



# FOR LIFE

*keeping water flowing*

## LIFEstory

### Pipeline water brings rural community back to life

*By Melissa Pouliot for GWMWater*

**The moment water from the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline started to trickle into Hopetoun's Lake Lascelles in September 2009, after nearly a decade of being dry, is well documented.**

About 150 people, or a quarter of Hopetoun's 583 residents, witnessed the grand occasion of their recreational lake and their community coming to life.

The close-knit community relies on the sheep and cropping land that surrounds it and its key community asset – its recreational lake.

As the first recreational lake in the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline footprint to receive water from the pipeline, the arrival of a secure and quality water supply has injected new life and enthusiasm into a community reeling from the effects of the longest drought on record.

Lake Lascelles-Corrong committee of management chairman Bert Hallam couldn't be happier.

Growing up in the Hopetoun district, Bert's parents Jack and Alma instilled a lifelong passion for the community into Bert. He says community volunteers are the lifeblood of towns such as his own.

Farming not far from town with wife Suzi and their three children, Bert was one of the key drivers of converting the reservoir he spent his childhood enjoying into a recreational retreat for locals and visitors alike.

*"I'll always remember the day the pipeline water started trickling in – there were some pretty excited community members around and we are so thankful that GWMWater listened to us and saw how important it was for our lake to be included in the recreational allocation."*

Bert joined the lake's management committee in the early 1990s. In 1996 they cleaned out the lake and refilled it as part of a project to regenerate the area. With help from Yarriambiack Shire Council the group sourced funding to build lakeside accommodation facilities and the future was looking bright.

"So many people were camping at the lake and we had school groups wanting to base themselves there so we started building the Mallee Bush Retreat. The concept was to build something that didn't compete with the local hotel-motel but would help bring a different type of visitor plus the school groups to the area," Bert says.

But not long after getting their first building finished the lake dried up. What followed for the next nine years was a gradual decline in the economic and social wellbeing of Hopetoun as the extended drought sucked the moisture and life from dams, wetlands, creeks and the farming industry.

Bert says losing the town's main social outlet for nine years took a major toll on community spirit.

"Over summer the lake is where people gather on the weekend but it's generally used all year round for walking and just gathering alongside – you would always be able to find someone to talk to down there. When it was dry for so long we lost families and we saw quite a change in the town. We didn't get the visitors and businesses closed. It was a tough time."

Bert says he'd lived through droughts his whole life but had never experienced anything like this one. When the lake first went dry he thought it would only be for a year or two – he never expected it to be dry for so long.

*“We certainly took our water for granted, that’s for sure,”*

he says.

But it didn’t take long for things to turn around in Hopetoun once water arrived.

The Mallee Bush Retreat now has eight accommodation buildings plus a communal kitchen and amenities block. Local secondary school students use the lake for canoeing as part of their school activities and school groups are staying for overnight camping trips. Visitors are coming over summer for waterskiing, camping and picnics by the lake - providing a welcome boost to local businesses.

Bert says the population has also stabilised. Three new houses were built in 2013 and the medical services are top notch. Hopetoun also has two primary schools and one secondary.

Exposure via national television program *Farmer Wants a Wife* in 2010 provided an extra boost when local farmer Devon Mills spent a day at the lake and spoke glowingly about his community at every opportunity.

“Hopetoun has got everything you need, and the pipeline has certainly made our community more attractive to hanging around,” he says.

Now the pipeline is finished and the Wimmera-Mallee has a secure water supply for perpetuity, Bert admits he worries people are again taking water for granted.

*“The probability of us getting recreational water for our lake no matter how dry things get are pretty high, but we need to be careful that we don’t take the pipeline for granted. People still need to understand that we live in a very dry part of Australia and appreciate just how lucky we are to have secure access to water for our communities and recreational facilities.”*

