

NPIRD UPDATE

NO. 4 MAY 2002

Land & Water Australia supports new sustainable irrigation program

At its board meeting held last month, the board of Land & Water Australia approved funding for a new irrigation program to begin in July 2002. The program will be called the National Program for Sustainable Irrigation.

The board demonstrated its commitment to a new national Research & Innovation program by allocating \$1,500,000 to it over the next three years. The board has stipulated that increased industry funding will also be a key component of the program.

According to Management Committee chairman, Stephen Mills, this decision is a very important one for the irrigation community in Australia and a vote of confidence in the work completed under the National Program for Irrigation Research and Development.

"The knowledge generated under the NPIRD program will form a sound platform on which to build the new program," he said.

"Now it is essential that industry supports the new program to ensure its success," he added.

National Program for Sustainable Irrigation focus

The focus of the new program will be sustainable irrigation.

Its aim is:

To provide Australia with research and innovations to achieve sustainable irrigation.

A prospectus being sent out to industry in the next fortnight identifies three themes for research. These themes are:

Enhancing sustainability of irrigation

Some of the issues to be researched under this theme are:

- improve understanding of sustainable irrigation

- provide measures of sustainability from which unsustainable practices can be identified
- provide indicators of progress towards sustainability at the landscape level (and which can be developed to provide a set of progress indicators at farm level)
- understand the size of change needed to achieve sustainable irrigation.

Exploring future visions and values

Issue areas include the following:

- predicting future business environments for irrigation, including global drivers
- seeking radical breakthroughs in irrigation concepts, designs and plant production systems
- exploring methods to minimise the environmental footprint of irrigation.

Informing public policy development

Areas for research include:

- improving understanding of water property rights and trading regulations
- understanding the needs of different regions, particularly in developing areas such as northern Australia
- identifying the distribution costs and benefits of sustainable irrigation
- identifying the social, economic and environmental consequences of failure
- enhancing the adoption of ecological risk assessment approaches.

NPIRD will conclude, as scheduled, on June 30, 2002. NPIRD projects which are mid-term will be managed by the new National Program for Sustainable Irrigation.

Land & Water Australia has said that the new National Program for Sustainable Irrigation is complementary to the bid being developed at present to establish a CRC for Irrigation Futures. If this bid is successful, the CRC won't begin until late next year at the earliest, at which time ways of merging will be explored.

CRC bid update

Land & Water Australia is supporting the present bid to establish a CRC for Irrigation Futures. The bid is being coordinated through CSIRO Land & Water.

Major developments with the bid are as follows:

- The interim board, under the chairmanship of Peter Hayes from Southcorp Ltd, will be having its second meeting in Canberra on 2 May. Priority items for discussion will be to review the proposed structure, confirm the participants and ratify the research plan.
- The research committee has produced a draft research plan which has been posted on the CRC website < www.crcirrigation.nisn.com.au > .
- Four nodes have been proposed for the CRC, three reflecting climatic zones and one node focusing on water policy issues.

The bid will be submitted at the end of May.

Land & Water Australia and NPIRD sponsor workshop

Land & Water Australia and NPIRD are sponsoring a one-day workshop being held in Sydney next month as part of *Irrigation Australia 2002*, the Irrigation Association of Australia's (IAA) biennial conference and exhibition.

The title of the workshop is *Researching the Future*, and its aim is to examine the future long-term directions for irrigation research in Australia. It is being organised by the National Irrigation Science Network (NISN).

Robyn Williams, presenter for the ABC's *Science Show*, and Patrick Dodson from the Lingiari Foundation will set the scene for the workshop.

For more information about the workshop contact Jeremy Cape, phone 08 8303 8552, email < Jeremy.cape@csiro.au > , and to register online for the workshop or conference go to the IAA's website < www.irrigation.org.au > .

Burdekin project stakeholders review progress

Over sixty stakeholders in the Burdekin project met in March to review progress with the Burdekin Initiative in North Queensland. NPIRD is a partner organisation in this initiative, whose focus is to address current water management practices and their potential impacts on long-term sustainability of the Burdekin Delta groundwater systems in north Queensland. The understanding and future management of this system

is critical to the well being of the near shore part of the Great Barrier Reef.

There were a variety of presentations on particular aspects of the Initiative, and a feedback session where stakeholders identified future directions for research. This meeting was followed up by a technical review of the research to date.

The meeting agreed that there should be a similar meeting within the next 12 months to examine in more detail progress on particular aspects of research.

For more information about the meeting and its outcomes contact project manager Dr Keith Bristow at CSIRO Ayr, phone 07 4753 8596, email < keith.Bristow@csiro.au >

NPIRD project Sustainable Management of the Burdekin Delta Groundwater Systems – Project No. CLW32

Project aims

1. To better understand how irrigation waters are stored and transported through the saturated zone.
2. To understand the impacts of current and improved irrigation efficiency on recycling and water spreading and subsequent interactions (if any) with nutrient, salt and chemical loading of the groundwaters.
3. To develop a conceptual framework and guidelines for improved and more sustainable management of the delta groundwater systems.
4. To provide insights into managing similar groundwater irrigation systems throughout Australia.

Socio-economic report

A final report on the *socio-economic* research needs of irrigation communities in making structural changes in the next thirty years, *Socio-Economic Research And Development For Irrigation Communities*, has been posted on the NPIRD website, < www.npird.gov.au > .

The report by Noel Beynon and Onko Kingma from CapitalAg Consultants identifies 16 inter-related 'research topic areas' for socio-economic research, development and extension for consideration by NPIRD. These topic areas are categorised into four themes, as follows:

Social arrangements – covering values, institutions and the debate on the structure of irrigation communities.

Economic activity – covering the issues relating to farming enterprises, business structures, development of markets for inputs and products, and the scale and scope of industries supporting agriculture.

Learning – covering issues relating to innovation, capacity building and the development and uptake of knowledge.

Supporting structures – covering issues relating to governance, structural adjustment, planning processes, operational arrangements, and support measures.

This work will inform the new National Program for Sustainable Irrigation's research program.

2002 ANCID Irrigation awards

ANCID has just announced that applications are open for its 2002 Irrigation awards. There are four categories, which aim to showcase improved management of commercial water supply and drainage infrastructure and on farm irrigation and drainage systems. Winners in each category will receive \$2000 cash and an engraved award. Awards will be presented at the ANCID conference being held in Griffith 2 to 4 September 2002.

For more information contact John Mapson, phone 03 5833 5502, email <johnmap@g-mwater.com.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 and Mines
Sunwater, Queensland
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 (Victoria)
South West Water (WA)
Ord Irrigation Cooperative
Sunraysia Rural Water
Wimmera Mallee Water
Agriculture WA

South Australia has committed to become a funding partner in the new National Program.

More information

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

This newsletter has been produced to keep stakeholders up-to-date with the National Program for Irrigation Research and Development and its activities.