

Irrigation Control System Upgrade

Member's Briefing Summary

What are we upgrading?

Our irrigation system doesn't only consist of pumps, pipes, valves, and sprinklers. To irrigate at night (when it doesn't interfere with golf, and when power is cheapest), we rely on computer programs, electronic components and the underground wiring network throughout the course.

It's this entire electronic system that we need to replace.

Why?

The system we currently rely upon was developed in the 1980's and not only has technology come a LONG way since then, but the system is obsolete, with spare parts and support no longer being available from 2027.

The existing electronic network, which runs throughout the course, runs on AC power. The wiring has a life span of 25-30 years. We have reached that threshold and have encountered increased wiring issues recently (e.g. the trenches and new wiring on 13th and 15th).

The very latest irrigation technology uses DC power, and can send diagnostic data back to the irrigation software, enabling staff to locate, identify and troubleshoot faults or potential faults - before the turf dies or deteriorates. We can be proactive, instead of reacting after the turf deteriorates.

An significant additional benefit of a full course rewire is that the number of wire joins (potential points of failure) will be significantly reduced. Faulty wire joins are a major issue for our current system.

The latest software technology makes irrigation management much more efficient. Staff are able to access the full irrigation software on their phones and make adjustments remotely in real time.

It also enables staff to set irrigation amounts in mm (equivalent to rainfall) rather than in minutes. This helps to reduce the guesswork involved in determining irrigation run times and ultimately leads to better turf and efficient water use.

The installation and connection of on-site weather devices (eg weather stations, rain cans) to the irrigation software enables the system to automatically halt and/or adjust irrigation

amounts, in real time, according to the amount of rainfall the course has received prior to or during the irrigation cycle.

Clubs who have upgraded their irrigations systems to this latest technology have reported water savings of 10-50%.

Who is doing the upgrade?

After an exhaustive investigation and selection process, we have selected Rainbird as the preferred supplier to supply our new system, replacing our current Toro system.

The lowest quote was from Rainbird, including components and installation was over \$300,000.

Having sought the advice of many Superintendents, their feedback was consistent – either Toro or Rainbird systems will do the job very, very well. They also said it was very important to have a good installation contractor.

Mac Ross from Barwon Irrigation will be our primary installation contractor, with assistance from subcontractors and support from Axedale Irrigation.

Some of the additional benefits contained in the Rainbird proposal were:

- Replacement of all 129 valves throughout our course.
- Replacement and/or resetting of every valve box (many of them of which are broken and/or uneven).
- With every green-side sprinkler being replaced by Rainbird sprinklers, we can recoup some funds by selling the newer, better Toro sprinklers already installed.

Our ultimate aim is to future-proof our irrigation system as much as possible – gain as much 'bang for our buck' as we can. The Rainbird proposal, with the added significant benefits of valve and valve box replacement (meaning every wire join throughout the course would be brand-new and to specification), was a key decisive factor.

When will it be installed?

The ideal time for irrigation upgrades is during the cooler, wetter months when irrigation is not required. So, installation will start in mid-May 2027, and should take about 16 weeks. There will be considerable planning conducted in the meantime, between staff, course

Committee and Match Committee to minimise the impact on members and with members kept fully informed.

How will it be installed?

Most of the new irrigation cable will be mole-ploughed throughout the course, leaving minimal surface disruption to the turf. Where rocky ground prevents mole ploughing, open trenching will be required. This will cause some surface disruption, however we will endeavor to keep it to a minimum and return the surface to original or better standard. We won't know the extent of this until work commences.

The 8 Toro sprinklers surrounding each green will be removed and replaced with brand-new Rainbird sprinklers. This will require some digging, however quality from the nursery will be used to repair these areas after installation.

All 129 Toro valves on the course (on fairways and beside tees) will need to be dug up and replaced with Rainbird valves so their new decoders can be fitted. This will require excavation to expose all of the pipework leading to and from the valves. In some cases, it will be easier and more effective to start to relocate the valves entirely. No fairway or tee sprinklers will be replaced, only the valves.

