



25 May 2018

Committee Secretary
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislative Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretariat,

Cotton Australia is the key industry body for the Australian cotton industry and is pleased to provide a submission to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislative Committee on the topic of the recently tabled Water Amendment Bill 2018 ('the Bill').

Cotton Australia is an active member of the National Irrigators Council, the National Farmers Federation, New South Wales Irrigators Council and the Queensland Farmers Federation and endorses any submissions they may have made to this Committee.

The vast majority of cotton production in Australia is reliant on the Murray-Darling Basin, as are the communities which rely on the success of the cotton industry such as Trangie, Warren, Wee Waa, Narrabi, Moree, Collarenebri, Mungindi, Goodiwindi, Dirranbandi and St George to name a few. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan ('the Plan') was created as a compromise between the varying interests of stakeholders with the view to achieving balanced positive outcomes across three objectives; environmental, social and economic.

The tabling of the Bill by Minister Little-Proud in Federal Parliament on the 10th May 2018, which received bipartisan support is an extremely encouraging sign of implementing the Plan in full.

It was disheartening to see the Senate in February sideline a key part of the Basin Plan which, until that time had received strong bipartisan support. The 70GL provision that was removed through a disallowance motion failed to appropriately recognize the Plans objectives and the impacts it would have on industries and communities through the Northern Basin. It appeared that the disallowance motion was being used a political pawn in the South Australian election. Cotton Australia, actively advocated to State and Federal Ministers and Senators to illustrate the true impacts of supporting Senator Hanson-Youngs motion.

The Northern Basin Review clearly outlined that by better targeting water acquisition, which is part of the amended plan, greater environmental outcomes could be achieved through the 320GL adjustment rather than the original 390GL. Cotton Australia has been vocal that the amendment which was removed needed to be re-introduced into parliament for the Plan to be successfully implemented and achieve 'enhanced environmental outcomes while balancing the social and economic objectives. This Bill does that.



Advancing Australian Cotton

Cotton Australia, along with other irrigator and farming groups collectively advocated that the water recovery in the Northern Basin should have stopped at 278Gl. Cotton Australia believes that the money saved from additional water recovery could have been invested in complementary measures, which would have leveraged greater environmental gains from the release of environmental water. However, we accept as one of the many stakeholders in the Basin there needs to be compromise and a target recovery of 320Gl, is one that is manageable. Cotton Australia does submit that the focus should now be focused on looking to introduce more complimentary measures to achieve that 320Gl target.

Cotton Australia has provided a number of detailed submissions around the Northern Basin review, attached is Cotton Australia's submission to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority relating to the Proposed Basin Plan Amendments.

Cotton Australia has been actively involved in the majority of public debates and consultations relating to reforms, regulation, policy and investment in the Murray-Darling Basin. As an industry body we have a clear interest in supporting the implementation of the Basin in full. It is in the interest of our industry, as is the case with other Basin reliant industries that the Plan deliver balanced positively correlated environmental, economic and social outcomes.

This Bill provides a mechanism to allow the previously disallowed regulation that would provide a 70Gl reduction in the northern basin environmental allocation to be implemented by ministerial order. The Bill provides certainty to the communities that the Plan can continue to be implemented in a measured manner consistent with the intent of the Act. Cotton Australia supports the passage of the Bill and commends the Federal Government and Opposition for providing bipartisan support. It is imperative that it is continually recognised that the Plan is focused on delivering balanced outcomes to improve the environmental outcomes while stimulating and supporting industries and communities who rely on the Basin. This requires the support of the Federal Government, Opposition party, Basin Authority, Basin States, Basin Communities and industry.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Murray,
General Manager,
Cotton Australia

Attachment A: *Cotton Australia Submission – Plan Amendments 2017*