

# Media Release

**The Hon Lisa Neville MP**

Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning – COVID-19  
Minister for Police and Emergency Services  
Minister for Water



Tuesday, 27 October 2020

## LANDMARK CONNECTIONS PROJECT DELIVERED

The Connections Project – the largest irrigation modernisation project in Australian history – is now complete, delivering 429 gigalitres of annual water savings for environmental use and on farms in Northern Victoria.

Funded by the Victorian and Australian Governments, the world-leading delivery system will support the sustainable future of productive agriculture in the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District (GMID) for generations to come.

The project also provides significant water savings through targeting systems losses, to meet Victoria's obligations under the Murray Darling Basin Plan without removal of water entitlements from farmers.

The water savings target of 429 gigalitres, set by the funding agreement has now been reached, although other minor work will continue on the ground to meet existing commitments and any rectification works.

This major achievement of water savings comes after the successful reset of the Connections Project by Victorian Minister for Water Lisa Neville in 2016, which got the project back on track by bringing a new focus to working with locals to get the best solutions for irrigators in the GMID.

The complex project successfully balanced considerations of the environment, cultural heritage, community, irrigators and a range of individual infrastructure delivery solutions – resulting in a boost to productivity which will see provide greater efficiency and flexibility for irrigators.

The Project is a huge part of Victoria's strong track record in delivering environmental outcomes under the Basin Plan in a way that protects irrigators from the negative impacts of buybacks. Reaching the water savings target was crucial to avoiding any more Commonwealth buybacks taking water from farmers in the district.

The Victorian and Australian Governments invested \$2 billion to build a modern, efficient irrigation network and reduce losses to evaporation and leakage by decommissioning over 1,700 kms of channel that were not used efficiently and upgrading over 300 kms of channels, building pipelines and installing new meters.

Delivered by the Connections Project Control Group and Goulburn Murray Water, it has generated thousands of jobs for contractors and local businesses in Northern Victoria and boosted the local economy. Since the reset, over 800 local jobs have been created annually resulting in an annual increase of the regional GDP of around \$170 million.

The modernisation of the irrigation system means over 7,600 irrigators have consistent flow rates, modernised channels and pipelines which improves water efficiency and supporting high value crops.

Under the project's funding agreement long-term annual water savings of 429 gigalitres will be shared between GMID irrigators, Melbourne's water retailers and the environment.

The irrigators' share of water has been prioritised and fast-tracked to ensure water savings are in the hands of local farmers as soon as possible. The Melbourne water retailers' share has remained in the north for use by irrigators.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

*"The Connections Project is a legacy for future generations – saving water for the environment, creating rural jobs and supporting long-term productivity for irrigators in the face of climate change."*

*"It hasn't always been easy – we've had significant hurdles to overcome along the way – but we reset the project, stayed the course and have already begun to see the benefits for both irrigators and the environment."*

*"The Connections Project is a great model for how we can achieve positive social, economic and environmental results through major investment in water infrastructure."*

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