

# Water research examined by Riverlink

The continued water allocation of zero percent in Victoria and uncertainty of variable water allocations has driven industry bodies and research agencies to engage in planning for a future with less water.

Riverlink, the regional research agency network, recently brought together senior representatives from New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, Victorian Department of Primary Industries, CSIRO Plant Industry, South Australian Research and Development Institute, Primary Industries and Resources South Australia and grape, citrus, nuts and vegetable industries to conduct a planning forum in response to the water crisis.

“Riverlink recognises that there is a vast amount of research information available to horticulture producers,” Mr Max Tolson, Riverlink Council Chair explained. “However, there are knowledge gaps that need to be filled; the essential issue is survival and recovery of the irrigated horticulture crops affected by low water allocation.”

“Regional horticultural producers understand that drought conditions and fluctuating water availability may be the future for our industries. Growers are seeking support to better manage water related risks when considering changes to farming methods that are more efficient in the face of water restrictions. Global pressures on crop prices mean that better irrigation decision tools are needed,” Mr Tolson said.

The planning forum provided an opportunity for research agencies to discuss relevant projects and possibilities for collaboration. The major activity completed by forum participants was to develop and prioritise a list of research themes.

Collaborating research teams have been allocated themes to develop into projects, Mr Tolson is hopeful for some short term outcomes, “Growers are in need of answers and direction to enable their crops to produce and survive the coming season, there is also a real need for recovery advice.



***Drip irrigation has been utilised by horticultural industries to increase water use efficiencies.***

“However, each grower’s immediate and critical needs must be balanced with the longer term survival of whole industry sectors. The long term future requires scientists to help develop techniques in dealing with fluctuations in water quantity and quality, along with a better understanding of yield and water use models that assist in building plant resilience. The permanency of horticulture in the region depends on the best possible scientific knowledge and research to back up the industries in the region.”

Regional government departments are currently conducting workshops to extend information concerning low water allocation strategies, details can be found on the Waterlink webpage: [www.riverlink.gov.au/waterlink](http://www.riverlink.gov.au/waterlink).

## **Process for priorities**

Participants for the water planning forum were put into groups (trying not to sit with colleagues) and asked to list research ideas and possible outcomes. The resulting ideas and outcomes were combined to produce a matrix of research themes.

Industry, researchers, extension officers and funding bodies discussed major areas of interest and prioritised the research themes.

Riverlink has been working with government agencies to further develop the water research theme matrix. Theme champions and coordinators have been nominated; project proposals and scoping have recently been submitted.

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