

# Trust In The Future

**Annual Report**  
2020-21



**COTTON  
AUSTRALIA**

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# Chairman's Report



Hamish McIntyre  
Chairman,  
Cotton Australia

## For us all, 2020 was one like no other.

When the tentacles of the COVID-19 pandemic began reaching across Australia in February and March 2020, it came as an added challenge for many in our Australian cotton industry.

The years-long, crippling drought continued, and the addition of the pandemic was another force outside our control that compromised our way of life.

But as our industry does when tough times strike, we pulled together and used our inherent strength and resilience to find a way through the challenges to survive.

The production figures for the past year paint a vivid picture of just how challenging the drought was, but also, how we are beginning to bounce back. In 2019/20, we recorded our smallest crop on record with 589,656 bales produced, compared to the 2020/21 season's estimated crop size of 2,621,810 bales.

Despite the challenges, I am pleased to report that Cotton Australia has recorded a number of significant achievements over the past year to work towards achieving the goals of our 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, which aims to ensure our industry is valued, viable and advanced.

While the pandemic forced us to re-prioritise our work in line with what was practical and COVID-safe, our team continued its efforts to rebuild trust in our industry. Our strategic engagement with the media and the sharing of our industry's story through key metropolitan outlets was significant and yielded positive outcomes, as did our enhanced digital storytelling.

Our team also found new ways to engage with stakeholders, such as politicians, on behalf of our industry, through COVID-safe video calls and virtual meetings.

In the water policy space, our team advocated effectively to key stakeholders and decision makers, including new federal Water Minister, Keith Pitt, and new Murray-Darling Basin Authority Chair, Sir Angus Houston. I am pleased to report our team also successfully put forward the views of growers through parliamentary submissions and by being active members of our affiliate organisations.

Regarding international markets, our industry was disappointed this year to learn of apparent changes to export arrangements with China. In October, it became clear to our industry that the Chinese Government had been discouraging their country's spinning mills from using Australian cotton. Our industry worked with the Australian Government to investigate the situation and fully understand what was going on. These changes for Australian cotton exports to China are disappointing, particularly after we have enjoyed such a mutually beneficial relationship with the country over many years. Despite these changes to our industry's export conditions, we know Australian cotton will find a home in the international market.

On stewardship, our team successfully ensured spray drift incidents were mitigated by activating an extensive spray best practice awareness campaign. I was pleased there was significant uptake of the Satacrop field mapping program by growers, which highlighted how important transparency and information sharing is in addressing this issue.

In the education space, I am pleased to report significant steps have been taken to deepen our connections with educators and upgrade our classroom resources.

This work will ensure teachers and students have the latest and most engaging information about Australian cotton, and will help improve understanding of our industry and cotton's place in Australian agriculture.

Our industry's best practices program, *myBMP* continued to yield positive results this past year, with continued uptake in the program from growers and an increase in the number of *myBMP*-certified farms in the industry.

I want to thank all of Cotton Australia's levy payers who have contributed financially to the operations of the organisation over the past year. Without your support, our organisation's achievements on behalf of the industry would not be possible.

Thank you too to those growers who served their respective Cotton Grower Associations as member representatives. The time you took to engage with Cotton Australia, attend our virtual meetings and events, and provide insight and feedback to us was invaluable.

Our organisation's financial statement can be found at the end of this Annual Report, which illustrates that we remain in a strong financial position. Consequently, the Cotton Australia Board has decided to retain the voluntary levy fee at \$1.50 per bale for the coming season – unchanged on last year.

I would like to thank my fellow Board members, Deputy Chair Nigel Burnett, our CEO Adam Kay, and Cotton Australia's staff for their efforts throughout the past year, and throughout my tenure as Chairman.

My time in the role has presented unique challenges, including: our industry being unfairly blamed for mass fish deaths, political gameplaying at the expense of our industry, a proposed Bill to ban cotton exports, a record drought, a global pandemic, and significant changes to export arrangements with China. I was proud to play a key role leading the industry through these challenges, and I thank my colleagues for their support and work during this time.

