

Technology will help farmers on edge

Murray Irrigation's \$230 million modernisation program may generate immediate benefits that will help farmers on the edge of failure at the beginning of this irrigation season.

Executive General Manager Water Delivery Scott Barlow, whose 22-year career spans every operational role in the company's water delivery system, said computer assisted modelling, modernisation and local knowledge will enable his team to deliver water with plans that could not be employed previously.

"Many of our former channel attendants are now operating technology that will deliver water far more effectively and strategically targeted than ever before; channel modernisation could not have been more timely," Mr Barlow said.

Winter works at 18 sites along the Mulwala and Wakool canals, combined with previous works under the Commonwealth/company funded PIOP 2 works will enable Murray Irrigation to fill, isolate, drain and refill sections of the canal and associated channels in a way that will drive maximum efficiency from the system.

"These modernisation works also give us scope to continually model delivery plans that will benefit customers overall," Mr Barlow said.

"This could mean batching water deliveries or negotiating with landholders to reschedule orders that will generate savings from our conveyance water.

"If we can model sufficient savings in advance, we'll be in a better position to pass these on to customers as efficiency water for them to monetise or turn into production."

Meanwhile, at the government level, the company has contacted the state's manager of water allocations to describe the dire circumstances in the region and it has been in discussions with state agencies responsible for managing environmental flows.

Murray Irrigation Chairman Phil Snowden said the company had been in contact with the Department of Industry – Water and the Office of Environment and Heritage, who have indicated their preparedness to convene a meeting of the Southern Connected Basin Environmental Water Holders Committee to identify what water might be available for a loan or transfer that will not have a detrimental effect on environmental supplies.

Mr Snowden said both entities had indicated they were aware of the dire situation and that they would try to identify any areas where they could contribute to the meagre water that is available.

"At the very least, let's get water sooner rather than later," Mr Snowden said.

"This is the bitter reality of a Murray-Darling Basin Plan where water entitlements held for the environment adversely affect the economic health of communities that rely on water."

The company has contacted Snowy Hydro in an unsuccessful approach to enter into a commercial arrangement for its customers to borrow water.

Murray Irrigation is not alone in its efforts, with the Ricegrowers' Association of Australia writing in support of the company's efforts at the state level, while Southern Riverina Irrigators is writing to the MDBA and the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder at the Federal level.

Murray Irrigation has also contacted WaterNSW to ascertain the mechanism by which its customers can benefit from a credit to their fixed government delivery fees announced by NSW Water Minister Niall Blair on Monday.

WaterNSW is yet to recommend the mechanism by which it will credit customers of water corporations.

Ends.