

# Cotton Australia: Current and Future Activities

MARCH 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2023

## Introduction

In the world of Cotton life is never dull and the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023 have certainly provided additional evidence of that with parts of the growing region coping well with the changing weather conditions and water profiles and others not able to plant cotton at all because the planting window closed before flood waters and conditions improved. The conditions have also been a factor in the high levels of spray drift reported with some regions reporting some level of damage to all their crops while others have emerged unscathed. Initially floods, then spray drift have robbed farmers of millions in potential income and our hearts go out to those impacted. There are some positive signs emerging however with yields still expected to be around 5 million bales and hopes that international demand may start picking up, particularly with China rumored to again be in the market for our cotton. I urge caution however, as there have been no official updates or changes reported. Cotton is already being picked in Central Queensland and very good yields are being reported with the good news not confined to Queensland growers. Once again innovation and improving knowledge are helping our farmers to achieve good results despite the challenges and that brings me to the Bayer Cotton Grower of the Year Awards. I encourage all growers to consider nominations in five categories. Visit [cottonaustralia.com.au/awards-nominations](http://cottonaustralia.com.au/awards-nominations) for your nomination form.

## Policy updates



## Water

### Murray-Darling Basin Plan

Murray Darling Basin plan politics and implementation are once again major issues, with the Federal Labor Government determined to implement "by the numbers". Key issues are whether the Basin Governments will extend the timelines and open up new applications for the 605GL Sustainable Diversion Limit Adjust Mechanism projects or stick with the 2024 deadline, and see projects under-deliver by approximately 300GI. If this occurs, the Federal Government can re-enter the market to acquire the shortfall. The other area of note is how hard the Federal government will go to acquire the 450GI of "Upwater". Currently this water can only be acquired through projects that meet a strict Social and Economic impact test and progress has been slow. Cotton Australia is working both independently and through NFF, National Irrigators Council, NSW Irrigators Council and valley-based groups to minimise the impact of the plan on our irrigators and communities, seeking solutions #Beyondbuybacks, and in particular calling on the Basin States to extend the timeline and open up for consideration of new projects for the SDLAM projects.

### Lower Bound Pricing Queensland

- While we are awaiting formal notification, we have been advised that from July 1, 2023 no Queensland Sunwater Rural customer will pay above Lower Bound pricing. This addresses a long running inequity (at least since 2012) where irrigators in some schemes were paying significantly above Lower Bound pricing while the formal Qld Govt policy was that rural water prices should be set at Lower Bound. This decision, while long overdue, will collectively represent millions of dollars' worth of savings for our irrigators. This matter was vigorously pursued by Cotton Australia, Queensland Farmers Federation and other members of QFF.

### Strategic Water Infrastructure Reserve Water

- Dawson Valley irrigators and Cotton Australia have been able to successful negotiate a second three-year lease round of the Dawson Valley Strategic Infrastructure Reserve water. This represents approximately 60,000 megalitres of additional access to water harvesting opportunities. The first three-year tranche which expired in September 22, saw boosted cotton production leading to record throughput at the Moura gin.

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## Stewardship

### Spray Drift

The 2022-23 season has seen a significant increase in the reports of spray drift damage onto cotton crops resulting from Group 4 herbicides.

A total of only 37 individual spray drift reports have been submitted to CA covering just under 40,000ha and equating to a loss of over \$50 million. However, the actual area impacted is much higher than this. (Please contact your RM to register if you have had drift) All cotton crops in the Macquarie, Gwydir and McIntyre have been impacted to some degree, and high proportions of crops in other valleys have also been impacted.

Cotton Australia has continued with its education, training and awareness campaign this season, including delivery of SataCrop, media (radio ads) and other extension and awareness activities. This season has highlighted that more needs to be done around the application of Group 4 herbicides as this level of damage is not sustainable and will result not only in significant financial implications for the cotton industry, but potentially threaten access to Group 4 herbicides all together.

