QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

Opportunities Assessment Summary Report for the South East Queensland Agriculture Regional Water Assessment (SEQAgRWA).

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This submission is provided to:

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About the Queensland Farmers' Federation

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of agriculture in Queensland.

Our members are agricultural peak bodies who collectively represent more than 13,000 farmers who produce food, fibre and foliage across the state.

QFF's peak body members come together to develop policy and lead projects on the key issues that are important to their farmer members and the Queensland agriculture sector.

Together, we form a strong, unified voice leveraging our effectiveness by working together to drive policy and initiatives that support a strong future for Queensland agriculture.

Submission

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Opportunities Assessment Summary Report for the South East Queensland Agriculture Regional Water Assessment (SEQAgRWA).

We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission from our members or individual farmers.

Introduction

While the assessment presents five options to strengthen water security for one of Queensland's most productive agricultural regions, QFF identifies a critical gap in the ideas mix.

Although the report highlights the QFF Water Use Efficiency Trial as an important evidence source, on-farm water efficiency has not been progressed as its own idea, leaving a major omission in the site of solutions available to agriculture. This is significant given the strong preliminary results of the trial which demonstrate measurable gains in irrigation scheduling, water productivity, crop performance and real-time decision-making across multiple SEQ farming systems.

These findings directly support the SEQAgRWA objective to "make better use of water" within existing allocations and align closely with Queensland's Prosper 2050 agenda and the $30B by 2030 agricultural production vision.

The five shortlisted ideas predominantly focus on supply augmentation, infrastructure upgrades, delivery-system optimisation and alternative sources. While valuable these ideas offer medium to long-term benefits, require substantial capital investment and involve complex regulatory pathways. Several also carry significant ongoing cost

implications for irrigators, who are expected to bear a considerable share of future scheme and infrastructure costs.

By contrast, on-farm efficiency is a low-cost, high-impact, rapidly deployable pathway that strengthens water security now. It improves reliability without requiring new entitlements, complements all existing options, and delivers productivity gains that can be realised immediately. The exclusion of on-farm efficiency narrows the strategic scope of the assessment and overlooks one of the most practical opportunities to provide meaningful and impactful support to SEQ growers.

QFF therefore proposes the inclusion of a sixth option of On-Farm Water Use Efficiency Enhancement to ensure the final assessment presents a balanced, contemporary and economically sustainable water security portfolio for growers in SEQ and to embed added resilience to the region's contribution to long-term food security by making more productive use of the water already available.

Overview of QFF's Position

SEQ's farming landscape is highly diverse, incorporating horticulture, tree crops, dairy, nursery production, fodder, and turf industries that collectively anchor Queensland's and Australia's food, fibre and foliage security. Water reliability across SEQ's agricultural regions continues to be challenged by irregular rainfall patterns, increasing climate variability and intensifying land-use change, rising input costs, collectively placing growing pressure on agricultural businesses and their capacity to remain productive.

While the SEQAgRWA outlines a range of future supply and system options, it does not address the practical gains available through improvements in on-farm water use. Enhancements in on-farm water management is one of the most immediate and cost-effective approaches to strengthen productivity, reliance, and resilience. To achieve this at scale, government support is needed, particularly through targeted outreach education and extension programs that help growers identify water efficient technologies and adopt these practices in the field.

Summary Report Idea Feedback

Idea 1: Enhancing Water Trading

Improving the transparency and usability of the trading system would reduce administrative barriers and support better water allocation decisions. Real-time data, clearer illustrations of trading zones and automated checks will assist growers.

Trading is useful but limited as it redistributes water rather than creating new supply. It does not resolve low-allocation years and depends heavily on growers having the tools, skillset and time to entertain trading water on the seasonal market.

QFF recommends the implementation of platform improvements alongside grower education and decision-support programs linked closely to drought resilience risk planning.

Idea 2: Improving Water Supply Scheme Efficiencies

Opportunities include reducing transmission losses, improving diversion performance, optimising release rules and upgrading key infrastructure.

This idea has the potential to enhance reliability, specifically for medium-priority users. However, supply system gains must be matched by smart on-farm water use to realise their full value.

QFF recommends the prioritisation of low-cost operational improvements combined with the integration of programs that support on-farm optimisation of water use.

Idea 3: Unlocking Additional Water at Maroon Dam

This concept proposes structural upgrades to upgrade the storage capacity of the dam by between 20,000-30,000ML, with the potential to deliver long-term water security benefits.

