

Welcome to **Diversions**, a newsletter for Southern Rural Water's groundwater and rivers customers and many of our irrigation area customers: we hope you find the information useful.

Keeping prices affordable

Southern Rural Water will continue its modernisation program and improving services for customers, without significant price increases, under the pricing recently approved for 2018-2023 by the Essential Services Commission (ESC).

Groundwater and river licence holders across southern Victoria will see reduced fees, while irrigators across southern Victoria can look forward to stable prices over the next five years.

More than 7300 SRW licence holders who access water from rivers and groundwater bores, will see annual bills reduce by 2.3%, before inflation.

Several tariffs have now been rationalised by combining or eliminating charges, and some fees reduced.

A \$65 million modernisation program underpins SRW's services over the next five years, while keeping customer prices affordable and ensuring the organisation remains financially sustainable. Replacement of ageing channels, new technology to deliver more regular flows and reduce losses and automated meter reading will help improve water efficiency and productivity gains.

New Manager for Groundwater & Rivers

Many customers would have known Chris Hughes who was Manager of Groundwater and Rivers section at Southern Rural Water.

After 15 years at SRW Chris has decided to pursue a career and some warmer weather in the north of the country. We wish Chris all the best and thank him for his service to the SRW community.

With the departure of Chris, we welcome a new Manager to the Groundwater and Rivers team. Steve Hosking has recently been appointed to the role on a six month secondment from Melbourne Water.

Steve has an extensive operational background having spent 33 years at Melbourne Water in a range of roles spanning sewerage, water supply and waterways and land functions.

Steve has also spent many years responsible for the shaping and management of Melbourne Water's surface water licensing, so he comes to us with good licensing knowledge.

"I am hoping that my experience with licensing and working with rural customers will serve me well at SRW, but I recognise I still

have plenty to learn when it comes to groundwater, which we did not have responsibility for at Melbourne Water," said Steve.

Customer focus has always been a strong component of his roles and Steve has represented Melbourne Water on a range of customer forums and workgroups including the Yarra Valley Agribusiness Board, Diversions Management Advisory Committee, Water Register Co-ordinating Committee and State Licensing Steering Committee.

Steve started with SRW on 16 July and is quickly learning some of the differences between the organisations, including the challenge of operating across a vast geographic area.

"What attracted me to this position was the opportunity to work with people at SRW, but also to work in new areas of Victoria. I am excited to become engaged in some of the issues that are facing water users across all of our regions and am looking forward to meeting with and assisting our customers".

"This secondment also provides a great opportunity for both Southern Rural Water and Melbourne Water to learn from each other and further strengthen our good relationship."

Save money and apply online

If you apply for your bore construction licence for a domestic and stock bore or an investigation bore online, you will save \$213 and your license is issued immediately. Apply now at www.mywater.waterregister.vic.gov.au/

Rural water awards for all sizes

Celebrating excellence in irrigation doesn't only acknowledge established large-scale operations and mega-farms. Innovation can also be found in small-scale and niche operations, and also among the next generation, who know that water efficiency underpins long-term sustainability.

In 2016 Southern Rural Water (SRW) had two Groundwater and Rivers finalists in the bi-annual Rural Water Awards. They reflected this kind of forward thinking, as well as the diverse range of our customers.

Hillywood Tree Nursery of Briagolong took out the regional surfacewater category, with its efficient use of water from the Freestone Creek in Central Gippsland, north-east of Maffra.

Ed Mosley (*below left*) runs the nursery as a wholesale business, selling advanced native and exotic potted trees, located on five hectares of the Mosely family farm, which also runs beef cattle.

Ed planned the site and then engaged an irrigation designer to help design a simple, efficient system focusing on both water and energy efficiency.

"It was a good opportunity to get recognised for the hard work that has been put into the nursery. The process was very easy – it probably only took half an hour. It's also given the business some more exposure, which is always good," he said.

A Gardener's Company, owned by Nic Gowans (*below right*) in Skipton was the regional Community and Education winner, also earning a special State Highly Commended award for their contribution to the local community.



The Company runs The Shamba (named from the East African word for an area of cultivated ground), a market garden which grows a diverse range of seasonal heritage vegetables. The garden was built at owner Nic Gowans's expense, on disused Shire land.

This project uses a creative approach to best use a folio of local water sources, including a decommissioned reservoir (Jubilee Lake), storm water and rainfall.

Soils, aspect, infiltration, plant water use zones and plant water use requirements have been matched with application rates.

The **2018 Rural Awards** are now open and you can nominate yourself or someone else who has developed or adapted clever ideas which have led to better water use outcomes. The benefits might include saving water or improving productivity.

