

Rural Water Roundtable

Terms of Reference

24 May 2022

I. Background

Freshwater is vital for the Tasmanian economy, environment and way of life. Freshwater is:

- a key economic enabler for agriculture, energy, mining, forestry, industry and commercial uses;
- underpins urban water security for drinking water, commercial uses and liveability; and
- essential for maintaining environment, ecosystems and landscapes for intrinsic value, biodiversity, recreation and tourism, and Aboriginal cultural values.

Historically, Tasmania has been in the fortunate position of having access to relatively abundant, good quality freshwater resources. There are, however, a range of emerging challenges which will influence the future sustainable management of our freshwater resources, the quality of those water resources and the availability of water for drinking water, commercial uses and the environment.

Without future thinking and strategic changes to the way we manage our water resources, water quality, the health of our waterways, and reliable and equitable access to water resources for consumptive uses may be threatened. Some key drivers for change include:

- the impacts of climate change on catchment yields, timing of water availability and demand, and potential impacts to water quality;
- increasing competition for water resources caused by scaling up our agricultural industry towards achieving our Agrivision 2050 target; and
- urbanisation and urban water service standard expectations.

Changes to water availability, water quality and river health not only have the potential to impact directly on the environment, businesses and rural communities, but also indirectly, by affecting the social licence of key Tasmanian industries.

The Tasmanian Government released its Rural Water Use Strategy in March 2021. The focus of the Strategy is on improving the sustainable use and allocation of Tasmania's water resources. The Strategy contains four goals and 29 actions to be implemented over the next 5 years.

In April 2021, the Tasmanian Government also committed to undertaking a River Health Advisory Project to report on the status and trends of Tasmania's river health and water quality and identify potential responses to these findings.

The Implementation Plan was released in May 2022 and sets out key activities for implementing the Rural Water Use Strategy and the River Health Advisory Project.

The Rural Water Roundtable (RWR) has been established to provide external perspectives and opinions for consideration in relation to ongoing implementation of the Rural Water Use Strategy and the River Health Advisory Project.

These Terms of Reference define the role and functions of the RWR.

2. Roles and responsibilities of the RWR

2.1 Roles

The RWR will enable Agriculture, Forestry and Water within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas) to collaborate, at a strategic level, with key water management stakeholder representatives.

The RWR is made up of senior executive representatives of organisations who manage Tasmania's water resources and who benefit from sustainable management of those resources.

Headline activities of the RWR include:

- Monitoring implementation of the Rural Water Use Strategy and providing advice on strategic directions as implementation evolves.
- Coordination of multi-party implementation activities that support the goals of the Strategy.
- Improved communication, coordination and alignment of industry activities and responsibilities for the sustainable management of Tasmania's water resources and industry working to compliment the goals and actions of the Rural Water Use Strategy and the River Health Advisory Project.
- Providing a forum to enhance two-way communication and developing relationships for the benefit of managing Tasmania's water resources.
- Providing information and input to community and stakeholder engagement approaches and communications activities.
- Providing an opportunity to support and advise on broader stakeholder engagement.

The RWR provides opinion, advice and perspectives and is not a decision-making body. Because the RWR is not a decision-making body, there is also no requirement for consensus within the group.

3. RWR Membership

3.1 RWR Chair

The RWR will be chaired by the Deputy Secretary (Primary Industries and Water), NRE Tas

The members may appoint a Deputy Chair from the membership of the RWR.

3.2 Membership

Organisations will be invited by the Secretary, NRE Tas. Organisations should be represented on the Roundtable by one nominated senior executive level person from that organisation. Representatives are expected to understand the views of their stakeholders and be knowledgeable about modern water management and the issues associated with water reform.

The member organisations of the RWR are:

- Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania
- Hydro Tasmania
- Tasmanian Irrigation
- Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association
- Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture
- TasWater
- Local Government Association of Tasmania
- NRM North
- representing Tasmanian Seafood Industry
- Dairy Tas
- Landcare Tasmania
- Inland Fisheries Service
- EPA

A list of representatives and their member organisation will be published on the NRE Tas website.

The Secretary, in consultation with the RWR chair, may invite other members to the working group as required from time to time.

The Minister for Primary Industries and Water is not a member of the RWR but may attend meetings of the group.

Term of Roundtable

The RWR is established to provide opinion and advice from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2024.

4. Meetings

Meetings will be conducted formally with a meeting agenda issued at least one week prior to the meeting. The agenda will have a standing item relating to disclosure of any conflict of interest or matters that could be perceived as creating the opportunity for conflict of interest or perception of advantage.

A call for agenda items will be put to Roundtable members at least three weeks prior to a meeting of the Roundtable.

A high-level summary of each meeting will be prepared by NRE Tas and will be published on the NRE Tas website.

During the life of the RWR, it will meet quarterly or as required for no more than three hours duration. Meetings may be held in person or via the electronic meeting platform, Microsoft Teams. Additional meetings may occur on an as needs basis with prior consultation.

Delegation of meeting attendance may only occur with the prior approval of the Chair of the RWR.

Administrative support will be provided by NRE Tas.

5. Communication protocols and values

5.1 Member Responsibilities

The membership of the RWR commit to:

- Attending scheduled meetings.
- Freely and respectfully sharing information and thoughts with members of the RWR.
- Being open and honest in passing on the views, interests, concerns and ideas of group members being represented.
- Respecting the ideas, questions and comments of all members and providing an atmosphere where all members feel comfortable and safe to participate.
- Conducting ongoing relationships with fellow group members and the project team with courtesy and sensitivity.
- Communicating in a manner that is non-confrontational and collaborative in approach.
- Contributing in a positive way to finding solutions to issues or concerns and that support the overall implementation of the government's adopted Rural Water Use Strategy and River Health Advisory Project.
- Remaining focused on issues and opportunities that are within scope, as associated with implementation of the government's adopted Rural Water Use Strategy and the River Health Advisory Project.