



Save the Murray

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Irrigation



In many parts of the Murray-Darling Basin irrigation dominates the landscape and the regional economy. Three quarters of the irrigation in Australia occurs in the Murray-Darling Basin. Each year, an estimated 10,442 Gigalitres (70% of Australia's total water use) is used for irrigation in the Murray-Darling Basin.

The value of irrigated production from the Basin has been estimated to be worth \$3-\$4 billion at the farm gate, with an estimated four fold multiplier in value through processing beyond the farm gate. The Murray-Darling Basin and its irrigated industries contribute significantly to the Australian economy.

Irrigators pay for a water licence which entitles them to a specific amount of water. If an irrigator wishes to develop further, the only way they can do this is by making water savings to use on the new development or by buying more water (if it is available). If irrigators use more water than they are allocated, they have to pay excess charges (which act as an incentive not to exceed allocation).

How much water is used?

A mega litre (ML) is equal to 1 million litres. It is approximately equal to 1 olympic size swimming pool. A hectare (ha) is equal to 10 000 square meters, about the size London's Trafalgar Square.

Rice	14.1 ML/ha
Cotton	6.5 ML/ha
Sugar cane	5.4ML/ha
Fruit	4.8 ML/ha
Pasture for grazing	4.0 ML/ha

How are irrigators trying to reduce water use?

Rice

Rice is the highest user of water per hectare of any other irrigated crop or pasture in the Murray-Darling Basin. The industry has strict regulations to ensure the maintenance of high growing standards that have minimal impact to the environment.

The Rice Environmental Policy is a statement of commitment agreed to by the membership of the Rice Grower's Association of Australia (RGA) to improve performance in all areas of environmental management and stewardship in their region.

Cotton

The cotton industry accounts for 14.7% of total water use in Australian agriculture and less than 20% of the total water extracted in the Murray-Darling Basin. Cotton is the second highest user of irrigation water in the Basin. The Queensland cotton producer, Cubby Station has on farm storages that hold more water than Sydney Harbour.

Mindful of environmental responsibilities, the Australian cotton industry introduced Best Management Practices which have been adopted by 95% of cotton growers. Best Management Practices aim to achieve true sustainability through improved farm efficiency and productivity, combined with effective environmental protection and sound resource management.

Grapes

Many vineyards in the Basin have converted their irrigation systems to drip and micro sprinklers, rather than the overhead variety which is far less efficient.

The implementation of good irrigation systems in conjunction with appropriate scheduling techniques, which enable effective assessment of water content in soil, ensures that no more water is used than is absolutely necessary.