

Macalister Customer Consultative Committee

Minutes of Meeting 206

Date	Time	Location
25 February 2025	10:00am	SRW Maffra Depot

Present

Mr Benn Thexton	Committee Chair
Ms Kate Lamb	Committee Member
Mr Christopher Van Den Dikkenberg	Committee Member
Mr Mark Coleman	Committee Member
Mr Tim Missen	Committee Member
Mr Thomas Dwyer	Committee Member
Mr Warrick Purdon	Committee Member
Mr James Clyne	Committee Member
Mr Bernard Coleman	Committee Member
Mr Brad White	Committee Member

In Attendance

Mr Cameron FitzGerald	Managing Director, SRW
Mr Simon Wilkinson	General Manager Service Delivery, SRW
Mr Matt Cook	Manager Water Supply East, SRW
Ms Hayley Taylor	Executive Assistant, SRW (minutes)

Guests

Ms Kate Berg	Manager Environment and Climate Adaptation, SRW
Ms Kellie Massouras	Manager Emergency Planning and Risk, SRW
Ms Melissa Jeal	Corporation Secretary, SRW

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.

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 205

The minutes of meeting 205 were **approved**, with the following amendment

Agenda item 9.1 Roundtable discussion – Mr Clyne was referenced twice as providing comments during this discussion. The second comments are to be attributed to Mr Van Den Dikkenberg.

Moved: Chris Van Den Dikkenberg **Second:** James Clyne

5. Business Arising

The report was taken as read and status comments noted.

6. PROJECT UPDATE

6.1 SRW's Carbon Offset Program

Ms Kate Berg, Manager Environment and Climate Adaptation provided the committee with an overview of SRW's Carbon Offset Program highlighting:

- SRW's target to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 1 July 2025. This target was developed in 2017 and SRW are on track to be the first Victorian Water Corporation to reach net zero.
- SRW has developed a Climate Change Mitigation Plan which sets SRW's net zero targets.
- SRW's baseline emissions assessment was conducted in 2016/17, and SRW have reduced emissions from 1800 to 561 CO2 equivalent. All current emissions are attributed to SRW's fleet.
- Strategies for SRW to reach net zero emissions:
 - Generating and purchasing renewable energy
 - Reducing our Fleet to zero emissions, and
 - Using carbon offsets where there is a gap.This is achieved through generating solar power, and partnering with Zero Emissions Water, to purchase renewable energy directly from a solar farm.

- SRW has a target of a zero emissions fleet by 2030. SRW is transitioning fleet to hybrid and electric vehicles and looking to reduce the overall fleet. SRW have also installed EV charging at the Maffra Depot with future plans to install chargers at other SRW sites.
- SRW will need to acquire carbon offsets until such time as SRW's fleet is fully electric. SRW can only purchase or generate carbon offsets in Victoria.
- SRW is involved in a partnership with Wannon Water, where Wannon Water will gift SRW credit units to allow SRW to meet commitments, and SRW will in turn, gift offsets back to Wannon Water when SRW generates offsets.

The committee inquired whether SRW had considered generating offsets in other ways. Management advised SRW had considered engaging with a broker to trade or purchase offsets, and soil carbon, but reforestation was deemed the most suitable option as the soil carbon offsets generated were less than the reforestation option.

Carbon Offsets Reforestation Project (CROP)

- The CROP is an environmental plantings project focused on revegetation around the marginal lands surrounding Lake Glenmaggie, Merrimu Reservoir and Blue Rock Lake.
- The carbon reforestation offsets project has the potential to remove up to 35,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere over 25 years
- The project has the potential to generate 35,000 Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCU) by 2050.
- SRW has registered the project with the Clean Energy Regulator.
- SRW will plant 13 hectares at Glenmaggie on Glenmaggie Creek which has been approved and is currently reviewing the feasibility of planning at Blue Rock.
- Reforestation will replicate the ecological vegetation class of the area as set out by the National Regulator.
- A bushfire assessment has been completed, and a bushfire management plan will be developed to ensure the site is resilient.
- A cultural heritage management plan will be developed to protect the artefacts found on the site during the cultural heritage assessment.
- The land will be managed in line with obligations set by the State Government and will be managed for the next 25 years.

The committee inquired what would happen if SRW do not hit net zero? Management confirmed the Wannon Water agreement ensures that SRW will be at net zero until 2030, where SRW will have reduced the fleet, generated offsets that will cover SRW's emissions and be able to payback Wannon Water.

The committee thanked Kate for the presentation.

