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West Wimmera Groundwater Management Area Advisory Committee

Minutes of meeting held on Friday, 6 August 2010
at the Nhill SES Meeting Room, Nhill



1. WELCOME/PRESENT

Bonnie Thompson (GWMWater Board Director and Committee Chair) declared the meeting open at 9:10 am

Members: Jo Murdoch, Trevor Domaschenz, Ron Hawkins, Geoff (Fur) Maddern, Lester Maybery, Ross McDonald, David Wallis, Charles Koch, Barry Williams, Neil Ottoson, Jim Fischer, Greg Fletcher (WCMA), Randal Nott (DSE)

Observer: Jennifer Fraser (DSE)

GWMWater: Barry Hall (Board), John Martin, Nigel Binney, Chris Guest, and Clare Dunn.

2. APOLOGIES

David Williamson (SENRMBS), Andrew Bainbridge (Hindmarsh Shire), Terry Lewis (DPI), Bruce Meyer (West Wimmera Shire), Roma Sampson

Max Burns (BGARC), Max has gone on extended leave, Bonnie acknowledged Max's efforts and contributions to the Committee.

3. DECLARATION OF ANY DIRECT OR INDIRECT PECUNIARY INTEREST IN ANY ITEM ON THE AGENDA

The Committee recognises statements made by members at previous meetings. Bonnie reiterated that should any matters arise where a member has a specific conflict they should qualify it at the time.

4. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Motion

Moved by Jo Murdoch, Seconded by Lester Maybery

That the minutes of the meetings of 21 June 2010 be accepted.

CARRIED

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Jun 5.1	<p>Neuarpur Zone 1 - Options for seasonal allocation (verbal report)</p> <p>A second meeting of Neuarpur Zone 1 irrigators was held on 29 June 2010. As with the first meeting, the majority of the irrigation enterprises were represented. A brief overview of the meeting was provided by John Martin and Charles Koch.</p> <p>The irrigators had a business like approach, acknowledging the need to address the decline in groundwater levels. The group considered the options presented with interest, and requested that GWMWater seek a review of the limitations in the Water Act and SWS with regard to restrictions and maximum carryover. There were a number of clear messages, being the need to protect the smaller irrigators, the need for time to adjust, and concerns regarding usage in South Australia.</p>
Jun 5.2	<p>Managed Aquifer Recharge – presentation by Jo Murdoch</p> <p>Copy of presentation distributed with minutes</p>

6. BUSINESS ITEMS

[The business items within these minutes are presented in the order they were discussed rather than the agenda order.]

Bonnie explained that the draft Strategy document has been provided to a professional writer with the aim that she will redraft the document in an easy to read manner – a reorganisation of the document rather than changing the intent. Bonnie sought volunteers from the committee to do a review of the modified document and provide feedback on the document so the paper can be presented to the committee by next meeting.

The members who volunteered were Trevor Domaschenz, Jo Murdoch, Fur Maddern, Charles Koch.

6.3 Northern Zone PCV – John Martin

The discussion paper (Item 6.3) has been produced in response to comments provided by DSE from the last meeting which prompted a review of the Northern Zone PCV.

Motion

Moved by Fur Maddern, Seconded by Ross McDonald

That the proposed approach to managing the PCV in the Northern Zone as described in the paper be accepted.

CARRIED

(10 in favour of motion, 2 opposed)

6.2 Border Zone – Charles Koch

Charles gave his review of the Border Groundwaters Agreement Review Committee annual report to 30 June 2009 which he found to be enlightening. His main concern was regarding the apparent inequity or imbalance in use

between South Australia and Victoria. This was reflected in the figures Charles provided being:

- South Australia used 4500 ML more than Victoria in Zones 5 and 6.
- Zone 7 sees South Australia using 7000 ML in comparison to Victoria's 850 ML.
- In Zone 4 14,728 ML was used in South Australia while 284 ML was used in Victoria (noting water is less accessible).
- The only zone in which usage in Victoria is greater is Zone 8.
- The four zones covered by the West Wimmera area reported a total usage of 17,000ML compared to 41,000ML in the corresponding zones in South Australia.

Charles made the point that when making decisions about Neuarpur, the water usage by South Australia needs to be considered. The Committee needs to consider that Victoria is nibbling at the large resource that we are sharing and that if we cut too hard, too early, on our own, it will be to the expense of Victorian irrigators and the community.

6.1 Neuarpur

6.1.2 Neuarpur Irrigators position and proposition – Charles Koch

Note that this item was considered in conjunction with item 6.1.1. which followed.

The letter to GWMWater (Item 6.1.2) summarises the views of the Neuarpur Group. It was put together after significant consultation with the irrigators. Twenty-two of the 31 irrigation enterprises (families) agreed to endorse the letter, three did not respond and six provided a qualified response because they did not totally agree.

The main concerns were omissions which included:

- Special help for small irrigators.
- No mention of carryover in the proposal (while they were assured this was implicit).
- Keeping in step with South Australia (that Victoria should not get ahead of them).
- Managed aquifer recharge.

Charles summed up by saying "we accept what you say (reduction required) but don't crucify us".

Bonnie acknowledged Charles' efforts in liaising with the community. The proposal will be considered with the other proposals.

6.1.1 GWMWater Neuarpur Proposal – Nigel Binney

Nigel gave an outline of the GWMWater Neuarpur Proposal as per paper 6.1.1.

