

**UPPER OVENS LICENCE RENEWAL PROJECT
CUSTOMER FOCUS GROUP MEETING
THURSDAY 17 December 2020
3PM**

Background

Following customer concerns raised over the Upper Ovens licence renewal term GMW has hosted three customer webinars to date:

- 22 June 2020: Information about the Water Supply Protection Area (WSPA) Plan and how it drives the licence term and costs.
- 20 and 21 July 2020: Listening to customers concerns and agreeing to specific matters to explore in more detail.

GMW has established a project team, and committed to customers that it will:

- Establish a Focus Group that includes some D&S customers, to explore the detail of potential paths to a resolution.
- Review the term of the licence and associated inspection regime for the Upper Ovens Water Supply Protection Area and including the possibility of a different inspection regime for D&S.
- Review and be transparent about the activities and costs comprising the \$700 fee and consider this fee in its historical context of increases over a period of time.
- Consider the relationship (including any overlaps) between the Licence Renewal Fee and the Annual Fee, in particular for Domestic and Stock Licences.
- Consider the equity for Upper Ovens customers and relative prices for D&S customers.
- Engage with Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to gain support for resolution of the issues – noting this could be a lengthy process.
- Improve communications with customer input and continue engaging on the issues.
- Consider comparative prices of similar services across the state.
- Consider the matter of intermittent water availability for some customers.

Below is a summary of the second Customer Focus Group meeting held on 17 December 2020.

GMW representatives

- General Manager: Customers and Stakeholders: Ann Telford
- General Manager: Water Delivery Services Warren Blyth
- Manager Diversions: Peter Clydesdale
- Policy and Regulatory Adviser: Geoff Coburn
- Diversions Services East Manager: Stephen Gemmill

Upper Ovens customer representatives

Attendees:

- Cameron Reid
- Sarah Nicholas
- Peter Jacobs
- Rod Hall
- Kerry Murphy
- Christopher Maud
- Colin McCormack

Apologies:

- Peter Eggleston, Ray Bollas

A presentation was given covering the following information:

1. Welcome and purpose of the Customer Focus Group
2. Our commitments – progress to date
Licence Term Review update – Warren Blyth spoke to considerable effort and discussions that GMW have been held with colleagues in DELWP and Minister's Office. GMW feel positive about where the conversation is now at.
3. Review and be transparent about the activities and costs comprising the \$700 fee and consider this fee in its historical context of increases over a period of time.
4. Consider the relationship (including any overlaps) between the Licence Renewal Fee and the Annual Fee, in particular for Domestic and Stock Licences.
5. Next steps

The presentation included:

- Discussion update on the licence term
- Licence Renewal fee breakdown
- Annual fees in the context of ensuring no overlap with Licence Renewal fee

During the presentation, there was discussion around the following questions and feedback:

- Question re how we acknowledge the conjunctive nature of groundwater and river water why are they priced differently? What a great question. We need to be able to address this and have offered to explore this in engagement for development of WP6.
- Service Point Fee and Access Point Fee still need better explanation in GMW's communications that come out with the annual fixed charges about the services delivered – particularly to D&S customers. Need to redefine both these. Ann will discuss this with her team to reflect differences in how the fees apply to irrigation and DS.
- The services delivered under the Access Fee were discussed and it was explained how DS customers are a main beneficiary of this work.
- The Focus Group requested GMW consider an extension on the payment of the \$700 renewal fee. The Focus Group were informed that GMW would not be extending the due payment beyond June 2021 but noted payment options would be in place for anyone experiencing financial difficulty.
- The Upper Ovens situation is unique. The implications to customers is that the regulatory regime does not match the unique nature of their water source and is therefore unfair. This is another issue to explore in Water Plan 6 (WP6).
- Upper Ovens Focus Group members to be given the same opportunities as all other customers and be invited to participate in engagement for WP6 as individuals.
- Invitation to customers to contribute to planning for engagement for WP6. (Workshop)
- Target customer communications by service type. D&S diverters sick of irrigation news!
- We can provide info and links to Kerry Murphy for publication in TAFCO Newsletter.

It was agreed that the Focus Group would meet when the outcome of the term of the licence was known when GMW would also present on commitment 8: Consider comparative prices of similar services across the state.