



Media Statement

10th January 2019

Cotton Australia statement on fish deaths at Menindee

Statement attributable to Michael Murray, Cotton Australia General Manager:

“New South Wales is in the grips of a long and devastating drought. This drought is impacting all agricultural sectors, including the cotton industry where this season’s crop is forecast to be at least half of last season’s.

“On the Barwon-Darling, the impact on cotton production is even more devastating with zero hectares of cotton being grown in Bourke this season, down from 4,000 hectares the year before.

“Further upstream at Dirranbandi (home of Cubbie Cotton), just 300 hectares of cotton has been planted, which is 1% of what can be planted in a very good season.

“Cotton Australia is very proud of our industry that produces a quality fibre that is in demand both here at home and around the world; but as an industry we are growing very tired of being ‘the whipping boy’ for all the problems that are being brought on by this crippling drought.

“The recent fish deaths in the Barwon-Darling river system at Menindee was a devastating sight. However, it is wrong to blame cotton growers for this incident.

“About 18 months ago, 2,000 gigalitres of water was in the Menindee Lakes before the Murray-Darling Basin Authority took the deliberate decision to accelerate releases from Menindee to meet downstream requirements and reduce overall evaporation losses from the Lakes.

“In hindsight, this was probably a poor decision, but it does highlight the incredibly difficult task of managing flows in a manner that minimise losses, but ensures enough water is available for communities and the environment during extended severe droughts.

“Since July 1st 2017, irrigators have extracted just 16 gigalitres out of the Barwon-Darling -- an amount that would have evaporated out of Menindee in just 16 days.

“Coupled with the extensive drought and the simple fact there has been little-to-no rain, the release of water from the lakes has exacerbated the conditions leading to these fish deaths.

“What this issue highlights is how difficult the management of the Menindee Lakes is. We welcome the investigation into the fish deaths by the NSW Department of Primary Industries and WaterNSW.”

Cotton Australia is the peak representative body for Australia's cotton growing industry.

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Note: This media statement was edited after publication. The updated figure of cotton being grown in Bourke this year is zero hectares not 500 hectares as was initially stated.