RIVERLINK
Linking Horticultural Centres in Sunraysia - Riverland

Australian Government
Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation

# Riverlink - supporting industry and R&D agency coordination in Australia's main wine grape production area



## FINAL REPORT to

GRAPE AND WINE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Project Number: **DNR 03/04**

Principal Investigator: **Dr Bob Emmett**

Research Organisation: **Riverlink**

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GRAPE AND WINE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

# FINAL REPORT

## Project Number DNR 03/04

## Riverlink - supporting industry and R&D agency coordination in Australia's main wine grape production area

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# Riverlink - supporting industry and R&D agency coordination in Australia's main wine grape production area

## 1. Abstract

Riverlink provides a pathway for effective collaboration between industry and government research and development providers in the Sunraysia-Riverland region. This project ensured that programs within Riverlink's collaborative network were efficient and responsive to the needs of clients and staff. A new process for setting priorities and developing projects for wine grape industry research, development and extension was introduced where priorities raised by wine and grape producers are ranked and included in a research plan that is used for new project development. Key sources of information on projects, activities and services include Riverlink's redeveloped website and annual wine grape industry symposium.

## 2. Executive summary

Riverlink is a unique tri-state horticultural research and development (R&D) network composed of one federal and three state government R&D agencies in the Sunraysia-Riverland region of Australia; CSIRO Plant Industry, Merbein, the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, Dareton; the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, Mildura; the South Australia Research and Development Institute and Primary Industries and Resources South Australia, Loxton. Staff members of these agencies work together and share resources to improve R&D services provided to Australian horticultural industries, including the Australian wine industry.

The main objectives of this project were to (1) implement the Riverlink Strategic Plan by ensuring that Riverlink creates an effective collaborative research network and Riverlink programs are aligned with and responsive to client and member needs, contribute to sustainable and profitable horticultural industries and communities and optimise the use of resources; and (2) review Riverlink's wine grape industry research, development and extension (RDE) priority setting processes.

Riverlink's wine grape industry RDE priority setting processes were reviewed and a new process was developed and implemented. The new process provides an equitable formalised pathway for regional wine and grape producers to raise priorities through their representative organisations and have their priorities ranked by the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee and included in a research plan that is promoted and used as a basis for new project development.

An improved procedure for the development of collaborative Riverlink wine grape industry projects was also introduced. Under the procedure, proposals for high priority RDE projects are developed from discussions between key researchers and industry representatives after the annual Riverlink Wine Grape Industry Symposium and are reviewed by the RDE Committee before they are submitted to appropriate funding providers for appraisal. Information on past and current RDE projects in the Committee's Research Plan, in Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension publications and on the Riverlink website is provided to support new project development.

Outcomes from Riverlink projects were communicated to the grape and wine industry and other Riverlink stakeholders and Riverlink staff through the annual Riverlink Wine Grape Industry Symposium, Riverlink Newsletters, the Riverlink Annual Report, the Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension publication and the Riverlink website. During the project, the Riverlink website was redeveloped to increase on-line access to information on Riverlink projects, activities and services.

Further development and regular reviews of the direction and operation of Riverlink are required to ensure that Riverlink continues to respond to the needs of its clients, stakeholders and staff and provides an effective collaborative research network in a changing environment

for R&D. Trends to be taken into account during Riverlink's future development include the increasing RDE capability of regional industry-based technical groups, new approaches to project development and funding allocation by industry and government co-investors and the decline of funding and resources for regionally-based RDE.

## 3. Introduction

*Riverlink*

Riverlink is a unique tri-state horticultural research and development (R&D) network in the Sunraysia-Riverland region of Australia.

The four government agencies and their centres within the network are the

- New South Wales Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) at the Agricultural Research and Advisory Station, Dareton NSW,
- CSIRO Plant Industry (CSIRO PI) at Merbein Vic,
- Victorian Department of Primary Industries (Vic DPI) at Mildura Vic, and
- South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) and Primary Industries and Resources South Australia (PIRSA) at the Loxton Research Centre, Loxton SA.

