

Welcome to the Southern Rural Water newsletter for customers in the Macalister Irrigation District.

Allocation up after rains

After recent rain, Macalister Irrigation District irrigators have been allocated 95% against high reliability water shares for the current season, giving them confidence to plan for this season.

Inflows to Lake Glenmaggie and Thomson dam from rainfall in the upper catchments have brought Lake Glenmaggie's storage volume to almost 70% and rising, similar to the same time last year.

Manager Water Supply East, Gavin Prior, explained that Lake Glenmaggie is an annual storage with a large and steep catchment area, so is able to recover quickly after rain. The allocation of 95% is an increase from the 45% opening allocation announced on 1 July.

"This increase is good news for farmers during a period of drought," he said. The catchment is responding well to rainfall with totals for July up to 38.5mm, which is already above the average for the month.

"We have had an extremely dry year," said Mr Prior. "The recent rain has given us some respite but the outlook for August to October is still dry with the Bureau of Meteorology predicting only a 40% chance of exceeding median rainfall in the local area."

The allocation is reviewed regularly throughout the season and is adjusted to take into account future rainfall and inflows into the storage.



Last Season

In the 2018-19 season, farmers in the MID received 100% of their high reliability shares and 35% of their low reliability shares.

A total of 176,845 ML was delivered during the season including 8,683ML of Thomson Drought Reserve.

Mr Prior noted that more efficient water delivery and on-farm irrigation efficiency across the modernised MID has slashed excess water discharged to drains in the system, falling from 25,000 ML in 2013-14, down to 7,785 ML in 2018-19. This also meant a significant reduction in nutrient run-off to the Gippsland Lakes.

"Add this to the 15,000 ML that has been returned to the system for environmental flows since modernisation of the MID, plus the work we are jointly doing with WGCMA and AgVic to improve the health of the lakes and associated waterways, a truly integrated effort in promoting good agricultural and water management practices," he said.

IMAGE: Glenmaggie at its lowest last season, revealing the old town bridge.

Electronic Update

This Macalister Irrigation District District Update has been emailed to customers.

This is the most cost effective way to get our news to you. The District Updates also can be accessed on the website: SRW.com.au/publications

A limited number of hard copies are available at reception at the Maffra office at 88 Johnson Street, Maffra.

Don't forget to subscribe to the **MID weekly Snapshot** at <http://www.srw.com.au/newsletter-signup>

Regulator safety upgrade program

Concern has been raised about the practice of customers operating regulators to aid the efficiency of water deliveries in our channel system.

There has been a long history of this, although due to modernisation projects, the practice is now limited to lower reaches of small low flow channels typically capable of 10-15ML flow rate where the depth of water going over the bar/regulator would be 15cm or less.

A member of the Macalister Customer Consultative Committee recently raised concerns about this activity. The main risks to customer safety are manual handling of the bar through reaching into the water to pull the bar out.

SRW has completed a detailed inspection and risk assessment of each relevant site. This identified six sites that require immediate rectification to be made safe. Works have commenced, and this will eliminate customer operation for these regulators.

SRW has developed a new 'handlebar' arrangement which reduces the manual handling risk associated with customer operation of regulators.

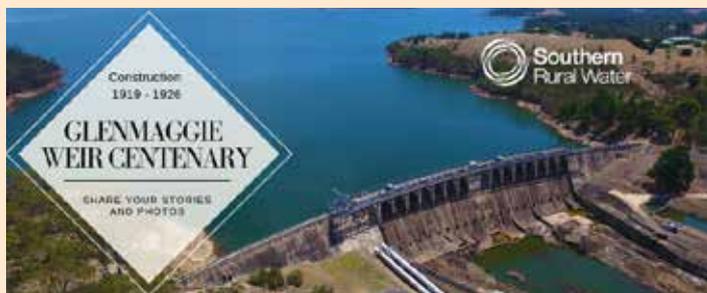
As an interim measure, SRW will provide all customers affected in Newry and Nuntin with these handlebars while they await future modernisation works.

All customers are advised to take reasonable precaution when operating the regulators.

SRW staff are available to provide assistance and operate the regulators if required.



Above: Handlebar in place to reduce manual handling risk to staff and customers.



Glenmaggie Centenary

Glenmaggie Weir will mark the centenary of the start of construction on 1 December. Work commenced a month earlier than planned as "The engineers ... intend taking advantage of the fact that water is very low at present and put in the foundations of the weir."

Check our Centenary facebook page to keep up to date with the celebration - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/GlenmaggieWeirCentenary/>

Low levels

As customers are aware, Glenmaggie is designed as a 'fill and spill' reservoir and storage volume reduces each season as it supplies water to customers in the local irrigation system.