A number of options were discussed at the 29 June 2010 Neuarpur Irrigators meeting. Some further options were raised through discussion at the meeting. The paper assesses all of the suggested options and narrows them down to four proposals for consideration. The fourth proposal was suggested following the irrigators' meeting.

It was noted that Jodie Pretlove had contacted GMMWater subsequent to the meeting with two options, one being exempting the first 200 ML of each licence from restriction, the other being allowing a five year period to apply the total restricted volume in any way that works for the crop rotation (ie with a 200 ML licence and a 75% allocation would allow a total of 750 ML to be used over the five year period).

It was also noted that irrigators had, at both meetings, expressed an interest in improving technology and efficient irrigation practice, and requested that funding support be sourced. GMMWater is investigating avenues for funding, but so far have not found a suitable program.

With regard to the discussion paper, Proposal 1 (70% allocation) and 2 (80% allocation) have been seen before, and Proposal 3 (phased-in reduction in allocations) represents a softer transition to an 80% allocation. Proposal 4 (Social contract) is new and places the onus on irrigators to work as a collective to achieve the desired use reduction target. If irrigators are unable to achieve the required target an immediate cut would be imposed.

Through discussing the proposals it was highlighted that there has a hint of change in the bore hydrographs in recent years, with some reduction in the rate of decline of levels.

Action:

The latest Neuarpur hydrographs to be distributed with the minutes.

Bonnie discussed Proposal 4 which is based on the idea is that there is sufficient trust for irrigators to work together and that irrigators understand the cut is required. The irrigators would enter a contract with GMMWater on the amount of water to be used the following year. If the irrigators do not meet the target then the season allocation will apply. This proposal is voluntary and relies on goodwill between the irrigator communities.

There was discussion about additional administrative work that would be required by GMMWater, however it was felt that it would be workable.

There was uncertainty about this proposal as it could make it difficult to plan and people might tend to set their estimates high to make provision for unpredictable weather conditions, and therefore potentially leave irrigators with a lack of water. It was commented that this would test the goodwill and generosity of irrigators towards each other.

Bonnie reiterated that the proposal allows the larger user to use water, while looking after the small licence holder; empowering the community to manage how much water is used.

Motion

Moved by Fur Maddern, Seconded by Jo Murdoch,
That Proposals 3 and 4 not be considered any further.

NOT CARRIED

Charles Koch proposed an Amended motion being the Proposal of Neuarpur irrigators (refer item 6.1.2) be a new Proposal (5). It was considered that this was not an amendment and would be a new motion.

Motion

Moved by Charles Koch, Seconded by Lester Maybery,

That the proposals put forward by the Neuarpur irrigators in their letter to GMMWater including a 3% reduction in allocation per year be accepted, as follows:

1. That the allocations be adjusted downward on an annual basis at the rate of three percent per annum.
2. That a review be held after ten years.
3. After this ten year review and taking into account all relevant evidence, the rate for the next ten years be then determined.
4. In the event of significant recharge of the aquifer, licences would be adjusted upwards.
5. In any event that the hope is not to adjust down licences by more than forty percent in the twenty year period.

Amendment to motion

Moved by Barry Williams, Seconded by Fur Maddern

That the proposed reduction rate in the original motion be amended to a 5% per year reduction for a period of six years be recommended.

The amendment was not put to the vote as further discussion followed.

There was some concern that the 3-5% would not achieve the objective of a 10% reduction in use until year ten.

It was considered by some Committee members that the proposed reduction regime would be acceptable providing that a trigger level be set of no greater than one metre (average) decline over the next ten years, thereby accepting that there may be some further decline but over the longer period of 20 years there should be a stabilisation in water levels.

Further discussion ensued regarding simultaneous management with South Australia. The long term objective is to stabilise water levels however this cannot be achieved by reduction in use in Victoria alone, a combined approach is required. If Victoria starts with a small reduction as a sign of good faith, then it gives South Australia a few years to come on board.

It was highlighted that any proposal to progressively reduce the allocations in Neuarpur sub-zone 1 should achieve stabilised groundwater levels over a period of approximately 20 years, but also needs to take into account the concerns of the committee and the irrigators (given they have been asked for their input). The concerns are reaching a target of reduced usage (10%) as soon as possible in order to observe any potential beneficial impacts on groundwater levels, achieve stability, having a reasonable period and mechanisms to assist the transition, and a mechanism for persuading reduction in use in South Australia.

Bonnie encouraged the Committee to give proposals careful consideration, including the likely impact on achieving the reduction target.

Amendment to amendment to motion

Moved by Ron Hawkins, Seconded by Neil Ottoson

That the amendment be amended to a reduction rate of 4% per year for a period of five years commencing June 2011 be recommended.

CARRIED

(6 in favour of motion, 5 opposed, 2 abstained from voting)

This therefore becomes the new motion.

Motion

Moved by Ron Hawkins, Seconded by Neil Ottoson

That the proposal put forward by the Neuarpur irrigators in their letter to GMMWater, with a 4% reduction in allocation per year for five years commencing June 2011 be accepted.

CARRIED

(7 in favour of motion, 4 opposed, 2 abstained from voting).

The following items were held over to the next meeting.

6.4 Changes in Draft West Wimmera Groundwater Management Strategy Document

7. Other Business

7.1 Independent Review of the SKM Hydrogeological Report

7.2 Advice of 5B/6B Border Zone PAVs.

8. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held in Goroke within a month.

9. CLOSE

The meeting closed at 2.10 pm.