

SGRF AGENDA

Meeting no. 58

9.00am, Friday 1 August 2025
Online via MS Teams

*'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

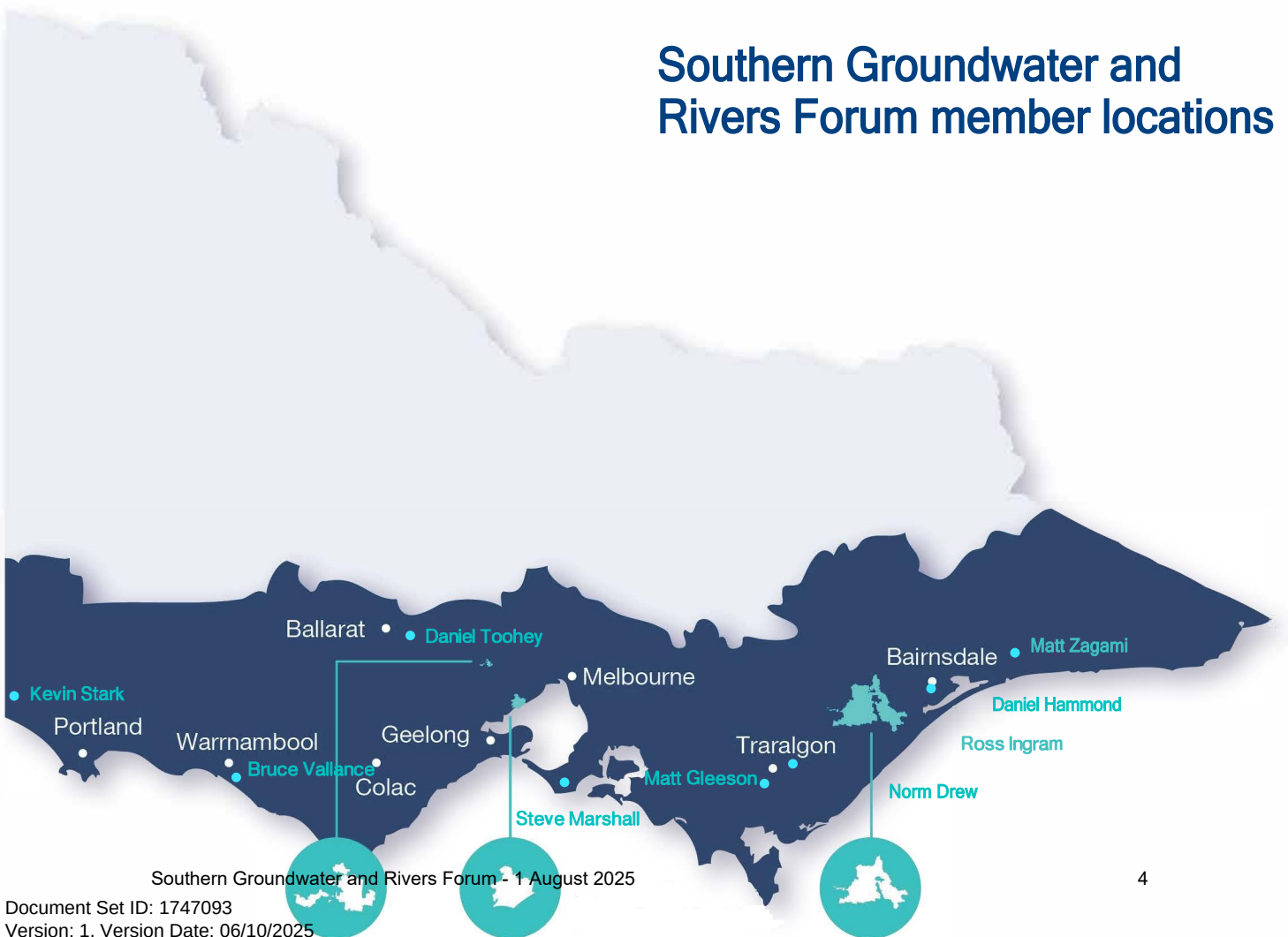
Great value for customers
and community through
excellence in rural
water management



