



Media Release

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## **Move to ban cotton exports a dangerous political stunt that attacks regional Australia**

*Statement attributable to Cotton Australia CEO, Adam Kay:*

The announcement today by the Centre Alliance that they will introduce legislation to ban the export of cotton is not only an attack on our industry, but a reckless attack on rural communities and hardworking Australian farmers. We thoroughly condemn this move and call on the Federal Government and Labor to stand up for our farmers and denounce this outrageous assault on our industry.

Let's call this announcement for what it: a dangerous political stunt.

Once again we are seeing some politicians, mainly those from South Australia where no cotton is grown, kick our hardworking growers in an attempt to score easy political points. These farmers are enduring one of the toughest droughts in our nation's history and do not deserve to be targeted so unfairly. It must stop.

Allow me to address some of the comments from the Centre Alliance politicians in their attack on our industry and hardworking rural communities:

- The growing and exporting of cotton in Australia is in the national interest.

Australia is at its strongest when our communities, both metropolitan and regional, are thriving. The Australian cotton industry does more than just provide work and income for farmers. In a non-drought year, the industry provides employment for up to 10,000 people. That means people in towns across our cotton growing valleys have jobs, businesses are thriving, and communities are strong.

Cotton represents between 30% and 60% of the gross value of the agricultural production in regions where it is grown.

- Exporting cotton is not like ‘exporting water’ as has been stated.

This ridiculous claim blinkers itself to the fact that most agricultural exports in Australia use water in some way. To ban the export of cotton based on its water use would set a dangerous precedent for the fate of other agricultural industries that use water.

It must be pointed out that, based on hectares, over 50 per cent of this year’s cotton crop is either dryland cotton or is being grown outside the Murray-Darling Basin.

- Cotton is a water efficient crop, not a ‘thirsty’ crop.

This idea that if the cotton industry was restricted, or banned, more water will be saved for the environment is ludicrous and represents a lack of understanding of water licensing. Banning cotton would not see any extra water returned to the environment, as the water has been allocated to the irrigator’s licence. Cotton is the crop of choice as it gives growers the best return per megalitre of water. Other summer crops, like corn and soybeans, use similar amounts of water per hectare. Cotton is an annual crop that is only grown when sufficient water is available. If cotton was to be banned in Australia, farmers would use their water to grow the next most profitable crop.

- The South Australian Royal Commissioner commended our industry.

The Centre Alliance politicians say the South Australian Royal Commission into the Murray-Darling Basin provided an ‘authoritative assessment’ of the state of the Basin. We acknowledge the Commissioner made recommendations about changing the regulation and administration of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan that we don’t agree with; but it must be noted that this ‘authoritative assessment’ also commended the Australian cotton industry. To quote one of the Commissioner’s references to cotton: “The rhetoric around ‘thirsty crops’ (and ‘greedy farmers’) hovers in the background. This attitude should be rejected.” The Commissioner also said: “Nothing in this report should be understood, let alone feared, as a voice against the continued enterprise of our already top notch irrigation farmers”.

These politicians who wish to blinker themselves to facts about our industry cannot in one breath use the Royal Commission as the ‘authoritative assessment’ that supports their argument, then, in the next breath, completely ignore the Commissioner’s positive findings about our industry.

We condemn today’s dangerous political stunt attacking Australian cotton and rural Australian communities.

Our industry will not be dictated to by some point-scoring politicians disguising their vendetta against our industry as being in the ‘national interest’.

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

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