

**Southern Rural Water
Werribee Reconfiguration Project
Customer Reference Group Meeting #2
10 April 2024, 2:00pm to 3:30pm**

Meeting Notes

Introduction

The Terms of Reference for the Werribee Reconfiguration Project Customer Reference Group (CRG) provide that the meeting facilitators would provide a summary report of each meeting to participants. At the first meeting of the CRG, the members and facilitators agreed that the facilitators would provide notes of the meeting rather than a summary report.

CRG members are welcome to provide feedback on these meeting notes if they contain any inaccuracies or omissions.

Meeting #2

The second CRG meeting covered the following topics:

- Notes from CRG Meeting #1
- Growers' 10-point plan
- Customer requirements

Conflicts of Interest / Items for noting

Several CRG members indicated they had signed up to Food Secure Melbourne (a grower cooperative seeking to secure and grow Melbourne's fresh food economy). One member indicated they are proposing to sell their land in the Werribee Irrigation District.

Notes from CRG meeting #1

The notes from the first CRG meeting have been shared with the group for their review. The group accepted the notes as accurate without any revisions.

These notes will be published on Southern Rural Water's (SRW) website to ensure full transparency. The CRG confirmed they consent to having their names published on the website too. For future meetings, SRW will distribute the notes shortly after the meeting and request comments out of session via email. This is to ensure the notes can be posted on the website promptly to enhance process transparency for the public. The CRG accepted this proposal and will work together to coordinate feedback on the notes.

Growers' 10-point plan

Elisa Hunter, SRW General Manager of Strategy, People and Culture, led a discussion on SRW's response to the 10-point plan presented by the CRG members at the first CRG meeting. SRW values and appreciates the work the group has put in to thinking about what they need from this engagement process. SRW has shared the points with key partners including Greater Western Water, Melbourne Water and DEECA.

SRW presented a redesigned program of meetings that aligns with the growers' 10-point plan and sought the group's comments. The group noted it will need solid conclusions on each point from SRW. SRW responded that it is happy to work through the plan in a logical way and may need to iterate its response to some of the points due to the complexity of the reconfiguration design

process. The CRG noted that the points around water quality are non-negotiable but there may be more flexibility on others. Some technical support may be required to work through some points. Quality and price need to be addressed first as these points inform all others.

The CRG is seeking information on the money borrowed to finance infrastructure for the district; SRW will present this at the pricing meeting.

Customer requirements

Brad McLean from Colac Consulting presented information on water quality, reliability and consumption supply volumes in the Werribee Irrigation District (WID). This included Werribee River catchment annual water availability from 1920-2016 and salinity in the Werribee River and Main Channel to WID from 1976 to 2019. Growers expressed concern that the water availability data was not up to date as it excluded the years 2017 to 2023. SRW explained that the data presented was from the Victorian Government's most recent long-term water resource assessment that is only prepared every 15 years. SRW will provide the CRG with the water availability data again, incorporating the most recent available data.

The CRG discussed its water reliability and quality needs. The CRG has stipulated it requires a salinity level no higher than 600 EC. Growers would like to see this limit specified in the relevant contracts if reconfiguration is to proceed. This level is what growers see as necessary to support quality soils in the WID. The lower the salinity the better. Growers stated that a band around 600 EC would be acceptable e.g., 550 - 650 EC. The CRG members said they will consider seeking agronomic advice to understand how EC affects nutritional uptake for vegetable production to confirm that this is an acceptable salinity range.

In relation to contaminant levels, the CRG specified "no contaminants" in its 10-point plan, however no water is truly free of all contaminants. The growers clarified that they define contaminants as those chemicals that prevent or negatively impact farming. Brad explained that any recycled water plant design would exclude expected contaminants and determine acceptable levels, with the plant to stop if those levels are exceeded. The CRG stated that contaminant levels need to enable them to continue farming and the recycled water must be safe for use on food crops. Brad explained that the recycled water treatment and delivery would be managed by a rigorous process, adhering to national and state standards and guidelines for irrigated water. The CRG proposed to update its 10-point plan to reflect this position.

Growers indicated that the district's annual and maximum demand would be at least its current demand. That is, 600 ML per week (into the District) but this may increase to 700 ML as demand grows. Growers are seeking service reliability that is at least as good as it is currently from their combined river and recycled water supply and they seek 500ML of storage for the summer peak. Growers also expressed their preference for retaining some river water entitlement to underpin reliability. Growers expect water to be delivered on demand but can tolerate a 2-day delivery variance when necessary.

At the growers' request, SRW will investigate providing details on a case study of a similar recycled water plant that provides the requisite quality and quantity of water.

Next steps

The next CRG meeting will cover reconfiguration options and will include attendance from Melbourne Water representatives. The date will be confirmed out of session.