Our Trademark Values

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

Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum member locations



Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum - 1 August 2025

Southern Rural Water's Groundwater and Rivers Strategic Focus Areas

June 2024 – June 2025

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 58

Date	Time	Location
1 August 2025	9.00am – 12.00pm	Online via MS Teams

Topic				
1		Acknowledgement of County	Chair	9.00am
2		Welcome and Apologies	Chair	
3		Declaration of conflicts of interest	All	
4		Confirmation of minutes – Meeting 57	Chair	
	4.1	Attachment – Draft Minutes SGRF Meeting 57, 2 May 2025		
5		Business Arising	Chair	9:05am
	5.1	Attachment - Business arising from previous meetings		
6		Committee appointments		
7		<u>TRAINING</u>		
	7.1	Cultural Awareness Training	Penny Winbanks	9:15am
8		<u>PRINCIPAL MATTERS – FOR DISCUSSION</u>		
	8.1	Metering Action Plan	Jessica Quinlivan	9:55am
	8.2	Farmer helping farmer	Simon Ilsley	10:15am
9		<u>PRINCIPAL MATTERS – FOR NOTING</u>		
	9.1	Groundwater and Rivers update	Penny Winbanks	10:35am

	9.2	Communications report		10:55am
10		<u>COMMITTEE MATTERS</u>		
	10.1	Important issues from other customer committees	Cameron FitzGerald	11:00am
	10.2	Matters referred to the Board/board committee	Jane Doolan	11:10am
	10.3	2025 Committee workplan		11:20am
11		<u>GENERAL BUSINESS</u>	All	11:20am
12		Meeting evaluation		
13		Next meeting		
14		Close		11:30am

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.

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 57
Action: For approval
Author: Hayley Taylor – Executive Assistant
Date: 24/07/2025

PURPOSE

1. To ensure that the minutes taken of committee meeting 57 are an accurate and sufficient record of discussions held and decisions made at the meeting.

RECOMMENDATION: That the committee approves the minutes of meeting 57 held on Friday 2 May 2025.

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 57, held online via MS Teams, on Friday 2 May 2025 are provided in attachment 4.1.
5. **Budget impact:** Nil
6. **Link to strategy:** Nil.
7. **Risk:** Committee meeting minutes are a public record. Members 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 57

Date	Time	Location
2 May 2025	9:00am	Online, via MS Teams

Present

Mr Ross Ingram	Chair
Mr Bruce Vallance	Forum Member/Deputy Chair
Mr Daniel Hammond	Forum Member
Mr Kevin Stark	Forum Member

In Attendance

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

Guests

Beth Ashworth	Director, Water Entitlements, Licencing and Groundwater, DEECA
Naomi Douglas	Co-Senior Manager, Water Licensing Policy, DEECA
Christopher Sanders	Cultural Liaison Officer, SRW

Apologies

Mr Steven Marshall	Forum Member
Mr Matt Gleeson	Forum Member
Mr Matt Zagami	Forum Member

Absent

Mr Norm Drew	Forum Member
Mr Daniel Toohey	Forum Member

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 and noted the apologies.

The committee members in attendance **noted** a quorum had not been achieved but after discussion with Management, it was decided to proceed with some agenda items. The Cultural Awareness Training will be held over to the next meeting so the committee can participate in the training together.

Mr Stark joined the meeting at 9:18am

3. Declaration of conflicts of interest

The Chair asked attendees to declare any conflicts of interest relating to the business of this meeting.

Mr Ross Ingram declared he had an interest in the off the shelf water from the Mitchell River mentioned in Agenda Item 8.1 – Groundwater and Rivers update.

4. Confirmation of minutes – Meeting 56

The minutes of meeting 56 held on 7 February 2025 were **approved**.

The committee discussed the track changes, and approved the minutes without the changes in agenda item 4 – Confirmation of Minutes – meeting 55

Moved: Daniel Hammond **Second:** Bruce Vallance

5. Business Arising

The report was taken as read.

6. GUEST SPEAKER

6.1 GM2030 Update

Ms Beth Ashworth, Director, Water Entitlements, Licencing and Groundwater, DEECA and Ms Naomi Douglas Co-Senior Manager, Water Licensing Policy, DEECA provided an update on the GM2030 project highlighting:

- The vision of the project is the sustainable use of groundwater that supports existing and new users, protects ecosystems and supports living cultural landscapes.
- The following tasks are nearing completion:
 - Sustainable Yields Technical Assessment – release mid-2025
 - Review of licensing practice and guidelines
 - Mapping the licensing and management framework

- Investigating groundwater information and accessibility – complete
- Pilot study into barriers to trade in Southwest Limestone - SRW has released a trading platform
- GM2030 Annual Status update was uploaded to the DEECA website
- The focus area's GM2030 in 2025-26 will be:
 - Release of the Sustainable Yields outcomes. It was confirmed that the outcomes from this project will not impact on existing entitlements or entitlement holders.
 - Development of a 10 year monitoring strategy
 - Release of a mid-project progress review (2026)
 - Continuation of the work with Traditional Owners to address barriers to accessing water and understand what parts of GM2030 are meaningful to them.

