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FIRST PIPES LAID TO BRING DESALINATED WATER TO MELBOURNE

The first of 84km of pipes that will deliver desalinated water to Melbourne from the end of next year have been laid in Melbourne's south-east this week.

As the major milestone for the Victorian Desalination Project was achieved, AquaSure has also stepped up recruitment with more than 500 workers to be employed on the project by March.

Water Minister Tim Holding, who inspected construction on the pipeline today, said the project was on schedule and was vital to ensure the long-term water security for Melbourne, Geelong and towns in Western Port and South Gippsland.

"The desalination plant will turn sea water into drinking water and is our long-term insurance policy against drought and climate change," Mr Holding said.

"This pipeline will deliver up to 150 billion litres of water a year from the desalination plant in Wonthaggi to connect with Melbourne's existing water supply network.

"This and other major projects like the north-south pipeline being delivered as part of the Brumby Labor Government's Water Plan are our roadmap back from severe water restrictions.

"Despite good rainfall late last year, Melbourne's water storages are only at 36 per cent which is why we need a reliable, non-rainfall dependent source of water."

The pipeline, made up of 6200 pipes, and the underground power supply are located within the same easement for about 78km and then diverge near Thompsons Rd, Clyde North.

The pipeline travels a further 6km to connect with the Melbourne water network at Berwick and the powerline follows an existing electricity easement to Cranbourne.

The "two-way" pipe will also enable water from Melbourne to be transferred to people in South Gippsland and Western Port.

The pipes will be capable of carrying up to 200 billion litres of water a year – should the plant capacity be upgraded in the future.

Mr Holding said around 1700 direct jobs and as many as 3050 indirect jobs will be created during construction in a tough global economy.

"There has been unprecedented interest in the project, with more than 14,000 job applications received by AquaSure and its design and construction contractor Thiess Degrémont," he said.

"The project will provide employment opportunities for local people. There will be several waves of recruitment in coming months for trades including concreters, steel-fixers and form workers and labouring positions.

"Construction of the Victorian Desalination Project is expected to inject \$1 billion into the Victorian economy and using Victorian and Australian companies wherever possible is an important aspect of developing this critical water project."

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Pipes laid this week were built at Tyco Water's Somerton factory as part of a \$150 million contract. The steel to produce the pipes has been supplied by BlueScope Steel in Hastings.

Construction started on the desalination plant site at Wonthaggi in September and significant progress has already been made. Building foundations have been poured and more than 900,000 cubic metres of earth has been excavated.

The earth moved is being used to create new dunes on the site, with AquaSure committing to Victoria's largest ever coastal revegetation program, including the creation of a coastal park with walking, cycling and horseriding trails.