

# Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum

## Minutes of Meeting 51

Date	Time	Location
1 December 2023	9:30am	Hub Southern Cross, Melbourne and via MS Teams

### Present

Mr Ross Ingram	Chair
Mr Bruce Vallance	Forum Member (via MS Teams)
Mr Daniel Hammond	Forum Member
Mr Daniel Toohey	Forum Member
Ms Josie Zilm	Forum Member
Mr Kevin Stark	Forum Member (via MS Teams)
Mr Norm Drew	Forum Member
Mr Steve Marshall	Forum Member (via MS Teams)

### In Attendance

Mr Cameron FitzGerald	Managing Director, SRW
Mr Simon Wilkinson	General Manager Service Delivery, SRW
Ms Hayley Taylor	Executive Assistant, SRW (minutes)
Ms Penny Winbanks	Manager Statutory Functions
Mr Russell Tomlin	Manager Operations and Compliance Groundwater and Rivers

### Apologies

Dr Jane Doolan	Board Director, SRW
Mr Tom Wallace	Forum Member
Mr Matt Gleeson	Forum Member

### Guests

Mr Jesse Rose	DEECA
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## 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 including Dr Jane Doolan who had an existing commitment.

Ms Penny Winbanks, Manager Statutory Functions and Mr Russell Tomlin, Manager Operations and Compliance Groundwater and Rivers were introduced to the committee.

## 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 50

The minutes of meeting 50 held on 20 September 2023 were **approved**.

**Moved:** Daniel Hammond    **Second:** Norm Drew

## 5. Business Arising

The report was taken as read.

Management confirmed that Water is Life had been reprinted, and copies would be sent to members as soon as they were received from DEECA.

## 6. GUEST SPEAKERS

### 6.1 GM2030

Mr Jesse Rose, Co-Executive Director, Water Resource Strategy, DEECA, introduced himself to the committee and provided an overview of his role and discussed the GM2030 project highlighting:

- The project aims to implement the framework that details priorities for groundwater management. The list of priorities inform the workplan for the next 7 years.
- The DEECA project team are currently building an evidence base around groundwater use including whether aquifers are at risk.
- The Sustainable Yields project is a priority focus area under GM2030. The project is investigating both monitoring and metering data from across the state to gain an understanding of sustainable yields in different systems. The DEECA team is building a methodology to add new data as it comes in and the sustainable yields data will also have a 'level of confidence' rating as

there are some areas with a lot of monitoring data, and other areas, typically unincorporated Groundwater areas, will have a low level of data confidence.

- This data will inform future policy options and help identify sustainable yields and rules for take in previously minimally or unused groundwater areas.
- Once the evidence base has been established, DEECA will come back to customers in 2024, to test and seek feedback on policy options.
- At the moment, there will be not changes for Groundwater users but there might be opportunities in the long term to consider how water is taken.
- DEECA will be seeking feedback from customers in 2024.

The Committee inquired as to whether some areas are over allocated. Mr Rose advised that this is a question that needs to be answered, and DEECA are unclear on the policy response if unsustainable take was found (long term decline). He advised there would have to be discussions with community around longer term plans but an aim of GM2030 is to have a long term resource that is sustainable into the future.

The committee inquired as to whether the monitoring considers offshore gas drilling and the impact on water resources as well as the impact to the filling of mine voids. Mr Rose advised that the impact of offshore gas drilling will be considered but the impact of filling mine voids does not fall into the scope of this project.

The Manager Statutory Function noted the Groundwater Atlas' developed by SRW considered impact of offshore drilling. The committee Chair suggested there could be an opportunity to update the atlas once the technical GM2030 work has been completed.

The Chair expressed the importance of communication with community and farmers. It was recommended that DEECA showing real data to customers, and don't just show high level information as farmers will be the first to know if there is a change in aquifer levels.

The committee discussed whether DEECA had considered using customer bores, and monitoring data and individual hydrological assessments as part of their data collection.

The committee thanked Mr Rose for attending the meeting.

Mr Rose left the meeting at 10:14am.

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

### **7.1 Groundwater and Rivers update**

The report was taken as read.

Mr Simon Wilkinson, General Manager Service Delivery highlighting:

- Ms Penny Winbanks, Manager Statutory Functions and Mr Russell Tomlin Manager Operations and Compliance Groundwater and Rivers had

commenced in their respective positions at SRW. Both Managers provided the committee of an overview of their experience.

- SRW has issued show cause notices and Ministerial Directions for dams in Moorabool where investigations indicate there are possible or confirmed non-compliances.
- SRW has undertaken a comprehensive communication campaign regarding customers compliance obligations, including online, social media and mailout material. SRW is now looking at other communication avenues including articles being placed in local newspapers.
- The South-West Limestone Barriers to Trade project has commenced with a workshop and survey to be carried out within the next few months.
- Macalister Trading Platform has been rolled out and SRW will look to expand the platform to other areas if the trial is successful.
- SRW has implemented an auction platform for water sales. The sale for the Mitchell River winter fill will occur on 7 December 2023 and will utilise this new platform.
- The Managing Director explained the current process being undertaken to negotiate the allocation of 16GL from the 3/4 bench between agriculture, environment and Traditional Owners. The SVID study demonstrated there is a business case for expanded irrigation along the Latrobe River. The study indicated there is between nine to 13GL of initial demand, that could produce high value crops. Environmental studies have indicated there is deficient water for the environment and Traditional Owner groups are seeking self-determination.

The committee reiterated the importance of communication with irrigators and users of the water before decisions are made.

