

# Tapping In



GWM Water

Newsletter 2 2025/2026

The Western Highway sign which marked the completion of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.

## 15 years of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline

Fifteen years ago, construction of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline was completed, marking one of the most transformative infrastructure projects in regional Victoria's history. Stretching across the Wimmera and Mallee regions and replacing 17,000 kilometres of open channels, the pipeline has reshaped how water is managed and delivered in one of Victoria's driest areas.

**The open channel system, some of which dated back to the early 1900s, lost up to 90 percent of its water through seepage and evaporation. During prolonged droughts, this inefficiency left communities, farms, and ecosystems vulnerable to severe water shortages. The need for a modern, climate-resilient solution was urgent.**

The Wimmera Mallee Pipeline delivered just that.

Completed in 2010, the project introduced a pressurised, closed-pipe system that now supplies water to more than 9,000 rural properties, 36 towns and many environmental sites. It has stopped water being lost to seepage and evaporation and ensured a more reliable supply even during the worst dry spells.

For landholders, the benefits have been substantial. With a dependable water supply, many have been able to diversify their operations, invest in more efficient systems for water use and better plan for dry years. The pipeline has also reduced

the need for farm dams, freeing up land and reducing maintenance costs.

Towns across the region have also seen significant improvements. Communities that once faced strict water restrictions now enjoy a more stable water supply, supporting regional growth, local businesses and public amenities. The pipeline has also enhanced emergency response capabilities, providing critical water access for firefighting.

Environmental outcomes have been equally important. The pipeline has enabled more targeted and efficient delivery of environmental flows to rivers, wetlands and lakes, helping to restore and maintain vital ecosystems.

The Wimmera Mallee Pipeline is more than just a piece of infrastructure; it has future-proofed western Victoria against the increasing challenges of climate variability and water scarcity, as it continues to deliver value to communities, agriculture and the environment.

## WHAT'S INSIDE

▲ SPECIAL FEATURE: 15 YEARS OF THE WIMMERA MALLEE PIPELINE



Former Water Minister, Tim Holding, former GWMWater Chair, Barry Clugston, and former Member for Mallee, John Forrest MP, turning on the water for Supply System 1 at Rainbow in 2007.

# 15 years of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline



## Mark Williams Managing Director, GWMWater

After 15 years of operation of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline, the consistent theme of feedback is how much the pipeline has been a game changer in rural farming operations.

For some in the Wimmera Mallee, there is no longer a lived history of the Wimmera Mallee channel system.

For those that do remember, they know how valuable the improved water security and quality have been.

The loss of farm dams and the recreation and social amenity that they provided farming families in the pre-pipeline era has been offset by the commitment to recreation water.

GWMWater has worked with the communities of the Wimmera and Mallee to extend the reach of recreational water beyond those nominated by the pipeline business case.

The ability to work with the community to retrofit a recreation lake in the Northern Mallee with the construction of Ouyen Lake has been one of our greatest successes.

Other achievements include Walkers Lake, Rainbow Lake, Nhill Lake, Yaapeet Lake and Donald Weir Pool. We are now also working with Gannawarra Shire Council to deliver water to the Avoca Weir Pool in Quambatook.

We have seen the expansion of intensive agriculture in the region since the pipeline was completed. We have also been able to extend the reach of the pipeline network to other parts of north-west Victoria.

To recognise the significance of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline's impact on the region, we have invited three Wimmera-Mallee luminaries who were involved in advocating for and planning the delivery of the pipeline to share their reflections.



Former GWMWater Managing Director, Jeff Rigby, at the community celebration for the completion of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.

Community celebration for the completion of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline.



## Darryl Argall Mayor, Hindmarsh Shire Council (2007)

For Darryl Argall, the journey toward the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline began with a bus ride, one that would ultimately lead to one of the

most significant infrastructure transformations in regional Victoria.

“It all started when I boarded a Wimmera Mallee Water\* bus at Minyip,” Darryl recalls. “We were heading out to inspect the Northern Mallee Pipeline Project, which was taking water from the Murray River at Piangil to Ouyen and Manangatang.”

The group stopped at the Donald Main Channel — a massive earthen structure, 20 metres wide and five metres deep. Below it lay a vast salt wasteland, a stark reminder of the environmental damage caused by water escaping the channel.

“Wimmera Mallee’s solution at the time was to line the channels with clay and plastic,” he explains. “But I knew evaporation would still lead to massive water loss.”

