

Snowy River, looking over the years

The Snowy River has seen many changes over the years since European settlement.

Like many rivers, the effects of land clearing, stock grazing the banks and de-snagging becomes evident during major flood events. Floods are something that farmers with river frontage have to live with and hope the major ones cause as little damage as possible.

The Snowy has also seen reduced flows since the construction of the Jindabyne Dam.

Local resident and farmer, Gil Richardson, believes reducing the flows had a major effect on the Snowy.

"Probably made the flooding more dramatic, too, because it goes from a very low flow to a very high flow for a short period of time. Reduced flows have also had an effect on fish populations," he said.

Gil has seen many floods and recalls the '71 flood, the biggest on record.

"My wife, Heather, and I sat at our place the day of the flood, which was a sunny day. The rain had fallen on the catchment upstream so we knew a big flood was coming. When it arrived on the floodplain the river was travelling so fast that it cambered up in the middle like a road, all the trees that had been washed out of the bank were riding that current down the middle of the river.

"At the peak the water lapped the top of the levy bank in front of our home. We'd left and gone away for the night and luckily the levee bank held and everything was still here when we got back."

Extensive work over many years has been done by the East Gippsland Catchment Management Au-



Local farmer, Gil Richardson, believes that continued flows will help the Snowy River on its road to recovery.
(PS)

thority (CMA) and its predecessor, the Snowy River Improvement Trust, together with landholders aimed at providing some protection from flood damage and improving the Snowy River's health.

CMA chief executive officer, Graeme Dear, said the Snowy River Rehabilitation Program took many

years of work by agencies and landholders together, "but we all recognise that recovery is a process that will take time".

"The works over the last 20 years is improving the river," Gil said.

"The weed control has been good and we expect that this will take a consistent effort to keep weeds

under control. The current vegetation looks good and if it holds the banks that will be another positive. It will get tested when we get another big flood event. The fishing has been good with people starting to catch a few more fish.

"The return of water to the Snowy River is to me an extremely impor-

tant thing. We are very grateful for the already received environmental flows from the Jindabyne Dam and these continued flows will hugely benefit the river right from the dam and out to the estuary."

Farmers understand what to do when floods are coming. They batten down the hatches, shift stock to high ground and remove riverside pumps. Stories also come out of floods, some about hardship and some just interesting little memories.

For example, Gil remembered in '71, "we had been refurbishing our house and I had a lot of new electrical appliances. I backed the truck in, rolled everything onto it and put a paddy calf in the cabin with Heather and sent her up the hill. We had a beehive and an aviary with some little and medium sized birds. Heather had caught some of the bigger birds but we couldn't catch the little ones so I pulled the front off the cage to let them escape if they needed to. The beehive stayed cause I got stung so I said you fellas can swim! We came back the next day and the little birds were all sitting happily in their cage as if nothing had happened!"

The Snowy is looking great now. The floodplain reach of the river is free from grazing stock and revegetation is continual along the same length.

Willows are controlled in the whole catchment including the Buchan, Rodger and Little rivers.

"The river has been looked after for a long time and I believe the endeavours are good. To get to where we are now took a big effort and full recovery will take some more time," Gil said.