

Media Release

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Irrigators back Interim board's local management investigation

A majority of irrigators in Mareeba-Dimbulah have provided conditional support to their interim board to continue investigating a move to local management.

Chair of the interim board Joe Moro welcomed the input from the waters users and accepted that the scheme's 1000 irrigators would need further time to consider the issues.

"The Interim board has carefully examined the risks and benefits of going to local management and although we are convinced that owning and managing the assets locally would be beneficial in the long-term, some irrigators still have concerns," Mr Moro said.

"Some irrigators want to be assured that the separation payment that government provides the new entity with is large enough, particularly to meet refurbishment that will be required after 2030. And even though local management only involves the water channels, irrigators want to ask government to provide some certainty in relation to future prices for bulk water," he said.

The Mareeba interim board hosted two customer forums this week and number of focus group meetings which were attended by around 125 customers representing up to 70% of the water allocation. Prior to the meetings the Interim Board wrote to all customers requesting their support and enclosing a summary of the business proposal they have developed for local management of the scheme. The summary is available at www.lmairrigation.com.au/Mareeba.

In the past two months irrigators in St George, Theodore and Eton have provided strong support for their interim boards bid for SunWater's eight channel schemes to be transferred to irrigator owned companies.

"Mareeba is a larger scheme and many customers believe that government has a role to play in continuing to support irrigators. Our business proposal offers irrigators a chance to chart their own destiny by owning the assets. Nevertheless the scheme customers are wary about taking on the risk of running the scheme without a guaranteed separation payment," he said.

"We have won strong support to put forward our business proposal to government and to keep talking about ensuring a new entity will be in the best place to ensure the long-term future of irrigation in the area."

Government has stated that local management of Sunwater's irrigation channels will only proceed if the business proposals can demonstrate that the move is in the long-term interest of irrigators and the State.

Leader of the independent project team established to manage the investigation process, irrigator and water commissioner, Ms Leith Bouilly, said most irrigators were recognising that the future would be more certain if they took control of the irrigation channels.

"This may be the last opportunity that irrigators have to consider local management," Ms Bouilly said.

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