



NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Irrigation Profile - Readers' Note

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Sydney–South Coast Region Irrigation Profile

**compiled by Meredith Hope and John O'Connor,
for the Water Use Efficiency Advisory Unit, Dubbo**

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Government joint initiative between NSW Agriculture and
the Department of Sustainable Natural Resources.

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This Irrigation Profile is one of a series for New South Wales catchments and regions. It was written and compiled by Meredith Hope, NSW Agriculture, for the Water Use Efficiency Advisory Unit, 37 Carrington Street, Dubbo, NSW, 2830, with assistance from John O'Connor (Resource Management Officer, Sydney-South Coast, NSW Agriculture).

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CONTENTS

1.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1.1	AN OVERVIEW OF SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION IRRIGATION	1
1.2	ISSUES IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	3
1.3	CONCLUSION	5
2.	INTRODUCTION.....	7
2.1	BACKGROUND.....	7
2.2	THE <i>SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION IRRIGATION PROFILE</i>	8
2.3	METHODS.....	11
2.4	RATING DATA RELIABILITY	11
3.	REGIONAL IRRIGATION OVERVIEW	13
3.1	SUMMARY	13
3.2	REGION DESCRIPTION	17
3.3	CLIMATE.....	20
3.4	POPULATION AND ETHNICITY	22
4.	IRRIGATION FROM ALL SOURCES	25
4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	25
4.2	NUMBER OF LICENCES WITH A PURPOSE OF IRRIGATING (ALL SOURCES).....	29
4.3	NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES USING IRRIGATION (ALL SOURCES).....	29
4.4	AREA IRRIGATED AND WATER USED (ALL SOURCES)	32
4.5	IRRIGATION METHODS (ALL SOURCES)	39
4.6	IRRIGATION YIELDS (ALL SOURCES).....	40
4.7	VALUE OF IRRIGATED PRODUCTION (ALL SOURCES).....	40
5.	IRRIGATION FROM REGULATED RIVERS	45
5.1	SUMMARY	45
5.2	DESCRIPTION OF THE REGULATED SYSTEM	46
5.3	NUMBER OF VOLUMETRIC LICENCES WITH THE PURPOSE OF IRRIGATION (REGULATED)	46
5.4	NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES USING IRRIGATION (REGULATED).....	46
5.5	VOLUMETRIC ENTITLEMENT TO IRRIGATION (REGULATED)	46
5.6	AREA IRRIGATED AND WATER USED (REGULATED)	48
5.7	IRRIGATION METHODS (REGULATED).....	48
5.8	IRRIGATED YIELDS (REGULATED).....	48
5.9	VALUE OF IRRIGATED PRODUCTION (REGULATED)	48
6.	IRRIGATION FROM UNREGULATED RIVERS.....	49
6.1	SUMMARY	49
6.2	ABOUT THE UNREGULATED WATER SUPPLY	50
6.3	NUMBER OF LICENCES (UNREGULATED).....	52
6.4	NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES USING IRRIGATION (UNREGULATED)	52
6.5	AREA AUTHORISED FOR IRRIGATION (UNREGULATED)	53

6.6	AREA IRRIGATED AND WATER USED (UNREGULATED)	53
6.7	IRRIGATION METHODS (UNREGULATED)	54
6.8	IRRIGATED YIELDS (UNREGULATED)	55
6.9	VALUE OF IRRIGATED PRODUCTION (UNREGULATED).....	55
7.	IRRIGATION FROM GROUNDWATER.....	57
7.1	SUMMARY.....	57
7.2	ABOUT GROUNDWATER SUPPLIES	57
7.3	NUMBER OF LICENCES WITH THE PURPOSE OF IRRIGATION (GROUNDWATER)	58
7.4	NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES USING IRRIGATION (GROUNDWATER).....	58
7.5	AREA IRRIGATED AND WATER USED (GROUNDWATER)	58
7.6	IRRIGATION METHODS (GROUNDWATER).....	58
7.7	IRRIGATED YIELDS (GROUNDWATER).....	58
7.8	VALUE OF IRRIGATED PRODUCTION (GROUNDWATER)	58
8.	IRRIGATION FROM FARM DAMS.....	59
8.1	SUMMARY.....	59
8.2	ABOUT FARM DAM WATER SUPPLIES	59
8.3	NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES USING IRRIGATION (FARM DAMS).....	60
8.4	AREA IRRIGATED AND WATER USED (FARM DAMS)	60
8.5	IRRIGATION METHODS (FARM DAMS).....	60
8.6	IRRIGATED YIELDS (FARM DAMS).....	60
8.7	VALUE OF IRRIGATED PRODUCTION (FARM DAMS)	60
9.	IRRIGATION FROM TOWN WATER SUPPLIES	61
9.1	SUMMARY.....	61
9.2	ABOUT TOWN WATER SUPPLIES.....	61
9.3	NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES USING IRRIGATION (TOWN WATER).....	62
9.4	AREA IRRIGATED AND WATER USED (TOWN WATER).....	62
9.5	IRRIGATION METHODS (TOWN WATER)	62
9.6	IRRIGATED YIELDS (TOWN WATER)	62
9.7	VALUE OF IRRIGATED PRODUCTION (TOWN WATER).....	62
10.	OPPORTUNITIES AND ISSUES	63
10.1	OPPORTUNITIES FOR IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE	63
10.2	ISSUES FOR IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE.....	63
11.	SUMMARY.....	65
12.	REFERENCES.....	67
13.	APPENDICES.....	73
13.1	DEFINITIONS OF STATISTICAL UNITS USED BY THE ABS.....	73
13.2	NUMBER OF IRRIGATORS AND AREA IRRIGATED IN EACH SLA IN THE SYDNEY– SOUTH COAST REGION	75
13.3	FLOW CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAJOR RIVERS IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	76
13.4	CLIMATE IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	76
13.5	CHARACTERISTICS OF DAIRY FARMS IN THE BEGA CATCHMENT	77

