

Liquid assets pour in

■ Saline water proves cash cow for Merredin

■ By Sonya Kimbar

MERREDIN'S salinity problem is being turned into a solution in what is believed to be a State first.

The Shire of Merredin is selling saline water from underneath the town to ALine East for use in the Great Eastern Highway roadworks.

The first truckload of water was taken by ALine East last week in a deal that will earn the Shire of Merredin thousands.

ALine East can use a combination of fresh and saline water for its roadworks.

Until now it has been buying only fresh water from Dam 3.

For the next few months it will use a combination of dam water and the saline water, which is extracted through a series of town bores and then stored in tanks north west of the CBH.

The big coup for Merredin will come in October when ALine East establishes a desalination plant, eliminating the need to tap into any fresh water supplies next summer.

When the roadworks are finished, the Shire of Merredin will inherit this desalini-

sation plant, paving the way for a long-term money-making venture.

Council chief executive officer Frank Ludovico said the project was of great benefit to Merredin.

"It's fantastic that we can use a resource that most people think is waste," Mr Ludovico said.

"It's allowing us to make money that we can put back into the town.

"Our challenge now is to secure a long-term customer for the desalinated water to make it economically viable.

"We need to investigate different options, whether it be things like tree planting, aquaculture, or using the water for the abattoirs."

ALine East is paying the Shire of Merredin \$1.50 a kilolitre for the saline water. It can use up to 400kL a day.

It has already spent \$40,000 on water storage tanks and will invest a further \$60,000 on the desalination plant and to repair leaks in the evaporation ponds.

ALine East alliance manager Mark Sutton said the project was a win-win situation for everyone. ■ *Continued page 3*



Merredin CEO Frank Ludovico, ALine East's Mark Sutton, Rockwater hydrologist Peter De Broekert and deputy shire president Mark Crees watch as the first saline water from under the town is used for the Great Eastern Highway roadworks.

First water pours from saline project

■ *From page 1*

Mr Sutton said ALine East was receiving cheaper water, the saline groundwater level was being reduced and the money was staying in the town.

"We are paying the shire in excess of \$150,000 for the water. All that money would have gone

to the Water Corporation if we had tapped into the pipeline for water," Mr Sutton said.

The Department of Agriculture has been involved in the project and installed the town bores as part of Rural Towns - Liquid Asset Project.

Rural Towns Program manager

Mark Pridham said the initiative was an important step in dealing with groundwater salinity in Merredin.

"It provides a model for other towns and demonstrates what can be achieved through cooperation," Mr Pridham said.