

**CUSTOMER WEBINAR
GUNBOWER GROUNDWATER ASSESSMENT
THURSDAY 20 AUGUST 2020
12-2PM**

Background

Goulburn-Murray Water (GMW) engaged GHD Pty Ltd (GHD) to undertake a desktop hydrogeological assessment for an area around Gunbower, between Torrumbarry and Kerang. This was to determine the groundwater resource availability for the deep lead aquifers in the area and the risks associated with potential use.

Groundwater resources in the study area are in an 'unincorporated area'. This means they are not covered by a groundwater management unit or plan. At this time there is no specific resource management arrangements in place to manage extraction and environmental or sustainability consequences.

The assessment determined a number of risks and areas for consideration, including:

- the use of high salinity water for irrigation on agricultural production and the environment;
- the potential irreversible salinisation of the deep lead aquifer; and
- potential impacts to groundwater levels that are used to determine annual allocations for existing groundwater licence holders within the adjacent Lower Campaspe Valley Water Supply Protection Area and Mid-Loddon Groundwater Management Area

GMW is currently engaging with its customers to seek feedback on the groundwater assessment and a customer webinar was held 20 August 2020.

Below is a summary of what was presented and discussed at the webinar.

GMW representatives

- General Manager, Customers and Stakeholders: Ann Telford
- General Manager, Water Delivery Services: Warren Blyth
- Manager Diversions: Peter Clydesdale
- Groundwater and Streams Manager: Matthew Pethybridge
- Groundwater and Streams Coordinator: Scott Ridges
- Diversions Services West Manager: Dale McGraw

GHD representative

- Senior Hydrogeologist: Jeff Morgan

Agriculture Victoria representative

- Senior Irrigation Officer: Nick O'Halloran
- Irrigation Officer: Kathy Long

A presentation was given at the start of the webinar covering the following information:

- Overview of work to date by GMW (Matthew Pethybridge)
- GHD Hydrogeological Assessment (Jeff Morgan)
- Determining groundwater licence volumes: Agriculture Victoria (Nick O'Halloran)
- GMW licence assessments (Matthew Pethybridge)
- Next steps (Ann Telford)

A copy of the presentation can be found on the ['Your Say'](#) page of the GMW website.

After the presentation, there was a general discussion around the following questions and feedback:

If the area in question becomes an incorporated area, would Gunbower still be in a separate zone?

GMW response: Yes. It is likely to be incorporated into a revised Loddon Valley Local Groundwater Management Plan (name not yet developed). This plan would be developed by a committee to be appointed by GMW groundwater licence holders and other stakeholders who would develop the rules for how the area is to be managed in the future.

If you have dug and already have your application in and are currently going through the process will you be allocated water before someone that hasn't yet dug?

GMW response: No. All applicants must go through GMW's licensing procedures, including advertising and technical information if required. Bores put in by applicants to date have been for exploratory purposes not for irrigation purposes.

Some landowners have already invested significantly in terms of testing and submitting applications. What process is GMW going through to ensure landowners don't over-invest ahead of a decision being made on the licence application process?

GMW response: GMW has put a temporary hold on the processing of applications to quantify the available resource and secondly manage the impacts of the saline resource. By doing so, GMW is ensuring that landowners are given the best information when moving forward.

Could the ground water allocation method be set up in a similar way to the above ground dam system? Could there be a series of trigger mechanisms, i.e. quantity and quality of water, where an allocation percentage could be determined?

GMW response: Groundwater is a bundled entitlement meaning allocations are by default 100 percent of licence volume for each water year unless there is a need for GMW to intervene due to reduced availability or a perceived impact from use.

Restrictions triggers for when an impact is likely are contained in Local and Statutory Management Plans and if water levels are below these triggers GMW will implement restrictions to prevent impacts to other users and the environment. As impacts to the resource occur over longer periods than surface water, the need for restrictions can be anticipated and communicated relatively early allowing licence holders to plan their use but are generally not increased through the season once they are announced, particularly for deep lead systems like in the Gunbower Area.

We would like to know how licence applications that have already been lodged are going to be assessed considering our application has been lodged for some time. What criteria will be used to determine the allocation of licences?

GMW response: GMW will begin to contact applicants in the near future to discuss the process moving forward.

Does GMW anticipate any further costs now the GHD assessment has been finalised?

GMW response: There are inherent costs in making an application for a groundwater licence including bore construction, advertising and potentially the supply of technical information to support an application.

Due to the unique nature of individual applications it is best to discuss these issues with GMW staff directly. Factors that may increase the potential costs include proximity to other users or environmental features and may run into tens of thousands of dollars.

Will there be a change in the capital value of the water after the assessment is completed?

GMW response: The price per megalitre of annual entitlement is set based on a GMW Board endorsed policy at \$180/ML. However senior management is doing a final review to confirm the licensing process and costs.

Would a representative from Agriculture Victoria be available to visit landowners to advise what they should apply to the groundwater to help with salinity levels?

Agriculture Victoria response: Yes. Agriculture Victoria is keen to work with existing licence holders to achieve the best possible result for sustainable production and the environment.