Nine out of 10 years it 'spills' during the season, providing a spill entitlement on top of existing allocation to customers.

However, during drought or similar conditions, the reservoir can fall to quite low levels. This year it ended the season at 6.2%, although customers received 100% of their High Reliability Share (HRS) allocation and 35% of their Low Reliability allocation.

There have been several years when it has fallen to lower levels.

- In 2006-7 it was at 5.8% near the end of the season (15 May), in 2002-03 it was 4.2%.
- Other low levels have been recorded in 2000 – 2001 (8.5%), 1999-2000 (6.9%), 1997-98 (4.9%) and 96-97 (9.9%).
- The lowest levels in recent decades were in 1983 and 1979 which both ended the season with just 7780 megalitres (around 4%). 1983 saw even lower levels before the end of the season but it was five times higher by June,

However the low levels created a great deal of interest, with the local caravan park operator reporting an increase in visitation to see what was revealed by the low levels.



Above: Old Licola Road Bridge uncovered.



Lifblood keeps water flowing

The Lifblood maintenance program, which started in 2015, is helping us to achieve sustainable outcomes in the Macalister Irrigation District (MID) channel network.

Our Field Officers are reporting and prioritising anything that could have a negative effect on our service to you.

In the past 12 months we have dealt with more than 1900 defects and 123 safety jobs with most now closed out. The reporting ensures we are planning continuous improvements to the irrigation system, making it more efficient, delivering better customer service and creating a safer workplace.

We also track our channel performance via the Channel Performance Report. The report measures the system's performance in maintaining pool levels of automated channels in the MID regardless of outlet type.

Via this report our system performance officers can easily see which channels are showing signs of restriction and give them high priority in our maintenance program, including our spray program across our channel system.

Lifblood is a key component in identifying works that will make big improvements on channel performance and, in turn, customer service levels.



Excavators at work above and top, and a completed channel below.



Water budget and trading can improve outcomes

Water budget

SRW and Agriculture Victoria continue to remind irrigators about planning to make the most of their water allocation.

Acting Regional Manager Irrigation for Agriculture Victoria, Janice Dowe recommends "The best way this can be achieved is by doing a water budget.

"A water budget can assist farmers to plan how many irrigations they have. This can help decide if they need to dry off areas of the farm and which parts of the farm give the best production per megalitre of water.

"Often a better quality pasture can be grown by irrigating a smaller area to match pasture water use, compared with a larger poorly irrigated area."

"Customers who schedule their irrigations against soil moisture levels get maximum pasture growth for their water spend," observes Gavin Prior, Manager Water Supply East at SRW. "This translates to better production and more efficient use of water and time."

"Irrigators should also plan irrigation to allow for adequate lead time in delivery because this can vary significantly depending on customer demand," said Gavin.

AgVic irrigation officers can help farmers with water budgets, irrigation advice and can provide information about incentives available for more efficient irrigation infrastructure and can be contact them on 03 5147 0800.

Two local farmers discuss dry seasons in recently added videos at <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/farm-management/drought/dry-seasons-support/resources>

Other useful AgVic links include:

- www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dryseasons
- www.feedinglivestock.vic.gov.au
- <https://www.facebook.com/agriculturevictoria/>

Water trading

Trading unused water can make a real difference to land owners in need and help the local economy.

In the 2018-19 season, 25,852 ML was traded.

SRW actively supports water trading where customers who are not using their full allocation can trade it temporarily or permanently.

There were two online auctions for 2018-19 seasonal allocations which help provide guidance to the market, with customers paying an average of \$282 per ML.

Water for sale can be advertised through Watermatch - <http://www.srw.com.au/buy-sell-water/watermatch/> - or advertised through the local paper which seems to attract a good level of interest.

Our staff are always happy to help with trading: you can call Southern Rural Water on 1300 139 510.

Thomson Drought Reserve

Lake Glenmaggie is used as the first source of supply for most Macalister Irrigation District customers with about 10% sourced from the Thomson system for irrigators on the Thomson River and Rainbow Creek.

SRW also holds a Bulk Entitlement for the Thomson and Macalister river systems, which includes a share of storage capacity and inflows into the Thomson Reservoir.

The storage capacity available is 45,000ML, with 6% of all inflows allocated to SRW. When this storage capacity is full, it provides the ability to increase our allocation of High Reliability Water Share by approximately 25%.

Under current Thomson Reserve management rules it is used to:

- maximise allocations to customers early in the season
- provide additional allocation for dry years.

In practice this means the drought reserve, or a proportion of it, is included in the model used to determine the available allocation until 100% HRWS is reached using Lake Glenmaggie and Harvest Rights only.

From this point, any allocation of low reliability water will come from inflows into Lake Glenmaggie.

