



Sewerage Project Status

December 2008

Lake Glenmaggie Community Representative Group

Privacy of Information and Gippsland Water

The land capability study currently being conducted by Whitehead & Associates in our area is to develop a township-wide assessment of the land and its ability to accept treated wastewater. The assessment of the condition of randomly selected septic tanks will allow the consultant to form an opinion regarding the design of a future wastewater scheme.

Data pertaining to individual septic tanks and their identification to a specific property, will not be detailed in the consultant's final report and property owners participating in the voluntary inspection will receive a personal, and strictly confidential, free condition assessment report of their wastewater management system – *Natalie Kuczer, Manager Communications, Gippsland Water*

Sewerage System Update

Background: The need for waste water management infrastructure to be developed for the townships of Coongulla, Glenmaggie and adjoining areas was identified over 30 years ago. Various Government and local water agencies have attempted to plan and implement an appropriate solution with no result. In January of 2006 the State Government committed to a waste water solution under the "Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program". Gippsland Water (GW) was tasked with the assessment, planning and implementation of the project.

In mid 2007, at the invitation of the Lake Glenmaggie Communities, GW presented a project timetable and 5 possible sewerage solutions. In June of 2008 the Essential Services Commissioner accepted GW advice that the project would be completed during the period July 2008 – June 2013. During the period from June to October 2008 it became clear that:

- The project time table had suffered significant slippage;
- GW exhibited little appetite for a conventional sewerage solution [due to cost];

- That a '6th option' including septic tanks on site was being considered without consultation [due to cost];
- Local Government can or will do little in the estate areas of Coongulla and Glenmaggie on the development of long term management for storm water and road surface/safety issues until the waste water/sewerage program was completed.

Meeting with GW: The Lake Glenmaggie Community Representative Group (CRG) sought to formally engage GW on these issues. CRG members John Gwyther, David Sullivan, and Leon Bannister met with GW's Managing Director David Mawer, General Manager Planning and Development David Evans, Manager Asset Improvements Group Garry Smith and Public Affairs Manager Natalie Kuzer.

A follow-up interview with David Mawer was held on the 9th by John Gwyther.

Interview: John asked questions of Mr. Mawer and his replies have been summarized below. Note that the session was not recorded so the responses are not quotes.

Q: What are the drivers for this scheme?

A: There are two key factors. Firstly there have always been concerns over runoff into the Gippsland Lakes, water quality being impacted by septic schemes, and general environmental pressure. Something needs to be done to fit in with more modern community and social views on smarter environmental care. Smaller towns are seen to be needed to upgrade whereas previously, they tended to fall "under the radar". As well, where there is a negative impact on the environment, society now expects that everyone has a responsibility to minimise that impact.

Q: Where does your responsibility start and end?

A: The State Government declared boundaries around the area to which the project will apply and GW has a mandate from them to deal with water and waste water within that area. We have included the project as a priority item in our current five year Plan to June 2013, after public consultation.



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This Plan was reviewed in great detail by the Essential Services Commission (ESC), G W's regulator, who gave their approval of the Plan earlier this year. Effectively, the ESC allows GW to do the works and earn the revenue needed for the project as defined in the Plan.

GW is part of a Project Control Group for this project with the EPA, DSE, and the Wellington Shire Council (WSC).

Onsite septic systems remain the responsibility of WSC, especially for areas outside the project.

Q: Why is the EPA directly involved? I'd expect them to take a policy monitoring role rather than such an active role?

A: The EPA is always concerned about pollution of the Gippsland Lakes and is keen to see the best possible water quality outcomes achieved, thus their active interest.

Q: What funding if any is coming from sources other than GW and the residents who benefit, for example State Government, DSE, WGCMA?

A: We don't know that yet. There is a process for obtaining funding which comes from other agencies for such projects and I see no reason why this project would be different. We do expect a contribution from others but the amount will depend on the business plan and Board approval.

