

SGRF AGENDA

Meeting no. 51

9.30am, Friday 1 December 2023
Hub Southern Cross - Melbourne

*'We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting.
We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities
who may be here today.'*



**Southern
Rural Water**

Managing Water. Serving Communities.

Our Vision

Great value for customers and community through excellence in rural water management



Our Trademark Values

We are Always Safe and Accountable working as One Team to deliver a lasting Legacy.

Southern Rural Water's Groundwater and Rivers Strategic Focus Areas

June 2023 – June 2024

There are five strategic focus areas for SRW in the Groundwater and Rivers area over the next 12 months:

1. Continued advocacy for sustainable access to water for irrigators via the implementation of GM2030, policy reforms in surface water management and key stakeholder groups.
2. Continue to encourage a flexible trading market through improved internal procedures and Government policies.
3. Provide more real time information for customers on water usage following the integration of meter reading data with mySRW portal to improve decision making.
4. Undertake more detailed water resource assessment across our systems through investment of unregulated water sales funds and the continuation of the Supply/Demand projects.
5. Understanding the implications of rapidly evolving cultural water policy on customer aspirations for improved access to water.

An update on what SRW is doing in relation to these focus areas is provided in the Groundwater and Rivers Update at each meeting.

Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum

Meeting 51

Date	Time	Location
1 December 2023	9.30am (room open from 9am)	Hub Southern Cross

Topic			
1		Acknowledgement of County	Chair
2		Welcome and Apologies	Chair
3		Declaration of conflicts of interest	All
4		Confirmation of minutes – Meeting 50	Chair
	4.1	Attachment – Draft Minutes SGRF Meeting 50, 20 September 2023	
5		Business Arising	Chair
	5.1	Attachment - Business arising from previous meetings	
6		<u>GUEST SPEAKERS</u>	
	6.1	GM2030 Update	Jesse Rose - DEECA
7		<u>PRINCIPAL MATTERS – FOR DISCUSSION</u>	
	7.1	Groundwater and Rivers update	Simon Wilkinson
	7.2	Board update	Cameron FitzGerald
8		<u>PRINCIPAL MATTERS – FOR NOTING</u>	
	8.1	Communications report	
9		<u>COMMITTEE MATTERS</u>	
	9.1	Important issues from other customer committees	Cameron FitzGerald
	9.2	Matters referred by/to the Board/board committee	Cameron FitzGerald

	9.3	2024 meeting schedule	
	9.4	2024 Committee workplan	
10		<u>GENERAL BUSINESS</u> - Thankyou to outgoing members	All
11		Meeting evaluation	
12		Next meeting	
13		Close	12.00pm

Lunch will be served at the conclusion of the meeting.

Item No: 1

Subject: **Acknowledgement of Country**

'We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders from other communities who may be here today.'

Item No: 2

Subject: **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair will welcome attendees and note any apologies for this meeting.

Dr Jane Doolan, SRW Board Member is unable to attend the meeting and sends her apologies.

General Manager Service Delivery, Simon Wilkinson will introduce the new Groundwater and River Managers.

Item No: 3

Subject: **Declaration of Conflicts of Interest**

The Chair will ask forum members to declare any conflicts of interest relating to the business of this meeting.

Item No: 4
Subject: Confirmation of minutes – Meeting 50
Action: For approval
Author: Hayley Taylor – Executive Assistant
Date: 24/11/2023

PURPOSE

1. To ensure that the minutes taken of committee meeting 50 are an accurate and sufficient record of discussions held and decisions made at the meeting.

RECOMMENDATION: That the committee approves the minutes of meeting 50 held on Wednesday 20 September 2023.

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATIONS

2. Minutes are confirmed at each committee meeting.

BACKGROUND

3. Draft minutes are circulated after each committee meeting. Any suggested changes are captured as track changes, for consideration and confirmation at the following meeting.

REPORT

4. Draft minutes of meeting 50, held via MS Teams, on Wednesday 20 September 2023 are provided in attachment 4.1.
5. **Budget impact:** Nil
6. **Link to strategy:** Nil.
7. **Risk:** Committee meeting minutes are a public record and may be subject to release under Freedom of Information. Directors should ensure that minutes accurately and appropriately reflect the discussion and decisions of the meeting.

NEXT STEPS

Who	Action
Meeting Secretary	Once confirmed, the minutes will be saved in Southern Rural Water's document management system and Southern Rural Water's Website.

Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum

Minutes of Meeting 50

Date	Time	Location
20 September 2023	1:00pm	Via MS Teams

Present

Mr Bruce Vallance	Forum Member
Mr Daniel Hammond	Forum Member
Mr Daniel Toohey	Forum Member
Mr Kevin Stark	Forum Member
Mr Norm Drew	Forum Member

In Attendance

Dr Jane Doolan	Board Director, SRW
Mr Cameron FitzGerald	Managing Director, SRW
Mr Simon Wilkinson	General Manager Service Delivery, SRW
Ms Hayley Taylor	Executive Assistant, SRW (minutes)

Apologies

Mr Ross Ingram	Chair
Ms Josie Zilm	Forum Member, Deputy Chair
Mr Steve Marshall	Forum Member
Mr Damien Moore	Forum Member
Mr Tom Wallace	Forum Member
Mr Matt Gleeson	Forum Member

Guests

Craig Smith	Acting Manager Statutory Functions
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1. Acknowledgement of County

Mr Simon Wilkinson, General Manager Service Delivery acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land on which the meeting was held.

2. Welcome and Apologies

The General Manager Service Delivery welcomed all present to the meeting.

Due to the committee Chair and Deputy Chair being unavailable for the meeting, the committee **agreed** that Mr Simon Wilkinson, General Manager Service Delivery, would chair the meeting.

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 49

The minutes of meeting 49 held on 2 June 2023 were **approved**.

Moved: Daniel Toohey

Second: Kevin Stark

5. Business Arising

The report was taken as read.

6. PRINCIPLE MATTERS – FOR DISCUSSION

6.1 Customer Engagement Review

Mr Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director, discussed the outcomes of the Customer Engagement Review and what it means for the committee, highlighting,

- The consultant recognised that the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum (SGRF) was a committee that had a broad representation of customers and that it worked well.
- Southern Rural Water (SRW) is looking for wide customer representation on its customer committees and is adding to its strategic approach by creating a new Strategic Forum which will include customers, community groups, government agencies and stakeholders.
- SRW's board discussed the results of the customer review in depth and considers that it is important to maintain distinct forums for customers while augmenting this with opportunities for wider engagement with other stakeholders.
- SRW will continue the Macalister Customer Consultative Committee (MCCC) reducing the number of meetings from seven to four.
- SRW will maintain the current number of meetings for the SGRF.
- There was a recommendation to appoint an independent chair for customer committees.

The Managing Director advised the committee of the conversation at the August 2023 MCCC meeting regarding the independent chair and that the members had discussed why they did not believe an independent chair would bring value to the committee. As a result of the discussion the board and management agreed to maintain an elected Irrigator as the Chair of the MCCC.

The Managing Director requested feedback on the proposal of an independent chair for the SGRF.

- The first Strategic Futures Forum is scheduled for October 2023. All members of SRW's customer committee's have been invited to attend.
- It is proposed that Werribee Bacchus Marsh Customer Consultative Committee (WBMCCC) will be disbanded and replaced with drop-in sessions for Bacchus Marsh customers, and engagement with the Werribee customers through the Werribee Green Wedge Committee.
- An open call for SGRF members will commence in October 2023.
- The next meeting of current SGRF group will be December 2023, with the new group to commence in early 2024.

The committee discussed the recommendation of the independent chair including:

- Members would prefer to maintain an elected customer chair and don't see the value that an independent chair would bring.
- The members have been able to have beneficial discussions with the current format.
- Response times from to items raised during the meeting could be improved by SRW.

Management **accepted** the committee's feedback and the SGRF will continue to have an elected customer Chair.

In regard to the upcoming Strategic Futures Forum, it was **agreed** that prior to the meeting, members would be contacted by management and those unable to attend the forum would be invited to raise any items for consideration at the forum.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Contact SGRF members prior to the Strategic Futures Forum and invite any member that cannot attend to raise items for consideration.	H. TAYLOR	11/10/2023

6.2 Price Submission - Compliance

Mr Craig Smith, Acting Manager Statutory Functions provided an outcome of the Price Submission in relation to funding SRW has allocated to compliance activities, highlighting,

- the approved Price Submission has an increased budget for compliance related activities.
- the Price Submission supports compliance by:
 - increasing resources by \$200k per year,

- productivity improvement from electronic meters which will allow staff to spend more time on compliance,
- new accountability metric which requires SRW to initiate an investigation into all alleged breaches within seven days, and
- monthly reporting to SRW's board on KPIs, and annual reporting to the Essential Services Commission.

