



From left, Max Reid, Dennis Flett, Dorothy Reid, Peter Walsh, Keith Barber, Peter Vogel and Mark Williams at 'Roselyn Wetland' near Birchip in 2013.



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Birchip farmers say pipeline ensures refuge for wildlife 'for perpetuity'

By Melissa Pouliot for GWMWater

Retired Birchip district farmers Dorothy and Max Reid love birds. They also love blackbox woodland areas on their Wimmera plains country including one close to the house which is a haven for more than 80 species of birds.

When neighbours Keith and Helen Barber raised concerns during planning for the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project about a lack of open water in a district with very few natural lakes, creeks or rivers, Dorothy and Max were behind the campaign to "Pipe Right".

And more than a decade later, and to the great delight of community campaigners to retain open water, the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline project is delivering 1000 megalitres of water savings to wetlands.

Dorothy says this allocation has assured the future of birds and other wildlife in the Birchip district.

In the early 2000s the Reids, long-time Birchip Landcare Group members, placed a Trust for Nature covenant on the 30-hectare blackbox woodland area near the house.

They wanted to preserve the area because of its valuable blackbox trees plus its beautiful wetland, named 'Roselyn Wetland', which provides refuge for water and woodland birds including many rare and vulnerable species.

Around the same time they placed the covenant, the Wimmera-Mallee was in the midst of its worst drought on record with water storage levels hovering at around eight per cent.

It was also around this time that a pipeline project planning committee was hosting meetings across the region to finalise pipeline design.

And also in 2003, Pipe Right released a Business Case highlighting the need for the pipeline project to maximise community and environmental benefits.

Dorothy says her and Max weren't actively involved on the Pipe Right committee but attended many meetings. They took a more active role to help achieve Pipe Right goals via the Birchip Landcare Group.

"When they started talking about building the pipeline, replacing channels and decommissioning farm dams (as part of the pipeline project,) quite a few of us were very concerned about what was going to happen to the wildlife," Dorothy recalls.

"Animals such as goannas which drink out of dams can't drink out of troughs. And we'd heard from people connected to the Northern Mallee Pipeline how foxes and cats would sit by troughs to catch birds coming in for a drink.

"It was these concerns that motivated us to be part of the Pipe Right's campaign to have some environmental places of water left once the pipeline was built."

GWMWater and the Victorian Government celebrated the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline's wetlands connection project on 15 August 2013 on the banks of Roselyn Wetlands.

Water Minister Peter Walsh was a part of the community celebration which also included a tour of Keith and Helen Barber's property to visit a wetland that has an environmental allocation via the pipeline wetlands project. This wetland gained notoriety last year when Keith and Helen spotted about eight of the rarely-seen threatened bird, Australian painted snipe, at the site.

The wetlands project has connected 51 sites across the Wimmera-Mallee to benefit from water savings from the pipeline. The project's 1000-megalitre entitlement will supply sites of environmental significance. The aim is to create a network of open water across three catchment management authority regions – Mallee, North Central and Wimmera.

Dorothy says the pipeline project's allocation for wetlands is the saviour of wildlife in the area.

For example, Australasian grebes moved in to Roselyn Wetland last year to rear four young. It is the first time she can remember seeing this species on their farm. They have also seen a black swan and an increasing number of ducks including grey teal, hard-head, wood and pacific black ducks. Earlier this year the wetland was a haven for around 400 ducks at a time.

“It's not just the saviour of waterbirds, but woodland birds as well,” she says. “The pipeline ensures a refuge for wildlife for perpetuity.”

