

Acquisition letters have gone out to farmers along the north-south pipeline ... and they're not happy

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COMPULSORY acquisition letters have been sent to land-holders along the controversial north-south pipeline. Nineteen letters were posted on Wednesday and more will follow. Land-holders say there is still overwhelming opposition to the project. They accuse Premier John Brumby of falsely claiming that only a few families oppose the scheme. Independent valuer and compulsory acquisition specialist Gerald McMahon said owners were angry. "No one is happy about having an easement going through their property... but there's no choice in the matter," said Mr McMahon, who has been appointed to represent land-holders in negotiations with Melbourne Water. "It's a bit like the bloke giving you the parking ticket. He's got the right, but he's still a mongrel and he's going to give you the ticket. "My premise is that they've got the right to do it, nobody is happy about it, but you've just got to deal with it." The *Herald Sun* this week travelled the entire pipeline route — from the Goulburn River, north of Yea, to Sugarloaf reservoir near Yarra Glen. Land-holders who agreed to let work teams on to their land said they did so out of fear or feelings of helplessness. Pipeline protest leader Jenny Beer said many farmers were scared of speaking out. "They can't afford to get arrested," she said. "Many are on semi-official bodies like landcare groups, local government committees, cemetery trusts, and their future role would be jeopardised."

The Government says Melbourne's water supply could run dry if the pipeline is not built by 2010. The \$750 million project is part of a plan by the Brumby Government to drought-proof the city's water supply. Up to \$2 billion in works on outdated irrigation infrastructure is supposed to provide extra water to be piped to Melbourne. The aim in the first year is to pump 75 billion litres of water to Sugarloaf, regardless of the savings made from the food-bowl modernisation project. Many farmers along the pipeline believe this water — made possible in part by \$300 million funded by Melbourne Water users — is being stolen from the region. Their claim on the water was strengthened yesterday when wheat farmers in the northwest said high temperatures, strong wind and little rain had all but ruined many crops. The Victorian Farmers Federation said northern irrigation