The committee discussed compliance including;

- Real-time information from meters: Management advised that there is a growing use of Taggle data to support compliance assessments. While a constant stream of data from the meter would use the battery too quickly, data provided at regular intervals means that operators can request ADHOC reads if a potential non-compliance issue is emerging.
- Moorabool Dams Investigation: Management advised that a community group has presented serious allegations to SRW alleging a large number of unlicensed farm dams in the Moorabool River catchment. SRW is undertaking investigations into each alleged breach and expect there will be compliance action from these investigations. SRW are using drone technology to assist with inspections. The Managing Director reiterated SRW's zero-tolerance approach to non-compliance.
- Bungaree meter replacement program: A member advised that they had received a letter from SRW 12-18 months ago, in regarding to electronic metering roll out in the Bungaree area and inquired whether it was still going ahead. Management advised that the program is going ahead and there is a project team working on implementing the electronic metering program.
- Pricing: Management advised that real prices will not increase from the Price Submission, but CPI will be passed onto customers.
- Current Compliance issues and activities: Management advised that there were no non-compliances for groundwater recorded in 2022/23, but that the year was very wet, so there was less reason to take water without proper authorisation.

A member suggested that there could be an opportunity to advise customers of compliance activities with the annual bill, so they are aware of SRW's compliance activities and the customers responsibility to ensure that they remain compliant. A member suggested that information for customers on how to ready their own meters would be beneficial.

Management **accepted** that there was room for improvement in regard to education for customers so that they are provided with easy to understand information regarding their obligations.

The committee inquired as to whether customers are notified when they are close to using their full entitlement. Management advised that SRW conduct six and 12 month meter reads for meters without Taggle and if at the six month read customers have used more than half their allocation then it prompts field officers to contact the customers. Customers with Taggle are also able to look up their usage and this information can also be tracked by SRW staff to identify emerging potential non compliances.

- **Stock and Domestic:** The Committee inquired whether there is there a correct way to record Stock and Domestic usage if it comes from the same bore as a customer's allocation. Management advised there is a calculated allowance for Stock and Domestic use that is allocated to the customer and this amount depends on what the entitlements is used for. Management advised that SRW are becoming firmer on the assessment of Stock and Domestic use in line with the zero tolerance approach to non-compliance.

The Committee thanked Mr Smith for the presentation.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Consider alternative communication methods to educate customers on their compliance obligations including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide easy to understand information on compliance obligations - Provide information on activities that customers can undertake themselves such as 'How to read a meter' that would assist them in meeting their compliance obligations. 	A. BRICK	20/11/2023

6.3 General Manager Service Delivery Update

The report was taken as read.

Mr Simon Wilkison, General Manager Service Delivery, highlighted,

- The update on the Moorabool Dams investigation.
- **Uplift in Compliance:** five staff are undertaking a Certificate 4 in Government Investigations.
- **Groundwater and Rivers Restructure:** the manager role has been spilt into two roles, Manager Statutory Functions and Manager Operations and Compliance. This will assist SRW in meeting compliance obligations. SRW will also recruit for a Statutory Referrals Coordinator to meet SRW's obligations in that area. The spilt of the manager roles will also assist SRW in being able to better respond and increase effort in other areas such as the electronic metering rollout and Water Sales.

Committee inquired:

- whether there are any more Traditional Owner Licences to be issued. Management confirmed there SRW has received more applications from Traditional Owners.
- when the water from the Mitchell River Water Sales would be made available. Management confirmed the sale will be undertaken via an auction platform through the new SRW Water Trading Platform. A date will be set once management can confirm that this functionality on the platform is working.

- about the licences to take water during high-flow periods. Management confirmed that SRW continues to discuss with DEECA opportunities regarding shifting from winter-fill to a high-flow water licences and Management will continue to report the views of the committee to DEECA. The Board Representative added that other stakeholders such as the environment also need to be considered, in recognition that high flow period can provide significant environmental benefits to waterway health, and that such matters would be considered by DEECA in their deliberations.

6.4 Board Update

Dr Jane Doolan, Board Representative, SRW, advised the members of issues the board is currently discussing, including:

- The board and Executive team participated in a tour at Budj Bim as part of the last meeting in Warrnambool.
- Annual Reporting including Financial and Operational reports, which have been audited by the Auditor General and VAGO. These reports will be tabled in Parliament in the coming months.
- Moorabool dams is significant issue for the board.
- The board is fully supportive of the increased compliance effort.
- The board is interested to see how the new trading platform is used by customers.
- New Board appointments have been finalised with two existing members being reappointed and the appointment of three new members.
- SRW met modernisation targets and water was flowing in the MID on the first day of the irrigation season.

The committee inquired as to when the trading platform would be available for customers outside the Macalister Irrigation District (MID). Management advised that the platform is currently being trialled in the MID as part of a Barriers to Trade, DEECA funded project, but SRW is about to commence another DEECA funded Barriers to Trade Project in the Southwest Limestone Aquifer and pending the outcome of the project, SRW will look to roll out the platform to that area. The Managing Director referred to the more complex trading rules for groundwater and surface water and advised that SRW plans to test the capabilities of the platform with more complex trading rules in a smaller area before considering a wider rollout of the platform.

Key messages from the committee will be communicated to the board at the next meeting.

