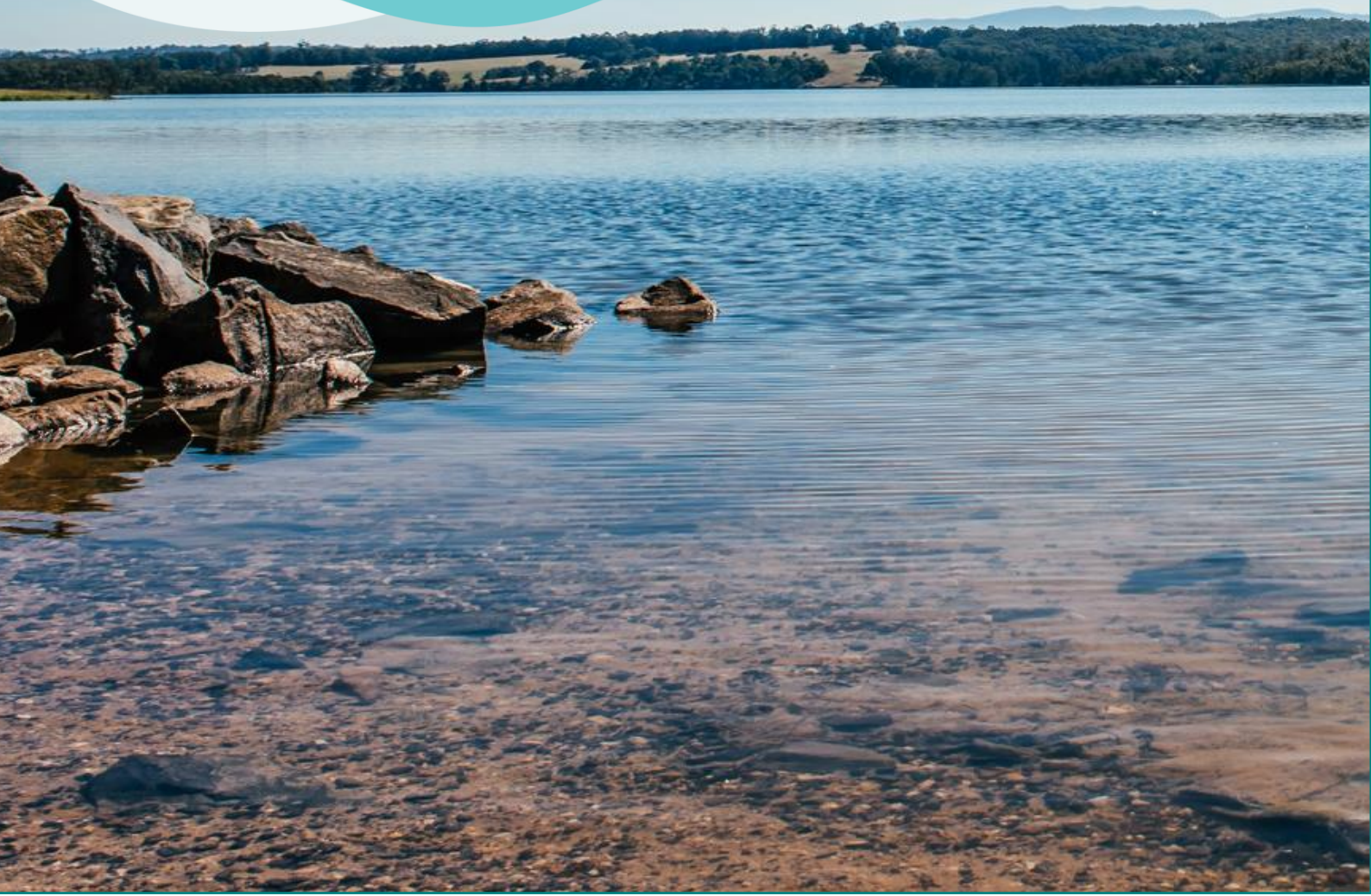




# Werribee System Reconfiguration Project

Werribee Customer Engagement  
Paper 1 – Background and Objectives

March 2024



## The Project

The Werribee System Reconfiguration Project (WSRP) is exploring alternative ways of using river water and recycled water to provide benefits for the whole Werribee catchment. A new high quality, reliable recycled water supply could provide irrigation water in future, enabling river water to be used higher up the catchment.

