



HD **Kimberley Water**

BY Sean Murphy

WC 2,541 words

PD 18 October 2014

SN Australian Broadcasting Corporation Transcripts

SC ABCTRS

LA English

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The West Australian Government is investing a record \$300 million in a plan to help create new small scale irrigation enterprises, to tap into the growing demand for protein and high quality produce in Asia.

PIP COURTNEY, PRESENTER: The WA Government is spending \$300 million to try and take advantage of the growing demand in Asia for protein and high-quality produce.

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The record investment includes a plan to help create new small-scale irrigation enterprises. It's a bold vision to access new water resources. And in some ways it's being led by Aboriginal-owned stations, which now account for half of the pastoral enterprises in the Kimberley region.

SEAN MURPHY, REPORTER: At Mowanjum Station, they're saddling up for a new era in the Kimberley pastoral industry. After decades of neglect, Mowanjum's new Aboriginal owners are steadily rebuilding their 50,000-hectare **property**.

JASON RUSS, MOWANJUM STATION MANAGER: At the moment, we've got the numbers up to around 1,400 head of cattle. We started off two years ago with nothing, so it's increasing quite rapidly and we're buying cattle as we go during the course of the year. We brought some more this year. But obviously, we've still got a long way to go. We've only half-developed the **property** and hopefully in the next two years we can finish off developing the rest of it and obviously increase our numbers.

SEAN MURPHY: This year, station manager Jason Russ and his team **sold** the first mob of cattle off Mowanjum in more than 30 years.

JASON RUSS: We **sold** over 250 head of cattle, got top dollar - \$2.10 a kilo for our steers. No, it was very pleasing and rewarding for me and there's also the community itself as well.

EDDIE BEAR, MOWANJUM COMMUNITY CHAIRMAN: It's important for the whole community. Like we just relying on government funding, you know. Now it's great to see Mowanjum try to do something for itself and to bring an income and things like that.

(Jason Russ showing younger generation how to saddle horses)

JASON RUSS: Hold on, there, boys. Righto, you guys, grab a holder each.

SEAN MURPHY: The enthusiasm for a new future in the industry is most apparent with Mowanjum's next generation.

JASON RUSS: What you've got to do is hold the saddle. Put your hand here, see my hand?

GIRL: Yes.

JASON RUSS: You hold the stirrup. The girth in one hand and put it over back. Never drop it on the back, just put it down nice and gentle.

Hopefully they've got an opportunity. it's right here, it's right around them, so it's huge potential for them and hopefully get them back on the land like they how used to be.

SEAN MURPHY: They make pretty good horsemen?

JASON RUSS: Yes, they do, they're natural people at it and they like doing it. That's one thing about it, Aboriginal people like riding horses and being on the land and being with their cattle.

(Talking to training kids)

That's it, hold the cattle up.

SEAN MURPHY: In a matter of weeks, this training program was showing benefits well beyond the stockyard.

JAYDE FULLER, DERBY GIRLS ACADEMY: They come out here with a different attitude. So most of these kids are having problems in school and stuff, but as soon as they come out here, they get on **board**, they get right into it and they just do what they're supposed to do.

I also see a big improvement in the classroom and also out in the schoolyards and school grounds and stuff.

ERNEST NULGIT: I just want to see the community change and the way things are going there's been less trouble on the street and, yes, it's working, yes.

(Archive footage: '7:30' 6 Sept 2012)

LEIGH SALES: In Western Australia's Kimberley region, 35 people have taken their own lives since January last year.

The tiny community of Mowanjum, with a population of just 300, lost five of its residents in a matter of months.

SEAN MURPHY: Two years ago, Mowanjum came to national attention with an agonising spate of suicides. Community leaders say the cattle station's growing success has helped turn that crisis around.

STEVE AUSTIN, MOWANJUM COMMUNITY CEO: I don't really want to delve into that too hard, but yes, you can see a turnaround, people are more focused now. It's like we've got direction and we're all looking to the future. Yes, it's had a huge impact on what happened a few years ago.

JASON RUSS: Basically, these are weaners that we just weaned off our cows and we've been processing, all the cleanskin ones have been processed and they're ready to go out to the paddock.