Ms Ashworth inquired as to whether the SGRF would be interested in a presentation specifically about the Sustainable Yields Project results once they are released. The committee **agreed** this would be beneficial.

Upon discussion, Ms Ashworth advised the Victorian Regional Monitoring Strategy will confirm the principles and priorities of monitoring across the state, to ensure monitoring is valuable and fit for purpose, and ensure the investment is spent where the best value. The strategy will also identify areas of risk and opportunities and is expected to include the following information:

- Acceptable levels of drawdown without impact to groundwater levels
- Risk
- Climate impact

While the metric will be statewide, it can be tailored to specific area's and conditions.

GM2030 may also consider regulatory reforms as part of the longer-term program.

The committee thanked Ms Ashworth and Ms Douglas for the presentation

Ms Ashworth and Ms Douglas left the meeting at 9.33am.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
DEECA to be invited to present the Sustainable Yields Project results to the SGRF meeting once they are released.	H TAYLOR	16/07/2025

7. PRINCIPLE MATTERS – FOR DISCUSSION

7.1 Rosters and Restrictions – process

Mr Russell Tomlin, Manager Groundwater and Rivers Operations and Compliance joined the meeting to discuss a proposal in relation to Rosters and Restriction communications to customers. The proposal presented a three pronged approach to communicating Roster and Restriction information with customers and includes;

1. Onboarding information for new licence holders
2. Roster information
3. Restriction information

The committee discussed the proposal and advised;

- It would be beneficial to receive a text message when there is a change in the restriction level.
- Timely and relevant communication to customers is key.

Mr Vallance discussed a situation whereby on the Merri River restriction levels have previously dropped from 100% to 15% very rapidly and when inquiries were made as to why, the customer was told restriction levels drop to 15% and then increases over time. Management **agreed** to take the question on notice and respond to Mr Vallance directly.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Provide advice to Mr Vallance as to the approach of setting restriction levels on the Merri River, where historically restriction levels have dropped from 100% to 15% and then increase over time.	R TOMLIN	16/06/2025

7.2 Process improvements – Applications and Water Sales process

Ms Penny Winbanks, Manager Statutory Functions discussed the issues identified during the last Mitchell River Water Auction and the opportunities identified to undertake process improvements.

The review identified that while customers are provided information in relation to the auction, the information may not be clear enough as to the standard licencing and auction process. Additionally, there may also be opportunities to provide education to referral agencies around their roles in the licencing process.

Ms Winbanks advised the focus of the improvements identified to date are:

- In collaboration with the EGCMA and WGCMA SRW are trialling a revised approach with the aim of improving communications across and between all parties
- Undertaking an audit of the information prepared by SRW's assessment staff to identify training opportunities
- Reviewing an updating the template provided to referral agencies to ensure sufficient guidance is provided.
- Undertaking a strategic review of processes to determine if there are further changes that could improve customer outcomes.
- Improving information provided before, during and after auctions with regard to the relevant licensing process.
- Case manager details for someone at SRW and the CMA will be provided to applicants.

- Information for customers in regard to the reviews the CMA's will be undertaking as part of the licencing process.

The committee stated that these improvements are a step in the right direction and reiterated that anyone participating in an auction needs to know what will happen if they do win water at the auction. The Chair identified that he had recently been through this process at the auction and is now having to go through the process again when purchasing water off the shelf. There is a perception that some of the Ministerial Guidelines are assuming irrigators are still applying water like it was applied historically (i.e. flood irrigating) and agencies are not fully considering contemporary practices when assessing water use.

Management acknowledged the issues raised and provided an overview of its understanding of the CMA requirements. Management also discussed the opportunity to provide input into GM2030 guidelines.

Dr Jane Doolan, Board Director suggested there could be an opportunity to raise these concerns with DEECA, acknowledging the guidelines are general and there could be an opportunity to review the risk profile for these specific area's. A Committee member advised a lot of the water being used from the Mitchell River is being used to replace Sale Water or water from the Wy Yung Aquifer.

8. PRINCIPAL MATTERS – for noting

8.1 Groundwater and Rivers update

The report was taken as read.

Penny highlighted:

Future of Orbost and District (FoOD) Study – report was provided by the group last year detailing some actions which aligned to SRW's priorities in regard to importance to trade. SRW has provided written advice to customers in the area in regard to how they can trade water, and other information on water trading. A formal response has been provided to the project group, and SRW has been invited to a meeting with the group to discuss how SRW can support the community in the region.

