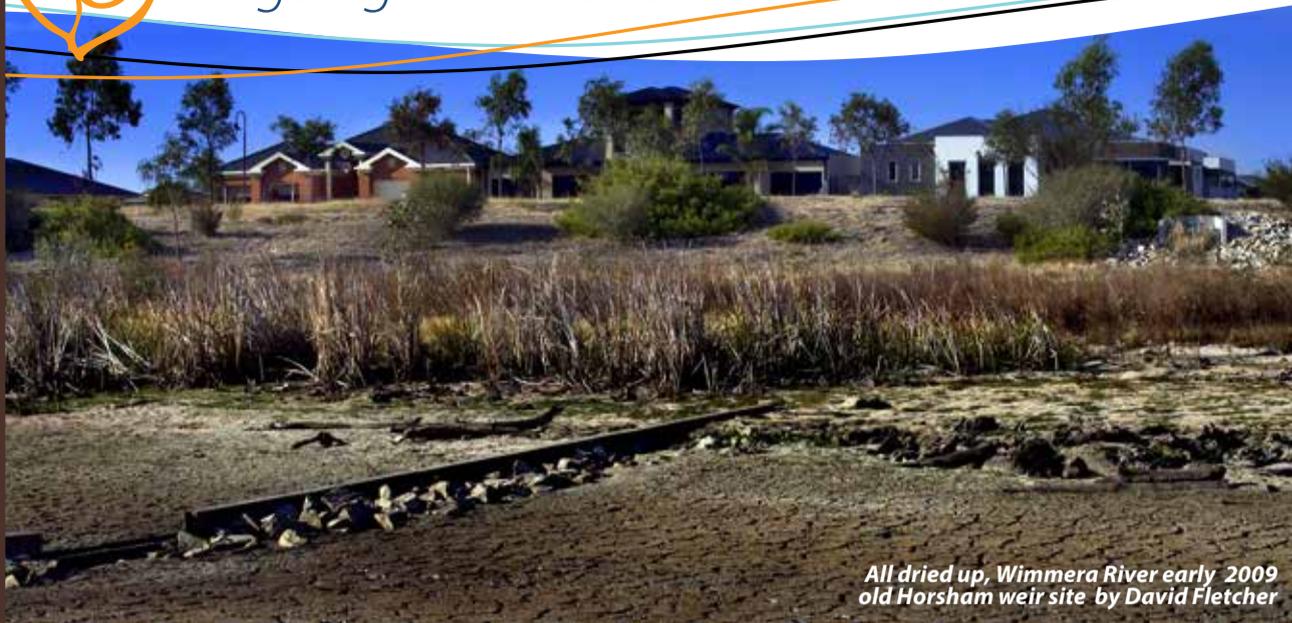


The Wimmera's Flowing Tale

...going with the flow



All dried up, Wimmera River early 2009
old Horsham weir site by David Fletcher

Looking back to 2009

It's a celebration! People flock to the banks of the Wimmera River when it rains in September 2009 to walk ahead of the life-giving trickle irrepressibly pushing north to the river's end – capturing national media attention, sparking riverbank celebrations and seeing the return of birds, fish, plants and activity from the Pyrenees all the way to Lake Hindmarsh.

Dimboola-based Hindmarsh Shire councillor Cliff Unger estimates the water has overnight lifted the value of river-front properties by \$30,000 - highlighting that more than just the local environment benefits from this fresh water.

Looking forward to 2022

The Wimmera River's condition is markedly improved despite some periods of very dry conditions. This improvement is, in part, thanks to increased environmental water availability via the Wimmera and Northern Mallee pipelines and other on-ground works such as fencing off river frontage from stock and other erosion-control activities.

Next week: Water brings communities, wildlife and 'zombie trees' to life

The drought bites hard, then breaks

"If we can get some guarantee of a return of water, the place will boom again."

Jeparit residents describe the value of the Wimmera River to their community, 2009

During the late 2000s, the longest drought on record continues to deal the Wimmera a mighty blow – businesses close, community groups lose their sense of purpose, fishing and rowing clubs and the numerous events they hold go into recess, tourist numbers dwindle, fishing and ski boats gather dust and families have to look elsewhere for weekend and holiday recreational activities.

While contractors work at a furious pace to complete the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project, the Wimmera River remains in a critical condition.

In May 2008 Grampians water storage levels drop to their lowest on record... just 3.3%.

By September pools within the lower Wimmera River vary between green, pink and black and produce a strong rotten-egg-gas odour that permeates the air in Jeparit. In stark contrast, Wimmera River pools watered the previous year via environmental water releases from Taylor's Lake to Quantong are able to sustain life.

Thankfully, soon after it starts to rain.



Water flowing past Dimboola weir
in late 2009 by David Fletcher

Environmental water fast facts

A common query is around the need to provide regulated environmental water releases in drier months, especially given the Wimmera River generally doesn't flow during summer leading into autumn.

- Catchment-scale issues mean that flows during dry periods are now crucial to the Wimmera River system.

- Environmental water releases are just one tool that addresses water quality issues such as salinity and excess nutrients.
- Summer releases are much smaller than those undertaken during winter and spring and without these flows, experience has shown that fish kills and algal blooms are much more common.
- Within a few weeks without flow in the lower

Wimmera River, salinity rises to half that of seawater. This is more than what many species of fish can tolerate.

- Work including revegetation and erosion control that Wimmera CMA, Landcare groups and farmers in the upper catchment, combined with ongoing environmental water releases, are also critical in reducing water quality issues that the Wimmera River faces today.