Nominations, closing 5 pm on Friday 31 August, are open in the following categories:

1. **Irrigation district water users** – drawn directly from your local water corporation's rural supply system
2. **Groundwater users** – bore water
3. **Surface water users** – diverts water directly from a waterway (river, creek etc.)
4. **Community and education group** – schools and community groups drawing water from any rural water source
5. **Farm to Plate** – sites which manage the whole supply chain; from production of raw produce through to retail market.

Nomination forms and full terms and conditions of the 2018 Rural Water Awards are at <https://vicwater.org.au/events-awards/rural-water-awards>.

Contact communications@srw.com.au if you are considering a nomination and we can help you complete the application form.

Spear Point Options

Spear (well) point systems are used to access shallow groundwater and have generally been constructed and operated on the basis of using a single pump for multiple bores. In this way the spear points system effectively is operated as a single system rather than a series of individual bores with individual and separate pumping infrastructure.

A recent enquiry was made by a groundwater licence holder to Southern Rural Water (SRW) for clarification regarding the rules that applied to spear point systems, particularly around the potential use of multiple pumps.

SRW has confirmed that there are no rules that prevent a pump being installed in each bore associated with a spear point system.

However each scenario would need to be considered individually by SRW as the groundwater licence conditions, infrastructure and potential impacts are likely to vary in each case.

A groundwater licence has specific licence conditions that include a maximum annual volume, maximum daily volumes and maximum extraction rates, as well as including the associated bores.

In the case of a spear point system the groundwater licence considers all bores to be a single work (bore) on the licence and it will have a single maximum daily extraction rate.

Changes to the operation of a spear point, for example installation of a submersible pump at each bore to be operated individually, could require an application to amend the groundwater licence depending on the overall configuration and operation of the system.

It may trigger requirements for extraction rates to be set at each bore and for additional metering to be put in place. In that circumstance, it would no longer be considered a spear point system.

From a practical point of view the groundwater licence holder would need to consider the capacity of the pumps and bores in order to avoid adverse impacts on themselves resulting from changes to their spear point systems.

Anyone considering changes to their spear point system is encouraged to contact SRW for specific licensing advice relative to their particular circumstances.

Automated Meter Reading

Staff from SRW's Groundwater and Rivers team have been implementing a program to install automated water meter reading systems on unregulated surface and groundwater meters.

'Taggle' is a company that produces low power automated meter tags that, when attached to a sensor on the meter, allows accurate off-site recording of water movement without the need for physical meter reading by field staff. Receivers are installed at strategic locations to ensure maximum coverage, and pick up the usage of each metered site on a daily basis.

Customer feedback indicates interest in the new technology with successful pilots demonstrating some of the benefits, including the provision of reliable off-site monitoring, availability of a current meter reading without the need for staff to visit the site, and the central storage of data.

It is envisaged that customers will soon have access to this information to obtain real time usage data via a customer portal, which will allow individuals to closely monitor the effective use of their water entitlement. This may provide opportunities for change in farming practices as accurate water usage data will allow for more educated decisions to be made on matters such as the timing of irrigation, fertilising, and rotations of stock and crops.

Warrion Groundwater Management Area (GMA) was the pilot area with more than 100 tags installed. Daily flow data from the past 12 months, which was previously not available, is already being used by DELWP for the HydroSight groundwater case study.

Deutgam GMA also has more than 100 tags installed and usage data is being imported from Taggle into the Irrigation Planning Module (IPMG2). This assists with monthly groundwater updates which previously involved at least four staff reading the meters over a three or four day period.

Stage 1 of the installation program ran from July 2016 to December 2017 with more than 600 tags installed including:

- Eastern areas covering Avon River, Denison, Wa De Lock, Rosedale and Sale groundwater areas
- Central areas covering Bunyip River System, Yallock Creek and Koo Wee Rup WSPA zones 1-7
- Taggle Receivers and antennas installed at Garfield, Koo Wee Rup, Nambrok and Brewers Hill.



Acting Project Manager Metering Modernisation Matt Weatherall (left) and G&R Manager Steve Hosking check out a Taggle pulse reader.

More than 350 tags have already been installed in Stage 2 and is continuing in:

- Eastern areas covering Wy Yung GMA and unincorporated GMAs, and the Mitchell and Latrobe Rivers
- Central areas covering Wandin Yallock GMA and unincorporated GMA
- South West Limestone GMA in Warrnambool and the surrounding districts
- Receivers and antennas at Silvan, Lindenow, Tyers, Illowa and Allansford have already been installed, with one at Timboon scheduled for the next few weeks.

The third stage of the project is expected to be completed by 2020-21 and it is hoped to pick up the remaining areas. Initially, this will be where receivers can be located to pick up enough sites to make them viable. However, as new technology becomes available, we will continue to investigate the use of mobile receivers which also allow tags to be used effectively in more remote areas.