The potential benefits of this reconfiguration include a better quality and more reliable irrigation water supply which would secure irrigated agriculture and enable future growth. Broader catchment benefits could include securing the long term potable water supply to meet future water demands from population growth and climate change, returning water to Traditional Owners, and protecting the river environment.

Southern Rural Water is one of several agencies involved in the project to develop a business case to examine if the proposal is a viable proposition. Partner agencies include the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), Melbourne Water, Greater Western Water and the Traditional Owner Partnership Group for the Central Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy (CGRSWS).

Past attempts to address the quality and reliability of recycled water have focused solely on irrigation outcomes and have not been supported by a fundable business case. By incorporating a broader catchment approach, an opportunity now exists to include additional benefits which may lead to a viable business case. This improves the chance of securing funding and realising benefits across the catchment.

## Customer Engagement

Feedback from Werribee Irrigation District customers is a critical part of the business case for the WSRP. A Customer Reference Group (CRG) has been created to provide this feedback. Customers have been chosen for the CRG to achieve as wide a representation of views as possible. Six meetings are proposed over a six month period to examine a range of aspects relating to the business case, including but not limited to:

- Customer water quality and supply reliability needs, including the volume of water the district would require in peak demand dry weather scenarios.
- What would be required for customers to have confidence in a new supply?
- What is the likely customer appetite for transitioning from river entitlements to recycled water?
- What range of water pricing would be acceptable to irrigation customers?

To ensure that there are open and productive discussions, SRW has appointed Proud Mary, an independent consultant to manage and run the facilitation process and to report on the meeting outcomes. The project lead from Proud Mary is Michael Wheelahan. Representatives from the partner agencies may also attend meetings.

Customer questions are welcome and agency representatives will try to answer these during the meetings and, if unable, will take questions on notice. Meeting papers and meeting minutes will be available to all on SRW's website.

# The Werribee River Catchment & the Werribee Irrigation District

The Werribee River catchment, from Werribee to Melton and Bacchus Marsh, is one of Victoria's fastest developing areas and is projected to grow by one million people over the next 30 years. This urban growth will create an additional demand for potable water and will produce increased volumes of recycled water and stormwater. The health of the river system is likely to decline further with less rainfall and runoff predicted in the future. There are significant opportunities to improve the health of the river system.

The reliability of irrigation entitlements from the Werribee River has declined due to reduced river flows. River flows are expected to lessen further due to a drying climate. Furthermore, river water becomes salty in drier years sometimes making it unsuitable for growing vegetable and salad crops.

Melbourne Water's Western Treatment Plant (WTP) supplies some recycled water to the Werribee Irrigation District (WID). However, the current supply can be impacted by of algae (causing extended supply interruptions, often during peak irrigation season) and the salinity of the recycled water is also higher than the desired levels.

The key outcomes for WID from reconfiguration would be to address these issues by providing a new recycled water treatment plant at Melbourne Water's Western Treatment Plant supplying reliable salt reduced water for irrigation. A more reliable and better-quality irrigation supply would enable increased vegetable production, product quality and reliability.

With agreement from water share owners and once recycled water is demonstrated to be reliable, the existing river water entitlement could be used higher up the catchment to provide potable water, environmental flow releases, and water for Traditional Owners.

## Engagement outcomes will inform a Business Case

Project partners are developing a business case which examines the costs, benefits and overall viability of reconfiguring water resources in the Werribee catchment. The business case is in two stages. A Preliminary Business Case is underway, and the intent is this will be followed by a Detailed Business Case (which is the subject of a Federal funding bid).

The customer engagement process will provide input into the Preliminary and Detailed business cases over the next 6 months.

*Please note that no decisions have yet been taken and no changes to any water entitlements will proceed without customer agreement.*

We look forward to working with you on this important project and we encourage you to provide feedback at every opportunity.