Back on the bus, Darryl saw the pipeline heading to Ouyen with crystal-clear water filling the reservoir, not a drop wasted. Over lunch, he voiced his concerns and was strongly supported by Councillor Maurice “Hook” Brain, who passionately advocated for piping the entire channel system.

That conversation sparked a movement. A few weeks later, a meeting at Yarriambiack Shire Council brought together a group of volunteers who would lead the ‘Pipe the Channels’ campaign. Darryl drew on his experience lobbying for the Roads to Recovery program in Canberra, where he had successfully argued for federal investment in local roads.

“I recommended the same approach for the pipeline,” he says. “We enlisted as many businesses and community groups as we could. The politicians began to listen.”

One pivotal moment came during a visit by Steve Bracks, John Brumby and John Thwaites to Antwerp. Darryl took them into a dry gully and asked if they knew where they were.

“You’re standing at the bottom of the bone-dry Wimmera River; a heritage-listed river,” he told them.

Bracks responded, “I think we should try to get water back into it.”

Darryl replied: “Pipe the channels and return the saved water to the river.”

The State Government became a strong supporter of the pipeline. Despite extreme drought conditions, the project was completed in just four years — a testament to the urgency, collaboration and determination of the region.

“It wasn’t just about infrastructure,” Darryl says. “It was about restoring our environment, securing our towns and giving future generations a chance to thrive.”

\*Wimmera Mallee Water and Grampians Water merged in 2004 to form GWMWater.



Primary schools' mural at the community celebration.



## Jo Bourke

### GWMWater employee & Chair of the Wimmera CMA (2007)

For Jo Bourke, a former GWMWater employee and former Chair of the Wimmera Catchment Management Authority (CMA), her involvement in the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project began in 2002, when she joined the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project Planning Group, tasked with preparing the business case.

What stands out most in her memory is the unwavering commitment of regional leaders to ensure the pipeline addressed every issue the community raised.

“Our theme became ‘A future for our children,’” Jo says. “We knew the current water management system was unsustainable, and we had to act.”

The business case was built around six key pillars: Environmental Sustainability, Water for Agriculture, Secured Town Supplies, Social and Recreational Objectives, Improved Water Quality and Water for New Development.

“All of these were incorporated into the pipeline so successfully that many in our region now take them for granted,” Jo reflects.

As Chair of the Wimmera CMA, Jo saw firsthand the environmental toll of the old system. Rivers and streams were drying due to a lack of flow, with water harvested for stock and domestic use. It wasn't sustainable.

“We were working in a period of absolute uncertainty,” she says. “Extended drought, joint funding arrangements and differing government priorities made it incredibly challenging.”

The Federal Government focused on environmental outcomes and national water policy, while the Victorian Government sought economic returns from infrastructure investment. Balancing these interests and convincing sceptics that such a large-scale project could succeed, was no small feat.

Jo's vision was clear. In the foreword to the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project business case, she wrote:

“Our vision is of a region where the environment is restored and sustained, where the economy generates wealth for the region and where people thrive. Piping water supplies to the communities of the Wimmera-Mallee will create the framework to achieve that vision.”

Fifteen years later, Jo believes that vision has been realised.

“The pipeline has delivered on that aspiration. It's given us the ability to sustainably manage water resources, allocate water that was once lost and maximise allocations even in the face of rainfall variability.”

*“It truly has provided a future for our children.”*



## Mary Fielding

### Community representative of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project Management Committee (2007)

“It was one of the greatest honours of my life to be one of the community representatives on the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project Management Committee. We were tasked with providing one of the avenues for community input and feedback on the proposed structure and deliverables of the pipeline.”

“Looking back over the 15 years of the life of the pipeline, the changes to agriculture and industry in the pipeline footprint have been enormous. Much of this change was possible by having access to high quality, reliable water and a design that has allowed it to cater for the rapidly changing demands that new opportunities place on the water supply now, and into the future.”

“In my opinion, the pipeline has delivered on all fronts; economic, social and environmental. Especially the Wimmera and Glenelg rivers, and to a lesser extent, off-stream water for environmental water bodies.”

“The pipeline was a wonderful forward-thinking project which has given our communities one of the most important pillars for survival and growth; water.”

A large-scale water treatment facility with multiple rectangular tanks containing brownish water. Workers in orange safety vests are visible on walkways above the tanks.

# Clean water for the Mallee

Following a successful pilot in Ouyen, GWMWater is expanding its Clean Water for North-West Rural Communities Project to Nyah, Piangil and the Waranga Channel. The project includes new treatment plants and pump stations to improve water sourced from the Murray River and Waranga Channel.