GLaWAC returned water– Licences have been issued to GLaWAC for the Albert and Franklin Rivers.

Metering – SRW is undertaking a fulsome review into SRW's metering plans and proposed to present these plans to the committee at a future meeting.

South West EOI process – close on 2 May 2025. Parattee EOI has exceeded volume available and will proceed to auction later in 2025.

The Chair highlighted the allocation of the 3-4 Bench Water to Traditional Owners, Irrigator's and the environment. Management advised SRW is meeting with customers on 9 May to discuss how the water will be made available.

8.2 Communications report

The report was taken as read.

9. COMMITTEE MATTERS

9.1 Cultural Awareness Training

It was **agreed** the Cultural Awareness Training will be held to the August 2025 meeting as it would be beneficial to conduct the training with the whole committee.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Cultural Awareness Training to be conducted during the August 2025 SGRF meeting	H TAYLOR	16/07/2025

9.2 Important issues from other customer committees

Mr Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director, SRW advised:

Macalister Customer Consultative Committee

The Macalister Customer Consultative Committee (MCCC) meeting held at the end of February 2025, focused on how the Macalister Irrigation District is managed during periods of high demand. The Water Supply East team conducted work over the winter maintenance period and implemented a high demand protocol and this work has reduced the wait times in the district. Further work will be completed to further improve system performance.

At the recommendation of the MCCC and after a panel review, an MCCC member was given a three month suspension, given an undertaking to complete SRW provided governance training and write a letter of apology to the committee. This was as a result of representations the member made in a public forum whereby it was stated the commentary was the position of the MCCC. This was not the case, as the committee had not formed an agreed position, nor authorised the member to speak on behalf of the committee.

Werribee

SRW is meeting with growers in regard to recycled water supply. The supply has been impacted by blue-green algae for an extended period of time.

Victorian Farmers Federation

SRW has been in discussions with the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) and wider community in regard to a Domestic and Stock supply into the Hawkesbury region. Communities in the area are experiencing challenging times, especially if they do not have a stock supply from an aquifer.

A member inquired whether Federal Government funding toward projects to improve access to stock and domestic water in the region. The Managing Director confirmed he has been involved in discussions to determine whether it is worth applying for funding.

Wannon Water is also working to improve access to stock and domestic water in the area.

9.3 Matters referred to/by the Board/Board Committee

Dr Jane Doolan, Board Director, SRW provided an overview of the items that will be highlighted to the board:

- Even if volumes of water are made available, there are still significant processes customers need to go through to access this water.

The committee discussed whether there is a possibility for customers to trade their allocation across aquifers in the South West Limestone.

Management discussed a potential benefit to collectively look at the water resources available in the area and determine whether there are other opportunities to make water accessible. The committee discussed the review of the Western Sustainable Water Strategy and when it is expected to be completed. Management was advised that a review date has not been set.

9.4 2025 Committee workplan

The committee **noted** the 2025 committee workplan, and Management advised the following topics would also be discussed at the August 2025 meeting.

- Metering update
- Sustainable yields discussion pending release of DEECA report
- Cultural Awareness Training

10. General Business

No items of General Business were raised.

11. Meeting evaluation

The Chair commented that the meeting was informative but due to quorum not being met, a more detailed meeting evaluation was not provided.

Management confirmed a quorum for the committee is five members (half of all members plus one).

12. Next meeting

The next meeting of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum will be held on Friday 1 August 2025 via MS Teams.

13. Close

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 10:41am.

Item No: **5**
Subject: **Business arising from previous meetings**
Action: **For noting**
Author: **Hayley Taylor – Executive Assistant**
Date: **25/07/2025**

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:

- one action item has been completed,
- one action item will be addressed during the agenda,
- one action item is overdue, and
- two action items remain in progress.

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
35570	Develop communications on: • how to access Winterfill flows, • Educating and encouraging water trading with a focus on sleeper licences	SGRF meeting 55- 15 November 2024, Agenda Item 6.1 Roundtable discussion – regional highlights, issues and opportunities.	30/04/25	Penny Winbanks	Factsheets, website articles and social media posts are created to communicate information to customers. Groundwater and Rivers is actively working with the Communications Team to create these articles to support customer knowledge on current activities or issues. A communications report is provided to the committee at each meeting, which highlights the focus area's over the previous reporting period. Customers are encouraged to contact their local Water Management Officer or the Customer Service team for information.