GW's Plan does mention an amount of \$0.785m from the DSE (p.18). Mr. Mawer did not want to be drawn on a percentage figure of the project that might be funded elsewhere.

Q: Can you outline the expected financial impact on residents?

A: GW wants the lowest cost, most effective scheme we can implement so the cost does depend on the option chosen. It also depends on the funding we are able to obtain from elsewhere. The Plan calls for residents to contribute to the cost of GW's capital works plus the cost of any equipment residing on the block. The Plan defines an option to pay \$800 as a one-off amount or \$80 per year over 20 years.

Q: The Plan (p.172) talks about "an additional recovery of \$2.86m from property owners in Coongulla". This is on average about \$12,000 per household for 240 houses. What is this for?

A: That is for the estimated cost of the capital works on a resident's block that the resident is expected to pay. Mr. Mawer did stress that this cost depends heavily on the option chosen.

Q: These are fairly large costs for residents. What options do they have if they do not want to use this system?

A: That remains to be seen. In a declared area like this, GW has the right to mandate compliance. However, GW has to work with WSC and other agencies to determine what the best way forward is.

The residents do live on an environmentally sensitive area so it is not just down to residents to say what they will or won't do. Note that residents do get benefits in the form of better service, increased property value and community environmental improvements.

Q: The impending land assessment work by Whitehead and Associates has generated a lot of anxiety in the community. Can you outline what is going on?

A: Whatever the final option chosen, we have planned for and do need to do more technical work on the capabilities of the land. This is what the consultant is doing next week. Their report will allow us to advance our thinking on our options.

NB: GW did say that they expect an update from this work and analysis in May-June for the CRG.

Q: People are anxious about inspections on their property and concerned that there will be an impact on them from his report if a problem is found on their block. What confidentiality rules will be in place here? How will you resolve their concerns?

A: Following the CRG raising this issue yesterday, GW is urgently working up confidentiality paragraph for the consultant. Mr. Mawer noted that GW's interest is in the technical capability of the area and GW wants



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to get a representative view of the terrain; they are not interested in specific sites per se.

Q: We've heard about the so-called "6th option" which includes some form of on-property septic system. Tell us about this and why this has surfaced now.

A: Technology in this area is moving along at some pace and it would be remiss of GW to make decisions on what would work and be best for the area without reviewing new technical options. Ignoring something just because it wasn't on the table 2-3 years ago is not the way to go. This is what happened at Seaspray as an example of a hybrid system that is an option here. Note that there is no expectation that the residents will have to pay all the costs.

Analysis: The key GW Project Control Group members now have a clearer understanding of the residents' and customers' frustrations with regard to this project. There was commitment expressed to comply with the project delivery time-line as agreed to by GW and confirmed by the Essential Services Commissioner in June 2008 within the five year period of 2008-2013. The selected sewerage/waste water solution is currently being researched and all options are being considered.

A costly and environmentally effective solution will be delivered. Consultation will be undertaken and GW's Managing Director David Mawer has agreed to meet with the community as appropriate. A public forum meeting is to be considered when the assessment work has been completed and recommended solution options have been developed [likely time-frame within 6 months].

The CRG has requested a position on the Project Control Group and GW has taken this request under consideration.

Further Information: GW's five year Plan is on their web site at www.gippswater.com.au. The CRG's website at www.glenmaggie.vic.au will be kept up to date as further information comes to hand.

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SRW Role on Project Control Group

On Monday 8th of December, the CRG was advised by Mr Clinton Rodda, General Manager Water Supply, that Southern Rural Water (SRW) had joined the Glenmaggie & Coongulla Sewerage Project Control Group.

"As the storage operator for Lake Glenmaggie, Southern Rural Water has a responsibility under the Safe Drinking Water Act to ensure that the water in the catchments where we have storages is managed appropriately, and as such we are pleased to be involved in such a process" Mr Rodda confirmed.

The full text of letter will be available on our website (www.glenmaggie.vic.au) shortly.

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