



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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Submission

1 June 2018

Mr James Purtill
Chief Executive, Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy
Attn: Border Rivers Moonie Water Plan Coordinator
PO Box 318
TOOWOOMBA QLD 4350

Via email: WPBorderRiversMoonie@dnrme.qld.gov.au

Dear James

Re: Draft Water Plan (Border Rivers and Moonie) 2019

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of intensive agriculture in Queensland. It is a federation that represents the interests of peak state and national agriculture industry organisations, which in turn collectively represent more than 13,000 primary producers across the state. QFF engages in a broad range of economic, social, environmental and regional issues of strategic importance to the productivity, sustainability and growth of the agricultural sector. QFF's mission is to secure a strong and sustainable future for Queensland farmers by representing the common interests of our member organisations:

- CANEGROWERS
- Cotton Australia
- Growcom
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland (NGIQ)
- Queensland Chicken Growers Association (QCGA)
- Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO)
- Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA)
- Flower Association
- Pork Queensland Inc.
- Queensland United Egg Producers (QUEP)
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group (BRIG)
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Irrigators Ltd (BRIA)
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd (CDIL)
- Pioneer Valley Water Cooperative Ltd (PV Water)
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council (QCMC).

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Draft Water Plan (Border Rivers and Moonie) 2019. We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission provided by our members or individual farmers.

The united voice of intensive agriculture



The Border Rivers and Moonie River Water Plans are scheduled to expire in 2019 and need to be revised to be consistent with the requirements of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan 2012. QFF also notes the draft Water Plan (Border Rivers and Moonie) 2019 is an amalgamation of the existing Border Rivers and Moonie water plans.

QFF acknowledges the considerable work undertaken by the Department of Natural Resources Mines and Energy (the department) to revise the Water Plan, which is accredited and must comply with the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Plan area and water to which the Plan applies

QFF has interest in understanding fully the implications of implementing the Draft Plan for the following areas:

- a. Border Rivers fractured rock – Granite Belt sub area underground water declared to be overland flow
- b. Upper Weir and Traprock and Border Rivers Alluvium – tradable water allocations
- c. Sediments above Great Artesian Basin
- d. Process for overland flow licencing
- e. Surface water – implementation of multiyear accounting
- f. Border Rivers alluvium – shallow and deep sub units
- g. St George alluvium – shallow and deep
- h. Queensland Murray-Darling Basin deep.

Our submission may not fully address issues involved in implementing water planning in these areas. QFF requests the opportunity to further consult with the department to clarify any issues and questions which may arise after this submission is lodged.

Plan Outcomes

QFF supports the balanced approach that is taken in the Draft Plan to define economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes and the measures for achieving the outcomes. Specification of the measures improves considerably the transparency around implementation of the Draft Plan. Measures that warrant mention include:

- a. defined time of 31 December 2022 for completion of the measurement of new water allocations and groundwater licences with a nominal entitlement of more than 10ML in defined groundwater areas and all relevant take of overland flow water
- b. annual water-use reports about compliance and SDLs
- c. identification by 30 June 2024 of works associated with the taking of overland flow water within defined zones
- d. each determination of environmental share recorded and make public annually
- e. granting of water entitlements for unallocated water reserved in the Stanthorpe water management area
- f. monitoring, evaluation and reporting strategy is to be developed by 1 July 2020
- g. information about the number, value and volume of water entitlements noting that no timing has been specified
- h. report on flow requirements to support cultural values and uses within five (5) years informed by engagement of Aboriginal people
- i. process for granting water entitlements for use by aboriginal people from specific reserves of unallocated water.

Objectives and performance indicators

QFF acknowledges the substantial time and investment made to improve the science and implementation of environmental flow management in this plan area as with other Queensland Murray Darling Basin catchments which should ensure that the Draft Plan meets the accreditation tests – ‘No less protection of environmental water’. It is also expected that the SDL target will be met for accreditation.

Strategies for achieving water plan outcomes

QFF welcomes the addition of Section 32 'Garden size and volume of water for watering' which reduced 'garden size' to 0.25ha in this Water Plan from the 0.5ha defined in Section 6 of the *Water Act 2000*. Increasing sub-divisions in some of the Water Plan zone, particularly in the management areas is a concern.

