

# DIVERSIONS

Diversions Newsletter Autumn 2020

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## Reflecting on the year past – Hugh Christie

I started in April last year as Manager Groundwater and Rivers, bringing more than 20 years of experience in the water industry from a range of organisations across South Eastern Australia and more recently Tasmania.

My experience includes water resource management and governance, irrigation, bulk water management, environmental water management, strategic planning, coordination of large construction projects and oversight of dam safety and water compliance programs.



Photo: Hugh Christie (right) with Project Manager Metering, Terry Clapham.

Over the last year, I've spent quite a bit of time travelling across our region, meeting our customers and developing a greater understanding of the unique features of the many rivers and aquifers in the region, as well as getting to know our ground water and rivers staff across the organisation.

More recently I've been involved in SRW's Bushfire Relief and Recovery Response team for East Gippsland, developing our response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) to ensure we can keep delivering services (see the next item for more information).

Once we get through these current challenges, I am excited about the opportunities over the next couple of years to improve how we support you, to grow your business whether it is through better access to information you need or improving access to water and trading opportunities. Technology such as the remote reading of meters will also help our field staff to be able to proactively work with irrigators, ensuring we get the most out of our water resources.

## Response to coronavirus (COVID-19)

Farmers and producers are vital to all Victorian communities in maintaining food supplies during the coronavirus pandemic. While many have seen an increase in demand from supermarkets, others who supply the hospitality and restaurant trades, have been more affected.

At Southern Rural Water, we've been working hard to keep our services operating as normal, providing water for food production, power generation and managing the raw water that secures urban water supplies. Our offices have been closed to the public from 23 March, and the majority of staff are either working remotely or are practising physical distancing where site visits are needed.

The situation continues to change and we urge you to regularly check the Victorian Government coronavirus page for the latest updates, including support packages for businesses: [coronavirus.vic.gov.au](https://coronavirus.vic.gov.au)

The Victorian Chief Veterinary Officer has also developed a factsheet with advice for animal owners during the pandemic. More information and answers to FAQs are available at:

[agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/emergencies/coronavirus](https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/emergencies/coronavirus)



## Ways we can support you

We have a range of ways to support customers experiencing financial difficulty. If you need assistance or want more information on how we can assist you, please contact us.

Please click on [www.srw.com.au/coronavirus](https://www.srw.com.au/coronavirus) to find out more about the ways we can help.

## Contacting us

As an organisation, we continue to be connected to our customers during this challenging time. Our staff are equipped to work from home, and can take your calls, process applications and respond to your email or web enquiries as usual.

You can be confident that we'll still be here to help you when you need us.

When you see our field staff on site, you will notice that they are following current physical distancing requirements.

We know this is a bit different, but we need our people to stay safe so they can keep delivering for you. We ask for your support on this.

As usual, bill payments can still be made via your current method or via any of the payment options listed on your bill.

If you have any questions or concerns about your services, please contact us:

Phone: 1300 139 510

Email: [srw@srw.com.au](mailto:srw@srw.com.au)

Live webchat: [click here](#) (available between 8.30am to 4.30pm Mon-Fri)

Further updates to our response to COVID-19 are available on our website, and via our social media channels.

Please follow:

<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus> for the latest Government health information and advice on coronavirus (COVID-19).

Thank you for your understanding.

## Finding a water trade

We encourage any licence holders with unused water to consider temporarily leasing or selling water to other producers who need water. Temporarily transferring water through a lease arrangement can occur for a period of up to 5 years, and has the advantage of offsetting licence fees and potentially receiving a return on your asset.

If you would like more information on trading water, you can call one of our field officers or visit our website

<http://www.srw.com.au/customers/water-trading-leasing/> We are currently redeveloping the online forum, Watermatch, and the upgraded version is due later in 2020. In the meantime, you can use our SRW Groundwater and Rivers Facebook group to find someone with water to trade:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SRWgroundwateranddrivers>

Please note, SRW is not a water broker and cannot advise on pricing. This is simply a forum for our customers to identify a suitable trade with each other. You can then contact our Customer Service team, who will guide you through the next steps.

## Local Water Reports available

SRW produces annual water reports that provide our customers with more localised information about water in their area.

They are based on surface water basins throughout southern Victoria, but also include information on groundwater.