This work is time-consuming and requires contractors to spend considerable time on fairways and tees. Therefore hole closures will be inevitable - for the safety of contractors and golfers, and for the working efficiency of the contractors. We will take this opportunity to do additional work on those closed holes where required. For example on the 18th we will look at improving the drainage in the bunker and in front of the green.

We have already begun discussing the use and locations of temporary greens around the course so that golfers can complete a full round of 18 holes. Any temporary greens put in place will be prepared, maintained and protected during the growing season so that putting conditions on these greens are as good as possible during the winter months.

Funding options

We looked at our current financial position and the trends over recent years and whilst everything has been positive,

We are looking at ways to minimise our risk.

Our preferences & aims are:

1. To have this project totally funded by outside sources. A big ask but possible.

- Through Bendigo council, we have applied for a \$230K grant from Sports Victoria of which we have committed to provide the balance of \$153K. However, that \$153K could come from outside sources; it does not need to come from our cash reserves. So, if we were successful with the grant, our contribution could be substituted with funds from corporates (e.g. Fosterville Gold mine) or from other grants such as Coliban, North Central CMA etc.

We have already started on looking at these sources of fundings and have meetings scheduled over the coming weeks.

2. If we lose out on that grant, we the other grants or corporate support we are pursuing could replace the \$230K sought from SV. We are already pursuing these options, with Coliban Water, NCCMA and Fosterville Gold Mine. We will not be waiting to for the results of the SV grant application.
3. If we are unsuccessful (or don't raise enough support), the Club will need to use around \$150k of our cash reserves and borrow the rest.
 - The loan could be from a variety of sources:
We have commenced discussions with Rainbird on Vendor finance. Our estimate from initial discussions with Rainbird is that loan repayments would equate to around \$50K per year on a 5-year loan.
 - We are also seeking details of “commercial” loans for comparison purposes.
4. As for 3 above, but we will explore “member debentures”. This needs further development and an idea of potential uptake as it imposes additional work on the club.

Managing our Finances

We are looking to secure as much external money as possible. We are hoping for the best but are planning for the worst – the possibility we can’t source external money and need to borrow.

Based on a potential \$50K per year in loan payments, we are looking at how we might increase our revenue to help service a loan and not have this significantly affect our current business operations.

The recommended member fees for FY2027 were predicated on the assumption we will need to service a loan.

It is important to note that the club receives about 70% of our general revenue from members. We looked at adopting a “user pays” approach and trying to spread the load across members and non-members.

In considering membership fees, we started with a near 5% CPI increase, which is the minimum we need to meet our normal operational costs. Rent, insurance and fuel have all increased significantly.

Committee also looked at increasing competition fees (which haven't increased for 7 years). A \$1 increase would raise an additional \$13K, but those fees would be paid only by members who play competition. Around half our members don't play or play infrequently. So a member playing twice weekly - and more than 100 do – would find that a \$1 increase in competition fees would cost them \$100 p.a. or \$50 if they only played weekly. Whereas someone not playing competition would pay nothing.

At present we chose to leave the competition fee unchanged because we want people playing competition, fraternising and spending money on the Bar and raffle.

For additional revenue our attention then turned back to the membership fee, which is paid by everyone and more fairly shares the cost invested in the golf course we all play. We elected to double the CPI increase, raising an extra \$13k evenly spread.

Committee is yet to finalise increases in other charges including green fees and cart hire but they will increase. Current members have built the cash balance we have committed to the project. A modest joining fee – ‘irrigation levy’ – would see new members contributing as well.

Our modelling shows all of these charges could potentially provide an additional \$42K of revenue.

We will also look at cart storage fees which have not increased in more than 15 years. Electricity costs have risen considerably over that time, so we will look at adjusting these in the coming months.

Our dream scenario is that we win the grant, achieve corporate sponsorship and are left with only a modest residual amount we can fund from cash already held.