Challenges

Water availability will be one of the greatest challenges facing the future of Murray Irrigation Limited and its irrigators. In addition to climatic factors, there is growing competition for the available water resources from a range of players.

An allocation for the Barmah Millewa Forest in 1993 indicated that the environment would be recognised as a legitimate user of water, effectively competing with irrigators for a share.
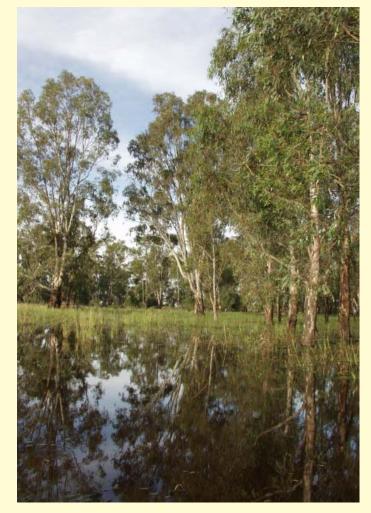
In 1995 the Murray Darling Basin Commission introduced a cap to limit the amount of water which could be extracted from the Basin's water resources.

A further environmental commitment was made in 2000 with an intergovernmental agreement to restore 20 per cent of average natural flows to the Snowy River and provide another 70,000 megalitres for the Murray River.

This was followed by the Murray Darling Basin Commission's Living Murray Initiative with 500,000 megalitres of water to be provided for environmental flows in the Murray River by 2010.

Water savings are the current focus of efforts to provide environmental flows, however additional water may well be needed to meet the current commitments.

Irrigators have received some security over their water entitlements through the 2004 NSW Murray Water Sharing Plan and the Federal Government's National Water Initiative.

A healthier landscape

Murray Irrigation Limited and local landholders are involved in a number of initiatives to improve the health of the region's landscape.

These include a project with the NSW Murray Wetlands Working Group to administer the provision of water to stranded farm wetlands. This project began in 2001 and has resulted in significant improvements in the health of more than 100 wetlands. The biodiversity of these areas has increased and there is a growing community appreciation of wetlands and their lifecycles.

However, with water trading accelerating and new players in the market, the emphasis will be on efficient, more profitable water use and increased environmental responsibility.

The Gulpa Creek and surrounding Millewa Forest benefit from environmental allocations. Photo: MIL Collection