

NPIRD UPDATE

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Irrigation R&D – what future?

The National Program for Irrigation R&D is the only national body to coordinate irrigation research activity in Australia. At present it is in its third 3-year funding phase, which is due to finish in June 2002.

To get feedback from the irrigation industry about what shape irrigation research and development should take in the future and what the important issues will be, the program is running six workshops around Australia in October and November. Locations of these workshops are: Deniliquin, Melbourne, Townsville, Narrabri, Renmark and Perth.

Participants will be asked to identify the future big issues for irrigation and where the research gaps might be. A report, which will be prepared after the workshops, will be used by the NPIRD Management Committee to shape future research options and develop future funding options.

For more information contact NPIRD program coordinators, Liz and Murray Chapman, phone 03 5763 3214, email <rplan@benalla.net.au>.

Irrigation risk management

A recent project funded by NPIRD, with support from Murray Irrigation Ltd, Murray Dairy and the Rice Growers Association, was risk management kits for the rice and dairy industries. The aim of the kits is to help irrigators assess their options when looking at how they manage their water entitlement, including whether trading is likely to be profitable.

Murray Irrigation has been delivering the kits by running workshops with farmers. According to Charles Thompson, who has been presenting the workshops, feedback from participating growers has been very positive. Growers have found the information very useful for working out critical water trading decisions.

The kit is available to other dairy areas for use. We are now developing links with cotton, sugar cane and horticulture for its adaption to suit these industries.

For more information contact Charles Thompson, Rendell McGuckian, phone 03 5441 4821, email <rm@rendellmcguckian.com.au>.

A new ERA

A major activity being funded by NPIRD is the ERA or Ecological Risk Assessment Project. The aim of ERA is to develop a generic ecological risk assessment framework that will help with managing irrigation more sustainably. The project has four components – an overarching linkage project being run by the CRC for Freshwater Ecology, and three case studies in irrigation regions on the Goulburn Broken, the Fitzroy and the Ord rivers. As far as we know, this is an international first.

So far key ecological issues associated with each of these irrigation regions have been identified and conceptual models for the high priority issues developed. The program is expected to start this irrigation season.

Project proposals for this second stage have been through an independent review and are now being amended and links strengthened. Outcomes will include a model for use on a national and international basis. Research undertaken in the Ord, Fitzroy and Goulburn-Broken will directly assist the management of irrigation in those areas.

For more information contact Liz or Murray Chapman, phone 03 5763 3214, email <rplan@benalla.net.au>.

Soil Water Monitoring a best-seller

Soil Water Monitoring, the first Irrigation Insights publication funded by NPIRD, has proven a bestseller. Uploaded on the website and available for purchase from CSIRO Publishing and the IAA, around 600 copies of the book have been sold since the beginning of the year (1000 copies were printed). At this rate it will probably be sold out by mid next year. Income from sales will be used to help fund an update and reprint.

This result can be regarded as a real success for NPIRD.

Other Irrigation Insights that have been produced or are in progress are *Subsurface Drainage Design and Management Practices in Irrigated Areas*, *Repairing Concrete Channels*, *Repairing Earthen Channels* and *Water Use Efficiency*.

For more information contact Anne Currey, communications consultant, phone 02 6628 7079, email <anne@naturallyresourceful.com.au>.

NPIRD website

The *Soil Water Monitoring* Irrigation Insights is by far the most popular page on the NPIRD website (www.npird.gov.au) and has recorded huge traffic since January this year, when it was included on the site. Around 225,000 downloads were recorded to August this year.

About 60% of the people who accessed the site were from Australia, however, other users included people from the US, New Zealand, Germany, France, United Kingdom, Chile, Poland and Saudi Arabia.

Current projects

NPIRD has 21 projects in progress at the moment. Some of NPIRD's current projects are as follows:

Socio economic issues affecting positive change in irrigation communities

A scoping study to determine: the world and national drivers which will transform irrigation districts; what irrigation districts will look like in 2030; the characteristics of irrigation districts today which will assist or hinder positive change; and a priority listing of areas for focussed research.

Investigation into the practicalities of and potential for controlling evaporation losses from on farm storages

An Irrigation Insights that will give practical help to irrigators making decisions about controlling evaporation losses from on farm storages.

Determining whole-of-system water use efficiencies for NSW river valleys

Integral to this project is: improved understanding of whole-of-system water balances in selected valleys; greater definition and more rigorous modelling of irrigation delivery and application systems and their interaction at farm, region and valley levels; and documentation of critical factors required for successful whole-of-system WUE modelling.

Enhancement of the water market reform process: a socio economic analysis of guidelines and procedures for trading in mature water markets

The aims of this project are to: develop an understanding of how markets may operate in Australia in the next decade; determine the impact of water markets on regional communities and towns and develop possible strategies to overcome them; and develop possible water trading rules and procedures for mature water markets as an input to strategic planning.

Leaky Systems Seminar

In September, Land & Water Australia held a leaky systems seminar in Dubbo that looked at natural resource management and research issues.

Brett Tucker, previous coordinator for NPIRD, presented a talk on water use efficiency in the water supply sector. A major reference used by Brett was the *Australian Irrigation Water Provider Benchmarking Report*. The research that this report is based on was part funded by NPIRD. Other presentations in the water case study segment of the seminar were on climate variability, potential for water savings on farm and water for the environment.

For more information contact Fleur Flanery, phone 02 6263 6020, email <fleur.flanery@lwa.gov.au>.

About NPIRD

NPIRD is funded jointly by the Commonwealth Government, through Land & Water Australia, and industry and agency funding partners. These partners are:

Queensland Department of Natural Resources
 NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation
 WA Water and Rivers Commission
 CSIRO Land and Water
 Goulburn-Murray Water
 NSW State Water
 NSW irrigators
 Southern Rural Water
 South West Rural Water (WA)
 Ord Irrigation Co-operative
 Sunraysia Rural Water
 Wimmera Mallee Water
 Agriculture WA
 South Australia has committed to become a funding partner from next year.

More information

For more information about NPIRD or its projects contact Liz or Murray Chapman, phone 03 5763 3214, email <rplan@benalla.net.au>.