The Riverlink centres have worked together and shared resources and expertise to improve R&D services provided to Australian horticultural industries since Riverlink's establishment in 1991. The horticultural industries and the R&D agencies are represented on the Riverlink Council that oversees Riverlink's operation through six R&D programs currently involving 150 staff. Three of these programs; Viticulture, Sustainable Horticulture, and the Riverlink Postgraduate Research Network, deliver R&D to the wine grape industry.

The Riverlink Council also provides an effective pathway for communication between industries and agencies in the Sunraysia-Riverland region, and for innovative improvement of services to Australian horticultural industries.

*Sunraysia-Riverland wine grape industry*

The Sunraysia-Riverland region produces a substantial portion of Australia's wine grapes. In 2007, wineries in the region processed approximately 679,000 tonnes, equating to around 51% of the total Australian wine crush (Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation, 2007).

Riverlink has a long history of providing high quality research and extension services to the wine grape industry. Currently Riverlink has over 40 viticulture staff working on over 30 grape and wine related projects, spread across the four government agencies and three states.

The Riverlink Council has direct input into R&D agency planning through its member agencies and regional industry representatives. Currently the Riverlink Council wine grape industry representative is Michael de Palma, Chairman of Murray Valley Winegrowers Inc. and the wine industry representative is Tim Smythe, Industry Development Officer for the Riverland Wine Industry Development Council. Recently Tim replaced Kevin Pfeiffer (also from the Riverland Wine Industry Development Council) who has been a long term member of the Riverlink Council.

*Previous project activities*

The outcomes of initial work on this project (DNR 03/04) from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2006 (Part 1) have been reported previously (Whyte, 2006). The initial work identified the need for further work on the project from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2008 (Part 2) that is covered by this report. Further areas of development to be addressed in Part 2 included delivery of some elements of the new Riverlink strategic plan, a review of wine grape industry research, development and extension (RDE) priority setting processes and redevelopment of the Riverlink website.

The objectives of Part 1 were to support Riverlink's:

(1) Provision of a pathway for collaboration between industry and state and federal R&D providers.
(2) Facilitation, organization and communication of regional industry R&D planning resulting in creation of opportunities for R&D funding bodies to co-invest in mutually beneficial R&D activities.
(3) Coordination of regional research, development and extension.
(4) Communication of regional research, development and extension.
(5) Ongoing development and implementation of a regional strategic plan for horticultural research, development and extension.
(6) Provision of professional development through its organization of seminars and workshops.

Outputs and performance targets for Part 1 were as follows.

| Outputs | Performance targets |
|---|---|
| 1. Information on Sunraysia-Riverland regional wine grape industry research and development priorities | Annual R&D planning day held for regional wine grape industry and attended by at least 20 industry representatives and 20 agency staff before August each year |
| 2. Riverlink newsletter produced and distributed to regional wine grape industry representatives | Newsletter produced 6 times per year and received by over 420 horticultural industry and agency representatives |
| 3. Riverlink annual report produced and distributed to regional wine grape industry representatives | Annual report produced by December of each year |
| 4. Professional development of regional industry and agency staff | A minimum of two professional development workshops or seminars held per annum |

*Riverlink Strategic Plan 2005-2010*

In 2004, the Riverlink Council developed a new strategic plan (Riverlink Strategic Plan 2005-2010, Whyte 2004) to enhance Riverlink's communication and development of horticultural initiatives.

The goals of the Riverlink Strategic Plan 2005-2010 were to

(1) Pursue innovative approaches to planning, funding, resourcing and implementing major horticultural initiatives in the Sunraysia-Riverland region.

(2) Ensure that Riverlink programs are aligned with and responsive to client and member needs, and contribute to sustainable and profitable horticultural industries and communities.

(3) Create an effective collaborative research network in the Sunraysia-Riverland region, and ensure optimal use of resources.

In the plan, the role of the Riverlink Communication and Development Officer was to ensure that the Riverlink network continues to deliver outcomes and support the progress of strategic objectives of the Riverlink Council and Program Leaders.