13.6	AREA AUTHORISED AND NUMBER OF LICENCES IN CATCHMENTS IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION.....	77
13.7	ANNUAL RAINFALL AT THE WINDSOR AND BEGA WEATHER STATIONS, 1993–94 AND 1996–97, AND LONG-TERM AVERAGE RAINFALL.....	79
13.8	ANNOUNCED ALLOCATION FOR THE BEGA CATCHMENT	80
13.9	AREA OF CROPS IRRIGATED, AND NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES USING IRRIGATION IN 1993–94 AND 1996–97	81
13.10	WATER REQUIREMENTS, YIELD, SOWING DATES, IRRIGATION METHOD AND EFFICIENCY BY CROP CLASS AND CROP	85
13.11	VALUE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION IN 1996–97	88
13.12	ENTITLED VOLUME BY LICENCE PURPOSE IN THE LOWER SOUTH COAST MICROREGION.....	89
13.13	CROP AREAS (HA) IRRIGATED USING WATER FROM REGULATED RIVERS.....	89
13.14	WATER USED (ML) FROM REGULATED RIVERS TO IRRIGATE CROPS.....	90
13.15	MATRIX OF STRESS CLASSIFICATIONS AND MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES	91
13.16	SUBCATCHMENT STATISTICS	93
13.17	ABS QUESTION PROFILE	111
13.18	AREA IRRIGATED AND NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES BY SOURCE OF WATER	112
13.19	AREA IRRIGATED USING WATER FROM UNREGULATED RIVERS.....	114

List of figures

FIGURE 1.	THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	VI
FIGURE 2.	THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SLAs, CATCHMENTS AND SUBREGIONS IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	
FIGURE 3.	MONTHLY AVERAGE RAINFALL AT BEGA	19
FIGURE 4.	EVAPORATIVE DEFICIT AT SYDNEY, NOWRA AND BEGA.....	20
FIGURE 5.	NUMBER OF ENTERPRISES IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION USING IRRIGATION IN 1993–94, 1995–96 AND 1996–97	29
FIGURE 6.	AREA IRRIGATED IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION BETWEEN 1993–94, 1995–96 AND 1996–97.....	31
FIGURE 7.	THE AREA OF PASTURE IRRIGATED IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	32
FIGURE 8.	THE AREA OF VEGETABLES IRRIGATED IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	33
FIGURE 9.	TOTAL VALUE OF INDUSTRY PRODUCTION ATTRIBUTABLE TO IRRIGATION IN THE HAWKESBURY–NEPEAN CATCHMENT AND SYDNEY SUBREGIONS (%).....	41
FIGURE 10.	TOTAL VALUE (AS A % OF INDUSTRY PRODUCTION) ATTRIBUTABLE TO IRRIGATION IN THE SOUTH COAST SUBREGION	41
FIGURE 11.	LOCATION OF REGULATED AND UNREGULATED LICENCES WITH THE PURPOSE OF IRRIGATION IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	47
FIGURE 12.	AREA IRRIGATED (HA) FROM UNREGULATED STREAMS IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	53

List of tables

TABLE 1. AREA IRRIGATED FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES OF WATER AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL AREA IRRIGATED	3
TABLE 2. AREA IRRIGATED FROM UNREGULATED SUPPLIES AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL AREA IRRIGATED.....	3
TABLE 3. ASSUMPTIONS USED TO ESTIMATE THE NUMBER OF IRRIGATION ENTERPRISES IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	28
TABLE 4. TOTAL WATER USED BY BROADACRE AND DAIRY FARMS THAT IRRIGATED FROM ALL SOURCES OF WATER IN 1996–97.....	35
TABLE 5. ESTIMATED IRRIGATION REQUIREMENTS BASED ON VOLUMETRIC CONVERSION RATES FOR CROPS IN THE SYDNEY–SOUTH COAST REGION	36

