

By Sally Gall

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## HIPCo and Flinders Shire sign 'game-changing' MoU



📷 HIPCo chairman Jeff Reid. Picture supplied.

The Hughenden Irrigation Project Corporation and the Flinders Shire Council have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on collaborative water harvesting undertakings, and there are hopes that more shires will come on board.

'Game-changing' is how HIPCo chairman Jeff Reid described the MoU with the Flinders shire, which he said will see the two groups work together to research and advocate for optimal economic and community outcomes in harvesting and utilising water resources, and support only the best projects for further consideration.

He said that rather than three or four groups along the Flinders River all "paddling our own canoes", to the detriment of all when it came to government consideration, HIPCo was trying to get all agencies to pull in the same direction.

That could mean that the Richmond shire would have to promote a project in the McKinlay shire, if it was found to be the most optimal, or McKinlay may have to do the same for something in the Flinders Shire.

HIPCo has been working on an [irrigated agriculture scheme](#) west of Hughenden, the Flinders Shire has advocated for an [off-stream water storage project](#), and the Richmond Shire Council has been seeking a 100,000 megalitre water allocation from the state government and a \$100 million grant from the federal government to [kickstart a water capture](#) and irrigated farming project in its region.

Mr Reid said the Richmond Shire had reacted positively to the idea and HIPCo was presenting it to the McKinlay Shire Council this week, explaining that it was better to present a united point of view rather than a number of small ideas.

"Doing it the way we have been makes it easy for government to say, if you can't pull together, how can we work with you," he said. "It's a matter of not being so parochial."

The plan is to have a working group in which all the different plans will be investigated and prioritised, in what Mr Reid expected would be a robust discussion.

A number of factors have brought the idea into being - the decision by the state government in January to [review the Gulf Water Plan](#), which in turn [canned HIPCo's tender](#) for the release of unallocated water in the Flinders River catchment, and news in August that HIPCo has secured state government funding for the next three years.

"HIPCo's a small technical group - we're funded to pay water experts, so we can feed expert opinions in to councils," Mr Reid said.

"We'll be offering advice only, not making any decisions.

"We might lay everything out on a spreadsheet, and it might be that two small projects get the tick."

He hoped the process would take six months.

Acting Flinders Shire mayor Niki Flute said it was exciting to see such collaboration for the first time.

"We would be happy to see any project go forward - if we can harness any water along the Flinders River, that's a good thing," she said. "Promoting individual projects makes it look to government that we're all in competition with each other."

Mr Reid said the single focus for planning in the Flinders Shire had been made possible via the leadership of mayor Kate Peddle, a former HIPCo director.

"(She) has firsthand experience with the problems of developing a large water project and has also seen the council's water project being unable to proceed," he said.

"The council's off-stream storage water bank project was unable to attract the required government funding, due to the limited number of commercial beneficiaries," he said.

"The HIPC Co project outlined in the business case was not able to proceed as we could not secure the required volume of water.

"The new mayor has opened the way for a new collaborative period to harness the water in the most sustainably economic way for the benefit of the people of the region."

Mr Reid hoped it would ultimately lead to a strategic plan for the future release of water in the Flinders River.

"The last time there were water tenders, they went to the highest bidder," he said. "Our voice can say loudly, that didn't work."