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We came to Berrigan in 1973 aged 26 with a young family to work for Frank Rennick Civil Contractors maintaining their earthmoving plant & equipment. There were 20 employees doing irrigation design and construction within 400km radius of Berrigan. Farming land was levelled for flood irrigation and on-farm dams were constructed with pumps stations for water recirculation and storage.

Our farmers are our local environmentalists and food suppliers!

In 1978 we opened our own engineering business in Berrigan – Cottam Engineering employed up to eight employees manufacturing replacement components for earthmoving and agricultural industries – all involved in irrigation development thus saving water.

From 2000 there was a decline in irrigation water, increased water costs and drought continued for eight years. Our local work declined, very poor cereal crops produced, irrigation development ceased, a record four years of no rice grown and closure of Rice Mill in Deniliquin. We diversified and now manufacture gearboxes for drilling rig manufacturer in Bendigo. These machines are used all over Australia in mining exploration.

In thirty seven years in Berrigan I have seen this area boom with rice and grain production, cattle, sheep and dairy industries. Then an enormous decline due to drought, water cutback, local red gum forest industry (now a National Park) caused shut down of sawmills and further loss of employment in the area!

All our businesses have been hanging on waiting for the drought to break. If a proposed 37% water cut happens the drought will continue and many businesses will just close.

The Murray Darling Basin inquiry has to get a balance of Social, Financial and Environmental outcomes!

Yours faithfully
M (Joe) Cottam
11th November 2010