

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 578
Asked on 21 August 2013

MR COX asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (MR McVEIGH)–

QUESTION:

What measures is the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry taking to assist stakeholders in the development of new irrigation prospects in the Flinders and Gilbert River systems?

ANSWER:

Agriculture is one of the four pillars of the Queensland economy. The Newman Government has an Agriculture Strategy that underpins its goal to double agriculture, fisheries and forestry in Queensland by 2040, including doubling food production.

Through my colleague the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, the Honourable Andrew Cripps, the Queensland Government has amended the Vegetation Management Act to allow cropping and irrigation system development in these rivers, and all available water allocations under the current Water Resource Plan have been made.

The North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy (NQIAS) is a joint Queensland and Federal Government project examining the long term prospects for irrigation schemes in Northern Australia, using the Flinders and Gilbert Rivers as a template.

The Queensland Government's role in the NQIAS is consistent with these goals. It is working with regional champions and local stakeholders to deliver real results. It is ensuring local producers have access to the skills and knowledge necessary to obtain water allocations, develop their properties and choose crops most suited to their business.

For its contribution to the NQIAS, the Federal Government is funding CSIRO \$6.8 million to provide the most in-depth analysis ever produced of the prospects for commercial irrigation in northern Australia, with the lessons learned to be used on other rivers in Northern Australia. I am ensuring these CSIRO studies (that will produce their final reports at the end of this year) have practical, on-the-ground outcomes.

Queensland has allocated up to \$3 million to this project in a roughly equal mix of in-kind contributions and specific funding. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has entered a joint agreement with TriAg (a research subsidiary of Blue Ribbon Seeds) to conduct crop trials at Richmond, which have been hindered by the drought. DAFF is also working with other commercial operators to conduct similar trials. The outcome of the NQIAS studies will be used to determine additional allocations that may be made available on these rivers.

As the project has developed, it has become clear that it will take producers in the area some time to develop their properties for irrigation. The current DAFF project will operate over four years. The Government has set this timeframe and expenditure plans for the project to properly align with the development plans of producers, allowing the outcomes of the CSIRO studies to be effectively integrated into development plans, and ensuring the provision of agronomic advice is better timed to coincide with crop plantings.