Action progress: This agenda

Action		Source	Due date	Completed date	Accountable officer	Status comment
35675	Cultural Awareness Training to be conducted during the August 2025 SGRF meeting	SGRF meeting 57- 2 May 2025, Agenda Item 9.1 - Cultural Awareness Training	16/07/25	25/07/25	Hayley Taylor	Scheduled to be completed during the August 2025 SGRF meeting. Refer to agenda item 7.1

Action progress: Overdue

Action	Source	Due date	Completed date	Accountable officer	Status comment
35676	Provide advice to Mr Vallance as to the approach of setting restriction levels on the Merri River, where historically restriction levels have dropped from 100% to 15% and then increase over time.	SGRF meeting 57- 2 May 2025, Agenda Item 7.1 - Rosters and Restriction process	16/06/25	Russell Tomlin	Working with Western Team Leader to understand the reasoning behind the way restriction levels on the Merri River are set. An Update will be provided directly to Mr Vallance prior to the August 2025 meeting.

Action progress: Future items (include a status comment when due date prior to next meeting)

Action	Source	Due date	Completed date	Accountable officer	Status comment
25330	Advise the SGRF of the date of the Strategic Futures Forum as soon as it is known.	SGRF meeting 51- 1 December 2023, Agenda Item 11 - Meeting evaluation	28/08/25	Hayley Taylor	Due date extended as date has not been confirmed. Action to remain open until date is confirmed, and SGRF notified.
35677	DEECA to be invited to present the Sustainable Yields Project results to the SGRF meeting once they are released	SGRF meeting 57- 2 May 2025, Agenda Item 6.1 - GM2030 update	31/10/25	Penny Winbanks	Due date extended from 16/07/2025 to October 2025 as the study has not yet been released.

Item No: **6**

Subject: **Committee Appointments – Chair and Deputy Chair vote**

SRW Management will call for nominations for Chair and Deputy Chair of the forum, including acknowledging any nominations received prior to the meeting.

Members will undertake a vote and the successful nominees will commence their positions at the November 2025 committee meeting.

Item No: **7.1**

Subject: **Cultural Awareness Training**

Penny Winbanks, Manager Statutory Functions, will facilitate Cultural Awareness Training for the Committee.

Item No: 8.1
Subject: Groundwater & Rivers Metering Action Plan
Action: For noting
Author: Jessica Quinlivan, Metering & Data Lead
Date: 1/08/2025

Purpose:

1. A slide pack will be presented to the SGRF that dives into current metering practices at SRW as well as summarising its recently updated metering action plan (MAP).

Background:

2. DEECA recently updated the state policy for non-urban metering ([Victorian Non-Urban Water Metering Policy](#)). The policy sets the minimum practicing standards on the following metering related areas:
 - Approved meter types and when they are required
 - Meter Installations and validations
 - Storing metering data and information
 - Automated meter reading (AMR)
 - Annual reporting on policy compliance
3. As a part of the update, each non-urban water corporation across Victoria was required to provide an update to their MAP. The plan summarises how SRW currently performs against the state policy and commits to action where improvements should be made. SRW recently published its updated MAP to its public website: [Metering Action Plan 2025](#)

Discussion Starters:

- Metering sounds simple enough, but in reality, is complicated. What would you like to know more about when it comes to your flow meter(s)? And how can we get this information to you?
- How often do you interact with your own meter(s) and what types of decisions do you make with it?
- AMR is the future of metering and unlocks lots of new data sharing possibilities. What types of water management data would be important to you and your operations?

Item No: **9.1**
Subject: **Farmer helping Farmer initiative**
Action: **For discussion**
Author: **Simon Ilsley, Planning & Referral Lead**
Date: **16/07/2025**

Purpose:

1. Simon Ilsley will present an introduction to a new initiative aimed at supporting greater domestic and stock water access in the South West. This will be followed by a discussion with members to hear their views and ideas about how we can make the initiative a success,

Background:

2. On 4 July 2025, the Victorian Government announced an additional \$75 million to help farmers through the current drought. Included in this package was \$2.5 million to leverage existing groundwater bores to access water for domestic and stock usage in drought affected areas.
3. The purpose of this initiative titled “Farmer helping Farmer” is to support farmers in drought effected areas in south-western Victoria by facilitating access to existing bore water on privately owned land. The focus area for the receipt of this bore water is the Heytesbury region, which has limited access to groundwater.
4. SRW will engage with regional stakeholders and local farmers to determine the viability of this project. These discussions will focus on the following matters:
 - Identification of the key considerations and issues with implementing this project.
 - Establishment of a set of parameters to determine if a site is suitable for the collection of bore water,
 - Protection of farmers who are volunteering to participate in this project.
 - Incentives to encourage farmers to participate in this project.
 - Identification of between 5 and 10 bores that are potentially suitable for participation in this project.
5. With above average rainfall forecast in south-western Victorian for the next three months, the focus of this project is to establish a network of available bores to support farmers in the first half of 2026. This will ensure that farmers recovering from the current drought conditions have confidence to maintain their recovery well into 2026 irrespective of rainfall levels.

