

PRESS RELEASE
INDUS RIVER SYSTEM AUTHORITY (IRSA)

Dated: The 11th of October, 2024

On 10.10.2024, after the approval of the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Mr. Ahad Cheema, the Secretary Economic Affairs signed a Memorandum of Subsidiary Agreement on “Climate Resilient and Adaptive Water Allocation in Pakistan” along with Chief Executive of the Australian Center for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) Prof. Wendy Umberger. Under this agreement, Australia will provide AUD 3 million for the project which is to be completed in a period of five years, i.e., till 2029. It is a research project and the goal of this research is to help improve canal water reliability through improved water allocation decisions and practices in Pakistan by updating the Water Apportionment Accord Tool to include mid-season planning and operations, exploring on-farm water storage options, all aimed at achieving climate resilience, adaptive management, and equitable water use for better social and economic outcomes for farming communities.

2. Today on 11.10.24 an important follow-up meeting was held on 11.10.2024 at the Ministry of Water Resources under the Chairmanship of Syed Mehar Ali Shah, Additional Secretary MoWR, attended by His Excellency (HE) Mr. Neil Hawkins, Australian High Commissioner (AHC) to Pakistan, along with Ms Stephanie Werner, First Secretary (Development) AHC, Mr. Abdul Hameed Mengal, Chairman IRSA, Mr. Asjad Imtiaz Ali, Member Federal IRSA, Prof. Wendy Umberger, CEO ACIAR, Ms Laura Timmins, GM ACIAR, Dr. Munawar Kazmi, Country Representative ACIAR and senior officers of MoWR, to discuss the modalities of implementation of midseason planning in the Water Apportionment Accord (WAA)-Tool and other water related matters of mutual interest.

3. HE Mr. Neil Hawkins, AHC to Pakistan, praised the joint technical collaboration that had been going on between the Pakistani and Australian Governments since 2018 through the concerned agencies from both the sides. He remarked that the joint collaboration was an exemplary step, worthy of being showcased as a landmark of relations between the two countries. He was hopeful that the efforts already conducted would definitely open-up further avenues of inter-governmental and inter-agency research and development in the already stressed water sector of Pakistan. He said that they were privileged and thankful to the Pakistani Government, MoWR and IRSA and to the other concerned stakeholders, to be able to provide financial and technical assistance for further developing the WAA-Tool. He earnestly hoped that the development process would also build capacity of IRSA in water related research and developmental activities through planned interactive study tours of IRSA’s water experts.

4. Additional Secretary, MoWR thanked the Australian High Commissioner to Pakistan, all members of the Australian delegation and IRSA Members for taking the time to visit the Ministry to discuss the different aspects of WAA-Tool’s further development and said that the financial and technical assistance of the Australian Government was indeed a much needed and timely step towards the right direction, especially at a time when the IBIS, which was under increasing pressures of water stress, was already enduring the negative effects of Climate Change.

5. Speaking on the occasion, IRSA expressed gratitude to the Australian Government, Australian High Commission, ACIAR and CSIRO for their technical and financial support in developing the WAA Tool. IRSA said that over the years, the Authority has been trying to create a tool like this with limited success. However, under ACIAR / CSIRO’s financial and

technical help, everyone's efforts have resulted in a practical and useful software. IRSA has been successfully applying the WAA-Tool for pre-season / advance water allocation planning. One of the main achievements of this tool, is the increased inter-provincial trust it has been building among the provinces through its transparent planning process. IRSA apprised that the software tool allows even non-experts to conduct water forecasting studies without going through complicated manual processes.

6. Explaining about the further improvements in the WAA-Tool in detail, IRSA said that efforts to improve the provincial canal water reliability through better decision-making are underway by upgrading the existing WAA Tool to include intra-season water planning. Once these upgrades are completed, the WAA-Tool will be much more useful in managing water distribution during unexpected changes in river flows, rainfall or dry spells during the cropping seasons. The upgradation process will improve water distribution among the provinces with greater accuracy, especially in the context of Climate Change. It will be expanded to cover more areas, including canal headworks / barrages. The Tool's full benefits will be realized when the tool would be used for both pre- and intra-season water planning. IRSA informed that the Authority believes that adding intra-season planning will make the tool even more robustly effective and will help in reviewing and making decisions on water allocation to ensure reliable and fair distribution to the provinces for irrigation and urban use. IRSA appreciated the remarks of HE Mr. Neil Hawkins, a day before while inaugurating Bus Art Campaign in Islamabad, that for 40 years Australia had stood beside Pakistan, working to tackle some of the most pressing challenges in agriculture and water management. At the end of the briefing, IRSA concluded that the proposed project was well-aligned with IRSA's duties and priorities and as such was urgently needed.

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