To download the 2019 annual Local Water Reports, please click on the links below, or find them under the Local Water Reports tab on: <http://www.srw.com.au/publications/>

### Gippsland

[East Gippsland Basin](#)

[Latrobe Basin](#)

[Mitchell River Basin](#)

[South Gippsland Basin](#)

[Thomson Basin](#)

### Port Phillip and Westernport

[Bunyip and Mornington Peninsula Basin](#)

[Werribee and Maribyrnong Basin](#)

### South West Victoria

[Barwon and Moorabool Basin](#)

[Corangamite Basin](#)

[Glenelg – Portland Basin](#)

[Hopkins Basin](#)

[Otway Coast Basin](#)

## Introducing our new team members in the West

In February, two new staff joined our Groundwater and Rivers team – Project Officer Davina Taylor and Field Officer, Anja Jeddi.

Anja is based in Colac. She will be managing the eastern parts of the Otway Ranges with the main streams being Gellibrand River, Carlisle River, Curdies River, Hopkins and groundwater on the eastern edge of the South West Limestone and Colongulac and Glenormiston GMUs. Anja will also be doing meter maintenance and keeping farm dams safe. Davina is based in Warrnambool. She has taken on a project role to increase customer contact and education, focusing on water trading to help enable more water being used for production.

Davina has a strong marketing and business development background and will be developing an education package and approach to promote a better understanding of water trading options and benefits.



(from left) LTR: Davina Taylor, customer Spencer Rendell, and Anja Jeddi.

Davina and Anja were welcomed with roses from a customer on their first on-farm visit in February (before coronavirus restrictions). The Rendells relocated their dairy farm from the Riverina to Tandarook, and met Anja and Davina with Senior Field Officer Gary Wills.

## Automated meter reading installations continue

To date, SRW has installed around 1,900 “Taggle” devices to surface water and



groundwater meters across our region from Orbost in the east to near Portland in the west.

We are now in stage 2 of the program, which will see about 3000 meters completed. Next areas on our list are Lake Mundi and Mumbannar in the west, then Portland/Heywood area and Noorat near Terang. The Latrobe Valley and Upper Latrobe areas will follow early in 2021.

The third stage will complete the automated metering program and will bring coverage up to about 4,500 meters across southern Victoria.

The devices read meters continually and send the data via low power radio frequencies to SRW. The data will be available soon to customers via our new mySRW customer platform, which is being implemented across all our customer groups and regions.

Having real-time data makes managing water resources much easier and saves time and money on manually reading meters. Importantly, it enables our staff to concentrate on the things that add value to customers, providing advice and assistance with opportunities in our sometimes challenging environments.

If you have a small white device on your meter, call us to find out more about it and how we can help you with managing your licence volume or, if you don't have one yet and want some information, we are more than happy to chat about the program and when it is intended to reach you.

## Meet our newest Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum members



### **Daniel Hammond** – Mitchell River valley, vegetables and mixed farming

Daniel has been involved in vegetable farming his whole life.

For the last 14 years, Daniel has worked for Bulmer Farms in East Gippsland, and is currently the General Manager- Growing. Bulmer Farms' operations are spread across 10 sites, totalling 1,200 acres in the Mitchell River valley. The main production lines are baby leaf spinach, lettuce and baby broccoli. Irrigation is a major part of Daniel's role, with the farms sourcing water from the Mitchell River and shallow aquifer bores.

He and his wife also own and operate a mixed farming operation outside Bairnsdale, where they produce beef cattle, lucerne hay and vegetables.

Daniel says he is enjoying being a part of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum and he is passionate about productive, sustainable and balanced water use for irrigation.

### **Steven Marshall** - Mornington Peninsula, Avocados & wine grapes

Steven is an agricultural scientist who pioneered the commercial growing of avocados on the Mornington Peninsula.

Steve's "Peninsula Avocados" are highly sought after and find their way from the wholesale market into the top fruit shops of Melbourne.

Avocados require large volumes of high-quality irrigation water to ensure a high-quality crop. Steve manages several farming properties on the Peninsula that source water from either dams or bores. He is also the designer of a new recycled water scheme called the Hinterland Environmental Water Scheme (HEWS), which has recently received Federal Government funding towards its feasibility study.

"Being on the Forum has given me greater insights into the issues and problems related to supplying water for agriculture across Southern Victoria. Although not a huge irrigation district, the Peninsula is often overlooked for its agricultural needs, so it is important that we have a seat on the forum", he said. Steve, his wife and their two children live in Shoreham.