Discussion starters:

- Will this project produce meaningful outcomes for farmers experiencing hardship as a result of the current drought?
- What are the key considerations for SRW in implementing this project?
- Does SRW need to consider the implementation of more immediate measures to support farmers? If so, what could these be?

Item No: **8.1**

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

Action: **For noting**

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

Russell Tomlin, Manager Groundwater & Rivers Operations and Compliance

Date: **25/07/2025**

Focus area	Commentary
Strategic focus 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.	We continue to work alongside DEECA through the implementation of GM2030 and raise matters around matters such as upstream trade, and high flows harvesting and flexible trade through regular meetings and the Statewide Licensing Committee Meetings. We will take an active role in the recently announced Western Region Sustainable Water Strategy review when it begins.
Strategic focus 2. Continue to encourage a flexible trading market through improved internal procedures and Government policies.	Since the last meeting SRW have met with the Future of Orbost Committee to discuss water trading and flexible access to water. We continue to advertise the online trading platform, and work with DEECA on removing other barriers to trading.
Strategic focus 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	We have reviewed and updated our Metering Action Plan. Further information relating to this will be presented at the August meeting
Strategic focus 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.	We have finalised our work consolidate our understanding of how climate change may impact the reliability of water systems, and the main finding is that the Werribee system requires further investigation. No further or changed results were identified in the unregulated areas. From a groundwater perspective, findings from DEECAs Sustainable Yield project (part of GM2030) will help us identify critical focus points for investment.
Strategic focus 5. Understanding the implications of rapidly evolving cultural water policy on customer aspirations for improved access to water.	We have developed process pathways for the issuing of licences to Traditional Owners that are supported by Government that balances the needs and expectations of customers while allowing for the return of water entitlements to occur.

	We are now seeking to develop communication materials to inform Traditional Owners groups on the water licensing framework, what aspects of licensing are negotiable and non-negotiable and the identified process pathways.
--	--

Issue	Commentary
Statutory Functions	
Alcoa Anglesea groundwater licence application	SRW received an application from Alcoa to renew and amend their groundwater licence to fill the mine void at Camp Rd, Anglesea. Public consultation has now closed with over 150 submissions received. A submissions hearing will be held in late August and convened by an independent panel. We expect an outcome before Christmas.
Latrobe mine groundwater licence renewals	Energy Australia (Yallourn) and Engie (Hazelwood) have submitted licence renewal applications to continue pumping groundwater for the provision of safe and stable, and to support operations (if applicable). This use does not relate to filling the mine voids. These matters are currently out for public consultation, with a submission deadline of 6 August 2025. The licences expire at the end of August and we expect to be in a position to make a decision before the licences expire, however we do have the ability to allow for the use of water in the short term while we finalise the decision if necessary.
Energy Australia application for surfacewater licence with returns	Energy Australia have submitted an application to take water from the Morwell River and then return it to the Latrobe (where the Morwell River Diversion ends). This application is not yet out for public consultation; however, it will be shortly. This will be the first licence issued under new guidance provided by DEECA that focussed on licences where some or all water is being returned to the same system.
Mitchell River: interest in water off the shelf	All water applications have been assessed and licences issued, with the exception of Gippsland Critical Minerals. This remains unactioned as we consider the requirements and impacts of other outstanding regulatory processes. One applicant withdrew their application. As a result, 50ML remains on the shelf for purchase.
South West Expression of Interest (EOI)	The EOI in the South West region has closed and based on the interest shown we will be undertaking

