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Management transition marks new era for Theodore irrigation

The Theodore irrigation scheme has once again created history following today's landmark transition to local ownership and management.

The scheme first wrote itself into the history books as the oldest irrigation undertaking in Queensland with construction commencing in 1924 and the first of the region's irrigation farms opening in 1926 near the purpose-built township of Theodore.

Today marks the start of a new chapter, with local not-for-profit company Theodore Water assuming ownership and management of the channel distribution infrastructure from the State Government-owned entity SunWater.

The transition will give the region's irrigators a greater say in scheme operations, asset renewal and refurbishment plans; increase their influence over the distribution price of irrigation water; and deliver improvements in reporting, transparency and accountability.

Theodore Water vice-chairman and local irrigator Peter French welcomed the move to local management, saying it would herald significant benefits for both irrigators and the community.

"When we began looking into the feasibility of local management six years ago, the overarching goal was securing the long-term viability of the irrigation scheme so that it would, in turn, encourage a profitable and productive farming industry and a robust local community," Mr French said.

"To achieve this, we needed greater influence over how the irrigation assets were operated and managed to ensure that the scheme would meet the needs of the local industry now and into the future.

"Detailed feasibility studies have shown that local management offers our best opportunity to generate operational cost efficiencies and maximise control over distribution prices.

"This will be primarily accomplished through the strategic asset modernisation plan being funded through the State Government's separation payment of \$15.1 million to Theodore Water, but also through a focus on streamlining the company's core business activities."

Mr French said Theodore Water would ensure that the system was specifically tailored to the needs and requirements of channel irrigators and take a flexible, innovative and consultative approach to operating the business.

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“As channel irrigators, there are some key factors that affect our businesses such as the distribution price of our irrigation water and the efficient, timely delivery of water at critical stages of a crop’s growth,” Mr French said.

“Both are largely dictated by the efficiency of the irrigation scheme and can have a significant impact on profitability so it’s critical to get this right.

“Theodore Water is committed to delivering the best outcomes on irrigation water distribution and service and in the process, helping support the regional economy, local employment and contributing to the Theodore community.”

Local management has attracted overwhelming support amongst local irrigators with scheme customers representing more than 95 per cent of the scheme’s water supply voting to become shareholders in Theodore Water Pty Ltd during a customer offer in April/May this year.

Theodore is the second of Queensland’s irrigation schemes to transition to local management, following St George’s move from SunWater to Mallowa Irrigation in July.

Theodore Water will be overseen by locally-based general manager Geoff Beard and day-to-day operations will be conducted by the former SunWater Theodore staff members who have transferred to Theodore Water. For more information on Theodore Water, visit www.theodorewater.com.au

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Caption: Theodore Water vice-chairman and local irrigator Peter French says Theodore Water will ensure that the Theodore irrigation scheme is specifically tailored to the needs and requirements of channel irrigators and takes a flexible, innovative and consultative approach to operating the business.
