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Water deputy tours new project

Country News insert, Shepparton

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By Geoff Adams

Victoria’s new parliamentary secretary for the water portfolio, Harriet Shing, toured a water efficiency project at Shepparton East on December 8 and got a close-up look at how irrigation delivery has been transformed in northern Victoria.

Ms Shing was elected to the Eastern Victorian district in the upper house in 2014 and was given the parliamentary secretary position, backing up Water Minister Lisa Neville, in January this year.

A lawyer by occupation, Ms Shing denied she was eyeing off the minister’s job and said it was her role to support Ms Neville.

“I am not looking for Ms Neville’s job.”

Asked why she was interested in the water area, she said it was a cerebral challenge and one that tested her limits.

Ms Shing toured the \$177 million Goulburn-Murray Water Water Efficiency Project at Shepparton East, which has already delivered its first gigalitre of water savings.

By June 2024, the modernisation works should deliver 15.9 Gl of savings, as well as create a more efficient delivery system for the horticulture and vegetable production areas of Shepparton East.

The tour was overseen by project director Frank Fissler, who steered through the

completion of the Connections project.

The Shepparton East project builds on the successful completion of Victoria’s largest irrigation infrastructure project — the \$2 billion Connections project — which delivered 429 Gl of water savings through irrigation upgrades.

During the 2021 winter, the G-MW Water Efficiency Project automated more than 20km of channel, converted sections of channel to pipeline, and upgraded about 50 outlets.

When the project is completed in 2023, the off-farm irrigation infrastructure works will have modernised or decommissioned more than 250km of channels and upgraded more than 1000 outlets.

Ms Shing acknowledged there was some frustration expressed when the Shepparton East area was originally excluded from the Connections project.

“We know the demography and industry has undergone significant changes since Connections was first developed,” she said.

“Thanks to the excellent work of G-MW and stakeholders this has secured the trust and co-operation of landholders and they have worked collaboratively with them to make gains in security of supply and reduce the costs to running their businesses.”

Ms Shing was also at the opening of two new fishway weirs in Koondrook and Cohuna, connecting 140km of prime fish habitat in Gunbower Creek to 530km of open Murray

River to boost native fish populations.

The project was funded through a \$1.5 million commitment from the Victorian Government’s Building Works Capital Stimulus Package and \$4.6 million via the Victorian Environmental Water Holder.

Fishways are constructed alongside weirs so fish can bypass the gates and swim upstream, allowing them to breed and feed.

The fishways are part of North Central Catchment Management Authority’s Native



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Fish Recovery Plan, which aims to create a world-class native fishery in the region.

The official opening follows eight months of works by G-MW and principal contractor S&R Engineering and Construction.



Keep on swimming: The upstream fishway gate that was installed at the Cohuna fishways project.



Upgrade coming: G-MW Water Efficiency Project director Frank Fissler with Victorian Parliamentary Secretary for Water Harriet Shing, checking out the old technology soon to be replaced at Shepparton East. Photo: K Frizzell