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1 CENTRAL HIGHLANDS COTTON GROWERS AND IRRIGATORS ASSOCIATION (CHCG&IA)

1.1 ABOUT

The CHCG&IA is an incorporated association under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1981* (QLD).

The CHCG&IA is local industry group that represents growers/irrigators and associated businesses in agriculture. Membership is comprised of members who grow crops that include cotton, mungbeans, soybeans, sunflowers, chickpeas, wheat, grapes, melons and citrus. Associate members include product resellers, bankers, agronomists, consultants, contractors, ginners, merchants and researchers.

The irrigation areas are serviced by the Nogoa, Comet, Belyando and McKenzie River catchments and businesses are a mix of family and corporate operations.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

Membership is voluntary, and the group is coordinated by volunteers. The CHCG&IA objectives are;

- Promoting economically viable and environmentally sustainable growth in the industry
- Promoting industry Best Practice and facilitating education opportunities for members
- Providing a support network locally and advocating for members at a district, state and national level
- Advocating “production, research, protection and advancement” of the local industry

1.3 OUR MEMBERS

Grower Irrigators – Approximately 50 members.

Associate Members – Approximately 80+ members.

2 NOGOA MACKENZIE SCHEME

2.1 ABOUT THE SCHEME

2.1.1 Fairbairn Dam

Fairbairn Dam is built across the Nogoa Gap about 19 kilometres upstream (south) of the town of Emerald, in Queensland’s central west.

2.1.2 Channel/Pipeline System

Water is diverted from Fairbairn Dam to two channel systems to customers via a network of mostly open-earth channels.

2.1.3 Selma Channel System

The Selma Channel System supplies water to the left bank, west and north of Emerald. The channel is approximately 47 kilometres long and supplies subsidiary channels totalling a further 26 kilometres.

The left bank outlet which releases water into the Selma Channel System is at a relatively high level and a pump station is required to lift water into the outlet channel for peak demand periods when the storage level falls. The pump station is located in the left bank wall of the spillway and is equipped with three variable discharge pumps.

2.1.4 Weemah Channel System

The Weemah Channel System supplies water to the right bank irrigation area east of Emerald. The channel is approximately 53 kilometres long.

The right bank outlet which releases water into Weemah Channel and the Nogoa River consists of a 6 metre diameter tunnel with an intake tower housing control gates at the upstream end. The tunnel was used to divert the river during construction of the dam.

Surface drainage systems are in place to provide drainage services in the area. The total length of drains is 204 kilometres.

(<http://www.sunwater.com.au/>, 2018)

2.2 FAIRBAIRN DAM

Dam name	Stream name	Lake name	Nearest town	Structure description	Maximum height of dam above foundation (metres)	Storage capacity (ML)	Surface area at full supply level (ha)	Year completed
Fairbairn	Nogoa River	Lake Maraboon	Emerald	Earthfill embankment	46.3	1,301,000	15,000	1972

(SunWater, 2018)

3 QUEENSLAND COMPETITION AUTHORITY (QCA)

The CHCG&IA association thank the Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships for issuing a referral notice to the QCA to investigate pricing practices relating to the business activities of SunWater, the sole operators of water delivery in the Nogoa Mackenzie scheme area. We invite the QCA to work with the CHCG&IA throughout the investigation period and look forward to collaborating to achieve fair and equitable irrigation prices for the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2024.

4 SUBMISSION POINTS

4.1 DAM SAFETY PROGRAM COSTS

The CHCG&IA reject the cost of dam safety upgrades being apportioned to irrigators. SunWater are referring to this as the Dam Improvement Program, however the works do not lead to any improvements and the costs should not be considered as supplying water to customers.

The following comments relate to the paper - *Rural irrigation price review 2020–24: apportionment of dam safety upgrade costs*;

- i. CHCG&IA request that the QLD government direct the QCA to cease the investigation into apportioning the cost of dam safety upgrades immediately.
- ii. CHCG&IA request that the QLD government complete a full engagement regarding the dam safety upgrades, with relevant parties, including;

- a. All bulk water customers
 - b. Central Highlands Regional Council
 - c. Industry groups
 - d. Other users eg; recreation, tourism
 - e. Whole of Community
- iii. Dams provide benefits to communities through;
 - a. Flood mitigation – evidence available from the 2018 and 2012 flooding events.
 - b. Water security
 - c. Development opportunities
 - d. Recreation
 - e. Tourism
 - iv. Until the publication of the current referral notice and consequent paper, '*Rural irrigation price review 2020–24: apportionment of dam safety upgrade costs*', customers were under the assumption that the cost of dam safety was the responsibility of government. Irrigators have operated under this assumption and have made investment decisions based on this.
 - v. Irrigators are being asked to fund infrastructure to protect the assets of others, including the state (roads, bridges), by ensuring the dam wall meets the requirements based on population below the dam.
 - vi. It is noted, the population and development below the dam is only possible because of the dam.
 - vii. CHCG&IA are very concerned by the budget over-spends on the Fairbairn Dam project that will now fall in the next price path.
 - viii. Timelines on the Fairbairn Dam project have also been extended and if there is any rain event could be delayed even further

CHCG&IA submit that the dam safety program is a community benefit and we categorically reject covering the cost of these capital works.

5 CONCLUSION

The CHCG&IA thank the QCA for investigating and recommending water prices to ensure SunWater is able to deliver water services efficiently and cost effectively in to the future.