



South-West WA
Drought Resilience Adoption
and Innovation Hub

Media Release

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Merredin and Districts Farm Improvement Group's Annual General Meeting stirs WaterSmart conversation in the community

Growers from Merredin and surrounding areas are rethinking water planning, management, and quality after a presentation from the WaterSmart Dams team at Merredin and Districts Farm Improvement Group's (MADFIG's) recent Annual General Meeting (AGM).

MADFIG is one of four grower group partners including Compass Agricultural Alliance (Darkan), Southern Dirt (Kojonup), and the Fitzgerald Biosphere Group (Jerramungup) collaborating with Grower Group Alliance (GGA) through the South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) and the University of Western Australia (UWA), to leverage existing work and prior investment in this field.

Project technical lead UWA Associate Professor Nik Callow was joined by his colleague Roberto Lujan-Rocha and SW WA Hub student bursary recipient Jane Brownlee in presenting water quality testing results to growers and MADFIG committee members at Merredin. Colleague Roberto Busi Zoomed into the meeting to provide additional insights.

Newly appointed MADFIG chair Neil Smith said the discussion surrounding UWA's pilot water economics work was particularly encouraging.

"Most growers set aside large annual budgets for chemicals," he said.

"You could certainly hear their brains ticking over when the team presented its research findings testing alkalinity, turbidity, and hardness from dams in our area.

"It was sobering to see how our various water sources stacked up when compared to optimal quality ranges for livestock and spraying.

"It will be interesting to compare these results with the later seasonal testing we have planned for the project."

MADFIG Executive Officer Glenice Batchelor said it was especially important to have an overview of the WaterSmart Dams project.

"It was beneficial to see what other growers found useful in their areas," she said.

"My background in biodiversity meant I was curious about Southern Dirt's vegetated dam trial in Kojonup.

"However, that demonstration drew questions from growers about vegetation draw-down and the impact on run-off implementing a similar practice in a lower rainfall zone such as ours would have.

"It will be interesting to see the final data."

MADFIG's outgoing chair Andrew Crook said the importance of fit-for-purpose technologies was reinforced by such discussion.

"Every situation and area is unique, and we need different solutions for different businesses and regions," he said.

Ms Batchelor said whilst other regions were looking at dam design and evaporation, it was important for MADFIG to investigate catchment and water quality solutions to maximise water use efficiency in an area where rainfall is at a premium.

"In our low rainfall zone, it's crucial to find technologies to increase water quality, storage capacity and water harvesting capabilities," she said.

"We need to reduce reliance on Scheme water and minimise ongoing water supply costs.

"That is why the work Smart Dam Champion Leigh Giles is doing on his retrofitted roaded catchment, and Roberto and Jane's study on the impacts of water quality, are particularly relevant for MADFIG's growers," she said.

"Combining this information with Roberto Busi's Herbicide Efficacy work is highly valued science."

Dr Callow's overview of what is being demonstrated across the 12 trial sites generated discussion about the WaterSmart Evaluation Tool (WET). WET will allow growers to evaluate the reliability of their existing dams, optimally size new dams and catchments, and evaluate the economics of a range of fit-for-purpose solutions.

The data collected in this project, as well as data from existing work and prior investment will be incorporated in WET. It will support individual properties, private contractors, water planners and local communities to make drought resilient investment decisions that will extend beyond the project.

This project is jointly funded through the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund (FDF) and the Western Australian state government's Agriculture Climate Resilience Fund (ACRF), supported by DPIRD.

For more updates including news on WET, sign up to the [project follower form](#).

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