

Broken Reconfiguration Feasibility Study

Community Briefing Session – Engagement Summary

Sessions Held

Tuesday, 30 April 2024, Benalla Racing Club

Session	Start Time	Attendees
1	9:30am	10
2	1:00pm	18
3	6:00pm	14

Wednesday, 1 May 2024, University of Melbourne, Dookie Campus

Session	Start Time	Attendees
4	1:00pm	8
5	6:00pm	13

The Broken Reconfiguration Study (BRFS) Team would like to thank BRFS Consultative Committee members who attended these public sessions, listening to community perspectives and sharing consultative committee insights generously. These members included Maureen Cottam, David Rush, Chris Gibson, Neil Renshaw, Wayne Spinks, Richard Anderson and Trevor Stedman.

Session Summary

Community members were invited to attend 1 of 5 information sessions held over 2 days for an update on the Broken Reconfiguration Feasibility Study (BRFS). A summary of the background to the study and the case for change was provided by the team along with general agreement from those attending that “doing nothing” was not a feasible path forward for Broken System to thrive in the future.

Based on analysis of the water and land use practices, the Study team presented some grouping that suggest most Broken system entitlement holders broadly fall into 1 of 5 profiles. Information on the common characteristics for each group along with potential options to improve outcomes unique to their circumstances were discussed and broadly accepted by attendees without dispute or suggestion of further profiles.

The team also shared data on responses to reconfiguration options from one-on-one engagement held to date. Attendees were able to discuss the insights and share their own views to help shape the future of the Broken system. Attendees were invited to build on the data received to date by completing a BRFS survey or pinning a comment to the system map on the yoursay.gmwater.com.au/brfs webpage.

OFFICIAL

@goulburnmurraywater

@GMWater

@goulburnmurraywater



What we heard

Attendee responses to the options presented included:

- Throughout the sessions, there was no suggestion or urging from the participants to remove any of the options from consideration.
- In each session, participants were asked if other options should be considered. No additional options were raised.
- Whole Farm planning was high on the priority list. There is a clear desire from the community for this support.
- Data presented from the initial one-on-one engagement sessions on the options aligned with expectations, with no significant surprises noted.

When discussing the 'Planning to continue in irrigation' Profile and associated BRFS options presented, attendee perspectives offered included the following:

- While some participants expressed interest in investigating opportunities for increased on farm storage, others noted the losses associated with evaporation and unsuitable soil conditions made it impractical for some properties.
- Managed Aquifer Recharge may be suitable at an individual scale and some support to investigate this was observed.
- Previously conducted on-farm planning has not provided confidence to invest more money given the system reliability concerns.
- Pointed out the average age of a farmer is 59 and thus it may be unrealistic to be securing loans and financial support. Some of the options (such as whole farm planning and on farm storage) may only be suitable with significant government funding.
- Reliability is based around 100% allocation however a lot of active irrigators don't actually require this reliability as they can 'innovate' and 'manage the system'. There is a desire for simplified processes to allow greater use of unused water (trading of allocation and carryover).
- Reiterated trading options do not increase overall system reliability however assist irrigators to manage water related risks.
- One participant suggested farmers have always managed their own risks and would continue to make the tough decisions around future planning.
- In order to provide more flexibility to farmers, participants suggested improvements to carryover arrangements should be considered.

- Broken Creek irrigators struggle to pump from the creek as it simply doesn't run at a high enough level.
 - Some support shown for an irrigation pipeline for Broken Creek irrigators however limitations and difficulties were noted.

When discussing the 'Uncertain and requiring additional information' Profile and associated BRFS options presented, attendee perspectives offered included the following:

- Requests for water market trading education and assistance for the community.
- It was noted people often find the trading process very complicated and confusing. Often water share is available but people aren't selling and brokers have minimal interest in following up with very minimal money to be made in the Broken System.
- Noted a priority aim is to assist entitlement holders make informed decisions. It is a reality that not all properties and customers may be suited to stay in irrigation, the study cannot resolve all issues for all irrigators.

When discussing the 'Planning to transition out of irrigation' Profile and associated BRFS options presented, attendee perspectives offered included the following:

- Previous whole farm planning programs have been aimed at modernisation in gravity irrigation systems and this may need to be adapted for the Broken system. It was explained that for this option the focus is the on the 'sit down and planning' at an individual level but it is understood this would need some tweaking for a Broken specific solution.
- Questions around the logic for decommissioning Gowangardie Weir. It is an important long-standing structure with environmental values upstream of the weir. It was noted that the main concern with the weir is fish passage and that effects that removal of the weir may have on irrigators would be considered in any decommission investigations. Some customers rely on fixed pool and river height data from the above weir.