Issue	Commentary
	auctions in both Paaratte and the Warrnambool Zone of the Dilwyn in September.
3-4 bench apportionment update	In June we launched an Expression of Interest process for the Lower Latrobe to determine the pathway for allocation of the 5.3GL of water made available through the Latrobe 3-4 allocation. To date we have received over 15 expressions of interest totalling ~5.9GL however these have not yet been verified for eligibility. EOI closes on 31 July 2025.
Small Farm Dams Project	The project is progressing we are likely to complete it within the timeframes and budget set. WE have received an additional \$30K to further evaluate the options following the completion of this phase. To date we have held two formal meetings, and a third interim online meeting where we provide further insight into the purpose of the modelling work. The next meeting September will focus on the results of the modelling.
Water for Traditional Owners	We have issued a further two licences to GLaWAC on the Albert and Franklin Rivers for 150ML each, and a licence for 250ML has been issued to Bunurong on the Powlett River. We will run an Expression of Interest process now on the Powlett
Mitchell River Management Review	We are finalising the award of contract to undertake the licence holder surveys and expect survey to be released in the coming months. The purpose of the survey will be to understand what irrigators think is working, what's not and their views on some of the possible trade-offs required to improve how we management water in the Mitchell.
Dry conditions in the Southwest	We continue to work with DEECA in the drought co-ordination group and are prioritising applications in the South West. Recently we have been provided with \$2.5M to lead an initiative to support greater access to domestic & stock water in the Heytesbury region (this area may be extended). Further information on this initiative will be provided via a presentation and discussion at the August meeting.
Metering update	The tender for the Meter Replacement Program (initiated in SRW Price Submission 2023) has been

Issue	Commentary
	awarded, with works to be completed by June 2026. This program aims to replace over 1,100 meters. We are also working on the pathway to install further AMR to improve metering data and establish asset class plans so we can have a systematic renewals program.
Future of Orbost and District Project Irrigation Water Study	Following our response to the FoOD Committee, SRW attended a meeting in Orbost in June to further discuss the water licensing matters raised. SRW consider this item closed out.
Operations and Compliance	
Moorabool Catchment Investigation	Catchment investigation inspections finalised and enforcement actions including Section 151 Notice of Contravention and Section 78, and 80 Ministerial Directions issued.
Maribyrnong Catchment Investigation	Catchment investigation communications sent to dam owners/occupants flagging upcoming dam inspections. Initial inspections ongoing in relation to PHD and waterway determinations. Potential compliance issues identified may result in further inspection, drone surveillance, evidence gathering and potential enforcement actions including Section 151 Notice of Contravention and Section 78 and 80 Ministerial Directions.
Mornington Peninsula Catchment Investigation	Catchment investigation desktop assessments have commenced. Upon completion communications will be sent to dam owners/occupants flagging upcoming dam inspections as per Maribyrnong Catchment investigation process.
Rosters and Restrictions	Work is progressing on the Roster and Restrictions uplift including: • Review and update of website information • Upgraded Rosters and Restrictions hotline with numbered options relating to relevant rivers and streams • Development of factsheets • Communications plan drafted to support communications with customers around Roster and Restriction requirements, timing with the information mailout to customers. • Mailout to customers will include a letter advising requirements around rosters and restrictions as well as their roster Customers will receive their letter in September 2025.

Issue	Commentary
Annual usage report (inc. Overuse)	On 10 June 2025 DEECA communicated to all water corporations that continuous accounting would be applied to all water users for unauthorised take in the Victorian Water Register from 30 June 2025. This means that the Victorian Water Register will now apply continuous accounting measures to all water users (irrespective of whether they hold groundwater or surface water licence, or a general place of take approval). As a result, any 2024-25 unauthorised take volumes for surface water take and use licences will be deducted from the water made available to the holder under their licence in the new year (in most cases on 1 July). From an operational, compliance and enforcement perspective SRW have commenced analysing data gathered collected from meter reading activities and identified matters relating to overuse and negative carry over. A consistent operational, compliance and enforcement response is being applied pertaining to overuse and negative carry over. The enforcement response to address the overuse and related contraventions of the Water Act 1989, includes but is not limited to, issuing advisory letters, warning letters, and infringement notices.

2025/26 Groundwater and Rivers focus areas

Statutory Functions

- Running water auctions in the South West region and potentially the Latrobe
- Finalising the Alcoa application
- Working through the Latrobe Valley mine licence renewals (we will be receiving further renewal application) and licence with return water application
- Defining and delivering the Farmer helping Farmer initiative
- Implementing the Metering Action Plan
- Continuing to work with Traditional Owner groups to build relationships, understanding and return water to them
- Working with IT to develop automated workflow process which will include online application and payment portals
- Improving application processes with agencies (particularly CMA's)
- Establishing strong training protocols and materials for staff

Operations and Compliance

- Address overuse and negative carry over resulting from end of year meter reads
- Delivery of training including relating to dams, compliance, enforcement within GWR and across the organisation where appropriate
- Provide clear and updated communications in relation to operations and compliance
- Increased use of drone technology to support operations, compliance and enforcement activities
- Complete investigations within Maribyrnong and Mornington Peninsula catchments
- Working with IT and DEECA to develop automated workflow processes, and GIS mapping relating to operations, compliance and enforcement
- Promoting engagement and collaboration with other regulators via Compliance Community of Practice meeting, Water Compliance catchup meetings, Authorised Officer Forum
- Identifying opportunities for co-location, joint operations, compliance and enforcement activities with other regulators

Item No: 6
Subject: **Communications and Engagement report – August 2025**
Action: **For noting**
Author: **Hayley Taylor, Executive Assistant**
Date: **25/07/2025**

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

We publish stories on growers doing great things with groundwater and surface water and what we are doing to support access to groundwater.