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Sydney–South Coast Region Irrigation Profile* was developed from a study to obtain region and industry assessments of water use and water use efficiency. The Profile details (where possible, by water source) what is known about:

- the number of irrigators and the number of enterprises that irrigate
- the number of licences, the entitled volume or area authorised for irrigation
- the area irrigated and water used in total and by crop type
- irrigation methods
- irrigated crop yields
- the value of irrigated agriculture in the Sydney–South Coast Region

Irrigation data in the public domain were collected from State and Commonwealth sources, from published research and industry reports and from unpublished reports. These data were assigned a reliability rating using a system developed by the National Land and Water Resources Audit (1999).

Note: We do not attempt to interpret or infer water use efficiencies from the data collected in this Profile.

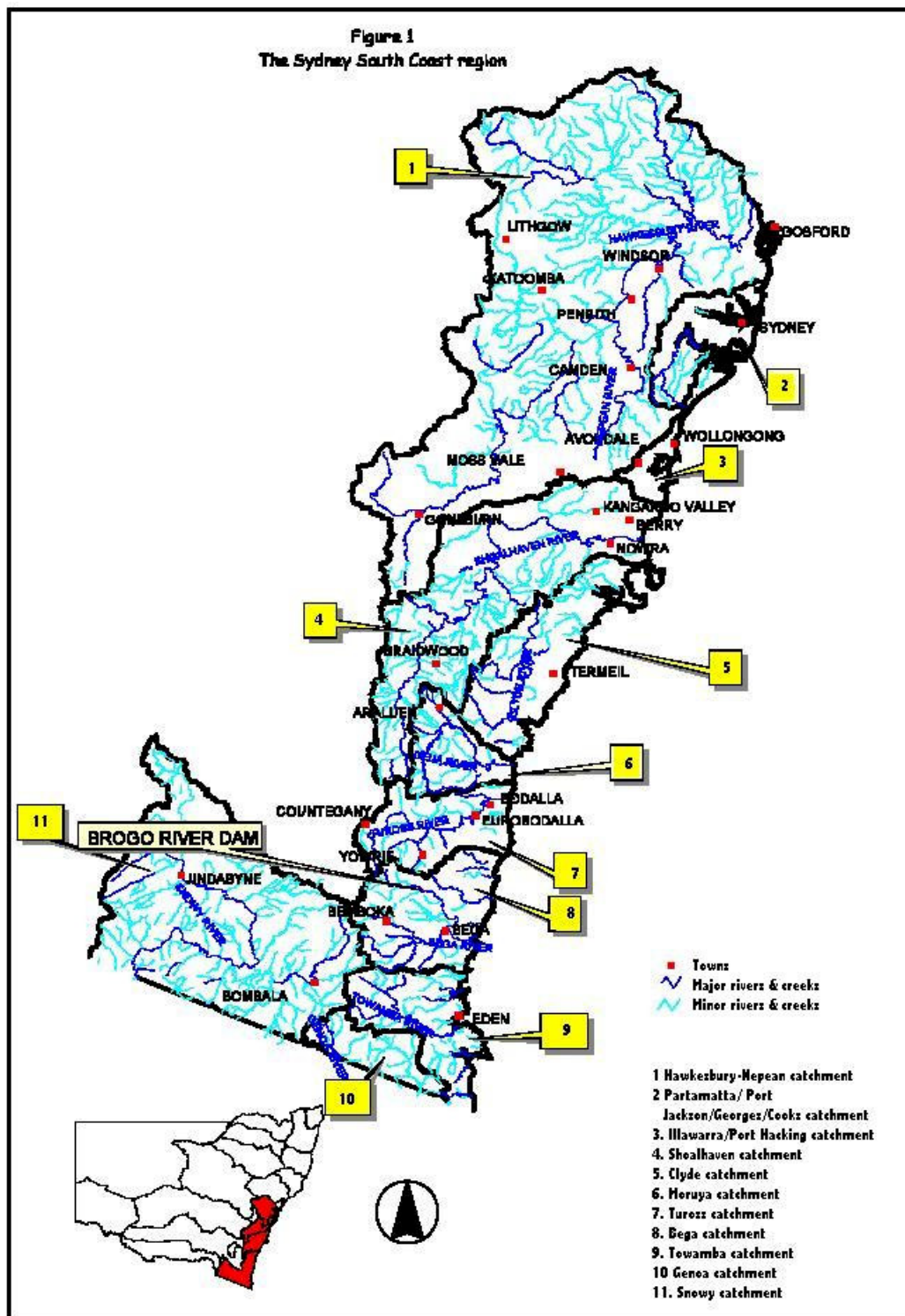
1.1 An overview of Sydney–South Coast Region irrigation

