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Foreword

Neil Andrew

Paper prepared for presentation at the “Water For Irrigated Agriculture and the Environment: Finding a Flow for All” conference conducted by the Crawford Fund for International Agricultural Research, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, August 16, 2006

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Foreword

THE HON. NEIL ANDREW

This conference was the twelfth in an annual series established by the ATSE Crawford Fund to raise awareness of the benefits that accrue both internationally and to Australia from international agricultural research — research that has as its primary goal the reduction of poverty, improvement of food security, and conservation of natural resources for agriculture in developing countries.

The conference addressed one of the world's great challenges during the next 20 years: managing competing demands for the world's limited supplies of fresh water. Our overview was global, and at the river basin level we focussed on some of the major rivers and river basins in the Asia-Pacific region: the Yellow ('3H') River, the Murray-Darling, the Indo-Gangetic Basin and the Mekong.

THE HON. NEIL ANDREW was brought up in the SA Riverland, where his family and later Neil had interests in horticulture. He was an active participant in the SA Agricultural Bureau movement, and was Chairman 1980-82. In 1975, he was awarded a Nuffield Agricultural Scholarship to make an overseas study tour. In 1983, he was elected to the Australian Parliament as the member for Wakefield in the House of Representatives. With changes in the boundaries of his electorate, he later moved to Gawler. He held various positions including that of Government Whip from 1997, and from November 1998, became Speaker of the House of Representatives. Neil retired from the position and from his seat in November 2004. He now lives in Adelaide and became Chairman of the Crawford Fund on the retirement of The Hon. Tim Fischer in June 2005.

The conference was opened by The Hon. Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs. Perhaps because of the prevailing drought at the time, it attracted a large audience — almost 300 people — and we had to close registrations well in advance of the day. The audience represented Australian parliamentarians, the diplomatic corps, Australian government departments, agencies, statutory authorities and commissions, scientific organisations and universities, aid organisations, non-government organisations, the private sector, the media and the public.

A key message from the conference was that more than one-third of the world's food is produced on about 250 million ha of irrigated land that accounts for about 80% of global fresh water consumption. Without irrigation people would die, and the demand for food continues to increase as the world's population grows inexorably. However, fresh water resources are finite, and the demands for more water for environmental services and other purposes are almost as pressing. To keep agriculture competitive and sustainable, a 50% increase in the productivity of water in agriculture will be feasible — and necessary — worldwide, over the next two decades.

With issues such as these on the table, there was plenty of room for vigorous debate and conflicting opinions, and our speakers came with a wide range of views and backgrounds. Media interest in the conference was extraordinary. Our keynote speaker, Dr Frank Rijsberman, was interviewed on ABCTV's *7.30 Report* and by numerous radio reporters, and his conference speech was widely reported, including an editorial comment in *The Australian*. A Reuters reporter was at the conference, and Frank's comments subsequently appeared in newspapers in at least ten countries.

Other speakers were also interviewed, and in total our public awareness efforts at the time of the conference generated at least 80 media ‘hits’.

The *ATSE* Crawford Fund wishes to acknowledge the following supporters for their important in-kind and financial support for the conference:

ACIAR — Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research

Alliance of Future Harvest Centres of the CGIAR

AusAID — Australian Agency for International Development

Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage

Cooperative Research Centre for Irrigation Futures

CSIRO Land and Water

CSIRO Livestock Industries

GRDC — Grains Research and Development Corporation

IWMI — International Water Management Institute

Land and Water Australia

Murray–Darling Basin Commission

National Water Commission

We who were privileged to attend the conference found it stimulating, challenging and informative. I hope you find this summary of proceedings just as interesting.



The Hon. Neil Andrew
Chairman
ATSE Crawford Fund Board of Governors