I join you in hoping we return to normality, and that our cotton industry, environment, and communities will continue to bounce back from drought.

Thank you once again for your commitment to our industry and your support, and I wish you all the best for the coming year.

Hamish McIntyre  
Chairman, Cotton Australia

# CEO's Report



**Adam Kay**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Cotton Australia

Over the past year, the Cotton Australia team has remained focussed on serving our growers and achieving the objectives of our Strategic Plan: an Australian cotton industry that is valued, viable and advanced.

I am proud of our team and their work to support our growers and industry, particularly when COVID-19 forced some of the team to shift the way they worked to meet government regulations and to ensure we remained safe. In all my thirty-plus years in the cotton industry, I've never seen one like the past 12 months. In some ways, the COVID 19 pandemic made little difference to the industry and our rural areas were thankfully largely unaffected. In other areas, it posed significant challenges to our supply chains and our stakeholders. Thankfully, we saw the end of the drought in many areas and the industry began to recover and rebuild over the past year.

Our team adapted to the changing situation, and whether it was video calls with politicians and stakeholders, online events, enhanced digital content, or the production of fresh education resources, we found ways to complete valuable and effective work that advocated for our industry.

I thank our team for their commitment and dedication during such trying times, and for the way they embraced new challenges and succeeded in overcoming them. I also thank our growers for their understanding and support of Cotton Australia as we made some necessary changes to the way we traditionally delivered value to the industry.

Our team has continued to achieve significant and meaningful results for our industry this past year, and I am proud to share the highlights with you in this report.

Cotton Australia's policy team continued its work advocating for our industry to politicians, decision makers, opinion leaders and stakeholders, particularly around our key policy areas of water, stewardship, sustainability, and workforce. The team also used its strong relationships with all sides of politics during and after the Queensland election to ensure industry perspectives were shared with key politicians and their staff. Our interaction with NGOs around our sustainability targets was a valuable exercise and led to shared understandings on key issues.

Our communication and education team continued its priority work with the Rebuilding Trust Strategy, and found new, pandemic-safe ways of sharing our story with Australians, particularly those in cities, as well as engaging with media, teachers, students, and other stakeholders.

I was proud to see the launch of AgSkilled 2.0, the second iteration of the successful workforce training program for New South Wales growers, a partnership with the state government, Cotton Australia, and other agriculture industry groups. We continue to strongly advocate for a similar training program for Queensland growers and are hopeful of success.

The Australian cotton industry's best practices program, myBMP, continued to kick goals this past year, with an increase in growers both registering and attaining certification, highlighting its effectiveness in helping our industry operate at the highest possible level. It was also good to see many of the certified growers rewarded for their efforts with premiums for their cotton last season. Similarly, the support provided to our growers by Cotton Australia's regional managers continued to ensure important industry information was communicated effectively and assistance with myBMP was always on hand.

As our industry's sustainability journey continued, the wider appetite from brands and retailers for sustainably produced cotton continued to grow. I welcomed the achievements our Cotton to Market team made in building positive connections with brands to help them source sustainably produced Australian cotton for their products. With China's soft ban on Australian cotton continuing, this work in the supply chain to drive demand for our product becomes even more important. We will continue to work with the Federal Government on trade issues and market diversification strategies.

Our team has done its best to advocate for our industry at a time of uncertainty and has adapted to meet the global challenges. I am proud to present this Annual Report, showcasing Cotton Australia's key achievements over the past year, and I join you in looking forward to a return to normality in a post-COVID world, hopefully very soon.

I wish you all the best for the coming season, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure Australia's cotton industry remains valued, viable and advanced, now and into the future.

*Adam Kay*

**Adam Kay**  
Chief Executive Officer, Cotton Australia

# ABOUT COTTON AUSTRALIA



Cotton Australia is the peak body for Australia's cotton growers, representing up to 1,500 cotton farming families in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, and a developing industry in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The organisation strives to foster a world-class agricultural industry that is sustainable, valued for its economic and social contributions, and its production of very high-quality cotton, in demand around the world.

