WIDCORP Research Update 2009

The Water in Drylands Collaborative Research Program (WIDCORP) is a flagship research program of the University of Ballarat. It is a multidisciplinary program working collaboratively across the University Research Centres and other research organisations and agencies to study the social, economic, cultural and environmental impact of a major water infrastructure project in a dryland region. Our research is using the construction of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline as a case study, and focuses on identifying water uses and water values, how communities balance the competing demands for water and how communities can best maximise opportunities made available as a result of the changes in water supply expected from the pipeline. This will form the basis for an on-going research program located at the Horsham Campus of the University.

Review of 2008 Goals

At the end of 2007 WIDCORP set the following of goals for 2008:

- To finalise a new Heads of Agreement
- Review the WIDCORP research plan
- Increase research output and impact by
    - Increasing research capability through partnerships with other research groups
    - Establishing project based research groups involving partner organisations, WIDCORP and other researchers
    - Allocating more research time within WIDCORP
    - Setting clear objectives to publish research findings to maximise impact
    - Delivering research outputs that have recognised value to partners

In reviewing the past 12 months, these goals have been met.

Building research into the future

A focus for WIDCORP in 2008 was to consolidate while continuing to build research capacity and capability. WIDCORP has made considerable progress in these key strategic areas. It has:

- Remained a viable and supported program;
- Continued to strengthen its collaborations with regional stakeholders;
- Delivered valuable research findings in collaboration with partners;
- Expanded its collaboration with national and international research agencies (Deakin University, CSIRO, Melbourne Systems Lab, Universities of Osnabruck and University of Arizona and Arizona State University);
- Elevated its reputation for delivering high quality research;
- Commenced working on joint projects with Deakin University, Melbourne Systems Laboratory University of Melbourne, and with University of Ballarat research centres, and partner organisations (eg. DPI – graduate program and projects, GWMWater optimisation projects); and
- Facilitated knowledge sharing and new thinking about dryland water management, sustainability and the impact of climate change through forums and workshops.

Significant research outcomes have been achieved in 2008 and the following major projects formed the major research focus. These projects include: a significant longitudinal study identifying farmer typologies and the drivers and barriers that influence the capacity of farmers to optimising the benefits of a piped water supply; optimisation of the Northern Mallee pipeline system; understanding farmers perceptions of the role of carbon in agriculture; resilience of small business in rural towns; biodiversity in a piped landscape; and developing innovative models for transparent decision making.

At the end of 2007 WIDCORP set the objectives of delivering positive outcomes for partner organisations and the wider community through capitalising on the work done, by building a stronger research capability and delivering significant research output. As Research Director, I would like to thank the Chair, Board and Research Advisory Committee members for their continued support in 2008. In 2009 WIDCORP will continue to build its reputation and begin to set the directions for an enduring, valued and respected research program in Horsham.

Objectives for 2009

2009 will be important in forging a long term future for WIDCORP. Some of the key objectives for 2009 include:

- Build and broaden our research to include the implications of climate change and regional sustainability and resilience
- Attract significant and high profile funding through ARC and other competitive research opportunities
- Build tangible links with national and international research programs
- Increase the number of HDR students through ARC grants, industry and University scholarships
- Build staff and research capacity
- Bring significant researchers and research leaders to the region through our research forums
- Begin developing a framework that will bring together the regions research and training capacity to create the critical mass needed to attract funding for a centre of excellence in dryland systems.