



Customer Consultative Committee Handbook

December 2023

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About SRW

Southern Rural Water (SRW) is a water corporation created under the Water Act 1989 (Vic). SRW is governed by a skills-based board of directors appointed by the Minister for Water, apart from the Managing Director, who is appointed by the non-executive directors.

SRW has approximately 170 staff based in offices across the state. SRW's main offices are in Maffra, Mitcham, Werribee and Warrnambool. SRW also has field offices in Colac, Merrimu and the Latrobe Valley.

Further information is available at www.srw.com.au.



SRW has two customer consultative committees.

- Macalister Customer Consultative Committee (MCCC)
- Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum (SGRF)

This handbook has been prepared to assist committee members in their work.



SRW Engagement approach

SRW formally engages with its customers and stakeholders in the following ways:

Strategic

- **Strategic Futures Group (Advisory Group)**
A broad group covering customers, community and stakeholder interests on agribusiness, water access, licensing, compliance and environmental opportunities.
- **Reference Groups**
Customer reference groups provide an important feedback mechanism for customers, in particular, when major change proposals could impact customers.
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and partnerships**
SRW has MoU's in place with Great South Coast Food and Fibre, Gippsland Environmental Agencies (GEA) and the Werribee Growers Co-operative (through the Werribee Reconfiguration Reference Group).

Operational

- **Customer Consultative Committees**
Two customer committees have been formed - the Macalister Customer Consultative Committee and the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum. These are advisory committees and seek to ensure customers have a clear voice on how SRW delivers its services.
- **Wyndham City Council/Green Wedge Forum**
Southern Rural Water attends all, and presents regularly at, the Wyndham City Council Green Wedge Forum. This provides us with an opportunity to enhance our partnership with the Council while achieving improved irrigator engagement.
- **Bacchus Marsh: Drop-in sessions**
Southern Rural Water hosts drop-in sessions in Bacchus Marsh twice a year. These sessions are hosted by our Service Delivery team and project managers and provide an opportunity for customers to talk to SRW staff.
- **Field Days**
 - Great South Coast Food & Fibre host an annual water forum. SRW attend this forum which provides a valuable opportunity to support our customers.
 - Farmworld Lardner Park Field Day sees large numbers of customers from the east in attendance. SRW has a presence at this field day, proactively engaging with customers on water issues and opportunities.

The following diagram maps SRW's proposed activities across our service area.



Purpose of Customer Consultative Committees

SRW appoints customer consultative committees on the basis that they have an advisory role and are representative of customer views. Committee membership provides an opportunity to have input into SRW's decision-making process with a focus on ensuring SRW remains focussed on delivering the value customers expect.

The purpose of SRW's customer consultative committees is to:

- provide advice to SRW in implementing programs and services,
- participate in the SRW decision-making process, including during the preparation of Price Submissions and annual corporate plans, by providing feedback to the board on matters relevant to the business and associated with that customer committee,
- assist SRW in better understanding the issues facing customers and their current and future expectations, and
- assist SRW in improving relationships with customers.

Business planning at SRW

SRW's approach to business planning

The Price Submission (every five years) sets out SRW's overall strategic and financial framework and is approved by the Essential Service Commission (ESC).

SRW's Corporate Plan is based on the financial year. It specifies budgets, prices and performance measures for the coming year and is submitted to both the Minister and Treasurer on 30 April each year.

Customer committees are consulted on initiatives and actions that are being considered for inclusion of these plans.

Committees will track progress and provide advice on initiatives and works arising from SRW's Price Submission and Corporate Plan. This includes:

- receiving operational performance reports, including salinity management;
- reviewing potential new initiatives; and
- reports on scheduled significant capital works.

SRW will set an annual work plan for each committee to ensure both SRW and the committees meet their responsibilities.

Membership

All customer consultative committee members must be a customer or nominated representative of the Macalister Irrigation District and river diverters on the Thomson and Macalister Rivers and Rainbow Creek. (MCCC) or be a customer or nominated representative with a groundwater or surface water licence (SGRF). A customer is defined as being involved in the ordering, accepting and/or using of water from the Macalister Irrigation District delivery system, or receiving an account from SRW for water delivered in the relevant Irrigation District.

Members of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum (SGRF) are limited to SRW Take and Use Licence holders.

Membership is for a term of between two and four years and members may be appointed for a further term of up to four years, with appointments of half of the members ceasing every two years. If a member ceases to be a customer within their term, they are allowed to see out the term of appointment at the discretion of the committee Chair and management representatives.