Cotton Australia exists for its growers. Its resources, human and financial, are directed to initiatives and programs that benefit cotton producers directly and indirectly.

For well over 40 years, Cotton Australia has grown alongside an industry that demands the highest standards, and during that time, has delivered a series of sustained wins for its growers.

Cotton Australia was established in 1972 (as the Australian Cotton Foundation) and in 2009 merged with the Australian Cotton Growers Research Association (also established in 1972). Led by a Board of up to 10 mostly cotton growers, the organisation is funded by a voluntary levy paid by growers on each bale of cotton produced.

Cotton Australia provides a united voice for cotton growers across research and development, stewardship, natural resource management, biosecurity, and cotton production issues such as water. This is achieved through policy and advocacy, education, communication and grower services.

Cotton Australia has offices in Sydney, Narrabri, Toowoomba and Brisbane, and field staff based in most cotton production regions. The activities of the Board and Staff are directed by an Annual Operating Plan, underpinned by the organisation's 2018-23 Strategic Plan that sets out priorities and core areas of business.

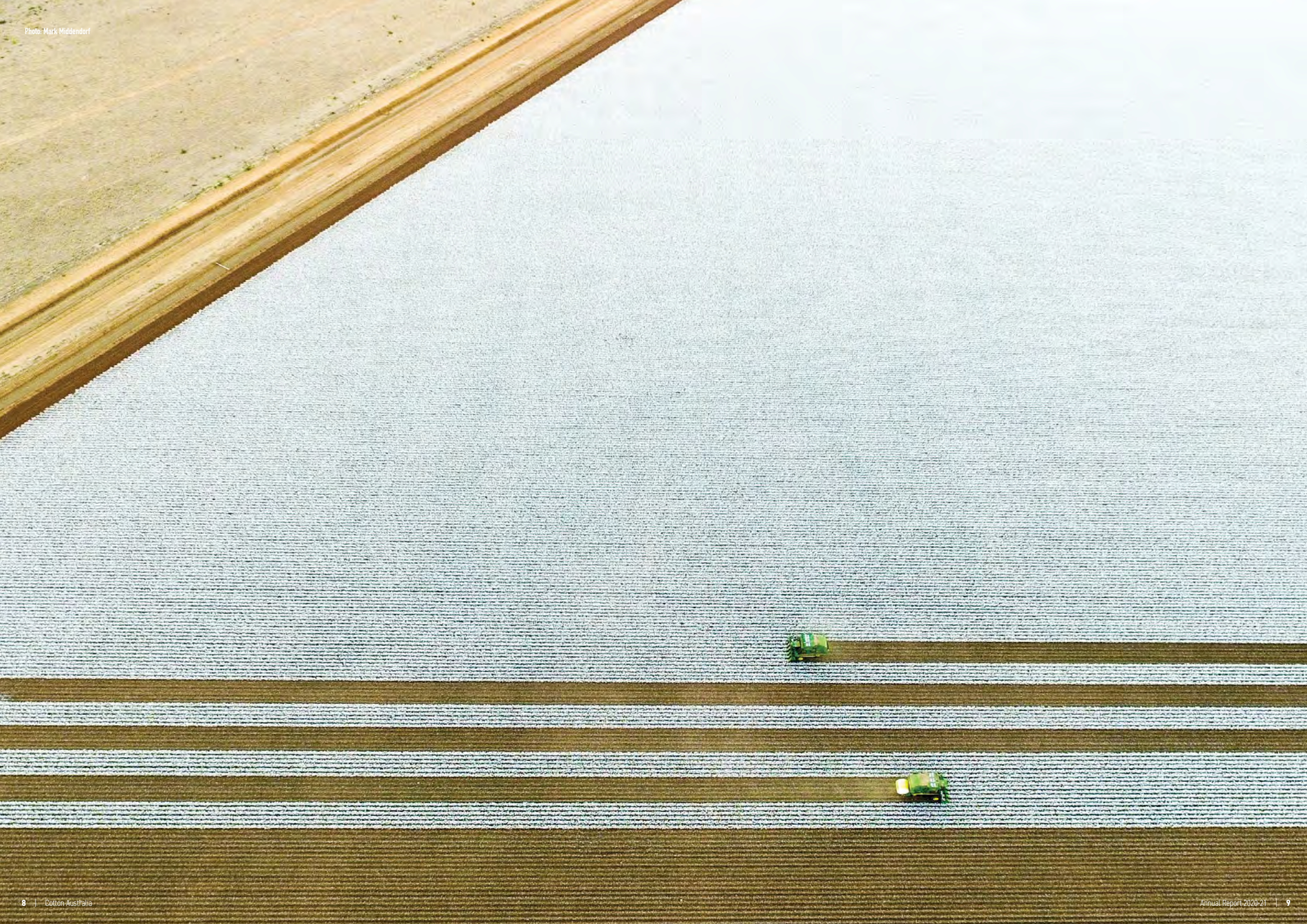
Cotton Australia is a member of, and works in partnership with, key partners to align messages and coordinate efforts. We work with affiliate organisations including the National Farmers' Federation, National Irrigators' Council, Queensland Farmers' Federation, NSW Irrigators' Council, cotton grower associations, Cotton Seed Distributors, the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, CottonInfo and a number of valley-based organisations that all contribute to supporting our industry.

