



CONFERENCE 2006

WATER FOR IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE & THE ENVIRONMENT

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MEDIA RELEASE

Finding a Flow for All

PARTNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT: THE KEYS TO SUSTAINABLE WATER USE

Australian agricultural expertise is helping to reduce water consumption in agriculture, through a suite of innovative and effective projects carried out by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

ACIAR's collaborative agricultural R&D in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, which are yielding real benefits to both Australia and partner countries, are being highlighted at *Water for Irrigated Agriculture and the Environment: Finding a Flow For All*, the Crawford Fund's annual development conference in Parliament House, Canberra on 16 August. The event will be opened at 9am by The Hon Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs, followed by the keynote address by Dr Frank Rijsberman, Director General of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the world's pre-eminent research institution on management of water for food and agriculture. A press conference will be held at 12pm in the Theatre. The Hon Malcolm Turnbull will make an address at 3.35pm.

"Australia's efforts in water management are being recognised internationally and many developing countries in the Asia Pacific region are drawing on our expertise in agricultural science, technology and management of water," said Mr Peter Core, Director of ACIAR.

ACIAR's agricultural R&D work sees improving the efficiency of agricultural production and water use as fundamental to improving the economic growth, environmental sustainability, food security and reducing poverty.

"The message is positive and clear," said Mr Core. "ACIAR's work in developing countries has shown that reduced water use by agriculture is possible while maintaining crop yields and farmer incomes – with potential flow on benefits for the environment and for national economies".

Mr Core highlighted just a few of ACIAR's water related success stories.

In Vietnam where the agricultural economy is heavily reliant on irrigation, ACIAR-supported projects have investigated more efficient delivery of water to farmers with increased crop yields and reduced energy inputs. The project in the Lan Khe irrigation system, which has increased rice yields by 11%, is expected to deliver \$13.2 million over a 30 year period and a cost:benefit ratio of research investment of 10:1.

The ATSE Crawford Fund wishes to thank the sponsors for this event, including:

Alliance of the CGIAR Centers; AusAID - the Australian Agency for International Development; Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research; Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage; CRC for Irrigation Futures; CSIRO Land and Water; CSIRO Livestock Industries; Grains Research and Development Corporation; International Water Management Institute; Land & Water Australia; Murray-Darling Basin Commission; National Water Commission

Mr Core explained that nowhere is water under greater demand than in China – one of the largest users of available water and where irrigated rice production is vital.

“Introduction of new irrigation methods to rice, based on alternate wetting/drying of soils instead of continuous flooding, have been trialled in 1.5 million hectares in China. The results have shown less water is being used while maintaining high yields. The techniques are now being trialled in Sri Lanka and the Philippines,” he said.

Another project studying water management in China’s Zhanghe Irrigation Scheme has introduced water-saving technologies that can increase food production using less water.

Changes to water delivery procedures have also helped to increase crop yields and will help to deal with problems of increasing water shortage and competition that are prevalent in vast areas of China – especially north of the Yangtze River.

“In Australia and developing countries alike, competition for water for different uses like food, industry, cities and nature conspire to create the real challenge of *finding a flow for all*” noted the ACIAR Director.

A range of other ACIAR projects tackle the challenge by looking at government policies and water governance. A collaborative project on water allocation and policy with IWMI in the Krishna basin in India – home to 67 million people – has drawn on Australian lessons from the management of the Murray-Darling basin. And another with ABARE focuses on the Yellow River basin in China – home to two thirds of China’s cultivated land - where building the necessary policy framework for reallocating water could boost agricultural production by an estimated \$A165 million (one billion Yuan) a year.

“We’ve had some great success in tackling soil and water problems of irrigated crops through the use of raised bed technology. The technology has successfully been trialled in India, Pakistan and Indonesia and is achieving increase yields and lower water use. As is the case for much of ACIAR’s work, this research shows positive results for Australia and in the future we may see raised bed crop systems as a feature on our landscape too”.

ACIAR collaborates with research providers in Australia and developing countries in areas where Australia has special research competencies. The Centre works with NGOs, IMWI and partner country researchers to deliver modern technology and apply better management practices to water to help ensure a sustainable future for smallholder farmers and traditional landholders.

Further information, photos, additional press releases, the program, abstracts and bios available at www.crawfordfund.org or contact Cathy Reade, 0413 575 934 creade@squirrel.com.au for interviews