

## **WATER RESOURCE AND WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT**

Policy statement

### **The issues**

There is growing awareness across Australia of the need for more efficient and effective management of water resources and for the protection of water quality. As a result, significant reforms to the way water resources are allocated and managed are underway, and there are major plans and investments to improve water quality in rivers and the Great Barrier Reef. There is also growing competition across all sectors for access to limited water resources.

For horticultural industries, secure access to reliable supplies of good quality water is essential as approximately 95% of production horticulture, fruit and vegetables, in Queensland are irrigated. The use of water by horticulture growers is highly efficient and profitable: the industry uses just 10 per cent of Queensland's irrigation water to produce 40 per cent of the value of irrigated agricultural production. Growers have achieved ongoing improvements in water use efficiency through the adoption of technology and better on-farm water management. This has been supported by the Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative and South East Queensland Irrigation Futures, both delivered in partnership between the Queensland Government and relevant industry groups. Through these projects Growcom has generated \$260 million in water savings and increases in productivity since it began in 1999.

While the water reform process has delivered some benefits to the horticulture industry, there are ongoing challenges in delivering efficient and effective water resource planning processes, securing all forms of water entitlements and providing compensation if entitlements are reduced, optimising irrigation scheme management, facilitating water trading, and designing water pricing and charges frameworks that are fair and transparent. Workable arrangements for growers to demonstrate sustainable management of land and water resources on farm have not yet been achieved.

Water quality management arrangements also pose major challenges for the horticulture industry. Efforts by governments to address water quality problems, particularly in the Great Barrier Reef, are multi-layered, highly disjointed and often poorly designed and implemented. Horticultural producers have made significant progress implementing practices that minimise the potential for sediments, pesticides and fertilisers to enter waterways, however a poor policy and planning framework and a lack of adequate resourcing and coordination is a major impediment to defining and accelerating the uptake of water quality management solutions.

Overall, rural industries are facing increasing competitive demands for Queensland's finite water supply. Options for recycled water for use in agricultural production are being pursued and there is a need to recognise that Queensland has a significant amount of undeveloped water resources, which could, with careful planning, be developed.

### **Our position**

The fruit and vegetable industry recognises the importance of balancing the economic uses of water resources while maintaining the health of river and ground water systems. Growcom supports processes which:

- Deliver robust water resource planning and allocation arrangements.
- Provide clarity and certainty to water entitlements in a timely fashion.
- Recognise the specific needs of the horticulture industry and its reliance on secure access to water.
- Establish water markets and facilitate trade in water resources.
- Maximise the efficiency and sustainability of water access and use.
- Drive improvements in irrigation scheme management.
- Define water pricing and charges regimes that are transparent, affordable and nationally consistent.
- Encourage innovation and provide incentives in water availability, use and water quality management.
- Support growers to implement farm management practices that improve water quality.
- Provide horticulture growers with sound economic & environmental outcomes via appropriate R&D activities

Ongoing efforts are required to clarify water access, use rights and obligations, and to implement a framework for compensation when established water rights are diminished.

Growcom supports the use of farm management systems as an effective self-regulatory method of managing on-farm risks including water use and for demonstrating sustainable natural resource management on farm.

### **Our commitment**

Growcom aims to ensure water resource management in the horticultural sector achieves strong triple bottom line outcomes. Growcom supports the use of water resources in a responsible manner and in a way that maximises the efficiency of water use.

Growcom will continue to support fruit and vegetable growers to be involved in the development of water policy and in planning for water resource management and allocation. Growcom will continue to work with government agencies, research organisations and industry to support sustainable water use and to manage water quality issues. We are also committed to the continual development and implementation of our Farm Management Systems program.

### **Our expectations**

Growcom expects water reform and water quality improvement processes to:

- Acknowledge the specific needs of the horticulture industry.
- Deliver entitlements, allocation and trading frameworks for water resources that enable the optimum distribution of water to enable sustainable horticulture production.
- Ensure water resource planning processes are based on sound science and equitable stakeholder engagement.
- Continue to invest in developing scientific knowledge and monitoring processes at appropriate scales to underpin water resource and water quality management.
- Ensure costs of supplying water and managing its access and use are efficient and transparent.
- Develop effective and efficient policy and planning frameworks, and implementation activities.

## **Our agenda Items**

Issues to be considered within this policy area include:

- The National Water Initiative and National Plan for Water Security.
- Water quality management, particularly the Great Barrier Reef and SEQ waterways.
- Water use efficiency, including the Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative and related programs.
- The development, monitoring and review of water resource plans and operation plans.
- Water property rights, resource security and compensation arrangements.
- Water infrastructure development and transparent costing.
- Planning for unallocated water resources.
- Emergency water use mechanisms in time of drought.
- Water trading.
- Local management of irrigation areas.
- Water accounting, metering and penalty systems for unauthorised water use.
- Water quality monitoring and reporting systems.
- Land and Water Management Plans and coordination with farm management systems / property management tools.