



Excellence in large area irrigation

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in a nutshell

- The 2006 IREC Irrigated Farm Competition showcased four diverse businesses each with outstanding strengths in the management of business diversity, market opportunity and environmental resources
- Amongst many common characteristics, all finalists impressed judges with their positive attitudes, a clear vision of their business objectives, and a strong belief that profitability and healthy farming systems go hand in hand

An impressive group of irrigators were finalists in this year's IREC Irrigated Farm Competition. Coming from four very different farming systems, and four different farming environments, all finalists demonstrated that a detailed knowledge of all aspects of the farm business is a key feature of successful farming operations.

So impressed were the judges that four individual 'finalist' awards were made. The finalists shared many common characteristics in their attitude and approach, but each had their own very evident strengths. The 2006 awards were:

- *Irrigation Management and Water Use Efficiency* – Tim and Sally Watson, Hillston
- *Natural Resource Management* – Ian and Jan Auldish, Hay
- *Agricultural Management* – Malcolm and Maree Brown, Warburn
- *Farm Planning and Innovation* – Glen and Julie Andrezza, Willbriggie

Increased pressure for water use efficiency, volatile produce prices and increasing consumer demands mean that a high level of knowledge of your market as well as your farming operation are important aspects in running a farm business. The four businesses that featured as finalists have planned and adapted their businesses around their own goals and their farm's physical conditions to enable them to succeed despite facing many and varied pressures.

All finalists had outstanding aspects of their businesses from which all farm businesses can learn. Common themes that were evident were:

- a positive attitude
- tailored irrigation and production systems to suit particular conditions
- a clear vision of what the business was to achieve and how to get there

- detailed knowledge of all aspects of the farming system
- profitability and healthy farming systems going hand in hand.

At an Awards Dinner held on 27 July 2006, Tim and Sally Watson were announced the winner of the 2006 IREC Irrigated Farm Competition (Large Area).

Judging was an inspiring task for this year's judges: Terry McFarlane (Previous IFCOM winner), Barry Haskins (NSW DPI), Michael Grabham (NSW DPI), Therese Chauncy (Coleambally Irrigation), Annette Pavese and Bart Challacombe (Murrumbidgee Irrigation).

The judging criteria focussed on seven key aspects of the farms: whole farm planning, business planning, agricultural management, irrigation and drainage, water use efficiency, education and keeping up to date, and natural resource management. Each of the judges independently allocated points to the entrants with respect to these seven aspects.

Innovative technology & management

Tim and Sally Watson were the overall winners of this year's competition and also received the award for *Irrigation Management and Water Use Efficiency*. The Watsons impressed the judging panel with their attention to detail and innovation across all aspects of their farming system. They have developed their farms using a range of irrigation systems, which are carefully matched to soil types and the crops produced, which has maximised water use efficiency across the operation. This, along with a range of irrigation scheduling methods to best suit their crops and management enables the Watsons to achieve outstanding production and water use efficiency results.

The diversity of their farming operation allows the Watsons to produce a range of crops including cotton, melons, pumpkins, sweet corn, wheat and maize. This diversity enables the Watsons to take advantage of a range of volatile markets, while minimising overall risk to the business.



Paying close attention to customer needs is an important part of the Watsons business strategy, achieved through visiting both overseas and local markets.

The business is well rounded, with high importance also placed on the natural environment of their properties. The Watsons have incorporated protection and enhancement of natural vegetation on and around their operations by looking after remnant vegetation and undertaking revegetation.

To ensure a strong farm team, staff is included in decision making and responsibilities shared across the business.

Focus on sustainability

Ian and Jan Auldust carefully manage their grazing operation in balance with the natural environment and received the award for *Natural Resource Management*.

The Auldists take advantage of their position on the Murrumbidgee River, with ample native vegetation, to run an operation which produces a high quality product while enhancing the environmental aspects of their land.

The Auldists impressed the judges with their detailed planning and incorporating native vegetation management into farm management. They have clearly set out what they want their farming operation to achieve and how to get there. Planning is well integrated with the day to day management of the farm. The grazing enterprise is managed to have a low impact on the environment. The judges were also impressed by Ian's level of involvement in Landcare and various other committees, another reason for receiving the Natural Resource Management award.

The Auldists' approach demonstrates that a healthy farming landscape is an important aspect of a productive farming business.

Maximising farm health & productivity

Malcolm and Maree Brown received the award for *Agricultural Management*.

The Browns impressed the judges with their approach to the development of their farms by adapting their irrigation and cropping system to better suit the farms' soil types. Their comprehensive farm planning and attention to market demands helps them get the most from their centre pivot irrigation system. The Browns have altered their agricultural


management to include stubble retention and direct drilling which allows them to double crop azuki beans with wheat, enabling the farm to harvest three crops in 18 months. Through these management techniques they are improving their soil health and maximising use of available soil moisture. Careful attention is also paid to improving native vegetation to improve the health of the overall farm.

