



# Channel Decommissioning

Channels have played a vital role in carrying water to properties throughout the Wimmera-Mallee region for nearly a century.

With the construction of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline system, the role of water supply channels will change significantly.

GWMWater's base principle is that all channels and associated structures will be decommissioned unless there is sound justification for retention. Justifications may include flood mitigation, drainage, cultural heritage, supply to recreational lakes or environmental benefit.

GWMWater is reminding landholders that it is too soon to start 'filling in' channels that are part of the existing Wimmera Mallee stock and domestic channel supply system. Before starting any on-farm works that

impact on the channel system, landholders should contact their council to check if they need a local government planning permit.

GWMWater is working with local government, catchment management authorities and road and rail authorities in developing a decommissioning strategy, including guidelines for on-farm works. This strategy is expected to be completed in late 2008. The strategy will consider drainage and runoff issues and the retention of some channels to supply and help provide natural runoff to recreational lakes and wetlands.

Some sections of channels may be initially blocked off at various points to ensure runoff is isolated to local catchment areas and does not travel uncontrolled along the channel and cause problems downstream.

## Retaining channels

In some places it may be necessary to retain channels. Examples of these situations are:

- > Where threatened or endangered flora has established on, or in proximity to, the channel.
- > Where channels convey water to natural waterways, minimising the impacts of flooding on people and property, both locally and downstream.
- > Where channel banks act as contour banks to slow and redirect the movement of surface water, thereby preventing or minimising soil erosion.
- > Where channels supply water to recreational lakes and the natural catchment has been modified, is non-existent or minimal.

## Redundant channels and channel easements

After the pipeline system is operational, there will be no need for property owners to retain channels deemed to be redundant.

Redundant channels may be filled-in and returned to productive use by the landowner.

This will help improve paddock layout, and remove pest animal and weed problems and channel seepage.



This historic photograph shows Clydesdale horses and Wimmera pioneers building Toolondo channel, which is part of the Wimmera Mallee stock and domestic open channel system. This photograph was taken about 20 kilometres south of Horsham in the mid to late 1950s.

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What landowners back-fill and the timing of the work is up to each individual landowner. There is no compulsion to undertake the works.

Where a channel is located within a registered easement, landowners may choose to have the easement removed from their title. The costs associated with easement removal have not been built into the pipeline project, but GMMWater is happy to provide a letter and advice to council that specifies the easement in question is no longer required. (*refer to 'Easements' Fact Sheet for more detail*).

## Very large channels

For channels that are very large and classified as difficult for landowners to cope with, GMMWater will bring the channel size back to the equivalent to other channels so the landowner can complete backfilling.

Removing or burying structures on the channels is also up to the landowner unless the structures are classified as very large and unable to be managed by the landowner.

If backfilling involves removal of native vegetation, landowners need to seek planning approval from their council.

Councils and VicRoads will help determine a decommissioning strategy for highway and road structures. Some structures may be removed and others back-filled.

Further information regarding channel decommissioning is available by contacting the **Horsham Piping It Office** on **1300 659 961** or by dropping into the office at **42-44 Kalkee Road**.