*Wine grape industry RDE priority setting processes*

Since 1991, the Riverlink Viticulture Program, led by Peter Clingeleffer (CSIRO PI, Merbein), has worked constantly towards increasing communication and collaboration between regional scientists and viticulturists in the Sunraysia-Riverland region.

Collaboration between R&D agencies and industry through Riverlink has resulted in a clear planning method to ensure that priority setting is achieved and goals are met. For many years, the Riverlink R&D planning forums have served the regional wine grape industry and research community well, and remain an invaluable communication tool.

Activities in Part 1 of the project, however, identified a need to review Riverlink's wine grape research priority setting process to ensure its continued relevance in the current climate. The review was required to

- Ensure current processes were aligned with and responsive to client needs.
- Examine the role Riverlink plays in providing a voice for regional industry groups to express research needs, and how equity in this process can be achieved.
- Consider the potential for Riverlink to assist regional industry groups to develop more consistent processes for setting district wine grape research priorities.
- Review methods of research priority setting to determine the most effective method for Riverlink.
- Determine how research planning processes of the Riverlink agencies integrate with research planning activities within the wine grape industry.
- Look at the potential for a regional viticulture network with an R&D focus in Sunraysia, similar to the Riverland Viticultural Technical Group.

It was envisaged that the review would involve regional industry associations, researchers and funding organisations. Outcomes from the review would be employed to ensure Riverlink research priority setting processes remain relevant for the Sunraysia-Riverland wine grape industry. To ensure future Riverlink Wine Grape Planning Forums continue to be effective, the Murray Valley and Riverland Industry Development Officers (or industry personnel) would be invited to contribute to forum development committees. Ongoing improvements to planning forums were required to meet the needs of Riverlink clients and progress collaboration with industry.

*Riverlink website*

Another outcome of the work in Part 1 of the project was a recommendation to redevelop the Riverlink website (Whyte, 2006). The redevelopment was required to promote Riverlink's image, activities and achievements, and use of the website as an information or communication resource. Broadening the scope of the current website would allow easier access to current Riverlink information by industry and collaborating agencies.

## 4. Project objectives and performance targets

The objectives of work on the project covered by this report (Part 2) were to

(1) Implement the Riverlink Strategic Plan 2005-2010, specifically

   a. Ensure that Riverlink programs are aligned with and responsive to client and member needs, and contribute to sustainable and profitable horticultural industries and communities.

   b. Create an effective collaborative research network in the Sunraysia-Riverland region, and ensure optimal use of resources.

(2) Review Riverlink's wine grape industry RDE priority setting processes.

Outputs and performance targets for Part 2 were as follows.

| Outputs | Performance targets |
|---|---|
| 1. Report on review of Riverlink Viticulture Program wine grape research priority setting processes | Review of Riverlink Viticulture Program wine grape research priority setting processes completed and report distributed to Riverlink Council and GWRDC by 31 December 2006 |
| 2. Information on Sunraysia-Riverland regional wine grape industry R&D priorities developed based on review outcomes | Annual RDE planning day held for regional wine grape industry by 30 September each year |

| Outputs | Performance targets |
|---|---|
| 3. Riverlink Viticulture Directions publication produced and distributed to regional wine grape industry representatives | Riverlink Viticulture Directions publication produced, hard copies presented to regional wine grape industry representatives at Riverlink Forum and a downloadable copy posted on the Riverlink website by 30 September each year. |
| 4. Riverlink newsletter produced and distributed to regional wine grape industry representatives | Newsletter produced 4 times per year and received by over 400 horticultural industry and agency representatives |
| 5. Riverlink annual report produced and distributed to regional wine grape industry representatives | Annual report produced by 31 December of each year |
| 6. Riverlink website maintained, developed and promoted to wine grape industry regional representatives | Riverlink website updated monthly |

## 5. Methods

The main focus of Riverlink is the creation of an effective collaborative research network in Sunraysia-Riverland with program activities that are aligned with and responsive to client needs.