**Josie Zilm** – East Gippsland, Rural Banking & Agribusiness, beef farming

Josie has worked in the agribusiness and primary production sectors for 15 years. She is the Rural Bank Regional Manager - Agribusiness for Southern Victoria, working with dairy, beef, sheep and horticultural industries.

Josie and her husband run a beef farm in Gippsland where groundwater and river water allows them to run an intensive grass-fed operation. Josie is passionate about water quality, availability and advocating for sustainable irrigation and environmental practices.

Working with SRW as a member of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum provides Josie and other local farmers with the opportunity to be involved in local water issues and opportunities which shape these farming businesses.

## New members wanted

We have seven vacancies on the Southern Groundwater and Rivers forum, with applications closing 19 June. The SGRF meets several times a year, providing opportunity for members to advise SRW on water priorities, bring new ideas, help shape policy, and provide input on issues across the regions. For more information and nomination forms, see [www.srw.com.au/sgrf-members/](http://www.srw.com.au/sgrf-members/)

## Bushfire Recovery assistance available

For those who have been affected in the 2019-20 bushfires, SRW has a range of options to support our customers experiencing financial difficulty.

If you want more information on how we can assist you, please contact us on 1300 139 510 or click on

<http://www.srw.com.au/customers/customer-assistance/> to find out more about our payment and financial hardship assistance programs.

Below is the latest information received from Agriculture Victoria regarding support available through Rural Finance to primary producers affected by the bushfires.

### • Small Business Bushfire Support Grant

Grants of up to \$10,000 are available to support small businesses (including primary producers) significantly affected by the 2019-20 bushfires to recover and rebuild resilient businesses.

Eligible activities include standard business costs, seeking financial advice, adjusting the business to be viable in the changed local context following bushfire, and improvements to make the business more resilient to future disasters.

The grants are available to eligible small businesses in the local government Shires of East Gippsland, Towong and Alpine who have suffered a decline in revenue of 40 per cent or more in a relevant three-month period. Businesses can apply for this grant in addition to other bushfire grants. For more information contact Rural Finance 1800 260 425 or see [www.ruralfinance.com.au](http://www.ruralfinance.com.au)

- **Victorian Bushfires Concessional Loans**

Concessional loans of up to \$500,000 are available to support small business, primary producers and non-profit organisations impacted by the bushfires.

The loans are intended to be used for the purposes of restoring and/or replacing damaged assets and/or to meet working capital expenses.

For further information contact Rural Finance 1800 260 425 or [www.ruralfinance.com.au](http://www.ruralfinance.com.au).

- **Emergency Bushfire Response in Primary Industries Grants**

Grants of up to \$75,000 to assist primary producers directly affected by the 2019-2020 bushfire with recovery costs. Eligible activities include rebuilding or replacing damaged or destroyed on-farm infrastructure, including fencing and trellises.

Wine grape growers who are located in eligible fire affected local government areas and have had crops affected by smoke taint may be able to claim for costs associated with the salvage, harvest and disposal of the smoke taint affected crops. Where no fire has occurred on the property, evidence of smoke impact, such as smoke taint testing results are required.

For further information contact Rural Finance 1800 260 425 or [www.ruralfinance.com.au](http://www.ruralfinance.com.au).

- **Back to Business support**

Producers in fire-affected regions can access up to three free one-on-one Back to Business sessions with a local farm management consultant to help put their business back on track.

All red-meat producers, including sheep, cattle and goat, who have been affected by the recent bushfires are eligible to apply.

The Back to Business program in Victoria is being coordinated by Agriculture Victoria. For more information [mla.com.au/bushfire-recovery](http://mla.com.au/bushfire-recovery)

## **Waiving domestic and stock bore licence fees**

The Victorian Government is waiving the \$235 application fee for new domestic and stock bore construction licences (BCL) for landholders in eligible areas of Victoria.

This initiative will help landholders secure their domestic and stock water supply needs in areas experiencing drought and dry conditions.

Apply online at the Victorian Water Register [waterregister.vic.gov.au/water-trading/my-water#Online\\_BCLs](http://waterregister.vic.gov.au/water-trading/my-water#Online_BCLs)

## **Ag Recovery in East Gippsland**

If you have questions about pasture management, feed budgeting and ag-related fire recovery contact the East Gippsland Agriculture Recovery team directly on (03) 515 95118 or call Agriculture Victoria on 136 186.