SRW attendance at committee meetings will consist of the Managing Director, the relevant operations manager, and the General Manager Service Delivery. A standing invitation for customer committee meetings is open to all board members. The board may, from time to time, meet committees as a whole to gauge first-hand views of matters considered by the committee.

Members of each committee represent the wider customer base and are expected to provide their advice and feedback in the interests of all customers.

Macalister Customer Consultative Committee (MCCC)

The MCCC consists of up to 12 members. The committee helps to shape and improve SRW's Eastern Irrigation Business, providing input into system and service improvements. Among other things, the MCCC members provide a customer's perspective on business issues and help shape positive external stakeholder views on the Macalister Irrigation Area.

Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum (SGRF)

The SGRF consists of up to 14 members.

The work of the SGRF and the Groundwater and Rivers team involves a strong relationship with the Minister for Water and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). Ministerial Guidelines or Directions are issued from time to time, guiding judgements that relate to SRW's licensing functions. These guidelines and policies, such as formal Sustainable Water Strategies, are developed by DEECA.

SRW provides the opportunity for SGRF members to provide advice and feedback on policy developments through interaction with senior SRW and DEECA staff. SGRF members may seek to advocate a position during the policy development phase; however, once a policy is finalised SRW, as a delegate of the Minister, must adhere to lawful directions and formally endorsed policy.

Committee appointment procedure

Appointments to SRW's customer consultative committees are made commencing on 1 July and concluding on 30 June.

- Every two years a report will be submitted to the board advising on impending vacancies and a plan for filling the vacancies.
- Vacancies are then be advertised.
- An assessment of applications will take place and interviews will be held, if required.
- A report will be submitted to the board, seeking endorsement of the appointments.

A panel consisting of the committee chair, a customer committee member, the SRW Managing Director and relevant SRW manager will review the applications. If the committee chair is an applicant, another member nominated by the committee will assess the applications.

The panel assesses each applicant in terms of the key selection criteria, the diversity statement, and eligibility criteria. Applicants may be interviewed at the panel's discretion.

The committee chairs and deputy chairs are appointed by the committee each year on or after 1 August.

Casual appointments may occur outside of the normal membership timeframes mentioned above. This could be due to the resignation or removal of a member, or because a specific expertise is required on a short-term basis. Management may appoint a new casual member until the next round of formal recruiting occurs, on the basis that the appointment will expire when the next formal recruitment process commences.

For casual appointments, management will consult the relevant committee chair before making an appointment and the board must be notified at the next board meeting following the appointment.

Recruitment

For proper engagement with customers, SRW must engage broadly and be mindful of diversity. When making appointments to a committee, SRW's objective is to form committees whose members reflect diversity in their:

- gender
- age
- industry experience, interest and demographic
- crop type or industry
- production system
- scale of operation
- land tenure
- balance of skills, knowledge or community involvement,
- geographic location, and
- networks.

Applicants must be able to dissect issues and make informed decisions on future directions and expectations, as well as being lateral thinkers who are able to bring new ideas. Applicants should have strong networks among customers and stakeholders and have a good understanding of environmental, social, and economic issues facing the business associated with the committee.

Induction

SRW will provide each person appointed to membership of a committee with the following:

- The Customer Consultative Committee Handbook
- A copy of the Department of Treasury and Finance's Appointment guidelines detailing the relevant sessional fees
- The most recent SRW Annual Report
- The current Corporate Plan and Price Submission
- VPS Code of Conduct
- Any additional documents that may be required.

Conduct

SRW expects committee members to be respectful and inclusive at all times. The views and opinions of each individual will be equally and fairly considered by all parties.

The committees are guided by behaviours identified in the Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector Employees. It is expected that all committee members undertake to demonstrate these behaviours in all interactions with each other, SRW staff, and other parties who may attend or support meetings, with a specific focus on:

- responsiveness – frank, impartial and timely,
- integrity – honest, open, and transparent,
- impartiality – providing advice on merit without bias or self-interest,
- accountability – working on clear objectives in a transparent manner, and
- respect – treating one another fairly and objectively ensuring freedom from discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

SRW reserves the right to review membership should the behaviours demonstrated by an individual directly contravene the expectations above.

Expectations

The members will commit to:

- undertaking preparatory work prior to meetings, including reading documentation
- attending scheduled meetings and contributing to discussions in a constructive and inclusive manner
- providing necessary data or information in a timely manner
- providing timely and constructive feedback, and
- notifying the relevant operations manager and/ or the committee secretary as soon as practical if any matter arises which may impact their ability to participate on a committee.