When discussing the 'No irrigation but require secure D&S access' Profile and associated BRFS options presented, attendee perspectives offered included the following:

- General support expressed in each session for options to provide reliable access to basic D&S water needs.
- Queried if implementing Stock and Domestic supply options would require water from customers existing HRWS. The options would require HRWS from the

existing entitlement pool for implementation. However, the exact form this option takes is an area to explore in more detailed investigations if the feasibility study demonstrates sufficient community support.

- Continued growth of lifestyle blocks and overall community D&S use makes D&S options complex i.e. Does a lifestyle block have the same right as an irrigator who relies on water for livelihood?
- Questions on whether 2 ML is sufficient for D & S use.

When discussing the 'Own Water Share and trade annual allocation' Profile and associated BRFS options presented, attendee perspectives offered included the following:

- Question about whether there was any back-trade in dry years. It was explained that back-trade can only occur when trade out occurs and in dry years this does not occur.

Other questions and discussion points raised by participants included:

- The devastation of flood events remains front of mind for many. While outside of this study, flood management improvements, particularly improvement to flood warnings, are being sought through the flood inquiry.
- Participants described the difficulties with maintaining a productive farm while experiencing the impacts of recent flooding events.
- One attendee showed interest in recycled water possibilities. It has been considered, but there doesn't appear to be significant uncommitted water for it to be treated as a standalone option.
- Questions on how losses in the system are accounted for. i.e. were losses shown in the graphs presented? It was noted that significant losses occur to run the system and a substantial portion of Lake Nillahcootie storage capacity is set aside to accommodate those losses.
- Observations that climate change predictions are just that and are not an absolute forecast. It was reiterated that the modelled high-emissions scenario is a real possible future scenario.
- An attendee noted that since the decommissioning of Lake Mokoan, a great deal of land that was once irrigated has been converted to 'dry land' country (i.e. non-irrigated).
- Links were drawn between the reduction in irrigation and falling groundwater levels, leading to reduced access to bore water. A healthy flow in the waterway is critically important for recharging the groundwater aquifers.

- Strong support for the position that the region can't afford to lose the important values provided by Broken Creek from landowners in and near Zone 3
- Broken Creek is operated very differently to how it was decades ago due to long term sediment build up. It is a shallow and slower flowing waterway. It must be run year-round and with a constant flow to meet irrigation and stock and domestic demand.
- One participant suggested the Broken Creek has changed significantly in their lifetime, going from '1 foot of mud and 6 foot of water to 6 foot of mud and 1 foot of water'. They also expressed a view that parts of the creek now resemble a muddy drain rather than a natural waterway.
 - Note: challenges for flushing sediment and debris from waterways are a limiting factor. Artificially increasing the rate of flow is not possible in many cases as it will result in properties being flooded. The volume of water required to regularly flush the creek is significant and environmental water holders don't currently have enough Broken system entitlement to meet that need.
- Participants described frustration with allocation being high in years when it's not needed and low when it's needed most.
- One attendee expressed dissatisfaction with paying fees in years where very minimal allocation is received, noting the money spent could be put to better use, such as investing in farm infrastructure improvements.
- There was concern that reduced water in the system with lower flows could mean entitlement holders at the end of the system (lower end) may not be able to take the water when needed if water depth is too low for the pumps to operate.
- One attendee challenged the current definition of D&S being limited to animal stock, suggesting that the demands of modern society may reduce animal agricultural practices and see growth in plant-based agriculture. Under the current D&S definition, the needs of animal stock is catered for but planted stock is not.
- One participant spoke of observed trends in recent farmland sales on the Broken system. There are often properties coming onto the market where the seller retains the water entitlement with the expectation of an upcoming government entitlement purchase. Example given of the property purchaser directly requesting to buy the entitlement and the seller still opting to hold the entitlement.
- The nature of Broken System losses was discussed, noting that it is a complicated subject and not easily simplified. Importantly, many of the options contemplated do not materially change the overall losses, as it is a river system and passing flows needed to support the environment is a limiting factor.

Next steps

- Community members were encouraged to complete the survey to ensure study outcomes reflect the views of the community.
- Attendees were provided with information sheets to take home and share what they have learned with neighbours and friends who may not have been able to attend.
- A social pinpoint map is available on the study website for community members to continue providing location-based feedback yoursay.gmwater.com.au/brfs
- Further one-on-one engagement sessions were offered to give those that couldn't attend an opportunity to participate in the study.

OFFICIAL

@goulburnmurraywater

@GMWater

@goulburnmurraywater

