

# The Wimmera's Flowing Tale

...going with the flow



Families flock to the Wimmera River when water returns. David Fletcher took this photo of people enjoying the river at Dimboola in 2009.

When water returned in late 2009 to parts of the river that had been dry for up to five years the environment and community celebrated. There was more cause for celebration when contractors laid the final pipe in the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project on March 30, 2010.

The return of water lifted community spirits and saw an environment that had been declared 'dead' in some areas return to life. We all hoped the corner had been turned although we recognised there was still plenty of work to be done.

## Looking back to 2010

*"We were slowly watching our town die. When we got rain and the water it was if everyone had suddenly won the raffle. Everyone was happy for everyone else. Having water come down the river has provided the town with the biggest anti-depressant imaginable. It's fantastic. Talk to anyone in Dimmy. It doesn't matter where they live they all claim they own the river."*

Col LeBlanc, Wimmera Bakery owner, Dimboola

### Zombie trees return to life

With poor quality or no water, majestic trees that had lined the banks of the river for hundreds of years shrivelled up. Surveys around Jeparit in the late 2000s noted that all redgum trees in one survey area were dead.

After water returned to the lower reaches of the Wimmera River surveys discovered a handful of these trees had come back to life! Affectionately coined 'zombie trees', they continue to live - although they will need ongoing fresh water and improved land management practices to survive.

## Looking forward to 2022

The reputation of the Wimmera River as a recreational paradise is known far and wide. Its location roughly halfway between Adelaide and Melbourne means that large numbers of people are drawn to the river to camp and fish along its banks and enjoy the natural scenery on offer.

There is also a packed calendar of river-based major events including regattas, festivals, water skiing and fishing competitions. In 2022 people come from far and wide to compete when the Dimboola Rowing Club hosts its 135th Annual Rowing Regatta (122nd in 2009).



Life-giving water back in the Wimmera River system near Horsham. Photo by David Fletcher

## Environmental water fast facts

- The volume and timing of regulated environmental water releases are informed by expert scientific knowledge and monitoring.
- Just like a healthy diet requires a variety of foods, a healthy river requires a variety of flows.
- Flows during summer and autumn are much less than during winter and spring but these flows are important to dilute salinity and black water pools to improve water quality.

- In winter and spring much larger volumes are critical to enable fish and platypus to move between habitats as well as flushing salt downstream.
- The largest flows typically are provided in bursts of several days to weeks. Due to the increased flow heights and velocities, they help increase the diversity of vegetation on banks and scour out sediment from pools.
- Periods of no flow are vital as well given the fact that Wimmera waterways are ephemeral. However, long periods of no flow lead to issues with water quality and vegetation encroaching into the river channel.

Next week: The Wimmera River's 'Big Break'