



Chris Hewitt

A long road

Warracknabeal district farmer Chris Hewitt saw the benefits of piping the Northern Mallee during nine years as a board member of the former Wimmera Mallee Water authority.

He said the opening of each stage of the Northern Mallee Pipeline were great highlights of his '15 years plus' involvement in the water industry. He saw first-hand the good quality supply of water which brought many benefits to the Northern Mallee including extra productivity and increased social amenity such as the ability to have green parks.

At the same time, he was also seeing the Wimmera Mallee's ageing open channel system and a myriad of maintenance issues it was creating. The Wimmera Mallee water supply problems prompted Chris to join early lobbying for continuing the Northern Mallee project by piping the rest of the Mallee and the Wimmera.

"It pays to remember that our region would be in even more trouble with water supply if not for the Northern Mallee pipeline," he said. Almost a decade of below average rain has Wimmera storages languishing at record low levels. To put this into context, the Wimmera Mail-Times newspaper highlights the water situation in late July 2006:

- Horsham is well into its 10th dry year in a row.

- The run of dry years includes the 2002 drought.
- For the first six months of this year, Horsham recorded less rain than the 2002 drought – 114mm to the end of June this year compared with 127mm for the same period in 2002.
- Grampians storages are at an alarming 7.0 per cent of capacity – an all-time low for this time of the year.

"I remember about five years ago during one of our lobbying trips to Canberra, John Howard's chief of staff was horrified to hear that our storages were at 32 percent of capacity!" Chris said. The early run of dry years in the region helped arguments for piping the Wimmera-Mallee but no-one back then ever imagined the extended run of dry years that followed and the dire need to conserve every drop of water in the supply system.

"It is really unfortunate that the system isn't already piped because 7.0 percent would be enough to provide the region with 12 months' supply in a piped system. As it is, our region faces uncertainty with water supply while we wait for piping," he said.

Chris represented Wimmera Mallee Water on a committee pushing for funding for a feasibility study for the Wimmera Mallee project. He continued

on the committee throughout the feasibility stage, representing the Victorian Farmers Federation after completing one term on the Wimmera Mallee Water board. He then moved onto the pipeline steering committee and joined people such as Stewart Petering and Jo Bourke in lobbying the Federal Government for funding for the detailed design stage.

Chris was appointed chairman of a community steering committee responsible for lobbying governments for funding and ensuring that community concepts for the pipeline were included in the design processes. During this time Jo Bourke chaired a project control committee and the pair traveled to Canberra a number of times over the years for high level talks with government.

He later became a board member on the new GWMWater, created from the merger of Wimmera Mallee Water and Grampians Water. As a current board member Chris continues to watch with interest the progress of the pipeline project.

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