Meeting Notes

Meeting	Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting 5
Date	1 October 2025
Project	Water Risks in the Upper Moorabool and Maribyrnong Catchments
Distribution	All, SRW website

1. Attendance

Name	Organisation/Representative	Project Role
Gemma Abela	Southern Rural Water	Project Support (Comms and Engagement)
Joan Hodgson	Southern Rural Water	Project Support
Ross Hardie	Alluvium	Chair
Andrew Little	Alluvium	Project Manager
Ella Guthrie	Alluvium	Project Support
Phillip Jordan	HARC	Modelling
Mitchell Cunningham	Moorabool Shire Council	SRG Member
Dan Toohey	Farmer	SRG Member
Angela Clough	Agriculture Victoria	SRG Member
Cameron Steele	People for a Living Moorabool	SRG Member
Nicole Kowalczyk	Maribyrnong River and Waterways Association	SRG Member
Nicholas Longden	DEECA	SRG Member
Charles Everist	Landholder	SRG Member
Ross Colliver	Landholder/Landcare	SRG Member
James Burkitt	Melbourne Water	SRG Member
Jake van Dam	Corangamite Catchment Management Authority	SRG Member
Jared Scott	Barwon Water	SRG Member
Michael Browne	Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation	SRG Member
Bella Schaffer	Greater Western Water	SRG Member
Jayden Woolley	Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation	SRG Member
Helen Van den Berg	Concerned Waterways Alliance	SRG Member
Scott Young	Victorian Farmers Federation/ Landowner	SRG Member
Naomi Douglas	DEECA	Observer
Anna May	DEECA	Observer
Apologies		
Matthew Hudson	Southern Rural Water	Project Manager
Alana Spring	Southern Rural Water	Project Support
Cameron Haines	Central Highlands Water	SRG Member
Peter Stray	Landholder/ farmer	SRG Member

Name	Organisation/Representative	Project Role
Janice Taylor	Victorian Environmental Water Holder	SRG Member
Geoffrey Steendam	DEECA	Observer
Rachel Brown	DEECA	Observer
Lisa Duncan	Melbourne Water	Observer
Alex Murray	DEECA	Observer
Anna Tuechler	Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation	SRG Member
Jane Robson	Landowner	SRG Member
Ken Allender	Landcare/landholder	SRG Member
Bridgid Creasey	Barwon Water	SRG Member

2. Agenda Items

Item	Topic
1.	Welcome and Acknowledgement of country
2.	Agenda and Context for the day
3.	Recap of previous sessions
4.	Group session: Identification of opportunities to improve domestic and stock water management
5.	Group session: Challenges and Impacts
6.	Reflections and next steps
7.	Meeting close

3. Questions and Answers

These key questions raised and the responses provided in the meeting have been summarised below.

Theme	Question	Response
Definitions	The term 'take' has different meanings particularly with reference to the Water Act.	The reference to 'take' with respect to farm dam water balance refers to the portion of water captured or intercepted by a farm dam that prevents that water running off and flowing into the lower catchment. In the context of an individual dam this refers to the difference between inflow and outflow.
Assumptions	There was a discussion of dams on waterways that were identified in further modelling. Can we take the assumptions of dams on waterways are more impactful in this discussion.	Not necessarily, from a legislative point of view they have a lot of impact but it depends on the upstream catchment area.

4. Meeting notes:

Acknowledgement & Agenda Overview

Ross Hardie gave an acknowledgement of Country, and then the meeting agenda was presented.

Ross discussed the purpose of today's meeting, to discuss opportunities to address water risks in the Moorabool and Maribyrnong catchment. Today's focus is on the SRG, to enable discussion and seek advice and feedback from the SRG about some options to address water risks in the catchments.

Recap on project learnings so far

Andrew gave a refresh on previous discussions about the role of the Water Act in defining the licencing requirements for stock and domestic dams, the referral authority responsible for giving approvals and the uncertainty in some definitions within the legislative frameworks around farm dams.