The facilities will treat 1.8 gigalitres\* annually, benefiting more than 750 farms and urban customers near Swan Hill. Construction is underway at Nyah, with upgrades at Piangil and Waranga Channel due within two years.

Customers in these areas can expect similar improvements to those seen in Ouyen, with the Waranga Channel plant supplying clean water to the South West Loddon Pipeline.

The new infrastructure aims to reduce risks from blue-green algae and black water events, ensuring a more consistent water quality for our rural customers.

The project is jointly funded by the Australian Government (\$5 million) and GWMWater (\$8.56 million). Australian Government funding is provided through the National Water Grid Fund.

\*1 gigalitre = 1000 megalitres = 1 billion litres

The treatment plant in Ouyen.

## Meet Chelsea!

Chelsea is a Water Services Operator in the Mallee Service Delivery team. Based in Ouyen, she supports the Mallee team through site inspections, interruptions, general maintenance, main breaks and potential sewer blockages. She enjoys the variety of work, a great team environment and the fact that everyday day is different.

Chelsea grew up in Port Hedland, WA, and while at school she was encouraged by her parents to pursue a school-based TAFE pathway. Chelsea then got an apprenticeship as a plumber where she completed her plumbing trade and worked for large mining companies. It is during this time where she met her electrician partner; Joel, who is originally off a farm in the Mallee. Joel and Chelsea then moved to Ouyen, and Chelsea worked in multiple casual jobs in agriculture, hospitality and childcare before starting with GWMWater in October 2024.

Living so close to Ouyen Lake, Chelsea appreciates spending time at the lake swimming, walking and running. As a member and committee member of the Ouyen Community Gym, she likes to keep fit and takes an active role in maintaining the gym facilities. Chelsea is also a part of the Ouyen United Football and Netball Club where she played netball last year.

Chelsea enjoys living in the Mallee. She values the connections and appreciates the volunteers that drive the community.



Looking for your next career move?

Sign up to job alerts at  
[gwmwater.org.au/careers](https://gwmwater.org.au/careers)



## Summer splash across our region!

We are making waves this summer with our commitment to recreational water across the Wimmera and Mallee—bringing life and local pride to our lakes and weir pools!

With up to 1,850 ML\* redirected from urban and rural holdings, plus 680 ML of high reliability water from the Murray and Goulburn systems, locals and visitors alike can look forward to recreational water activities in our region.

**“Recreational water is vital to our communities — it drives tourism, supports local businesses and makes our towns more liveable.”**

Mark Williams, Managing Director

This initiative builds on 15 years of support through the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline. In 2024/25, 2,699 ML was delivered to Grampians-supplied lakes, with 753 ML carried over for the 2025/26 year.

From 18 August, 12,360 ML was transferred from Rocklands Reservoir to Taylors Lake, boosting environmental flows and recreational value while being a backup supply.

The top-up of water across our lakes and weir pools do not compromise water supply to our customers.

A recent study found that pipeline-supplied lakes contribute \$8 million annually to the regional economy; proof that water for recreation is a smart investment in our future.

So pack a picnic, grab your paddleboard, fishing rod, family and friends and head to one of these 14 stunning lakes and weir pools!

To see the lakes and weir pools receiving an allocation, visit [gwmwater.org.au/recreational-lakes](http://gwmwater.org.au/recreational-lakes)

\*1 ML = 1 megalitre = 1 million litres

# Do you know a Year 12 student with big plans for university?

GWMWater is proud to offer five \$1,000 book sponsorships to help cover the cost of textbooks for students pursuing further studies in science, engineering, innovation, or environmental fields.

These grants are designed to support passionate young minds as they take the next step in shaping a better future.

GWMWater is committed to investing in the bright futures of our community and nurturing the next generation of thinkers, creators and problem-solvers.

To express interest, visit [gwmwater.org.au/grants](http://gwmwater.org.au/grants)

## Your chance to win \$100 off your next bill!



SCAN ME

Enter our competition by answering the below question for your chance to win \$100 off your next water bill!

**How many years has it been since the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline was completed?**

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Your GWMWater account number \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Make sure your entry gets to us no later than:

**4 pm Friday 28 November 2025**

Entries can be:

- > posted to us at PO Box 481, Horsham 3402
- > completed online at [gwmwater.org.au/competition](http://gwmwater.org.au/competition)
- > submitted by scanning the above QR code

For terms and conditions, as well as recent winners, visit [gwmwater.org.au/competition](http://gwmwater.org.au/competition)



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