

Jo Bourke

Crucial cog in pipe dream

Jo Bourke had a great vision for the Wimmera and Mallee, a vision that has driven her work for the pipeline and is expected to change the region forever.

It is a picture of not only a greener western Victoria but a community with the ability to make wise decisions based on more choices in a more attractive region.

"It's not just greener, it's about sustainability. To me sustainability is my kids being able to have more choice than I had," Ms Bourke said.

She is looking forward to good quality water bringing new economic opportunities and diversification for farming, the environment and even employment.

"So whether that's farming or living in the community, it's that the next generation will have more choices and do things a in a better way than we have," she said.

Ms Bourke has been Wimmera Catchment Management Authority's chairperson since 1999 but also worked as chairman of the project planning group for the Wimmera Mallee pipeline.

"I was required to oversee the development of the business case and the detailed design of the pipeline. We were looking for people to provide input into the design of what would be their water infrastructure for the next 100 years."



Jo Bourke
Photo courtesy Wimmera Mail-Times

Apart from some intensive lobbying to state and federal governments, it was Ms Bourke's job to bring together the regional partners – farmers, business groups, environmental groups and recreation organisations.

"What we are doing in the Wimmera and Mallee has never been done to this scale before. There's going to be significant changes for everyone's life (in this region)."

GWMWater chairman Barry Clugston recognised Ms Bourke's vision for improved water quality while he was working with her in the planning stages.

"Jo was able to look ahead for the bigger picture and encourage people to think about the real possibilities and maintain that vision," Mr Clugston said.

He said that although the pipeline was the result of many people's work, Ms Bourke's achievements would not go without notice.

"Jo's contribution to it has been significant at a crucial time and I think that is going to stand the region in good stead for the future."

Her work with the pipeline became indirect once the project moved into its construction phase. But during the planning, Ms Bourke was regarded as the face of the pipeline.

"It was my 24-hour-a-day job," she said. "I would go to the football and talk water. I would go to the supermarket and talk water."

Despite water taking over her life, Ms Bourke found this period particularly satisfying because of the number of people who were interested in the project.

"Sometimes there were points when it was the worst job in Australia and other times when it was the best," she said.

"There were public meetings when we had young people coming along and they were getting excited about what was going. They could see the potential of the pipeline straight away."

There was obviously great excitement when governments announced funding, a means of encouragement when others lacked inspiration.

"I was occasionally working with people who just didn't have the vision of where we wanted to go with it," she said. "To me that was very frustrating."

Ms Bourke now believes things can only get better. “They will roll out the pipes and it will rain again. The challenge now is that we get the absolute maximum benefit to the community from this project.”

*Article courtesy of Eliza Adamthwaite,
Wimmera Mail-Times*

Further information is available by contacting the Horsham Piping It Office on 1300 659 961 or dropping into the office at 42-44 Kalkee Road.