The Managing Director stated that SRW will continue to support sustainable expansion of irrigator water use and the SVID study provides an evidence base to support the achievement of long term sustainable irrigated agriculture.

The committee discussed the water entitlements held by power companies, that are being used to fill the mine voids and whether this water would become available in the future.

The committee discussed the importance Traditional Owners retaining ownership of their water allocations and the possible benefits to irrigators if Traditional Owners were to trade their water.

- The committee discussed the benefits of high flow take from rivers which would mean a change of policy. The Managing Director advised that this is one of the priority discussions that SRW is having with DEECA regarding the policy.
- Management discussed different compliance approaches and noted that a warning letter is part of SRW's enforcement actions, and different scenarios will warrant different types of enforcements. SRW will continue to assist customers to remain compliant with regular meter reads, helping connect customers to trade water before they go over their allocation.

- The members discussed the Moorabool Dams project and inquired as to whether previous communication had taken place with licence holders in the area. Management confirmed that a general letter went to all licence holders advising that SRW was undertaking investigations in the area and the Show Cause letters are the first direct communications with the dam owner. Management advised that SRW will be moving to more of a proactive compliance approach utilising mapping tools, drones etc rather than reactive compliance and focus on areas that are stressed.

## 7.2 Board Update

Mr Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director, advised the members of issues the board is currently discussing, including:

- The Strategic Futures Forum was held with customers and stakeholders and provided an opportunity to talk to a wide variety of stakeholders. Two members of the SGRF attended on the day. Topics discussed included:
  - planning decisions and how they impact farmland and incursion of new developments into farmland.
  - Water trading and the balance between getting more water in use for farmers, versus the sleeper licences being considered good for the environment.
- Three new Directors have commenced on the SRW Board.
- The ratification of nominees for members to SRW's customer consultative committee is included on the December board meeting agenda. Members will be updated on the outcome shortly after the board meeting.
- The first drop in session was held for Bacchus Marsh, and positive feedback was received. The next session will be held around March 2024.
- The Werribee Green Wedge committee is being utilised to engage with Werribee customers. This committee is still a work in progress and SRW is working with the council to refresh its Terms of Reference.

The Managing Director provided the committee an update on the current flood situation and detailed how SRW managed the inflows and outflows to prevent a major flood occurring downstream from Lake Glenmaggie. The committee discussed how floods are managed by SRW. The General Manager Service Delivery discussed his experience of working out of Glenmaggie during the October 2023 flood and his appreciation of the impact of flooding to downstream communities.

Management advised that SRW will continue to review processes to ensure that the organisation work to continually improve.

Key messages from the committee will be communicated to the board at the next meeting.

## 8. PRINCIPLE MATTERS – FOR NOTING

### 8.1 Communications Report

The report was taken as read.

A member advised that some customers do not use social media and suggested that some articles could be duplicated on other platforms.

## 9. COMMITTEE MATTERS

### 9.1 Important issues from other customer committees

This item was covered in agenda item 7.2.

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

This matter was covered in agenda item 7.2.

### 9.3 2024 Meeting schedule

The committee **agreed** to the proposed schedule.

Management **confirmed** that placeholder invitations for the 2024 committee meetings will be forward to members.

The committee discussed opportunities for committee members to meet with the board and advised that members used to be invited to meet with the board after board meetings. Management **agreed** to reinstate these meetings.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Provide opportunities for members of SRW's customer committees to meet with board members from time to time.	C. FITZGERALD	30/03/2024

### 9.4 2024 Committee workplan

The committee **noted** the 2024 committee workplan. The committee **requested** Management provide an update from the SRW representative that sits on the Border Groundwaters Agreement Review Committee for the South Australia, Victorian boarder, at the next meeting.

Management highlighted:

- Once a consultant has been engaged for the Small Farm Dams project, which will review how Domestic and Stock Dams are being used and whether they are appropriately licenced, Management will add updates on this project to the workplan.
- The SWL Barriers to Trading project report is due in March 2024. SRW will keep the committee updated on progress and outcomes of the project.

A member advised that communication with customers is important, especially in areas where there are other issues being addressed (i.e. landowners working with authorities on the transmission line locations) meaning landholders could be hostile until they realise SRW are communicating on something unrelated. The member suggested that it would be good to know when SRW will be onsite so they can ensure gates are open.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Matt Hudson to attend the February 2024 SGRF meeting and provide an update on discussions with the Border Groundwaters Agreement Review Committee for the South Australia, Victorian boarder	M. HUDSON	01/02/2023

## 10. General Business

### Thankyou to outgoing members

Mr Cameron FitzGerald, Managing Director thanked Ms Zilm for her valuable contribution to the committee and SRW, as well as her contribution to the Latrobe Irrigators group.

Ms Zilm thanked the members and SRW for the opportunity to be part of the SGRF, and what she has learnt through her involvement with the committee.

## 11. Meeting evaluation

The Chair sought feedback on the effectiveness of this meeting.

The committee advised that:

- It was agreed that it was good to meet in person at least once per year,
- A true test to the effectiveness of the meeting is how much the board and SRW staff get out of the meeting, and
- The committee appreciates the complexities and issues that SRW need to deal with when advocating for irrigators with the Government.

The committee **requested** that the date for the next Strategic Futures Forum be communicated as early as possible.

Action	Action Officer	Due Date
Advise the SGRF of the date of the Strategic Futures Forum as soon as it is known.	H. TAYLOR	30/01/2024

## 12. Next meeting

The next meeting of the Southern Groundwater and Rivers Forum will be held on Friday 2 February 2024 via MS Teams.

## 13. Close

With no further business the meeting was declared closed at 11:58am.