SEAN MURPHY: The WA Government has rewarded Mowanjum's self-help with nearly \$5 million to develop groundwater irrigation. Water Minister Mia Davies says developing an irrigation enterprise at Mowanjum will be part of a wider investigation on how to exploit the north-west's untapped water resources.

The \$50 million water-for-food program is part of a massive new investment in agriculture.

MIA DAVIES, WA WATER MINISTER: There's a \$300 million - the biggest investment that this State Government, or any state government, in fact, has ever made into agriculture and we see growth occurring in our region - **China**, Japan, our South-East Asian markets. There is a fantastic opportunity for this part of the world to become part of the solution to a growing demand for food.

We do it very well in Western Australia, but we are currently constrained and the constraint is that we currently have 50,000 hectares of irrigated agriculture in Western Australia. That's out of two million across Australia. Compare that to the 29 million hectares in the US and we know that we've got some work to do to make sure we're ready to take advantage of that opportunity.

SEAN MURPHY: Out of Australia's national herd of 25 million, WA has just 2 million head of cattle and about half of those are in the northern rangelands. Irrigation will help to rapidly expand those numbers. Here at Mowanjum Station alone, they think they can triple their maximum carrying capacity.

JASON RUSS: Well it just means that you turn off your cattle a lot quicker. Instead of waiting two years to turn off cattle, we'll be turning off cattle all year round basically.

(**Group** being shown land)

GARY HUMPHREYS: This one is, I don't know, maybe 100 metre, 200 metre across. The one we are talking about for Mowanjum is about 600 metres across, like three football fields across.

SEAN MURPHY: Developing centre pivot irrigation at Mowanjum will be a step into the future for the traditional owners, but also for the wider pastoral industry. It will help determine how much water is available across the region and at what cost.

GARY HUMPHREYS, WA WATER DEPARTMENT: We really don't know in detail. We know there's lots and we know that there's lots because we know there is water stored in the Fitzroy alluvials, for example, in the Kimberley. There's lots of water stored in the alluvials. So we could pump that out of the groundwater system very close to the rivers.

There's these groundwater aquifers, the deeper sedimentary basins and there may be good quality water in large amounts at 10m, 20m, 100m, 200m, 500m below the surface and that might be easy to get if we do the investigation work first, find it and prove it up.

So there could be very large amounts.

SEAN MURPHY: Last year, Landline visited Rio Tinto's Marandoo mine in the Pilbara, where dewatering has resulted in a new irrigation enterprise. The big miner's 15 centre pivots can produce up to 30,000 tonnes of hay a year for the **company's** own pastoral enterprises and other cattle stations. But a major stumbling block in developing more irrigation in the north-west is the restrictive nature of land tenure on pastoral leases.

TERRY REDMAN, WA LANDS MINISTER: Pastoral leases have significant limitations to what they can do - for starters they can only graze, so grazing livestock on the natural vegetation that exists. So any notion of improving how they do business or to have irrigation or to capitalise on perhaps available water and soil types is fairly limited.

What we are proposing through the water-for-food project is to try and speed up and make more streamlined the process of them getting different lease types, such as a Section 79 General Lease, whereby they can do many of these activities and have less constraints on doing business and also hopefully attract third-party investment.

SEAN MURPHY: So how much of a barrier to attracting investment are the current arrangements?

TERRY REDMAN: It's a big barrier. Security of tenure's a big issue. So if someone's going to put a footprint of investment into an irrigation **site** or an agricultural opportunity, then you want to have security over tenure.

SEAN MURPHY: Australia's richest woman, Gina Rinehart, has already recognised the huge potential in WA's pastoral industry. Hancock Prospecting bought half of Liveringa Station this year and irrigation is a key factor in the Liveringa Beef business model.

BRETT BLANCHETT, LIVERINGA BEEF: It drought-proofs us somewhat. It doesn't allow us to withstand a wet season with no rain. It does give us options and that's pretty important here.

SEAN MURPHY: The **company** already has four centre pivots taking surface water from the nearby Fitzroy River.

Live exports account for most of Liveringa's business and fodder grown on-farm saves time and money.

But at Liveringa, they're increasingly finishing and processing their Brangus beef in southern WA.

