



## West Wimmera Rural Water Supply Feasibility Project

The West Wimmera Shire covers more than 9,000 square kilometres, encompassing sections of the Little Desert and Big Desert National Parks and more than 2,000 natural wetlands. The main economic activity in the region is agriculture, primarily broadacre grain, intensive animal, seed, sheep and wool production.

The southern end of the West Wimmera shire is primarily reliant on rainfall runoff for domestic and stock water supplies. Access to good quality groundwater supports agricultural activities in the western side of the shire area but the West Wimmera aquifers tend to be more saline and lower yielding in the eastern end. This area has typically had a reliable catchment to support grazing and agricultural activities, but years of drought have had a severe impact on agricultural productivity.

The West Wimmera shire also boasts a large number of wetlands, which when full, provide important habitat for flora and fauna as well as social and recreational benefits to the region. In drier years these natural wetlands have run dry, threatening the environmental and social benefits that water can have in this region.

In the context of climate change, it is likely that these wetlands will be dry more often than has been experienced in the past. The extent that local catchment dams have also been a reliable source of water is also being challenged under climate change and the extent that this has implications for agricultural productivity may be aided by a reticulated water supply.

### What is the West Wimmera Rural Water Supply Project?

GWMWater and the West Wimmera Shire Council have been approached to investigate the feasibility of extending the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline to provide water to the farm gate in the south east region of the shire, where groundwater and surface catchments are unreliable.

If feasible, a pipeline extension will reach into agricultural areas in the south east of the West Wimmera Shire, where traditionally there has been reliable rainfall. With the prospect of an ongoing drier climate, agricultural productivity and growth could be enhanced in this region by the installation of a reticulated water delivery network.

A piped water supply could also provide ongoing water security for the townships of Edenhope and Harrow as well as significant economic, social, recreational and environmental benefits to the region.

### **What is the project area?**

The project area to be investigated encompasses the south eastern corner of the West Wimmera Shire, extending from Rocklands Reservoir to Edenhope across to Wombelano and down towards Balmoral. An indicative project boundary has been provided at the end of this factsheet, although the final area will be determined by the extent of interested landholders. If sufficient interest in the vicinity of the project area nominated is obtained, a detailed design will take place to provide piped water to the farm gate.

### **What are the potential benefits of a piped water supply?**

A pipeline providing water to currently un-serviced areas could:

- allow existing agricultural enterprises to consolidate and expand knowing they have access to a reliable, high quality water supply 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- encourage new enterprises and investment to the region with the certainty of continued access to water.
- improve the water supply security to the townships of Harrow and Edenhope.
- increase environmental benefits for local waterways and wetlands by removing the reliance on catchment dams, which may enhance inflows into the Glenelg River.
- provide recreational and social benefits with the possibility of releasing some water into Lake Wallace or alternative waterbodies.

### **Who is funding the Project?**

The feasibility project to investigate extending the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline into the West Wimmera Shire has been jointly funded by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and GWMWater.

### **What is being funded?**

**Phase 1** is the development of a feasibility report, identifying the desire and capability of providing affordable water supply options that will meet the need of the West Wimmera region; and

**Phase 2** is dependent on the results of Phase 1. If the project is found to be feasible the next step will be to proceed to a full business case that determines the preferred solution and details likely costs involved to construct and supply water. When complete, the business case can be used to secure infrastructure funding for the required works.

### **Who is involved in the project?**

To oversee the development of the feasibility study a Project Steering Committee (PSC) has been formed, made up of representatives from the main government agencies. These include representatives from:

- GWMWater
- DELWP
- West Wimmera Shire Council
- Southern Grampians Shire Council
- The Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
- Regional Development Victoria
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
- Glenelg-Hopkins Catchment Management Authority

A key component of Phase 1 of the project is to receive feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders, particularly landowners in the project area to determine if they want a piped water supply.

To facilitate this engagement, the West Wimmera Shire Council is establishing a Customer Consultative Committee. The role of this committee is to support the PSC to investigate the demand for a more reliable water supply to the regions around and south east of Edenhope.

Specifically, the Customer Consultative Committee will represent the views of potential customers and beneficiaries of a piped supply to help identify potential social, economic and environmental impacts and benefits of the project.

### **Where will the pipes go?**

Infrastructure to deliver water to Iluka Resources' mineral sands mine at Douglas has remained unused since mining activities ceased. This existing pipeline could potentially be used as part of an overall supply scheme extending into the West Wimmera Shire.

The exact location of pipes will occur after the customer consultative committee has identified landholders interested in receiving a supply and cultural and environmental considerations are assessed.

### **Where will the water come from?**

The source of water will be investigated as part of the feasibility study. It is assumed that the most efficient supply will be from Rocklands Reservoir via the pipeline constructed by Iluka to the decommissioned Douglas mine.

### **Do I have to connect?**

Landholders will have the opportunity to opt-in and will not be required to connect.

The feasibility of the project will require an assessment of the number of interested landowners and may not proceed if sufficient interest cannot be demonstrated.

### **What is the cost likely to be?**

A project of this scale would seek contributions from third parties such as government. A business case will need to be presented, outlining commitments from landowners as well as additional social and environmental benefits the project is expected to achieve.

Upon confirmation of interested landowners, detailed preliminary design for the pipeline and full costing for the project, the completed business case will be presented to the government for infrastructure funding.

Whilst the full cost to landowners and/or the community is not yet be known, similar rural pipeline infrastructure projects have required a financial contribution of no more than \$15,000 per landowner, per farm enterprise.

It is anticipated that this amount would be the most a landowner would be required to contribute to receiving a piped supply of water to the farm gate and depending on the number of farmers deciding to connect it could be significantly less than this amount.

In addition to the capital contribution, landowners would be required to purchase a water allowance and pay ongoing service fees and for water usage as per existing rural water customers of GMMWater.

**What do I have to do if I am interested in learning more?**

Make contact with a customer consultative committee member, the West Wimmera Shire Council or contact GMMWater for further information.

Attend an information session to be held across the region to inform the community and landholders about the feasibility project.

Lodge an expression of interest to connect to your property to a secure non-potable water supply.

Further information on GMMWater's services can be found on our website at [www.gmmwater.org.au/wwrp](http://www.gmmwater.org.au/wwrp) or by calling us on 1300 659 961.

The following fact sheets are available on the website:

- Expression of Interest to connect to a secure water supply form
- New customers – rural pipeline systems
- On farm benefits of a piped water supply
- Rural pipeline products and charges
- On-farm water reticulation
- About GMMWater
- Benefits of piped water for lifestyle property owners
- Rural Customer Charter

# Indicative Project Boundary