For information go to [agriculture.vic.gov.au/bushfires](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/bushfires)

## mySRW online

In response to customer feedback on increasing the range of options to access their information, we have developed mySRW, an online platform for customers.

The mySRW platform gives online access to entitlements, usage, allocations, billing and account information.

mySRW will allow you to:

- view their usage information
- view water entitlements
- enter meter readings
- view account balance and bill history
- submit applications
- request payment extensions
- submit maintenance and feedback requests
- update contact information

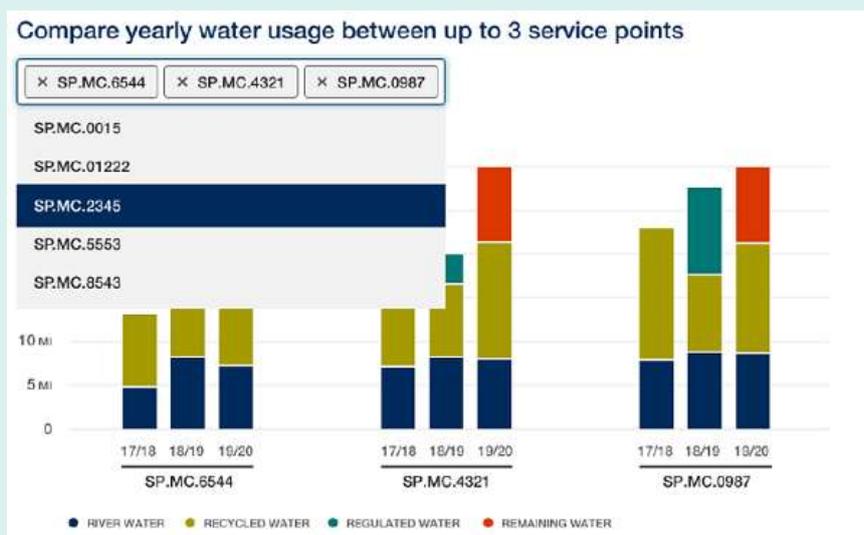
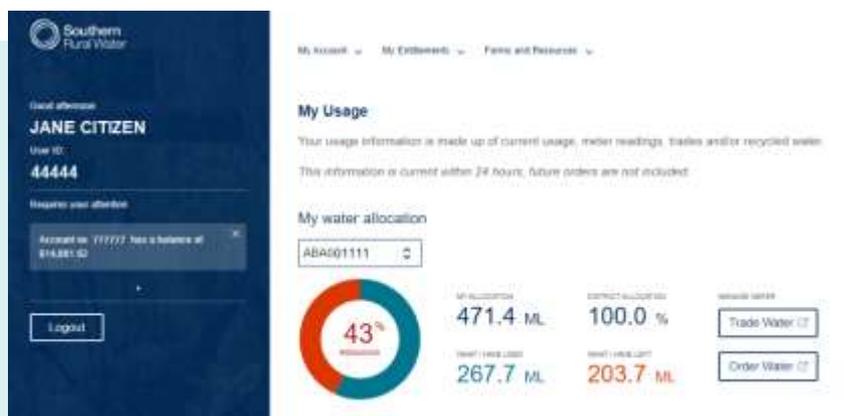
- browse resources and useful links
- talk with staff via Live Chat

The first phase has been the initial launch to our customer representative groups in November 2019 and most of the regulated districts. Throughout 2020, the rollout will continue to remaining regulated users and groundwater and rivers customers.

To register for updates about mySRW, please subscribe to our email newsletters at: <http://www.srw.com.au/newsletter-signup>

(Pictured below) The mySRW screenshots show examples of what water allocations look like for irrigation district customers, with remaining balances.

The final screenshot shows how customers will be able to perform detailed queries such as comparing water use across meters (or service points where applicable), and from different sources, over a period of years. Analysing these results will help farmers identify trends in water use and plan ahead with greater confidence.



## Customer consultation in the South West

As part of improving our management of groundwater in the South West, the Groundwater and Rivers team held two workshops in Mount Gambier and Casterton late last year with groundwater customers and other stakeholders along the South Australian border.

The purpose of the workshops was to better understand our customers' views on ways to streamline management frameworks, improve opportunities for water trading, and start engagement on preparation of management plans for the Lower Otway Aquifer.

The feedback received from both sessions was extremely valuable and will help us continue to improve groundwater management so that it remains sustainable and meets our customer's needs.