The project involved an assessment of values and hydrologic modelling, which were discussed as identified risks in the previous SRG meeting.

Phil discussed the work involved in the modelling, identifying where there have been changes in farm dams in the catchments, quantifying the changes (sizes, spatial variability, capacity to intercept runoff).

The growth in farm dam numbers since 2009/10 has been between 2-4% (Maribyrnong and Moorabool respectively), with a growth in volume of farm dams of around 16%-20% (reflecting the amount of dam enlargement). Climate change pressures on available water is expected to increase. Interception is more impactful in summer and autumn, even though the storage volumes are typically lower dams capture a greater proportion of the total runoff.

Looking to risks that are evident through the modelling, the impacts are predominantly seen in the low flow components and further exacerbated under climate change.

Identification of opportunities to improve domestic and stock water management

The discussion is put to the group to talk to the opportunities that may exist to address some of the risks that have been identified in earlier stages in the project.

Opportunities fell under the following categories:

- Information and education
- Operations
- Water Policy and Legislation
- Research and Innovation
- Other

Discussion was conducted around tables and documented on sticky notes posted around the room under each category. The discussion focused on opportunities to address the complex issue of increasing numbers of farm dams and the expansion of dams within the catchment. Opportunities explored a range of topics such as the need to establish clarity and delegation of responsibility under existing policy and legislation, improvements to data, measurement and information gathering, and the need to instil behaviour change, establishing a common understanding and incentive to act.

The themes and opportunities identified during the roundtable discussions are outlined below. Please note that these are preliminary ideas intended for further exploration, and not definitive recommendations.

Theme	Opportunities
Water policy and legislation	• Revise "your dam, your responsibility" guidelines to reflect environmental and catchment implications. • Review and update the waterway determination guidelines. • Develop a registry of approved earthmovers.

	• Clarify and establish consistency and understanding of the definition of 'reasonable use', and the definition across planning zones and catchments. • Cap and trade system for farm dams • Establish licencing system for D&S dams, or restrict volume of take rights under Section 8 • Work with CFA to address potential loophole for some dams (ornamental) and replace with emergency water supply points – currently there are none in Macedon. • Protect emergency water supply for fire protection by replacing with bore and tanks • Limit new dams on divided properties, establish land planning controls for new and expanding dams under the Catchment Land and Protection Act • Limit size of farm dams based on property size and upstream catchment (as they do in NSW)
Operations	• Provide resourcing and capacity support for compliance functions. • Reducing the demand from farm dams by farm planning / water planning • Establish a central "single source of truth" for waterway definition and how it is applied. • Review and integrate existing waterway / water source datasets to avoid duplication or gaps and align to other work programs such as the Cultural Heritage definition of a watercourse. • Metering of bores pumping into D&S dams • Incentivise dam decommissioning. • Promote low-flow bypasses or seasonal passing flow mechanisms. • Clarify roles & responsibilities for the establishment of new dams or expansion of existing dams – communicate landholder responsibilities and implications, agencies role in approvals and compliance, and where there may be gaps. • Communicate guidelines, responsibilities, risks and opportunities to landholders to promote awareness and support buy in.
Information and education	• Update and maintain the Water Register to provide public and accessible information about all farm dams (including dams that do not require a licence), including metrics of size, dimension, depth, volume, purpose. • Improve streamflow monitoring information. • Public education (especially to new landholders) on the Water Act, the current frameworks and rights and the context of water risks due to farm dams • Provide better public access to information relating to water rights, waterways, and farm dams. • Articulate what the challenge is and why things need to change, to establish common understanding of the issue. • Take examples from other states (NSW) to understand what is happening elsewhere and what can be done about it
Research and innovation	• Improve efficiency of water use on farms. • Look at ways to reduce costs of implementing changes in water management, such as funding infrastructure change on farm. • A stock & domestic pipeline to deliver water for farmers, which would increase water security for farmers, and reduce the impact on the river systems.

