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Hawkesbury-Nepean metering project – benefits both river health and on-farm water efficiency

New water metering systems rolled out across the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment as part of the \$28.6 million *Improving Hawkesbury-Nepean Water Balance Accounting Project*, will provide benefits for river health and water use efficiency.

NSW Water Commissioner David Harriss, said the project is an important initiative for licensed water users in the region to help secure the long-term sustainability and health of this iconic waterway.

“The recently completed project was implemented by the NSW Office of Water and involved the installation or upgrade of water meters, data loggers and telecommunication devices to surface water extraction equipment for approximately 2,000 water licensed water users across the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment,” said Mr Harriss.

“This state-of-the-art water accounting system will measure and report ‘real-time data’ on water extraction activities, allowing licence holders to access information on their water use, with aggregated data that will be made publicly available via the NSW Office of Water website.”

“This project will prove an invaluable tool to irrigators in helping to manage their on-going water use.”

“Metering will also enable irrigators to apply for a two-part tariff, which means annual water payments are based on ‘actual usage’ rather than entitlement alone. This could add up to large savings for some irrigators,” he said.

Commencing in May 2009, the project involved field inspections, identification of site specific installation requirements, development of materials lists and on-ground installation works and was completed in September 2011.

The project is part of the National Water Initiative and the majority of water users have embraced the idea and can see the many benefits it will bring to not only their individual on-farm operations, but the in-stream and catchment-wide health aspects through managed extraction limits.

James Backhouse, an irrigator on South Creek who utilises water for pasture production and vegetables, sees the project as a tool to assist in his day-to-day farming activities.

“The updated irrigation system frees me up so I can spend my time more productively on the farm by not having to connect the tractor and move irrigation pipes, I just have to flick a switch...its great,” said Mr Backhouse.

A family farming operation on the Nepean River who produce turf and landscape supplies can also see the project assisting their farming operation.

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“The introduction of metering will allow us to obtain accurate water usage data for the first time. This will enable us to see how we can improve water use efficiency in our commercial operation,” said Mr Matt Collins.

“The information collected will also assist the irrigators collectively to measure the total consumption of water used by agriculture to effectively demonstrate the necessity to preserve our security and share of such an important valuable natural resource for the future,” he said.

Mr Harriss said the project had also realised benefits for the NSW Office of Water’s ‘real time data’ capabilities and provision of this information to the general community via the world wide web.

“Each of these newly metered sites relies on high-end technology to not only meet the projects objectives, but ensure continued operation in some extremely harsh operating environments.”

“All of the sites consist of an electromagnetic water meter, in-situ verification hardware, solar panels, battery and wireless modem.”

“These remote telemetry units capture water usage and diagnostics data at regular intervals and upload this information to the NSW Office of Water, which, in turn is made available to water users.

“The sophistication of this hardware even allows diagnostic information to be gathered to troubleshoot problems, as well as remotely verify water use and meter operation.”

“This project really is a ‘win win’ for all concerned. The meters allow irrigators to improve water use efficiency and the ability to accurately manage one of their major resources in the production cycle from a financial perspective.”

“The project also enables both water users and the NSW Office of Water to carefully manage licensed extraction to ensure sufficient water reserves are maintained within the river system to sustain riverine health,” Mr Harriss said.

Further information regarding the *Improving Hawkesbury-Nepean Water Balance Accounting Project*, is available on the NSW Office of Water website – www.water.nsw.gov.au

Pictures available on request