The members should expect:

- consistent communication with SRW,
- a forward plan of meetings to be scheduled annually prior to the beginning of the year in question,
- documentation relevant to meetings to be circulated in advance to ensure adequate preparatory time, and
- that reasonable time will be given to provide feedback.

Confidentiality

In general, members are encouraged to discuss the broad issues and ideas raised within their sphere of influence. However, members shall not improperly use information to gain advantage for themselves or someone else, or to cause detriment to outcomes.

SRW will make available information that is relevant to assist in the committee's work, other than information which might infringe on privacy.

SRW acknowledge that there may be times where sensitive matters are discussed and confidentiality will be required. In this case, members will be directly informed that the materials presented, or matters discussed, are to be treated as confidential.

Committee members are required to provide SRW with personal information to allow effective communication and appropriate remuneration of sitting fees. Members' names, contact details and photos may be used by SRW in relevant publications, such as, but not limited to, newsletters and SRW's website.

SRW will, from time to time, conduct briefings for customer consultative committees which may necessitate the provision of confidential information.

Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest exists whether it is:

- Real – it currently exists,
- Potential – it may arise, given the circumstances, or
- Perceived – members of the public could reasonably form the view that a conflict exists or could arise.

It is not a conflict of interest for a committee member to receive a service from SRW in common with other customers of SRW, provided that the committee member does not stand to gain an advantage that would not be readily available to a non-committee member.

All matters that raise or appear to raise a conflict of interest should be disclosed to the committee chairperson immediately and recorded in the minutes. This record must include the nature of any private interest and the subsequent actions taken by the member and committee.

Where a conflict of interest is identified, the relevant committee member will:

- leave the room at the start of the relevant agenda item and not return until the start of the next agenda item,
- not discuss the matter at all with any other committee member (either within the meeting or elsewhere), and
- not participate in any committee decision on the matter.

Removal from the Committee

A member or members of a committee may be suspended or dismissed by the by SRW if SRW has determined:

- that the member/s have breached the Code of Conduct,
- that the member/s no longer meet the eligibility criteria for membership of the committee,

- that the member/s by their conduct have become disruptive or uncooperative, or are unable to work within the strict requirements of or the general spirit and intention of the Code of Conduct, and/or,
- 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.
- or committee member/s suspension or dismissal is proposed, the following steps will be taken:

Where SRW proposes that a member or members of a committee are to be suspended or dismissed a panel, comprising of the Managing Director, the operations manager and the chairperson or deputy chairperson of the customer consultative committee will, within 21 days of receiving written representations, assess the case and advise of the outcome to the member/s concerned. The panel's decision will be final.

A committee may be suspended or terminated by SRW if SRW has determined:

- that a committee by its conduct has become disruptive or dysfunctional and unable to work within the strict requirements of or the general spirit and intention of the Code of Conduct,
- that the conduct of the committee has brought, or is likely if continued to bring, either or both of the committee or SRW into disrepute, and/or,
- that the intended work of the committee is completed.

Where SRW proposes that a committee be abolished the following steps will be taken:

- The members of the committee will be formally advised of the situation by SRW.
- The members of the committee will have the opportunity to show cause as to why the members should not be removed from the committee and to present a case to SRW within 21 days of receiving SRW's formal advice.

Remuneration

Payment of sitting fees and travel expenses are made as per the Department of Treasury and Finance's *Appointment and Recruitment Guidelines*. The payments are made:

- from attendance records, as noted in regular meeting minutes,
- in accordance with regulations set by the Victorian Government from time to time,
- as determined from time to time by the Minister,
- for regular meetings of the committees and special meetings requested by SRW,
- within the scale as set out in the *Appointment and Recruitment Guidelines*.

SRW customer consultative committees will be remunerated in line with Schedule C: Group C organisations - Advisory Committees, Registration board and Management boards of small organisations : C3 of the Victorian Government's Appointment and Remuneration Guidelines

Advisory committees required to consider issues/matters that are local or affect confined areas including local land and water advisory committees.

Most meetings are expected to fall into the half-day category, unless significantly in excess of four hours.

Should the committee chairperson be unavailable for a meeting, the acting committee chairperson is to receive remuneration at the rate outlined in the *Appointment and Recruitment Guidelines*.

The guidelines can be viewed here: <https://bit.ly/3QbG3DH>

Reimbursement for expenses

As per the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) guidelines, committee members are eligible to be reimbursed for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses such as travelling, meals and other incidental expenses associated with attending meetings, overnight absence from home, or absence from the normal work location in the course of field duties, in line with DEECA and SRW policies. All expenses should comply with the SRW travel, accommodation, and meals guidelines – any amounts above these will be at the committee member's expense.

