

# Macalister Customer Consultative Committee

## Minutes of Meeting 202

Date	Time	Location
27 February 2024	10:00am	SRW Maffra Office

### Present

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

### Apologies

Thomas Dwyer	Committee Member
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### Guests

Mr Matthew Stagg	Projects and Innovation Specialist
Mr Edward Smith	Manager Headworks Operations
Ms Gemma Abela	Manager Strategy, Communications and Business Planning

## 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 200 and 201

The minutes of meeting's 200 and 201 were **approved**.

**Moved:** Brad White

**Second:** Kate Lamb

## 5. Business Arising

The report was taken as read.

The Chair advised the committee that in February 2023 the MCCC met and spoke about the delivery delays in the Macalister Irrigation District. As a result of the meeting a factsheet was developed and distributed to customers in the area. This factsheet has been updated and redistributed to customers in February 2024 due to another period of high demand.

Management advised that SRW have undertaken a review of the delivery system and the draft report will be discussed at agenda item 6.1.

SRW have also changed the length of ordering period from four weeks to two, to assist with planning water and reducing the practice of placing “speculative orders” in IPM.

In regard to action item 25246, management advised people in the district who have access to land or delivery share will be able to participate in water sales, with the purpose of the water sales being to put more water into production.

The committee discussed the requirements around whether land size was taken into account when people apply to purchase water. It was confirmed Annual Use Licence was considered as part of the assessment completed by SRW when water is purchased.

## 6. GUEST SPEAKERS

### 6.1 High demand period and MID Operational Model Review

Mr Matthew Stagg, Projects and Innovation Specialist, and Mr Matthew Cook, Manager Water Supply East provided an overview of the MID Operational Model Review including:

#### Background:

- Order delays due to a period of high demand which lead to order delays of up to 14 days in some areas.
- Channel operations including high demands on the system, weed growth and siltation of channels leading to poor performance.
- Demand Management System (DMS) and Total Channel Control (TCC) systems, while offering greater flexibility to customers to manage their orders, have created 'demand locking' in some area's.

#### Factors contributing to delays:

- Seasonal conditions.
- Irrigators utilising the DMS to speculatively placing orders to lock up water.
- TCC systems minimises outfalls and maintains pool height's which means that the system does not allow orders over a certain volume to be booked to maintain effective operations. Erosion, weed growth and changes to orders impact the effectiveness of the TCC system. At times, the Planners will take the system out of automation, and manually run the system to try to increase water delivered to customers.
- Weed issues, particularly submerged weeds, can choke the system. SRW undertakes maintenance activities during the winter to control weed growth but has limited options available to removed weeds during the season.

The Chair suggested SRW could consider reducing through outlets, so more people are able to access water in high demand period. Management advised this was something that could be considered as part of the review of the operational system.

#### Other considerations contributing to delivery delays:

- Reduced capacity the further down the system an irrigator is located.
- Installation of high-flow outlets enable on-farm best practice but reduce available capacity in the system.

#### Management discussed:

- the way the Main Southern, Main Northern, Main Eastern/Sale Supply Area is operated, including choke points on the systems, capacity on the channel at different points.
- notice given for orders by customers, the volume of water delivered from January and February 2024, with demand spiking in the second week of February 2024.

A member inquired as to whether historically customers were required to give more than three days' notice. SRW advised that the customer charter states customers must give 72 hours' notice when placing an order. The committee was advised SRW monitors data that compares the day of the order requested versus the day the order was able to be delivered.

Addressing the challenges:

Management advised SRW is working to address the challenges by:

- Expanding mechanical cleaning of channels.
- New weed treatment chemical trial.
- Working with Rubicon to consider options to modernise customers' WaterLine experience.
- Creating a high-demand protocol for SRW's Planners which will inform how SRW treats requests to change orders during periods of high demand.
- Reducing order lead time back to 14 days to improve equity and avoid speculative orders.

The committee discussed how the planners are operating the system including manually moving orders in the systems to try to get more orders into the systems.

A member advised that they had received a message from an irrigator indicating they felt they were dealing with these issues on their own as they do not see SRW's water bailiffs. The member recommended the factsheet could be sent earlier to provide customers more information including what customers could expect in periods of high demand. Management noted the emails, texts that were sent leading into the period of high-demand and will continue to work to improve communications to customers.

HARC Options Report:

Management advised this piece of work is a significant undertaking as it looks at the whole MID Operational model. The review included engagement with MCCC members and SRW staff.

Key challenges identified in the report are:

- Resourcing constraints.
- Modernisation challenges.
- Customer perceptions and communications from SRW to irrigators.

