

**GIPPSLAND AND SOUTHERN RURAL WATER CORPORATION  
SOUTHERN GROUNDWATER and RIVERS FORUM**

**MINUTES of MEETING 45**

**Held 10.30am, Friday 3 June 2022**

**In Person and online via Zoom**

**PRESENT:**

Mr Ross Ingram	Chair (Zoom)
Ms Josie Zilm	Forum member, Deputy Chair (Zoom)
Mr Bruce Vallance	Forum member
Mr Daniel Hammond	Forum member
Mr Stephen Marshall	Forum member
Mr Matt Gleeson	Forum member (Zoom)
Mr Norm Drew	Forum member (Zoom)
Mr Daniel Toohey	Forum member (Zoom)
Mr Kevin Stark	Forum member (Zoom)

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Ms Jane Doolan	Board Director, SRW
Mr Cameron FitzGerald	Managing Director, SRW
Mr Hugh Christie	General Manager Service Delivery, SRW
Mr Bryce Morden	Manger Groundwater & Rivers, SRW
Ms Taryn Price	Executive Assistant, SRW (Scribe)

**APOLOGIES:**

Mr Damian Moore	Forum member
Mr Tom Wallace	Forum member

**GUESTS:**

Ms Jesse Rose	Director of Entitlements DELWP
Mr Anthony Jenkins	Senior Policy Officer, DELWP
Bryony Grice	Director Environmental Policy & Community Partnerships, DELWP
Brody Hamilton	Project Support Officer – Aboriginal Water Unit, DELWP

**1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

The Chair acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land on which the meeting was held.

**2 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting.

The Chair **noted** the apologies.

**3 DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The Chair asked attendees to declare any conflicts of interest relating to the business of this meeting.

There were no new conflicts raised.

#### 4 **CONFIRMATION MINUTES**

The minutes No. 44 held on 3 March 2022 were **approved**.

**Moved:** Matt Gleeson

**Seconded:** Daniel Hammond

#### 5 **BUSINESS ARISING**

The report was taken as read.

It was **noted** that Action 24684 on the business arising report is now completed as the presentation is occurring within this agenda, item 6.1 Groundwater Strategy GM2030.

Action 24248 will remain on the report until resolved.

The committee raised no questions.

#### 6 **GUEST SPEAKERS**

##### **6.1 Groundwater Strategy GM2030**

Anthony Jenkins, Senior Policy Officer, DELWP provided an overview of GM2030. The presentation highlighted the three priority outcomes for the strategy and time bound actions to support achievement of outcomes over the next eight years. Anthony stated that DELWP have been utilising input from SRW and other rural water corporations, as well as consultation under the CGRSWS, to inform the work to date.

Anthony advised that work is underway to renew the Water Register and DELWP will start to review website content to establish alignment with how information is provided to the public and agencies.

The DELWP Sustainable Yields project is investigating the characteristics of a range of aquifers for completion in 2023.

The committee raised the following questions (*responses from management provided at the meeting follow each question*):

- A member asked how the roadside environments would be protected from salinity runoff impacts given the potential increased use of more saline groundwater resources, noting that farmers need water, but need for consideration of long-term effects.

*Anthony advised there is guidance being prepared on use of saline groundwater – potential for large increase in saline water application with proposals to shandy but difficulty setting and enforcing conditions especially when low salinity water is scarce. Risks are at the site and broader need to manage risks to land from saline run off. Anthony noted that this will also involve understanding what level of salinity is acceptable for specific uses, soil types and duration of use.*

- A member noted that there is strong interest in local scale desalination especially for large-scale, long term horticultural investment, investment in technology providing the option to increase water security when peak demand occurs.

*Jesse Rose advised that DELWP are observing emerging technologies, assessing water quality and whether desalination is reducing saline levels. It was noted that EPA have a regulatory role around the disposal of brine from desalination.*

- A member stated that consultation with regional people using the water will become more and more important, noting there is difficulty seen in people from Melbourne making decisions for rural Victoria. The member noted that people not feeling listened to is a big issue in regional Victoria.

*Jesse advised that talking to forum members, broader water users and registered water corporations helps.*

*Anthony asked the forum to consider what types of approach and engagement that work well with regional stakeholders, or what approaches DELWP has taken in the past that hasn't generated meaningful engagement*

- A member advised for DELWP to start with water authorities and the VFF, and the interested parties that are in regional Victoria. The member stated that SRW has a full list of all people that would be impacted by groundwater management.

