



9<sup>th</sup> April, 2013.

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Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications  
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**Submission to inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation  
Amendment Bill 2013**

Cotton Australia is the key representative body for the Australian cotton growing industry. It helps the industry to work together to be world competitive and sustainable, and also tell the good news about the industry's achievements. Cotton Australia determines and drives the industry's strategic direction, retaining its strong focus on R&D, promoting the value of the industry, reporting on its environmental credibility, and implementing policy objectives in consultation with its stakeholders.

Cotton Australia works to ensure an environment conducive to efficient and sustainable cotton production. It has a key role in Best Management Practices (*MyBMP*), an environmental management program for growers. This work has seen a significant improvement in the environmental performance of the industry, with huge improvements in water use efficiency, significant reductions in pesticide use, and millions of dollars invested into R&D. The Australian cotton industry directly employs thousands of Australians and this year will contribute over \$2 billion to the Australia economy.

Cotton Australia (we) welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the inquiry into the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013 (EPBC Act)*. We support the effective regulation of the mining and coal seam gas industry to protect Australia's natural assets for future generations- particularly the surface and subsurface water sources that underpin production for our industry. In light of the limited level of protection afforded to water sources in both NSW and QLD, we conditionally support the inclusion of "Water Resource" as a "Matter of National Environmental Significance" under the *EPBC Act*. Cotton Australia notes the intention and application of the water trigger to large coal mines and coal seam gas projects. Whilst federal intervention is supported here, it is essential that assurance be given this water trigger is not extended to impact on the agriculture industry itself who rely on this resource to supply Australia and the world with food and fibre. The state of food and fibre security in Australia must be maintained in combination with access to our invaluable environmental assets. The Cotton Industry itself is subject to a variety of requirements under a variety of water legislation that has led to industry-driven world leading sustainability practices.

## Significant Impacts

As noted in the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (SEWPaC) guidelines on what is a “significant impact”, a significant impact is an impact that is important, notable or of consequence, having regard to its context or intensity. As yet, no specific guidance has been given by the Department as to what constitutes a significant impact on a water resource. Cotton Australia would recommend a more expansive definition adopted into the EPBC Act or associated regulation to provide more clarity, certainty and confidence in the current proposal for the agriculture sector and community more broadly. An incorporation of principles contained the SEWPaC Significant Impact Guidelines would be seen as acceptable.

Cotton Australia would welcome any opportunity to present to the Committee on the abovementioned points. For further information or discussion on the content of this submission please contact Cotton Australia’s Coal Seam Gas and Mining

Yours Faithfully,



Sahil Prasad.