Last season, around 7,000ML was included in our allocation of 35% LRWS. The balance of 30,000ML was left in the reserve to support the opening allocation at the start of this season as per the current policy.



MCCC contacts

Members Name	Area	Contact
Raelene Hanratty, Chairman	Upper Maffra	0438 450 300
Raelene Hanratty, Deputy Chair	Denison	0407 842 740
Graeme Anderson, OAM	Denison	0407 347 174
Alan Clyne	Tinamba West	0407 544 761
Norm Drew	Heyfield	0427 482 553
Steve Dwyer	Newry	0407 570 469
Jeannette Howie	Denison	0429 486 312
David Read	Stratford	0414 743 209
Jason Scicluna	Montgomery	0427 458 271
Malcolm Sellen	Nambrok	0414 988 946
Hans van Wees	Upper Maffra West	0449 611 103
Robert Wheeler	Bundalaguah	0409 429 517

New Chair of MCCC

Following her election as Chair for the next 12 months, former Deputy Chair Raelene Hanratty has extended her thanks to Deputy Chair Brad Missen for his contribution to the Committee as Chair for the past 18 months; especially during the major period of construction of the Tinamba Pipeline.

“The vision of the MCCC for the modernization of this district, and our unrelenting pressure, has been instrumental in the securing of Federal and State funding for the MID 2030 Project and the implementation of the upgrades to the irrigation delivery system.

Looking forward, I am excited to represent irrigators right across the MIA in further development of the region, and to enhance the claim of the ‘Premier Irrigation District’; including the Phase 2 project incorporating further outlet modernization, system rationalization the construction of the Newry Pipeline.

I encourage all irrigators to take advantage of the opportunities that become available to increase their knowledge of the unique way our system operates; and to consider the benefits of the MID 2030 project on your own properties where relevant.

As your representatives to SRW, the MCCC is committed to delivering your voice to Management and the Board.”

Raelene Hanratty



Former chair Brad Missen, and new chair Raelene Hanratty, who has been dairyfarming in the MID since 1986 and has been a member of the MCCC since July 2014. It is her belief that the MID is vital to Victoria’s food production; envisaging strong growth in agricultural profit.

Meet your Senior Land Management Officer - John Monahan

John Monahan has returned to the Asset Officer role, liaising with customers on private works on SRW assets (such as channel crossings) and furthering the Drainage Transfer Program.

John, who joined SRW almost 13 years ago, will combine this role with his Customer Consultation role for the modernisation program.

He's been involved in customer consultation under the modernisation project for about three years working with customers on options during the various stages.

As Senior Land Management Officer, John's role under modernisation involves the removal of channel easements and placement of easements along the new pipeline.

Returning as Asset Officer, John will be the focussed point of contact for customers who plan any works on our assets or want to discuss options.

He'll also be working on the Drainage Transfer Program which transfers drains back to farmers to re-use water on-farm and reduce the discharge of nutrient rich water to the Lakes system.

The scheme has already seen 130km transferred back to the community, about one-third of the system.

John is also responsible for the leasing under licence of any of the land around our Gippsland assets for uses such as grazing and community use activities (walking trail, boat club

etc) and ensuring the land use is the optimal arrangement for SRW and our customers and those agreements are in line with the current Corporate Instructions for leasing.

John was originally a primary school teacher before he moved to the military and then worked in Scotland in several roles. He was in Corrections and Mental Health before joining SRW.

John and his wife Nina live on 2.5 acres at Longford where a small orchard, his ride-on mower and his garden keep him busy, along with his two grandchildren, reading and supporting Collingwood.



Customer Survey

Around 5,800ML or 5% of entitlement has been distributed to customers in the MID over the past few years, with minimal impact on the value of existing water entitlements owned by customers.

A further 3,000 ML of water savings generated entitlements also has been sold in 2015-18.

It is anticipated an even larger volume could become available following the modernisation works underway and planned into the future.

In the next few weeks we will be conducting a survey to help us understand the benefits of distributing water savings to SRW's customers and the impact it has on your operations.

As a customer you will continue be a major beneficiary of the MID 2030 project so we would appreciate your support by completing the survey.

The survey will help us understand:

- economic benefits from distribution of all water savings
- customer intentions for buying water entitlement
- changes in the location of the water savings entitlements purchased.

The survey is still being finalised, but it is proposed that some of it will be by phone and the balance by an internet based questionnaire.

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.



88 Johnson Street
Maffra 3860

Maffra Depot
185 Johnson Street
Maffra

1300 139 510
srw@srw.com.au
www.srw.com.au

Maintenance Coordinator
Kane Watson
5139 3148

Manager WSE
Gavin Prior
5139 3119

Maintenance Supervisor
Peter Miller
5139 3248