## THANK YOU TO OUR LEVY PAYERS

Cotton Australia's success and effectiveness is only possible with the support of you, our levy payers.

We want to thank all those growers who contributed the full Cotton Australia levy for the 2019-20 year. It is for you that we do what we do.





# Rebuilding Trust Strategy

Transparently sharing our industry's story to ensure a strong future.

- + Face-to-face events turn digital due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- + New online audiences discover Aussie cotton.
- + Engagement continues in a COVID-safe manner.



Cotton Australia meeting with Queensland Government Minister Anthony Lynham.

## Cotton Australia's Rebuilding Trust Strategy continued to be a central area of work for the entire organisation over the past year.

While the industry enjoyed a relative reprieve from the media spotlight in 2020, Cotton Australia used this period to continue its proactive work to share the industry's story with all Australians, engage with stakeholders, enhance industry capacity, and build support.

### The objectives of the strategy are to:

- + Improve the reputation and social licence of Australian cotton.
- + Restore trust in Australian cotton.
- + Broaden support for Australian cotton.

The initiatives in the strategy are broad ranging, and over this past year, Cotton Australia, spearheaded by its communications team and with the involvement of growers, achieved many successes in continuing to implement the strategy. Below are some of the key achievements and activities we have undertaken to help rebuild trust in our industry.

## Events

Just prior to Australia entering into its COVID-19 lockdown, Cotton Australia staged its first Cotton Open House stakeholder engagement event in Sydney. The event brought together a diverse range of stakeholders – supporters and opponents of the industry – for a successful day of conversational information sessions about Australian cotton.

At the time of writing, Cotton Australia was in the process of organising a similar event to be held for stakeholders in Brisbane in June 2021.

Other events over the year that would have been staged face-to-face, such as Camp Cotton, Teach the Teacher, and Cotton Community Catchups, were held virtually where possible, or postponed to 2021.

## Digital

Cotton Australia continued its work in 2020 to enhance its digital content that shared the industry's story with new and metropolitan audiences.

As part of this, engaging stories, videos and photos were produced to inform city and rural residents, with a highlight being a series of grower profiles that conveyed the industry's strong community and family farming roots.

A targeted social media advertising campaign helped ensure Cotton Australia's content reached more people than ever before, particularly in metropolitan areas; and the creation of Cotton Australia's Instagram account (@auscotton) ensured industry images and information reached people and influencers that favour the photo-based platform.



Grower Nick Beer featured in an online article.