*Riverlink communication and development activities*

During this project, the position of the Riverlink Communication and Development Officer was partially funded by GWRDC. This officer supports Riverlink by

- Developing and enhancing the Riverlink network, strategic plan and communication strategies.
- Providing a focal point for access to Riverlink services by the horticultural communities in Sunraysia-Riverland.
- Planning, coordinating and promoting a wide range of events within the horticulture and research sector.
- Facilitating planning and resourcing of research, extension and education projects in cooperation with Riverlink Program Leaders and industry organisations, ensuring that research is relevant and based on industry priorities and that collaboration is encouraged to provide industry with the most efficient use of resources and expertise.
- Managing sub-projects within the Riverlink project such as the Riverlink Postgraduate Research Network (Riverlink.PRN).
- Supervising project staff in accordance with the Victorian Department of Primary Industries' occupational health and safety (OH&S) policies and procedures.
- Assisting the Riverlink Council and Program Leaders with administration and strategic development of horticultural programs and resources according to industry needs.
- Managing the Riverlink budget and resources effectively and providing leadership by enhancing a team culture in Riverlink agencies.
- Working with the Riverlink Council and Program Leaders to create an efficient and seamless R&D network that is innovative and responsive to regional industry.
- Developing and implementing evaluation strategies for Riverlink.

*Planning and development of RDE projects*

Collaboration between government R&D agencies and industry within Riverlink is supported by annual RDE priority setting forums. An outcome based project identification process is used to allocate staff to projects based on their ability to deliver the outcome rather than their membership of a particular agency.

The Riverlink Viticulture Program has held annual research communication and planning forums involving researchers and industry since the mid 1990s. These forums have served as a valuable tool to communicate progress and outcomes of regional research and seek feed-back on future research needs.

In recent years, regional industry associations such as the Murray Valley Winegrowers Inc and the Riverland Wine Industry Development Council (via the Riverland Viticultural Technical Group) have surveyed their members on research needs prior to each annual forum and have presented the outcomes as district research priorities. In this project, Riverlink's RDE priority setting procedures for the regional wine grape industry were reviewed and amended as described in Section 6. Results and discussion.

*Communication of research*

Communication of research is also an important component of an effective research network. In addition to the annual Riverlink RDE priority setting forums, this is achieved using a range of other communication tools including the

(1) Riverlink Newsletter (four editions per year) that covers Riverlink activities, outcomes, staff information and events. The newsletter is distributed (via hard copy, email and uploaded to the website) to industry personnel, and to collaborating agencies.

(2) Riverlink Annual Report that covers Riverlink outcomes throughout the year, Council reports, Program Leader reports and budgets. The annual report is distributed (via hard copy and uploaded to the website) to industry personnel and to collaborating agencies.

(3) Riverlink website (updated monthly) that is a resource for accessing information on Riverlink and its ongoing activities.

(4) Participation in the annual Mildura and Riverland Horticultural Field Days and other community events to promote awareness of Riverlink and its activities.

(5) Riverlink Viticulture Directions publication (renamed Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension) that is supplied to industry representatives and collaborating agencies to provide information on current viticulture projects in conjunction with the annual Riverlink Viticulture RDE priority setting forums.

(6) Media releases that highlight activities within the Riverlink network. These are distributed to rural media in relevant regions and horticultural focussed media on a needs basis.

(7) Promotion of workshops and seminars held each year to enhance the knowledge and professional development of collaborating agency staff.

## 6. Results and discussion

Riverlink achieved the six targets set for the project in 2006/2007 and some of the five targets set for 2007/2008. Achievement of the other targets scheduled for 2007/2008 was delayed until early 2008/2009 as noted in the sections below. Main reasons for the delays were:

(1) Work on the project was suspended in October-November 2007 after the former project leader (Lee Byrne) resigned and moved to the UK. This interruption of the leadership and staffing of the project delayed project activities and the achievement of some performance targets.

(2) From early December 2007, the current project leader Dr Emmett worked with the Riverlink Council and its Committee to assess the future directions of Riverlink and develop and implement new Council meeting formats and operating procedures. While the latter activities were essential for further development of Riverlink, the allocation of time for this work delayed other project work and progress towards the achievement of some of the delayed targets.

