Macalister Customer Consultative Committee

Minutes of Meeting 209

Date	Time	Location
Tuesday 25 November 2025	10:00am	SRW Maffra Office

Present	
Mr Benn Thexton	Committee Chair
Mr Christopher Van Den Dikkenberg	Committee Member
Mr James Clyne	Committee Member
Mr Bernard Coleman	Committee Member
Mr Tim Missen	Committee Member
In Attendance	
Mr Cameron FitzGerald	Managing Director, SRW
Ms Rachel Lunn	General Manager Service Delivery, SRW
Mr Matt Cook	Manger Strategic Projects and Service Optimisation
Ms Renee Wicks	Manager Water Supply East, SRW
Mrs Lauren Gourlay	Executive Assistant, SRW (minutes - online)
Guests	
Ms Penny Winbanks	Manager Statutory Functions, SRW
Mr Peter Hahnemann	Project Manager, MacFresh
Apologies	
Ms Kate Lamb	Committee Member
Mr Brad White	Committee Member
Mr Warrick Purdon	Committee Member
Mr Mark Coleman	Committee Member
Mr Thomas Dwyer	Committee Member (apology not received)

1. Acknowledgement of County

Mr Benn Thexton, MCCC 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.

Ms Rachel Lunn, SRW's new General Manager Service Delivery was introduced to the committee members and Rachel provided an overview of her experience.

Mrs Lauren Gourlay, Executive Assistant, was introduced to the committee members and the change in personnel within SRW was explained. Lauren thanked the group for their welcome.

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 208

The minutes of meeting 208 were **approved.**

Moved: Mr James Clyne **Second:** Mr Bernard Coleman

5. Business Arising

The report was taken as read and status comments noted.

Outstanding actions were addressed:

- Ms Renee Wicks' contact details were circulated
- Ms Penny Winbanks will be attending this meeting to discuss groundwater transfer processes

The committee noted the next steps for the outstanding actions have been addressed and accept them as closed.

6. New and Continuing Committee Members and SRW Appointments

Rachel noted for the minutes her appointment to the General Manager Service Delivery role, offering her thanks to Simon Wilkinson and Hayley Taylor for their time with the committee.

Lauren provided an update on the committee recruitment campaign and confirmed two applications received and the process will be followed with The Chair.

Mr Matt Cook noted he had spoken to all current members of the Committee and confirmed their intent to continue on in their roles. The only member not yet reached was

Mr Mark Coleman, who is on leave. Matt noted he will contact Mark when he returns from leave.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Follow up on membership process with Chair – in line with processes set out in the committee handbook	L. GOURLAY M. COOK	28/02/2026

7. Updates and Information Sharing

7.1 Groundwater Transfer Process Improvement

Ms Penny Winbanks, Manager Statutory Functions, provided a paper for reading prior to the meeting, which the Committee confirmed was done.

Providing an overview of the groundwater transfer process improvement update, Penny noted:

- The presentation and information offered today is in response to some of the queries noted in the previous MCCC meeting.
- There are two licences required in Vic to allow an individual or business to legally hold a water entitlement and use for defined purposes – a 'take and use' licence under s51 and the licence issued under s67.
- Rachel advised that, generally, the policies and obligations are set, however the State Government has indicated they will be looking to review current policies and update them.
- Reference was made to the Groundwater Prices and Forms page of the SRW website

The Chair noted his concern was the application for temporary transfer that was submitted in December 2024; a response was not received until August 2025 and wanted to know what the delay was. There was concern as to why it has taken so long to address and who the key contact is to reach out to for status updates.

The committee also noted frustrations of having to follow up on applications previously submitted and the difficulty trying to speak to someone within SRW to find out what is happening or receive an update is the continued source of frustration for many customers.

Rachel noted that when applications get complicated, there is a sense of 'who does this go to' and there is a need to address internal processes and improve our service. Rachel requested that the committee members direct their queries to her in order to understand the issue and address the pain points of SRW processes.

Rachel then requested a specificity of examples as to where the pain points are and that she is open to conversations with customers to address the issues. Mr Cameron

FitzGerald confirmed there are clear and current cases to use as reference points (those raised by James and Benn in the meeting today).

The committee noted the key issue is always the communication from SRW and having to chase the organisation to provide an update on any issue that has been brought forward.

Rachel noted that part of Matt's new role as Manager Strategic Projects and Service Optimisation is to address these issues and identify areas for significant improvement.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Discuss option for a temporary working group with key customers that have raised issues. Develop improvement plans to bring to next scheduled committee meeting	R. LUNN C. FITZGERALD P. WINBANKS M. COOK	28/02/2026

7.2 Water Supply East Customer and Community Update

Ms Renee Wicks, Manager Water Supply East, provided an update on the season to date, highlighting:

- Mag H program was rolled out on 17 November and will conclude on Friday 28 November.
- Currently in a spill – minimal irrigation orders at the moment as private dams are mostly full.
- Weed spraying has been put on hold due to the weather conditions.
- Boisdale leaks have been repaired and whilst the conditions are relatively quiet, servicing and maintenance continues to be rolled out in preparation for the peak season kick off.
- Mr Peter Miller has returned from long service leave, in addition to two trainees who are with SRW for the next two years. There has also been a number of new staff who have been recruited to the team and are continually learning on the job and picking up the requirements of the roles.