*Discussions have taken place at different points with SRW and other water corporations with DELWP having access to customer committees where groundwater use is particularly an issue. Jesse reassured that DELWP is looking at that pathway to engage with interested parties as they map our priorities out to 2030. This also gives people opportunity to flag where other users are interested.*

*The approach we want to take is to get a clear understanding of the framework and what works, and where are the opportunities to improve in order to retain good aspects of existing arrangements while improving weaknesses.*

- A member commented on the crossover within the department, noting there is a critical opportunity to understand where our high value groundwater is and how that might be impacted by planning processes with Western Vic transmission lines an example. The member suggested looking at the longer-term impact of major projects on water use and suggested bringing in other parts of the department to get involved to establish plans.

*Advice from Jesse, potential gaps and opportunities to map where high value groundwater use and future opportunities are – need to review how DELWP Water works with DELWP planning colleagues and other areas – so when broader decisions are made, ensuring water use impacts and opportunities are considered in the decision-making process.*

- A member noted that the issues will be different in various regions, and it would be good to get a sense of what's being driven and why, such as compliance in the basin plan – noting presumably small-scale desalination in the north as opposed to east/south.

The member also queried if DELWP are incorporating that people using recycled water may need to manage salinity in that water before application to certain crops. The issue is nothing to do with other waste products. The member asked if DELWP are going to incorporate recycled water in thinking about rules for managing salinity and desalination and noted that this is a current roadblock due to no information.

*Jesse advised that the feedback is currently constrained to saline groundwater. However, noted that where there might be an appetite for desalination of other water, if that arose out of the work being conducted in the next few years, then there would be a need to work closely with EPA. DELWP will take it on notice.*

- A member stated that it is about the perception of what is in the recycled water going out (waste products such as drugs).
- A member queried what the issue is.

*The first piece is understanding the issues. It is likely D&S across the state. Groundwater settings are not right so we will need to understand what our process is for assessing compliance. The initial focus is education and information, getting improved understanding of D&S take and what additional tools are needed.*

- A member asked if there is concern for feed lots and piggeries with regard to stock and domestic water changes.

*Yes, there are some commercial users taking advantage.*

*Hugh Christie noted that there is a clear view from the members that grazing stock is classified as stock use and there needs to be a reasonable understanding of the practicality of the resource. With regard to saline groundwater, no one likes excess regulations. There needs to be a clear pathway to manage discharge and brine.*

*Jesse noted that assessing is the role of the EPA and a balance needs to be achieved with regard to the level of regulations without unnecessary restraints.*

## **6.2 Water is Life**

Bryony Grice, Director Environmental Policy & Community Partnerships, DELWP provided an overview of the draft Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap, *Water is Life*.

The committee raised the following questions (*responses from management provided at the meeting follow each question*):

*Cameron FitzGerald stated that there are 14 environmental agencies, working together as part of the Gippsland Environmental Alliance, to enhance capacity to achieve outcomes greater than our parts. Cameron also advised that SRW supported the 2GL water allocation to GLaWAC out of the Mitchell River.. He provided an overview of the 2.5GL water allocation provided to Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners in the Fitzroy River system to support water requirements in the Budj Bim cultural landscape.*

*Cameron reiterated that with each issue we face we must consider a range of factors that are not well aligned with regard to self-determination.*

- A member stated that the amount of water received by irrigators in the Mitchell reduced significantly through the Gippsland SWS – that originally they negotiated 10GL but it reduced to 6GL, then only 2GL has been sold so far. The member advised that the cost of winterfill water at auction to growers was substantial due to the limited volume made available.
- A member suggested that money should be invested directly with Traditional Owners to understand water and managing barriers faced in the water sector. The member suggested to consider where the Traditional Owners are comfortable for agencies to go/not go in terms of assumptions and decisions. The member questioned why this area is developing so rapidly – what are the blind spots to implementation?

*DELWP are working with agencies and Traditional Owners to get it right, guided by foundational principles. The draft Water is Life Cultural Water Road Map policy document presented is part one. Part two is the Traditional Owner Nation statements, expressing cultural water related values.*

- A member queried if there has been good engagement with the Indigenous communities.

