

Farm modernisation project launched

By Stuart Bray and Janelle Montgomery, NSW Industry & Investment

Irrigators in the Gwydir Valley and Border Rivers catchments received a positive boost with the launch in December of a \$21.7 million farm modernisation project funded by the Australian Government's 'Water for the Future' initiative.

The project managed by NSW Industry & Investment (I&I NSW) with assistance from the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA provides an opportunity for NSW Border Rivers and Gwydir Valley irrigators to upgrade irrigation infrastructure, improve productivity and adapt to reduced water availability while maintaining their irrigation industries.

NSW Sustaining the Basin

Border Rivers-Gwydir (STBBRG) is the first activity to be funded under the \$300 million Australian Government's commitment towards the NSW Farm Modernisation Program under the NSW Priority Project.

STBBRG is a pilot project to gauge irrigator views on incentive based water recovery programs and guide future investment in irrigation infrastructure in other NSW catchments.

Eleven consultation meetings for irrigators, agribusiness advisors and irrigation consultants were held throughout the catchment in December 2009 to discuss funding opportunities for on-farm infrastructure projects to improve water use efficiency.

Feedback about the project was generally positive. There was concern about the timeframe for works to be completed and significant hesitation to giving back water without a premium to current market value.

But there was overwhelming support for completing Irrigation Farm Water Use Efficiency Assessments (IFWUEA) to assist in future planning to improve on-farm water use.

Lack of irrigation water in the catch-



STBBRG Project Staff (from left) Janelle Montgomery (I&I NSW), Rod Jackson (I&I NSW) and Zara Farrell (Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA).

ment for several years has created difficulties for irrigators who have seen a decline in production of 40 per cent or more. Despite this the attendance at the public meetings was good with 63 per cent of active irrigators across the region attending.

Fifty three expressions of interest to participate in the project were accepted by the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA who is managing the tender process. Forty nine of these were accepted to participate in the project and can now proceed with engaging an approved irrigation consultant to undertake an IFWUEA and access relevant training.

STBBRG will provide up to 80 per cent of the cost of an IFWUEA with a limit of \$6000 per farm to determine the best options to improve water management on-farm. NSW Border Rivers and Gwydir Valley irrigators can also engage an irrigation consultant to assist in developing their on-farm projects and tender application.

Gwydir Valley irrigators indicated they are predominantly considering undertaking storage works and conveyance works while Border Rivers irrigators indicated they were mainly considering undertaking

conveyance works and changing their irrigation system.

Participating irrigators will need to prepare a tender application outlining the proposed on-farm works and expected water savings. The project will fund 80 per cent of the infrastructure in return for 50 per cent of the expected water savings in equivalent water entitlements being returned to the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder.

Tenders must be submitted by irrigators no later than March 12, 2010.

STBBRG also includes a range of workshops, seminars and field days at strategic technology demonstration sites to assist irrigators to develop their tender applications.

Mike Murray, CEO of the Gwydir Valley Irrigators Association said "The Border Rivers-Gwydir project has very short timeframes, but for irrigators already considering specific on-farm infrastructure projects it does provide a business opportunity worth considering."

For further information on STBBRG go to www.industry.nsw.gov.au/info/sustainingthebasin or email gwydir.info@industry.nsw.gov.au



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