



Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications  
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23-7-2015

Dear Committee, **Re: Inquiry - Water Amendment Bill 2015 [Provisions]**

Cotton Australia is the peak body representing the interests of cotton growers across Australia, the majority of whom operate within Murray-Darling Basin.

Cotton Australia would like to express to the committee its full support for the provisions in this Bill, being to:

- amend the Water Act 2007 to impose a duty on the Commonwealth not to exceed the 1500 GL limit on surface water purchases in the Murray-Darling Basin at the time of entering into a water purchase contract; and
- amend the Murray-Darling Basin Plan 2012 to provide increased flexibility in the recovery of 450 GL of water through efficiency measures funded under the Water for the Environment Special Account.

While there can be many arguments about the need for the Basin Plan and its effectiveness, there can be no argument about the need to implement the plan in a manner that has the least social and economic impact on the communities of the Basin, while maximising environmental outcomes.

The move to limit outright purchase to no more than 1500GL of the targeted 2750GL of long-term average water entitlement is a very positive step toward minimising social and economic harm.

While in the short-term direct “buyback” may appear to be the cheapest option to “bridge-the-gap”, it comes at a very significant cost to communities.

You only have to visit towns such as St George, Dirranbandi, Moree, Collarenebri, Walgett, Bourke, Trangie and Warren to witness first-hand the very real additional social and economic impacts “buy-backs” have placed on these communities which are already struggling due to numerous negative forces.

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Alternatively, you can visit these same towns, as well as towns like Coleambally, Griffith, and Goondiwindi, and see the very positive contribution on-farm and off-farm irrigation efficiency schemes are making.

Be they schemes or individual projects, you will notice a vibrancy and enthusiasm for the work, which not only provides a short-term cash injection to these communities as the works are carried out, but lays the foundation for a long-term sustainable and profitable irrigation sector.

I urge this committee that if it has any doubts about the wisdom of this Bill to take the opportunity to visit any one or more of the communities mentioned above, and observe first-hand the positive contribution of these efficiency projects.

With regards to the provisions surrounding the 450GL Special Account Water, it would be remiss of this submission not to make the point that Cotton Australia strongly believes that no case has been made that demonstrates the need for this water to be acquired.

However, if it must be acquired, Cotton Australia firmly believes that it must only be acquired in a manner that results in no negative social or economic outcomes.

Therefore Cotton Australia is supportive of the extra flexibility proposed by this Bill, and again urges any committee members with doubts to take the opportunity to visit schemes that have carried out Commonwealth funded works such as Coleambally Irrigation or the Trangie-Nevertire Scheme to gain an appreciation of the very positive nature of these efficiency efforts.

Cotton Australia is a member of the National Farmers Federation, National Irrigators Council and NSW Irrigators Council and supports the submissions from these organisations.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Murray,  
General Manager,  
Cotton Australia

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