

LEARN.IRRIGATE.GROW. 

Led by farmers. Demonstrated on farm.

Demonstration Project Landholder Booklet

AGRICULTURE VICTORIA




West Gippsland
Catchment Management Authority

What is the *Learn.Irrigate.Grow* program

Learn.Irrigate.Grow is a demonstration and extension program that supports irrigated farming businesses across the Lake Wellington catchment area to trial and demonstrate new technologies, management practices and solutions that can improve productivity and protect our waterways.

By supporting on-farm demonstration projects, the program generates practical knowledge that farmers can see, learn from and apply on their own properties.

The program is funded through the Victorian Government's Sustainable Irrigation Program (SIP) and is delivered collaboratively by Agriculture Victoria and the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA). Demonstration projects are complemented by extension and knowledge-sharing activities that provide recipients with access to technical expertise, peer learning opportunities and support to evaluate and communicate project outcomes.

The primary objectives of the program are to increase the adoption of innovative technologies and management practices that:

Key features

- Reduce nutrient runoff from irrigated land
- Minimise the impacts of salinity and high-water tables
- Improve on-farm productivity, resilience and long-term sustainability
- Foster collaboration, peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange across the irrigation community.
- Build the skills, knowledge and capability of irrigators.

Beyond the adoption of improved practices, the program also recognises the importance of strengthening relationships within the irrigation community. By connecting farmers, facilitating knowledge exchange and encouraging collaboration, *Learn.Irrigate.Grow* contributes to the development of stronger social networks and a more resilient farming sector.

Who can apply?

Learn.Irrigate.Grow is aimed at irrigators who are interested in trialling emerging technologies and methods on their farm and sharing the learnings with the irrigation community.

To be eligible for funding, applicants must:

- Be located within the Lake Wellington catchment
- Operate an irrigation agricultural enterprise producing food, fibre or other agricultural product
- Hold, or have lawful access to water supplied under a Water Use Licence or Take & Use License
- Have the legal authority to undertake the proposed project activities on the demonstration site.
- Be willing to enter into a Landholder Partnership Agreement with WGCMA
- Be willing to share outcomes, including success and challenges, through agreed extension and communication activities.
- Have not already received funding for a demonstration project under the current funding round (2024-2028).

Applicants may partner with industry bodies, researchers, consultants, technology providers, education institutions or government agencies; however, the farming business must be the lead applicant and primary beneficiary of the project.

Available funding

Learn.Irrigate.Grow provides funding of up to \$30,000 (excluding GST) per project to support eligible demonstration activities.

Applicants are encouraged to contribute their own funding, in-kind support or partner contributions. Projects that leverage additional investment may be viewed favourably during the assessment process.

Applicants may submit multiple Expressions of Interest (EOIs); however, only one grant may be awarded to an individual business per funding cycle (2024-28).

Payments will be made by instalments based on successful completion of project milestones. Milestones will be developed in consultation with applicants.

How long have I got to complete the project?

Projects must be established and in operation by 30 June 2028 and then completed within three years of the funding agreement being awarded. Most demonstration projects are expected to run over more than one season to allow sufficient time to collect meaningful data and assess project outcomes.

Agriculture Victoria extension staff will work with successful applicants to develop a project plan and delivery timeframe that is appropriate for the proposed project.

What activities are eligible for funding?

Activity Type	Example
Professional agricultural planning or consulting services	Contracting a professional agricultural planner or consultant to develop or assist with the development and implementation of on-farm plans or activities that meet the project objectives. Examples: • Engineering, agronomic or technical consulting
Equipment and/or infrastructure	Purchasing of equipment or infrastructure that contribute to project objectives. Examples: • Irrigation Automation and control systems • Scheduling technologies and decision support tools • Water monitoring technologies • Sensors, artificial intelligence or data analytics • Fertigation systems • Renewable energy systems
Monitoring and evaluation equipment and/or services	**All funded projects <u>must</u> include a plan for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of the demonstration. This could include specific monitoring equipment and/or contracting professional services to assist with monitoring and evaluation. Costs associated with monitoring can be included in the grant application. Examples: • Soil and/or water tests • Bulk density tests • Weather stations • Soil moisture monitors • Monitoring software
Other	As a rule of thumb, any expenditure on products or services that are necessary for the demonstration to succeed will be eligible.

