



Media statement

Tuesday, 28 July 2020

Fertiliser trials protecting waterways and farmers

Increased confidence in the use of recommended fertiliser application rates across a range of agricultural areas is one of the early benefits to emerge from the State Government's uPtake program (the program).

Results from last year's trials were consistent with data from the national Better Fertiliser Decisions for Pastures project giving farmers and industry more confidence in national data.

Of the 19 trials, 14 showed no productivity response to phosphorus applications, demonstrating sufficient phosphorus in the soil to meet pasture needs.

Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) Manager of Aquatic Science Malcolm Robb said the result was consistent with soil testing of more than 22000 paddocks over the last 10 years showing 16700 paddocks had sufficient or excess phosphorus in the soil to meet pasture needs.

"Having confidence in the science behind the soil testing program is critical for farmers to change their fertiliser practices and improving the health of our waterways," Mr Robb said.

Twelve trials showed a productivity response to the addition of basal nutrients (nitrogen, sulphur, potassium and micronutrients) demonstrating the importance of addressing the limiting nutrient in the soil to maximise productivity and improve water quality.

uPtake has been running since last year to reduce nutrients being washed off grazing farms across the South West and into waterways, threatening the health of our waterways and the bottom line of farmers.

"Optimising fertiliser use; dairy effluent management; and identifying and evaluating new whole-of-farm best practice to reduce nutrient losses to waterways is a win for both farmers and the environment," Mr Robb said.

Farmers are currently encouraged to soil test their paddocks and calculate their fertiliser rates based on data collected under the national project. The trials expand on data from the national project, to ensure fertiliser calculations are relevant to Western Australia and the Swan Coastal Plain's sandy soils.

A technical reference group has been established to develop the design of the trials, with scientists from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) and Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) and the agriculture sector involved.

The project is funded with \$3.26 million from the State Government's Healthy Estuaries WA program (formerly Regional Estuaries Initiative); and \$2.35 million through the Australian Government's National Landcare Program with in-kind support from fertiliser, dairy and beef industry groups.

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