Cotton Australia has been meeting with the state regulators (EPA, Biosecurity Queensland), the APVMA and other stakeholders including the grains industry to discuss potential mitigation options. The overall sense is that the regulators and grains industries may be supportive of some new regulations for the supply and application of Group 4 herbicides.

Cotton Australia has developed an options paper to circulate to CGAs for feedback to determine which options the industry is most supportive of pursuing. We would also welcome feedback from individual growers. Please email Michael Murray [michaelm@cotton.org.au](mailto:michaelm@cotton.org.au) or call him on 0427 707 868.

### WAND

The new spray hazard warning system called Weather and Networked Data (WAND) is having a positive impact for farmers across NSW and QLD with 72 of the towers now live. The towers provide near real-time weather data about the presence and absence of hazardous temperature inversions and is available to all growers and contractors free-of-charge at [www.wand.com.au](http://www.wand.com.au).

As of March 3 there were 1407 users with an average of 135 farmers per day logging on an average of 3.2 times for each user. All the towers are expected to be completed by the end of March.

## Sustainability Framework

### 4<sup>th</sup> Environmental Assessment

During the last quarter the cotton industry's fourth environmental assessment concluded. Conducted every 10 years to assess industry's progress and gauging future threats and opportunities, this assessment included farm visits in selected valleys with both myBMP and non-myBMP growers participating. It was complemented by various industry and external stakeholder interviews. Cotton Australia and CRDC are currently reviewing the Environmental Assessment project's recommendation with a view to formally responding in this coming quarter.

### Planet.People.Paddock

Work has continued on the implementation of Australian Cotton Industry's Sustainability framework PLANET.PEOPLE.PADDOCK with the second annual update being prepared. It is a summary of the actions, progress and trends for the 12 months to 30 June 2022 and these concise instalments compliment the comprehensive sustainability report provided every 5 years. The annual update will be released at the end of next quarter and what will be the Australian cotton industry's third sustainability report will be due in 2023/24.

### Native vegetation

Work to draft the biodiversity indicator for native vegetation in cotton landscapes commenced in this quarter. Grower-funded research tells us most growers want the industry to show leadership with clear achievable and measurable industry native vegetation targets to work towards. The approach acknowledges native vegetation and varies by region so the proposed targets will be science-based and aligned to the natural resource management priorities in your region. Cotton Australia and CRDC are canvassing this approach to CGAs now and into the next quarter for feedback.

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## myBMP update ✓

It has been a busy period for the myBMP team with another 50 growers registering for the program taking the total to 1086 growers, up from 1036 last reporting period. The number of audited farms has increased to 346 with others in the pipeline. There are 30 audits in progress and that includes 12 initial audits and 14 renewal audits. Better Cotton traded for the 2021-2022 season totaled 262,80 metric ton or 1.156m bales.

### New Auditor

- Bronwyn Christensen has been approved as a myBMP auditor. This places an auditor in an ideal location for conducting audits in the Dawson Valley, Central Queensland, and the Northern Territory. This brings the total number of auditors to six.

### On farm activities

- myBMP manager Rob Crothers travelled to the Macquarie region in late November 2022 to assist Regional Manager Craig Chandler to prepare several growers for a myBMP audit. Five new growers have since requested an audit.
- Two additional Stations in the Northern Territory have completed their myBMP self-assessment and have requested an Audit. If successful, this will bring the total number of stations myBMP certified in the NT to Three.
- A myBMP workshop and on farm visits are planned for the Northern Territory in March 2023.
- Three Kununurra growers in Western Australia became myBMP certified in December 2022.

### International Visitor

- Hollie Stringer who is a Sustainable Cotton Senior Coordinator at the Textile Exchange took time out of her busy schedule to visit four myBMP growers on the Darling Downs with Rob Crothers. The Textile exchange is a global not for profit, driving positive action on climate across the fashion and textile industry. They are becoming very influential and taking the time to meet some of our myBMP growers was very beneficial and helped Hollie understand our grower's level of commitment to the sustainable production of cotton. Hollie is based in Amsterdam.