Re-assessment of the focus of Riverlink was necessary to respond to changes in the environment for horticultural R&D in Australia (see Section 8. Recommendations). Significant changes were occurring in the horticultural industries in the Sunraysia-Riverland region and nationally, and in state and federal government agencies. An issue of particular concern was the decline of regional industry and agency resources for horticultural R&D, associated with the on-going drought and the unavailability of water for irrigation, and the need for more rapid and substantial re-adjustment.

(3) CSIRO's announcement of the closure of its research centre at Merbein Vic. on 21 May 2008 also retarded progress towards the achievement of the delayed targets. The need for Riverlink staff, especially those at Merbein, to address issues arising from the pending closure was unforeseen and delayed some scheduled Riverlink meetings and activities.

In the first six months of 2008/2009, a casual assistant will be employed to help the project leader address the delays and complete other scheduled activities.

*Review of wine grape R&D priority setting processes and formation of the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee*

A 'Review of R&D Planning for Riverlink Regions' was conducted in October 2006 to investigate the scope and appropriateness of Riverlink research planning and priority setting. This review meeting was attended by representatives from Riverlink, Murray Valley Winegrowers, the Riverland Winegrape Growers Association, Riverland Wine Industry Development Council, wine and grape industries. The main outcome from the meeting was to develop a Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee to formalise the process of planning and setting research priorities, and to follow subsequent project development and the submission of project proposals.

An interim committee met in November 2006 to discuss the RDE Committee and a 'Memorandum of Understanding', that outlines the purpose, membership and activities of the RDE Committee, was produced. Later, this was accepted and signed by representatives of the grower associations and the Riverlink Council.

The first meeting of the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee was held in March 2007 to begin the prioritisation process and to develop the annual industry forum for 2007. Liz McGuire, Industry Development Officer of Murray Valley Winegrowers was elected as Chair of the Committee.

A report on development of the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee was delivered to the Riverlink Council, the Riverland Viticultural Technical Group, the recently formed Murray Darling Viticultural Technical Group and GWRDC.

*New process for setting regional wine grape industry RDE priorities*

In the new prioritisation process, the development of wine grape industry RDE priorities for the Sunraysia-Riverland region is the main responsibility of the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee. This is done through consultation with regional grape and wine producers by their representative organisations, i.e. Murray Valley Winegrowers, Riverland Winegrape Growers Association and Riverland Wine Industry Development Council. RDE priorities and concepts proposed by these organisations and accepted by the Riverland and Murray Darling Viticultural Technical Groups are received by the Committee for ranking and research planning.

The Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee consists of invited representatives of Murray Valley Winegrowers, the Riverland Wine Industry Development Council and the Riverlink agencies. The aims of the Committee are to

(1) Promote cooperative planning of RDE priorities for the wine and grape industry in the Sunraysia-Riverland region.

(2) Facilitate prioritisation of RDE issues and grower awareness of and access to existing research information, encourage progression of appropriate projects and provide reporting mechanisms.

Each year, the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee meets regularly (mostly three times each year) to review submissions, track current research projects, consider arising priorities and plan future directions. These meetings are usually held before each Riverlink Council meeting for reporting purposes. Additional meetings are convened when required.

A Riverlink Wine Grape Symposium is also held each year to present research outcomes, highlight RDE priorities and planning and gather additional priority issues from the industry. The latter are fed into the planning and prioritisation processes of the grower organisations and technical groups, prior to submission to the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee meeting.

*Regional wine grape industry RDE priorities*

RDE priorities submitted to the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee in 2007 were reviewed, ranked and incorporated into the Committee's 2007 Research Plan. In the plan, priorities were listed in relation to general topic, type (long or short term, R&D or extension, regional or national) and potential fund source, and ranked in ascending order of importance (from 1 to 10). For each general topic, potential project areas were specified. Some notes on past and current projects related to each potential project area were also included in the plan for reference and to assist new project development. Other notes in the back section of the plan summarised each priority topic in relation to impact on industry and industry issues that will be addressed.

The Committee's 2008 Research Plan is being developed by incorporating new submissions into the 2007 Plan and re-ranking all of the priorities.

