



RENMARK IRRIGATION TRUST

Constituted by a Statute of the Parliament of South Australia 1893

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Renmark Irrigation Trust – AWS Water Stewardship Group Certification Scheme

What is (good) water stewardship?

Stewardship is often about taking care of something that we do not own. Stewardship approaches focus on the management of common pool resources, in our case, water and important water related areas. Good water stewardship is based on the principle of there being a collective need for sustainable water resources and a collective need for effective responses to address shared water related challenges, with an organisation showing proactive and diligent approaches to effectively address these challenges.

What is the Alliance for Water Stewardship?

The Alliance for Water Stewardship (**AWS**) is a global membership collaboration of businesses, NGOs and the public sector. Members contribute to the sustainability of local water resources through their adoption and promotion of a universal framework for the sustainable use of water – the AWS Standard – that drives, recognises and rewards good water stewardship performance.

Renmark Irrigation Trust's water stewardship story

In the context of irrigation practices in the Murray-Darling Basin, the Trust thought it had taken many steps to best practice, but was unsure how to test this. An opportunity was identified with the newly developed Alliance for Water Stewardship international standard. Renmark Irrigation Trust became AWS Gold Level certified in 2018, and Platinum Level certified in 2020, becoming the first irrigated agriculture body to be certified at each level and, in regards to its platinum certification, the fifth organisation globally. The Trust, as an irrigation infrastructure operator, sees certification and the resulting validation as a responsible water resource manager as critical in its mission to lead and advocate in water related issues for not only its >600 Member Grower base, but for the region and the industry in general.

Trust Members Group Certification Scheme

As part of its water stewardship certification strategy, the Trust plans for Members to access the Trust's in-house certification experience and seeks expressions of interest from Members to participate in a pilot group certification scheme. The proposed group certification scheme presents a unique opportunity to gain recognition for industry leading irrigation practices, as well as a competitive advantage in domestic and global markets. This opportunity is not currently available to any other irrigation scheme in Australia, and there is only one other agricultural group certification scheme certified in the world. This advantage can be accessed by way of two methods, being:

1. Access to information/marketing brochures and communication mediums, communicating that as a Trust Member your irrigation water is delivered by an AWS Platinum Certified Irrigation Infrastructure Operator; or
2. Expression of interest in the Trust AWS Group Scheme Pilot. This process will attract some costs (and additional time commitments) that are still to be determined but will allow a Member who has successfully completed the certification process to display the AWS certification level achieved (including access to branding logos) and market themselves as AWS certified, as the Trust currently does – potentially developing a competitive advantage in markets, and bolstering credentials with financial institutions and during grant applications.

Underpinning the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the Renmark Community

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What is the AWS Standard, how does it work, and how do I know that it is credible?

The AWS Standard offers a credible, globally-applicable framework for major water users to understand their own water use and impacts, and to work collaboratively and transparently with others for sustainable water management within the wider water catchment context. Implementers follow the steps and guidance in the AWS Standard to achieve good water stewardship practices that improve site water performance and contribute to wider sustainability goals. The AWS Standard was developed through a four-year global, multi-stakeholder consultation, seeking a framework that could be implemented by any site, in any sector, in any catchment around the world, and is the only framework for water users that is fully compliant with the stringent guidelines for standards system laid down by ISEAL, the global alliance for credible standard systems. Enhancing credibility, an independent audit, against global best practice, is required in five key areas; water governance, sustainable use, and quality, provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene, and how healthy important water related areas are.

Our water stewardship vision

The Trust believes the water stewardship framework can be a common tool that breaks down the water tensions between the states, and within communities; and can build water resilience and a community owned vision for the MDB, and indeed the nation. Water is one of our most precious resources – its careful and balanced management and protection of the riverine ecosystem is of paramount importance to life, Basin communities, and reliant industries that include agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing. Given the Trust’s successful water stewardship credentials, this pilot group certification for members, and the local government (Renmark Paringa Council) undertaking water stewardship certification, Renmark has an opportunity to establish a water stewardship certified region. This is already creating broad socio-economic benefits and is leading to increased partnerships in tackling shared water-related issues.

By empowering local communities with a framework to identify water-related issues and develop their own bespoke, creative, unique solutions, the Trust believes sustainable communities can be established Basin wide, reducing top-down Government consultation and allowing communities to “own” solutions to water-related issues. The Trust seeks to use its journey with the water stewardship model as an exemplar throughout Australia and on a global stage sharing with interested parties. The time to progress the water stewardship framework is now, before the next drought hits and federal/state politics and other economic pressures obstruct progress to more sustainable and water resilient communities.

Next steps

If, after reviewing this expression for interest notice, you are interested in participating in a group certification scheme pilot, please contact the Trust Office on (08) 8586 6911 or email James John at jjohn@rit.org.au. You will then be required to review underlying documentation, including a group membership agreement and certification requirement documents, before confirming your wish to participate in this pilot program.

Kind Regards



R Humphrey Howie
Presiding Member