Cameron acknowledged the turnover of staff and the experience that has left the organisation has offered up a challenge to continuing the high level of service - but has the utmost confidence that the new hires are picking things up very quickly and is aligning to the preferred culture of the organisation.

The committee noted the spill and requested a current figure. Renee confirmed the total volume able to be spilt is 62,000 and we have currently spilt ~50,000. It was noted by the committee that the deadline of 15 December is fast approaching.

The committee also noted the environmental flow was released and then the spill was called – whilst the community may have had questions as to why this was done, the committee noted this was a great call for SRW and applauded the decision-making process and result.

7.3 MacAvon Update

Mr Peter Hahnemann, Project Manager MacFresh, joined the meeting to provide an update on the status of the Avon Valley Water Security Project.

Before this, Cameron reconfirmed that previous discussions on whether the MacAvon upgrade was the right pathway and that the committee had agreed that expanding the district was not the right move until the current system is working at optimal capability. The presentation to be discussed is predicated on the Macalister Fresh and where this progress currently sits.

Providing a brief update on the Macalister Fresh consultation paper, Peter noted the delay in engagement with customers is due to DEECA and Board feedback on the strategy as it had been developed. The content is currently in redevelopment to communicate the best message for the district and the intent of the organisation.

As a result of this feedback, the project delivery has been extended to 2026. The near-term goals in terms of better communication and the development of Matt Cook's role have both been built into the project plan and longer-term strategy.

Peter then moved to discuss the update on the Avon Valley Water Security Project. The detailed business case is due to be completed in December 2026, with the Communications and Engagement plan underway. There will be an engagement window where the project team will reconnect with Avon Valley landholders with updates.

There was discussion regarding on-farm and balancing storages and Peter noted the technical studies scheduled for 2026 will address the questions of environmental flows into the Avon.

Peter then noted the recent water auction on the Latrobe river and the interest flagged as part of the EOI process. 4,370ML was auctioned on 28 October 2025 across 25 lots. SRW is now working with customers and referral agencies to issue licenses.

Cameron supplemented the discussion with an update on the process and reasoning for the auction process and that the approach taken will ensure all licence holders are on equal footing and operate on the same rules.

7.4 Upcoming Customer Service Continuous Improvement Actions

Matt discussed the improvement actions that are currently underway. As discussed earlier in the meeting, communication to customers during times of full storage and 100% HRWS and additional LWRS.

Matt noted and The Chair concurred that the key is to avoid the same issues that happened in 2022/23 and 2023/24 and that learnings from both instances have SRW in a better position this time around and what to expect in times of peak demand is known and prepared for.

8. PRINCIPAL MATTERS - FOR DISCUSSION

8.1 Future Strategy and Policy

Rachel noted the discussions that were held at the recent Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum (SGRF) and that the consensus of the committee was that the forum be used to provide input on the organisation's strategy and also how to address policy reform and offer feedback to DEECA and other governing bodies.

Rachel then noted there was an opportunity to offer this committee the same opportunity, to which the committee members were very happy to accept and discuss further.

8.2 2026 Committee Workplan

Noting the previous discussions on opportunities for reshaping the future discussions, the committee noted there may be a change in the workplan that will be addressed in future meetings.

Further to this, Cameron and Rachel suggested placeholders be added to calendars for December and January 2026 if needed to address development of communications to irrigators in the case of a full storage and a dry summer resulting in delayed deliveries to irrigators.

9. PRINCIPLE MATTERS - FOR NOTING

9.1 Water Supply East Update

The report was taken as read. The committee advised the report is beneficial and highlighted the importance of having information available when customers need or want it.

10. COMMITTEE MATTERS

10.1 Roundtable discussion

The committee members noted there have been some significant discussion had throughout the meeting and that it's been a very busy year, but overall, the progress has been pleasing.

10.2 Important issues from other customer committees

Rachel provided a recap of the SGRF discussion and the preference for the group to be move involved in discussions that are fed back through to DEECA to support development of policy and matters that impact customers.

Rachel also noted the committee were keen to hold a forum in the middle of the year that all members could attend, whether online or in person, where everyone can be in the room to share ideas. This was something to consider for future meeting discussions.

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

Cameron noted the Board was in a period of renewal with the addition of three new members. The onboarding is holding up the Macalister Fresh work however it is critical a fully united Board is present to move the project forward without hold up.

Cameron also discussed the work already underway to prepare for the upcoming pricing submission and that the engagement plan is in full swing. Invites for key meetings will be sent to the committee in the coming six months to discuss the right pricing points and key areas of development. The Price Sub project team will be reaching out in due course.

11. GENERAL BUSINESS

There was no other business raised by the members.

12. Meeting evaluation

The Chair invited members to ask any further questions to ensure they were equipped to discuss matters with customers. No clarifications were required.

13. Next meeting

The next meeting of the Macalister Customer Consultative Committee is scheduled for Tuesday 26 February 2026 at SRW's Maffra Office.

14. Close

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 12:08pm.