Travel reimbursement is provided at the Australian Tax Office (ATO) rate for travel between the place where you are required for committee attendance and your residence or usual place of work (whichever is relevant on the day of travel), exceeding 15 kilometres one way.

You can view the rates here: <https://bit.ly/3cvpTXN>

All expense claims must be made on the claim form, accompanied by a tax invoice providing sufficient information to validate the claim, and lodged with the committee secretary within 28 days of the expense being incurred.

The committee secretary must verify the expenses and confirm they were incurred during the committee's work.

SRW provides for the day-to-day operations of customer consultative committees including sitting fees, room hire, catering and the like.

Committee Relationships

The committee chairperson is the principal spokesperson for the committee. It is the chairperson's responsibility to speak, write or represent the committee where required.

Customer committee members should encourage customers to take up any suggestions, queries, complaints, grievances or compliments about SRW with the relevant operations manager. If this raises a wider question of business practice or policy, the member is encouraged to raise the matter with the customer consultative committee for consideration.

Customer complaints

Committees are not a customer complaints service or customer liaison service. Any complaints should be forwarded to SRW without delay. Committee members will not advocate for complainants.

Meetings

Attendees must confirm attendance by responding to the calendar invitation or other method at least two weeks before a meeting.

If there is less than 40% attendance at a scheduled meeting, then SRW reserve the right to reschedule the meeting to a more suitable time.

SRW's customer consultative committees are not required to cast votes or make decisions, but to provide clarity and observations in order to assist SRW with their recommendations to the board.

Regular meetings

The committee will meet with SRW at least four times per year and meetings will be held in person or via video conference (Microsoft Teams). The location and time of the committee meetings is a decision for SRW upon the advice of members.

Additional meetings will be scheduled as required and agreed by the Managing Director, the operations manager the committee chairperson. Information forums with individual committees will be convened upon request and with approval of the Managing Director.

Agendas

The agenda for committee meetings will be aligned to the annual workplan and be set by the operations manager and the committee secretary and provided along with relevant information papers five (5) business days prior to scheduled regular meetings.

Committee members must raise a matter for inclusion in the agenda with the committee chairperson or committee secretary before the agenda is set for the meeting.

The annual workplan will be circulated for discussion with the committee at the last meeting of each calendar year.

Out of session or additional business

Business which can't be conducted during a scheduled meeting may be done by circulating papers digitally to all members. The agreement will be recorded in the minutes of the next meeting.

Additional meetings, i.e. workshops or consultation sessions, will be scheduled by agreement of the committee chairperson and SRW and will be paid in line with the DTF guidelines.

General business

Committee members can raise matters not on the meeting agenda and are encouraged to raise these items with SRW prior to the meeting, for inclusion in the agenda where appropriate.

Additional items can be added to the agenda for discussion only:

- at the commencement of the meeting (before any matters of business have been dealt with),
- with unanimous agreement by all at the meeting.

If there is a question that is unlikely to be of general interest it is preferable to explore this with the committee secretary outside of the meeting.

If questions are raised, management may elect to provide a response at the next meeting, or to circulate it in due course after having made appropriate investigation and enquiry.

Minutes of meetings

Draft minutes of meetings are circulated after each meeting and must be treated as confidential by members until they are confirmed.

Confirmed minutes are added to SRW's website and will be publicly available for a rolling 12-month period. Copies of the minutes are also available upon request to SRW.

Administrative duties

The committee secretary will be the formal link between the committee and SRW Management.

The committee secretary will provide administrative support for all regular meetings.

Customer Consultative Committee Handbook Review

The Customer Consultative Committee Handbook will be reviewed by SRW Senior Management at least every 4 years and is approved by the Managing Director. Customer Consultative Committee Members will be reissued with a copy of the handbook after each review and asked to complete the declaration after each review.

Version #	Implemented By	Revision Date	Approved By	Approval Date	Reason
8.0	Simon Wilkinson – General Manager Service Delivery	November 2023	Cameron FitzGerald - Managing Director	8 December 2023	Review to align handbook to SRW Customer Engagement approach and corporate style

Customer consultative committee member declaration

I have read and understood the Southern Rural Water Customer Consultative Committee Handbook and agree to comply with the conditions as described.

NAME _____

SIGNED _____

DATE / / _____

COMMITTEE _____