

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

**MINUTES of MEETING 44**

**Held 9.30am, Thursday 3 March 2022**

**Online via Zoom**

**PRESENT:**

Mr Ross Ingram	Chair
Mr Tom Wallace	Forum member
Mr Bruce Vallance	Forum member
Mr Daniel Hammond	Forum member
Mr Matt Gleeson	Forum member
Mr Norm Drew	Forum member
Mr Daniel Toohey	Forum member
Mr Stephen Marshall	Forum member
Mr Kevin Stark	Forum member

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Ms Jane Doolan	Board 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:**

Ms Josie Zilm	Forum member, Deputy Chair
Mr Damian Moore	Forum member
Mr Cameron FitzGerald	Managing Director, SRW

**GUESTS:**

Ms Natalie Collard	Food and Fibre Great South Coast
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**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. 43 held on 2 December 2021 were **approved.**

**Moved:** Daniel Hammond      **Seconded:** Steve Marshall

## 5 **BUSINESS ARISING**

The report was taken as read.

It was **noted** that the following action items on the business arising report are now completed:

- Action 24680
- Action 24681
- Action 24682
- Action 24683

Action 24248 and 24684 will remain on the report until resolved.

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

- Ross Ingram noted that the situation with the Traditional Owners was poorly communicated to the farmers on the Mitchell River and advised that there is still a bit of unhappiness in the community regarding the 2,000ML, and concern regarding what will happen going forward. This position was also informed by the history of unallocated water in the Mitchell River and the active demand for water.

*Bryce Morden provided a comparison with what has occurred with Gunditj Mirring TOs and made reference to the Central & Gippsland Sustainable Water Strategy as to what future applications may look like.*

## 6 **GUEST SPEAKER**

Natalie Collard, Executive Officer Food and Fibre Great South Coast provided an overview of Food and Fibre Great South Coast Inc. and their 18-Point Water Plan. Natalie advised there will be a Sustainable Water forum to be held in 2023.

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

- Licences for 30 years is a good start – to have notice several years in advance would allow time to change and adapt.
- A member disagreed with brokers buying the water and stated that he is against the model where third parties who don't have use for the water own the water.

*Natalie Collard advised that the VFF were not immediately on board with this and that it is more about prompting a discussion and establishing understanding. She confirmed that the aim is to encourage a wider understanding of issues and opportunities, establishing safeguards against risk, and that is not a matter of everything within the plan being adopted. FFGSC wants to use the Plan to generate a healthy discussions on all points to create value and to understand potential unintended consequences through the supply chains.*

- A member stated that there are two sides to unbundling. Within the Murray Darling Basin, even though there was a drought on, there was an increase in regional productivity as the water was moved to where there was best value use. He stated

that it is not about brokers, but about being able to have a trading system to ensure water is sent to the most efficient use. He also stated that the mechanism needs to be right.

- A member then stated that unbundling was not successful – bringing traders into the system would be detrimental. He explained that when the farmers got into hard times and sold their water, it was then difficult and expensive to buy it back.
- A member questioned if there was any trouble in southwest obtaining people to step into irrigation related roles, in reference to more water availability creating more jobs and is there a plan to get people?

*Natalie Collard responded that we are creating impact. We are potentially Australia's only one-stop shop for educational resources for schools connected to Food and Fibre. She will be presenting at an upcoming School to Work summit, as the only industry person on the program. Natalie agreed that there is a chronic skill shortage, but she is aiming to change this with careers teachers.*

- Jane Doolan noted that Food & Fibre has concentrated on water as a major tool and queried the Regional Development Plan sector and how responsive is it to this?

*Natalie Collard advised that their strategic plan is in alignment with the Great South Coast Sustainable Water Statement, and this has shown scale of the water opportunity in the southwest region. It has identified underperformance in utilising natural resources and complacency in production of food and fibre because natural abundance hasn't forced innovation in this area. Natalie advised that all five councils now have a pathway to align efforts in the 18-Point Plan – these are transformational steps towards increased productivity.*

- A member noted that there needs to be a balance of food supply.

*Natalie Collard confirmed that she values all feedback, including when there are problematic issues identified.*

*Hugh Christie advised that people are wanting to develop in the southwest, and one of the challenges is how they balance buying land, building water assets and having surety, noting that in some ways, water is harder to find than land. It is a case of potential mechanisms to enable development and investment.*

- A member commented that he is trying to access recycled water on the Mornington Peninsula and sees parallels with the work FFGSC is doing to try and improve access to water. He advised that the groundwater is too saline and there are no high flows, so growth is very restricted at this point in time. He noted that there is also difficulty in trying to get agriculture into local schools program.