The judges were impressed by the high quality and high yields the Browns have achieved with their key crop of azuki beans and their ongoing attention to tailoring their system to crops which are well suited to their irrigation system and soils. The Browns are constantly reviewing all aspects of their business including farm planning and market demands to ensure they are continually adapting and improving.

Striving for excellence

Glen and Julie Andrezza continue to build on their strength of industry-leading rice production and received the award for *Farm Planning and Innovation*.

The Andrezzas have embraced opportunities available through programs such as EnviroWise to develop their farming system to its full potential. Glen uses comprehensive farm planning as an important tool in improving the farm's performance. The plans are regularly referred to, updated and implemented, which has resulted in ongoing positive changes to the farm.

Glen impressed the judges with his ability to continually improve rice production, achieving excellent yield and water use efficiency. The Andrezzas land is particularly well suited to rice production, and Glen has focussed on this strength and continues to build on what he does best. A large part of Glen's ability to achieve such excellent production results is his intimate knowledge of water use efficiency across the farm. The judges were impressed by Glen's knowledge every paddock's water use efficiency, what each is returning to the business, and how he can further push the system to improve on that efficiency. 

Further information

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Figure 1: Tim and Sally Watson of Hillston impressed judges with their attention to detail and innovation

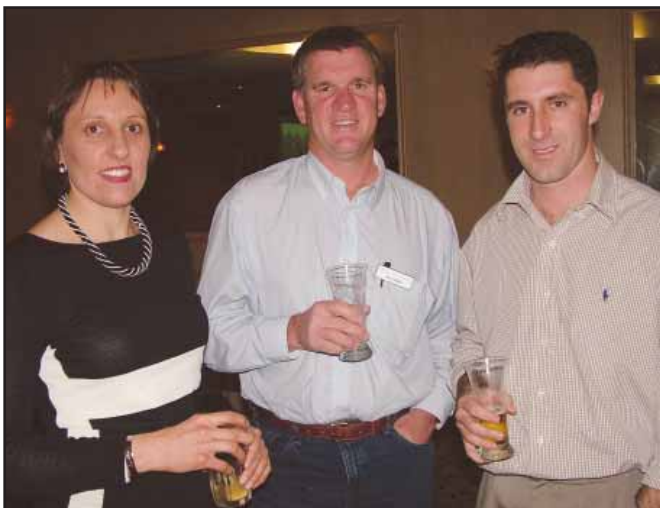
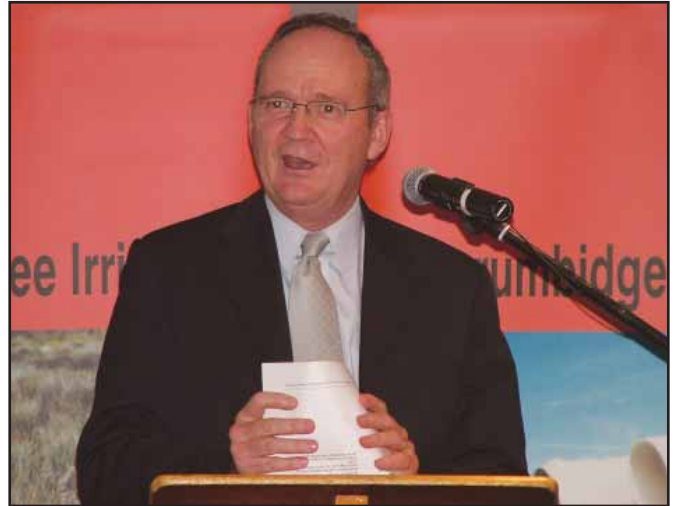


Figure 2: Six finalists - from left, Malcolm and Maree Brown, Glen and Julie Andrezza and Tim and Sally Watson



IREC Irrigated Farm Competition 2006 Awards Dinner

27 July 2006 - Griffith



Clockwise from top left

1. Mike Hedditch, SunRice; Ken Matthews, National Water Commission; Brett Tucker, Murrumbidgee Irrigation; John Blackwell, CSIRO; Peter Draper, IREC Chairman; & Arun Tiwari, Coleambally Irrigation
2. Guest speaker, Ken Matthews, NWC
3. Daryl Gibbs of Hay accepting the Award for Natural Resource Management on behalf of Jan & Ian Auldish, Hay
4. Iva Quarisa, Timo Gobius & competition judge Barry Haskins, all of NSW DPI
5. Serious dinner discussion being held by Janelle McGufficke, Louise Adcock, Martin Rugeri, Rob Kelly & Bart Challacombe