	• Use innovative technologies such as AI or remote sensing to gather data and conduct ongoing monitoring and tracking of farm dam growth. • Better understand surface water groundwater interactions • Continual research to improve validation or sensitivity testing of modelling methods

Other	• Look at alternative water sources (treated wastewater, groundwater)
	• Consistent advice from responsible authorities
	• Turkey Nest dams that are elevated so they have limited runoff capture (for seasonal winterfill only)
	• Look at wide range of funding sources to mobilise actions.
	• Licensed dams: No new farm dams (water use) in fully allocated systems: but don't limit development i.e. a cap-and-trade system for water use including farm dam.
	• Within rights (not on a waterway, not for commercial use): i.e. D&S dams that are not on a waterway including ornamental lakes.
	  ○ Greater control/ constraint/ restrictions needed e.g. more appropriate definitions for 'reasonableness'.
	  ○ domestic use is not reasonable if there is reticulated water supply.
	  ○ limit/restrict size of ornamental lakes.
	  ○ limits on the scale of harvesting and storage
	• target grey area between regulated and within rights dams.
	• Better definition of waterway e.g. explicit documentation of waterways in the subject catchment

Reflection

The group split into smaller groups to circulate and discuss the challenges in implementing each option and the impacts that discussed opportunities may have. A summary of these discussions is provided below.

Challenges in delivery

- Costs of actions is a challenge, in terms of who wears the cost (i.e. decommissioning, water efficiency programs), where does the funding come from (i.e. to support research and innovation) and how is it considered in justifying actions (i.e. business cases assessed using a single bottom line approach)
- Willingness to change is a challenge, as there are different perspectives of the issue and different buy in across the catchments.
- Red tape around complex processes limits efficiency
- Political reticence to change, especially for actions that are drastic or require ministerial approval.
- Confusion of the responsibility of water regulation versus cultural heritage protection
- Reticulated network for alternative water supply is expensive, and takes time to establish.
- Challenges associated with monitoring and compliance.
- Groundwater as an alternative supply is not an unlimited resource.
- Technical challenges in implementing change, such as defining a waterway.
- New research and innovation opportunities must be tested and verified before being mainstreamed, which takes time and cost.
- Concerns around data quality for existing and new technologies, and the limitations of information that relies on broad assumptions.
- Challenges in capturing the outcomes from the wide range of existing programs that are underway through the Drought Resilience Fund
- Prioritisation of actions, especially where programs take a long time to mobilise.

- Across different stakeholder groups there are differing opinions of the need for change. This extends to the need for clarification of terms and definitions, such as 'reasonable use.' There is disagreement of the effectiveness of the current definition and whether it needs to change.

Impacts on catchment values (users, environment, traditional owners)

- Transitioning to a different future requires supporting farmers with the transition and bringing them along the process to keep them empowered and not alienated.
- Improved clarity and understanding of the water risks, importance of actions, current rights and responsibilities.
- Improved water literacy
- Action to reduce farm dam impacts is incentivised and garners widespread support.
- 1000 eyes on the catchment – embedding mechanisms to incorporate community-based data gives community action legitimacy and creates a pathway for effective use of on ground data.
- Improved technology and investigation give a better understanding of knowledge gaps and existing assumptions. As technology and research evolves there may be a need to do further sensitivity testing to improve the accuracy of models, but this will build further confidence in the evidence base.
- Definitions and rules are currently written from a consumptive use water rights/ access perspective. The level of support or impact that operations have on other catchment functions such as environment or cultural are not the primary consideration.

Overall reflections from Chair and next steps

Ross gave a recap of the sessions and some of the key messages that came out of the day. The following SRG meeting will involve a 'what we've heard' discussion and next steps, to seek feedback and reflect final thoughts into the reporting process.

The timeline for the draft report delivery was discussed, including the challenges to meet the existing November 12th date. SRW will consider moving the next meeting back a few weeks and will be in touch with the SRG members to discuss their availability.

Before closing the session, Ross took a moment to thank all of the members of the SRG for their active participation and engagement in the proceedings.