For examples of projects that have previously been funded, please refer to:

[WGCMA | Learn Irrigate Grow On-Farm Demonstrations](#)

Ineligible activities

The following activities/costs are not eligible to be claimed as part of a project:

- Labour, staffing or time related expenses (other than contracted professional services)
- Retrospective payments for works already completed
- Any activities considered to be routine farm maintenance or costs associated with routine maintenance
- Any product or service funded, in part or in whole, by another grant program
- General supplies and consumables including:
 - Fertilisers
 - Seed
 - Chemicals
 - Animal Feed
 - Fuel
 - Water Charges
 - Electricity Costs
 - Activities commenced before execution of the funding agreement.
 - Rectification works resulting from non-compliance with regulations.
 - Costs associated with obtaining planning permits.
 - Costs being claimed from another funding program.

How do I apply

Please ensure you read the Program guidelines thoroughly before applying.

Potential applicants are encouraged to discuss project ideas with Agriculture Victoria prior to submitting an **Expression of Interest**.

Key contact:

Caelan McIntosh, Irrigation Extension
Officer at PH:0476 885 716 or email
caelan.mcintosh@agriculture.vic.gov.au

Expressions of Interest can be
submitted online at
<https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/pQUzM2V0Jx>.

Projects will need to consider the following
core principles:

- Demonstrate technical feasibility
- Demonstrates strong alignment with two or more program objectives
- Demonstrates or captures data on a novel or innovative technology or practice

Or Scan the
QR code

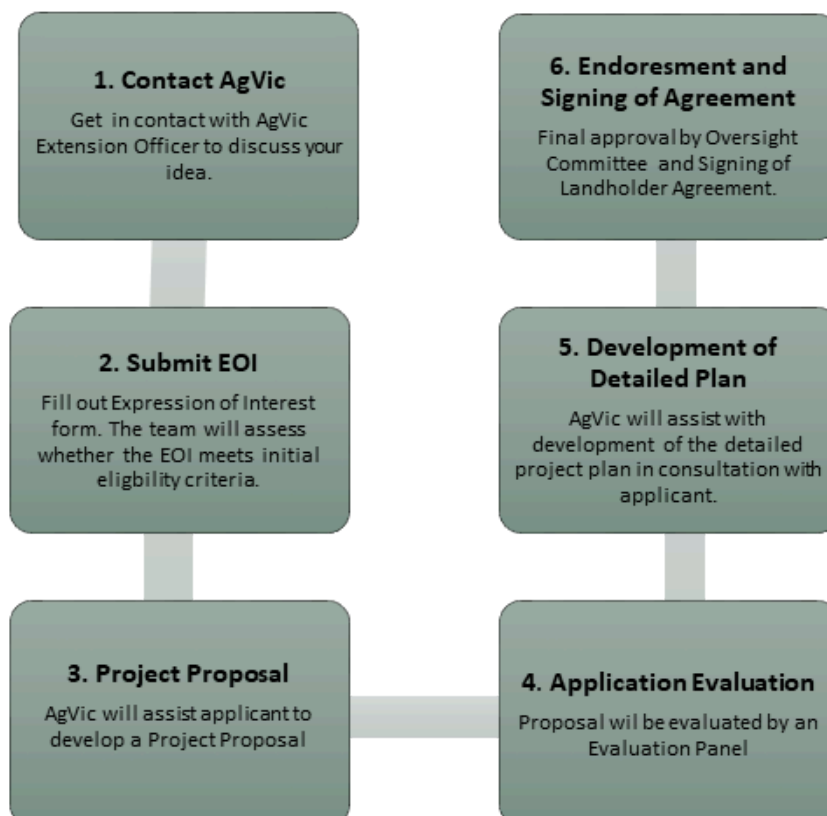


What are the conditions of funding?

- Successful applicants will be required to enter into a Landholder partnership agreement with WGCMA.
- As a condition of funding, participants will be expected to support the promotion and communication of project activities and outcomes throughout the life of the project.
- This may include contributing content, photographs, videos, testimonials, project updates and lessons learned for use in field days, case studies, newsletters, media stories, websites and social media channels managed by Agriculture Victoria, WGCMA and program partners.
- Recipients may be requested to display project signage at the demonstration site for the duration of the project and for any approved field days or extension activities.
- Recipients are encouraged to actively promote their project through their own communication channels and networks where appropriate, including business social media platforms, websites, community groups and industry networks, to maximise knowledge sharing and encourage the adoption of demonstrated practices.
- Agriculture Victoria and WGCMA will provide communications guidance, key messages, branding requirements and supporting materials to assist recipients in promoting their project and ensuring communications are consistent with program objectives.