- The two main irrigation centres in Sydney and the South Coast are the Hawkesbury–Nepean and the Bega catchments. Pockets of irrigation are scattered along the coast between these centres.
- The area of land irrigated on individual farms is small compared with the rest of the State. Broadacre and dairy properties in the Sydney–South Coast Region irrigate, on average, 26 ha. Broadacre and dairy properties in the rest of the State irrigate 189 ha on average.
- In the Bega catchment the most important irrigated crop is irrigated pasture for dairy production. Pasture for dairy production, turf, vegetables, cut flowers and nurseries are important irrigated industries in the Hawkesbury–Nepean catchment.
- Of the total area irrigated in New South Wales, between 1% and 2% is in the Sydney–South Coast Region.
- Of the total number of licences in New South Wales with a purpose of irrigation, 12% are in the Sydney–South Coast Region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



- Of the total land area irrigated in the Sydney–South Coast Region, 70–80% is pasture.



Prepared by the Resource Information Unit, NSW Agriculture.
Catchment boundaries from data provided by DLWR, based on the Australian Atlas of River Catchments, November 2000.

1.2 Issues in the Sydney–South Coast Region

1.2.1 How many enterprises in this region are irrigating?

There was a large discrepancy in the estimates of the number of irrigation enterprises in the Sydney–South Coast Region. Sources report either 937 or 3,213 enterprises irrigating crops.

There are believed to be 1,000 additional enterprises irrigating in the Hawkesbury–Nepean catchment that do not have a licence. It is therefore difficult to provide a reliable estimate of the volumes of water being extracted for irrigation from the catchment. This issue is being addressed by the Department of Land and Water Conservation (DLWC) in the region.

There has been an apparent decline in the number of enterprises irrigating and the area irrigated between 1993–94 and 1996–97. There was no explanation for this decline other than that the responses may have varied depending on the composition of questions in the 1993–94 and 1996–97 survey forms. In 1996–97, information on the volume of water used on crops was sought for the first time by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Many irrigators do not know how much water they apply and this question alone may have reduced the response rate for other irrigation questions.

1.2.2 What area is irrigated?

Someone unfamiliar with the vagaries of the ABS data-set may choose the wrong data-set when determining the total area irrigated.

In 1993–94, the 'total area irrigated' could be determined in two ways:

1. Irrigators were asked to estimate the area of land they irrigated.

The total area irrigated could be derived by summing the data from these responses for each Statistical Local Area or SLA.

2. Irrigators were asked to estimate the area irrigated from different sources of water.

Where a single patch of land is irrigated from more than one source of water, such as from groundwater and from unregulated supplies, an irrigator might have double-counted this patch of land when responding. This may cause the total area irrigated to be overestimated (table 1).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

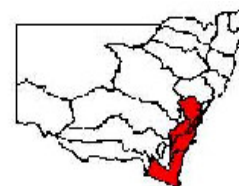


Table 1. Area irrigated from different sources of water as a percentage of the total area irrigated

	Surface	Town	Groundwater	Dam	Total
Area (ha)	23,721	550	1,904	6,983	23,251
% of total area irrigated	102%	2%	8%	30%	

Source: ABS 1998

Data from the volumetric conversion survey could not be reconciled with the ABS estimates of total area irrigated from all sources. The area irrigated as estimated from the volumetric conversion survey ranged from 91% to 171% of the area estimated by the ABS.

Table 2. Area irrigated from unregulated supplies as a percentage of the total area irrigated

	1993–94	1995–96	1996–97
Volumetric conversion data (ha)^a	22,279	23,290	23,728
ABS total area irrigated (ha)^b	24,351	13,634	15,188
	91%	171%	156%

Source: ^a DLWC 2000d ^b ABS 1998

1.2.3 Knowledge gaps

- There was a large discrepancy between the estimated value of irrigated agriculture in the Sydney–South Coast Region. The reported value was either \$173 million or \$727 million.
- There are no data on the total amount of water used by irrigated agriculture from all sources in the Sydney–South Coast Region.
- There are gaps in knowledge regarding irrigation methods, yields from irrigated crops and the amounts of water used by irrigation from regulated rivers, unregulated rivers, groundwater, farm dams and town water supplies in the region. There are hardly any records of the volumes of water used to irrigate crops from any source in the region. Data were last collected from farms irrigating crops using regulated supplies in 1990–91 from the Bega–Brogo river system.

1.3 Conclusion

A more comprehensive and consistent approach to the collection of irrigation statistics is needed. Such an approach would help to ensure that data are comparable across different water sources and industries. Protocols for the collection, management and distribution of irrigation data are required to ensure that data are accurate and reliable. This comprehensive approach can only be developed with the full involvement and support of the many agencies and irrigator groups that require these data.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

