



Wimmera

Partners/Sponsors National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, Wimmera Mallee Water, Horsham Rural City Council, Yarriambiack Shire Council, Hindmarsh Shire Council, West Wimmera Shire, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Department of Primary Industries.

Monitoring Information 49 groups, 220 participants, 191 sites. **Education Participation** 2 500 participants.

Coordinators Brad Hollis, Patrick Monaghan, Jeanie Clark, Harvey Champness, Leigh Blackmore.

A monitoring legacy

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ecall what happened back in 1995? Well, Doriemus won the Melbourne Cup, an earthquake shook Kobe, Japan, and a handful of Jeparit locals formed an active Waterwatch group that is still going strong more than 10 years later.

The senior members of the Jeparit Waterwatch group (JWW) may be over 70 years old, but they are still very active and have extensive experience and knowledge of the river. **“Waterwatch keeps us old buggers alive!”** quipped one of the two founding members, Col Clew.

Jeparit is the last town along the Wimmera River before it enters Lake Hindmarsh, one of the system's terminal lakes. Over the past 10 years, the group has monitored and captured some incredible events, including the region's last major flood (1996), environmental water releases, the drying out of Lake Hindmarsh in 2000, and riparian and ecological changes, such as increasing phragmites and mistletoe.

Since forming, the group has met monthly at the local museum to test samples from six river sites and now have over 700 data records.



“Monitoring dam, spring and river water has been of practical benefit for my farm,” said Waterwatcher Frank Pitt. **“My stock had always drunk the river water, until this big dry. With Waterwatch, we know that it is the high salinity (over 30,000 EC's) that is problematic for the stock.”**

Founding member David Livingston recalls that the river had also dried up into pools during the long 1940's drought. **“We knew the river was salty then, but not how salty. It's a pity Waterwatch wasn't around here 50 years ago, then we would know how different this long dry decade is. Back then, fish still lived in the salty pools.”**

“There are few fish in the river now, and the corellas don't drink from the river any more either”, added Col, a keen fisherman and birdwatcher.

The other part of JWW has been Jeparit Primary School. Though the Waterwatch activities have varied each year, physical-chemical monitoring has remained throughout, building on the valuable community water quality database.

Local Waterwatch coordinator Jeanie Clark, who has been with the group since they started, said it has been a privilege to be able to work with both the young and old in Jeparit over the last decade. **“These senior citizens bring such a wealth of knowledge to their monitoring, but they are looking ahead to what they are giving to the future.”**



Top Age knows no boundaries - particularly when it comes to monitoring!
Centre Ten years on... Members of today's Jeparit Waterwatch group outside the Jeparit Museum. **Right** Group members collect a water sample from the Wimmera River, near Jeparit.