



**GROWCOM SUBMISSION**

**STATEMENT OF PROPOSALS TO AMEND THE WATER RESOURCE (MORETON)  
PLAN 2007 AND MORETON RESOURCE OPERATIONS PLAN**

**29 January 2016**

## Introduction

Growcom as the peak industry body for the Queensland horticulture industry strongly supports the objectives of sustainable water management and the principles of ecologically sustainable development as articulated in the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. In particular, Growcom supports the principle that decision-making processes should effectively integrate both long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equitable considerations. For that reason, we contend that this proposal cannot proceed until some key scientific questions are answered and mechanisms put in place to ensure the ongoing economic viability of the Lockyer Valley. It is imperative that any new management arrangements do not jeopardise the productive capacity of the Valley. Growcom has worked closely with the growers in this region for many years through the Queensland government funded Rural Water Use Efficiency Initiative (RWUEI), the Lockyer Valley Growers Association and the Lockyer Water Users forum and as such has an insight into the concerns of the local growers as well as a perspective on the industry as whole. We also work closely with our peak body the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) and endorse the positions articulated in their submission.

It must be said that any reduction in the productive capacity of this region, known as the salad bowl of Queensland would not be acceptable to us as an organization or more broadly to the people of Queensland. We accept the need to base decisions on science and for that reason urge the Queensland government to invest in key studies and alternative water supply options to ensure that community expectations are met around ongoing fruit and vegetable production and environmental objectives.

## **What issues in the Statement of Proposals for the amendment of the Moreton WRP and ROP do you support? What issues concern you? How do you think the Moreton WRP and/or ROP can be improved to address these or other issues (within the scope of the proposed WRP and ROP amendments)?**

It is extremely difficult to comment on the statement of proposals without a clearer understanding of how allocations will be determined and the scientific basis for decisions. We contend that there are significant knowledge gaps that must be filled before this process can continue as the possible negative impact on the agriculture sector in the area under question is too significant. We also note that the water users are defined as the key beneficiaries of this proposal. At this stage, it is difficult to see any benefit unless a holistic and comprehensive approach to water access is taken based on best available and new data across a range of disciplines.

## **Economic contribution of Horticulture in the Lockyer Valley**

The Lockyer Valley is one of the major agricultural production areas in Australia. The area is the major source of a range of vegetable crops produced in Queensland including lettuce (70% of Queensland production), potatoes (23%), beetroot (87%), broccoli (66%), cabbage (60%), carrot (33%), cauliflower (55%), celery (43%), onion (52%), potato (23%), pumpkin (19%), spring onion (82%) and corn (29%)<sup>1</sup>. The 3000 square kilometers of alluvial soils of the Lockyer Valley are recognised as some of the most fertile in the world. The 13,000 hectares of irrigated land in the Lockyer produces around 35% of Queensland's vegetable supply valued at more than \$160 million annually. The horticulture industry is a major employer within the Lockyer Valley Council area and the economic contribution of the industry is far greater than just the value of crop production. Whilst we appreciate that the statement of proposals does not capture all of the Lockyer Valley, this in itself will cause major inequities between those producers whose access to water is unchanged and those who will potentially have access to less water at a higher cost.

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<sup>1</sup> Queensland Government Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries Production (tonnes) levels of key vegetables grown in the Lockyer and Fassifern Valleys, Stanthorpe, Darling Downs and whole of Queensland for 2005-06.

The Lockyer and Mid Brisbane Catchments have been identified as priority areas for food security and the supply chain for South East Queensland, Australia and the Asia Pacific Region. The Rural Futures Strategy for South East Queensland identifies that the value of production could increase by as much as 65% by 2031. An increasing demand for food and food security is broadly recognised as a key global trend likely to impact on rural areas across the world. Institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) have published projections of an increase in global food demand out to 2050. These projections indicate that world food demand may increase by 70 per cent by 2050 (FAO 2009). Key drivers of this outward shift in aggregate food demand include: population growth, continuing income growth per person and urbanisation in many developing countries. Much of the projected increase in global food demand is expected to come from rising consumer incomes in fast growing developing countries which the Lockyer Valley is well placed to serve given its geographical position in relation to Asia and access to a major port and airport.

It is important to note that the combination of weather, soil and proximity to markets makes the Lockyer Valley uniquely successful in terms of being able to grow and distribute high value perishable horticulture crops with minimal crop protection and fertilizer inputs. Whilst many commodities are grown for most of the year, winter is the most productive season and the combination of cold nights and warm days means that crops are much less vulnerable to pest incursions than other vegetable growing regions such as Bundaberg and Bowen. The Valley’s proximity to Brisbane means that transport costs are reduced which has flow on benefits for the consumer. This means that production cannot just be transplanted elsewhere.

