

Plan Design Deliver

Savings come from reducing losses

July 2010

Northern Victoria
Irrigation Renewal Project

NVIRP
waterforgrowth

Directors tour East Loddon region

Directors and staff of NVIRP toured the East Loddon and Pyramid-Boort region recently to examine modernisation projects being undertaken in that region.

The tour incorporated some on-farm discussions and a visit to the Bridgewater Weir on the Loddon River. Discussions were had with Loddon Water Service Committee members and Loddon Shire Councillors about a pipeline to deliver water for farming properties in the East Loddon area as well as the Serpentine township. The project, managed by G-MW and Coliban Water, will receive an NVIRP contribution in return for water savings achieved. The connection for the scheme would be the Waranga Western Channel and the water savings will be achieved by piping the water instead of using the open channel system currently servicing these properties.

The next site involved discussions with a Pyramid-Boort landowner and the Board, Pyramid-Boort Modernisation Coordination Committee members, NVIRP and G-MW staff in relation to a significant connections project currently under investigation. The project would result in considerable reduction of modernisation costs and substantial water savings, albeit the potential impact on a local lake was noted and the need to involve the Catchment Management Authority in discussions early in the project was highlighted.

Later in the day, the Loddon Shire provided a presentation to the Board on their Planning for Change project. The project will evaluate the challenges and opportunities facing agricultural industries within the region and aims to identify regional irrigation resource opportunities and encourage investment into these opportunities.

Throughout the year the Directors meet with local Modernisation Consultation Committees and are always keen to meet with farmers who have issues in relation to their farm designs or water delivery as well as those who enthusiastically embrace the NVIRP concepts.



Photographed at the Bridgewater Weir, Loddon Shire Cr Elizabeth Brooke, member Loddon Water Services Committee Garry Addlem, NVIRP Chair Richard Guy, and Cr Geoff Curnow Loddon Shire.

Watering plans set to enhance region's wetlands and waterways

Plans to provide environmental water to sites of high conservation value will be in place before the modernised channel system is operational for the 2010-11 irrigation season.

Environmental watering plans have been prepared for eight wetlands and three waterways that derived an environmental benefit from channel system outfalls and outlets. The plans will assist the watering of these key sites so that they will continue to have water available now that the automated system has reduced incidental outfalls.

The environmental water will be held by the Environmental Water Holder who is appointed by the Victorian Government and it will be their responsibility to determine when and where water will be allocated for these environmental sites.

The plans were prepared for NVIRP by the North Central and Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authorities and have been sent to both the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments for consideration and approval.

"In some cases, automating a backbone channel has meant removing a water source for a wetland of high conservation worth. Where this is the case, environmental watering plans will ensure enough water is provided to protect those key sites once the new system is operational," NVIRP CEO Murray Smith said.

"Planned watering is more beneficial than receiving incidental water because it can be carefully managed to provide the right amount of water when it is needed the most.

"Plans aim to identify the values of a wetland or river, how much water is needed to protect those values and the best regime to deliver the water. McDonald Swamp near Cohuna is one of the sites that will receive environmental water when required and when it will produce the most ecological benefit. The swamp is an important drought refuge for water birds including the Great Egret and White-bellied Sea Eagle.

"Meeting tight timelines, the Catchment Management Authorities and NVIRP's Planning

group have delivered the environmental watering plans on schedule.

"Environmental water set aside is over and above the additional NVIRP water savings target of 225 gigalitres for Stage 1 works," Mr Smith said.

Environmental watering plans were required to uphold the Victorian Government's commitment that these wetlands or rivers would not be disadvantaged as a result of the modernisation works.

Last year, the Victorian Minister for Planning Justin Madden determined that although an Environment Effects Statement was not required for Stages 1 and 2, six conditions would need to be progressively met in accordance with the *Environment Effects Act (1978)*.

The Commonwealth Government also required approval of the plans under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.



Aerial photo of McDonald Swamp west of Cohuna following an environmental watering in December

Retiring channel allows expansion on dairy farm

Cohuna farmer Kevin Forster will reclaim a 1.5km stretch of land on his dairy farm when a leaky old spur channel, that supplies a neighbouring property, is decommissioned as part of NVIRP's Connections Program.

A farm irrigation assessment carried out by one of NVIRP's contracted irrigation designers found that the channel could be replaced with a pipeline, connecting the neighbouring property directly to the backbone channel saving 140 megalitres of water.

An incentive offer was made to Mr Forster to coordinate the works now planned for June this year (2010) and he couldn't be happier to see the project go ahead.

"It's going to be great; it means I'm going to have more land to use on my farm," Mr Forster said.

The 60-year-old dairy and beef farmer and his wife Judy have farmed two Cohuna properties, six kilometers apart, for 37 years.

Although recent times have been tough the couple have managed by buying temporary water to irrigate about 400 hectares of pasture.

Keen to explore ways to reduce their water use and make the farm more viable, the Forsters attended an NVIRP small group meeting about the Connections Program which aims to restructure on-farm systems to save water and improve the service.

Once the channel is removed and the pipe-

line installed, Mr Forster will re-laser his paddocks and put in a new, more efficient channel to connect his property to the backbone. Three Dethridge wheels will be decommissioned and a single magflow meter will be installed. Some drinking troughs for cattle will also be put in place.

Mr Forster has worked with his neighbour to plan the works and created an easement for the pipeline.

"This took time because we went to the titles office to create a registered easement," he said.

"But things have gone pretty smoothly.

"The spur is a big ugly looking thing and it's going to be great when it's gone.

"For me it will make a huge lifestyle difference; the water's going to be ready in an hour instead of having to wait to fill the thing up.

"In the long-term the modernisation is going to be a benefit for everyone, not just for the farmers on the land, it will be a big improvement for everyone."



Kevin Foster and Modernisation Coordinator Stephen Arthur pictured in front of his spur channel