

National Program for Sustainable Irrigation Phase 2

The National Program for Sustainable Irrigation provides Australia with leadership through collaborative investment in research and innovation to achieve sustainable irrigation. Phase 1 of the Program was established in 2002 and built upon and extended the work of the National Program for Irrigation Research and Development.

The Program offers a unique service – providing leadership to identify, scope, purchase and manage research useful to partners, that can help to substantially improve the sustainability of irrigation.

A second phase of the National Program for Sustainable Irrigation is now being developed and is due to start in July 2006. Details of Program contacts can be found on the last page. The Program is seeking to form partnerships with commodity groups, water authorities and government agencies to invest in new research of benefit to the irrigation industry as a whole.



Vision: Sustainable irrigation is valued within Australian landscapes

Mission: To provide Australia with leadership through collaborative investment in research and innovation to achieve sustainable irrigation

Outcome: Substantial improvement in the environmental and productive performance of Australian irrigation

Strategy 1: Commissioning and Managing Research

Strategy 2: Leadership and Collaboration

Strategy 3: Knowledge into Practice

Aims

- Collaborate with irrigation research investors Australia wide to define, commission and manage research projects that provide benefits to a broad range of industries facing common issues.
- To produce new information of national importance and to facilitate its adoption.

Research results will:

- enable irrigation industries to be responsible and profitable users of water (e.g. salt, nutrient and soil water movement within and beneath the root zone);
- inform the management of irrigation within a landscape (e.g. ecological impact of reconfiguration of irrigation systems);
- be communicated in readily accessible formats; and,
- be relevant to practitioners, policy makers and planners.

Industry Context

Increased demand for water for agricultural, industrial and urban uses has put the management of Australia's river and groundwater systems under scrutiny. Management must balance the various demands for water, while providing for in-stream requirements to maintain biodiversity and water quality. Managing irrigation demands and improving the sustainable use of irrigation is a key component of water resource management.

The irrigation industry is marked by not really being considered an 'industry' at all. Irrigators tend to identify themselves in other ways (grains or broadacre, permanent plantings, dairy, vegetables etc.). This perspective is changing as the pressures on our water systems have increased, and Phase 1 of the Program has played a substantial role in providing a forum for irrigation stakeholders to collaborate and invest in common issues impacting on the sustainability of irrigation.

Advances in knowledge have been made that have led to improvements and savings at the farm and landscape scale. Research projects have delivered new tools and information specific to water re-use, plant growth, water use efficiency, precision irrigation, and irrigation community-wide planning. However there remain whole areas of inquiry essential to achieving sustainable irrigation.



The National Program for Sustainable Irrigation

The Program is a coalition of investors in sustainable irrigation research and innovation from throughout Australia. Investors come from all aspects of the irrigation industry – public and private interests – including policy, growers, water providers, commodity and extension groups. The Program has a Management Committee that provides the priorities, direction and financial management of the Program. Land & Water Australia is a statutory authority that provides overall governance and day to day management of the Program.

The Program's Role

The Program's role is to provide leadership among sustainable irrigation research investors by:

- Providing a forum for the development of irrigation stakeholder research priorities and exchange of information
- Investing in research (including pre-empting issues) that will improve the sustainability of the irrigation industry
- Providing a mechanism for joint inquiry to achieve effective and efficient use of industry funds for sustainable irrigation research, innovation and knowledge dissemination.

What the Program is not

- The National Program for Sustainable Irrigation is not a research provider. The Program develops, purchases and manages research from the most suitable research teams Australia-wide, so that lessons learnt and new knowledge can be adapted and adopted by irrigation stakeholders.
- The Program does not make water policy - however the knowledge generated by the Program informs policy makers.

Other Organisations

There are a number of organisations operating in the irrigation sector and there is often confusion surrounding how they fit together. Following are brief details about arrangements the Program has with three other agencies.

CRC for Irrigation Futures

The CRC for Irrigation Futures is a research provider and the National Program for Sustainable Irrigation is a research purchaser. The Program often purchases research from the CRC for Irrigation Futures research teams.

National Water Commission

The Commission's role is to drive national water reform and to help implement the Australian Water Initiative. The Program provides advice to the National Water Commission from time to time.

Murray Darling Basin Commission

The Murray Darling Basin Commission has a role in managing water flows in the Murray Darling system, developing policy and achieving strategies such as the Living Murray and the Basin Salinity Management Strategy. It is a limited investor in irrigation research.

External Evaluation

A recent external evaluation (Hassall & Assoc. 2006) found that the Program:

- creates a forum to identify and discuss issues impacting on sustainable irrigation;
- is consensus based and forward looking;
- provides a mechanism for partners to invest in irrigation research of direct relevance and to share knowledge; and,
- scored very highly on direct relevance to industry, knowledge management and smart science.

Contacts

Anwen Lovett

Manager, Sustainable Primary Industries
Land & Water Australia
(02) 6263 6032
anwen.lovett@lwa.gov.au

Murray & Liz Chapman

Program Coordinators
(03) 5763 3214
rplan@benalla.net.au



Image courtesy Narrabri Courier