



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

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Submission

2 August 2022

The Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water
1 William Street
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Via email: UAW_DawsonSWIR@rdmw.qld.gov.au

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water, Draft Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve, Dawson River Pilot Project review report (July, 2022)

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of intensive and irrigated agriculture in Queensland. It is a federation that represents the interests of 21 peak state and national agriculture industry organisations and 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)
- EastAUSmilk (formerly QDO)
- Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA)
- Turf Queensland
- Queensland United Egg Producers (QUEP)
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council (QCMC)
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group (BRIG)
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area Irrigators Ltd (BRIA)
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd (CDIL)
- Fairbairn Irrigation Network Ltd
- Mallowa Irrigation Ltd
- Pioneer Valley Water Cooperative Ltd (PV Water)
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd
- Eton Irrigation Scheme Ltd
- Pork Queensland Inc
- Tropical Carbon Farming Innovation Hub
- Queensland Oyster Growers Association (QOGA)
- Lockyer Water Users Forum (LWUF).

The united voice of intensive and irrigated agriculture



QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the draft Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve, Dawson River pilot project review report (July 2022). We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission from our members or individual farmers.

Summary

The draft Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve, Dawson River pilot project review report was released in July 2022, and as part of the review process stakeholders were asked to provide comment on the draft prior to the release of a final report. QFF note the key areas that we wish to address in this submission are detailed below and can be summarised as:

- Water use - increasing water security has increased business viability and returns.
- Water trading – not a priority in the Dawson Valley and not a significant factor.
- Economic outcomes - pilot project strengthened economic potential for the region as the expansion in available water has allowed for an increased crop yield.

Overview

The Dawson Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve (SWIR) Pilot Project, commenced in 2019, through a temporary release of strategic water infrastructure reserve water in the Fitzroy Basin Water Plan. The *Water Act 2000* (Water Act) was amended to allow for the temporary release of the SWIR water for a maximum of three years, where infrastructure projects have been deferred. The Pilot Project release of water from the Fitzroy Basin Water Plan has been done to enable landholders to expand or diversify irrigation development and cropping activity.

QFF supports the submission put forward by Cotton Australia, and as such briefly outline the main components in support of a renewal of the Dawson Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve (SWIR) Water.

Water Use

As outlined in the draft report, the use of Unsupplemented water in the DVWMA has increased and that the use of supplemented water use in the DVWSS has increased. The increase in water use, as made available by the Pilot Project has allowed for an increase in water security to the region, via a number of licences to irrigators that commenced on the 01/10/2019 and expires on the 30/09/22. The increase in water availability has allowed for farm expansion and greater crop production, via increased water availability and reliability which should remain a primary objective of the SWIR in a renewal process. A longer-term access to secure water, which allows for longer term management of crops is a high priority for agricultural producers.

Water Trading

In the draft report one of the objectives of the Pilot Project was to provide the ability for water users to access committed water reserves within the water plan, under a water licence with the intent to stimulate the water trading market. The draft report noted overall, water trading decreased whilst the SWIR licences have been in effect.

It is not clear how water trading has been identified as a major objective of the SWIR pilot project, when trades on average are consistently low, and only in the time of water trade rule changes in 2016/17-2018/19 period did this stimulate an above average water trading¹.

QFF supports Cotton Australia's submission, in response that enhanced trading should not be an objective of the SWIR.

Economic Outcomes

One of the objectives of the release of the SWIR water in the DVWMA was to provide the ability for water users on the Dawson River to access water reserves with the intent to support crop development and job creation, through flexible water management.

Long-term water security is an essential element for economic growth in regional areas. The Southern and Darling Downs Water Assessment (SDDRWA), which forms a component of the economic potential of the SWIR, provides a commitment to assess and deliver outcomes that underpin a long-term strategic plan for water management across the region. As noted in the SDDRWA, agriculture and primary production is a key pillar of Queensland's economic plan, and as such QFF supports the renewal of the SWIR to continue in the contribution to regional economic growth and whilst continuing to address future water supply needs.

The SWIR pilot project strengthened economic potential for the region as the expansion in available water as part of the objectives, contributed to the increase in crop production. QFF supports the economic data presented in Cotton Australia's submission which shows that the release of the SWIR has contributed to cotton production worth approximately \$16 million² which has also seen an increase in employment, with a flow on effect of economic development and support to local communities.

Summary

The Dawson SWIR Pilot Project, as a temporary three-year release, has produced various positive outcomes, which have aligned with the core objectives of the project. However, pricing and infrastructure as part of the economic outcomes and water use objectives require further investigation to ensure water is priced according to other water access arrangements.

QFF welcomes the renewal of another round of Dawson SWIR water leases and continues to assess the SWIR water whilst it is not committed for other purposes. QFF fully endorses the submission by Cotton Australia and look forward to establishing a more refined framework for the next release.

If you have any queries about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Sharon McIntosh at sharon@qff.org.au.

Yours sincerely

Ms Jo Sheppard
Chief Executive Officer

¹ Submission to Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water Draft Report Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve Dawson River Pilot Project Review Report; Cotton Australia (July, 2022).

² Submission to Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water Draft Report Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve Dawson River Pilot Project Review Report; Cotton Australia (July, 2022).