Constructive conversations took place at Cotton Open House 2020.

## Engagement

Throughout the past year, Cotton Australia engaged with politicians and staffers from all sides and levels of politics.

Through face-to-face virtual meetings and continued dialogue, Cotton Australia advocated for our industry to ensure political stakeholders knew the truth about Australian cotton and were informed about our important work being undertaken around sustainability, water use efficiency and stewardship.

Proactive engagement with journalists was also a priority for our communications team, with a focus on liaising with reporters about developments in the Australian cotton industry and pitching stories about the significant and positive work underway by our growers and researchers.

Another focus of our work over the past year was to regularly engage with schools, to ensure teachers and students were informed of our industry and were provided with resources and materials to support the growth of knowledge around Australian cotton.

Other industry organisations, including CRDC, CottonInfo, Cotton Seed Distributors, Australian Cotton Shippers Association, and the Association of Australian Cotton Scientists, were also engaged with regularly and played key roles in continuing the implementation of the Rebuilding Trust Strategy. We thank all of the organisations and individuals that have supported our strategy to build trust in Australian cotton.

## Projects

During 2020, Cotton Australia and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) supported a partnership between iconic Australian brands Country Road and Landcare Australia to improve biodiversity on cotton farms, starting with the Namoi Valley of New South Wales.

Funded by a corporate contribution and money raised via the sale of its famous Verified Australian Cotton Heritage Sweats, Country Road committed a minimum \$600,000 to the partnership over three years. To read more, visit the 'Cotton to Market' section of this annual report.

Knowing there was significant public appetite for information about the products and uses of Australian cotton, in mid-2020, Cotton Australia produced and released a set of new resources on that topic. A video, an infographic and an educational challenge activity were produced to engage students and the public about Australian cotton products.

## > WHERE TO FROM HERE

The implementation of the industry's Rebuilding Trust Strategy will be a multi-year process.

As such, the coming year will see Cotton Australia continue to work with our growers and industry affiliates to ramp-up communication of the Australian cotton story, to ensure as many people as possible know about our processes, achievements, challenges, and commitment to sustainability, efficiency, and stewardship. We will continue to look for fresh ways to adapt the Rebuilding Trust Strategy to ensure we are meeting people where they are and remain transparent and informative about Australian cotton.

Cotton Australia was pleased to collaborate with the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) over the past year around the Community Trust in Rural Industries project. The project is investigating levels of trust in agricultural sectors, with cotton being a case study. Cotton Australia thanks CRDC for consulting with our organisation during this project, and we look forward to working with CRDC to use the study's findings to inform our future strategic decisions around rebuilding trust, and guide fresh activities to support our industry.

# Water

Advocating around water policy issues, including regulation, allocation, and metering, continued to be a primary policy focus for Cotton Australia over the past year.

While the effects of drought continued to be felt in many cotton growing valleys over most of the year, good rain also fell, triggering floods across parched landscapes.

In the water policy space, ensuring the continued implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan remained a core focus of our advocacy work, as was expressing our industry's views on changes to floodplain harvesting regulations in New South Wales.

Detailed below are some of the key developments around water policy from the past year, and a summary of Cotton Australia's achievements on behalf of our growers.

## Water politics

Over the past year, the implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan continued; however, there were no additional federal government buybacks of water, and very limited activity in water efficiency projects aimed at recovering water entitlement.

Keith Pitt became Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia in February 2020, but due to COVID-19 restrictions, he had very little opportunity to travel through the Basin during the year.

Despite this, Cotton Australia continued to engage with the Minister on behalf of our growers, meeting with Minister Pitt twice during the year - once in person in Brisbane, and once virtually. We expressed to Minister Pitt the need to complete the implementation of the Basin Plan in a manner that minimises social and economic impacts, while advocating for a much greater emphasis for a much greater emphasis to be placed on complementary measures to leverage greater environmental outcomes from the use of environmental water. We were encouraged by Minister Pitt's confirmation that federal government policy is to not recover any more water from irrigators.

