

Meeting Notes

Meeting	Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting 2
Date	18 March 2025
Project	Water Risks in the Upper Moorabool and Maribyrnong Catchments
Distribution	All, SRW website

1. Invitees

Name	Organisation/Representative	Project Role
Matthew Hudson	Southern Rural Water	Project Manager
Alana Spring	Southern Rural Water	Hydrogeologist
Gemma Abela	Southern Rural Water	Observer
Ross Hardie	Alluvium	SRG Chair
Andrew Little	Alluvium	Project Manager
Ella Guthrie	Alluvium	Project Support
Rebecca Klein	Alluvium	Project Director
Phillip Jordan	HARC	Modelling
Rachel Brown	DEECA	Observer
Anna May	DEECA	Observer
Alex Murray	DEECA	Observer
Helen Van den Berg	Concerned Waterways Alliance	SRG Member
Mitchell Cunningham	Moorabool Shire Council	SRG Member
Dan Toohey	Farmer	SRG Member
Sharon Blum Caon	CCMA	SRG Member
Angela Clough	Agriculture Vic	SRG Member
Lisa Duncan	Melbourne Water	SRG Member
Cameron Steele	People for a Living Moorabool	SRG Member
Nicole Kowalczyk	Maribyrnong RWA	SRG Member
Nicholas Longden	VEWH	SRG Member
Charles Everist	VFF	SRG Member
Charlotte Hilbig	Wurundjeri	SRG Member
Ross Colliver	Landholder/Landcare	SRG Member
Jane Robson	Landowner	SRG Member
Ken Allender	Landcare/landholder	SRG Member
Jake van Dam	CCMA	SRG Member
Jared Scott	Barwon Water	SRG Member
Brigid Creasey	Barwon Water	SRG Member
Bella Schaffer	GWW	SRG Member
Graham Holt	GWW	Observer

Name	Organisation/Representative	Project Role
Apologies		
James Burkitt	Melbourne Water	SRG Member
Cameron Haines	CHW	SRG Member
Peter Stray	Landholder/ farmer	SRG Member
Jayden Woolley	Wadawurrung	SRG Member
Michael Browne	Wurundjeri	SRG Member
Geoffrey Steendam	DEECA	Observer
Elisa Hunter	SRW	Observer

2. Agenda Items

Item	Topic
1.	Welcome and acknowledgement of country
2.	Recap of meeting 1
3.	Agenda and context
4.	Legislation/policy presentation
5.	Discussion on the legislation/policy presentation
6.	Overview of values
7.	Feedback session on values
8.	Next steps
9.	Meeting close

3. Briefing Papers

Briefing papers on the D&S policy and the values identification were provided prior to the meeting. These minutes should be considered in conjunction with those papers.

4. Meeting notes:

The SRG welcomes two new members, Charles Everist from VFF, a farmer and water user of D&S in the Deep Creek catchment, and Dan Toohey, a farmer, irrigator and D&S user in the Moorabool

SRG meeting 1 outcomes

The policy item in SRG meeting 2 is a response to the outcome of the first meeting where there was a desire to hear more information about policy and legislation (D&S). SRW have responded by delivering a policy paper, presentation and discussion in the first session today.

D&S policy legislation presentation

Matt Hudson from SRW presented a summary of the current legislation and policy related to domestic and stock water, and an overview of how SRW implements this. A paper was provided on this content, prior to the meeting.

Questions and answers relating to policy/legislation/implementation

The key questions raised following the presentation and the responses have been summarised below.