Outcomes were graded by a multi-criteria assessment which considered;

- Level of service.
- Climate resilience.
- Equity.
- Efficiency.
- Cost.
- Workload; and
- Lead- time.

The higher the score of the option, the more it would have a positive impact to the operation of the system and to customers.

Mark Coleman left the meeting at 10:59am

Short term options:

- Alternate operational modes including partial DMS – requires planner interaction if customers want to change an order, and this could be considered in periods of high demand.
- Key upgrades for capacity – TCC is expected to operate more efficiently as regulators are replaced as part of the Regulator Replacement Program.
- Comms Loading – updating radio infrastructure and assessing where rebalancing of the network is required so that the network works as effectively as possible.
- Rubicon Changes – Operational Rules and improved tools that show irrigator declined orders to allow Planners to slot customer orders in, where orders have been cancelled.

Longer term options:

- Customers changing the way they use the system including on farm storages, demand rules.
- Hardware upgrades including changes to DMS systems and WaterLine.
- Increase capacity of key crossings/regulators.
- Complete outlet modernisation.
- Using delivery share as the basis for water sharing when orders received are above channel capacity.

The Committee discussed:

- changes in farming practice where customers in some areas are ordering during the day and not at night.
- benefits of being able to plan their own orders, and while this is great for the customer experience in normal periods, in periods of high demand it creates challenges in the system as the DMS system does not consider whether a partial order could be placed. Previously Planners were able to work with the customer at the time of the request, to alter the order to fit around orders already in the system.
- Reasons for why some systems are not on DMS. Management advised some areas have not yet been modernised and some channels have restrictions that are not well suited to DMS.
- the change in the way customers order water, and the impacts of more customers ordering water 14 days in advance therefore 'locking up' water in the system.

Management discussed how delivery share could be used to share water in periods of high demand.

The Committee stated that at the moment, delivery share has no value to customers and they would need to see how it could be implemented including speaking to organisations that use delivery share, before considering the proposal.

The Chair stated it seems like the 'first-in-best-dressed' model is not equitable, but farmers will continue to do what is best for their business. Management advised SRW has implemented an operational rule where Planners are able to decline a change to an order, and if the customer does want to change the order they are put to the end of the queue.

The Managing Director advised SRW will continue to work to improve the customer experience in these high-demand periods, SRW believes the use of delivery share could create a more equitable system for customers. Management acknowledges this would be a very hard change for customers and SRW will do more work on the delivery share option and seek feedback from the MCCC as the work progresses. Any changes would require broad customer support.

The Committee encouraged SRW consider ways to bring delayed orders back to three to four days, including flow rate restrictions so more customers can order at a time, and how alternative ordering times could be communicated to customers if they are unable to place an order.

Management advised these changes would be considered as part of implementing the recommendation of the MID Operational Model review.

It was **agreed** the MID Operational Model Review will be a standing agenda item at each MCCC meeting.

A copy of the presentation will be provided to the committee after the meeting.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Add MID Operational Model Review to the MCCC committee workplan for discussion at each meeting.	H. TAYLOR	20/05/2024

## 6.2 Flood Forecast Modelling

Mr Edward Smith, Manger Headworks Operations joined the meeting at 11:38am and discussed SRW's systems for managing floods, forecasting system and data that the models produce and how they are used in emergency responses. He highlighted:

- The policies used by SRW to manage floods.
- The strategies used by SRW to fill Glenmaggie, flood plans and release strategies for storages.

The Manager Headworks Operations discussed the process SRW follows when the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) forecasts rainfall that could cause flooding downstream of a storage. This data is then used to create a plan for SRW to manage a potential emergency response. The flood forecasting system includes a rainfall runoff routing

model, rainfall forecasting and real time rainfall and streamflow data. This real time information, when added to the model, creates inflow data for SRW storages which informs how SRW will respond to an event.

The committee was shown how data is used by SRW to plan for a flood including:

- current conditions are added to the model, and how SRW can modify inputs during an event to ensure real-time information is at hand.
- SRW utilises modelling to calculate initial rainfall losses and continuing losses where some rainfall does not result in streamflow's.
- SRW models all three BoM scenarios (50%, 25% and 10% probability) across the affected catchment. BoM indicates which is the best model to use for each event.
- models predict stream levels and streamflow volumes over time and predicted levels in reservoirs assuming there are no releases.
- modeller will match the data once the peak is reached to ensure that the organisation has the most accurate information possible.
- Prior to a significant rain event, SRW models downstream water levels to assist with planning releases. SRW may increase releases earlier to try to take the top of the peak of the flood with the aim of minimising the impact of flooding downstream.