What is the application process

Below is an outline of the application and support pathway.



For full details see the Project Terms and Conditions – **Appendix 1.**

Appendix 1 – Program Full Terms & Conditions

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

- 1 Expressions of Interest may be submitted at any time by completing the approved EOI form.
- 2 The program operates as an open funding round. Applications will generally be assessed in order they are received, subject to available funding.
- 3 The WGCMA website will advise whether funding is currently available and whether EOIs are being accepted.
- 4 On receipt of an EOI, AgVic will register the EOI in the approved records management system and assign a unique application identification number.
- 5 The Delivery Team will conduct First Pass Assessment to the following criteria.

Criteria	Assessment
1 Located in Lake Wellington Catchment Area	Pass/Fail
2 Irrigated Farming Business	Pass/Fail
3 Funding requested \$30,000 or below	Pass/Fail
4 Has not previously received funding under the current Environmental Contribution funding round.	Pass/Fail
5 Demonstrates basic technical feasibility	Pass/Fail
6 Demonstrates strong alignment with one or more program objectives	Pass/Fail
7 Demonstrates or captures data on a novel or innovative technology or practice	Pass/Fail

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- 6 The outcome of the First Pass Screening will be documented by the Delivery Team in the program records management system, including:
 - Applicant name and project title.
 - Date of assessment.
 - Eligibility assessment outcome against each criterion.
 - Any supporting comments or rationale.
 - Names of the officers undertaking the assessment.
 - 7 Applications that receive a Fail against any eligibility criterion will be deemed ineligible and will not progress further in the assessment process.
 - 8 The Agriculture Victoria Extension Officer will notify applicants of the outcome of the First Pass Screening and provide a brief explanation where an application is deemed ineligible.
 - 9 All eligible EOIs will progress to Proposal Development Stage.

PROJECT PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

- 10 The AgVic Extension Officer will work collaboratively with applicants, industry partners, suppliers, technical experts to develop a draft project proposal.
- 11 Where deemed relevant, a copy of the draft project proposal may be supplied to the following parties:
 - SRW who may advise on supply or drainage considerations.
 - WGCMA Statutory Planning regarding any Works on Waterways or earthworks on the floodplain
 - Local Government regarding native vegetation issues
 - EPA who may identify whether any applicants have existing sanctions that the Committee need to consider. If any sanctions are identified, then the EPA are to provide a written description of the basis of the sanction and any other information that may be useful for consideration by the Governance Group
- 12 The proposals will include:
 - A brief outline of the project
 - A description of how the project intends to address the strategic objectives of the program
 - Outline any permit & accreditations required
 - Outline of the project costs including any provider quotes, anticipated landholder in-kind
 - Outline the key evaluation questions and methodology



PROJECT ASSESSMENTS & RECOMMENDATION

- 13 Project proposals will be assessed by the Evaluation Panel. A minimum of 5 members, including at least one representative of the oversight committee must be present. Assessment sessions may be conducted in person or online.
- 14 Assessment meetings will be conducted in accordance with the program's probity, confidentiality and conflict of interest requirements. Prior to assessment, all committee members must declare any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest. Any identified conflicts will be managed in accordance with the Program Governance Framework.
- 15 The Evaluation Panel will:
 1. Collectively assess the project against the Assessment Matrix and agree on a final assessment score.
 2. Rank proposals only where the number of recommended projects exceeds the available funding.
 3. Document assessment outcomes and recommendations.
- 16 To be recommended for funding, applications must pass all eligibility requirements and achieve a minimum assessment score of 70% of the total available score.
- 17 Assessment scores will guide funding recommendations; however, scores will not be the sole determinant of funding decisions.
- 18 In making recommendations, the Panel may also consider:
 - Geographic distribution of projects across the catchment.
 - Representation of different irrigation industries and farming systems.
 - Diversity of project types and demonstrated outcomes.
 - Opportunities for knowledge sharing and industry-wide benefit.
 - Strategic priorities identified through the Sustainable Irrigation Program.
- 19 The Evaluation Panel may recommend that an application be:
 1. Endorsed for funding
 2. Endorsed subject to specified conditions
 3. Deferred pending further information
 4. Not approved for funding

