2014 Regional Snapshot

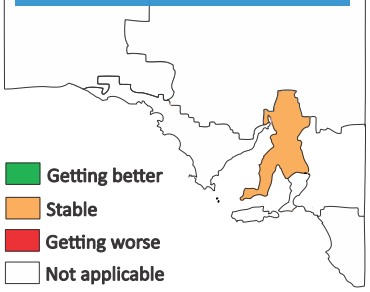
Is irrigation efficiency improving in agricultural areas?

South Australia's irrigated crops and livestock products, worth about $1.4 billion in 2012, use about 60 per cent of the water we use in the state. Less than 7 per cent of the farmers in the Northern and Yorke NRM region rely on irrigation to grow pastures for livestock, grape, fruit or vegetables. Efficient irrigation reduces impacts on ground water levels, soil salinity, reduces production costs, and provides more flexibility to rotate crops.

The amount of water applied to crops is influenced by soil type, irrigation method, and the timing of irrigation. By matching these to the needs of each crop, farmers maximise production and apply less water. For example, upgrading from sprinkler to drip irrigation can save about 2.5 million litres per hectare of grapevines or citrus trees. Our State NRM Act and water allocation plans allow farmers to sell their water; this market based system helps to ensure that the most efficient farmers use more water.

This report tracks the amount of water applied per hectare, and trends in methods of irrigation.

Trends in water application rates in irrigation areas



State target

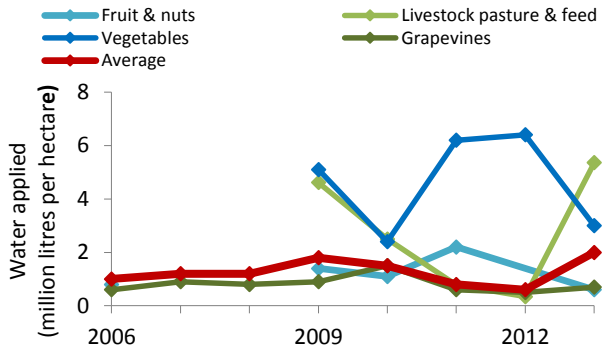
Maintain the productive capacity of our natural resources

Trend (2006-13)	Stable	Water applied per hectare has remained stable

Different crop types have different water needs and these vary depending on the soil type and rainfall (see graph on right).

In 2013, about 7,000 hectares were irrigated in the Northern and Yorke NRM region – mostly around Clare. The average irrigation rate was about 2 million litres per hectare (see graph on right, red line). The amount of water applied per hectare was relatively stable between 2006-13. Long term trends in water application rates are not available for all crops (graph on right).

Water applied per hectare to irrigated livestock pastures and feed and vegetable crops has been variable since 2009.



Where we are at (2013)	Good	Irrigation efficiency improved in 2013

Energy, labour and set up costs influence the irrigation options available to farmers, but irrigation efficiency continues to improve.

Trends in irrigation methods show how our farmers are improving water application rates. A breakdown of irrigation methods is not available for the Northern and Yorke NRM region, but statewide information shows that drip irrigation, which is typically the most water efficient, is the most common method and its use has been increasing.

Governments and NRM boards work with farmers to improve irrigation efficiency by demonstrating land management benefits and providing financial incentives to make it increasingly attractive.

Reliability of information	★★★★☆	Very Good

Further information:
Technical information for this report
Water use in the Northern and Yorke NRM region

Government of South Australia