

Senate Rural Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2010
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: APD/GRDC 01

Division/Agency: Grains Research and Development Corporation

Topic: GRDC research on water use efficiency

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Senator Nash asked:

Senator NASH—That would seem to be a very good reason to retain GRDC as they are, I would think. Anyway, I am obviously terribly worried, Dr O’Connell, seeing some of this funding just disappear out the door. Can you perhaps provide to the committee—I know you say about 70 per cent of the work—information on the work that you are doing on that water use efficiency, or certainly direct us to where it is obviously publicly available? If you could just alert the committee to that, because that is probably one of the key areas

at the moment that we really need to look at—where the work is being done, where we can increase the productivity through water use efficiency, which we have been saying for some time now is the most appropriate way of doing it.

Mr Reading—We are happy to do that and also, as we have mentioned in previous discussions, the advances that have already been made—and the one we always quote is Western Australia. If you look at figures in 1969, the average in-season rainfall was 152 millimetres per season and the average yield was 400 kilos, and track that fast to 2006 and the average in-season rainfall has declined to 110 millimetres and the average yield now is over 990 kilos there. This has been ongoing for a long time and it is absolutely critical.

The things that have contributed to that have been farming practices, in terms of minimum and reduced tillage et cetera, and now increasingly genetics are starting to play a role.

Answer:

The Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) has a broad portfolio of investment focussed on improving water use efficiency — from germplasm enhancement and varietal development in pre-breeding, through to applied farming practices which use water most efficiently.

The GRDC is investing \$17.6 million between 2008 and 2013 through its Water Use Efficiency Initiative for grain-based farming systems across Australia’s southern and western grain growing regions. The intention is to help growers make more profitable use of the rainfall received, with the ultimate goal to increase the water use efficiency of farming systems by ten per cent.

The CSIRO is assisting the initiative by providing science, crop, soil and climate modelling support to each of the 17 regional projects and coordinating the initiative’s annual forum to facilitate sharing of information and experiences.

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Question: APD/GRDC 01 (continued)

The GRDC has produced '*Water Use Efficiency Ground Cover Supplement September- October 2009*' which outlines GRDC's investment strategy and regional projects funded through the national Water Use Efficiency Initiative.

The GRDC also recently partnered with the Irrigated Cropping Forum to develop a series of case studies on 14 individual irrigation businesses operating within the southern Murray Darling Basin. These case studies have been published in a booklet titled '*Lifting irrigated cropping profitability and water use efficiency*'. As well as the hard copy publication, each of the 14 case studies can be downloaded via the following link http://www.icf.org.au/pubs_f/licp2.html

The diversity of approaches demonstrated in the case studies supports the GRDC's view that there are many ways to lift irrigated cropping profitability and water use efficiency.

The GRDC provides outcomes of its investments publicly through a range of communication and extension tools including GRDC Grower and Adviser Updates, field days, media releases, publications, factsheets, a Driving Agronomy Radio Program and Ground Cover newsletters and a Ground Cover TV program distributed on DVD. All information is also available on the GRDC and research partner websites.