

MACALISTER CUSTOMER CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING 195
Held 10.00am Tuesday 25 October 2022
SRW, Maffra

PRESENT

Mr Benn Thexton, Deputy Chair
Mr Steve Dwyer
Mr Norm Drew
Ms Kate Lamb
Mr Alan Clyne
Mr Graeme Anderson, OAM
Mr Brad White

SRW Representatives

Ms Joanne Butterworth-Gray, SRW Board Chair
Mr Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director
Mr Simon Wilkinson, General Manager Service Delivery
Mr Matthew Cook, Manager Water Supply East
Mrs Pamela Crawford, Service Delivery Officer
Mrs Hayley Taylor, Executive Assistant

ABSENT

Mrs Jeannette Howie

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr David Faulkner, Accounting Manager - for item 6.5
Dr Stephine Suter, Environmental Water Resource Officer,
WGCMA – for item 6.6

2. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the committee requested Southern Rural Water (SRW) staff leave the room so the committee could conduct an in-camera discussion.

SRW staff left the meeting at 10:03am and returned at 10:21am.

The Deputy Chair opened the meeting by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and waters of the MID.

The committee Deputy Chair provided an overview of the in-camera discussion advising that discussions were held around the purpose of the committee, the raising of agenda items and expected behaviour of members.

The Committee noted there were no apologies.

Mr FitzGerald advised that he, Ms Butterworth-Gray and Mr Wilkinson were attending the meeting from Warrnambool due to a board meeting being scheduled on the same day. Mr FitzGerald advised that he and Ms Butterworth-Gray would leave the meeting at 11am to attend a board stakeholder event and Mr Wilkinson would be present for the duration of the meeting.

3. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No further conflicts were declared.

4. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on **Tuesday 27 September 2022**.

Moved: Mr G Anderson

Seconded: Mr S Dwyer

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Meeting	Agenda Item #	Action	Action Officer	Status
September	7.3	Volume of water released down river and its positive environmental affects to be made public.	Crawford/Cook	Ongoing

Mr Cook provided an update noting media releases have been published over the last four months which include positives of releasing water to the environment.

Mr Drew stated people in the community aren't aware that Glenmaggie has spilt, and the Deputy Chair asked whether SRW can provide a media release stating that Glenmaggie has spilt.

Management **agreed** to forward to request to the Communications Team.

Mr Drew noted the attendance of Mr Prior at the last meeting and thanked him for the presentation on 'Place of Take', noting that Mr Prior is highlighting the difference between the MIA and the northern irrigation districts.

The committee noted the MIA storage volumes are not updating correctly on some webpages. Management advised the SRW website is correct, and work is being undertaken to ensure links to other webpages are working correctly.

Action	Action officer	Due date
Request Communications Team create a media release to notify the public that Glenmaggie is spilling	Cook	11/11/2022

6. PRINCIPAL MATTERS

6.1 DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Mr Thexton acknowledged Mrs Hanratty's departure and thanked her for the time she spent on the committee and noted she has done a fantastic job in trying conditions.

The committee **requested** a letter of thanks from the committee to be sent to Mrs Hanratty, with the letter to be approved by the Deputy Chair prior to being sent.

Moved: Mr A Clyne

Seconded: Mrs K Lamb

The Committee moved to appoint Mr Thexton as Acting Chair until elections can take place.

Moved: Mr A Clyne

Seconded: Mr G Anderson

All in favour

Ms Butterworth-Gray advised the board will also send a letter of thanks to Mrs Hanratty.

Mr Thexton provided an update on his background. .

Mr Thexton stated his vision for the committee in his role as acting chair which includes a focus on the future productivity of the MIA noting the following on future meetings:

- conduct of members needs to be with respect and integrity.
- the aim is to build the committee up and draw in new members.

Mr Wilkinson advised SRW fully supports Mr Thexton’s appointment to Acting Chair and his vision for the committee.

Mr Wilkinson advised that SRW will be undertaking a review of all customer committees and the December MCCC meeting will allow for discussion on the direction and key issues for the committee.

Action	Action officer	Due date
Draft a letter of thanks from the committee for Mrs Hanratty.	Taylor	11/11/2022

6.2 SIGNIFICANT ISSUES OR ACTIONS

There are no current significant current issues or actions.