During 2020, Cotton Australia prepared submissions for a number of federal water inquiries, including the Multi-jurisdictional Inquiry Into The Management of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, and the ACCC Water Markets Inquiry. These submissions can be read on Cotton Australia's website. We also provided significant feedback to the Bureau of Meteorology on how it should present water data on its upgraded water website.

Cotton Australia met virtually with the new Chair of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, Sir Angus Houston. We advocated to Sir Angus our industry's position on the Basin Plan, including support for enhanced complementary measures.

## Rain eases drought, but water policy challenges remain.

- + Engagement with key stakeholders around water a priority over the past year.
- + Advocating for high levels of metering compliance a core effort.
- + Floodplain harvesting law changes in NSW an area of focus.



## New South Wales

Over the past year, New South Wales has embarked on a series of policy developments that have impacted on our industry.

Regarding metering and telemetry, the requirement to have all pumps measuring greater than 500mm fitted with a compliant meter and telemetry device by December 1st 2020 remained in place, despite concerns about availability and the suitability of telemetry equipment. Challenges around supply of telemetry devices had to be navigated, primarily due to the very late approval of devices by the NSW Government and the commercial limitations of having enough devices available to have all sites completed in time. The reality is that, at the time of writing, a significant number of entitlement holders were technically in breach, despite their best efforts to be compliant, and the challenge will continue into the next year.

Changes to floodplain harvesting, shifting to a volumetric licensing arrangement, was another key development over the year. The parliamentary process saw a disallowance motion put in place around exemptions to floodplain harvesting, leading to legal ambiguity on the issue.

At the time of writing, both of these ambitious NSW Government initiatives had progressed a long way, but significant challenges remain.

Cotton Australia worked closely with the following valley-based groups in NSW – Lachlan Valley Water, Macquarie River Food and Fibre, Namoi Water, Gwydir Valley Irrigators' Association, Border Rivers Food and Fibre, and Barwon-Darling Water.

We supported these groups as they navigated the challenges of implementing New South Wales' metering and telemetry policy, and the volumetric licencing of floodplain harvesting.

Cotton Australia congratulates these key valley groups and NSW Irrigators' Council for their invaluable work in this area.

*Footnote: In May 2021, the NSW Parliament disallowed three critical regulations that would have enabled the volumetric licencing of floodplain harvesting and the measurement of its take. This meant again, a return to a high degree of uncertainty in this critical area.*

## Queensland

Over the past year in Queensland, a core focus was on the Queensland Government's metering policy, with the aim of enhancing metering of water in the state. While there were no significant developments per se, Cotton Australia continued to advocate our position for a high level of metering compliance, in particular within the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Cotton Australia hosted a workshop in Dalby in September, which involved the key Queensland Murray-Darling Basin irrigator groups, to ensure consistency in policy. Speakers and guests attended from across the federal and Queensland governments, and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority. Key discussion items at the forum included the roll-out of enhanced metering and measurement in the Queensland part of the Murray-Darling Basin, the management of overland flow, complementary measures, and the ACCC Water Market Review.

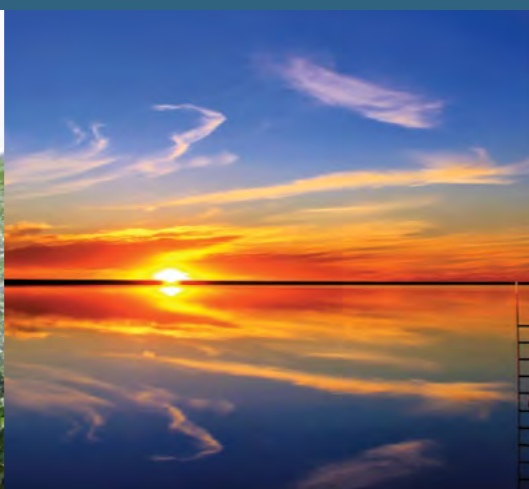


Water Minister Keith Pitt with Cotton Australia's Michael Murray.

