

# Water scheme's going dambusters

ROGER HANSON

PIPELINES and construction activity for the massive \$104 million Midlands Water Scheme is a welcome sight for farmers.

Maria and John Weeding, who farm their Merino sheep property Weedington on the York Plains with their sons Anthony and Nicholas, said Tasmanian Irrigation has created a scheme that is viable.

"It will take time to develop. It won't happen overnight, but it will allow further diversification on the farm," Mrs Weeding said. "We are all on a steep learning curve."

Work on properties is not overly intrusive. A narrow gap of topsoil is cleared to allow for a drain about a metre deep to be dug.

Pipeline is laid with 75cm between the top of the pipe and the surface, before topsoil is covered back over.

The Weedings run about 12,000 sheep for fine wool and fat lambs on their 3000ha property, and operate Merino stud Weedington Poll. The property is part of an original 1823 land grant.

"It is great opportunity for us," Mrs Weeding said. "Everything we grow now is at risk because we are at the mercy of nature."

York Plains is on top of the Tamar-Derwent catchment area.

"We are in a dry area, where

the water runs away from us. Now we can catch it and utilise a reliable water supply," Mrs Weeding said.

With surety of water, the Weedings are looking to the future.

"My sons work on the farm and they have children, and this project is for the next generation," Mrs Weeding said.

The Weedings already grow limited wheat, some of it going to the Callington Mill at Oatlands for artisan bread. With water they hope to diversify into poppies, lucerne, grass seed and barley.

Drawing water from Arthurs Lake, it is the largest irrigation development ever undertaken in the state, on the same engineering scale as the hydro schemes.

Tasmanian Irrigation chief Chris Oldfield said it was an inter-generational opportunity, with tri-partisan government support.

"It is a true private-public partnership, with irrigators and the community involved since day one," Mr Oldfield said.

More than 60 landholders have spent about \$25 million to buy water, as part of the private sector's partnership with the State and Commonwealth governments.

"Farmers buy water rights and they own them for ever. This puts an economic value on water, resulting in high-value use," Mr Oldfield said.

"It will create jobs and flow



through to rural communities." The scheme is close to reaching its peak – 140 people are

**PIPE DREAM:** Property owner Maria Weeding with pipes ready to be laid. Pictures: KIM EISZELE

working across nine sites spread through the Midlands and Central Highlands.

More than 38,500ML of additional water will go to farms in an area stretching from Campbell Town to south of Kempton.

The surety of water will allow

an additional 6000ha of land in the northern and southern Midlands to grow poppies.

Deputy Premier Bryan Green, who inspected progress on the project, said it was the most complex of the irrigation developments in Tasmania.

"This scheme will deliver

enormous benefits that will create jobs and opportunities throughout the region for generations to come by enabling farmers to diversify into higher-value crops that must have reliable irrigation," Mr Green said.

"Irrigating the Midlands on



**STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE:** Intake construction proceeds at Arthurs Lake.



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,  
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

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Applications close on **Wednesday 24 April 2013 at 5pm AEST**.

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**News**

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**In the scheme of things**

**SNAPSHOT** of the Midlands irrigation scheme –  
**Cost:** \$104 million to develop and construct  
**Irrigable area:** 55,680ha  
**Extent of area:** From north of Campbell Town to south of Kempton  
**Locations within area:** Campbell Town, Ross, Tunbridge, Oatlands, Mt Seymour, Jericho, Kempton

**Annual volume delivered:** 38,500 megalitres over 365 days  
**Water source:** Arthurs Lake in Central Highlands  
**Water reliability:** Greater than 95 per cent  
**Nature of development:** Construction via public-private partnership. Operation fully funded by irrigators

**Capital sources:** Federal Government \$55 million, irrigators \$37 million (when fully sold), State Government \$12 million  
**Water sales to date:** \$25.175 million  
**Buyers:** 61 landholders and one investor  
**Water remaining for sale:** 10,524 ML of winter-delivered water

this type of scale has been talked about for more than 100 years and soon it will be a reality.”

It is on target to be commissioned later this year, and the water will flow to farms early next year.

So far, about 27km of the total 137km supply and distribution lines have been installed. Four crews are at work trenching in

the 93km distribution pipelines.

A further four crews are working in the Central Highlands on the off-take structure at Arthurs Lake and on the 34km of high-pressure supply pipeline that will bring the water down to the Midlands.

At Floods Creek, at the foot of the Tiers west of Tunbridge, Tasmanian Irrigation is build-

ing a 6MW hydro power plant.

The force of the water streaming down the tier will build enough pressure to turn turbines in the hydro plant to create power.

This electricity powers the pumps to push the water along to property boundaries.

It is estimated about 1.7MW would be required to pump that water through the high-density polyethylene (HDPE) distribution pipeline.

That means there is excess power, so to lower project costs for farmers Tasmanian Irrigation will sell the excess power back into the power grid.

In August Hazel Bros com-

munity and stakeholder liaison officer Mark McCormack started talking with landowners, farmers and all stakeholders about the issues involved in building the Midlands scheme.

He spoke with farmers about access to property, issues of which they needed to be aware, especially weed control with so many vehicles and earth-moving machines lumbering across the landscape.

Major Tasmanian Irrigation projects completed in the past 18 months include the Whitmore, Headquarters Road, Sassafras-Wesley Vale and Winnaleah and Meander Valley pipeline schemes.

**WHOLE-HEARTED:** Chris Oldfield at the dam site.



**MORE TO COME:** A dam site near Tunbridge.

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