While QFF recognises the potential long-term value of augmenting Maroon Dam, we are concerned that aspects of this option may be more closely aligned with meeting the increasing urban water demand driven by unprecedented population growth in the Logan/Albert supply system, rather than delivering meaningful increases in agricultural reliability. There is a risk that the project could be presented as providing additional rural water, yet in practice the majority of the benefit may accrue to urban users through increased storage and system security.

QFF would be guided by a clearer validation of the increasing need for rural water, supported by evidence gathered through the current consultation process, along with a targeted communications strategy to engage existing licence holders and prospective users. Together, these activities will provide a critical picture of the genuine demand for water in the region and ensure that any future investment is proportionate to agricultural need, transparently costed, and does not result in irrigators carrying upgrade costs for infrastructure that may predominantly benefit urban water users.

Given these uncertainties, and the significant capital costs, regulatory requirements and long delivery timeframes associated with this idea, it should be progressed cautiously and without compromising investment in more immediate and cost-effective measures such as on-farm efficiency.

Idea 4: Exploring Groundwater on the Sunshine Coast

Preliminary desktop assessments show modest potential for small-scale irrigation but are constrained by data gaps, water quality knowledge, and aquifer sensitivity uncertainty.

Sustainability and cost remain major considerations for growers. The potential groundwater yields are modest, variable and highly dependent on seasonal recharge,

with limited long-term data to confirm reliability during dry periods when agricultural demand is the highest. The upfront cost of drilling, casing, equipping and powering a bore is substantial, with ongoing operational expenses often exceeding the value of the water secured. Given these factors, groundwater is unlikely to provide a substantial or cost-effective contribution to agricultural production in SEQ's broader water security needs.

QFF recommends the department continue to undertake hydrogeological investigations, pairing a potential for agricultural groundwater extraction opportunities with on-farm efficiency measures that reduce pressure on small aquifer resources.

Idea 5: Increasing Recycled Water Use for Agriculture

Recycled water offers a high-reliability supply option for parts of SEQ, with potential connections from the Bundamba AWTP and upgraded treatment plants providing opportunities to diversify supply.

While recycled water has strategic potential, its viability for agriculture depends on affordability, reliability, fit-for-purpose quality and transparent governance, noting that high capital and operating costs could place it beyond the reach of many growers.

Water quality factors such as salinity, nutrient loads and long-term soil impacts can also limit its suitability for certain horticultural crops, particularly where overhead or drip irrigation is used and recycled water cannot always be safely or practically applied.

Clear pricing, allocation priorities and cost-sharing arrangements are essential to ensure irrigators are not funding infrastructure that offers limited benefit, and any recycled water initiative should be paired with on-farm efficiency support to help growers integrate the resource effectively and make informed decisions

QFF recommends a staged assessment of recycled water options paired alongside targeted on-farm efficiency programs to ensure growers can make best use of the resource and achieve genuine productivity gains.

Idea 6: On Farm Water Use Efficiency

Although the SEQAgRWA recognises QFF's Water Use Efficiency Trial as an important evidence source, on-farm water efficiency has not been included as a final idea, leaving a significant strategic gap.

Preliminary final insights from the trial demonstrate a clear improvement in irrigation timing, reduced water losses, better pup and energy performance, more accurate monitoring of crop stress and soil moisture, and greater confidence in day-to-day decision making at the farm operational level.

This option offers immediate, low-cost gains in water reliability, strengthens food security, and complements every existing idea in the shortlist, while aligning directly with Prosper 2050 and Queensland's $30B by 2030 production target.

A regional program run over consecutive seasons would expand the learnings of the trial, supporting growers to adopt practical tools like telemetry and irrigation decision aids, and provide tailored education and support and extension to empower our growers to make better use of the water they already have.

QFF recommends that the SEQAgRWA formally include an on-farm efficiency option to provide a balanced mix of supply, system and demand-side measures. Incorporating this idea would deliver immediate, meaningful and impactful benefits to growers, reduce pressure on future infrastructure investment, and ensure that the region's agricultural producers are supported to make the most productive use of their existing water resources.

Conclusion

SEQ's agricultural regions are vital food bowls in Queensland and critical to our own future food security. The final report provides a solid foundation for further consideration, but without an on-farm efficiency option the strategy remains incomplete.

Supporting growers to use water more effectively now will uplift productivity, improve reliability and resilience to variable weather conditions, while safeguarding the food security contributions that SEQ's horticulture, dairy, nursery, fodder and turf industries make to Queensland and national supply chains.

QFF looks forward to continuing this essential work with the Department of Local Government, Water & Volunteers to refine and advance this critical work as a key component to SEQ's water security strategy.

Yours sincerely

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