Water transfers important

Looking to access additional water can be a real challenge for many horticulture and agriculture businesses.

But, according to Manager Groundwater and Rivers Steve Hosking, water might not be such an issue if more people were willing to transfer their unused allocation or licence for short periods of time.

"Across the state, there is always some demand for additional water," Mr Hosking said.

"Equally, there is also a high proportion of irrigators with water not currently in use."

With allocation caps in place on most areas, water trading, either on a temporary or permanent basis, is the only answer - and users can find out more about the different options by calling 1300 139 510 or visiting our website.

"One way to look at it is that farmers can turn unused volumes of their water licence into cash to reinvest in their own operations," Mr Hosking said.

"Then, when they need the water at the end of the temporary trading term, it goes back on their licence."

We have set up WaterMatch, a free online service that helps those seeking water find what's on offer.

You can register for automatic notifications whenever water becomes available or place your details on the service to trade your water.

"When you find your match for water, you still need to go through us to lodge the application, but it is a very simple process," Mr Hosking said.

Temporary trades or transfers are for a fixed term, agreed between the buyer and seller – and the seller gets the volume back at the end of the period. A permanent transfer is selling the licence to a buyer, where the volume remains with the buyer.

If unsure around your trading options please contact us on 1300 139 510.

Groundwater and Rivers forum members

In each edition of *Diversions*, you'll meet two members of the Forum:

Bruce Vallance - Dairy Farmer, Nirranda

Bruce Vallance has always been in agriculture – starting with sheep and cropping on the family farm, and then share farming a piggery. He leased a farm in the Nirranda area near Warrnambool before taking on his current property there more than 20 years ago. He runs about 650 cows on the 220 hectare property.

He's been involved in the Forum for a couple of years after being encouraged to nominate by a Board member. He says he's found SRW very forthcoming on its business plans and enjoys providing input into guiding those plans for the best outcomes.

"It's good to help realise the potential of water resources in the South West for farm development," he says.

Also involved with UDV and Farm Discussion groups, Bruce is married, with three children: one daughter a first year vet student, his son an engineer, and another daughter is a nurse at Royal Children's Hospital.

David Hotchkin - Potato and fat lambs, Thorpdale

David Hotchkin is a third generation potato grower in Thorpdale and one of the largest 'crisping' suppliers to a major processor.

A member for around six years, he says it's important that someone from each irrigation district is sitting on the forum and important for the district to have that contact with SRW at various levels.

"It is critical tool for each individual district to have access and good for Groundwater and Rivers to have feedback and for ground staff to be supported at the Forum," he says.

He and his wife, have two daughters and son, who has become the fourth generation in business.

David is also involved with the VFF in the Thorpdale branch and on Potatoes Victoria.

Groundwater Management Plans reviewed

The periodic review of Groundwater Management Plans (GMPs) for existing Water Supply Protection Areas (WSPAs) ensures that these plans reflect the latest information, and that groundwater continues to be managed in an equitable and sustainable manner.

SRW is currently reviewing the Warrion GMP, Yarram GMP and Koo Wee Rup GMP. The aim of these reviews is to:

- assess the status of the resource
- identify any new government policy or legislation that may impact on the GMP
- identify and evaluate existing and future potential risks to the groundwater dependant values in the WSPA.
- assess the performance of the Groundwater Management Plan
- determine whether any changes to the GMP are appropriate.

The review for Warrion GMP has been completed. The review has found that groundwater levels have recovered well since the Millennium Drought and both usage and

water levels have stabilised in recent years. There has been no deterioration of the water quality in the aquifers since monitoring began. Consultation with groundwater users, SRW operational staff, and key stakeholders has supported the conclusion that the plan has been working well, and there are no drivers for change to the management rules.

A preliminary review for Koo Wee Rup has been concluded. Feedback from operational staff and some groundwater users has indicated that greater flexibility of existing trading rules may be beneficial. SRW is currently exploring several different options for improving trading flexibility while still maintaining adequate safeguards for the protection of the environment as well as existing users and the resource.

The review of the Yarram GMP is still at an early stage, and we will be seeking feedback from groundwater users, operational staff and other key stakeholders as part of the review process.

If you would like more information about the review process or you would like to provide your input, please contact Matt Hudson, SRW Manager Hydrogeology, Water Plans and Policy at 1300 139 510.

Don't drink the water

Any water from sources managed or licensed by Southern Rural Water, including irrigation storages, channels, rivers and creeks, groundwater and farm dams, is untreated. It should not be considered safe for human consumption without proper treatment.

Contact us



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www.gwhub.com.au