



QUEENSLAND
FARMERS'
FEDERATION



Central Queensland Draft RWA Report July 2026

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Prepared for:
Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers

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This submission is provided to:

Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers

Director

Regional Water Security | Water Infrastructure, Policy and Partnerships

Submitted via email regionalwaterassessments@dlgww.qld.gov.au

Our members

- Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers
- Cotton Australia
- CANEGROWERS
- Greenlife Industry QLD
- eastAUSmilk
- Timber Queensland
- Queensland United Egg Producers
- Turf Queensland
- Pork Queensland
- Australian Chicken Meat Federation
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Fairburn Irrigation Network
- Mallowa Irrigation
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Ltd
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd
- Eton Irrigation
- Lockyer Valley Water Users

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

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Central Queensland Draft RWA Report.

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

Executive Summary

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Central Queensland Regional Water Assessment (RWA).

Central Queensland is one of Australia's most productive agricultural regions, supporting significant opportunities for future growth in irrigated agriculture. QFF supports the objectives of the RWA to improve water security, identify opportunities to increase water availability and support regional economic development.

As the peak body representing Queensland agriculture, QFF considers it essential that future water planning frameworks protect existing water users while preserving opportunities for long-term agricultural expansion and diversification.

QFF's submission focuses on four priority areas that we believe will have the greatest influence on the future productivity and growth of agriculture across Central Queensland.

In particular, QFF considers that the Regional Water Assessment should:

- recognise the importance of retaining the Dawson Valley Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve within the Dawson Valley to support future agricultural development and strategic infrastructure opportunities.

- support continued investigation into opportunities to increase affordable supplemented water supplies across Central Queensland to support future agricultural growth and regional development.
- acknowledge that future overland flow reform, while outside the direct scope of the RWA, may represent a significant opportunity to increase productive water availability and support regional economic growth outcomes identified through the assessment process.
- support the delivery of long-term urban water security for Emerald in a manner that protects the reliability and value of existing agricultural water entitlements within the Nogoa-Mackenzie Water Supply Scheme; and
- enhance recognition of the significant opportunity for horticultural expansion and broader agricultural diversification across Central Queensland as a part of future water demand and development scenarios.

QFF welcomes ongoing collaboration with the Queensland Government and regional stakeholders as the Regional Water Assessment progresses through the final stages of development.

Dawson Valley Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve

QFF Strongly supports the retention of the Dawson Valley Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve (SWIR) to continue supporting regional development and future investment opportunities. The SWIR has played an important role in facilitating irrigation expansion, private investment and regional economic activity throughout the Valley and should continue to be managed in a manner that preserves these benefits for future generations of producers.

QFF supports the draft RWA's recognition of the contribution irrigated agriculture makes to the Dawson Valley economy and its recommendation to continue investigating opportunities to improve long-term water availability and security within the region. This includes consideration of future infrastructure opportunities capable of increasing affordable supplemented water supplies and supporting agricultural growth, including further investigation of options identified through previous regional water planning processes.

QFF acknowledges the important role existing SWIR leasing arrangements have played in enabling productive use of reserve water while preserving flexibility for future strategic decisions regarding long-term management of the resource. QFF recommends that, where the existing leasing framework continues, lease terms be extended to 10 years to provide irrigators with greater certainty to invest in irrigation infrastructure, on-farm development and long-term agricultural production.

Should the Queensland Government consider the future release of SWIR water to the market, QFF encourages the adoption of allocation mechanisms that promote broad participation and support regional agricultural development outcomes by providing genuine access opportunities for existing irrigators.

Overland Flow Opportunities

QFF acknowledges that overland flow management arrangements are not explicitly considered

as a part of the current Regional Water Assessment process. However, opportunities to improve the utilisation of overland flow resources are intrinsically linked to the objectives of the RWA, namely identifying pathways to increase water availability, support regional economic growth and unlock future agricultural development opportunities across Central Queensland.

Accordingly, QFF encourages the Queensland Government to consider overland flow reform as a complementary work program that could significantly enhance the long-term benefits identified through the RWA. For some agricultural enterprises, access to overland flow can provide a flexible and comparatively low-cost source of productive water, particularly when integrated with existing on-farm storage and irrigation infrastructure.

QFF recognises that any future reforms must be supported by robust science and maintain appropriate protections for existing water users and environmental values; however, there remains considerable merit in further examining the role overland flow reform may contribute in supporting future agricultural productivity, drought resilience and regional economic growth across Central Queensland.

Emerald Urban Water Security

QFF recognises the importance of securing a reliable long-term water supply for Emerald and surrounding communities and supports efforts to improve urban water security across Central Queensland. QFF also supports the draft RWA's objective of identifying practical long-term solutions to meet the future needs of the Central Highlands community.

However, solutions should be pursued in a manner that does not unnecessarily reduce the reliability or value of existing agricultural water entitlements within the Nogoa-Mackenzie Water Supply Scheme. QFF encourages the continued investigation of market-based water acquisition, supplementary groundwater opportunities and other diversified drought security measures alongside potential infrastructure proposals, with any changes to operating arrangements supported by transparent hydrological and economic assessment to identify any unintended impacts on agricultural water users, regional agricultural production and water entitlement reliability.

Horticultural Expansion and Agricultural Diversification

While the draft RWA appropriately recognises the contribution of existing agricultural industries, QFF considers there is an opportunity for greater recognition of Central Queensland's significant potential for horticultural expansion and broader agricultural diversification.

The region possesses many of the attributes required to support growth in high-value irrigated agriculture, permanent tree crops and intensive production systems with future development opportunities dependent on secure and reliable water resources. The RWA should ensure these opportunities are appropriately considered within agricultural demand scenarios so that future water planning decisions preserve, rather than unintentionally constrain, opportunities for long-term regional growth, value-added agricultural production and employment outcomes across Central Queensland.

QFF also encourages the Department to undertake an enhanced ground-truthing exercise with landholders and agricultural stakeholders to better understand latent and emerging demand for water across Central Queensland. Traditional expressions of interest for water provide a useful indication of existing demand but may not fully capture future opportunities associated with agricultural diversification, changing commodity markets and evolving land use models.

Opportunities such as horticultural expansion, permanent plantings, integrated tree cropping systems, soil carbon projects and other diversified agricultural enterprises may require different water products, reliability profiles and investment timeframes than those historically observed within the region. Better understanding these opportunities will help ensure future water planning decisions are informed by both current demand and realistic future development pathways.

Conclusion

QFF supports the continued progression of the Central Queensland Regional Water Assessment and its focus on improving water security and supporting regional economic development.

Protecting existing productive water, identifying opportunities to unlock additional water resources and ensuring future water planning frameworks support agricultural growth and diversification will be critical to maximising the long-term economic benefits available to Central Queensland communities.

Importantly, future agricultural demand may not necessarily resemble historic patterns of water use. As agricultural systems evolve, so too will the nature of water demand, investment decisions and agricultural land use opportunities across the region. Ensuring future planning frameworks recognise both existing demand and emerging opportunities will be essential to maximising the long-term value of additional water resources and infrastructure investments.

QFF looks forward to continuing our work with the Queensland Government and regional stakeholders as the Regional Water Assessment progresses through the final phase of development.

Yours sincerely

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