6.3 MATTERS REFERRED BY THE BOARD

Ms Butterworth-Gray noted;

- it was great to hear Mr Thexton’s words on the positive approach to taking the committee forward; and
- the Board has requested a review of all committees to ensure they are representing modern SRW.

6.4 Water Supply Update

Mr Cook advised he has accepted the role of Manager Water Supply East.

Mr Cook provided an operational update on the following:

- Modernisation

The Operations Team have visited nine farms with Mr Jake Thunder, Project Support Officer, to speak with customers about co-contribution and construction. Jaydo is

ready to start groundworks and SRW and Jaydo are working with customers to start the project with as little inconvenience as possible. Discussions with customers regarding co contributions have been constructive and overall well received. This is a huge improvement from the start of the project.

Mr Anderson noted that with Mrs Hanratty’s resignation from the committee, someone would need to replace her on the PCG committee. Mr Dwyer was nominated to be the representative.

Moved: Mr A Clyne **Seconded:** Mr G Anderson

Mr FitzGerald thanked the members for their feedback and noted he was pleased to hear the positive feedback. Mr FitzGerald will pass on the feedback to Mr Thunder.

- Seasonal update

There have been very wet conditions and it is still consistently wet. SRW has delivered just under 3,000ML, similar to this time last year. Allocation 100% HRWS and SRW will conduct a review for low reliability water shares on 15 December 2022 with the expectation that with low usage to date and the need to hold and supply HRWS it will likely be a low allocation. Fortnightly reviews will then continue.

- Flood operations

SRW are running Glenmaggie with flood mitigation in mind and keeping airspace to absorb water coming down the river. There is no risk of allocation loss in running the storages in this way.

The committee inquired whether SRW was receiving information on the Thomson Dam. Mr Cook advised SRW were involved in regular meetings with Melbourne Water to ensure SRW can plan for Cowwarr Weir operations if the Thomson is to spill.

Mr Thexton inquired whether there is an opportunity to add graphs to the Weekly Snapshot on release trends. SRW **agreed** to review the data to see if this is possible.

- Place of Take

Key project staff met with the committee remotely last week. The impact of the project is seen to be minimal for MIA customers and the plan is to ensure a smooth transition at the end of June 2023 once implemented.

Mr FitzGerald thanked Mr Thexton for his leadership and noted he valued the way that Mr Thexton led the meeting. He reiterated the importance of the committee to SRW.

Ms Butterworth-Gray and Mr FitzGerald left the meeting at 11:04am.

Mr Drew noted there haven’t had a flood warden meeting since before COVID-19 restrictions were implemented and inquired whether SRW could convene a meeting with relevant stakeholders. Mr Cook **agreed** to take the request to the Emergency Manager and Headworks team. The committee discussed the phone tree system, and management recommended that the Emergency Manager is bought into the conversation to discuss modern communication plans.

Action	Action officer	Due date
Pass on MCCC feedback on the positive way conversations with MIA landholders effected by modernisation have been handled.	FitzGerald	11/11/2022

Pass on MCCC's request that the Emergency Manager convene a meeting with Flood Warden's, Headworks and other relevant stakeholders.	Cook	11/11/2022
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6.5 Debt Recovery Update

Mr David Faulkner, Accounting Manager joined the meeting and provided an update on SRW's debt recovery noting;

- Throughout COVID-19 response measures there was no debt recovery action from April 2020 to July 2022.
- SRW was consulted during the drafting new debt recovery guidelines which come into effect in March 2023. The key point in these guidelines is communication. There are numerous pathways forward if communication is established with a customer. But if communication cannot be established then SRW must follow the pathway to full debt recovery and part of this process can be to cut off the water supply. The timeline to full debt recovery has now shortened.
- SRW's aim is to agree to sensible outcomes for customers to repay their debts.
- With an uplift in customer communications, SRW has collected 50-60% of outstanding debt.
- SRW has engaged an external party to contact customers with outstanding debt and report back to SRW with payment plans. This has no impact on customers credit ratings.

The committee asked Mr Faulkner about the debt level across SRW and in the MIA. Mr Faulkner advised;

- There are 45 to 50 customers that are habitual non-payers.
- There are 570 account holders across all SRW that have less than \$500 owing, with most being Groundwater customers.
- Before annual billing went out the debt level in the MIA was just over \$1.4M (over 90 days) across 700 accounts, with 30 accounts making up the majority of the debt. \$1M of that debt is under a payment arrangement.

