

In late November and early December 2021, GMW held a series of focus groups with our gravity irrigation, diversions and drainage customers to help inform the development of Service Plans that will outline how we manage services in to the future.

Topics discussed included:

- Future planning
- Flexibility and choice (including 365 day delivery for GMID customers only)
- Climate change implications
- Management Plan reviews (diversions and drainage customers only)
- Infrastructure investment and decommissioning
- Irrigation development
- Policy and trade rule implications
- Tariff elements
- Communications

This feedback will be used to inform the next phase of our Service Plan engagement program – customer workshops.

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## Top line summary of feedback

### Diversions - Groundwater

- Trading rules and implications depend on where customers are located – the local environment needs to be considered.
- Trading is relatively straight forward - permanent trading is quite in depth and would like to see it move a little quicker, however it's hard to find a market. Don't want to see a commodity market, would prefer trading is kept to users of water.
- Pumping times and daily/monthly limits don't always suit operations.
- Website and GMW local staff are primary source of information.
- Pricing breakdown on bills is clear.
- Management Plans are beneficial but need to be updated more regularly to ensure their currency – take in to account allocation trading and increased protection of more complex aquifer systems.
- Onerous obtaining licences due to total licence caps and a lot out there unused.

## Diversions - Unregulated and Unregulated D&S

- Domestic and Stock fees considered excessive - could be restructured.
- To get a Domestic and Stock licence, entitlement needs to be purchased through a broker. This is an additional cost to GMW's fees and makes the cost per ML very high.
- Unsure if having a greater pool to buy water from will result in any price reductions when transferring water.
- Less water is being observed in streams and springs over summer
- Increased periods of unusable supply – following bush fires and extreme weather events.
- Is there an ability to adjust pricing in rostered/restricted years?
- Inclusion of restrictions of rosters has helped add clarity, however they fluctuate too much. If there isn't any water, there is no practical way of receiving the 2ML paid for.
- Water availability is at about 25 per cent of what it was almost 40 years ago.
- Separation of Domestic and Stock use from Diverters/Irrigation needs to be considered for planning and pricing – some customers only using their Domestic and Stock for domestic purposes with no income being generated. This needs to be reflected in pricing.
- Needs to be greater price consideration for Domestic and Stock customers - fees need to be proportionate.
- Service Point Fees need to be reviewed.
- Concerns expressed about the quality of water delivered.
- Streams are being managed in a sustainable way because users are only using 25 per cent of entitlement. This means the system is sustainable.

## Diversions - Regulated

- Utilising the water market depending on business needs – currently trading or considering trading to provide more certainty.
- Lack of understanding of trading ability in some systems – customers need better education.
- Applications process quite labour intensive – great support from local Diversion Inspectors.
- Approval processes for some applications complicated with multiple agencies involved for different elements (e.g. irrigation development guidelines).
- Carryover is a beneficial tool in aiding in future water certainty.
- Changes in metering/pump specifications has been problematic and required equipment upgrades or replacement – again good support from Diversion Inspectors.
- Vegetation management is sometimes a problem in Broken Creek and can impact water delivery.
- Irrigation water can do amazing things - it's an important part of our agricultural system. It is important to generate irrigation development and educate people better.
- Need to be careful that large developers don't take control of the system. Important to ensure that anyone impacted is engaged with.

- There would be benefit in future developments if it spreads the costs and keeps pricing down.
- Would benefit in understanding GMW's organisational set up – funded, budgeting for, outside influences, costs v staffing.
  - Are there any cross subsidies?
  - Are the prices truly cost reflective?
  - Are we on a sustainable path? Is the costing workable?
- Bottom line v affordability is being considered – what is it costing in total per ML?
- Fees on accounts need better explanation – fee names sometimes confusing.
- Understand different prices for different application forms based on manpower and processes etc.
- Forms could be improved with the use of plain English and examples.
- Interested to hear GMW's thoughts on Climate Change and our regional future – what strategies can we bring about to offset what we think is going to happen?
- Website is a beneficial source of information.

## Drainage

- Drainage is critical for salinity management and reducing water logging on irrigated agricultural land.
- Drainage Course Declarations (DCD) are lower cost to implement than traditional drains, allowing water to flow along natural drainage flow paths.
- DCDs and associated obstruction removal programs are working well and are better for the environment. Consultation on these DCD projects has been excellent. As long as required maintenance occurs by asset owners, DCD-based systems will continue to be effective.
- Traditional primary and community drains are permanent assets and we need to ensure they remain unobstructed to work as efficiently as possible.
- A lower level of drainage service at a reduced cost but meeting future needs does not seem possible as it would impact on spraying and maintenance, and potentially reduce the level of service.
- Customers want their property to be drained as quickly as possible and the current price seems to be accepted.
- The customers spoken to were generally happy with current level of service.
- Drainage is one of the best controlled services that GMW provide.
- Decommissioning of drains in areas no longer being irrigated would need consultation with customers to ensure they understood any potential changes if the drain were to be removed.
- Customers have drainage diversion agreements but now rarely get any value or use from them unless it is a wetter season.
- Pumping drainage water into channels remains a concern – how does GMW ensure that the water does not contaminate channel water?

## Gravity

- Rationalisation of outlets/meters is really dependent on industry types and water security needs.
- Trading is dependent on industry, dairy is hard to vary from season to season, however if cropping then there are potential trading opportunities.
- Where an option, transferring between properties (licences) more beneficial than permanent trading.
- Delivery shares allow room for expansion.
- Bottom line v affordability v profitability – what is it costing in total per ML?
- Rather than 365 day supply, could consider extending the season beyond 15 May and also commencing prior to 15 August.
- 365 day supply attractive to horticulture, however season extension (2-3 weeks at each end) more attractive to dairy, but not critical. Season extension also valuable in times of low water allocations.
- 365 would be a dream come true for Domestic and Stock users.
- Cost and pricing implications of 365 would need to be fully explored, understood and communicated transparently.
- Need to better understand localised and industry changes to truly understand benefits of 365 day supply for each area.
- Concern over how family enterprises will compete in the future with larger scale corporations. Social aspects should also be considered when attracting irrigation development.
- Markets potentially causing water loss from zones – should buyers contribute to the running of a zone they own water in if only purchased as a commodity?
- Overall the modernisation program has been a win –more water and a better system.
- Water when needed is critical – perhaps consider different ordering timeframes for peak and off peak and better managing large high flow deliveries that impact deliveries downstream.
- Planners are essential – they are a really important asset.
- Weed management is still a problem.
- Need better information on how prices are derived.
- Level of service should better dictate fees – currently different levels of service by area (large differences in Torrumbarry v Loddon Valley).
- The due date for all GMID Fixed Charges accounts should revert to 15 January.
- High security water is too expensive.
- Cross-subsidisation has seen a backwards service shift.
- Supportive of further investigation in to meter hibernation.