7. PRINCIPLE MATTERS – FOR NOTING

7.1 Communications Report

The report was taken as read.

8. COMMITTEE MATTERS

8.1 Important issues from other customer committees

The Managing Director advised that the focus of the August MCCC meeting was whether to appoint an independent chair and management clearly heard that the proposal was not supported by the committee.

The committee inquired as to the intended purpose of the independent chair. Management advised that the recommendation came as an outcome of the Customer Engagement Review and resignation and feedback of the previous MCCC chair Members of the MCCC also provided feedback where they indicated that not all views were being represented during meetings. Management and the board felt that an independent chair may provide a professional, impartial chair that would chair all customer committees.

Mr Drew, as a member of both the SGRF and MCCC stated that he felt the MCCC was unbalanced and that impacted the functionality of the committee.

The committee commented that the next chair has the skills required to chair a committee. Management advised that SRW will take skillsets into consideration as part of the recruitment process.

The Managing Director highlighted the work the Communications Team has been undertaking in informing customers on important matters, and they will continue to work to reach out more customers across different platforms.

8.2 Matters referred to/by the Board/Board Committee

The board representative advised that the following items will be taken back to the board:

- Preference of the committee is to not to appoint an independent chair for the SGRF,
- Management will contact members and pass on any points they would like raised if a member is unable to attend the Strategic Futures Forum, and
- SRW need to ensure customers are educated on their compliance obligations and additional factsheets and education on how to use SRW's systems such as Waterline and reading meters would be beneficial. It would also be beneficial if there was a prompt for customers to be contacted if there are close to using their allocation and a need to understand D&S allowances.

A member inquired as to whether the profiles of new board members be shared. Management advised that the profiles will be published on the SRW website and **agreed** to circulate the link to profiles once they are published.

The Committee inquired whether there is an opportunity for new board members to attend a SGRF meeting to hear firsthand from customers. The committee welcome the opportunity to meet new board members to a future meeting.

The Committee commented on digitalisation of water accounts and highlighted the need for SRW to ensure that customers are not being left behind as technology changes.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Circulate link to board member profiles to SGRF members once the new board members have commenced.	H. TAYLOR	05/10/2023

9. General Business

The members raised the following items:

Committee membership updates:

Ms Josie Zilm advised Management that she would be stepping away from the Deputy Chair role due to competing commitments but would like to remain on the committee.

Mr Damien Moore advised Management that he would be stepping away from committee due to competing commitments.

Drought Reserve

Latrobe drought reserve water was made available to farmers in 2019 and early 2020. Management advised they will continue to evaluate the climate and make decisions on releasing Drought Reserve water to customers.

Progress on 3/4 Bench water allocation – Latrobe Catchment

Management advised:

- Meetings are being held with DECCA, CMA, GLAWAC with DEECA leading the project. SRW will continue to work with other agencies to reach an outcome for the allocation of this water that was identified as an action in the Central and Gippsland Regions Sustainable Water Strategy.
- it is expected there will be customer and community consultation on the allocation of this water.
- SRW has undertaken assessments to determine potential use of additional water from the irrigators.

Electricity Transmission Projects and the effect on irrigated county:

A member inquired whether electricity transmission projects have been brought to SRW's attention or whether SRW had been approached for comment in regard to the risk to irrigated land.

Management advised that SRW has previously made representations in regard to the use of infrastructure under transmission lines and at the time the developers indicated that the issues raised would be considered. SRW will continue to highlight the value of agricultural land.

Management advised that developers have engaged with SRW in regard to transmission lines over the Merrimu Reservoir as may be a bushfire risk.

Timely processing of applications:

A member inquired whether SRW controls the timing of application to transfer water. Management advised that SRW processes applications within required timelines..

10. Meeting evaluation

The Chair sought feedback on the effectiveness of this meeting.

Management **agreed** to the request that consideration is given to providing a Teams link for in person meetings and that the December meeting is held in person as it may be some members last meeting.

The committee thanked the General Manager Service Delivery for chairing the meeting.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
December SGRF meeting to be held face to face in Melbourne	H. TAYLOR	15/10/2023

11. Next meeting

The next meeting of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum will be held on Friday 1 December 2023 face to face in Melbourne.

12. Close

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 2:50pm.

Item No: **5**
Subject: **Business arising from previous meetings**
Action: **For noting**
Author: **Hayley Taylor – Executive Assistant**
Date: **24/11/2023**

PURPOSE

1. To allow the forum to assess management progress on items identified for action from Southern Groundwater and River Forum meetings.

RECOMMENDATION: That the forum **notes** the status of business arising action items, including:

- four action items have been completed, and
- one action item will be discussed within this agenda.