*DELWP have held state-wide forums and brought Nations together on a regular basis, as well as direct 1:1 consultation. There are 38 nations within Victoria and DELWP anticipate receiving around 20 statements. This consultation will propose principles to inform actions on water returns: use of environmental water, environmental water holdings, and water returns, and we will work to establish how to recognise Traditional Owners as Environmental Water holders.*

*Traditional Owners can comment until 10 June.*

- A member questioned if there will be meaningful change for Traditional Owners.

*There are currently mixed views, which is not surprising, as not all nations are in agreement.*

- A member asked what this would mean for irrigators.

*The SWS and local groundwater plans are where decisions need to be made. This may change the way we do business, but consultations/decisions are still to be done and the assessment/decision making processes.*

*Cameron noted that existing commitments remain in place for projects where there is a signed agreement, but capital works have not yet started. Subsequently, our view is that Traditional Owners' perspectives need to be embedded in every decision around water recovery. Cameron encouraged members to provide feedback to DELWP.*

- A member applauded the attempt to get Traditional Owner involvement, however noted that the short, targeted consultation is at odds with current processes.

*DELWP noted that this is unlike anything else at the moment, and that some Traditional Owners don't think that the government should be consulting with other stakeholders at all. The design of the consultation had to take that into account to respect cultural safety and appropriateness with working with Traditional Owners. Final positions have been worked on for many years, so even though this consultation seems short, the ideas and concepts have been considered over several years.*

- A member raised concern with the lack of consultation and how this could be a detriment to long term arrangements.

*There is a distinction with Water for Life – it makes no decision on how water is shared.*

- A member suggested that DELWP need to talk about irrigation/Traditional Owners and Environmental Water to be involved in solutions, including ensuring all parties

are informed so that irrigators can allow for all interests in water in their submissions. Ross Ingram thanked the DELWP attendees for their presentations and for taking the time to share them with the committee.

Anthony Jenkins, Jesse Rose, Bryony Grice and Brodey Hamilton left the meeting at 12.15pm.

## **7 PRINCIPAL MATTERS – for discussion**

### **7.1 Board Update**

Jane Doolan advised that the focus for the Board has been on the following:

- Pricing Submission
- Corporate Plan – which has been sent to DELWP and Department of Treasury and Finance.

Cameron advised that the CPI came in at 5.1%. We are experiencing cost increases, such as fuel and the cost of staff, especially new staff due to shortages. This is a higher number than what is normal. Cameron wanted to make sure that the committee was aware of this.

The committee did not raise any questions.

### **7.2 Review of Groundwater and Rivers Strategic Outlook**

Hugh Christie advised this is an opportunity for the forum to review the strategic focus of the last year and reflect/provide commentary on these areas, which then allows for any updates as well as giving Jane and Cameron the opportunity to hear thoughts. Providing opportunities for members to have an impact on agenda items for the next 12 months.

How do these resonate with you? Are there any areas SRW should be focusing on?

The committee raised the following questions (*responses from management provided at the meeting follow each question*):

- With regard to the Mitchell system sales, some of the minor tributaries need to be assessed as viable under Sustainable Diversion Limits, and whether allocation is available. Suggestion that extraction point should be the mainstream of the Mitchell River.

*It would be hard to regulate on small tributaries as to when would be the right time to divert. It would become complicated if taking that option.*

A member advised he has not specifically spoken to others in his area about taking from smaller tributaries but can't think of anyone that would want to extract from smaller tributaries.

- Strategic focus 5 (resource assessments) – is there reliance on the state government to get this done?

*There's a mixture. We can use income to invest in these items although there are times where DELWP will provide funding if high profile, i.e. actions out of SWS or*

regarding integrated review of management. Also, , DELWP will provide some assessments with regard to Sustainable Yields while SRW will assist with assumptions.

Matt Hudson (SRW employee) has completed work on supply and demand assessments in three systems, we will organise for Matt to attend a future forum. His work was funded partly through water sales funds.

- A member noted that there should be an improved cost model for assessment processes – application assessment cost to reflect additional work for complex applications rather than spreading the costs.

We need to ensure the users of our service pay for the value we create. This is achieved through the pricing submission reviewing effort and costs. Part of this is where we can improve information and processes to minimise other costs – potential for significant savings.

