



Cooperative Research Centre for
IRRIGATION FUTURES

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE FISHERIES AND FORESTRY
ENQUIRY INTO**

Rural skills Training and Research

**RESPONSE BY THE
CRC FOR IRRIGATION FUTURES**

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The rural industry requires a paradigm shift in training. Present Education and Training available for the rural industry currently delivers much needed knowledge and skills to an industry under extremely high pressure to change. This Training is however predominantly a teacher centred pedagogy that delivers isolated content heavy curriculum. The result is an industry shackled to a system that provides limited ability to respond to changes.

The need for a more adult learning based training system is of paramount importance as our world, both locally and globally, changes at an exponential rate. The rapid changes (environmental, social, technological and economical) that we all face requires an enhanced capacity to respond to change. In general the current training and education offered to the rural industries of Australia is reactionary and for the most part ‘top down’. Coupled with teacher centred pedagogy the result accentuates the poor uptake of research and best practice.

Research in Australia’s Centres for Excellence and Cooperative Research Centres (CRC’s) is world leading however there is a growing chasm between the research outputs and industry utilisation. This is the result not only from the current training paradigm but also the uncoupling of research from regional Australia and consequently Industry and practice. Regional Universities must maintain their

practical and research links to rural industries in order to maintain and extend our level of research and development.

Due to the rapid change demanded of rural industries it is imperative that Industry receives increased access to an adult learning based education and training system in order to respond to these changes and develop a more professional approach to business.

Key Issues with Respect to the CRC for Irrigation Futures

The capacity of the CRC IF to achieve its stated goals is heavily dependent upon a rural training and research infrastructure based on the principles outlined above. Our current experience indicates that this infrastructure is currently limited and may be further adversely impacted on by proposed government tertiary education policy.

Issues of critical importance for the CRC IF in this context include:

- Greater recognition of the unique features of adult learning processes and support for existing training organisations in delivering this kind of service;
- Continued and on going support for regionally based education and training institutions; and
- Continued support for regionally based research capacity in our universities, departments and private sector organisations.

Irrigation represents the backbone of much of regional Australia providing up to 80% of the employment opportunities in some towns and creating the critical mass of economic activity for many more. Irrigation represents some 50% of the gross turn over and over 60% of the total profit derived from the agribusiness sector in Australia. Despite rapid advances in on farm performance through adoption of new technologies and practices it is currently subject to some of the most intense environmental scrutiny of any industry in Australia. In addition global market reform is seeing the growth of new industries and the collapse of some traditional sectors. The demand for new knowledge to respond to these pressures is high yet the adoption rates continue to lag behind the required rate of change.

We need access to worlds best practice regionally based research, education and training institutions to effectively respond to these drivers of change in order to maintain our responsibility to the social and environmental development of regional Australia and our contribution to the national economy.

We would be interested in working with the committee to further address these issues and establish a framework in which the specific issues related to Australia's irrigation community can be addressed.