## Cotton 2 Market Update

- Development of a Strategic Roadmap for Australian cotton has commenced, to better align industry needs with customer needs. Five key focus areas will be examined by the industry: traceability, myBMP/sustainably certified cotton, data, human rights and Australian cotton marketing
- 2022 end of year closed at 2,003,235 units of clothing and homewares carrying Australian cotton swing tags and/or labels. Overall current total of 39,898,767 units over 10 years.
- New brand partnerships continue to develop, including with Seed, The Iconic, Big W, Factorie and CERES Life
- Camp Cotton 2023 plans are underway with confirmation of 22 international delegates to date including brands, retailers, spinners, manufacturers, and NGOs. The event will be held from 2-5 May starting in Sydney and concluding with 2 days tour in the Narrabri region.
- The Australian Cotton Data dashboard project is complete, with the launch to stakeholders imminent. This is a world first for a cotton industry [www.cottondata.com.au](http://www.cottondata.com.au)
- A new "Let's Talk" EDM has been developed especially for brands, retailers and supply chain partners with strong engagement over the first three issues.

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## Communications update

### Media (releases, responses generated by CA)

#### Ongoing Media releases/reports/responses generated by Cotton Australia during the reporting period:

- Cotton Industry 2023 Award nominations open
- Cotton Circularity Project phase 2 (pending release)
- Active Farmers Games for Mental Health
- Free Trade Agreement with India
- China Cotton Ban – The Australian
- Cotton Australia and GPA on Spray Drift Action needed
- Government data proves cotton's value to local communities
- Cotton Jobs Australia relaunch
- Water efficiency for cotton growers
- Chemical use efficiencies examples Darling Downs
- Cotton exports increase to record levels
- Cotton crop update – significant crop expected 2023
- Cotton Industry forecasts reviewed due to weather conditions

### Digital

- Cotton Australia's debut podcast *From the Field - Season One* launched in May, as part of our efforts to rebuild trust in the industry. The podcast spanned five episodes and featured conversations with Aaron Kiely, Joe Briggs, Amanda Thomas, Alexandria Galea and Nigel Burnett around five core themes. The series was targeted at metropolitan listeners, and was distributed on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. As at 28/02/23 the series had attracted 1024 listeners.
- Spotify recorded 37% of downloads with Apple products 49%
- Cotton Australia's Newsroom initiative, where the team has created and positioned journalistic-style content about the industry for social media, has been enhanced. Recent stories of note have included: Grower of the Year 2022 Field Day, Cotton Water Efficiency, Growers reducing their use of chemicals.
- While Social Media activity has seen reduced activity because of the vacant digital communication manager role, a strong presence has been maintained through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

## Education update

### News

- **AgCareerSTART** is now in its second year with a goal to have 75 participants in employment across the nation. The good news is that funding has been extended to include a third year in 2024 with a further 75 places on offer. Currently there are 62 offers of employment, with a potential 15 of these working on cotton farms. A fantastic result that will go a long way to support new people into the workforce.
- **Wrapped in Cotton**, Cotton Australia's new fashion design & textile resources for the secondary classroom has been enhanced with Set Two launched this January, ready for teachers to implement the program during the year. We have already had some great feedback from the Set One that focused on the sustainability of the industry. Set Two's focus is on technology as it leads students to create a seamless design using Canva for their design process.
- **Careers in Agriculture Magazine** has been launched and accessed on the Career Harvest website.  
<https://www.careerharvest.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FINAL-QFFCareersInAgriculture.pdf>