*Riverlink Wine Grape Industry Forums*

The 2007 Riverlink Wine Grape Symposium was held on 14 June 2007 at Mildura Vic. to review the progress of selected projects and highlight high priority areas for future wine grape RDE established through the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee. Industry representatives, R&D agency staff and grape and wine producers attended the Symposium.

At the request of industry and agency representatives, a Riverlink Water R&D Planning Forum was also held on 19 July 2007 at Mildura to establish regional industry and government agency R&D priorities related to water, drought and climate change. The Forum was attended by industry representatives, staff of Riverlink R&D agencies, representatives from GWRDC and Horticulture Australia (HAL) and state and federal government water policy representatives.

In the following months, R&D proposals to address the highest priorities for wine grape and water RDE were developed after follow-up meetings between key researchers and industry representatives. The R&D proposals were developed and submitted to appropriate funding providers for appraisal in line with their calls for project submissions.

The 2008 Riverlink Wine Grape Symposium that was scheduled to be held in June 2008, was rescheduled to October 2008 because of need to address issues arising for the on-going drought and the pending closure of CSIRO's facilities at Merbein Vic. In October 2008, the Symposium will be held at two locations, one in the Riverland and the other in Sunraysia, to facilitate industry participation in relatively difficult economic circumstances.

*Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension publication*

'Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension 2006' (Byrne, 2006) was published and distributed to viticultural associations, research agencies and grape growers in March 2007. The publication provided a comprehensive overview of Riverlink wine grape, dried grape, table grape and general viticulture research currently underway or recently completed within the Sunraysia-Riverland region.

Preparation of 'Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension 2007' was delayed while the wine grape R&D priority setting processes were reviewed and the new process was developed. Information that was to be included in the 2007 publication will now be incorporated into 'Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension 2008' which is being prepared for distribution in conjunction with the 2008 Riverlink Wine Grape Symposium in October 2008.

*Riverlink Newsletter*

The Spring 2006, Summer 2006/07, Autumn 2007, Winter 2007 and Spring 2007 editions of the Riverlink Newsletter were published and distributed to approximately 550 industry and agency representatives. Completion and distribution of later editions of the Newsletter (Summer 2007/08, Autumn 2008 and Winter 2008) were delayed for the reasons noted above. These newsletters and the Spring 2008 edition are now scheduled for publication and distribution later in 2008.

*Riverlink Annual Report*

The 2006 Riverlink Annual Report was published and distributed to key stakeholders in March 2007. A copy of the report was also uploaded to the Riverlink website. The report contains information on the six Riverlink R&D programs, reports from industry representatives on the Riverlink Council and information on Riverlink projects and publications, staff and services in the Sunraysia-Riverland region.

The 2007 Riverlink Annual Report was scheduled to be published and distributed to key stakeholders in March 2008. However, completion of the report was delayed (also for the reasons noted above) and the report is now scheduled for publication and distribution in late 2008.

*Riverlink website*

In December 2006, the Riverlink Council approved the development of branded stationery and a similarly branded and professional, stand-alone website. In early 2007 the website was redeveloped and up-loaded for internet access in March 2007. In 2006/2007 and 2007/2008, the website was updated monthly, with the exception of October to December 2007 when there was interruption to the project leadership and staff availability, as noted above.

The Riverlink website (www.riverlink.gov.au) is now the main promotional tool for the network. It provides on-line access to a wide range of information on Riverlink projects, activities and services. The website has a series of easy-to-access drop-down pages with information on key topics including

(1) 'About us' (Riverlink history; strategic plan; Council; Program Leaders; communication and development).

(2) 'Riverlink.PRN' (postgraduate and industry opportunities; current and completed studentships; living, working and studying in the Sunraysia-Riverland region).

(3) 'Waterlink' (current events, fact sheets, links related to water and drought management)

(4) 'Research projects' (current projects on citrus, viticulture, tree crops, vegetables, sustainable horticulture; lists of past projects completed from 1993-2007).

(5) ‘Sunraysia-Riverland’ (regional information).

(6) ‘Publications’ (Riverlink Annual Reports; viticulture research publications, including summaries of industry forums; media releases; fact sheets).

