

A Message for Irrigators

Burdekin-Haughton Irrigation Scheme Decision

The Queensland Government has assessed the business case proposal for transitioning the Burdekin-Haughton channel irrigation scheme to local management arrangements (LMA) whereby local irrigators would own and operate it.

The assessment found too much uncertainty as to whether the transition to LMA would deliver the best outcome for the long-term sustainability of the scheme.

This means the most viable option for irrigators and customers at this time is for SunWater to continue the operation and maintenance of the scheme in partnership with the local community.

Assessment outcomes

This decision was based on an assessment of the business case against the principles governing the local management arrangements project, including customer support, value for money and financial viability.

It was unclear whether sufficient benefits to the taxpayer could be achieved from the transition to LMA. There was also uncertainty as to whether there was a strong level of support from customers which is essential for the scheme to succeed under LMA.

Additionally, some parts of Burdekin-Haughton scheme currently face the challenge of rising groundwater levels and potential salinity impacts on soil quality. Unless this issue is addressed, it could hamper the long-term sustainability of the scheme and those agricultural businesses which rely on irrigation.

We are working with stakeholders on a strategy aimed at lowering the groundwater levels and reducing the risk of future salinity in key sections of the irrigation schemes. This strategy is due for release in 2019 and the scheme should remain with SunWater until there is confidence this strategy is working.

The LMA process has been valuable, enabling irrigators to gain a greater understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the efficient operation of the irrigation scheme.

SunWater is looking forward to continued engagement with its customers to take advantage of the significant knowledge and experience of the local irrigation customers and build on the knowledge generated through the process.

We thank everyone who has contributed to the LMA process and in particular acknowledges the efforts of the Burdekin-Haughton interim LMA board established to develop the options presented to government.

Next steps

While the decision concludes this review, the process has identified a range of options for improving the operation of the scheme and strengthened relationships to help deliver these improvements.

The Burdekin-Haughton irrigation scheme remains a critical part of the economy of North Queensland, an essential contributor to the State's agricultural sector, and a key source of regional employment.

SunWater will continue to own and operate the scheme and will be engaging with customers to establish a new Burdekin-Haughton customer engagement process.

For more information call 13 QGOV (13 74 68), email LMA@dnrme.qld.gov.au or search 'LMA projects' on www.dnrme.qld.gov.au



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