

1 Policy History

Revision No.	Council Meeting Date	Minute No.	Adoption Date
1	08/06/1999	346	08/06/1999
2	13/07/1999	407	13/07/1999
3	14/01/2003	25	14/01/2003
4	11/05/2010	0142	11/05/2010
5	26/08/2014	0267	26/08/2014
6	09/02/2021	21/042	09/02/2021
7	09/07/2024	24/182	08/08/2024

2 Policy Objective

Irrigation water is the fundamental ingredient to the continuing success of the region. A guaranteed, transparent and affordable water supply is crucial for the future of the community and viability of irrigation industries.

Council will responsibly and transparently utilise its available water resources to sustain the community, business operations and the local environment.

Council will actively work with local water infrastructure operators, irrigator and business representative groups to enhance the volume and maintain regional water security for the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA).

Council will actively advocate to both State and Federal Governments for water policy development that is informed by the views of various regional interest groups in the irrigation and complimentary industries.

3 Policy Statement

Working with Stakeholders

Council will request an annual meeting with (MI). Attendees will include Councillors, MI Board Directors and relevant senior staff of both organisations. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss current and planned projects of the respective organisations. The meeting will also inform Council's strategic planning and infrastructure investment priorities.

Griffith City Council is a primary water supply operator and holder of water licence for Griffith and surrounding Towns and Villages. Council is also a member of the Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation of Councils (RAMJO).

In June 2020, RAMJO adopted a Water Position Paper which takes a whole of Basin, solutions approach to the subject of water security.

Griffith City Council endorses the RAMJO Water Position Paper and the key recommendations contained therein. Each of the recommendations are reproduced in this Griffith City Council Water Position Paper and Council makes supplementary comments in respect to several of those recommendations.

1. Water Market

RAMJO recommends a comprehensive review of the water market, which could include (but not be limited to): ownership, water security, capturing true costs of water transfers, telemetric reporting, and floodplain harvesting. Regulatory reform across multiple areas is necessary to ensure a nation-wide plan goes hand in hand with an efficient water market.

Griffith City Council Supplementary Statement:

During August 2019 the Government directed the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to conduct an inquiry into markets for tradeable water rights in the Murray-Darling Basin. The interim report of the ACCC was released for public comment on 30 June 2020. The final report is to be submitted to Government by 30 November 2020.

Griffith City Council supports the continuation of water trading, including the maximisation of economic performance of irrigated agriculture, relying on fair and efficient water markets, underpinned by an environmentally healthy river system. Water trading, however, is not performing to these standards and reform is required. The market is complex and governance failure has created distrust amongst water users.

Reform of the governance framework under which water trading operates is required to address:

- Potential conflicts of interest involving water brokers and water-exchange brokers.
- Manipulation of the market by entities which exploit very limited regulation.
- Lack of transparency of the water market which benefits better resourced and professional traders.
- Regulatory reform to allow water trading between water consumers only.
- Improve communication of water allocation policies, river operations policy and real time data to irrigators.
- Rationalise/consolidate the number of government and regulatory bodies which oversee water policy. Remove duplication or overlapping in decision making.
- The topic of water “carry-over” has been a divisive issue amongst some irrigators. Greater transparency of how carry-over operates is required.

Griffith City Council participates in the temporary trade/sale of water. Council will only trade with water users. Water will only be traded to water users located within the Murrumbidgee Valley.

2. Impact of Water Prices on Agricultural Diversity

2a. RAMJO recommends that no one industry should be specifically protected. However, resources should be made available to develop an integrated and coordinated Agricultural Plan for the Murray Darling Basin (incorporating Valley Irrigation Plans) with a view to encouraging innovation, adaptation and an appropriate balance between permanent plantings and annual crops. The outcome of the plan should be to optimise productive yields, water use and economic return to communities and the nation. (Recommendation 8 expands further on innovation).

2b. RAMJO recommends supporting all agricultural and horticultural industries as diversification of domestically grown produce is important for the sovereignty of our nation. We recommend that by placing equal importance on resources for our region's ability to provide sustenance for an increasing population, and implementing protections against potential pest and disease that could decimate one or more of our industry sectors, we will be able to continue to play our part in Australia's food security.

2c. RAMJO recommends government develops criteria and mechanisms to enable flexible short-term emergency water management provisions where critical situations (e.g. drought, disease, pandemic) could result in major job losses, industry viability or national food security issues. (Recommendation 6 expands further on drought).

Griffith City Council Supplementary Statement:

The right of the individual irrigator to grow whatever crop they chose should be retained.

3. Environmental Flows

3a. RAMJO recommends that the suite of measures including stakeholder communication, spill event efficiencies, dilution flow reviews, loss reduction mechanisms, and optimising the delivery of water requirements be pursued to increase the current availability of water, and recognise unrealised gains as it relates to water availability.

3b. RAMJO further recommends that the recommendations related to improving reporting and communications by all regulatory bodies including Murray Darling Basin Authority, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, Department of Agriculture and Water Resources and Basin States from the 2019 'Basin Plan Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Capability Assessment' should be implemented.

Griffith City Council Supplementary Statement:

Griffith City Council supports additional public investment into existing water distribution infrastructure to reduce transmission losses thus increasing water available for environmental flows.