QFF understands that the department has undertaken a risk assessment in the reticulated areas and, has also restricted stock and domestic takes which QFF supports.

QFF requests that a note be added to Section 39 'Limitations on taking overland flow water' to acknowledge the legal requirements under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* (see Section 440ZG 'Depositing prescribed water contaminants in waters and related matters'). While QFF is supportive of the intent of Section 39, it must also be made clear that the implementation of this provision would not prevent a person from complying with their obligations under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*.

QFF has met with the department and has discussed concerns regarding Section 90 'Amendments to a plan which may be made without consultation'. QFF understands that the intent of this section is to reduce regulatory administrative burden, particularly associated with drafting errors and to expedite required changes, based on science, as it becomes available. QFF strongly supports science-based decision-making processes, however, we are concerned that factors may be amended which negatively impact farmers. Whilst 90(a)(iii) clearly states that the amendment or addition 'does not adversely affect the water allocation security objectives stated in Part 5, division 2'; previous reductions to water allocations within this plan area have occurred.

QFF advised that within Stanthorpe area, further consultation is required with the department and farmers on the following matters:

- a. Implementation of definition of existing groundwater works – also in Border Rivers Alluvium and Border Rivers Fractured Rocks
- b. Arrangements for the release of unallocated water within five (5) years
- c. The department must validate and confirm the granting of ancillary licences – in Stanthorpe area this is to handle number of small weirs without clear ownership
- d. Conversion of area based-licences to allocations with limited data
- e. Water licences and allocation conversions elsewhere, for example, Weir River.

QFF notes the provisions related to the Stanthorpe Water Management Area including the various provisions for ground water and surface water. QFF supports the management of ground water at less than 6m as overland flow given the unique hydrology of the area and welcomes the Draft Plan's objective to continue to collect data from this area and as outlined in the Draft Water Management Protocol.

However, it is noted that the Draft Plan proposes a fundamental change in policy regarding the determination of overland flow entitlement. Specifically, s59(4) explicitly requires exclusion of existing/historical on-farm storage that has been legally used for temporary storage of captured overland flow. Growers have expressed concern that this change in policy will have potentially significant impact on the water entitlements for existing long-term water users without certification of their property and formal licencing of overland flow. This change would represent a reduction in allowable access from levels allowed under both Murray Darling Basin Plan and the current Water Plan. QFF therefore requests the retention of existing policy so that all overland flow licences are assessed on the same criteria, including areas of temporary storage.

QFF notes that the Draft Plan now permits unsupplemented allocation holders to provide written advice to the department that they will not be accessing their 'share' of an announced period. Without written notice, the unused share is calculated and treated as passing flow to catchment outflow. With written notice the share is included in the announcement and able to be used by other allocation

holders. An ‘opt-in’ approach, such as that used in New South Wales supplementary areas which will reduce or eliminate the lost opportunity associated with unused water.

The Proposed Emu Swamp Dam Development

QFF notes the following unallocated water reserves (surface water only) in the Boarder Rivers and Moonie Plan area.

Water Management Area	Average Annual Volume (ML)	Purpose
Stanthorpe Water Management Area	1740	Strategic water infrastructure
Stanthorpe Water Management Area	1500	Town water supply
Stanthorpe Water Management Area	1060	Any
Stanthorpe Water Management Area	200	Community or Aboriginal
Moonie Water Management Area	100	Community or Aboriginal

The detailed business case for the Emu Swamp project is not due to be completed until later this year. It is therefore imperative that sufficient water reserves are made available in this Plan for the future development of this project.

QFF understands that the water allocations necessary for Emu Swamp Dam comprise of the utilisation of the strategic infrastructure reserve, the unusable allocation (overflow) from Storm King Dam and a portion of the Urban Strategic Reserve only (noting that the Southern Downs Regional Council has submitted that it does not need the extensive 1,500 ML allocation laid out in the Draft Water Plan). QFF notes that any Urban Strategic Reserve surplus to Council’s needs should be considered for conversion to strategic reserve for the Emu Swamp Dam project.

