

Stewart Petering

Pipeline crusader

Stewart Petering has had water on his mind most of his life. In 1944 he recalls his father going to meetings for plans to pipe the wasteful open channels that criss-cross the Wimmera.

Despite being a year of drought and terrible dust storms, the project was dropped because of the cost, Mr Petering said.

Now over 60 years later the former mayor of Yarriambiack said he was delighted one of the Wimmera's most critical projects was becoming a reality.

"It was such an interesting project, I always believed in it," Mr Petering said.

Mr Petering chaired the Pipeline Steering Committee formed in 1999 and sat on a project planning group from 2002.

He said a 'big push' to initiate the project came from local government and was taken up by Wimmera Mallee Water.

"They had already done the Northern Mallee pipeline and they showed us the way."

One of the first successful steps of the committee was seeking \$300,000 funding for a feasibility study. This part of the project alone would take several years.

"Nothing ever happened quickly, everything took a lot of time," he said.

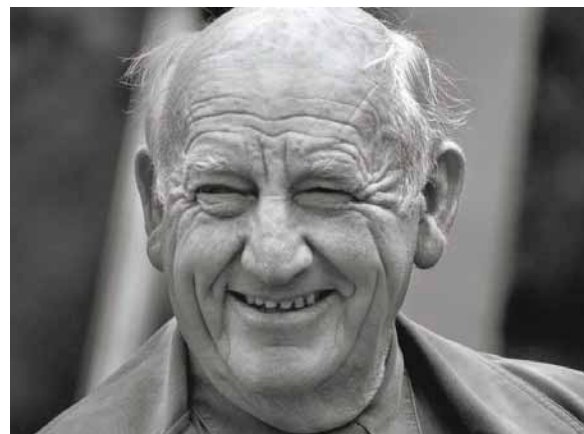
The study revealed critical figures showing that of the 120,000 megalitres released along the Wimmera's 17,500 kilometres of open channels only 17,000 was being used.

Mr Petering said in a climate where water was becoming a major national issue, nearly 90 percent of the flows were being lost to evaporation and seepage.

Unfortunately the results of the study were released on the day following the September 11 bombings in 2001.

"We didn't get a lot of publicity due to the day. However, keeping the momentum of the project going through the subsequent stages of the business plan and lobbying for the \$300 million funding was a triumph of the community working toward a common goal. It all happened because so many people were willing to put in an enormous amount of time and effort."

Mr Petering lists many names of those who were critical to the development of the project including Darryl Argall, Hook Brain, Rod Mackay, Chris Hewitt, John



Stewart Petering at the announcement of the successful tenderer for construction of stage one of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline. Photo by David Fletcher for GWMWater

Konings, Jennifer Tod and Jo Bourke as outstanding regional contributors.

"We were very lucky to have John Forrest who was the main driver for the project and had been involved in getting the funding for the Northern Mallee pipeline so we all knew about it. But we were also lucky that John Brumby understood and really supported the project from early on."

"We lobbied all parties for support because the importance of this project was above politics," Mr Petering said.

He describes one of the most satisfying moments in the long years of working for the project as the official announcement in June 2005 that confirmed federal and state government funding for two thirds of the project.

"I was very pleased that Mr Thwaites praised John Anderson and his efforts on the project," Mr Petering said.

He said the project showed how the three levels of government could work successfully together.

Mr Petering said the project did meet some opposition in the form of the Pipe Right group and concerns about on-farm costs and recreational waterways.

"But it had to happen, people had to be allowed to have their say," he said. "We were always confident that the vast majority were in favour."

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