

# Background Information – The Snowy Scheme

Leaflet from: Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority

## **The Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme Background Information**

The Snowy Mountains Scheme is an integrated water and hydro-electric power project located in Australia's Southern Alps. It is undoubtedly one of the engineering wonders of the modern world.

The Scheme diverts water for irrigation west to the Murray and Murrumbidgee river systems and produces clean, renewable energy for South Eastern Australia.

The Scheme consists of a complex integrated infrastructure which includes sixteen major dams, seven power stations (two underground), 145 km of interconnected tunnels and 80 km of aqueducts.

The Snowy Scheme is not just a great feat of engineering; it is also a great social achievement. It is widely recognised as the birthplace of multiculturalism in Australia and has made a significant contribution to the economic development of modern Australia.

100,000 people from over 30 countries worked on the Scheme during the 25 years of construction. The work force reached its peak of 7,300 in 1959.

Countries from which workers came included: Austria, Finland, Jordan, Russia, USA, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Switzerland, Turkey, Estonia, France, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Rumania, Ukraine.

The contribution of these nations is

commemorated in the Avenue of Flags in the main street of Cooma, which was first unveiled in 1959.

The story of the Scheme's construction is a story of people who persevered through harsh conditions, rugged country and a unique climate.

They came from many different cultures, changing the white, Anglo-Saxon style of Australian society and bringing with them new ideas, new customs and new cuisines. Working together on the Scheme, they became part of the "Snowy family" - with former enemies and allies from wartime Europe working side by side.

The Scheme cost approximately \$1 billion to build, which includes interest costs accruing during construction. The project was completed on time and under budget.

In the 1800s, finding water to irrigate the driest inhabited continent in the world was a high priority. Diverting the water from the Snowy River to irrigate farmland west of the Great Dividing Range was the source of debate for over half a century before agreement was reached on harnessing the water to satisfy both agricultural and power demands.

Construction started on 17 October 1949 at Adaminaby, with the Governor General Sir William McKell, Prime Minister Ben Chifflery and the Scheme's first Commissioner, Sir William Hudson, in attendance.

During the 25 years of construction, thousands of Australians visited the Scheme, took part in car convoys through the mountains or studied the great Scheme at school. In the post war years, the Scheme became a source of national pride and captured the imagination of the

nation.

The Snowy Scheme continues to play an important role today.

Through the provision of water west of the Great Dividing Range, it is vital to agricultural production and river management, including flood mitigation, flow augmentation during drought and the control of salinity in the Murray River.

The Scheme's rapid response generators provide special services into the electricity grid, including supply of peak energy to New South Wales, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia, frequency control, voltage control, emergency support and black start capability in the event of complete system failure.

Through the use of a clean, renewable resource, generation of electricity by the Authority directly displaces approximately 5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions every year.

The Snowy Mountains Scheme has become a symbol of the alliance between men and nature, harnessing water for agriculture and clean power for cities.