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATIONS

2. Business arising is considered each meeting.

BACKGROUND

3. Actions are captured in the minutes each month and transposed into risk wizard where base and aspirational dates are added along with the responsibility for completion.

REPORT

4. Attachment 5.1 describes each action item, its status, and a comment on its progress.

BUSINESS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS - Southern GWR forum

Action progress: Complete

Action	Source	Due date	Completed date	Accountable officer	Status comment	
25108	Copies of Water is Life is distributed to members including the presentation.	SGRF meeting 48 - 17 March 2023, Agenda Item 6.2, Water is Life	30/06/23	Hayley Taylor	Hard copies of Water is Life will be distributed once received from DEECA. Water is Life can be found online at https://www.water.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-values/the-aboriginal-water-program Due date extended. 24/11/2023 - DEECA has confirmed that Water is Life has been reprinted and will be sent to SRW to distribution to SGRF members.	
25247	Contact SGRF members prior to the Strategic Futures Forum and invite any member that cannot attend to raise items for consideration.	SGRF meeting 50- 20 September 2023, Agenda Item 6.1, Customer Engagement Review	11/10/23	23/11/23	Hayley Taylor	Email sent to members requesting any items that they would like raised are emailed to Executive Assistant by COB 24 November 2023.
25249	Circulate link to board member profiles to SGRF members once the new board members have commenced.	SGRF meeting 50- 20 September 2023, Agenda Item 8.2, Matters referred to/by the board	05/10/23	03/11/23	Hayley Taylor	Email with link to profiles sent to SGRF members on 3/11/2023.
25250	December SGRF meeting to be held face to face in Melbourne	SGRF meeting 50- 20 September 2023, Agenda Item 10, Meeting evaluation.	15/10/23	03/11/23	Hayley Taylor	Meeting scheduled for 1 December at The Hub Southern Cross, Melbourne

Action progress: This agenda

Action	Source	Due date	Completed date	Accountable officer	Status comment	
25248	Consider alternative communication methods to educate customers on their compliance obligations including: - Provide easy to understand information on compliance obligations - Provide information on activities that customers can undertake themselves such as 'How to read a meter' that would assist them in meeting their compliance obligations.	SGRF meeting 50 - 20 September 2023, Agenda Item 6.2, Price Submission - Compliance	20/11/23	24/11/23	Andrew Brick	Refer to agenda item 7.1

Item No: **6.1**

Subject: **GM2030**

Jesse Rose, Co-Executive Director Water Resource Strategy at DEECA, will attend the meeting to discuss the implementation of the GM2030 strategy and provide an update on the project.

Item No: 7.1

Subject: **Strategic Focus Areas and Groundwater and Rivers update**

Action: **For noting**

Author: **Penny Winbanks, Manager Statutory Functions**

Date: **14/11/2023**

Focus area	Commentary
<p>Strategic focus 1.</p> <p>Continued advocacy for sustainable access to water for irrigators via the implementation of GM2030, policy reforms in surface water management and key stakeholder groups.</p>	<p>SRW is currently involved with a DEECA review of <u><i>Policies for Protecting High Value Groundwater Dependant Ecosystems</i></u>.</p> <p>DEECA will continue to be invited to SGRF meetings to discuss GM2030.</p>
<p>Strategic focus 2.</p> <p>Continue to encourage a flexible trading market through improved internal procedures and Government policies.</p>	<p>SRW has commenced work to explore opportunities for a trade platform supporting trade in unregulated systems focusing on the South West Limestone as a pilot. This work will follow a similar approach to that used to develop the trade platform for the Macalister Irrigation Area.</p> <p>A project update is provided within this report.</p>
<p>Strategic focus 3.</p> <p>Provide more real time information for customers on water usage following the integration of meter reading data with mySRW portal to improve decision making</p>	<p>SRW's focus for mySRW is to deliver an e-billing upgrade. Customers will have access to a payment gateway for applications and online payment features. Customers will be able to receive bills electronically and pay bills immediately via gateway.</p> <p>The team is working toward completing this project this financial year.</p>
<p>Strategic focus 4.</p> <p>Undertake more detailed water resource assessment across our systems through investment of unregulated water sales funds and the continuation of the Supply/Demand projects.</p>	<p>The SRW Resource and Strategy team have developed a prioritised plan for the review and renewal of local management plans across the SRW region. Focus areas are to include water systems that have been subject to water sales over the past 5 years.</p>
<p>Strategic focus 5.</p> <p>Understanding the implications of rapidly evolving cultural water policy on customer aspirations for improved access to water.</p>	<p>SRW has granted two licences to Traditional Owners during the period. A surface water licence of 500ML has been granted in the Tambo System and a 200ML unincorporated groundwater licence near Buchan Caves.</p>