Based on the high economic returns to water and strong support from irrigators in the Stanthorpe water management area, **QFF recommends that the Water Plan make 3,510ML of mean annual diversion available for Emu Swamp Dam to ensure its viability** as set out in the following table.

Water Allocations	Mean Annual Diversion (MAD) (ML)	Nominal Volume @ 90% reliability (ML)	Cumulative Nominal Volume (ML)
Strategic Infrastructure Reserve	1,740	1,900	1,900
Unsupplemented Storm King Dam allocation (surplus to Council’s 700 ML requirements)	400	450	2,380
Urban Strategic Reserve/Town Water	Up to 1,400	Up to 1,555	3,900
General reserve (leaving up to 1060ML MAD for Pike and Accommodation Creeks)	0-400	0-460	N/A
Target	3,510	3,900	

To make available up to 1,060 ML of general reserve, for example, to Pike Creek and Accommodation Creek irrigators, QFF recommends that the water plan provides the following for Emu Swamp Dam:

- Strategic Infrastructure Reserve 1,740 ML of MAD
- Unused urban Storm King Dam allocation 400 ML of MAD
- Urban Strategic Reserve/Town Water 1,370 ML of MAD.

This totals approximately 3,510 ML of MAD. Failing this, a portion of the general reserve should be used for Emu Swamp Dam, to achieve 3,510 ML of MAD, to the extent that this cannot be provided for from the preferred allocations (set out above).

QFF notes the considerable support for the project with farmers already completing the Expression of Interest Round 1 demand assessment and now progressing towards the Round 2 – Letters of Intent phase of the detailed business case. If the project is viable, farmers have expressed convictions that the project move to contractually binding water sales early in 2019 – whereupon initial cash deposits would be made to secure project funding.

The area (including Stanthorpe) is currently water constrained and additional water would add significant opportunities for economic growth, financial expansion and employment for the area.

At this stage of the detailed business case, the project owner – the Stanthorpe and Granite Belt Chamber of Commerce – has quantified that the Emu Swamp Dam is worth an additional \$50-70 million per annum of on-farm gross revenue to the area, providing a benefit-cost ratio ranging from 2 to 2.8. For every dollar spent on the project, the on-farm the benefits will be double or greater.

The 3,510 MAD volume is essential for the project to be viable, and results in approximately 3,900 ML of nominal volume (yield), which would be sold to irrigation customers to fund up to half the costs of the project. It is understood that the balance of funds would be sourced from government, returning a long term (30 year) economic benefit to Queensland of up to \$110 million in net present value terms.

Water Management Protocol (WMP) 2019

Given the complexity of management required across the upper catchments, QFF requests confirmation from the department that adequate consultation has been undertaken with all land-owners with regards to the criteria laid out in the Water Management Protocol (WMP) 2019.

The draft WMP specifies that movement of allocations from any Water Management Area (WMA) to another is to be prohibited. There are a significant number of additional Environmental Flow Objectives (EFOs) that have been defined and locations. Noting that the department is proposing no movement of allocation between WMAs, it is unlikely that assessment has been undertaken of the potential constraints these new EFO requirement may place on movement between areas. This may create unintended constraints to trading water. As such, landowners may wish to see the development of transparent transfer protocols to allow free movement of water between WMA's.

QFF seeks clarity regarding allowable locations for seasonal assignment – draft WMP s54(c) indicates that flow condition for allocation is to be applied to new/seasonal location. Does this imply assignment within water user groups only, while the wording in s54(i) could imply potential assignment between WMAs.

Similarly, the Draft WMP s54(f) implies that assignment reduces account regardless of whether water is actually used or not. This has implications when associated with proposed accounting rules (for example, if the long-term nominal volume could not be achieved). Clarity is critical in that seasonal assignments appear to be the only potential mechanism for transfer of account volumes which will be important for water users during periods of good hydrological conditions.

If you have any queries about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Dr Georgina Davis at georgina@qff.org.au

Yours sincerely

Travis Tobin
Chief Executive Officer