Mr Dwyer noted the bills are very complicated to understand and it would be helpful if the bills identified the amount owing clearly. Mr Faulkner advised SRW have identified that the bills can be complicated to interpret and recognise there is an opportunity to make the bills easier to read.

6.6 Seasonal Watering Plan for Macalister and Thomson Rivers

Mr Cook welcomed Dr Stephine Suter, Environmental Water Resource Officer WGCMA, to the meeting.

Dr Suter noted;

- Due to wet conditions over the last two years, the environment has not needed to place an order for water.
- WGCMA is in constant communication with SRW in relation to spill and are now having the same conversations with Melbourne Water. Mr Thexton stated there

needs to be communication with customers, so they are aware of what is happening with environmental flows. Mr Cook stated there is an opportunity to improve on these comms but noted SRW do publish information on environmental flows in partnership with WGCMA and **agreed** to review whether there is an opportunity to include this information in the Weekly Snapshot.

- There are working groups that review yearly requirements for environment, including when flows are needed to help with fish migration and platypus movements and prioritise when and how environmental flows are needed. Recent surveys have identified an improvement in fish recruitment and large breeding events of bird species. This shows that the work undertaken over drier years is working.
- The Environment is allocated with HRWS and LRWS the same as all other customers.

Mr Drew inquired as to what monitoring has been done to assess the success of the Cowwarr fish-way. Dr Suter advised that a 10 year monitoring program has identified fish species appearing further upstream, and are seeing a lot of young fish.

Dr Suter noted she was excited to hear the news of the Maffra Fish Way, which will be built at the side of the Maffra Weir. SRW will be involved in the build, and management noted that it will not impact in the way water is delivered.

Mr Dwyer noted during conversations around the Newry pipeline, SRW committed to install two outlets for possible wetlands in the Newry Creek. Management confirmed that SRW has committed providing 'the infrastructure required' for wetlands in the Newry creek as defined by the CMA to maintain the environmental values identified by the CMA. CMA will work to progress earlier conversations with stakeholders on this topic.

Action	Action officer	Due date
Review whether information on Environmental flows can be included in the Weekly Snapshot.	COOK/ CRAWFORD	11/11/2022

7. FOR NOTING

7.1 CORRESPONDENCE

The Committee noted there has been no correspondence since the last meeting.

7.3 COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

The Committee noted the Communications report.

7.2 FEEDBACK REGISTER (RELEVANT TO MID)

The Committee noted there has been no feedback since the last meeting.

8. GENERAL BUSINESS

Mrs Lamb advised her general business item had been covered in-camera.

Mr Anderson noted the Customer Committee review and looks forward to the recommendations from the consultants

Mr Anderson stated the role of the Chair of the committee has changed and the committee, through the Chair, is no longer consulted on allocations. Mr Cook advised the allocation

model does not allow for opinion but will consider advising the Chair on expected allocation, so the committee can respond to questions.

Mr Wilkinson advised SRW plan to invite the consultant to the December 2022 meeting to review the meeting format and hear from members. Once the format is finalised with consultation with members, SRW will begin recruitment for new members.

9. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting No. 196 of the Macalister Customer Consultative Committee is scheduled for 10.00 am on Tuesday 13 December 2022.

Meeting	Date
MCCC 196	Tuesday, 13 th December 2022

10. MEETING CLOSE

With there being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.00pm.

	July 2021	Sept 2021	Oct 2021	Dec 2021	Feb 2022	April 2022	May 2022	July 2022	Sept 2022	Oct 2022	Dec 2022
Raelene Hanratty	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P		
Graeme Anderson	P	P	P	P	Apol	P	P	P	P	P	
Stephen Dwyer	P	P	P	P	Apol		Apol	Apol	P	P	
Jeanette Howie	P	P	P	P	P	Apol	P	P	P		
Norm Drew	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Alan Clyne	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Kate Lamb	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
Brad White	Apol	P	P	P	P	Apol	P	P	P	P	
Benn Thexton	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	Apol	Apol	P	

P Attended Meeting
 Apol Notification of apology
 Blank Did not attend

CONFLICT OF INTEREST TABLE

Name of Committee member	Description of interest	Interested parties	Is the interest current?
Kate Lamb	Beef grazing operation in Denison	Kate Lamb	Yes
Brad White	Owner of irrigated farm business in Riverslea	Brad White	Yes