*Natalie commended the efforts currently being made and stated that the connection between driving it at the schools and understanding the impacts of cutting program is something that is critical, and we're excited as to what's possible getting everyone on the same page now. Even small steps have a large impact.*

*It was noted that part of the goal is to encourage our Traditional Owner groups to share their water strategies with the community. To be successful, the water conversation has to elevate from the region scale to a state-based discussion.*

- A member queried trading between water users in groundwater systems where trade is not permitted and queried the involvement of local government in water.

*Natalie advised will be calling on councils to help support broader discussions with local community members on smarter irrigation workshops and best practice.*

Action	Action officer	Due date
A copy of the Great South Coast Sustainable Water Statement, and the Economic Analysis of Food and Fibre in the Great South Coast to be provided to committee members	PRICE	18/03/2022

Natalie left the meeting at 10.33am.

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

### **7.1 Board Update**

Jane Doolan advised that there have been two board meetings - December and February – since the last SGRF. The focus for the Board has been on the following:

- Pricing Submission, including the process for customer engagement, development of the capital program, and potential trade-offs.
- The SRW Corporate plan – this being the last year of this pricing period – ensuring delivery of commitments and understanding what goes into the next submission.
- Asset management – working through current approaches and issues.
- Policy and framework reviews – these are critical to set the standard for the business.

Jane confirmed that the messages from this committee at the last forum were tabled at the December board meeting.

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

- A member wanted to know what is happening with groundwater trading in southwest.

*Groundwater trading is addressed within the Central & Gippsland Water Strategy and further information about local issues will be covered in the GWR Manager update at this meeting.*

### **7.2 Murray Darling Update**

Jane Doolan presented a summary of what has been happening in the Murray Darling Basin. This provided an overview of how the Commonwealth Water Act was established, a breakdown of the elements of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and an assessment of the progress.

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

- Kevin Stark queried what Jane Doolan's thoughts are on unbundling.

*Jane Doolan advised that because the Basin is so connected, with trading up and down the system, unbundling is required to support trade and generate value.*

*Overall, trade has been good for the country and industries, but there are consequences. Looking at the system we manage, the key thing is if we want enhanced trading ability within system limits, what do we need to get that?*

- A member queried the choke at Barmah – to get water to South Australia  
*Recent work indicates that the choke will keep narrowing for the next few decades. This is currently under investigation, with investment in studies looking at options such as infrastructure, how to manage the system better and what are some of the options within the state system that could be used and the feasibility of sediment removal. There is also the need to ensure people understand the risk of delivery shortfall and the risk is increasing due to climate change.*

*Hugh Christie advised that SRW has received funding from DELWP for a trial for a water exchange in the Macalister Irrigation Area with the aim to identify approaches and tools to facilitate improved trading opportunities. It is hoped that this will have flow on benefits to GWR customers.*

- A member advised the committee that the government has been strongly focussing on MDB and that there has not been enough government focus here (southern Victoria). There is a need for local councils to be onboard.

*There is a need to have Regional Development Plans, and assess how water contributes to the region. There is a potential for the region to be an exemplar for water criticality in regional development.*

- A member stated that it is important to ensure that Victoria maintains their share of the water in the Murray Darling Basin and asked Jane what the most important points are.

*Victoria is clear it wants to see the supply project work to ensure that when reconciliation is undertaken in 2024, there should be minimal impacts on irrigation communities.*

## **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:

- SRW has written to the Minister to abolish the Glenelg Water Supply Protection Area and rescind the PCV associated, consistent with the strategic focus to encourage flexible trading. This process will allow permanent trading to recommence along the area along the SA border, which is currently limited to temporary trades only.
- The Minister will initiate a Statutory process including public consultation prior to rescinding the WSPA.

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

- Is SRW still hoping to have other 2 GL in Mitchell on the table by mid-year?

*There have been delays due to key people being unavailable; however, will engage someone else to run the sale with the goal of getting it started this year. Whether the licences get allocated or issued for this coming winterfill season is unlikely and probably won't happen by the start of July. SRW is keen to see this progress. Another SWS may or may not provide further water. It would be beneficial to demonstrate there is good demand in the Mitchell Basin to justify more water being made available ahead of the final Central and Gippsland SWS.*

- A member queried Traditional Owner water.

*Gunditj Miring has made an application near Haywood for 2.5ML identified in the Western SWS. Public notification has taken place, with a couple of letters of support received and no objections. Water can be taken from July to October which may help the drainage system run better. An announcement on the application outcome is due in next fortnight.*

- The same member asked who is a Traditional Owner? Do they have to be a TO to obtain a licence?

