

**Southern Rural Water
Werribee Reconfiguration Project
Customer Reference Group Meeting #3
20 May 2024, 2:00pm to 4:00pm**

Meeting Notes

Introduction

The Terms of Reference for the Werribee Reconfiguration Project Customer Reference Group (CRG) provide that the meeting facilitators shall provide a summary report of each meeting to participants. At the first meeting of the CRG, the members and facilitators agreed that the facilitators would provide notes of the meeting rather than a summary report.

CRG members are welcome to provide feedback on these meeting notes if they contain any inaccuracies or omissions.

Meeting #3

At the third CRG meeting, Melbourne Water presented on the proposed recycled water scheme design.

Notes from CRG meeting #2

The facilitators shared the notes from the second CRG meeting with the CRG for their review. The CRG accepted the notes as accurate without revision and they are now available on Southern Rural Water's (SRW) website.

Update from Cameron FitzGerald

Cameron Fitzgerald, SRW's Managing Director, presented a brief update to the CRG.

Cameron reiterated that SRW is eager to do all that it can to progress the project in alignment with the growers' 10-point plan. He has shared the plan with Melbourne Water, Greater Western Water and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Each of these organisations supports progressing the project in a way that strives to meet all elements of the 10-point plan.

Recycled water scheme

Lauren Mittiga, Kris Coventry and Clare McAuliffe from Melbourne Water presented to the CRG on the proposed recycled water scheme.

The first point of discussion was the current scheme and its issues. Currently, the Western Treatment Plant takes in raw sewage and then produces Class A recycled water through the following steps:

1. Anaerobic ponds – converts carbon to biogas
2. Activated sludge – converts more carbon and removes pathogens
3. Ponds – removes more pathogens
4. Ultraviolet (UV) disinfection
5. Chlorine disinfection

Through the existing recycled water process, ponds are a distinct weakness. They are subject to natural factors such as wind and algal blooms. Wind increases turbidity thus affecting UV penetration. At high enough concentrations Blue-green algae blooms produce toxins, which means Melbourne Water needs to cease supply of Class A recycled water. Algal blooms are likely to become more of an issue as the climate warms. The current plant is also subject to issues due to aging assets and the absence of a filtration process.

A member of the CRG asked Melbourne Water about the amount of water discharged to Port Phillip Bay. The plant processes on average 550 ML/day and around 400ML/ day ss discharged into Port Philip Bay. Melbourne Water will provide further information to the CRG on water volumes and how it is used.

Melbourne Water next discussed what a new recycled water scheme should include based on customer requirements. These requirements include a reliable water supply that can deliver weekly demand with a tolerance of outages of up to two days as long as the overall volume is delivered; average salinity levels of 600 EC; peak weekly volume of 600ML (with the option of an increase to 700ML); and contaminant levels that allow growers to farm and are safe for use on food crops.

To meet these requirements, Melbourne Water is proposing a new treatment process:

1. Anaerobic ponds – converts carbon to biogas.
2. Activated sludge – converts more carbon and removes pathogens.
3. Filtration – removes solids and turbidity.
4. Reverse osmosis – treatment of part of the flow to reduce salinity and blend to achieve target salinity.
5. UV and Chlorine – disinfection.
6. Storage – about 160ML, holds water to maintain supply during plant outages and peak demand.

The WSRP Project Team is still considering the options and need for contingency supply. The new plant would be sited in a location that would allow for future expansion on the Western Treatment Plant site.

The CRG emphasised the importance of getting the treatment plant design right, given growers livelihoods are directly linked to water security. It is important that there is sufficient storage to cover outages and peak demand. The proposed new treatment process would include a 160 ML storage.

Members of the CRG discussed the salinity standards. Melbourne Water clarified that 600 EC will be the annual average and that levels would fluctuate, up to 1,000 EC and slightly over that figure on some occasions. Modelling shows that EC levels will be above 600 EC about 10% of the time, mainly during summer. Some CRG members expressed concern that there is risk around 1,000 EC and that one or two poor quality irrigation events could cause real damage. The CRG will further consider growers' salinity level requirements, in consultation with agronomists. SRW referred to information available at:

[Recycled water \(Werribee\) | Southern Rural Water \(srw.com.au\)](https://www.srw.com.au)

One member of the CRG also raised concerns regarding heavy metals. Melbourne Water clarified that it monitors their levels and knows what is in the treatment plant's influent. SRW can provide

growers with heavy metal load data. A lot of heavy metals are removed through solid removal. Melbourne Water provided an offer of Dr Daryl Stevens, Melbourne Water, to present to growers on how the treatment plant deals with contaminants should this be of interest. One member of the CRG requested Dr Erinn Richmond from EPA Victoria to present, who may be able to talk to PFAS investigations completed on site in WID.

Melbourne Water's presentation included estimated costs for the supply of a salt reduced, reliable Class A recycled water. Cameron indicated that the project is intending to seek grant funding, but the project would not be feasible if customers want to retain all their current rights to water in the Werribee River; if SRW can't come up with a plan that satisfies growers then there will be no deal. Cameron reiterated that growers will never be forced to give up their entitlements.

The CRG sought clarification on additional points including how much customers owe on previous investments and the average amount of river water growers have taken over the last 10 years.

The CRG discussed the possibility of re-negotiating contracted volumes. Melbourne Water could provide a rebate and is discussing this with SRW. Growers can buy back in, but this would likely be very expensive, especially during drought. SRW stated that it is already losing money on its supply to growers.

Next steps

The date of the next CRG meeting will be confirmed out of session. It will likely be in a few weeks' time.