Action	Action officer	Due date
Matt Hudson to attend a future forum to discuss supply and demand works	MORDEN / PRICE	02/09/2022

## 8 **Principal Matters – for noting**

### 8.1 **Strategic focus and Manager Groundwater and Rivers Update**

The report was taken as read.

#### Strategic focus:

Bryce Morden provided an overview of the report.

It was noted that:

- There are challenges within the Mitchell regarding Water Sales. There are current applications for water sales (Tambo) – Mining, Irrigation and Traditional Owners. Working to understand how we factor in the TO component and how we share resource in a structured way that fits within policy without distorting the market.

The committee raised the following questions (*responses from management provided at the meeting follow each question*):

- A member queried whether the auction would be by tender or an open auction?  
*Open online auction, same as the Mitchell and Tarwin. We take expressions of interest and assess eligibility. Eligible parties can bid per lot.*

Hugh Christie advised people can see the current bid/price of the lot.

- A member stated that he can't see how Traditional Owner water applies to groundwater.  
*Some apps we have currently are for groundwater. SRW is working with DELWP to understand how to assess.*
- A member queried if the Traditional Owner has proposed to purchase at commercial

rates?

*No, and we are currently working through this with DELWP to understand how SRW will navigate this.*

Hugh acknowledged that Jesse and his team are doing a great job around policy and assisting SRW to navigate this space, especially with Traditional Owner water.

Daniel Hammond offered his time to assist with consulting and bridging the gap to invite parties to attend his property and those of other irrigators.

- A member asked if the committee should inform themselves of Traditional Owner culture and what is important to them to better understand?

Another member stated that Traditional Owners may not know what they want as there is quite a lot of misunderstandings and conflict with each other.

- Jane Doolan questioned whether there is potential for Traditional Owners to talk through their statements with SRW as a learning process to assist with understanding.

*Bryce Morden noted that Gunditj Mirring are currently working through their water nation statement and potentially may be able to present at a future meeting.*

Action	Action officer	Due date
To discuss with Traditional Owner nations about opportunities for SGRF to learn about nation statements under Water is Life	MORDEN	02/09/2022

## **8.2 Latrobe Valley Strategy (LVRRS) update**

The report was taken as read.

## **8.3 Sustainable Water Strategy Update**

The report was taken as read.

Cameron noted it is getting close, and this is the time to get things on the table. It is front of mind for lots of people within government. SRW takes perspective from here to present the matters that matter to the forum members.

A member noted this is an election year and talking to people in politics they are interested in advocating and understanding what stakeholders would like.

## **8.4 Pricing Submission update**

The report was taken as read.

## **8.5 Macalister Avon Irrigation Development update**

The report was taken as read.

Cameron FitzGerald advised that this was also a subject of discussion at the MCCC, noting there was one item they were firm about in understanding what the level of demand is within



the district. Cameron stated that a study has been completed and the number coming back is about 11GL for the MID at current market rates, with additional water being made available due to water savings.

A member stated that the diverters have been neglected and this is a current bug bear.

It was noted that the MID is one regulated district.

The committee raised the following questions (*responses from management provided at the meeting follow each question*):

- A member stated that in light of discussions, is it likely water could be split other ways, or it will go to irrigators.

*Our view is if we have a signed agreement, we expect the agreement to be honoured.*

*We have talked with our customers through the pricing process – we have to pay for a portion of the works (SRW and customers) and selling water is how to contribute and meet requirements for the works. These projects are structured under the agreement but there are broader impacts to be considered.*

*The component that our irrigator customers are funding will definitely all go to production. The state government funding will go to environment or TO owners. Fed government has been earmarked for production and our view is that it will continue in this place, in a signed agreement.*

- A member asked if DELWP have assessed the greatest impact for licence holders and seen the above funding for harder projects with less return? The member stated that SRW potentially has opportunity to assess the best wins for current customers.

*We always want to have a good understanding of the best possible opportunities and support these things.*

- A member queried water savings that go to the environment, asking ‘who gets that?’

*It will go to the Victorian Environmental Water Holder and then managed by WGCMA to work with the VEWH as to how it is used for best environment benefits.*

- A member asked if it would be better if it was held by the Traditional Owners?

*There is a very open question, particularly considering what has been discussed today. The SGRF has received a high-level briefing, but DELWP may be moving in that direction.*

- There is already a lot of consultation and input – can some of that, in some systems in a long-term arrangement, be transferred?

