

***JH & KM Coupland***

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2019

Dear Committee Secretary,

**RE: EXPORT CONTROL AMENDMENT (Banning Cotton Exports to Ensure Water Security) BILL 2019**

Firstly, I feel sure this bill can not and will not be passed because we are not a communist country and we should continue to encourage freedom to produce commodities which will satisfy market requirements.

My family live on the Lachlan River about 42 km west of the regional town of Condobolin. Cotton is a relatively new crop to our area and is fast becoming an opportunity crop of choice amongst irrigators. Other irrigated crops we have grown or currently grow, are corn (maize) and irrigated wheat as a rotation crop. We usually have a commercial beef enterprise but, due to the current drought, we destocked and just have a small number of our neighbors cattle on agistment.

Our catchment reservoir is the Wyangala Dam near Cowra. We have about 490 hectares laid out for irrigation but since 2000 have only grown the whole area to cotton once (in the summer of 2017/18), using water allocated during the 2016/17 flood. Otherwise, we grow a portion of the area with whatever water we are allocated and in a rotation with winter wheat crops (to rest country between cotton crops).

Between 2001 and 2010 we experienced a prolonged period of drought during which time our catchment received only one seventh of its average annual inflows and we received only three small General Security water allocations (32%, 3%, 19%). We grew small cotton crops during those 3 years in order to meet our huge annual interest payments. Those three crops kept us going through the drought and allowed us to stay on our farm until 2010, when we had a very good year and were able to recover.

All other years over that period we had 0% carry over water and 0% allocation, unable to grow any irrigated crops and barely any dryland crops due to lack of rainfall. In 2008, we were only allowed 10% of our high security stock & domestic license. At that time we had 60 acres of wine grapes, a permanent planting which required water every year all year round. This eventually died and we were forced to pull it out at great expense. Our General Security Licenses mean our area is more suited to growing opportunity crops when we have water available rather than permanent plantings.

We choose to grow cotton with our water as it is a highly suitable crop for our hot, dry summers. We produce a top quality fibre with water that traditionally falls in our catchment during winter and is stored for summer usage. The return per Megalitre of water is second to none and we have produced water savings of up to 25% by recycling our tail water. We grow Bollguard cotton which has seen insecticide usage in Australia reduced by 94% in the last two decades. Water use efficiency has increased by 40% across the country in the last decade and only getting better. We have a very good, accurate water reading meter which is checked and read regularly but have been told to upgrade to the new \$10,000 telemetric meter by 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019. All irrigators are required to do the same and hopefully this will stamp out the very small number of users taking water when they are not supposed to.

Compared to every other cotton growing country, we come out on top for quality, yield (2.5 times the world average), water use efficiency and sustainability. My family are in the process of becoming MyBMP accredited which is a rigorous environmental set of management goals we have to meet for increased environmentally, economically and socially sustainable cotton.

Even though cotton only uses on average 20% of all irrigation water across the Murray Darling Basin, we contribute up to 60% of the gross value of agricultural production in cotton growing areas. Cotton contributes enormously to the country's GDP, the 2016/17 crop worth \$2.3billion from only 1,436 farms.

Our local economy benefits substantially as well. We buy all of our farming needs as locally as we can. If we can't find something we need in our small town, we will source it from the next town. It has definitely kept our towns alive during this shocking drought.

We have both contributed greatly to our local community over the years. Jock, as well as being a farmer, is also a very experienced Agronomist. He is a member of two of our Lachlan Water Representative committees and he has been contributing to these community groups for about 30 years. He has seen the water stripped away from our local communities to satisfy the needs of the very thirsty South Australian Coorong which is unsustainable and completely unnatural, even though the Lachlan River culminates in the Great Cumbung Swamp, not the Murray mouth. The last 18 years has been by far the driest period in our river catchments since the dams were constructed and the low flows have very little to do with extraction and more to do with intense drought conditions.

We, as irrigators, should be left to decide which crops are better suited to our own farms and our river systems and which crops we will grow to meet demand. We are the ones who know the river, know the land and want to manage our farms for our future, our children and their childrens' futures. Rex Patrick is an Independent Senator with a political agenda and should be ignored when it comes to matters that will adversely affect people's livelihoods, particularly because he refuses to acknowledge the facts. He has been campaigning to incite anger and therefore rustle up votes from emotionally charged city voters who are so far removed from the issues affecting us in the country/regional areas.

Please do not allow this bill to pass the senate enquiry. It wouldn't result in any water savings at all across the Murray Darling Basin but would adversely affect agricultural economic contributions, both locally and country wide. It would also set a very dangerous precedent of dictating what we can and can't grow or market. A prime example was the ban on live cattle trade as a knee jerk reaction, by the then Labor Government, to animal activist propaganda.

Thank you for the opportunity to defend our wonderful industry.

Yours sincerely,

Jock and Katrina Coupland