



# **Submission to the Environment, Agriculture, Resources and Energy Committee**

## ***Strategic Cropping Land Bill 2011***

**Nov, 2011**



## **Cotton Australia**

Cotton Australia is the key representative body for the Australian cotton growing industry. It helps the industry to work together to be world competitive and sustainable, and also tell the good news about the industry's achievements. Cotton Australia determines and drives the industry's strategic direction, retaining its strong focus on R&D, promoting the value of the industry, reporting on its environmental credibility, and implementing policy objectives in consultation with its stakeholders.

Cotton Australia works to ensure an environment conducive to efficient and sustainable cotton production. It has a key role in Best Management Practices (myBMP), an environmental management program for growers. This work has seen a significant improvement in the environmental performance of the industry, with huge improvements in water use efficiency, significant reductions in pesticide use, and millions of dollars invested into R&D.

The Australian cotton industry directly employs thousands of Australian's and this year will contribute over \$2 billion to the Australia economy.

Cotton Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Strategic Cropping Bill 2011.

Cotton Australia is a member of the Queensland Farmers Federation (QFF).

Cotton Australia is aware that QFF will also be making a submission to this Inquiry, and while Cotton Australia is confident that this submission will reflect the views of Cotton Australia, if there is any divergence of views expressed then Cotton Australia's position is the one outlined in this paper.

Cotton Australia wishes to express its disappointment in the extremely short period of time that the Queensland Government has allowed stakeholder to provide submission to this Inquiry, particularly given the long-term impacts mining and other extractive industries have on our soil resources.



## **General Comments**

Cotton Australia congratulates the Queensland Government on its commitment to try to preserve high quality agriculture land.

Cotton Australia understands that the Strategic Cropping Land Bill is an Australian first, and is aware that other jurisdictions (NSW) are closely following its development, with the view to introducing its own measures to protect prime agricultural land.

However, while recognising that the Queensland Government is acting in good faith, and responding to community requests to preserve our productive agricultural base, Cotton Australia strongly believes that the Strategic Cropping Land Bill is too narrow in its focus, and will fail to preserve some of the land that it has been designed to protect.

Of particular concern, is that the criterion focuses almost entirely on soil characteristics and not on a whole range of factors which determine the strategic value of land. Soil while important, is only one factor and an assessment must include climate and water resources.

For example, Cotton Australia believes the Bill will provide no protection from Coal Seam Gas (CSG) production on the floodplains that overlay the Condamine Alluvium in the Cecil Plains region.

CSG extractors may be able to argue that they will not permanently alienate the soil (although Cotton Australia would strongly argue that this is yet to be proven, and the precautionary principle should apply), but there remains significant concern that CSG extraction will damage the Condamine Alluvium.

If this was to occur, the long-term strategic food producing capacity of the region would be severely impacted by the loss of access to the water resource.

Further, Cotton Australia contends that the focus on the soil, allows mining companies to attempt to circumvent the SCL legislation by moving from open cut operations to underground operations such as long-wall mining or bord and pillar.



While these forms of mining may preserve the soil characteristics, the impacts of subsidence have the potential to severely impact on the productive capacity of the land.

Subsidence leads to changed water flow and drainage patterns, which can heighten the risk of erosion, and result in a serious loss of productive capacity.

Cotton Australia is aware of at least one proposal to mine underneath the Emerald Irrigation area, and any subsidence in this highly productive food and fibre producing area would destroy the overall irrigation capacity of this area, which has been subjected to hundreds of millions of dollars of private and public investment.

Cotton Australia is opposed to the segregation of Protected and Management Zones. Cotton Australia strongly argues that all land that has been identified SCL should be within the Protected Zone.

The concept of being able to mitigate the impact is hard for the industry to have any faith in, and is in effect saying it is “okay to mine and destroy the SCL value of this land, provided you pay for it.”

Finally, Cotton Australia is very concerned that transitional arrangements, such as that offered to the Springsure Creek coal project, not only immediately reduces the amount of land protected by SCL, but also undermines public confidence in the ability of SCL to provide ongoing protection.

This concern also extends to the exceptional circumstances provisions, which can still allow development on Protected Land.

As a member of Queensland Farmers Federation, Cotton Australia will leave detailed responses to specific clauses in the Bill to its submission.

For further information or assistance please feel free to contact Cotton Australia’s Queensland Policy Manager Michael Murray on 0427 707868 or [michaelm@cotton.org.au](mailto:michaelm@cotton.org.au).



Cotton Australia would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Inquiry, and provide further information on the major impacts of mining and other extractive industries.

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