

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

MINUTES of MEETING 46

Held 9.30am, Friday 2 September 2022

Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT:

Mr Ross Ingram	Chair
Ms Josie Zilm	Forum member, Deputy Chair
Mr Bruce Vallance	Forum member
Mr Daniel Hammond	Forum member
Mr Stephen Marshall	Forum member
Mr Matt Gleeson	Forum member
Mr Damian Moore	Forum member
Mr Stephen Marshall	Forum member

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 and Rivers, SRW
Ms Taryn Price	Executive Assistant, SRW (Scribe)

APOLOGIES:

Mr Daniel Toohey	Forum member
Mr Tom Wallace	Forum member
Mr Kevin Stark	Forum member
Mr Norm Drew	Forum member

GUESTS:

Mr Daniel Miller	Chief Executive Officer, GLaWAC
Ms Danica Jobson	Research Executive, Instinct & Reason Pty Ltd
David Donnelly	Director, Instinct & Reason Pty Ltd
Clifford Lewis	Head of NSW consulting, Instinct & Reason Pty Ltd
Alison Dexter	Head of Australian consulting, Instinct & Reason Pty Ltd
Stuart Critchell	Senior Manager Water Recovery and Compliance, 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.

Bryce Morden introduced Simon Wilkinson, General Manager Service Delivery, replacing Hugh Christie in the role. Simon provided an overview of his career and the lead up to taking this role.

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. 45 held on 3 June 2022 were **approved**.

Moved: Bruce Vallance **Seconded:** Josie Zilm

5 BUSINESS ARISING

The report was taken as read.

6 GUEST SPEAKERS

6.1 DELWP Aboriginal Water Program - nation statement and TO water policies

Daniel Miller, CEO of the Gunaikurnai Land and Water Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) joined the meeting. Daniel provided an overview of GLaWAC, stating that the corporation has Native Title, a Traditional Owner Settlement Agreement with the State, and has Registered Aboriginal Status (RAP) with legislative responsibility.

Daniel advised water management is an emerging space for GLaWAC, and they are strengthening their position. Daniel confirmed that GLaWAC are wanting to grow their partnerships within the water sector. There is currently a project with DELWP helping to connect community members to the river systems, often to places community members are not aware of, to rebuild the connection to the rivers and waterways.

The future for GLaWAC in the water space is that it will be structured, with formal documentation and processes, and will continue to speak with government about recognition. The precedent set by the Mitchell will generate options in other waterways, assessing what works best for country, Traditional Owner groups and the broader community.

Jane Doolan asked whether their intended use of their entitlements would align with the focus on waterway management and whether they intend to partner would in the development of the Regional Waterway Strategy when it is due for renewal.

Daniel stated that GLaWAC are good at strategy and that GLaWAC won't take on a role that can't be managed. Daniel advised that what GLaWAC choose to undertake is dependent on such things as timing. There may be small involvement or great involvement, depending on what is occurring. Daniel stated that these items will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, to work out principles and to take it from there.

Jane also asked whether GLaWAC had developed their Nation Statement in line with the draft Water is Life presentation and whether it would be available.

Daniel stated that some work has been undertaken on GLaWAC's Nation Statement and this will link back to broader expectations and GLaWAC will be part of the process to the best approach around implementation of Water is Life.

Jane asked Daniel about GLaWAC's expectations of SRW and their processes.

A challenge for SRW is the geographic breadth of the organisation, and GLaWAC will support SRW to ensure work can be done in the Aboriginal space. GLaWAC can have structured chats, meet targets together, and provide advice about the best way to work with Aboriginal people in general and best practice work from the GLaWAC perspective. Daniel advised GLaWAC can act in a broker role for SRW and provided an example of working with a shire within the GLaWAC footprint.

- A member stated that the 2 GL to GLaWAC came from left of field and noted that the SGRF was advised at the previous meeting that Traditional Owners didn't want broader consultation on the Water is Life process. The member stated this could have a negative impact on the wider community, noting it is important that people communicate with each other including education about values.

Daniel advised that the statement of no consultation was incorrect. He advised that notification is often short, in some instances GLaWAC hear about announcements only days in advance limiting the opportunity to consult but agreed that consultation and discussions together are important.

The member stated that Traditional Owners should have a greater say on the water that is not currently allocated and the health of the system.

