

# The Wimmera's Flowing Tale

...going with the flow

## The Wimmera River provides the lifeblood for the region.

For more than 150 years the Wimmera River's flows have been used to support the establishment of thriving agricultural enterprises, robust communities and key industries. However, development of the Wimmera came at a major cost to the river system.

This six-part River Series will take you on a journey of the Wimmera River. In one of the driest areas in one of the driest continents in the world - droughts, fire and flood are a natural part of the Wimmera landscape. This series focuses on how the river and the people who rely upon it for survival have adapted and changed in this harsh environment. It will also look to the future of this mighty river which is integral to the long-term survival of one of the most vibrant and resilient communities in rural Australia...



The Wimmera River, photo by Paul Carracher Wimmera Mail-Times

## ✦ Environmental water fast facts

Helping secure the future health of the Wimmera River system are 'environmental flows' which are provided from water savings from the Wimmera Mallee and Northern Mallee pipelines. They are shared with the Glenelg River system and are delivered in three ways:

1. **Passing flows** - a percentage of rain-fed inflows into a weir or storage. For example, during winter and spring, 20% of the water entering a lake will pass through the lake as an environmental flow, while the remaining 80% will be captured for storage purposes.
2. **Spills** - once a lake or a weir reaches its set safe operating level ie 80% full, all water over that level spills, creating an environmental flow.

3. **Regulated releases** - the environment is an 'entitlement holder' and a percentage of the total water in storage is available for regulated environmental water releases.

## Looking back to 2002

- The Wimmera is in its fifth year of drought
- The Wimmera River system is officially recognised as the most flow-stressed river in the Murray Darling Basin because it has the smallest proportion of inflows to reach the end of the river
- Grampians water storage levels are around 10%
- A massive community project at Elmhurst, near where the Wimmera River starts, creates pools and small spillways along the river and revegetated river banks in an effort to provide quality water and habitat for native species further downstream such as platypus
- Total rainfall at Horsham (Longerenong), 234 millimetres, almost half the annual average

### North to Nowhere

In recognition of widespread community alarm for the Wimmera River system, the Wimmera Mail-Times embarked on a five-part series in February 2002. 'North to Nowhere' tracked the 350-kilometre length of the river. Editor Danny Lannen says he initially wanted to find the 'holy place' where the Wimmera River rose in the Pyrenees, beginning

as a trickle to then become this great artery that ran inland connecting so many communities and lives'.

The award winning series was a major boost to campaigners for the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project, one of Australia's largest water infrastructure projects.

"The series drew its own conclusion – pipe or perish," Danny recalls.

Start of the Wimmera River, photo by Paul Carracher Wimmera Mail-Times



## Looking forward to 2022

The Wimmera and Northern Mallee pipelines are delivering benefits to:

- The environment - by returning water savings to the Wimmera River system
- The community - by having more water for recreation
- The economy - by providing opportunities for business development and growth previously stifled by the region's limited water supply

Children born during the depths of the drought in the mid-late 2000s will have entered secondary school and have enjoyed the benefits of a healthier river and improved water availability such as fishing, water sports and yabbying. They will have a high awareness of how precious our water resources are in this dry inland part of Australia even though they will not remember the severe water restrictions and dire river health situation of when they were born.

Next week: 'Landcarers' walk the river