

Channel cuts reduced

By Geoff Adams

Northern Victoria's multi-billion-dollar irrigation Connections program, based on the Foodbowl Modernisation Project, will look different to the one mapped out in the original business plan.

Although the total length of channels will be reduced, the cut will not be as great as that originally envisaged.

Goulburn-Murray Water's new managing director John Calleja said the original foodbowl plan was developed during a time of drought, high interest rates and poor commodity prices.

Today, with water back in

the dams and improved economic outlooks, more farmers are wanting to continue irrigating and fewer are walking off the land.

"More want to stay in farming," Mr Calleja said last week. "In the long-term view, that's a great outcome."

He said for a project developed in a drought and with other assumptions, there wasn't the expectation of connecting as many as want to do so now.

"That's why we are seeing some backbone extensions. Farmers want to keep farming."

Mr Calleja said they were working to improve efficien-

cies in the project and remove as many costs as possible, to balance the outcome.

"We are looking at other things to speed the project up.

"We're looking at more contract workforce to help us get through the project faster.

"We have a lot of those solutions which we are looking at, and confident we can manage."

Up to April this year the project has rationalised 609 km of channel out of a target of 2582 km.

More than half of the targeted 226 km of channels have been remediated and about half of the 10 000 meter

installation program has been completed.

Mr Calleja believes the water savings targets can still be achieved by 2018, but his prime focus is on delivering the promised solutions on time and on budget.

■ The Federal Government, which has put up \$1 billion in funding, has started a mid-term review of the Foodbowl Modernisation Project.

The government has engaged consultancy company GHD for the 2015 Connections Stage 2 review.

Mr Calleja said one meeting had been held and the review was expected to be completed in the last quarter of this calendar year.



Shiny and new . . . This 20 m-long AB-double is one of the earliest off the production line at Byford Equipment in Moama; once regulatory approval for where they are permitted to travel is taken care of, expect to see many more picking up milk in the Goulburn Valley and beyond.

Tankers save money and roads

By Cathy Walker

By reconfiguring the B-double milk tankers and increasing their size to create an A-double, a Moama company is saving truck operators hundreds of thousands of dollars in tyre costs and reducing the milk transport footprint.

Responding to feedback from customers, Byfords Equipment has developed the A-double and AB-double tankers that can carry 20 per cent more milk because they are slightly larger and, importantly, the spacing of the axles makes them capable of carrying a heavier load.

But it's not just farmers and truck operators who are delighted with the Byfords innovation.

Byfords' compliance offi-

cer Chris Nisbet said last week the vehicles were putting smiles on the faces of shire engineers charged with keeping local roads in good condition.

"In Cobram for example they are permanently fixing broken roads because of milk tankers," Mr Nisbet said.

Because the weight of the load is spread more evenly on the A-double and there is less braking stress, Byford Equipment has calculated that in the course of collecting 100 million litres of milk, a transport owner would save \$330 000 in replacement tyres.

By its very nature, Mr Nisbet's job makes him a patient man. It's his task to liaise with councils and governments to gain access permission for the new tankers.

"My job as compliance officer is purely about getting access," Mr Nisbet said.

"The B-double was given a very small footprint."

He sees the irony in the fact that "we have to fight to get new tankers on the road that are better, smarter and safer".

Mr Nisbet said one A-double tanker was in the Blu-Logistics fleet in Queensland.

"Murray-Goulburn was one of the main companies that worked with us in the development and have been the major purchaser so far."

Once the red tape is taken care of, Byford can get going on as many as 50 new A-double or AB-double tankers.

"We'll immediately add half our year's annual pro-

duction," Mr Nisbet said.

The new tankers were tested at the DECA facility at Shepparton by Murray-Goulburn drivers — who, Mr Nisbet said, "gave them an incredibly good wrap-up".

Explaining the specifications, Mr Nisbet said: "These two vehicles have been designed to have a total mass of 63.5 tonnes for the AB-double and 74.5 tonnes for the A-double.

"Currently in Victoria the 26 m is approved to 71 tonnes and the 20 m AB-double to 59.5 tonnes."