Griffith City Council supports both private and public investment in on farm programs that create better water efficiencies.

“Water buy backs” from the irrigation sector by the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder have caused significant strain on business enterprises and the broader community. Griffith City Council does not support any form of acquisition of water entitlement from within the region.

Lake Wyangan at Griffith is an important cultural site for to the Wiradjuri people, the traditional owners of the land. Griffith City Council is working closely with the Griffith Local Aboriginal Land Council to have “cultural water” inflows secured for the Lake. Ideally the provision for “cultural water” should come from existing environmental acquisitions.

Council is also partnering with MI to improve water circulation at the Lake. These inflows together with Council investment at the site will assist in addressing significant environmental challenges such as blue green algae blooms and salinity.

Water policy and its management is very complex. The lack of transparency and clarity of information from regulatory authorities has continued to create distrust amongst irrigators and has had deleterious impacts on the regional business environment. A refocus on

clear, consistent and regular communications will assist in restoring community confidence.

4. Infrastructure – Now and Into the Future

RAMJO recommends the Federal Government undertakes to create a Sovereign Wealth Fund, complemented with a long-term plan incorporating a national approach to water infrastructure investment and with a view to sustaining our nation across all environmental, social and economic sectors now and for decades to come.

Note - This could be done in part via a review of unspent funding already allocated for delivering requirements of The Plan and an assessment of future investment requirements into the Murray Darling Basin infrastructure to better 'drought proof' and 'future proof' our Nation.

Griffith City Council Supplementary Statement:

Investment in new water storage and distribution infrastructure is urgently required to secure the future of communities and regional irrigation district's primary production.

Griffith City Council supports any initiative from the State and Federal Governments to further investigate and fund the following projects:

- Burrinjuck Dam – Raise wall height to increase storage capacity.
- “Coffey” Scheme – Proposed by Engineer David Coffey to divert flows from the upper reaches of the Clarence River into the Murray Darling Basin.
- Bradfield Scheme – Diversion of flows in western Queensland and improving flows into the Murray Darling Basin.
- Continue research, development and implementation of cloud seeding projects to increase snow falls to capture more water in storage infrastructure.

5. Conveyance Water and Losses

RAMJO recommends a critical review of the accountability of conveyance losses including capturing true costs of buyer and seller trades, and intra/inter valley delivery costs, and below Barmah Choke infrastructure impacts. Evaporation mitigation and seepage reduction initiatives should be explored.

Griffith City Council Supplementary Statement:

Griffith City Council supports additional public investment in the MIA water transmission channel infrastructure to reduce seepage losses.

6. Drought

RAMJO recommends that the federal government, in collaboration with the states, leads the development of a comprehensive National Adverse Events Management Plan (incorporating a Drought Management Plan for the Murray Darling Basin) to plan for, mitigate and manage impacts to the food bowl. This should include forecast risks such as a changing climate, reduced flows and unanticipated events that impact food security and local employment.

Agreed actions in the plan should be resourced through a permanent fund (Sovereign Wealth Fund) and should facilitate relief and foster agricultural innovation.

Griffith City Council Supplementary Statement:

Griffith City Council supports increased investment in weather monitoring services by “The Bureau” formerly known as the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) in the region to support better informed decision making by the regional irrigation industry.

7. Climate Change

RAMJO recommends that the federal government leads an evaluation of the impact of climate change on Basin inflows and losses to determine the feasibility of infrastructure and other interventions to stabilise and, if possible, enhance inflows and storage capacity into the Basin in the face of predicted future water scarcity.

Griffith City Council Supplementary Statement:

The possibility of a future with less water is noted. All steps possible to maintain water security and availability to regional industries and communities is supported.

8. Agricultural Adaptation – Investment and Research

8a. RAMJO recommends that a Sovereign Wealth Fund be created to provide a permanent source of funding for drought relief, infrastructure development, system maintenance and adaptation.

8b. RAMJO in addition recommends that changes in both the superannuation and financial sectors are made to encourage investment into the Australian agricultural sector to ensure its future success and ability to remain globally competitive.

8c. RAMJO recommends that, with support from the Federal Minister, an interested NSW Government Organisation be nominated by the NSW Minister for Agriculture to partner with RAMJO and a regionally based NSW University within our region to collaborate on an application for a major Australian Research Council 'Centre of Excellence' grant.

8d. RAMJO in addition recommends, as part of this collaboration, that Innovation Hubs be introduced into our region as a cooperative model of research, innovation, and investment for the future sustainability of Australian agriculture.

Griffith City Council Supplementary Statement:

Griffith City Council supports the Deakin University, Centre for Regional and Rural Futures (CeRRF) Irrigation Research Centre based in Griffith.

MI is based in Hanwood (Griffith) adjacent to the Deakin University facility. MI has considerable expertise in terms of management of irrigation water. There are synergies between these two organisations in terms of the future of irrigation.

Griffith City Council will work collaboratively with any cooperative model that focuses on research, development and extension of irrigation expertise to support a sustainable future for our community.

4 Definitions

Not applicable

5 Exceptions

Not applicable

6 Legislation

Not applicable

7 Related Documents

Not applicable

8 Directorate

Utilities