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## Events

- The **Sydney Royal Easter Show** runs from 6<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> April and Cotton Australia will again instal a fully-staffed education exhibit in the all-new Ag Discovery Pavilion. We already have some volunteers from Sydney University but will be asking any growers or cotton industry supply chain workers to come along for a day or three to talk to the huge crowd of interested people that wander through this engaging, hands-on activation.
- **National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE)** Conference was held at Qld Uni in Toowoomba from 7-12 January 2023. Cotton Australia sponsored two teachers to attend, who are both new to agriculture. Tipperary Station School Principal Carla Clough and Bundaberg teacher Martin Van Der Merwe. Both Carla and Martin are super keen to immerse their students in all things cotton and will be great advocates for us in the teaching community. Jenny Hughes spent the week networking with the 120 teachers and industry. The conference was supported by Rabobank Client Council, including Southern Queensland Council Chairman Stuart Armitage, who also attended the first two days, along with Georgie Krieg who's led the cotton farm tours.
- **Moo Baa Munch** was held from 25-26 October at Downlands College in Toowoomba with Cotton Australia conducting a workshop for 620 primary and secondary students.
- **Youth Eco Summit (YES)** is a curriculum based 2-day learning expo that was held on 16-17 November at Sydney Olympic Park, attended by nearly 3000 primary school students enjoying a fun day out learning about sustainability which was the focus of our Food & Fibre workshop, looking at the carbon cycle and the importance of 'good bugs' as well as the use of technology to improve agricultural sustainability. PIEFA also attended the sessions.
- Cotton Australia's education team have accepted the invitation to present a rotating workshop at the **DPINSW Judging Day** to be held in Blaney on 10 March. This is a well-attended event that draws up to 300 senior agricultural students from NSW Central West schools.
- The **EXCITED 4 Careers in Agriculture** program is in its second year with our partners at Central Queensland University and planning is underway to again deliver this career focused workshop series in Southern NSW in May with more details to follow as they are locked in.
- Cotton Australia has just confirmed it will again sponsor the **EKKA's Natural Fibres competition**, along with exhibiting in the Agricultural Hall from 12-20 August.

## Other news



### • **Sundown Pastoral Keytah – 2022 Bayer Grower of the Year Field Day**

On Tuesday the 21<sup>st</sup> of March more than 220 people attended the Field Day hosted by the Bayer Grower of the Year for 2022, Sundown Pastoral's Keytah. Owners Danielle and David Statham, along with General Manager Cropping Nick Gillingham hosted the event which included many information sessions ranging from carbon and greenhouse gas emissions to soil health and traceability.

David Statham said it was an honour to host the event on the farm. "We wouldn't be where we are today without the benefits of a lot of farming families throughout the region. We're stronger together than what we are apart. We learned a lot from other people early on so I have no issue in sharing any information with any grower throughout the region or any cotton grower."

The event also provided a timely opportunity for Cotton Australia to launch the nominations process for the 2023 Cotton Industry Awards with the Chair of the Cotton Australia Board, Nigel Burnett, encouraging nominations from far and wide. "I encourage growers to come forward. I feel proud as a leader within the industry to see just how good these people are."

### **Farm Safety Training**

- The Federal Government National Farm Safety grant project as seen on Cotton Australia, via Bec Fing's House Paddock Training & Consulting delivered Farm Safety workshops to over 200 Qld and Western Australia cotton producers.

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## Dates for your diary

March 8, International Women's Day  
March 15, Field Day for the 2021 Bayer Grower of the Year Quigley Farms  
May 31/June 1, General Meeting Sydney  
August 2/3 Cotton Collective Toowoomba

The next Cotton Australia General Meeting and review of research projects is to be held in Sydney (Coogee) tentatively on May 31 and June 1, 2023. Cotton Australia's General Meetings bring representatives from across the industry together so the views of growers – via their nominated member representatives – can have direct input into the policies, strategic direction and operations of Cotton Australia. At the November meeting your CGA's representatives will be reviewing the research proposals that CRDC is proposing to invest in, using your research dollars. Direct involvement by growers in selecting and reviewing research proposals is a strength of the Australian Cotton Industry making all the more important for your nominated representatives to attend and represent your valley's point of view.

## Update from your Regional Manager – *NAME, REGION*

Headline

Text

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