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- 20 Indicative Funding will be nominated against recommended projects up to the value of the available budget,
 - 21 Where all the funding has been committed, the WGCMA website will be updated as soon as practicable to advise prospective applicants of the program status.
 - 22 Where an application achieves the minimum assessment requirements and is recommended for funding, but insufficient funding remains available, the application may be placed on a reserve list.
 - 23 Applications on the reserve list will be ordered according to the date of the original Expression of Interest was received, unless otherwise determined by the Oversight Committee due to strategic program considerations.
 - 24 Should additional funding become available through project withdrawal, project underspend, funding recovery, additional program allocations or other sources, applications on the reserve list may be considered for funding without requiring a new Expression of Interest.
 - 25 Applications will remain on the reserve list for the duration of the current EC funding round unless withdrawn by the applicant or otherwise determined by the Oversight Committee.
 - 26 A record of assessment outcomes, recommendations and supporting rationale will be maintained for audit and governance purposes

INDUSTRY CONSULTATION

- 27 Following completion of the technical assessment process, projects that meet the minimum funding threshold and are recommended for funding by the Evaluation Panel may be presented to the Irrigator Reference Group (IRG).
- 28 The purpose of an IRG review is to provide practical irrigator perspective on the proposed project portfolio and to identify opportunities to maximise industry relevance, demonstration value, knowledge sharing and adoption outcomes.

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- 29 The IRG role is advisory in nature and does not replace or duplicate the formal assessment process.
- 30 The IRG may:
- Provide feedback
 - Identify opportunities to strengthen extension and communication
 - Suggest project conditions or considerations that may improve outcomes
 - Provide advice on emerging industry priorities and challenges
 - Highlight opportunities for collaboration with industry groups, networks or other projects.
- 31 During the consultation meeting:
- Members will declare any actual, perceived or potential conflicts of interest in accordance with the Program Governance Framework.
 - Recommended projects will be presented in de-identified format
 - The Evaluation Panel representative will provide a summary of the assessment outcomes and rationale for any recommendations
 - IRG members will have the opportunity to provide comments, recommendations and suggestion for consideration.
 - Feedback provided by the IRG will be documented in meeting minutes and provided to the Evaluation Panel and Oversight Committee.
- 32 The Evaluation Panel will consider any comments or recommendations received from the IRG before finalising funding recommendations.

FUNDING APPROVAL

- 33 On completion of the assessment and consultation process, the Evaluation Panel will develop final recommendations and provide these, together with assessment outcomes and supporting rationale to the Oversight Committee through the WGCMA Sustainable Irrigation Officer.
- 34 The Oversight Committee will review the recommendations to ensure they are consistent with program objectives, funding principles, governance requirements and available budget.

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- 35 The Oversight Committee may:
- Approve the funding recommendations as presented;
 - Approve the recommendations subject to specific conditions;
 - Request additional information or clarification from the Evaluation Panel; or
 - Refer recommendations back to Evaluation Panel for reconsideration where significant governance, probity or strategic concern are identified.
- 36 The Oversight Committee retains the authority to amend, defer or reject recommendations where significant governance, probity, financial or strategic concerns are identified. Any departure from the Evaluation Panel recommendations will be documented, including the rationale for the decision and any required corrective actions.
- 37 Following final evaluation, the Delivery Team will inform the applicants on final outcomes via phone call, followed by formal written confirmation.
- 38 Where all funding has been committed, the WGCMA website will be updated as soon as practical to advise prospective applicants.

DETAILED PROJECT PLANS

- 39 A Detailed Project Plan will be completed by the AgVic Extension Officer (Demo Lead) in consultation with the with applicant, ensuring any Evaluation Panel or industry recommendations are considered.

LANDHOLDER PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

- 40 The Final Project Plan will form part of the WGCMA Landholder Partnership Agreement (LPA) and will be incorporated as a schedule to the Agreement.
- 41 The Oversight Committee will review the Final Project Plan and Agreement.
- 42 The WGCMA signatory to the Agreement must be an authorised officer in accordance with the WGCMA Delegations Register and financial delegations.
- 43 Executed agreements and associated project documentation will be retained in the relevant WGCMA records management system in accordance with organisational record-keeping requirements.

