

# Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum

## Minutes of Meeting 48

Date	Time	Location
17 March 2023	10:00am	VicWater - Melbourne

### Present

Mr Ross Ingram	Chair
Mr Tom Wallace	Forum Member
Mr Bruce Vallance	Forum Member
Mr Matt Gleeson	Forum Member
Mr Kevin Stark	Forum Member
Mr Norm Drew	Forum Member
Mr Daniel Hammond	Forum Member
Mr Steve Marshall	Forum Member

### In Attendance

Dr Jane Doolan	Board Director, SRW
Mr Cameron FitzGerald	Managing Director, SRW
Mr Simon Wilkinson	General Manager Service Delivery, SRW
Mr Bryce Morden	Manager Groundwater and Rivers, SRW
Ms Hayley Taylor	Executive Assistant, SRW (Scribe)

### Apologies

Ms Josie Zilm	Forum Member, Deputy Chair
Mr Daniel Toohey	Forum Member
Mr Damien Moore	Forum Member

### Guests

Naomi Douglas	Aboriginal Water Unit, DEECA
Lauren Chester	Murray and Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations

*Due to availability of attendee's, agenda items were not discussed in order.*

## 1. Acknowledgement of County

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.

Mr FitzGerald and Dr Doolan advised they would need to leave the meeting early.

## 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 of minutes – Meeting 47

The minutes of meeting 47 held on 2 December 2022 were **approved**.

**Moved:** Matt Gleeson

**Second:** Steve Marshall

## 5. Business Arising

The report was taken as read.

SRW **agreed** to supply the Terms of Reference for the Water Quality Study as part of Latrobe Valley Mine planning to the members.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Provide the Terms of Reference for the Water Quality Study to the members	B. Morden	20/04/2023

## 6. GUEST SPEAKERS

### 6.1 GW2023

SRW were unable to secure a speaker for this meeting. DEECA will be invited to attend the June 2023 meeting to discuss GW2030.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
DEECA to present on GW2030 at the June 2023 meeting.	B. Morden	20/05/2023

## 6.2 Water is Life

Naomi Douglas and Lauren Chester joined the meeting to discuss Water is Life.

DEECA advised:

- There was good engagement from Traditional Owner (TO) groups in all forums and workshops.
- Water is Life will be continuously reviewed based on feedback from TO groups.

The members noted that:

- Issuing licences to TO organisations may potentially create 'sleeper licences' and this would need to be thought through carefully.
- TO organisations should be able to trade their water if they wish consistent with other licence's issued
- It is important that the water is available for future generations of TO's and therefore any selling of allocation permanently should be carefully considered.
- There was a lack of communication with rural communities when bringing together Water is Life. Communicating with rural communities will reduce the risk of the creation of a divide between groups and help alleviate fears that water will be taken off irrigators.

The members **requested**:

- Management provide options for cultural training to committee members, preferably in their own areas.
- Copies of Water is Life is distributed to members including the presentation.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Management provide options for cultural training to committee members, preferably in their own areas.	B. Morden	20/05/2023
Copies of Water is Life is distributed to members including the presentation.	H. Taylor	20/05/2023

## 7. PRINCIPLE MATTERS – FOR NOTING

### 7.1 Communications Report

The report was taken as read.

### 7.2 Public Release of Central Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy (SWS)

The presentation was included as part of the meeting pack.

Key points noted:

- There are actions noted in the strategy that relate to surface and groundwater customers in SRW's region.
- The SWS does not cover the southwest area of SRW's region. Food and Fibre Great South Coast is working to propose a SWS to encompass the southwest and this is being considered by DEECA.
- SRW's Managing Director was a member of the consultative committee which also included TO groups, other water corporations and environmental organisations.
- Focus areas aligned to the matters raised within the forum to ensure the voice of customers was heard.
- Actions to explore the expansion of recycled water in the west. The current recycled water in the west is salty due to saline infiltration and industrial water use in metro areas. the SWS supports a current concept investigation study that looks to bring recycled water from Melton Treatment plant to reduce west irrigators reliance on water sourced from the Werribee River.
- Recognition of additional water entitlements available in the Latrobe system which includes 16GL of the  $\frac{3}{4}$  bench to be allocated to TO groups, the environment and irrigators. The working proposition at this time is one-third each.  
The committee inquired as to why the environment would be allocated more water. Mr FitzGerald advised a long term assessment determined there was a deficit for environment as when the current flows were set the modelling didn't take into account climate change.
- Funding for fishway at Maffra – 35km of Macalister River will be opened up to fish passage. When the weir was upgraded, SRW left space for a fish ladder and have recently gained funding to install the ladder. SRW are working with the West Gippsland CMA to design the ladder.

The members discussed:

- Further irrigation on the Latrobe: Mr FitzGerald stated that he is hopeful that this is close if all parties work together for an even distribution of the additional water. SRW is meeting with DEECA and the other organisation to work through the entitlements.
- Return of water to TO Groups: The Chair noted there is concern that sleeper licences are being created. People don't generally have an objection to TO Groups with a legitimate use for the water, but if there is no way to use the water, and the water isn't traded, then the TO licence becomes a sleeper licence which could impact reliability for existing licence holders but limit growth opportunities.
- Winterfill licence process to distribute 2GL of water: Management advised SRW is hoping to start the process once Tambo sales have been finalised and **agreed** to provide an out of session update to the committee by mid-April.
- Manufactured Water – The committee discussed whether politics would influence the uptake of recycled water. The Managing Director advised that a lot of work is being done around new and emerging contaminants, but recent

conversations indicated that the risk management practices and treatment elements are robust.