Legislation/policy/implementation question	Summary of response
How much power does SRW have through the existing surface water management plans, e.g. for the Moorabool, to manage stock and domestic use?	Surface water licences are already capped and limited trading options are available. Licensed take is restricted /banned below certain gauged flows. The flow restrictions would be based on historic flows which include the effects of stock and domestic take at the time. Flow restrictions can be reviewed to take account of changes in the flow regime. Groundwater management plans can also consider Domestic & Stock (D&S) impacts.
Who has oversight for Ministerial Guidelines?	Take and use of off waterway dams, Guidelines prepared by Department of Energy Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), Minister has formal approval. Planning rules/permits vary from council to council, some councils require approvals when a dam is above a size (volumetric) trigger.
What's defined as a waterway? Can a waterway be defined using existing datasets, e.g. the DEECA spatial dataset?	Determinations are made on site. Where the presence of a waterway is not obvious the determination process typically includes a walkover of the catchment to define the local topography, and area above the application point. Current guidance is if upstream catchment area >60 ha then it is likely to receive regular flow and therefore may be deemed a waterway. In regards using a spatial dataset - SRW address matters under the <i>Water Act 1989</i> , determine if it is a waterway under the legal definition – first and foremost look to the Act. The legal status of the dataset would need to be considered further.
Works licence for waterway works for on stream dams – how do they consider cultural heritage? Is the database referenced?	As part of the licence application/determination process SRW will refer application to the relevant Traditional Owner group and check the online state database/website for cultural heritage aspects.
Does SRW have powers to retrospectively investigate dams on waterways?	Yes. Powers under the Water Act
What progress has been made with the domestic and stock reasonable use guidelines	Improved reasonable use guidelines have been previously considered; however, enforcement of any new guidelines would require changes to the Water Act
Does infilling, siltation/de-siltation of dams needed a licence?	For existing licensed dams, significant modification, including enlarging will require a licence amendment. Desilting without enlarging does not generally require a licence application. A decommissioning licence may be required in the case of infilling/removal of a licensed dam.

Legislation/policy/implementation question	Summary of response
What happens if a farmer doesn't contact SRW about new D&S dam?	If the dam is later deemed to be on a waterway (or a hazardous dam) then compliance investigation/action may be appropriate.
How often do SRW investigate compliance issues related to domestic and stock use?	SRW regularly investigates D&S issues, this is generally when we are notified of a potential issue, or when field staff see a potential issue during their general duties.

A breakout session was held with SRG members and observers, split between 4 table groups, to discuss the gaps/opportunities in policy, legislation and implementation related to domestic and stock water. A summary of the key gaps/opportunities is provided below:

Breakout session: Gaps in policy and legislation

Group 1:

- There is a gap in understanding D&S use in systems to inform water allocation, which has implications when developing surface water/groundwater management plans
- DEECA uses estimates of D&S when setting caps on water availability, which will also be impacted by climate change
- Some clarification is required on how SRW imposes restrictions, and what the Minister's/DEECA's role is on qualification of rights
- There is a gap in communication and public awareness in understanding what is required and who oversees the licensing/ take rights
- Information/communication on farm dams should not be restricted to dam safety, more information is needed on what is acceptable in terms of dam size, including clarification on how farm dams' impact on water security

Group 2:

- There is a lack of information for landholders and agencies regarding construction of dams off waterways
- Further clarification s need on the scope/requirements for a cultural assessment and the relationship to the definition of waterway
- Roles and responsibilities between agencies need to be better clarified
- There is a lack of information for monitoring of the impacts of take (stream gauges)
- Greater regulation of water take is required including stock and domestic use.
- More consideration is needed of the impacts of upstream take on downstream values

Group 3:

- Determining Authorities (Barwon Water, CCMA, Melbourne Water) see a gap in inter agency coordination for referrals, and see a regular gap in SRW providing additional/supporting information to assist in determination/conditions
- Not enough or unclear use of DEECA watercourse dataset for determination of a waterway, and relying on officers to do this on ground can be risky and potentially inconsistent
- If the dataset does not apply due to the legal definition of water courses (including constructed waterways, diversions etc) then can this dataset be adapted for this purpose to allow farmers/ landowners to be informed?
- There is an information and education gap to support people where the onus is on them to contact SRW
- Will the dataset be reviewed to determine if watercourses still exist under climate change?
- There is a need for clarification on the impact of a recognised settlement agreement and native title on definitions

- There is an opportunity to review SRW's Local Management Rules and Streamflow Management Plans with updated datasets and a better understanding of stock and domestic use. Examples include requirements for monitoring (stream gauges with telemetry) and updated ban trigger levels.

Group 4:

- There needs to be greater consistency and transparency in waterway definitions
- Greater accounting/metering of domestic and stock volumes of take are required for water accounting and modelling
- Changing climate makes some areas of legislation out of date, there is an opportunity to review and update aspects of the legislation.
- There is ambiguity in the rules and when and who to speak to
- Gaps in communication/ education exist, there are lots of agencies and there is an opportunity to provide simple, clear messaging
- The water act includes colonial era rights, there is not enough consideration of native title/cultural heritage values in the existing domestic and stock assessments
- A clear funding mechanism that can bring about change is required

Values discussion

Andrew Little from Alluvium presented a summary of the key catchment values in each catchment. A paper was provided on this content, prior to the meeting.