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- 44 **No project works, procurement activities, purchases or commitments of expenditure are to commence until the Landholder Partnership Agreement has been fully executed by both parties.**
- 45 A Final Project Plan must include:
- Objective
 - A site map showing the location and extent of the demonstration area and any relevant infrastructure, waterways, wetlands or environmental features associated with the project.
 - Detailed Methodology
 - Budgets and Quotes
 - Timelines & Milestones
 - Risks for successful implementation and mitigation strategies
 - Roles and Responsibilities
 - Communications, Extension and Community Engagement
 - Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting.

PROJECT DELIVERY

- 46 The AgVic Extension Officer (Demo Lead) will act as the primary point of contact for the applicant and provide support throughout project delivery, including project implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements.
- 47 Funding payments will be linked to the completion of nominated project milestones as detailed in the Project Plan. The payment schedule will identify:
- Milestones that trigger funding payments;
 - Evidence required to demonstrate milestone completion; and
 - Any milestones that may be amended through an approved project variation process.
- 48 Prior to the release of milestone payments, project progress must be verified by the Delivery Team members. Verification may include site inspections, progress reports, photographs, monitoring data or other supporting documentation.
- 49 Applicants must retain and provide copies of all invoices, receipts and other financial records relevant to the project. WGCMA reserves the right to request additional evidence to verify project expenditure and completion of funded activities.



Variations

- 50 Due to the nature of the program, project variations are expected from time to time and will be managed using a risk-based approach.
- 51 Participants must notify the AgVic Demo Lead as soon as practicable if any issue, risk or change in circumstances arises that may affect project delivery, achievement of milestones or demonstration outcomes.
- 52 Minor project variations may be approved by the Delivery Team where the proposed change does not alter the intent, objectives or expected outcomes of the project.
- 53 Significant changes that materially alter the projects objectives, demonstration outcomes, funding allocation must be referred to the Evaluation Panel for consideration.
- 54 Where a variation involves changes to the approved funding allocation, any recommendation of the Evaluation Panel must also be approved by the Oversight Panel.
- 55 Approved variations will be documented and incorporated into project plans. This reflects the reality that the AgVic case manager is there to:
 - Support delivery,
 - Identify issues early
 - Help find solutions
 - Manage variations
- 56 Where the Delivery Team identifies that a project is not progressing in accordance with the approved plan, milestone schedule or Landholder Partnership Agreement, the recipient will be notified in writing.
- 57 The written notification will outline:
 - The issue identified
 - Any outstanding milestones, reports or obligations
 - Actions to address the issues
 - The timeframe for response
 - Any implications for funding or project delivery if the matter remains unresolved.

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- 58 Recipients must respond to the written notification within 10 business days, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Delivery Team.

59 **Project Terminations**

A project may be terminated where:

- The recipient requests withdrawal from the program;
- The recipient fails to respond to, or address issues identified through formal written notification within specified timeframes.
- False or misleading information has been provided; or
- A significant governance, fraud, integrity or reputational risk is identified.

- 60 Where a recipient withdraws after receiving grant funding:

- Unspent funds and payments relating to incomplete or unverified activities may be required to be returned to WGCMA.

Reallocation of funding

- 61 Where a project is terminated or completed under budget, any uncommitted or recovered funds may be reallocated to:

- Eligible projects that met the minimum threshold but were not initially funded due to budget limitations; or
- Be allocated back to the available program budget.

- 62 Any reallocation of funding must be approved by the Oversight Committee.

Communications & Knowledge Sharing

- 63 As a condition of funding, participants will be expected to support the promotion and communication of project activities and outcomes throughout the life of the project.
- 64 This may include contributing content, photographs, videos, testimonials, project updates and lessons learned for use in field days, case studies, newsletters, media stories, websites and social media channels managed by Agriculture Victoria, WGCMA and program partners.
- 65 Recipients may be requested to display project signage at the demonstration site for the duration of the project and for any approved field days or extension activities.

