



Improving the science of water footprinting

1. What is the project about?

This project will evaluate and potentially improve irrigation water footprinting measurement and reporting methods with the aim of making them more applicable for Australian agriculture.

While water footprints have the potential to identify opportunities to improve industry efficiencies, they do have several shortfalls. Most notably the potential for misapplication. This project will provide guidance for Australian extensive irrigation industries about the potential economic and environmental impacts of different water footprinting methods and will provide alternative options to water footprinting methods.

2. Why do irrigators need to know about it?

Investors, customers and consumers are seeking information about the water footprint of the product they are purchasing or investing in. The public perception of a large water footprint has the potential to erode the social licence of an industry and their products.

Several different schemes for water footprinting are currently in use and these schemes can give different ratings for the same agricultural production system. This lack of consistency means Australian farmers could find themselves penalized for having high water footprints depending on the scheme used with most schemes reporting high water footprints for farming systems located in the Murray Darling basin.

3. How will the research benefit irrigators?

The aim of this project is to develop alternative options to existing water footprinting schemes that recognise farming systems implementing water management practices that maximise water productivity regardless of where they are located.

By costing-out the potential impacts of different footprinting methods, this project will outline the size of the threat for industries and identify footprinting methods or alternative options which offer the best outcomes in terms of economic viability, environmental impacts and consumer and investor confidence.

Research activities will include social research to identify which water footprinting methods or alternative options are most likely to gain traction with consumers and investors in Australia and abroad.

4. Key results to date

For further information or project progress updates, contact: **Dr Guy Roth, Project Leader T: 02 67992202**
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