The committee inquired whether forecasts or models created by SRW could be distributed prior to an event. SRW advised that flood data is fed back into the BoM once an event occurs. The 7-day future model is fairly uncertain, and the forecast does not always eventuate.

Management advised the review into the two flooding events in 2023 considers how SRW runs the models, the actual events that occurred, as well as operational decision making. A focus point of the review has been on communication to customers before and during events.

The committee discussed the November 2023 flood and the decision-making process regarding releases from Glenmaggie, and noted the December releases where the rain did not eventuate is an example of how models can be inaccurate.

Management discussed the November 2023 flood event and the modelling used by SRW before and during the event. It was highlighted the Glenmaggie Gorge streamflow gauge was not working accurately on one night, and the SRW made the decision to increase releases from Glenmaggie at that time. Once the data came through releases were decreased to match what the gauge was reading.

A member inquired why the releases were decreased instead of maintaining them to take more of the peak off the flood. Management advised the model is a prediction and while the releases did go up and down during the event, SRW was able to keep releases below major flood level.

A member inquired about SRW's reasoning as to trying to stay below major flood level. SRW acknowledges the impact to people downstream of Glenmaggie and tries to lessen impacts downstream where possible.



The committee thanked Mr Smith for his presentation.

Mr Smith left the meeting at 12.24pm

## **7. PRINCIPLE MATTERS – FOR NOTING**

### **7.1 Water Supply East Update**

The report was taken as read.

Management advised lunch and learn session times will be distributed with the minutes.

### **7.2 Communications Report**

The report was taken as read.

Ms Gemma Abela, Manager Strategy, Communications and Business Planning joined the meeting at 12.25pm to discuss SRW's communication and engagement plan for customers and highlighted;

- The focus areas of communication and engagement for SRW include:
  - Tailored engagement – communication to people that are directly impacted by projects, events (flood, high demand periods), and new technologies.
  - Community engagement – attendance at face-to-face events to meet people in person. This can be at informal or formal events.
  - Digital engagement – the SRW website is the main source of information for customers and community and the team is undertaking continuous improvement to tailor the user experience to what people are searching. Social media is used to link people back to the website as the single source of information.

The committee thanked Ms Abela for attending the meeting.

Ms Abela left the meeting at 12:38pm.

## **8. PRINCIPLE MATTERS – FOR DISCUSSION**

### **8.1 Board Update**

Mr Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director advised;

- MCCC members have been invited to meet with the SRW board on 5 March 2024 and it is an opportunity for members to meet with the board in an informal setting.
- After each MCCC meetings the Managing Director provides an overview of each meeting to the board.

## **9. COMMITTEE MATTERS**

### **9.1 Important issues from other customer committees**

Mr Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director advised:



- The Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum met on 2 February 2024. Mr Ross Ingram from Lindenow was re-elected as Chair of the committee, and Mr Bruce Vallance from Southwest Victoria was elected as Deputy Chair. A new member, Matt Zagami attended his first meeting. The main point of discussion during the meeting were:
  - the Southwest Limestone Barriers to Trade project, and the challenges of trading water in the area.
  - The new Groundwater and Rivers team structure where the Manager role has been split into two positions, a Manager Statutory Functions and Manager Operations and Compliance.

## 9.2 Matters referred to/by the Board/Board Committee

This item will be discussed at the stakeholder meeting with the board on Tuesday 5 March 2024.

## 9.3 2024 Committee workplan

The workplan was taken as read.

## 10. General Business

Tour of Newry Modernisation Works – the proposed dates were distributed as part of the agenda. The committee was asked to advise Ms Taylor as to which date was most suitable.

DEECA MID Modernisation Project Control Group (PCG) – Management asked for nominations from the MCCC members to attend the DEECA PCG meeting. It was **agreed** the Manager Water Supply East would provide the members with information on the purpose of the PCG.

Final notices – stops on water and debt collection activities – Management advised there are a number of outstanding accounts with significant amounts owing. SRW intends to stop water to customers that have not responded to any reminder and final notices. SRW will call these customers as a last opportunity to pay or enter a payment plan before water is stopped. The Managing Director advised SRW followed this process prior to the pandemic, but during the pandemic, at the direction of government, debt collection activities were paused.

## 11. Meeting evaluation

The Chair noted the meeting had run over time, and suggested consideration is given to extending future meetings.

## 12. Next meeting

The next meeting of the Macalister Customer Consultative Committee is scheduled for 28 May 2024.

## 13. Close

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 12:51pm.