*The original idea was that DELWP give each CMA an environmental entitlement to their rivers – but in the north it would mean all of the water would be held by GBCMA. This was part of the drivers for the creation of the VEWH. There is a need to be able to move it around to get the best environmental outcomes. What do you lose from the concept of moving around?*

## 8.6 Compliance and Enforcement update

The report was taken as read.

It was noted that SRW have the best compliance levels across rural water corporations.

## 8.7 Communications report

The report was taken as read.

# 9 COMMITTEE MATTERS

## 9.1 Important issues from other customer committees

Cameron FitzGerald advised we have not met with the WBMCCC, as the next meeting is scheduled for Monday 20 June. Cameron advised that we have not had a huge amount of engagement in our Pricing Submission customer consultation sessions, however with regard to Groundwater & Rivers customers we are seeing some feedback around whether it is appropriate to charge CPI. A board paper next week sets our targets as to what good value looks like.

## 9.2 Matters referred by/to the Board

Jane Doolan confirmed the following matters to be taken to the Board:

- Dealing with DELWP on key issues: GW2030 and Aboriginal Roadmap – we would be encouraging DELWP to consult and that our customers want to be consulted on these things.
- Water for Life Roadmap: we need to understand and take on board the messages – having a program where our local Traditional Owners talk through their nation statement and forum members to take back more information to their peers and ensure good consultation.
- The forum members understand CPI is 5.1%.
- The forum is comfortable with the range of strategic issues identified for 2022-23.
- There is a lot of interest in water sales and how Traditional Owner applications are managed.
- Early consultation on projects – important that the consultation occurs before the work starts.

## 9.3 Committee Membership update

Hugh Christie advised we have decided to maintain the existing forum membership through the pricing submission period. We will be looking to prepare for committee renewal through the next quarter with the intention of starting the next calendar year with new members.

Hugh noted that SRW will take the opportunity to review the customer committee charter prior to advertising, to ensure a clear statement on expectations and how the committee works. The charter will be brought back to the customer committees for feedback.

Action	Action officer	Due date
Provide the Customer Committee Charter to the forum	MORDEN	02/09/2022

## 10 **GENERAL BUSINESS**

A member suggested that at the next meeting it would be beneficial to see some of the average steam flows from our major irrigation streams. Flows in the east have been significant, and it would be good to see how it compares to averages.

Action	Action officer	Due date
Include a report on average water flows from major unregulated systems at the next forum.	MORDEN	02/09/2022

## 11 **MEETING EVALUATION**

The Chair sort feedback on the effectiveness of this meeting.

The Chair asked the forum to assess the performance of the Committee at this meeting, using the below questions as a guide.

- A member advised that it was awkward having a hybrid meeting.

It was **agreed** by all parties to have one meeting held in person annually and the remainder virtually. The in-person meeting to not include video capability.

Bryce Morden noted that Zoom is not the usual platform for SRW meetings and there is a staff preference for using MS Teams.

Hugh Christie thanked the forum members for the level of conversation, stating it is a credit to the group on how we engage with potentially confronting items facing the rural water industry.

## 12 **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum is Friday 2 September and will be held by video conference.

## 13 **CLOSE**

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 1.38pm.

	March 2020	June 2020	Sept 2020	Dec 2020	March 2021	June 2021	Sept 2021	Dec 2021	March 2022	June 2022	Sept 2022
Ross Ingram	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apol	✓	✓	
Tom Wallace	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apol	
Josie Zilm	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apol	✓	
Daniel Hammond	✓	Apol	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Liz Clay	✓	Apol	✓	Apol	Apol	Apol					
Bruce Vallance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apol	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Damian Moore	✓		✓	Apol	✓	✓	Apol	Apol	Apol	Apol	
Kevin Stark	Apol	Apol	Apol	Apol	✓	Apol	Apol	Apol	✓	✓	
David Hotchkin	Apol										
Philip Wratten	Apol										
Matt Gleeson	Apol	✓	✓	✓	Apol	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Steven Marshall	Apol	✓	✓	✓	Apol	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Norm Drew			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Daniel Toohey			✓	✓	✓	✓	Apol	✓	✓	✓	

- ✓ - Attended Meeting
- Apol - Notification of apology
- Blank - Did not attend