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Media Release

Irrigators consider State Government offer to own and operate irrigation channels

Irrigators in Eton will undertake further due diligence and financial modeling after receiving an offer from the State Government to own and operate SunWater's irrigation channels locally.

Announcing the formal offer this week, the Minister for Energy, Biofuels and Water Supply Mr Mark Bailey said the local management of channel irrigation schemes presents a major opportunity for local communities to determine the future of their irrigation schemes.

"The transfer of these schemes from SunWater to local management demonstrates the government's commitment to agriculture and regional Queensland," he said. "Local management will give greater transparency, while giving water users greater control of their water pricing and future changes to the scheme."

Mr Bailey encouraged scheme customers in the Eton area to consider the offer which relates to the transfer of all below-dam infrastructure from SunWater to local ownership and includes \$13.9 million to help with the transition.

Chair of the Board of the Eton Irrigation Scheme, Mr Lee Blackburn said a meeting of scheme customers met last night to assess their support for proceeding to local management in light of the offer, which aligns closely to the Business Proposal that scheme customers put to the government in 2014.

"Moving away from Government ownership gives locals control over an asset that is important to our regional economy. The board believes locals are best placed to efficiently manage and sustainably grow the scheme over the long-term. A very strong level of support was received from customers for the Business proposal during the consultation process in Stage 2," Mr Blackburn said.

"At this stage we have the continued continuing customer support from customers to continue with the local management process and work will commence on further engineering due diligence and financial modeling which will assist in finalising the terms of the transition."

"The process the government has established shows that it is serious about empowering local people and we will be seeking the continued support of scheme customers to continue along that path," he said.

The local management of the Eton Irrigation Scheme will enable the transfer of irrigation infrastructure that distributes water to around 300 customers, irrigating 15,000 hectares of land.

Scheme customers in Emerald, Theodore and St George are also considering offers from the State government while government-appointed boards in the Burdekin-Haughton, Bundaberg, Mareeba-Dimbulah and the Lower Mary are conducting further investigations into the local management option.

More information about Local Management Arrangements (LMA) for SunWater's irrigation channels is available at www.lmairrigation.com.au.

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