

RON COCKS MEMORIAL AWARD

FOR OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP IN IRRIGATION

Dr Terry Heiler

2018 RON COCKS MEMORIAL AWARD WINNER

Terry Heiler has made a significant contribution to irrigation and water management both in New Zealand and internationally in a career spanning 50 years. He is one of two winners of the Ron Cocks Memorial Award in 2018. The award is given for outstanding leadership in irrigation.



In 1967 Terry arrived in New Zealand. He found how we manage water very different to Australia. "In Australia there were lots of dams, whereas most irrigation in New Zealand was from run of river. I kept wondering where all the dams were."

Terry initially worked for the New Zealand Agricultural Engineering Institute where over time he built a team of soil and water researchers. In 1982 he was appointed Director of the Institute. Its work saw new irrigation technology developed in New Zealand like drip irrigation, and pioneering computer based design methods for storing flood runoff for irrigation.

Terry brought a clear understanding of farm systems and an ability to use his professional engineering skills to optimise the benefits of water usage for farmers and the rural communities they lived in.

In 1990, Terry established his own consultancy firm specialising in natural resources, Heiler and Associates. He carried out a range of New Zealand and international work for both public and private sector clients.

At Lincoln University, Dr Heiler also led the establishment of Lincoln International Ltd, a business enterprise tasked with marketing the research, extension and capacity-building resources of the University and the wider agricultural community in the Lincoln area to international aid and development projects.

Terry's specialist expertise and leadership ability was acknowledged in appointments to government advisory boards on External Aid and Development (of which he served as Chairman), and to the National Infrastructure Advisory Committee. He has also served on the Landcare Research Board and as Chairman of WoolPro, Eco-link and Tectra, and on the Regional Committee of the Canterbury Water Management Strategy.

Dr Heiler led Lincoln University's thrust into the commercial research and development, transforming a number of organisations into LinLink, establishing Lincoln Ventures, which is now known as Lincoln Agritech Ltd. Dr Heiler left the university in 1993 to focus on international consultancy projects.

In 2013, Dr Heiler was awarded the Bledisloe Medal by Lincoln University. This award recognises those who have made an outstanding contribution to their chosen field of expertise, advanced New Zealand's interests, or brought credit to Lincoln University.

CONTRIBUTION TO INZ

In 2006 Terry was appointed inaugural Chief Executive of IrrigationNZ. At the time Terry joined IrrigationNZ, farmers, schemes and water user groups had no overarching organisation. "The government and regional councils wanted to talk to one organisation about major water policy issues, not lots of different groups or individuals. There was clearly a need for a national representative organisation. It also seemed clear that there was going to be more need to engage with scientific and environmental groups and IrrigationNZ allowed this to happen," he says.

In line with IrrigationNZ's objectives, Dr Heiler's job was to lead the promotion of best practice across New Zealand's irrigation industry in water management, water efficiency, and the environmental impacts of intensified land use. Terry provided leadership to the New Zealand irrigation industry through providing scientific and technical advocacy to Government and Regional Councils.

INTERNATIONAL WORK

Terry has been involved in around 40 projects in 20 different countries, with most of his international work undertaken in Asia and the Middle East. His work has involved acting as a consultant on the design and build of irrigation systems. He has also worked on feasibility and investment proposals, developing policy, restoring flood damaged irrigation schemes and designing flood mitigation projects, and peer reviewing proposals.

In 1987 Dr Heiler was awarded the Crawford Reid Memorial Award of the United States Irrigation Association. The award honours individuals who have significantly advanced both the irrigation industry and proper irrigation techniques and procedures outside of the United States. To date, Dr Heiler is the only New Zealander to have received this award.

TERRY'S VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF IRRIGATION IN NZ

Terry says that in most areas of the world, sorting out water allocation can be very complex as rivers cross international borders. This means that New Zealand is much better placed to manage water than most other countries, however we are still struggling to resolve many issues in the economic/environmental space.

"Irrigation in New Zealand is much more advanced than in many other countries, and is rapidly becoming more so. Because our agricultural sector is exposed to the market, farmers are more used to trying out new technology to help them do things more efficiently," he says. "They want to learn how to improve their operations. The interest of farmers have in new technology, training and seeing what their neighbours are up to, never ceases to amaze me."

Terry says that he would like to see water issues resolved through reference to science and discussion between everyone involved.

"We have a very adversarial system currently for managing water. It has led to some poor outcomes from the judicial system. Most of the farmer costs involved in the system have been gathered by the law profession, with little benefit to any of the players. We need to learn to work together in a less adversarial way. A less than useful characteristic of the way we approach our problems is the changing policies linked to the political cycle. A longer term and bipartisan view would be helpful."

Dr Heiler retired as Chief Executive of IrrigationNZ in 2010 but remains strident in his advocacy of irrigation as "absolutely essential if New Zealand is to meet the market challenges of the future."

