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RENMARK IRRIGATION TRUST GOLD CERTIFICATION

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ABOUT AWS WATER STEWARDSHIP

AWS Water Stewardship is a site-based system of integrated water management, which aims to achieve four key outcomes for the site and the catchment where the site is situated:

- 1 Sustainable water balance
- 2 Good water quality
- 3 Healthy water-dependent ecosystems & cultural sites
- 4 Good water governance

Water Stewardship was conceived in Australia during the Millennium Drought and the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) has been developing and managing the global Water Stewardship system since then. The system is based on:

- an International Water Stewardship Standard (AWS Standard)
- a credible verification program for assessing companies and organisations against the AWS Standard
- a brand and recognition system that encourages and rewards best practice water management by companies and organisations.

Water Stewardship is adopted by businesses and public sector organisations that use water, or impact on water quality, environments and the overall catchment water-cycle. It assists businesses and organisations to achieve sustainable water use and to remain, or become, good catchment citizens.

Water Stewardship principles improve understanding of site and catchment water risks, and of the social, environmental and economic benefits water provides to the wider community and catchment. Three levels of certification are possible: Core, Gold and Platinum.

AWS promotes good water stewardship, provides training and capacity building, and manages the AWS Water Stewardship System. Its vision is that all water users are good water stewards.

ABOUT RENMARK IRRIGATION TRUST

Renmark was established by the Chaffey Brothers in 1887 as an irrigation settlement, after having developed similar achievements in California. Later that year negotiations were completed to develop another irrigation area in Mildura. Relatives of the Chaffey Brothers still reside within the Sunraysia area today.

The Renmark Irrigation Trust (RIT) was constituted by a Statute of the South Australian Parliament which was assented to on 23 December 1893, becoming the area's first local government authority. The main purpose of the Trust was to facilitate putting into operation the water rights to which the ratepayers were entitled under the terms of the Chaffey Bros. Irrigation Works Act of 1887.

Currently, the RIT infrastructure serves over 600 irrigators covering more than 4500 hectares throughout the Renmark District. The Main Pumping Station was officially commissioned on the 1 December 1972 by then Premier of S.A. Hon. D.A. Dunstan. Water is pumped through approximately 140km of pipeline that spreads throughout the Renmark Irrigation District. The main Pumping Station consists of 6 Pumps with a Total Pumping Capacity of 5,150 Litres per second. Water is metered at both the diversion point from the river and at the farm gate.

RIT WATER STEWARDSHIP CERTIFICATION

Water has underpinned the Renmark community since the arid Murray River plains and scrub were converted to a flourishing irrigation district in 1887. It is not just a business input, without good water there would not be a community.

PARTNERS

AWS Water Stewardship is a site and catchment-based, multi-stakeholder approach. As such a range of key partners were engaged for the project:

Water Stewards (RIT) – For water stewardship to be properly established and implemented, sites must commit to water stewardship principles and continuous improvement in water management practices towards best practice. There are range of drivers for sites to take-up water stewardship, such as; it helps to monitor and manage water-related risks (physical and reputational), it helps to communicate with and engage stakeholders in a structured way, it helps to identify cost-effective holistic water solutions, it helps to simplify compliance with a range of requirements. For the RIT, which has invested in infrastructure improvements and participated in public programs as a matter of business, a key driver was to verify their performance as a leading supplier of irrigation water in the Murray Darling Basin.

Project Partners – When engaging and working in complex, multi-stakeholder settings such as the Murray Darling Basin, the broadest possible suite of project partners representing government, industry, environment and community interests is essential. The RIT water stewardship trial was managed by South Australian Murray Irrigators (Caren Martin) and chaired by former Waterfind Chair, Pauline Rooney. The project reference group also included the Chair of the Natural Resource Management Board for the SA MDB, Sharon Starick, the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (Dan Jordan) and Michele Ackeroyd (formally from the Goyder Institute).

Project Funders – Project funding is, self-evidently, a critical pre-condition for success. If water stewards are not in a position to (fully) fund water stewardship then other means must be sought. AWS Water Stewardship offers a user-driven demand-side solution to improved catchment health and best practice water management. In general, this approach can be more cost effective than supply-side infrastructure solutions or remedial action to address water scarcity, quality and ecosystem health, and therefore offers public and private water users and NRM managers an innovative, cost effective investment in addressing their catchment challenges, as well as supporting sustainable business and communities. The RIT water stewardship trial was supported financially by the South Australia Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) with additional support from NAB. Project Partners also contributed essential in-kind resources to support the project.

OUTCOMES

The AWS certification process, including independent audits, verified RIT's water performance at Gold level.

- RIT is consistently compliant with water licenses and allocations, and voluntarily manages compliance on behalf of its members
- RIT operates at 98% delivery efficiency, compared to Australian irrigation/rural water providers average of 83% (ABS, 2015)
- RIT voluntarily participates in the SA Water/Government salt interception scheme
- RIT voluntarily participates in environmental watering with the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder
- RIT voluntarily participates in Renmark Paringa Landcare Bookmark Creek Action Group to improve the Bookmark Creek environment.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND SCALING-UP

AWS Water Stewardship is a continuous improvement process. At a site level, the RIT will carry out their water stewardship action plan, and review and update their plan annually to achieve, or maintain, best practice water management as recognised by catchment stakeholders.

At a catchment level, AWS Asia-Pacific hopes to use this experience and the resources developed to promote water stewardship uptake in other irrigation schemes in the South Australian Riverland and the Murray Darling Basin.