6.2 Emergency Management at SRW

Ms Kellie Massouras, Manager Emergency Planning and Risk provided the committee with an overview of emergency management at SRW, including an update on the Flood Warden System and highlighted:

- Victoria's emergency management arrangements which include specifications of roles and responsibilities of organisations across the state. Regional and municipal committees are responsible for reducing the likelihood, the effect, and the consequence of emergencies in their area.
- Legislation now requires the community to be directly consulted in emergency management.
- Each risk identified is required to have plans on how to manage the risk and SRW is required to have our own plans which mirror these plans.
- The risks impacting SRW and how SRW manages and mitigates each risk.
- During events, SRW reports to municipal or regional committees or organisations as described in the plans. SRW will send a representative to the control centre to be able to communicate information to or from the control centre.
- As part of SRW's flood response plan in the Thomson Macalister area, a community lead Flood Warden's network was formed in the 1980's. The purpose of the network is to enable consultation amongst flood wardens and with Southern Rural Water. This consultation supports each flood warden to make their best endeavours to provide flood warnings to landowners with infrastructure and livestock known to be impacted downstream of Southern Rural Water's operations at Glenmaggie and Cowwarr weirs. Recently SRW has been assisting the members in refreshing the committee. SRW is assisting with running the meetings and has been formalising a Terms of Reference for the group.

A member inquired as to why SRW cannot contact customers directly. The Managing Director advised that as part of the new process, SRW will send out a message alerting farmers that SRW is preparing for a potential event. SRW's website will also be updated in real time, which will track changes to releases for customers and the community to check. The Control Agency for flood events manages communication to the public through the VicEmergency App, but this app does not advise of water releases. The SRW website updates will provide this additional information. The flood warden network provides a benefit of local knowledge to the community.

The members discussed flood events highlighting;

- the Flood Warden network is only as good as the information they receive and would like to see more data stations to provide a better picture of changes in conditions and would like to see government investment in this infrastructure.
- some farmers are affected by flood water that does not meet minor flood level. Management clarified that SRW starts notifications when the organisation is making choices around releasing water from weirs.
- discussed the reliability of information on the BOM website.

Management advised once the mapping of the flood wardens is complete, customers and community will be notified of who their flood warden is

The committee thanked Kellie for the presentation.

7. PRINCIPLE MATTERS – FOR DISCUSSION

7.1 Committee Governance

The Chair advised this agenda item was included after a member made representatives made on behalf of the MCCC that were not correct. He stated individuals can have their own opinions, but there are structures and processes governing who can make committee representations.

Ms Melissa Jeal, Corporation Secretary, provided a presentation on governance arrangements at SRW, highlighting;

- What governance is and what it looks like in the Victorian Water Sector.
- SRW's Customer Committee Governance is governed through the board and SRW management. SRW has two instruments that provide instruction on how the committee is run, the purpose of the committee and the expected behaviours of committee members. These are the Customer Committee Handbook, and the VPS Code of Conduct.
- Public comment is authorised as described in the Customer Committee Handbook.

The committee discussed the representations made on Nuclear Power Generation by Mr Dwyer. It was noted, the Chair of the Committee wrote to the Hon. Darren Chester and the ABC, clarifying the MCCC's position (there is no position) on Nuclear Power Generation. The formal position of the MCCC has been noted as an amendment to the minutes of that Nuclear Power Generation Inquiry.

The Managing Director described the process outlined in the Handbook of a member who has not followed behaviours or requirements of the committee.

The committee requested an In-Camera session to discuss the matter.

SRW left the meeting at 11:28am, and returned at 11:56am. Mr Wilkinson remained in the meeting to assist with committee process on the matter.

The Chair advised:

- The committee recommends that Thomas Dwyer be suspended from the MCCC pending a review of his conduct by a Panel, as outlined in the Customer Consultative Committee Handbook.
- The recommendation is made on the basis that Mr Dwyer misrepresented the MCCC to the parliamentary enquiry into Nuclear Energy
- The suspension from the committee is on the grounds *'that the conduct of an individual has brought, or is likely if continued to bring, to either or both the committee or SRW into disrepute'* as detailed in the Customer Consultative Committee Handbook.

Mr Dwyer left the meeting at 12:00pm.

The Chair clarified that Mr Dwyer had tendered his resignation, but it was not accepted, and his membership would be reviewed in line with the process outlined in the handbook.

The Managing Director thanked the committee for their professionalism when dealing with this matter.