(7) ‘Riverlink Newsletter’ (editions in PDF format).

(8) ‘Events’ (current events relevant to Riverlink staff and regional horticultural industries, e.g. industry and scientific conferences, seminars and meetings).

*Other Riverlink activities*

Riverlink staff participated in the Riverland Horticultural Field Days at Barmera SA in September 2006 and 2007 and in the Mildura Horticultural Field Days in May 2007 and 2008. Displays at the field days promoted Riverlink network activities and highlighted outputs from selected Riverlink R&D projects. Riverlink received the Westpac Bank Advisory Service Award for its contribution to the 2008 Mildura Field Days.

Riverlink staff also promoted the network’s activities and post graduate student opportunities in the Riverlink.PRN during Open Days at La Trobe University’s Mildura Campus in August 2006 and 2007.

Articles on Riverlink projects and progress of the network were also published in regional and agency media.

## 7. Outcomes

New developments in this project were in line with implementation of Riverlink’s Strategic Plan 2005-2010; i.e. they ensured that

(1) Riverlink programs are aligned with and responsive to client and member needs, and support the development of sustainable and profitable horticultural industries and communities.

(2) Riverlink creates an effective collaborative research network in the Sunraysia-Riverland region that ensures optimal use of resources.

*Setting priorities for regional RDE*

Riverlink’s wine grape industry RDE priority setting processes were reviewed and a new process was developed, endorsed and implemented (Section 6. Results and discussion) in response to the needs of industry and the Riverlink government agencies. The new process provides an equitable formalised pathway for regional wine and grape producers to raise priorities through their representative organisations and have their priorities ranked by the Riverlink Wine Grape Industry RDE Committee and included in a research plan that will be promoted and used as a basis for new project development.

*RDE project development*

Procedures for the development of collaborative Riverlink wine grape industry projects were also improved when the new priority setting process was developed. Under the procedures, proposals for new high priority RDE projects in line with the RDE Committee’s Research Plan are developed during meetings between key researchers and industry representatives after the annual Riverlink Wine Grape Industry Symposium. After the proposals are reviewed by the RDE Committee, they are submitted to appropriate funding providers for appraisal. Information on past and current RDE projects in the Committee’s Research Plan, in Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension publications and on the Riverlink website is provided to support new project development.

*Riverlink communication*

Outputs and outcomes from Riverlink R&D projects were communicated to the grape and wine industry and other Riverlink stakeholders using a range of communication tools including the Riverlink Newsletter, the Riverlink Annual Report, the Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension publication and the Riverlink website. During the project, the Riverlink website was redeveloped to provide easy on-line access to a wide range of information on Riverlink projects, activities and services. Industry support for the Riverlink network has grown as a result of the promotion of its collaborative activities.

## 8. Recommendations

1. Further development of Riverlink is needed to improve provision of RDE services to horticultural industries in the Sunraysia-Riverland region and Australia through collaboration and the sharing of resources and expertise at Riverlink research centres.

- The merits and future of Riverlink were discussed by Riverlink Council government agency representatives and by industry representatives in separate meetings on 27 July 2007 and 30 August 2007, respectively. Industry representatives also discussed the role of Riverlink in relation to challenges facing horticultural industries in the Sunraysia-Riverland region in the next three years. The discussions highlighted the on-going importance of Riverlink and the need to continue its development.

2. Regular reviews of Riverlink's direction and operation (e.g. every 2-3 years) are required to ensure that it continues to be dynamic and adequately responds to the needs of its clients, stakeholders and staff in a changing R&D and industry environment.

- Over the last 2-3 years, the on-going drought and lack of sufficient water for irrigation has increased the need for more rapid and substantial industry re-assessment and adjustment. This has applied especially to horticultural industries in the Sunraysia-Riverland region, including the wine grape industry.
- Reductions in production caused by the drought have not only reduced new opportunities for business development but also the availability of levy-based industry funding for R&D. Some flow-on effects of the latter have been the reduced availability of matching state and federal government funding and the need for government and industry RDE providers to re-assess and rationalise their activities.
- Some significant changes have occurred in the industry and R&D environment in recent years and these require on-going consideration by Riverlink during its operation. The key changes include the

  (1) Increased capability of industry-based technical groups to undertake regional RDE.