- The process is informed by the standard risk method where Risk = likelihood x consequence
- In this instance, Risk will be informed by hydrology modelling (acting as the likelihood) compared to the potential impact on the water/flow dependent values (acting as the consequence)
- The project team asked the group for feedback on the risk assessment method, feedback on the values and sources of information and any gaps and further items for consideration, most of which will come after the meeting
- It was noted that information sources are unlikely to cover every detail about the sensitive species or water dependent values and this is what the group can provide comment on

Application of values to risk assessment:

- Environmental values will be measured through the impacts on capacity to meet flow recommendations under the FLOWS studies
- Social values will be measured through qualitative assessment comparing the model results to social objectives and the potential for impacts on environmental values to impact on social values
- Cultural values will be measured through a qualitative assessment based on comparing model results to the stated objectives, aimed to be done in consultation with Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri (pending agreement)
- Economic values will be measured through impact on licence rules, with a qualitative assessment based on environmental results and potential to impact tourism activity and a quantitative assessment on the frequency of being above the flow requirements
- Additional values mentioned by the group:
 - The project should try to include the importance of water for firefighting and secure access to water for emergency response. Dams play a key role in firefighting
 - Land value is another value that should be considered.
 - Reach based values should be considered to determine values as they pertain to the location throughout the catchments.
 - The project should try to include environmental water reserve and delivery and reliability of the environmental entitlements
 - The project should try to include agricultural productivity
 - Understand the emotional connection to the river in addition to amenity, particularly with how it relates to the diverse groups that exist across the catchment

- It was noted that the PALM study can give an indication of values– the Dammed future of the Moorabool River
- The project should try to include changes to the flow regimes under different option scenarios to determine what impacts on values can change
- The current intention is to understand what the opportunities are and what levers we have to pull
- The team will need to determine what the modelling questions are that we are investigating, as this will be the topic of discussion at the next SRG meeting

Questions and answers relating to catchment values

The key questions raised following the presentation and the responses have been summarised below.

Question on values	Summary of response
What is the risk/ scenario impact assessment being compared against? This is key to understanding the base case of modelling.	The model will enable an assessment of D&S on river flows, under historic (unimpacted), current and future scenarios. The risk assessment will then look at how the modelled flow changes could impact water dependent values. The specific scenarios and assessment will be detailed and explored in the modelling phase.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we considering values downstream of the study areas, for example, the Barwon River after the confluence of the Moorabool? • Could there be an acknowledgement of the downstream impacts of the flow regime past the Batesford Quarry? 	Yes, at least in a qualitative way. Further information will be sought from CCMA and Melbourne Water on values downstream. This information will help scope the downstream assessment.
What consideration is there of different social values across the catchment?	The current content is fairly high level and includes some commentary on water dependency. Further consideration of social values will be made by contacting the local councils, and other relevant agencies.
Social values are broader than amenity. Is there a way to cover the individual connection to waterways and distress members of the community feel to see the conditions worsen.	The social connection that communities have to waterways is important and will be more explicitly recognised in the work.
Growers feel like they are the bottom rung of priorities - are there weightings that are feeding the value prioritisation?	The risk assessment will not prioritise the values being assessed.
Does the economic consideration include the Bulk Entitlements?	The importance of public water supply is included in the values assessment. The SOURCE modelling includes the existing Bulk Entitlement rules and the risks to the delivery of Bulk Entitlements
What will be the modelling capacity to be able to examine the flow requirements in the unregulated systems for example to examine the impact on drought resilient ecosystems in Deep Creek	The extent to which flow-based modelling can assess the risk to drought refuges is unclear. Further consideration will be given to this question in the modelling phase.
Should economic values assessment be a quantitative assessment rather than a qualitative assessment? For example, quantifying the value of agricultural productivity?	Once the flow modelling has been undertaken, further consideration will be given to whether a more quantitative description of economic impacts is practicable within the project scope/budget.
Further commentary is needed on the environmental entitlements and the	Noted

Question on values	Summary of response
environmental water reserve, and the potential impact of domestic and stock use on these values.	

Questions to the group/from the group about the project plan and upcoming SRG meetings:

Can we combine the modelling results and risk assessment meetings as they are well aligned?

- The SRG were happy to combine the modelling results and risk assessment as long as we can cover both topics

Further consideration of the need for private consultation on cultural values with TO groups will be undertaken.

Next Steps

- Online meeting to discuss modelling inputs and modelling approach (April/May to be confirmed)
- Next full SRG meeting on modelling/risk assessment results (June/July date tbc)