



Facing the challenges & making changes

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in a nutshell

- Sustainable management of natural resources is the objective of a project being undertaken by Murrumbidgee Horticultural Council
- The project strives to increase community awareness of environmental challenges and changes; empower rural women to take an active role in on-farm chemical management and reporting; and develop an active water benchmarking network for young irrigators using current technologies

Sustainable management of natural resources in the MIA is being promoted in a partnership between Murrumbidgee Horticulture Council Inc and the Natural Resources Advisory Council (NRAC) of the NSW Government, through a project that commenced in late 2006 and will run for a 12-month period.

The focus of the project will be on achieving active chemical compliance and water benchmarking. These aspects of farm management have both immediate on-farm benefit (legislative compliance, farm safety, reduced input costs, more efficient water use, potential contribution to crop quality) as well as broader Natural Resources Management benefits in terms of water quality, drainage and pollution management. They have also been selected because anecdotal evidence from other regional programs has indicated growers require support to understand and meet their legislative obligations with respect to chemical management, and that there is difficulty sustaining involvement in water benchmarking and water budgeting despite the potential benefits of efficient water use to individuals and the region.

Specific aims of the project are:

- increased community awareness of environmental challenges and changes through involvement of school children and the community
- empowering rural women to take an active role in on-farm chemical management and reporting by the development of a web site specifically designed by women to reflect their needs
- development of an active water benchmarking network for young irrigators using current technologies for the recording and sharing of this information.

Raising community awareness

The first part of the project involved an art competition to raise community awareness of environment challenges and changes. The competition was held with the local primary

and high schools. The themes for the competition were:

Primary Schools: Our Local Environment

High Schools: Farming and the Local Environment – Managing the Balance

There were many fabulous entries received and locally acclaimed artist Jenny Forster had a hard time selecting the winners. The large amount of entries showcases the community's involvement in environment awareness and action – there is no change without community action. The entries show that our children understand the environment we live in and the challenges of balancing agriculture and sustainability.

A display of the winners was showcased at the Riverina Field Days and the Griffith City Library during May. Griffith East Public school took home the prize for the most entries/student ratio and was awarded a Wollemi Pine for its efforts.

Chemical compliance & reporting

A workshop was coordinated in June by the Murrumbidgee Horticulture Council to identify the core information and service needs of rural women in order to support their involvement in on-farm chemical management. This workshop was attended by farming women and industry representatives.

From this workshop Murrumbidgee Horticulture Council intends to establish an interactive web page with information and links to services for rural businesses. With the help of those involved, this project will provide a new extension tool utilising web-based technologies to distribute a continuous communication stream on Chemical Compliance and Reporting, helping women to use the Internet to gain access to the latest information and improve decision-making and management.

Those involved have provided valuable input and advice on practical issues that they face in their day-to-day



management of Chemical Compliance and Reporting. Murrumbidgee Horticulture Council will be holding further workshops and information sessions and urges all women to become involved in this project so that they can play an active role in the design and implementation of this project, to ensure that not only is the website 'user friendly' but contains important practical information relevant to their on-farm management, issues that are affecting their farming business, families and the wider community.

Active water benchmarking & reporting

Young irrigators have the legacy of previous generations as well as a changing environment to deal with. Technology provides an opportunity for managing change. The project will use existing technologies to provide an accessible and interactive tool for young irrigators to demonstrate innovation and productivity through the management of

our most critical resource – water. A regional benchmarking network has benefits for on-farm, local and regional water management.

Workshops to assist in developing this approach will be co-ordinated through the Young Irrigators Network in mid 2007. Murrumbidgee Horticulture Council is also currently looking at existing projects within the region that are working with the latest technologies and how this may work in with the proposed projects. Discussions have been held with irrigation companies and CSIRO for the potential to work in collaboration with them on current projects. [www](#)

Further information

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Figure 1: Winning entries in each category of the art competition were (from left front) Jackson Austin Kindergarten, Anthony Piromalli Year 1, (middle) Emma Provera Year 3, Jack Walton Year 6, Siobhaun Smith Year 4, James Provera Year 5, Hannah Farranato Year 2, Adam Goolagong Special Needs, and (back) Alice Golden Year 8, Emily Crozier Year 10, Lisa Oliver Year 9, Timothy Fairley Year 7.



Figure 2: A display of the winning entries in the art competition



Figure 3: James Provera's picture of his local environment. James is in Year 5 at St Mary's Yoogali.



Figure 4: A group of rural women and industry representatives participating in a workshop to identify the core information and service needs of rural women.