

## QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 1023

asked on Thursday, 23 August 2018

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**MR D LAST** ASKED THE MINISTER FOR NATURAL RESOURCES, MINES AND ENERGY (HON DR A LYNHAM)—

QUESTION:

With reference to media reports that the draft Water Plan for Cape York will allow 2.5 percent of available water in Cape York to be used for agriculture and 2,000 megalitres of water for general use in the Normanby Basin, but allocates 16,000 megalitres (8 times the amount) to Indigenous groups who are permitted to onsell water to farmers facing drought and are concerned they will lose access to water—

Will the Minister advise how the draft plan ensures that farmers are not disadvantaged, while achieving sensible environmental outcomes?

ANSWER:

The Cape York draft water plan was released for public consultation on 4 June 2018 and proposes significant opportunities for the agricultural sector. The Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy is reviewing the submissions received to inform the finalisation of the plan by the end of 2018.

All existing water rights are honoured and secured by the draft plan. All existing water licences for irrigation are secured, even if they are not currently being used to their full extent—thereby offering opportunity for growth without farmers needing to seek additional water and protecting access to their water during drought. Current entitlements in the Normanby catchment are 21,708 megalitres and are able to be used for a variety of agricultural needs.

The plan ensures that farmers can continue to rely on these pre-existing rights to support stock water needs. The draft plan also allows for up to five megalitres per annum of surface water or underground water to be taken without the requirement of a water licence for prescribed activities such as washing produce, using stock dips and spray races for controlling parasites on livestock, and washing down farm equipment or vehicles. Only surface water can be used in the Lakeland area of the Normanby catchment for these purposes. The use of underground water for these activities will require a water licence to manage growing development pressures on the aquifer.

Permanent and seasonal relocation of underground water licences is proposed for the Cook and Lakeland areas to support more opportunity and greater flexibility for agricultural uses in these areas. Similarly, trading of surface water entitlements in the Normanby, Endeavour and Jeannie catchments has also been proposed to facilitate growth by establishing permanent and seasonal markets.

These opportunities are in addition to the draft plan's proposal to provide 516,350 megalitres of unallocated water to meet future demands across Cape York. The volumes proposed for each catchment have been set using the best available

science to maintain at least 97.5 per cent of median annual freshwater flows, thereby protecting natural environments including the Great Barrier Reef.

Under the draft plan, unallocated water volumes will be apportioned in each catchment based on the proportion of land held by Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders interests.

The water can either be granted to native title holders or tenure holders under the *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* or the *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991*. A general reserve has been determined in each catchment based on the proportion of non-Indigenous freehold land.

Importantly, farmers are not constrained to the general reserve. Farmers can enter into short or long-term lease agreements with traditional owners to harness the opportunities available through the Cape York Peninsula Heritage Area reserve.

This is a potential win-win outcome which provides real decision-making opportunities for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, and supports farmers to progress agricultural projects in partnership with traditional owners.