



AgForce Queensland Industrial Union of Employers

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Senate Inquiry into Water Licences and Rights

Dear Committee Secretary,

Please accept AgForce Queensland's response to the Senate *Inquiry into Water Licences and Rights*. AgForce represents thousands of Queensland beef, sheep and wool, and grains producers who recognise the value in having a strong voice. These broad-acre industries manage 80% of the Queensland landmass for production and most regional and rural economies are dependent on these industries directly and indirectly for their livelihood.

AgForce is pleased to provide the following in response to the Senate inquiry into water licences and rights, particularly as they pertain to the following issues:

- a. the issuing, and sustainability of water licences under any government draft resource plans and water resource plans;*

AgForce would like to draw the Committee's attention to Section 10 of the *Queensland Water Act 2000*, which relates to allocation and sustainable management. This section of the Act specifically pertains to sustainability in that the clauses contained therein:

- (a) allows for the allocation and use of water for the physical, economic and social well being of the people of Queensland and Australia within limits that can be sustained indefinitely; and*
- (b) protects the biological diversity and health of natural ecosystems.*

Thus it must be emphasised that NONE of the water catchments in Queensland that have undergone the Water Resource Plan (WRP) and Resource Operation Plan (ROP) stages have been assessed as over-allocated.

The planning process in Queensland has been reasonably good in that consultation with irrigators and environmental stakeholders has occurred and that the subsequent WRP outcomes have meant that irrigators are mostly satisfied and environmental needs have been looked after, this is particularly the case in the Pioneer and Burdekin catchments. Indeed, the WRPs that have been completed in the non-Murray Darling Basin catchments are viewed as long-term sustainable plans,

in that there has been no suggestion that in 10 years time these plans will need to be drastically changed.

The catchments in the Queensland Murray Darling Basin have been treated in a similar way in that the Queensland Government has looked at all issues and have developed a WRP that is sustainable in the long term. Although other states may contest this, the fact remains that water users in the Queensland Murray Darling Basin are only able to take water that is there under existing water harvesting rights, thus there is no legitimacy behind the claim that water is being taken away from downstream users. Indeed, WRPs in Queensland are developed through *detailed technical and scientific assessment* (as well as extensive community consultation) that determines the right balance between the many interests that rely on the water resources. In developing a plan, the resource is scientifically assessed to ensure that water is allocated within sustainable boundaries as per the sustainability clause in the *Queensland Water Act 2000* and the National Water Initiative objectives.

- b. the effect of relevant agreements and Commonwealth environmental legislation on the issuing of water licences, trading rights or further extraction of water from river systems;*

The *Queensland Water Act 2000* meets all the National Water Initiative (NWI) requirements for water markets and trading, pricing and water resource accounting - as well as encompassing all other inter-related requirements contained within the NWI.

Federally, the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* has affected development potential and has had subsequent economic impacts in some catchments, for example the Fitzroy and Flinders catchments. Such legislation has reduced economic development and sustainable water harvesting. On a State level, the *Wild Rivers Act 2005* has also served to impede development by essentially locking production in a 'time warp' from the date of the Act's inception. The irony of this legislation is that it is put in place over rivers that have been identified as having essentially all their natural values intact – the pristine state of these rivers however is a testament to the good land management of producers. The Act thus effectively punishes them for good land management by failing to acknowledge ecologically sustainable development and precluding long-term development options and diversification.

- c. the collection, collation and analysis and dissemination of information about Australia's water resources, and the use of such information in the granting of water rights;*

AgForce is of the view that the collection, collation and analysis of certain aspects of Australia's water resources has not been disseminated widely and, in a lot of areas there is a distinct lack of scientific data available, thus affecting decision making in the granting of water rights.

In conjunction with the lack of scientific data for particular areas of water regimes and management - is the issue of metering. Metering is still a prominent concern in that it currently does not exist everywhere it is required. It is of our view that as a minimum requirement at least 20 years of metering data would be required before an idea of what would constitute a sustainable yield could be obtained.

- d. the issuing of water rights by the states in light of Commonwealth purchases of water rights; and*

It should be noted that the Queensland Government has not issued any new water licences in the Murray Darling Basin since 1994, nor have many been granted in other catchments in Queensland since 2000. Indeed, for the last 10 years the Queensland Government has been recognising and converting those existing licences into allocations. Thus it can be seen that the Queensland Government has done the right thing by the environment and met the requirements of the Commonwealth and the National Water Initiative objectives.

In addition, further consideration should also be given to the fact mentioned above that there has been an embargo in the Queensland Murray Darling Basin since 1994 on the issuing of new water licences. Point needs to be made here regarding certain comments from down South with regards to Queensland issuing new water licences in the Murray Darling Basin. These claims are in fact erroneous and it must be realised that those commentators are speaking in relation to sleeper licences not new water licences. These sleeper licences have been recognised by the Queensland Government in line with the objectives and requirements of the National Water Initiative. It should also be noted here that the effect of recognising the small number of these sleeper licences would have a miniscule effect on total catchment flows.

Further to this submission, AgForce supports the National Farmers' Federation submission to this inquiry, and looks forward to expanding on this submission in the future if required.

For further information please contact Genevieve Johnston on (07) 3236 3100 or email johnstong@agforceqld.org.au.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "I. W. Burnett". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Ian Burnett
Water Spokesperson and Vice-President
AgForce Queensland