<https://www.srw.com.au/news-media/managing-groundwater-dry-times>

<https://www.srw.com.au/news-media/flipping-taste-victoria-burger-day>

<https://www.srw.com.au/news-media/secure-latrobe-river-water-supports-no-bull-beef-business>

<https://www.srw.com.au/news-media/weve-built-new-bores-help-bushfire-affected-communities-nillumbik>

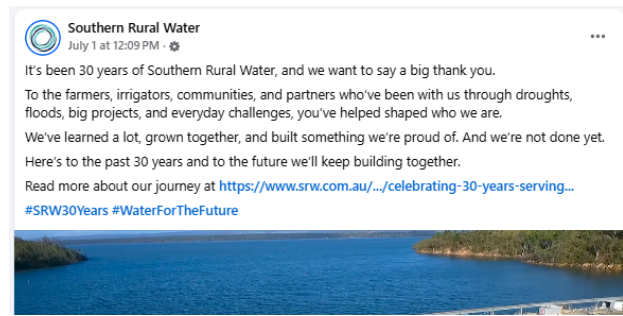
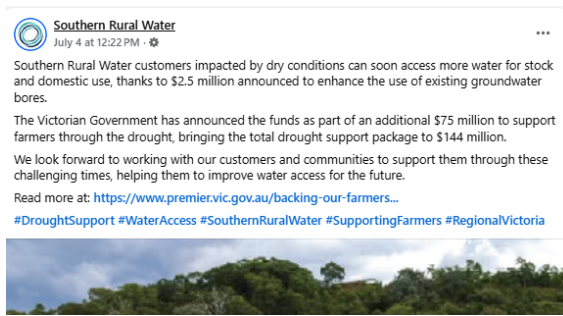
5. Seasonal Outlook

At the start of each season SRW publish a seasonal outlook which details expected conditions for the season, as well as information on Roster and Restrictions and handy links. The winter outlook is linked below.

<https://www.srw.com.au/news-media/seasonal-outlook-warmer-weather-continues-winter>

6. Social media

Our social media posts about groundwater and rivers customers have received good responses. Below are examples of content since the last meeting. Please follow our social media pages to see more.



7. Advice, help and support for Customers

Since the last meeting, SRW has published social media posts and new articles on our Website, providing customers with information how to access financial assistance and drought support through Agriculture Victoria. The social media posts link customers to the SRW website for further information

Drought Support: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/166mtkQjbR/>

Groundwater: What you need to know: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EwybES7V5/>

8. Promoting events

SRW promotes events including webinars and workshops via our social media channels that may be of interest or provide assistance to customers. Please follow our social media pages to see more upcoming events.



Item No: **10.1**

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: **10.2**

Subject: **Matters referred to the board/board committee.**

Dr Jane Doolan, Board Director will discuss matters that will be referred to the Board.

Item No: **10.3**

Subject: **2025 Committee workplan**

Southern Rural Water will provide updates to the committee as indicated in the 2025 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 2025 Committee workplan is included as attachment 10.3.1 for **noting**.

SOUTHERN GROUNDWATER AND RIVERS FORUM ROLLING WORK PLAN

		2025				2026				
	Requirement	FEB	MAY	AUG	NOV	FEB	MAY	AUG	NOV	Notes
Principal & Business Matters	Communications report	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	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	✓		✓		✓		✓		- February – Discussion – what does the SGRF want to see in the Corporate Plan. Align with GWR Strategic Focus Areas - August – Corporate Plan (new plan for noting)
Project updates (DEECA and SRW)	SWS 4.13 – Small Farm Dams									At key project milestones
	GM2030									At key project milestones
Admin / Other	Meeting evaluation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Important issues from other customer committees	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	MD to provide verbal update
	Matters referred to the committee by the board/board committee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Committee Workplan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Meeting schedule for the year				✓				✓	

Item No: **11**

Subject: **General Business**

The Chair will introduce any items of general business.

Item No: **12**

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: **13**

Subject: **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum is to be held on Friday 14 November 2025, in person, in Melbourne CBD.

Item No: **14**

Subject: **Close**

The Chair will close the meeting.