*Gunditj Miring is the corporation acting on behalf of the Gunditj Mara people and who have applied for a S51 licence as there is no TO class of licence. In terms of public benefit, SRW is looking at how fees do and don't apply, and this depends on if there has been RAP or TO status afforded to a group to access water, rather than an Indigenous person individually application noting that a large number of licences are already held by Indigenous individuals and corporations but are not specifically allocated for cultural purposes (and are subject to fees and charges).*

## **8.2 Sustainable Water Strategy Update**

The report was taken as read.

## **8.3 Latrobe Valley (LVRRS) update**

The report was taken as read.

It was noted that an Environmental Effect Statement is being undertaken on the Hazelwood Rehabilitation, assessing balances and impacts driven through this process.

- How far away is this?

*It has been announced but, this is a process that will take some time, likely multiple years, and they are also waiting for the SWS.*

## **8.4 Compliance and Enforcement update**

The report was taken as read.

Bryce Morden noted that SRW have had some push back in light of an increased focus on compliance. SRW are currently working through an instance of physical assault of a staff member that occurred in the middle of this year. There have been some instances of threatening behaviour (not physical assault) also. Bryce suggested that committee members should broach this with their networks to communicate that Field Officers are there to perform their job and to ensure resources are accessed in fair and equitable ways.

## **8.5 Communications report**

The report was taken as read.

- A member queried the Torquay dam.

*The VCAT appeal is scheduled for June this year. This highlights the importance of robust processes, how SRW manages the urban rural interface. These issues can cost a lot of resources.*

## 9 **COMMITTEE MATTERS**

### 9.1 **Important issues from other customer committees**

Hugh Christie advised there were no matters referred from other committees; however there was a one-day planning and history workshop held with the MCCC which delivered a lot of value to the people who attended. SRW are still working through tenders for modernisation works, which is a focus for people within the MID.

## 10 **GENERAL BUSINESS**

A member queried the Board members' backgrounds and stated that the focus should be a broader representation of the community, such as customers of SRW and have members that are or have been farmers. The member commented that a Board of this nature should have some representation that are in that category.

*Jane Doolan will bring this comment to the Board and advised that this is a ministerial selection query.*

*Hugh Christie advised that the Ministerial focus is skill-based. He also advised that the MCCC raised a similar concern as there are currently no Board members within the MIA customer group, and that the committee will be writing to the Minister to raise their concern with representation directly.*

A member noted that in the past a SRW field officer, during times of restrictions, would text customers as to what the restrictions would be for that day. He queried why this can't continue? Other SRW customers have commented that they would like this service to continue.

*SRW need a system that is balanced between ability and customer needs. The communications around rosters and restrictions is the hotline. There is room for improvement and SRW need to ensure it is auditable, consistent across the business and providing a good record of information provided to customers. The hotline currently does not provide that audibility. SRW are currently developing a project to develop an automated process to assess rosters and restrictions and communicate assessment outcomes in an effective and auditable format.*

It was **noted** that members would value 'push' notifications of restrictions to their phones.

## 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.

1. Do we think the Committee is adding value?

Yes.

A member commented that it was disappointing that this meeting wasn't held in person due to cancellations and it would be great for a meeting in person for networking, possibly in Maffra for those within the area.

Jane Doolan confirmed key messages to go back to the Board:

- Process for providing water for TO and learning from past experiences to improve the process
- Interest in the Food & Fibre 18-Point Plan – support for the directions, interest for some of the ideas
- General reflection of Board's skill base and lack of farming or water user experience
- A level of service provided by individual staff member and see that as being maintained
- Members added the following:
  - At the next meeting in person it would be good to have time set aside to be able to discuss the meeting afterwards.
  - Unbundling to be taken back to the board. A member stated that councils don't support agriculture but state how important it is for their areas. It would be beneficial for them to consider existing users as having a higher stake.

12 **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum is Friday 3 June 2022 and will be held in person.

Discussion was had regarding the location, days and timing of in-person meetings. It was **agreed** to change the day of the meetings to be Friday, instead of Thursday, and for in-person meetings to commence at 10.30am (for a 10.45am start) to allow time for travel.

13 **CLOSE**

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 12.04pm.



	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	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Josie Zilm	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apol		
Daniel Hammond	✓	Apol	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Liz Clay	✓	Apol	✓	Apol	Apol	Apol					
Bruce Vallance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apol	✓	✓	✓		
Damian Moore	✓		✓	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