■ **To watch a demonstration of the tankers' manoeuvrability online, search YouTube for Byford truck turn demo.**



**GOULBURN
BROKEN**

CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY

Farm Water Program

Round 4 of the Farm Water Program is now underway with assessment of projects expected to occur during July and August 2015, and a ballot will also be conducted during this period if required. Irrigators who have submitted Registration of Interest are being contacted during June by Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (CMA) staff and/or Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources staff regarding projects. Round 4 includes \$50 million of funding available under Tranche 2 of the Victorian Farm Modernisation Project, which is being delivered by the Victorian Government.

The Farm Water Program (FWP) is thrilled to have recently received the Australian Water Association's 2015 National Program Innovation Award. The win is a credit to the region's irrigators and the considerable efforts undertaken by them to complete projects. So far, more than 500 irrigation upgrade projects have benefited from \$124 million worth of funding through the Farm Water Program.

The impact the program is having on the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District is strong: increases in farm productivity of between 0.6-2 tonnes dry matter per hectare and water savings of 67.4 gigalitres to benefit the environment. On-farm irrigation improvements through the FWP are clearly bolstering the regional economy and complementing the GMW connections work. The ongoing realisation of such benefits will allow for further expansion to productivity and promotion of sustainability into the future. The Farm Water Program partners will continue to seek future funding for the program.

Environmental Water Update

Goulburn River: Minimum flows of 900 to 1,000 ML/day are currently being delivered down the lower Goulburn River (downstream of the Goulburn Weir) to provide habitat for native fish and waterbugs. A winter fresh downstream of the Goulburn Weir is planned to commence in mid-June with a peak flow of approximately 9,500 ML/day. Following the peak, flows will slowly return back to current levels. The winter fresh aims to water bank vegetation. It will also increase habitat for waterbugs and fish and help maintain water quality. The timing and height of the peak could be different if a natural flow event occurs around this time.

Broken Creek: Environmental flows down the lower Broken Creek ceased at the end of the irrigation season on May 15. Environmental flows are scheduled to recommence at the beginning of the 2015/16 irrigation season in mid-August.

Wetlands: In spring 2015/16 environmental water is planned to be delivered to Doctors Swamp, Reedy Swamp, Kinnairds Wetland, Black Swamp, Moodie Swamp and Barmah Forest. The environmental water aims to improve the health of wetland vegetation and promote waterbird breeding.

Hopes for more robust horticulture code

By Cathy Walker

Goulburn Valley fruit growers and packers agree with Federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce that an independent review into the mandatory Horticulture Code of Conduct is urgently needed.

They believe it is a hotch-potch system that has tied the hands of packers, who want to make it easier and more streamlined.

Fruit Growers Victoria chairman Gary Godwill said it was time growers received prices based just on the quality of their fruit and not be subject to the fluctuating prices thrown up by the timing of when it was sold.

Radevski Coolstore general manager Peter Radevski said



Peter Radevski

the code needed a total overhaul.

"Under the code the relationship between a packing

plier is very vague and unfair to both the growers and packers," Mr Radevski said.

He said in the Goulburn Valley the links between grower, packer and wholesale market were never taken into account when the original code was drafted.

Peak grower body Ausveg also welcomed Mr Joyce's announcement last week of a review and looked forward to having an input to the code, first implemented in 2007, that exists to regulate trade between fresh fruit and vegetable growers and their merchants and agents.

VFF Horticulture Group president Owen Brinson said his group had lobbied strongly for a mandatory code.

"We're extremely disappointed that the submission

sent to government in 2011 and supported by state farming organisations and the (former) Horticulture Taskforce were totally ignored," Mr Brinson said.

He said the proposed 13 key reforms should be some of the first things the review considered.

"We believe it is essential to retain a mandatory code, and call on the recommendations already provided to be considered in the review and the code strengthened, not weakened."

Mr Brinson said the horticulture sector had no confidence in the voluntary supermarket code. The current code is only applicable to the wholesale sector but does not apply to food processors, exporters or retailers.



www.gbcma.vic.gov.au