



## As It Happened

(with apologies to SBS)

**In the present day headlong rush to embrace emerging clever technology it is worthwhile to look back at the recent past, ie: from 1945 to 1975, and to accept that even in those times it was possible to carry out all sorts of technical and complicated projects. This comment, of course, applies to all types of callings – engineering, geology, forestry, archeology, valuations, surveying, trades and perhaps accounting.**

We have been privileged – or cursed – over the last thirty years to witness an explosion in electronic computing and measuring processes. We are now reaching the stage where the younger trades and professionals don't know about the methods of the recent past and I suspect some of our younger members would not even regard 1945-1975 as the recent past!

This article considers the contribution of government trade and professional staff in facilitating post 1938-1945 war development in Australia in general, and Victoria in particular. Lest there be a rush of private practising professionals who object to selection of government trades and professions, let me say that the private sector did its bit too but it is necessary to acknowledge that most national and State projects were done "in house" by the Departments' or Authorities' own staff.

As these comments are based on my observations of Victorian Government Departments and Authorities and particularly of the former State Rivers & Water Supply Commission (1907 – 1984) during the period 1945 – 1975, most of the statements are to do with that body.

However, it is necessary to note that the following Departments and Authorities went through big expansion projects in the period – Department of Crown Lands and Survey, Snowy Mountains Authority, SEC, Geological Survey, Forestry, Soldier Settlement Commission, Titles Office, CRB, SR & WSC, MMBW, Gas & Fuel Corporation, Victorian Railways – together with a number of other lesser Departments and Authorities.

Note that nearly all of the bodies listed have either disappeared or undergone a basic structure and name change. The cause of the change can be put down in part to Fred Hilmer and other 'rationalists' who convinced the Federal Government, State Governments and instrumentalities that it was better and cheaper to have most activities carried out by contract with the department retaining a small administrative or over-seeing role of activities.

Those readers who are devotees of the excellent documentary "Yes, Minister"

and "Yes, Prime Minister" will note this approach has the potential to create a real "Sulihull Project" mentality, that is, it is nearly impossible to get a true indication of project cost!

Later day governments have refined the process even further by introducing PPPs (Public Private Projects) and the lovely term "Business in confidence". These two vehicles allow governments to withhold anything or any information they wish!

To return to the basic theme of the former SR&WSC. In the post war period the SR&WSC became involved in some very large projects, amongst which were

- Big Eildon 1948-1956
- Cairn Curran Reservoir 1950-1956
- Remodelling of large irrigation district infrastructure in Northern Victoria
- Glenmaggie Dam mid 50s-1962,
- Layout of Nambrok Dennison Irrigation District, Tullaroop Dam,
- Raising and renovations at Hume Dam for the Murray Darling Commission,
- associated water supply works with Soldier Settlement Commission projects at Tatura, Numurkah, Robinvale,
- the destruction of the Heytesbury Forest to create dairy farms
- The Rosslynne Reservoir, the Merrimu Reservoir and its associated diversion tunnels
- Bellfield Reservoir
- The Dartmouth Dam is outside the period being discussed.

In common with most other departments and instrumentalities the SR&WSC had a serious shortage of engineers, geologists, surveyors and valuers in 1945. Being slightly divorced from the State Government (the SR&WSC was a Commission) the Commission set out to train its own professional and support staff.

[continued on Page 3]

Patron  
 Professor David de Kretser, AC  
 Governor of Victoria