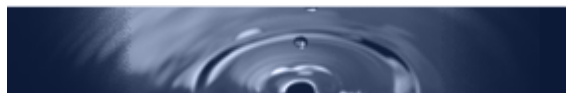



Hervey Bay Queensland Australia
Wide Bay Water Corporation



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Advanced irrigation to pay dividends

Wide Bay Water's investment in irrigation technology is set to pay dividends when the Corporation develops Sunshine Farm at Nikenbah.

The 210 hectare farm will expand the Corporation's planting program in the Booral/Nikenbah area. The Corporation has already planted 300,000 trees on Pulgul and Bunya farms.

The trees are planted as a crop which is fed the city's treated water when it is not required by other users, like cane farmers, who pay for the water. The scheme is designed to stop water being discharged into the pristine waters of the Great Sandy Strait.

"To ensure the tree seedlings receive exactly the right amount of water for optimum growth we can just plug the irrigation network into our moisture-control system called 'Irrinet' which lets us remotely control the watering," said Wide Bay Water Recycling Officer Carl Suddaby.

Irrinet is operated from a solar-powered computer shed at the plantations. It controls the irrigation systems for the gum trees, some of which are now 18 months old.

"This system is about as state of the art as you can get for irrigation," said Mr Suddaby.

Sensors at the existing plantations measure ground moisture, humidity, rainfall and wind speed. This data is transmitted via radio waves back to the Irrinet computer where it is assessed. Watering directions are then sent back to the irrigation network.

"For example we might decide we need water similar to a 5mm rainfall event on a particular section that day and with the push of a button it can be done," said Mr Suddaby.

"We'll need to build a pump shed, storage dam and irrigation network at each new plantation and then we'll be able to plug into Irrinet and water the seedlings with above-ground drip irrigation."

Mr Suddaby said the recycled water from Hervey Bay's treated sewage was ideal for growing trees.

Treated to Class B level which is not suitable for drinking, the water contains dissolved nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus. These substances are harmful to the marine environment, which is why the corporation developed the reuse scheme instead of dumping the water in the Bay. Ironically, the same substances are advantageous for farming.

"We've taken the water, which was a waste product, and used it in a beneficial way. Growing trees is a much better option than dumping it in the sea," he said.

For more details phone Denis Heron, Wide Bay Water Corporation, on 1300 808 888.

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