

Submission to Parliamentary Committee.

Re: Water Reform and Other Legislation amendment Bill 2014

Integrated Food and Energy Developments Pty Ltd (IFED) welcomes the proposed amendments and the opportunity it affords the agricultural sector to undertake large scale, environmentally sustainable food and renewable energy projects.

Australia is a world leader in row intensive, broad-acre, tropical farming. This expertise translates into highly productive use of land and delivers to the world high quality food at low cost. Australian farming is adaptive and quickly adopts new clean and green farming techniques. This leadership is incredibly important in tropical cropping as other nations follow Australian leadership in this area.

The amendments create a pathway to expand this industry and skill base and will further entrench Australia's reputation for innovation, careful planning and high technology implementation. It will motivate investment to significantly increase food supply to regional and global markets and expand North Queensland's credentials as renewable energy power-house.

The benefits to Queensland in jobs, export earnings and strengthened rural communities will be substantial.

Environmental Planning

Changes to the Water Act enable the Minister to amend a water plan, if appropriate, to implement the outcomes of an environmental impact statement process by reserving unallocated water for large scale projects. This will provide more certainty for developers and will encourage and facilitate greater private sector involvement in relevant projects. This approach also reflects the importance of a public environmental assessment of large scale agriculture projects.

The creation of a link between water allocation and a scientific demonstration of environmental sustainability through a public process is a welcome procedural step that should be widely applauded. It enables opportunities for community feedback and allows proper scientific assessment to be undertaken and communicated. Development conditions can be established using existing proven government regulatory processes.

Water Development Option

IFED applauds the introduction of the Water Development Option and the other initiatives to streamline water resource planning. These initiatives are essential to help incentivise and facilitate private funding of the large-scale water infrastructure projects required to support agricultural development, one of the four pillars of Queensland's economy. The current uncertainty, timeframes and costs associated with water allocations are a major impediment to initiating large scale agricultural development projects in Queensland.

The Water Development Option initiative coupled with the short form amendment process, based on the outcome of the environmental impact assessment, is a sensible approach. These proposed amendments seem to achieve good balance between the need for project proponents to have more certainty and timeliness about the process and outcome and the need for due process to ensure acceptable environmental and community outcomes.

Stream Mapping

Currently stream mapping is widely available through a variety of government services, for example, Queensland Globe, Queensland Government Information Service. Information presumably was based on aerial photography. Many streams are often identified by changes in colour rather ground level.

Ideally, the focus of legislation should be to reduce farm footprint rather than encouraging disjointed farms spread around streams of dubious origin and negligible value. This has an extraordinary impact on farm design and the subsequent farm footprint.

A tight farm footprint will – more than any other measure - protect streams and associated vegetation. Minimising farm footprint significantly increases the effectiveness of capturing and recycling run-off and further reduces sediment loss by reducing overflow entry points as well as stream crossings.

Provision in the legislation is required to remove a stream designation if:

- It is not really a stream i.e. does not meet criteria;
- It is a low value stream based on certain criteria; and
- Footprint can be substantially reduced by removing the stream designation (effectively an offset due to substantially less clearing).

Further changes to legislation

The legislation can be further enhanced by increasing the involvement of Water Users in the management of River Basins. Responsibilities might include:

- Protection of River “Health”
- River gauge maintenance and monitoring
- River basin and Groundwater modelling
- Water metering
- Sediment loss reduction
- Identification of beneficial water availability

Existing levies on water can be used to fund relevant activities in the Basin.

We look forward to further progress on the proposed amendments and congratulate the government on making these amendments.

By:

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