Flinders & Gilbert Agricultural Resource Assessment

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Flinders-Gilbert Agricultural Resource Assessment

- part of NQIAS
- 155,000 km²
- >90% pastoral
- ca 7,200 people
- <1000 ha irrigated agriculture
What have we done?

1. Identified and evaluated soil & water resources;

2. Quantified productivity & scale of irrigated agriculture opportunities;

3. Quantified costs & benefits and their distribution amongst different users

supporting sustainable whole of region development
Slightly more detail....

1. Water flow & function
2. Water storage options
3. Land & soil suitability, including flood & salinity risks
4. Agricultural, horticultural & pastoral production potential
5. Environmental, cultural & industrial linkages
6. Distribution of costs & benefits
7. Information & data distribution

...summarised from ca 4,000 pages of information
Key findings

1. despite close proximity, catchments vary very widely

2. Flinders: farm dams can enable 10-20,000 ha of irrigation in 70-80% of years

3. Gilbert: instream dams can enable 20-30,000 ha of irrigation in 85% of years

4. significant water use would amplify ecological challenges of dry years, moderate impact in ‘normal’ years

opportunities, risks, trade-offs
Key messages

- very little extant quantitative knowledge of agricultural resource base
- the more you look, the more you find
- wide ranging enterprise potential
- significant farm-scale profit potential
- largest challenges lie beyond the farm gate

not inconsistent with previous studies
good information removes impediments to progress
the more you look, the more you find
agricultural opportunities are plentiful
are high gross margins enough to stimulate investment?
‘whole of development’ economics have proven challenging
A history of irrigated development attempts

- Qld-British Food Corporation (1948)
- Territory Rice Limited (1955)
- Mareeba-Dimbulah (1958)
- Ord River Irrigation Area (1960)
- Tipperary Land Corporation (1967)
- Lakeland Downs (1968)
- Camballin Irrigation Area (1969)
- Northern Agricultural Development Corporation (1970)
- Burdekin River (1987)
A history of irrigated development success

Qld-British Food Corporation (1948)
Territory Rice Limited (1955)
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Anatomy of failure

- Natural environment challenging but not main source of failure
- Management, planning & finances most important
- Overcapitalising early, before lessons learned

Impatience costly
Anatomy of success

• climate, soils, farm operations, markets & supply chains viewed as an inter-dependent system

• up-scaling occurs at a considered pace

• allow for lags before investment returns

patience a profitable virtue
Joining the dots

- capitalising on northern opportunities not without challenge
- a range of economic, regulatory & biophysical opportunities & barriers
- unlocking significant new investment requires confidence about the scale of opportunities and risks
- tools exist to quantify and locate opportunity and risk

Opportunity remains to apply tools to ‘join the dots’ to inform whole of region development
Thank you

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