BRETT BLANCHETT: The supply chain that we have means that we take a lot of cattle into the south. We probably this year put 10,000 head through the yards here, dip them to take them south. That requires a fair bit of fodder to hold those cattle over the days between the dippings and wait for trucks. It just gives us a versatility to be a little bit flexible with what we do.

SEAN MURPHY: The **company** is now trialling new crops, such as sunflowers and canola.

BRETT BLANCHETT: We're looking at the possibility of bringing a small biodiesel plant in so we can convert perhaps our irrigation pumps and our generators to biodiesel and equip them to run on biodiesel. And that's probably about 50 per cent of our fuel consumption.

But the flipside to that is that the meal from that process is high in protein and that's really what we are lacking in the north, we're protein deficient. So a meal at 33 per cent protein is a real plus for us in our feedlot.

SEAN MURPHY: At Liveringa, the core beef business is the **company's** main priority. But the WA Government is hoping land tenure reform will mean pastoralists across the north-west can grow a range of new high-value crops.

MIA DAVIES: We do have, like I said, an abundance of land. There is the great potential for us to prove up sustainable water to underpin agriculture across the State, but particularly up here in the Kimberley and the Pilbara. What it will do is actually drive real economic growth, real economic growth based on strong market demand from an export point of view.

SEAN MURPHY: Native title has been determined in about 75 per cent of the Kimberley. So any lasting reform of land tenure will have to take that into account. Now, with about half of all the pastoral leases across the region owned by Aboriginal communities, rather than being a hindrance, native title could in fact be the solution to developing this new irrigation model.

WAYNE BERGMAN, KRED ENTERPRISES CEO: Aboriginal people were the backbone of the pastoral industry. It's a time for us to ride that wave and I would like to see the Aboriginal groups, the members of our organisation in the strongest position to make sure the next generation can benefit from this.

SEAN MURPHY: Wayne Bergman heads Kred Enterprises, which is working with a cooperative of Aboriginal-owned stations, including Mount Anderson, which had its native title settled in a historic ceremony this year.

They're hoping to create a blueprint for change to land tenure that incorporates native title.

WAYNE BERGMAN: It will create a precedent, not just for Aboriginal people, but for the whole state. Non-Aboriginal pastoral stations will be able to, I hope, find the balance between recognising traditional title to our country, but also creating title where Aboriginal people can bring in extra development.

History has been always about someone else has a good idea for us and we have to live with it, whether we like it or not. This is about us controlling our own destiny.

SEAN MURPHY: In the Kimberley, some of the available water will be connected to the National Heritage-listed Fitzroy River. The conservation **group** Environs Kimberley says it has concerns about the river and groundwater-dependent ecosystems.

MARTIN PRITCHARD, ENVIRONS KIMBERLEY: What we're really concerned about is what kind of scale is being proposed here, how much water is required, will that damage groundwater-dependent ecosystems and we're also really concerned about the economics of the proposal.

GARY HUMPHREYS: We'll be making sure we don't have any impacts on the behaviour and the environment and the dynamics of the Fitzroy River, and therefore not having any impacts on the biology of the Fitzroy River. So we've got a team of biologists working on our project team as well. We've got groundwater dependent ecosystem specialists in our project team to make sure we don't have those impacts.

SEAN MURPHY: At Mowanjum Station, they're sending this year's weaners back into the scrub for the coming wet season. By Christmas, they hope to have their first centre pivot installed and a new dawn beckons for the business and the community that owns it.

JASON RUSS: At the moment I've got Aboriginal guys out of the community working on the cattle side of it and this will be a totally new venture. So we'll go into the farming side of it, so it will be tractors, and baling hay, cropping hay, fertiliser and feeding cattle. So it's a whole new range of opportunities out there for sure.

LEAH UMBAGAI, MOWANJUM ELDER: I find it really interesting and exciting, really. Just looking at for the future, especially for our people.

MARGARET MUNGULU, MOWANJUM ELDER: Our surrounding communities can see what we're doing for the future generation.

DONNY WOOLAGOODJA, MOWANJUM ELDER: Because it's going to give the younger people the opportunity to do something for themselves. It's self-determination and well, it's the best way to do things.

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IPD Kimberley

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AN Document ABCTRS0020141019eaa00001