Issue	Commentary
Water Sales	<p>Expressions of interest were sent out in July. These have been assessed.</p> <p>SRW have a water sales auction platform is now completed. The online auction for Mitchell River winterfill water sale will occur on 7 December 2023. A letter has been sent via email and post to each applicant that expressed an interest in the water. A Government Gazette advertisement has been placed and notified of the auction.</p>
South West Limestone - Barriers to trade project	<p>DEECA has funded a social research project to understand the barriers to trade within the Southwest Limestone GMA. A Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued for a consultant to undertake the research project on barriers to trading water in the region. RMCG has been appointed as the consultant for the project. A survey is currently in development and will be issued to all current license holders in SWL with valid email addresses, along with a number of 1:1 interviews with a selection of key customers. A report is due to be issued to SRW and project sponsors DEECA in March 2024 with the findings and recommendations.</p>
Compliance and enforcement	<p>Communications to Customers</p> <p>SRW have implemented a communications plan which outlined campaigns and communication methods to ensure that customers were aware of their compliance obligations, and the zero tolerance approach to water theft. An outline of some of the items SRW has done to communicate this message to customers are outlined below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zero tolerance message featured on Allocation Bank Account statements to customers in August. • Social media posts and videos • Full website content update https://www.srw.com.au/water-and-storage/water-management/compliance • Website news items https://www.srw.com.au/news-media • Video and stories featured in customer quarterly newsletter • Zero tolerance fact sheet produced for distribution by field officers. Copies of the fact sheet produced is included as Appendix 1. <p>SRW are also finding additional opportunities to speak about zero tolerance, including into other communication material were possible.</p> <p>Work will continue with field staff to create fact sheets for activities that customers could complete themselves, such as 'How to read a meter'.</p>

Issue	Commentary
Moorabool Dams Investigation	<p>SRW has continued to investigate alleged non-compliances regarding the construction of private dams in the Moorabool catchment. 220 dams have been individually assessed by means of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing SRW records (i.e. is a licence in place) • Satellite Mapping • Field inspections • Drone inspections of properties where access was difficult or additional photogrammetry data was necessary to assess compliance <p>Assessment of these dams is being undertaken for compliance with the Water Act which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially hazardous • Irrigation take and use • Illegal construction on a waterway <p>Detailed briefs of evidence are being compiled for all cases of suspected breaches. The process will then be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the evidence to the Delegated Authority for determination on whether a breach has occurred • Issue show cause notices where a breach(s) is confirmed by the Delegate (three have been issued so far) <p>SRW will work through an orderly process focussing on the most significant issues first, giving consideration to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community safety • size of impact on catchment flows • association with any illegal take and use for irrigation <p>There are two tracks of investigation – enforcement notices and compliance notices</p> <p>Letters requesting ‘further and better particulars’ have been sent to landholders where investigations have indicated that the dam may be non-compliant with the Water Act.</p> <p>Information provided by the landholder will assist SRW in determining whether Ministerial Directions will be issued.</p>
Groundwater and Rivers realignment	<p>Two new Groundwater and Rivers Managers have been appointed as a result of the Groundwater and Rivers restructure.</p> <p>Manger Groundwater and Rivers, Statutory Functions – Penny Winbanks.</p> <p>Penny has worked for SRW since 2005, starting her career as a Licencing Officer out of the Warrnambool Office. She has held numerous roles within SRW,</p>

Issue	Commentary
	<p>focussing on complex strategic projects, water resource planning and policy, drought preparedness and stakeholder engagement. Most recently Penny held the position of Manager, Strategic Partnerships and Policy. In this role she was responsible for leading the engagement for the Pricing Submission, overseeing the regulation of the Barwon Down Remediation and Environment Protection Plan, as well as driving the Macalister/Avon Irrigation Development Project. She was also responsible for leading Reconciliation actions across the organisation.</p> <p>Manager Groundwater and Rivers, Operations and Compliance – Russell Tomlin</p> <p>Russell joins SRW from DEECA where he held the position of Manger Compliance and Regulatory Practice at Solar Victoria. He has extensive experience in investigative, operations and compliance roles, including the establishment and advancement of effective compliance/enforcement frameworks, and has held Director and Senior Management positions with the Department of Justice, WorkSafe, TAC and Victoria Police.</p>
Groundwater and Rivers Team update	<p>Departures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil <p>New:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment Officer: Aimee Richardson has been appointed to the role of Assessment Officer. Aimee was an internal applicant having worked in Maffra as a Customer Service Officer for the last year.

Item No: 7.2

Subject: **Board Update**

Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director, will provide an overview of discussions at the most recent Board meeting.

Item No: **8.1**
Subject: **Communications and Engagement report – November 2023**
Action: **For noting**
Author: **Kris Perkovic, Senior Community Engagement Adviser**
Date: **22/11/2023**

PURPOSE

- To update the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum on recent communications and engagement activities.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee note the report.