Daniel confirmed that anything that can be done to assist GLaWAC's understanding would be greatly appreciated.

Daniel thanked SRW and the SGRF for the opportunity to join the meeting and welcomed any invitations to assist with understanding and communication between SRW, the community and GLaWAC.

Cameron thanked Daniel for attending the session and for providing an opportunity to understand GLaWAC's achievements, noting he sees there are opportunities to help keep communications open and build a coalition of people seeking great outcomes for the community and Traditional Owners.

6.2 DELWP Water Compliance

Stuart Critchell, Senior Manager Water Recovery and Compliance at DELWP thanked the members for the opportunity to attend and provide information on the project. Stuart advised that the last time social research on compliance was conducted was 2015, noting that a lot has changed since that time. This includes changes to the Water Act, technology and demographics of landholders. Stuart advised that the aim of this project is to provide evidence-based analysis of compliance and enforcement, as well as the behaviours of landholders. The findings of this project will inform communication approaches and to establish a baseline on landholders' understanding of compliance. Stuart introduced staff from Instinct and Reason - the consultancy leading the work.

Stuart Critchell left the meeting at 10.38am citing the need for independence and confidentiality of the project is paramount.

David Donnelly, Director of Instinct & Reason Pty Ltd advised that discussions will occur around the state. This is to understand where people are coming from and what the view is of the people using the water, where issues of compliance occur and to raise an understanding of compliance within the community.

David opened the forum for discussion.

The following topics were discussed:

- Overuse in southern Victoria
- Farmer consultation
- Restrictions creating pressure
- New farm owners unaware of rules relating to water management
- Stock and domestic (D&S) water and its use in non-compliant ways
- Types of non-compliance

David thanked the committee for their time and feedback.

Daniel Hammond left the meeting at 11.12am.

The committee discussed their perspectives and how I&R will best meet with SRW's customers, noting that SRW has a high level of compliance with authorised take.

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 – which was discussed later under a separate agenda item.
- Corporate Plan and Annual Report – which has been sent to DELWP and Department of Treasury and Finance.

The next board meeting is next Tuesday 6 September. Jane advised that the strategic priorities for the SGRF were signed off on. The board appreciated the work of this group and accepted the priorities that will be covered in the Manager Groundwater and Rivers report.

The committee did not raise any questions, however a member stated that the job that the staff performed regarding the Pricing Submission was brilliant. The member questioned the value of the external facilitators when staff did such a great job. The member noted that he didn't think the facilitators were needed.

Cameron FitzGerald welcomed the positive feedback. Cameron noted that there is consistent feedback that the PREMO model is based on customer engagement and stated that it has become quite costly with the independent process. There will be further reflections on the feedback to the ESC to find the right balance between independence and assurance and the cost of this process, ensuring efficiencies.

7.2 Pricing Submission Update

Cameron presented on the Price Submission 2023-28 and provided an overview on the process and deliberations. Cameron noted there have been significant efforts in getting people involved in the engagement.

Cameron advised that the proposal was tabled with the Board in August, and SRW are now finalising the submission which will be submitted to the Essential Services Commission in September of this year.

The following items were noted:

- Compliance
- Proposed new tariffs

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

- A member questioned the independent assessment and what take the Board has – do they query on price increases or is the focus more towards keeping the business profitable?

Jane Doolan advised that the Board is aware of the long-term financial position of SRW. There is a long-term strategy (25 years) that the board is looking to, to become fully financially sustainable - subject as to endorsed price increases and achievement of proposed productivity gains, some of which are based on the adoption of new technology.

In addition, government funding for modernisation was dependent on cost-sharing with irrigators, which is the reason for proposed price increases in some of those areas.

- A member asked if there is a price level to profitability? What other ways will we look at achieving infrastructure projects?

Jane advised that it is a holistic approach, incorporating prices increases, water sales and productivity savings, noting that if price was our only lever there would need to be a much greater increase.

Cameron stated that when there are long lived assets, that 25 years is a short timeframe. When modernisation was started, SRW had a big focus on investment to improve services to end customers, but some critical assets that connect to customer's infrastructure was not focussed on, so a more holistic view is important.