  - Most industry organisations are now nationally-based with a chief executive officer (CEO) and have regional industry associations with industry development officers (IDOs) who are involved in regional R&D and/or extension projects.
  - Large corporate farms with technical groups capable of conducting their own R&D and extension are also an increasing part of the rural landscape.

  (2) Adoption of new modes of operation of rural industry research corporations (RIRCs) in relation to allocation of funding for RDE.

  - Traditionally funding for R&D has been mostly allocated to projects submitted through open calls. In recent years, however, some RIRCs (e.g. GWRDC) have had restricted open calls and have allocated funds to specific initiatives through direct negotiation with R&D providers.

- Some RIRCs also have specific blocks of funding for regional RDE [e.g. GWRDC Regional Innovation and Technical Adoption (RITA) allocation] conducted by regional industry associations or industry-based technical groups.

(3) Allocation of state and federal government funds to RDE as a part of larger projects under government initiatives in preference to the allocation of government funds to match industry funding invested in smaller projects.

- Large national projects addressing climate change, drought and national biosecurity are some current examples of state and federal government funded initiatives that are also attracting industry co-investment.
- Some recent examples of state government infrastructure initiatives are the development of the Wine Innovation Cluster in Adelaide SA, the Biosciences Research Centre at Bundoora Vic. and the National Wine and Grape Industry Centre at Wagga Wagga NSW. The development of large RDE programs with links to university education at these centres is also attracting federal government and industry co-investment.
- The investment of substantial government and industry resources in these initiatives is increasingly diverting limited resources away from regional initiatives, especially at times when the availability of industry resources for R&D is restricted.

3. Riverlink's role in facilitating and/or coordinating communication of outputs relevant to the Sunraysia-Riverland region from large collaborative, national and/or international R&D projects managed from centres at locations beyond the region needs further development.

4. Further issues that need to be addressed include the development of

(1) Efficient procedures for establishing RDE priorities and developing appropriate collaborative RDE projects that align with the needs of regional horticultural industries and government agencies, and the different modes of funding allocation by project co-investors.

(2) Collaboration between appropriate staff at Riverlink centres and at centres beyond the Sunraysia-Riverland region on a needs basis during project development.

(3) Closer collaboration with industry-based technical groups during the development of RDE projects and the communication of project outputs and outcomes.

## 9. Appendices

### 9.1 Communication

The communication tools used within the Riverlink network are listed in Section 5. Methods, Communication of research.

### 9 2: Intellectual property

No 'commercial in confidence' intellectual property was produced in this project.

### 9 3: References cited

Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation (2007). 2007 National Winegrape Crush Report. Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation, Kent Town SA. 52 pp. (p. 9-12).

Byrne, L. (ed.) (2006). Riverlink Viticulture Research, Development and Extension 2006. Riverlink, Mildura Vic. 39 pp.

Whyte, M. (2004). Riverlink Directions 2005-2010. Strategic Plan of the Riverlink Research Network. Delivering R&D Solutions for Australian Horticultural Industries. Riverlink, Mildura Vic. 8 pp.

Whyte, M. (2006). Riverlink - supporting industry and R&D agency coordination in Australia's main wine grape production area. Final Report on Project DNR 03/04 for the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation. Riverlink, Mildura Vic. 20 pp.

## 9 4: Staff

Riverlink is made up of the staff working in the collaborating agencies:

- NSW DPI at the Agricultural Research & Advisory Station, Dareton NSW
- CSIRO Plant Industry at Merbein Vic.
- PIRSA and SARDI at the Loxton Agricultural Centre, Loxton SA
- Vic DPI at Mildura Vic.

Riverlink staff members who have made direct contributions to this project are:

- Lee Byrne – Riverlink Communications and Development Officer (July 2006 to October 2007)
- Dr Bob Emmett – Acting Riverlink Communication and Development Officer (November 2007 to June 2008)

## 9.5 Budget reconciliation

A GWRDC Form B for this project was submitted separately.