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATIONS

2. Communications and engagement activity is reported at each meeting.

BACKGROUND

3. The Communications and Engagement team develops communications plans, issues media releases, manages the website and social media, customer and community engagement activities and looks after media enquiries.

REPORT

4. Website

A selection of stories published on our website focused on groundwater and rivers.

www.srw.com.au/news-media/harvesting-perfection-picnic-point-farm

www.srw.com.au/news-media/south-gippsland-onion-grower-unpeels-secret-their-success

<https://www.srw.com.au/news-media/having-chat-and-cuppa-bacchus-marsh-growers>

www.srw.com.au/news-media/helping-gippsland-veggie-grower-sustain-regional-employment

www.srw.com.au/news-media/apply-be-member-southern-groundwater-and-rivers-forum


<https://www.srw.com.au/news-media/helping-garlic-pioneers-south-west-victoria-grow>

5. Social media

Our social media campaigns have received good responses. Below are some examples of content since the last meeting. Please follow our social media pages to see more.

Southern Rural Water
25 September · 🌐


Starting a new business is challenging at the best of times. But when your venture relies on a secure supply of water, the stakes get higher. Luckily for horticultural entrepreneur, David Winters, we found him a water trade that helped his company thrive.... See more



David Winters
Founder, South West Advanced Trees

Southern Rural Water
22 h · 🌐


Down by the river in west Bairnsdale, you'll find Picnic Point Farm. This family-run gem is famous for its exclusive Picnic apple variety, and they've got an automated watering control system in place to nail that precision in water management. Read more at <http://www.srw.com.au/.../harvesting-perfection-picnic...>



John Baldwin
Picnic Point Farm, Gippsland

Southern Rural Water
8 November at 13:27 · 🌐


Meet Sam Powell, a fifth-generation onion farmer from Thorpdale, South Gippsland. Onions are Australia's fourth-largest vegetable crop and Sam grows some of the country's best. Here, Sam shares some of the secrets of his family's success. ... See more



Sam Powell

Southern Rural Water
10 November at 14:35 · 🌐

Schreurs & Sons, one of Australia's top celery producers, knows the true value of water in creating regional jobs. This generational family business relies on Tarwin River water, which is the lifeblood of their business and sustains 170 year-round jobs. Read more at ... See more



Adam Schreur

Southern Rural Water
25 October at 14:01 · 🌐


Water is the lifeblood of rural economies and communities. We need to use it wisely to ensure water can continue nourishing environments, growing food and keeping people in jobs. See why sustainable groundwater use is key to southwest Victoria's long-term future. ... See more



Bruce Knowles
Radnor Farms

Southern Rural Water
25 October at 09:25 · 🌐

We are installing brand-new water meters for our Bungaree customers as part of our water meter replacement drive. There will be a total of 162 meters replaced in the Bungaree area, which will support our customers to use water more efficiently. Read more about this initiative at <https://www.srw.com.au/.../upgrading-meters-improve...>



NEXT STEPS: A further update will be provided at the next SGRF meeting.

Item No: **9.1**

Subject: **Important issues from other customer committees**

Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director, will provide a verbal update on important issues raised at other customer committees.

Item No: **9.2**

Subject: **Matters referred by the Board**

Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director, will discuss matters that have been referred by/to the Board.

Item No: **9.3**

Subject: **2024 Meeting schedule**

The SGRF meets quarterly on the first Friday of the relevant month.

Southern Rural Water propose that the SGRF meets quarterly in February, May, August and November, to better align with key periods within the year. The proposed schedule is provided below for discussion.

Date	Time	Location/Online
Friday 2 February 2023	9.00am – 12.00pm	Online
Friday 3 May 2023	9.00am – 12.00pm	Online
Friday 2 August 2023	9.00am – 12.00pm	Online
Friday 1 November 2023	9.30am – 1.00pm	Face to face - Melbourne

Next Steps:

SRW to finalise the proposed schedules in light of the discussion.

Item No: **9.4**

Subject: **2024 Committee workplan**

Southern Rural Water will provide updates to the committee as indicated in the 2024 Committee workplan. Additional items can be added to the agenda at the request of committee members and by SRW to address any current issues or events.

During meetings, the committee can request that items are added to the workplan to ensure that updates on specific topics are provided at key intervals.

The workplan will be included as an agenda item for each meeting.

A copy of the 2024 Committee workplan is included as attachment 9.4.1.