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:

- First strategic focus area: GM2030 has been released by DELWP and is available on their website. The link will be provided to this committee to review.
https://www.water.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/word_doc/0022/592042/DELWP0222_Groundwater_Management_2030_Accessible_v2.docx
- Glenelg Water Supply Protection Area: The Ministerial orders to abolish the WSPA will be published next week. This is a positive step for removing a redundant

regulation and will allow permanent trade.

- Safety reporting for end of water year meter reads demonstrates very high performance for safety: 14 field officers and 3 supervisors have attended close to 4,000 customer sites and no injuries have been reported.

No questions were raised, however a member noted that they have some concerns that people visiting their property act in a safe manner and appreciated the safety outcomes.

8.2 Unregulated Systems Report

The report was taken as read.

Ross Ingram thanked SRW for the report.

8.3 Communications Report

The report was taken as read.

9 COMMITTEE MATTERS

9.1 Important issues from other customer committees

Cameron FitzGerald advised that the main discussions with the WBMCCC and MCCC have been about matters that relate to each on the Price Submission. There has also been some discussion on drainage for the WBMID, and discussions about modernisation in the MID.

Communications will be sent to customers for Newry/Nuntin for the modernisation project about to commence.

9.2 Matters referred by/to the Board/board committee

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

- Sustainability of the organisation
- Evaluation of independent facilitators in the process of the Price Submission
- Strong interest in building partnerships with Traditional Owners.

A member noted that they had recently spoken with the Minister and that it was a good conversation. The member was pleased that counsel was sought.

The members requested that the board advocate for DELWP to attend the regions to educate their staff and to communicate with regional people.

10 GENERAL BUSINESS

Ross Ingram advised the committee members of the visits to Bon Accord and Bulmer Farms by SRW and DELWP staff this week to educate them on what is occurring within the Mitchell system, including the level of investment involved with water infrastructure.

Daniel Hammond appreciated the visit and interest shown in the history of the farm and where the business stands now. Daniel reiterated the importance of communication, extending further invitations to attend at a busier time.

Bryce Morden noted the positive feedback from DELWP staff and further interest to visit SRW customers. Bryce stated that the visits were impactful for showing the effects of policy decisions and scale of investment and economic development associated with their policy and regulatory decisions.

A member reiterated the importance of DELWP clarifying information provided and getting further detail, whether by email, phone or further visits.

- A member stated they are interested in an Avon Irrigation District update and queried if SRW has any projects that the community should be aware of with regards to drought preparation.
- A member queried the DELWP funding agreement for the peri-urban catchment review noting the relevance to the Mornington Peninsular.

Bryce advised that SRW and GMW will review D&S impacts. The focus will be on understanding the issues around people taking more D&S than they should and what the drivers are either side of the Great Divide. Bryce stated he will connect with Steven Marshall when relevant.

- A member stated that the MRD and water use, and the potential flooding upstream is an ongoing topic.

Cameron stated that this was for emergency purposes to secure the energy supply for the state. SRW are clear that once the MRD is fixed that the licensing regime is strict, ending in June 2023. SRW has been pushing hard in the Latrobe system to expanded access and is expecting some announcements soon on this matter.

Bryce advised that the temporary arrangements are working to protect Yallourn and reiterated that they are temporary. If Engie want to retain the structure as part of a potential future Mine Closure and Rehabilitation Plan, Engie will need to demonstrate that risks to upstream properties are effectively managed.

Cameron advised that he met with the Federal Agriculture Minister recently, Murray Watt, who seemed keen to be a positive force for agriculture.

Action	Action officer	Due date
Provide an overview of the MRD at the next meeting (including graphics)	MORDEN	02/12/2022

11 **MEETING EVALUATION**

The Chair sort feedback on the effectiveness of this meeting.

A member stated that the meeting pack is great, and the meetings are always well facilitated.

Members confirmed that 9.30am is a good starting time for the meetings.

12 NEXT MEETING

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

13 CLOSE

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 12:11pm.

DRAFT

	March 2020	June 2020	Sept 2020	Dec 2020	March 2021	June 2021	Sept 2021	Dec 2021	
Ross Ingram	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apol	
Tom Wallace	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Josie Zilm	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Daniel Hammond	✓	Apol	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Liz Clay	✓	Apol	✓	Apol	Apol	Apol			
Bruce Vallance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apol	✓	✓	
Damian Moore	✓		✓	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