7.2 Season Outlook

Mr Matthew Cook, Manager Water Supply East provided a presentation and update on the season to date, highlighting:

- Approximately 56% of water shares have been used this year.
- The allocation model review considers the flow of water into the storage over a 28 day period. As part of upcoming allocation reviews coming into the end of season, channel capacity will also be considered, in regard to whether the amount of water left can be delivered.
- A permanent water auction is scheduled for 4 April 2025. The committee discussed previous allocation of water savings during earlier modernisation projects where a decision was made where customers were allocated a portion of the savings rather than the savings being auctioned. The Managing Director confirmed this is not SRW's view now, and water auctions are held. The Managing Director advised SRW still hold some water shares, which are scheduled to be auctioned, but in the meantime, to bring the water into production, SRW has conducted temporary water auctions of these water shares. The Chair inquired whether as part of the research into whether it is feasible to expand the district, reliability of water in the current district footprint is assessed.

A member inquired why the carry-over ability of environmental water is not afforded to customers. Management clarified that the Victorian Environmental Water Holder have a separate Bulk Entitlement (BE) issued by the Minister and SRW is required to follow the rules set out in the BE.

7.3 Discussion | High Demand Review

The committee Chair led a roundtable discussion on how customers have found the system performance since December 2024. The committee advised;

- have not experienced the same issues (Tim Missen)
- some timing issues at Nambrok given demand was higher and more frequent as they did not dry off. (Brad White)
- have not had issues with SRW delivery. They have been pumping from the river and moving water around the farm to meet requirements. (Warrick Purdon).

The committee discussed on-farm storages and inquired as to whether SRW knows what capacity of on-farm storage across the district. Management advised SRW do not have this information. The committee commented that as part of the Macalister Fresh project, it considers to benefits of on-farm storage particularly in strategic locations to assist with capacity. (Chris Van Den Dikkenberg)

Management discussed water deliveries this year have been the same in the peak periods of last year, but this season has been different, whereby customers are ordering less per order due to the water they have available and have been drying off sections of their farms. While a lot of work has been done to reduce choke points, through weed spraying and desilting channels over the last winter, the biggest impact to improved delivery times has been the way water is being ordered.

8. PRINCIPAL MATTERS – FOR NOTING

8.1 Communication Report

The report was taken as read.

9. COMMITTEE MATTERS

9.1 Important issues from other customer committees

The Managing Director provided an update on items discussed during the recent Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum (SGRF). The SGRF members discussed and provided feedback on improvement of application times, GM2030 project and communication to customers on rosters and restrictions

9.2 Matter referred by/to the Board/Board Committee.

The Managing Director provided an update on items discussed during the recent board meeting, including

- Mid-year Managing Director performance review,
- Digital future of SRW, including required upgrades to aging technology systems. SRW will implement upgrades through an ERP implementation in small batches, commencing with the finance system. The board will also have a new Digital Transformation subcommittee to ensure good governance over the technology uplift.
- A new Minister for Water has been appointed – Minister Gayle Tierney. SRW will provide a briefing on the organisations current and future strategic direction and work to continue to grow a positive relationship with the Ministers Office.

SRW will shortly go to tender for the Tunnel 5 project which will fix the leaks on the tunnel. The project will be run over the winter period to fix the tunnel.

9.3 2025 meeting schedule

The committee **accepted** the 2025 meeting schedule with no amendments.

10. GENERAL BUSINESS

The following items were raised by members:

- Reports around the district that there are blackberries growing on easements that need spraying. Management advised they have also heard this, and a

contractor has been engaged to complete a one-off spraying project to catch-up on weed spraying around the district.

- The Wellington Shire has recently completed a course educating staff on Love Grass and the next time one is run, Mr Mark Coleman will reach out to SRW to see if anyone would like to attend.
- Reports of a lot of rabbits at the Cowwarr Depot building and foxes along the channel banks.

11. Meeting evaluation

With the meeting running over time, this agenda item was not discussed.

12. Next meeting

It was **agreed** the meeting secretary will request agenda items from the committee at least two weeks prior to each meeting.

It was **agreed** the meeting secretary will distribute an electronic version of the Macalister Irrigation Area history document, published in August 2022 to the committee.

The next meeting of the Macalister Customer Consultative Committee is scheduled for Tuesday 27 May 2025 at SRW's Maffra Office.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
The meeting secretary will request agenda items from the committee at least two weeks prior to each meeting.	H. TAYLOR	06/05/2025
The meeting secretary will distribute an electronic version of the Macalister Irrigation Area history document, published in August 2022 to the committee.	H. TAYLOR	10/03/2025

13. Close

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 12:42pm.