Hugh Christie, Matt Hudson, Kevin Williams, Angus Ramsay and Trevor McDevitt were involved in facilitating discussions with customers and stakeholders at the workshops.

If you would like more information, please contact us on 1300 139 510.

Matt Hudson (below) presenting at the Mt Gambier meeting in 2019 and (below right) Matt, Trevor and Kevin at Casterton.





## 50 years customer service milestone for Frank Crameri

SRW recently celebrated Field Services Officer, Frank Crameri's 50 years of service to customers of groundwater and rivers.

Those of you in the Gippsland community, especially in the Koo Wee Rup area, would know Frank very well.

Frank joined the State Rivers and Water Supply in 1970 to do maintenance and flood protection works, after working on a horse stud farm. His lifelong interest in finding sustainable solutions for water customers has continued to grow since then.

As part of a team at Southern Rural Water, Frank works with farmers to manage irrigation use from rivers, creeks, bores and farm dams.

SRW Managing Director, Cameron FitzGerald praised Frank for his years of commitment.

"We're proud of Frank's half a century of great service to the farming community," he said. "The knowledge he brings through his extensive experience is highly valued by our customers and all of us at SRW."

Fifty years on, Frank is still enjoying all aspects

of his job in the water industry, especially his contact with customers.

He said, "I've always enjoyed talking to people and hearing their stories. Some customers vent their frustrations but, if you're willing to listen, they soon come around and work with you because they know you've got their best interests at heart."

Frank works with a diverse range of customers and has seen Koo Wee Rup develop into a site for lucrative and well-managed specialty businesses including asparagus, garlic, strawberries and horses.

Frank's area of expertise is water, but he is also interested in the whole business and how the management and use of water fits in with the owner's plans for expansion or development. He looks for solutions that provide the most efficient and reliable access to water so businesses can thrive. This has earned him deep respect from customers and has led to solid friendships over the years.

With his long history of seeing the effects of droughts and floods on the landscape, Frank is aware of the need to manage water sustainably in the environment. We are proud of the contribution Frank has made and continues to make for SRW's customers.

## Vegetable Innovation Field Days go online

Having survived drought conditions, then bushfire smoke for weeks, the organisers of the 2020 East Gippsland Vegetable Innovation Days were determined that they would find a way to share their hard work despite coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions limiting attendance.

The field trials were held from 6-8 May in the Lindenow Valley, East Gippsland, via a 'virtual expo', using an innovative online approach to share the results of the field trials to the widest possible audience.

The EGVID expo was set to attract hundreds of vegetable and salad leaf producers from across the state for the event, which held every three years. Instead, the event made good use of streaming video and social media, to ensure the results of the trials were able to be captured and shared online.

The organisers were given permission to have a limited number of attendees on site, provided physical distancing rules were followed.

SRW was one of the sponsors of the event, which is aimed at innovation and boosting productivity and growth in the industry. The online sessions covered online webinars, in-field filmed discussions around new varieties, fertilisers, chemical, soil conditions and efficient use of water.

A series of short videos is currently being edited, and the organisers will make these available soon via their Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/EastGippslandVegetableInnovationDays/>



## Excellence awards open

Farmers in Gippsland are invited to apply for one of the Excellence in Agribusiness Awards, organised by Food and Fibre Gippsland to recognise, celebrate and reward collaboration and innovation.

The competition adopts a two-tiered approach with three premier awards, Agribusiness of the Year, Young Agribusiness Leader of the Year, Female Agribusiness Leader of the Year followed by a range of thirteen awards across the entire food and fibre supply chain from farm to plate, including sustainability, safety, collaboration and more.

SRW is one of the main sponsors of the event, which focuses on businesses leading the way with business practices that maximise productivity and profitability.

The deadline for entries has been extended to June 25, and the process is available on <https://www.foodandfibregippsland.com.au/>

Entrants will answer a series of questions on their farm/business performance and future plans in a written submission. A judging panel of business leaders in food and fibre will play the role of an independent board and assess the submissions. Shortlist finalists will be interviewed onsite and the winners announced at a gala dinner on 20 November.



## Share your story

Are you running a successful and productive farming business? Have you developed innovative practices, particularly in your use of water? Do you have a story to share about how water use has changed over the years and what you've learned from it on your property?

We'd love to hear from you, and you could feature in a future Diversions newsletter, or be eligible for entry into agriculture awards.

Please email [communications@srw.com.au](mailto:communications@srw.com.au) or call the Communications and Engagement team on 1300 139 510.



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