

Irrigation management in the Northern Mallee:

Training, incentives and
benchmarking.



Sustainable Landscapes Mallee

Snapshot 2008

Maxine's feeling for water...

Creating change in Australian irrigation

When you Google the name Maxine Schache you get 21 references...all relate to irrigation.

Sites referencing Maxine include: the Irrigation Association of Australia, the American Journal of Oenology and Viticulture, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Maxine really has a feeling for water...

Since 1993, Maxine has worked to create change in northern Mallee irrigation industries.

In cooperation with the Mallee Catchment Management Authority (MCMA), Maxine has coordinated DPI's irrigation management courses, the provision of government incentives and the benchmarking of regional best irrigation practices. She has been instrumental in improving regional water use efficiency in the region.

According to the latest measurements (and compared to the 1993 figures), there is now more than 50% less drainage and salt volume going back into the Murray river from the northern Mallee pump district. Maxine believes this reduction is due to improved management and the use of better irrigation technology - driven over time by access to training, financial incentives, and the immense upgrades associated with the wine boom in the early part of this decade.



Maxine Schache, Irrigation Team Leader
Sustainable Landscapes Mallee

Progress through Partnerships



In a nutshell...

- Since 1993, around 2500 northern Mallee irrigators have attended DPI Irrigation Management Courses.
- Over 75% of northern Mallee irrigators now use pressurised systems.
- More than 50% less drainage and salt volume now goes back into the river from the northern Mallee pump district (compared to 1993 figures).
- Maxine has coordinated the distribution of more than \$4 million in incentive funding.

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

"When we started our irrigation management courses in the early 1990s, over 75% of irrigators in the Mallee were still using inefficient furrow irrigation," said Maxine.

"Fifteen years later, more than 75% of regional irrigators now use pressurised systems. This change alone has had an enormous impact on the efficiency of water use in the region."

Evolving from training developed in South Australia, the DPI Irrigation Management Course coordinated by Maxine continues to be an important catalyst for change amongst northern Mallee irrigators. Around 2500 irrigators have now attended the course, with other regions in Australia adopting its format.

"Training regional irrigators in best management practices has been an important component of salinity management in the Mallee," Maxine explained.

"Our courses are run on a needs basis and provide independent expert information. We have built up a lot of trust within the irrigation community due to the high standard of our courses, and the confidence they inspire in people to better manage their irrigation."

DPI Mildura irrigation staff linked financial incentives to their training programs from the very beginning (the first region to do so). This ensured that irrigators who took up new technology had the corresponding knowledge to effectively use it. As part of regional salinity management plans, developed by the community and administered by the MCMA, more than \$4 million in incentive funding has been provided to Victorian irrigators in the northern Mallee since 1993. This link between incentive funding and training has worked so well that other states have now adopted the practice.

"The financial incentives drive change, our training supports change, and our benchmarking projects measure change," said Maxine. "It's a package that fits together very neatly."

Maxine is considered a legend in the northern Mallee irrigation community. As such, she was recently appointed to advise the national Cooperative Research Centre for Irrigation on issues in the winter irrigation zone.

"I am someone who makes people uncomfortable about where they are at, so they feel compelled to make a change," she grins. "But I can also help them to make that change. I am all about making a difference on-farm and to the environment!"

DPI-Mildura Irrigation Services

Irrigation management courses

Introductory course

- Irrigation management (*prerequisite for incentives*)

Specific courses

- Drip irrigation
- Sprinkler irrigation
- Irrigation scheduling
- Pump efficiency and maintenance
- Drip maintenance
- Filtration
- Fertigation
- Soil water interpretation

Higher level courses and field walks with Australian and international experts are also arranged on an ad hoc basis.

Irrigation benchmarking

Irrigation benchmarking is currently looking at five commodities: table grapes, dried vine fruit, advanced fertigation citrus, almonds, and centre pivot potatoes. Volunteers share information on yield, water use and management practices. Aim is to maximise productivity per megalitre.

Financial incentives

Incentives are funded by both state and federal bodies, and administered by Sustainable Landscapes Mallee. The overall aim of incentives is to minimise salt return to the Murray River. Applicants can seek financial assistance to: adopt new irrigation technologies, check systems and complete irrigation drainage management plans. Fund availability is advertised when available.

Further information

Available from Maxine Schache at DPI-Mildura on 03 50514500.

