



Qualified in irrigation practice

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in a nutshell

The Irrigation Association of Australia believes that its new certification program sets benchmarks for the minimum set of skills for people operating, managing or installing irrigation systems as well as those who provide advice in this area. For example, Certified Irrigation Managers have proven that they have the skills needed to ensure that the right amount of water is applied to a crop at the right time with the least impact on the environment.

A recent conversion to overhead irrigation systems on Woperana Station, near Tocumwal, meant that Greg Ingram and his staff needed to develop some new skills to get the best from the new systems.

Greg is property manager of *Woperana Station*, which is 5500 ha in size and 1200 ha is irrigated from groundwater or surface supply from Murray Irrigation. The property is a mixed farming enterprise with dryland grazing and winter cereals and various irrigated crops including maize, legumes and oilseeds. Half of the property is laid out for border check irrigation and the remainder of the irrigated areas has recently been converted to overhead sprinkler, using either lateral move or centre pivot irrigators.

The conversion of the irrigation system created an interest in best irrigation practice for Greg, leading him to apply for a scholarship to take part in a training and recognition program run by the Irrigation Association of Australia. The program qualifies participants as a Certified Irrigation Manager. Greg was one of 10 leading irrigation practitioners who won a scholarship. The successful applicants came from four states and between them produce under irrigation, milk, fodder, cane, cotton, potatoes, grains, grapes and nursery plants.

"While I already hold qualifications in Agriculture and Rural Business Management and have completed the Murray Irrigation course, I was interested in gaining some formal recognition for my particular skills in irrigation and hopefully learning more," Greg said.

For the first month, Greg and the other scholarship holders worked with staff from Tocal Agricultural College and NSW DPI to assess what skills they had and to identify skill gaps, if any. The group was then brought together for three days in Sydney where they underwent intensive training and assessment. Greg found that while he had no gaps in his learning, he certainly learned a lot more about the things he already knew.

"I learned the most from the others in the group and what they were achieving in terms of water use efficiency and productivity," he said.

IAA Certified Irrigation Managers have at least three years industry experience and have proved they are competent in irrigation scheduling, hydraulics, soil mapping and environmental risk management. Certification must be renewed every two years by providing evidence of having kept irrigation skills and knowledge up to date.

Greg is keen to see more Certified Irrigation Managers in the district so as to be better prepared for even tighter allocations in future. Despite having already completed the local irrigation course, Greg believes that he can now make greater savings, particularly by having a closer look at his soil types and can better train his own staff to recognise the consequences of watering.

Both Murrumbidgee Agricultural College and Riverina TAFE can deliver the program in partnership with the IAA.




Figure 1: Greg Ingram, manager of Woperana Station at Tocumwal, believes that the Certified Irrigation Manager qualification will help irrigators demonstrate their right to their share of the water resource.



The IAA believes that if you are managing an irrigation system, whether on a farm, golf course or park, a Certified Irrigation Manager qualification is the minimum set of skills needed to ensure that the right amount of water is applied at the right time with the least impact on the environment. The IAA also offers certification for irrigation designers, operators, contractors, installers, agronomists and retailers. Such broad offerings can help to lift the game across the industry and the IAA envisages a future for irrigation in Australia where all irrigation systems are: developed by Certified Irrigation Designers; installed by Certified Irrigation Contractors and Installers; run by Certified Irrigation Operators and Managers; with product and advice from Certified Irrigation Retailers and Agronomists to ensure best use of our precious water resources.

"I believe that participation in this type of program is an imperative," Greg said.

"It should be readily available to every farmer. It provides the absolute minimum skills you need if you are to be a custodian of water, ensuring that you can manage it in the best way possible, in full acknowledgement of your soil types, crops and the environment. It is fair but rigorous and will help us all prove our right to our share of the resource." 

Further information

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Irrigation industry looks to more effective national representation

Two key organisations within the irrigation industry are investigating the best way to represent their constituents, with a possible merger on the cards.

The Executive of the Australian National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage (ANCID) and the Board of the Irrigation Association of Australia (IAA) have formed a joint group to work towards a closer working relationship to better represent and service the Australian irrigation industry.

Both organisations believe the National Water Initiative and the establishment of the National Water Commission have, for the first time, provided an 'all of government' national blue print for the future of water and irrigation.

ANCID and the IAA have agreed the irrigation industry needs to have a more unified, professional voice. The new working group comprising members from the two organisations has now been established to determine whether two more tightly focussed and cooperative bodies or a new single entity can best work with government and others to represent their members, the industry and develop the considerable opportunities facing irrigation in Australia.

ANCID is the Australian Committee of the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage and its membership represents most irrigation water authorities

and irrigation water delivery companies in Australia. ANCID members represent approximately \$6.6 billion of assets (at replacement value), in 68 businesses with 35,000 irrigators and 198 towns as customers. This represents about 45% of all irrigation water entitlements in Australia. ANCID is active in benchmarking, industry research and development and information dissemination.

The IAA represents both the rural and urban irrigation sectors with membership along the entire value chain from manufacturers and distributors to end-users and provides irrigation information, training and certification programs, a network of development officers, and runs the largest irrigation exhibition in the southern hemisphere.

The working group will explore the priority needs of the industry, how they can be most effectively met and what structure and governance arrangements might best achieve this. A proposal will be developed for each organisation to put to its members.

Further information

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