The committee questioned whether consideration has been given to using manufactured water for boosting stream flows. Mr FitzGerald advised there are significant EPA requirements that make implementing this approach challenging.

- Latrobe water – the committee discussed the filling of the mines with water. SRW noted that the mines have existing water entitlements and further work is required to understand if water can be used to fill the voids. A committee member raised concern that there may be issues with the groundwater as the mine voids are filled. Management advised the Mine Land Authority is overseeing investigations into the impacts of filling the mine voids with water.

The Managing Director advised the  $\frac{3}{4}$  bench was previously being held as an entitlement in the Latrobe catchment for expansion of coal mining for electricity. Blue Rock is essential for electricity production and is run differently to other dams as there must always be water in it and it cannot be run down like Glenmaggie. This will change when power stations are closed and represents an opportunity to rethink storage operation rules. The committee inquired as to whether the board has considered creating more dams. The Managing Director advised that an on-stream dam in the Mitchell was considered a few years ago, but it involved flooding a national park. When this was identified as not possible, funding was secured for on-farm storage for irrigators in the area.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Provide a date as to when the 2GL of water Mitchell River water is to go on sale	B. Morden	20/04/2023

## 8. PRINCIPLE MATTERS – FOR DISCUSSION

### 8.1 Board Update

Dr Doolan advised the members of issues the board is currently discussing, including,

- Mine Land Rehabilitation: Strategy discussion around risks and opportunities

The committee discussed whether:

- The use on the licence allowed for the water to be used to fill the mine voids.

Mr Morden advised that if the licence conditions don't meet requirements for water to be used to fill the voids, then the mine owners will need to go through the same application process as other customers.

- Whether the potential impact to groundwater levels and impact to environment with filling the voids with water has been considered.

It was **agreed** that SRW would refer this question to the Land Mine Rehabilitation Authority as they are responsible for looking at the suite of issues relating to the mine voids.

- Enterprise Bargaining: currently waiting on a decision regarding the Wages Policy from Government.
- Corporate Plan: the next few years are expected to be challenging due to inflation and increased interest rates.
- Pricing Submission: Expect a draft from the ESC at the end of March.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Inquire with the Land Mine Rehabilitation Authority as to whether the potential impact to groundwater levels and impact to the environment has been considered when filling the mine voids with water.	C. FitzGerald	28/04/2023

## 8.2 Manager Groundwater and Rivers Update

The report was taken as read.

Mr Morden advised:

- DEECA is funding a Traditional Owner Application Officer that will set up processes and progress Traditional Owner Applications to avoid cost shifting onto existing customers.
- SRW are testing the safety systems in regard to undertaking compliance field work. There is a current Stop Work in place for compliance inspections that require two staff. This will be lifted once SRW is satisfied controls are in place to allow the work to be undertaken safely.

## 9. COMMITTEE MATTERS

### 9.1 Important issues from other customer committees

The Managing Director advised that:

- The MCCC and SRW held a special meeting to discuss water delivery delays in the MID. As a result of the meeting, on behalf of the MCCC a factsheet was produced for affected customers regarding the contributing factors for the delays and suggestions by the MCCC as to ways customers could minimise the impacts of the delays. SRW has also implemented changes to the running of the system to get more allocation in the system that customers can access.

SRW will now review ordering rules and system improvements to manage peak delivery periods. This will be done in consultation with affected customers.

- Customer Engagement Review is still progressing, and the recommendations will be discussed with the committee once it has been completed.

## 9.2 Matters referred to/by the Board/Board Committee

No matters have been referred to the committee by the board or board committee.

## 10. General Business

The members raised the following items:

- New Staff: It was recommended that SRW ensure processes and procedures are adequate to ensure knowledge gaps are minimised when there is staff turnover.
- Sale of Water: It was noted there is a feeling in the community that SRW are dragging their feet because of Kalbar stage 2. Management advised this is not the case and a timeline on the sale of the Mitchell Water will be communicated to members by mid-April.
- Advertisement for boards: The recent advertisement was noted by the members. SRW advised that four of SRW's Director's 4 year terms are coming to an end. Anyone wishing to apply for the position will go through an independent process. The members discussed the makeup of the board and raised concern that customers do not sit on the board anymore. Management advised that the board is skill's based, but anyone, including customers, with the appropriate skills can apply.
- SGRF member reappointment / recruitment will be looked at after engagement review. SRW seeks to have diverse representation across all its committees.
- Communication with Farmers: it was noted that previous communication method of farmers talking to farmers is not happening as much with big farm syndicates not speaking to smaller enterprises on a regular basis. It was suggested that SRW consider this when communicating with customers. Management referred back to the Engagement Review and noted that they recognise the changing customer base.

## 11. Meeting evaluation

The Chair sort feedback on the effectiveness of this meeting. The members did not provide any feedback.

## 12. Next meeting

The next meeting of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum is Friday 2 June 2023 and will be held via Video Conference.

## 13. Close

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 1:41pm.