

FarmWater



Australian Government

On farm works reinvigorate region

Modernisation of the irrigation network and funding for on-farm efficiency works are a “blessing” for Goulburn-Murray farmers, according to Katunga’s Bill Gread.

Mr Gread received funding through Round 1 of the On-Farm Irrigation Efficiency Program (OFIEP) to carry out laser grading, fast flow and automation works on 18.2 hectares of land at his 172 hectare Katunga cropping operation.

The Australian Government’s \$300 million OFIEP assists irrigators in the southern connected system of the Murray Darling Basin to modernise their on-farm irrigation infrastructure while returning at least half the water savings to the environment.

A consortium of Goulburn Murray Irrigation District organisations, led by the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, secured \$21 million from the first round of the OFIEP to fund 76 projects.

Mr Gread said he had already started extensive lasering and channel work on his farm, which he bought six years ago, when funding became available through the OFIEP in 2010.

“The place was pretty run down when I bought it so I got to work on the re-use dam, white-rocking some of the channels, earthworks and getting rid of some of the bays in some parts of the farm,” he said.



Field of dreams ... Katunga’s Bill Gread surveys paddocks and channels upgraded through Round 1 of the Farm Water Program

At a glance

Who: Bill Gread, Katunga

Where: Murray system, Victoria

What: 18.2ha – laser grading, channel work, fast flow and automation

Water savings: 68ML – 34ML transferred to the Australian Government for environmental purposes.

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In the meantime modernisation work on nearby channels had been carried out as part of the Northern Victoria Irrigation Renewal Project.

Mr Gread said he recognised that the OFIEP funding could provide him with the opportunity to carry out on-farm improvements that complemented the irrigation network modernisation works.

“Through the connections upgrade, I’d gone from getting five or six megs through the wheel to 20,” he said. “Instead of wasting days watering – a real waste of time, water and money – it meant I could water in hours.

“To make the most of this, on-farm works were obviously the way to go so when this (Australian Government) money came up I thought to myself ‘this is a once in a lifetime opportunity so I’ll go for it’.”

The on-farm work was completed last August and Mr Gread said he was already reaping the rewards.

“I had these paddocks that were basically full of rubbish and because of all the uneven-sized bays and gullies watering them was costly and unviable – a neighbour reckons he’d seen maybe two crops of oats grown on them in the past 20 odd years,” Mr Gread said.

Since the on-farm efficiency work was completed Mr Gread has planted stands of lucerne and some sorghum and has already had a couple of good cuts this season.

“I reckon fast-watering is the way to go and, now, because of what we’ve done with the bays and channels, most of the run-off – about 98 per cent I’d say – is going in to the re-use dam and that’s got to be good thing,” he said.

Mr Gread said the Australian Government funding had allowed him to carry out work that would have otherwise been delayed for years.

“It’s a real blessing – a lot of people just couldn’t have afforded to get this sort of work done,” he said.

“I reckon this Goulburn-Murray valley region is a golden region - a real Garden of Eden – but because of the drought, we were watching it wither before our eyes.

“All those people who pulled together this modernisation work and extra funding for on-farm work, well I reckon they deserve a lot of recognition and respect.

“This work is completely re-invigorating the region, it’s given us all a new lease on life.”

For more information about the OFIEP visit www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/srwui/irrigation-efficiency