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- 66 Recipients are encouraged to actively promote their project through their own communication channels and networks where appropriate, including business social media platforms, websites, community groups and industry networks, to maximise knowledge sharing and encourage the adoption of demonstrated practices.
 - 67 Agriculture Victoria and WGCMA will provide communications guidance, key messages, branding requirements and supporting materials to assist recipients in promoting their project and ensuring communications are consistent with program objectives.

PROJECT COMPLETION

- 68 Project completion and final acquittal will occur in accordance with the approved Project Plan and Landholder Partnership Agreement. Final payments will only be released once all required project milestones, reporting obligations and financial acquittal requirements have been satisfactorily completed.
- 69 The Delivery Team will verify project completion and confirm that all contractual obligations have been met prior to recommending final payment.
- 70 Project outcomes, lessons learned and monitoring results will contribute to the evaluation of the Learn.Irrigate.Grow program and future program improvement activities.
- 71 To maximise knowledge sharing and industry benefit, funded demonstration sites may be utilised for approved extension, communication and peer-to-peer learning activities for a period of up to three years following project completion, subject to agreement between the landholder, Agriculture Victoria and the WGCMA.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

- 72 Any reports, case studies, media, etc, and therefore any data, information and Intellectual Property contained within these publications, that are produced as a result of the funded projects, in accordance with the Landholder Partnership Agreement, will become the property of the WGCMA and AgVic. As a public entity, all WGCMA and AgVic publications would then be freely available to the public.

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- 73 If a participant considers certain information to be commercially sensitive or confidential, they should advise the Delivery Team during project development. The Oversight Committee will consider reasonable requests to withhold confidential information from public release, provided this does not unreasonably limit the demonstration, learning and knowledge-sharing objectives of the program.
- 74 Any specific arrangements relating to confidentiality, intellectual property, data ownership or publication of project information will be documented within the Landholder Partnership Agreement.

RECORD KEEPING

- 75 Appropriate records management is essential to maintaining transparency, accountability and auditability of the Learn.Irrigate.Grow program.
- 76 All program documentation, including Expressions of Interest, assessment records, project plans, governance records, meeting minutes and monitoring information, will be stored within approved Agriculture Victoria and WGCMA record management systems.
- 77 Agriculture Victoria will maintain operational project records, including applicant correspondence, case management notes, assessment documentation and project monitoring records, within the designated SharePoint environment or successor system.
- 78 WGCMA will maintain all contract, financial and funding agreement records in accordance with organisational financial management, procurement and records management procedures.
- 79 All funding recommendations, approvals, assessment outcomes, conflict of interest declarations and supporting documentation must be retained to provide a clear audit trail for program decision-making.
- 80 Spatial data and project outputs must be recorded by the Delivery Team in accordance with DEECA reporting requirements. Project locations, outputs and associated spatial information will be entered into Weave and maintained in accordance with relevant DEECA Output Data Standards.

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- 81 Records will be retained, managed and disposed of in accordance with applicable legislation, privacy requirements, organisational records management policies and Victorian Government information management standards.
 - 82 Access to applicant, project and financial information will be restricted to authorised personnel and managed in accordance with privacy, confidentiality and information security requirements.

PROGRAM DISCLAIMER

- 83 Funding is not guaranteed until a fully executed Landholder Partnership Agreement is in place.
- 84 Submission of an EOI does not guarantee funding approval.
- 85 Learn.Irrigate.Grow funding is subject to available budget and program priorities.
- 86 False or misleading information may result in an application being deemed ineligible, cancellation of funding approval or recovery of funds.
- 87 WGCMA and Agriculture Victoria reserve the right to amend program processes and requirements where necessary to ensure compliance with legislation, funding agreements and governance requirements.

CONFIDENTIALITY, CODE OF CONDUCT AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

- 88 This program is conducted in compliance with the Victorian Public Sector Code of Conduct.
- 89 Throughout the program any breach of governance, real or perceived, including conflict of interest, code of conduct, fraud or corruption shall be referred to the WGCMA CEO immediately in accordance with the WGCMA Fraud and Corruption Policy.

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Led by farmers. Demonstrated on farm.



AGRICULTURE VICTORIA



We acknowledge and pay our respects to the
Traditional Owners of the region, the Gunaikurnai and
their rich culture and spiritual connection to Country.



West Gippsland
Catchment Management Authority