



# National Irrigators' Council

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## MINUTES

### Groundwater sub-committee

Wednesday 16 February: 4.30 pm – 5.30 pm

Chair: Mary Ewing

<b>Item 1</b>	<b>Present and Apologies</b> <u>Present:</u> Mary Ewing (Chair), Michael Murray, Jenny McLeod, John Shannon (BRFF), Dale Holliss, Matt Toscan, Michael Drum, Iva Quarisa, Glenn Lok, Isaac Jeffrey (CEO), Joy Thomas (NIC) <u>Apologies:</u> Mike Neville, Zara Lowien, Fraser Bligh
<b>Item 2</b>	<b>Minutes of Groundwater sub-committee meeting held 20 October 2021</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Business arising.</li></ul> <u>Action 1:</u> February Groundwater sub-committee meeting, speaker to be invited on Victorian perspectives on groundwater issues in Victoria, including cross border issues. <i>Postponed until July meeting (due to Covid pandemic preventing face to face meeting at Nagambie) when Goulburn Murray Water representative will join the Groundwater committee to discuss.</i>
<b>RESO 1</b>	<i>Michael Murray moved:</i>  <i>That the Minutes of Groundwater sub-committee meeting held on 20 October 2021 be accepted as a true and accurate record.</i>  <i>Seconded by Dale Holliss</i> <span style="float: right;"><b>CARRIED</b></span>
<b>Item 3</b>	<b>General Business</b> <u>New South Wales:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Managing compliance with groundwater extraction limits</li></ul> Jenny noted the proposal by Murrumbidgee Groundwater and Lachlan Valley Water regarding a new rule in water sharing plans, to assist in managing extraction limit compliance; currently awaiting Department view, not yet rejected though the Department advised they would not have the opportunity to work through the detail for six months.  The Committee Chair advised that Lower Lachlan and Lower Murrumbidgee Groundwater supported the additional rule for management purposes; the Department may be open to it - as well as investigating other options with existing rules. No feedback to date.  Matt advised that Murrumbidgee Groundwater has written again to the Department, mindful of the recent change of NSW Minister.  The matter to be followed up at NSW Irrigators' Council meeting in two weeks' time.  Matt noted a couple of their customers are facing problems. Some have gone over possibly 100 ML in one year and nothing has come back on them next season; they have done 1000 ML and back over three years, have found 2000 ML extraction. People in court for major breaches. In one instance, it was a permanent trade of water.  Jenny noted that from her understanding is not that they have water in their account, they have extracted more than their bore limit and perhaps should have been aware of it.

The Committee Chair noted that in terms of data usage, it doesn't look as though any valleys will go close to hitting LTAAELS (long-term average annual extraction limits) and perhaps managing compliance will not be an immediate high priority.

Matt advised that Murrumbidgee Groundwater use will be low or potentially lower than the previous seasons; did not think this would be the case with bigger plantings and with surface water now so cheap, less than the cost of electricity and diesel; the worry is everyone is refilling with the carryover accounts and kicking the can to a couple of years down the track. There is an opportunity to do something now and need additional rules in place for future protection.

Jenny agreed the timing is right to introduce this rule to give people advance notice; if they use 200% in each year and if delayed it will mean a situation has been created where the problem presents itself again. The current rules don't stop people exceeding LTAAELS.

b) Update / progress on policy position / principle on telemetry

Dale advised he was pleased that the Dept has decided telemetry not required in the Bundaberg area, a good outcome for growers. A wider observation, Qld Water will concentrate on MDBA until 2025 and Dale's replacement will have a position worked out for whatever happens.

Michael noted that metering is still a work in progress, Telemetry on groundwater, not required.

The Committee Chair sought views on exemptions on metering requirements in NSW for people with small groundwater licences for stock and domestic; this requires those people not to take water from an at-risk groundwater resource. There is a situation where quite a few landowners, not necessarily irrigators, but for stock and domestic, with an at-risk groundwater resource, are unable to take even basic landholder rights, so they either have to instal a meter or construct a new system. This would be an expensive solution for many; certified meter installers would have to instal meters where there is little water being extracted.

The northern valleys put up a proposal in December 2021; some people were required to comply by 1 December 2021; interested in feedback on potential workable solutions.

Michael suggested there should be a reasonable compromise in this circumstance; perhaps via a basic mechanical meter, if it is for stock and domestic – an urban water meter should be adequate; the other alternative might be to simply have it listed as stock and domestic works.

The Committee Chair noted that the advice is if the water is for productive use. Matt noted that DPI advised that a smaller meter might suffice.

c) Groundwater Water Resource Plans (WRPs) and accreditation.

The Committee Chair advised no further advice on Groundwater Water resource plans.

Michael noted he was informed that all new water resource plans were close to being accredited.

d) Other issues

Michael advised of coal seam gas (CSG) extraction issues around Fraser's (Bligh) area, the encroachment of CSG into the Condamine alluvium water and concerns about subsidence; it is yet unclear whether it will be even across the landscape; a need for a clear line of responsibility back to the resource company responsible and whether a regional plan should be required. A hot issue on the Downs, including the issue of deviated wells and where they are established.

Michael noted it is recognised under the Mining and Resource Act as a defensible thing, but it would appear that there is Arrow Energy approval in place; in some areas they have not done the right thing. Up until 12-18 months ago, most people thought it would not be a major issue but concern now with the Condamine alluvium situation and the geology; if the aquifer is de-watered, it

	would collapse. There is a view that the most significant subsidence will occur in the first 5-7 years around 5-20 cm. It is one to watch; most of the legislation comes under the State; subsidence is not recognised as an environmental impact. QFF and Cotton Australian and CDIL are involved; the incoming QFF CEO will be involved.
<b>Item 4</b>	<b>Other business</b> There was no other business raised.
<b>Item 5</b>	<b>Meeting closed at 5.15 pm</b>