SOUTHERN GROUNDWATER AND RIVERS FORUM ROLLING WORK PLAN

	Requirement	2024				2025				Notes
		FEB	MAY	AUG	NOV	FEB	MAY	AUG	NOV	
Principal & Business Matters	Communications report	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Board update	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	GWR Strategic Focus Areas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Report on progress each meeting as part of the Manager GWR update. Update Focus Area's each May.
	Plan for new Financial Year			✓				✓		Plan to address Key Focus Areas
	Groundwater and Rivers Update	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Brief paragraph to update to committee on current projects and issues
Policy and strategic direction	Committee appointments	✓								As required. (Chair and Deputy Chair vote)
	Compliance and Enforcement			✓				✓		EOFY performance
	Climate Outlook and Drought Response Update				✓				✓	
	Corporate Plan				✓				✓	For noting. Full plan provided as discretionary reading
Project updates (DEECA and SRW)	SWL Barriers to Trade	✓	✓							Final report to be presented - May 2024
	SWS 4.13 – Small Farm Dams									Once consultant has been engaged by DEECA
	GM2030									At key project milestones
Admin / Other	Meeting evaluation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	MD to provide verbal update
	Important issues from other customer committees	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	As required
	Matters referred to the committee by the board/board committee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Committee Workplan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Item No: **10**

Subject: **General Business**

The Chair will introduce any items of general business.

- Thank-you to outgoing committee members (Managing Director)
-

Item No: **11**

Subject: **Meeting evaluation**

The Chair will seek feedback on the effectiveness of this meeting.

The Chair will ask 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?
 2. What's working?
 3. What's not working?
-

Item No: **12**

Subject: **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum will be held on Friday 2 February 2024 via MS Teams.

Item No: **12**

Subject: **Close**

The Chair will close the meeting.

Zero-tolerance to unauthorised water take

Managing water fairly

Water is a precious and limited resource. It is critical to our economy, environment and communities. This is why water needs to be managed fairly for all water users.

Zero-tolerance to unauthorised water take

Taking and using more water than is allowed under your entitlement is illegal.

Any water taken in excess of your entitlement means there is less water available for other entitlement holders.

The Victorian Government and Southern Rural Water have a zero-tolerance approach to unauthorised water take.

Managing your water

Water entitlement holders are responsible for managing their water use.

There are many ways you can avoid exceeding your water entitlement. These include:

- Make sure you have enough water available in your Allocation Bank Account and allow enough time for allocation trades to be processed.
- Place irrigation orders through [WaterLINE](#).
- Check if [restrictions](#) apply to your waterway.

Read your meters or check your usage on WaterLINE or call Southern Rural Water on 1300 139 510.

Trading water allocation

To trade water allocation to your Allocation Bank Account you can:

- Purchase water from a seller within your water system subject to trading rules.
- Transfer water from another property that you own.
- Purchase water through a water broker.

You can find relevant the forms on the [Water Register](#) website.

Compliance and enforcement

Southern Rural Water proactively monitors customer account balances through our metering, telemetry and inspection programs.

Any unauthorised take identified will be investigated and an enforcement response may be required.

Customers who do not correct their negative in their Allocation Bank Account balance may:

- Have their access to the system restricted.
- Be issued with a penalty infringement notice.
- Be subject to a reduced entitlement the next season through negative carry-over.
- Face prosecution or have their licence suspended or cancelled.



What is a penalty infringement notice?

Southern Rural Water can issue a fine known as a penalty infringement notice to water users who have committed a water infringement offence. All infringement notices are governed by the [Infringements Act 2006](#).

What offences can be fined?

Water users can be fined if they take water not in line with their allocation.

Under the *Water Act 1989* and *Water (Infringements) Regulations 2020*, the following water infringement offences can attract fines:

- Taking water without a water share in a declared system (up to 10 megalitres)
- Taking or using water without a take and use licence from a non-declared system (up to 10 megalitres)
- Wrongful take of water (up to 10 megalitres), interfering with flow of water in any waterway, aquifer or works without any authorisation
- Breaching conditions of a take and use licence or a works licence
- Contravening a restriction or prohibition in a permanent water savings plan

How much are the fines?

Victoria's *Water (Infringement) Regulations 2020* set gradual penalties, which increase with the amount of water taken and the nature of the offence.

From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, the maximum penalty for an individual is \$2,308 and \$11,539 for a body corporate per offence.

What are my options if I receive a fine?

Your fine, or penalty infringement notice, will include information about the offence, the amount owed and how it can be paid.

Information on payment arrangements, along with how to request an internal review, can be found on the [Fines Victoria website](#).

In addition to paying your fine, you must also bring your account balance back into compliance by purchasing or trading in additional water to your account.

Reporting non-compliance

If you wish to report an alleged offence or breach of the *Water Act 1989*, please contact Southern Rural Water.



srw@srw.com.au



1300 139 510



www.srw.com.au

Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum - 1 December 2023



Southern
Rural Water

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