## Key issues and recommendations

As a minimum we recommend that a social and economic impact study be undertaken which cross references the crop water requirements with the proposed allocations and determines the ongoing viability of key crops. Crop water use requirements have been modeled using the iRUSTIC computer program and are set out below. It should be noted that for many operations, up to three crops are rotated on the same site so these numbers would have to be added together to gain a true picture of the water requirements of a given site. We suggest that these figures are only a starting point in terms of determining water requirements and significant work needs to be done to ascertain actual water requirements to maintain current productive output. Horticulture crops are high value and can optimise small pockets of good quality soil provided they have access to sufficient water. The water needs of smaller farms dependent on the production of high value crops compared with larger enterprises which have more opportunity to vary cropping and water use needs to be taken into consideration.

Crop Name	Irrigation Method	Soil Type	Seasonal Water Demand (ML/Ha)	Location
Beans March and October	Drip Irrigation	Silty Loam	2.75	Gatton
Beans March and October	Drip Irrigation	Clay loam	2.73	Gatton
Beans March and October	Solid set	Silty Loam	3.91	Gatton
Beans March and October	Solid set	Clay loam	3.64	Gatton

Crop Name	Irrigation Method	Soil Type	Seasonal Water Demand (ML/Ha)	Location
Beetroot	Solid set	Clay loam	3.18	Gatton
Broccoli	Solid set	Clay loam	1.01	Gatton
Cabbage	Solid set	Clay loam	1.56	Gatton
Carrot Winter Planting	Solid set	Clay loam	2.37	Gatton
Cauliflower	Solid set	Clay loam	1.80	Gatton
Celery Feb and Aug	Solid set	Clay loam	5.89	Gatton
Lettuce Winter Planting	Solid set	Clay loam	1.32	Gatton
Lettuce Oct - Feb	Solid set	Clay loam	3.59	Gatton
Onions	Solid set	Clay loam	2.89	Gatton
Peas Sep - Feb	Solid set	Clay loam	4.24	Gatton
Potato Apr and Aug	Solid set	Clay loam	4.41	Gatton
Pumpkin	Solid set	Clay loam	3.79	Gatton
Rock Melons	Solid set	Clay loam	3.24	Gatton
Shallots/Spring Onions Spring	Solid set	Clay loam	2.98	Gatton
Shallots/Spring Onions Autumn	Solid set	Clay loam	2.16	Gatton
Shallots/Spring Onions Winter	Solid set	Clay loam	1.50	Gatton
Silverbeet	Solid set	Clay loam	6.45	Gatton
Sweetcorn	Solid set	Clay loam	3.54	Gatton
Watermelons	Solid set	Clay loam	2.91	Gatton
Zucchini Jun and Dec	Solid set	Clay loam	3.70	Gatton
Zucchini Dec	Solid set	Clay loam	2.49	Gatton
Zucchini Jun	Solid set	Clay loam	1.20	Gatton

The reduction of productive capacity will have extremely detrimental impacts on the economy of the Lockyer Valley as a whole. As per the QFF submission, it is essential that benchmark data for the whole scheme is collected early on in the planning process to ensure the financial impacts can be correctly assessed. This includes the current utilisation of agricultural land, the number and size of farming enterprises, crop production levels, employment data and market indicators. Horticulture producers are key employers in the region and also bring much needed tourism revenue to the region through the employment of backpackers. An individual farm can employ up to 400 seasonal workers each year all of whom need to be accommodated and fed within the region.

As articulated in the QFF submission, there are still significant data gaps in relation to the technical information required to develop this plan appropriately. Whilst this is outside our area of expertise, we stress that all data must be of the highest

quality before any decisions are made that may have an impact on the productive capacity of the Valley. New hydrological studies must be undertaken to ensure that the aquifer is correctly understood and the groundwater model must be reviewed and cross-referenced with the data from observational bores. We contend that the precautionary principle must be invoked with respect to the productive capacity of this area.

Growers are deeply concerned by the potential consequences of this proposal as evidenced by their strong attendance at recent meetings. We urge the department to consult widely and effectively and appropriately consider the perspectives of the landholders many of whom are fourth generation farmers in this area. Until the appropriate in-depth studies are done, we will stand by the testimony of our growers as representing the best understanding of the system. We will hold the government to account to ensure that decisions are truly based on science and that every effort has been made to ensure the producers are in fact the true beneficiaries of any management changes.