## Our thanks

Cotton Australia worked closely with a range of other irrigation groups to affect positive change this past year. We were active members of the National Irrigators' Council, the National Farmers' Federation's Water Taskforce, Queensland Farmers' Federation, and NSW Irrigators' Council, and we also worked closely with a large number of valley-based irrigation groups across our growing regions.

We thank all of the above groups, along with the individuals, local governments and community groups that recognise the importance of irrigated agriculture, and who advocate on behalf of their industry and communities.





# Drought & Floods

A season of drought and flooding rains brings pain and hope.

- + Drought lingered for much of 2020 in cotton growing regions.
- + Floods in March 2021 saw rivers flow and dams fill.
- + Next season's crop forecast improves.

Throughout the past year, cotton growing communities have been tested by the ongoing challenges of drought, and then floods.

## Drought

The year started with residual good flows through the Lower Condamine-Balonne system in Queensland and the main streams of the Barwon-Darling. This provided growers in these regions reason to be optimistic after years of drought.

Across the remaining cotton growing areas, there was little widespread relief, with the exception of the Southern Valleys in New South Wales, where irrigation entitlements started to grow in July, and steadily increased over the following months.

This improving trend around water entitlements spread to most other cotton growing areas, except in Queensland's Central Highlands, where both Fairbairn Dam, and on-farm dams remained low at the time of writing this report.

The NSW Government provided support to those in the state affected by the natural disaster through fixed water charges (up to \$4,000). In Queensland, the main support provided to cotton growers was through the ongoing rebate for fixed electricity charges.

## Floods

A significant, widespread rainfall event occurred in March 2021 across much of New South Wales and southern Queensland, bringing with it a change in fortune for drought-affected environments, rural communities, and growers.

The rain and subsequent floods got most rivers flowing, and there was significant inflows into government and private storages.

However, for a small number of growers, particularly around the Texas region in northern NSW and southern Queensland, the floods brought devastation and, in a number of cases, complete crop loss.

The floods once again highlighted to the cotton community that while rain is the lifeblood of our industry, flooding events can cause significant hardship for impacted growers.

Cotton Australia recognised and welcomed the disaster assistance that was made available to impacted producers on both sides of the border, in the form of grants and loans.

Cotton Australia notes at the time of writing, the Queensland Government had made disaster assistance loans available, but was still considering disaster assistance grants. Cotton Australia acknowledges and thanks Queensland Agriculture Minister Mark Furner for taking the time to meet with affected growers in the Texas region.

## > WHERE TO FROM HERE

While the rain and floods have returned water to an exceptionally dry landscape, the environment, communities, and growers will continue the recovery process from the devastating drought over the coming months.

The significant rainfall has seen dams fill with more water than they have had in years, and seen the rivers flow again.

The increased availability of water means the Australian cotton industry's crop forecast for the 2021-2022 season has significantly improved. At time of writing, a crop of approximately four-million bales was forecast, depending on seasonal conditions and water allocations over the coming months.

*Disaster assistance grants were made available in late April by the Federal and Queensland Governments.*



# Research Direction & Stewardship

## Strengthening our industry through comprehensive biosecurity policies and informing innovative research.

- + Growers provide research priority advice through COVID-safe forums.
- + Biosecurity work ensures industry readiness for potential biosecurity threats.
- + Mice plague prompts swift response to protect cotton.

In a year when science and research into bio threats was at the forefront of global attention, work to protect Australia's cotton industry from disease and pest incursions continued during 2020/21. Our team played a key role in this work, advocating on behalf of growers for effective, best practice responses to biosecurity threats and helping manage issues of importance in this space.

Throughout 2020/21, Cotton Australia worked to ensure our growers' voices were heard in the guiding of research priorities for our industry. Through our facilitation, our farmers voiced their views and opinions on the industry's research needs – research that will help guide the Australian cotton industry into an even brighter future.

### Research priorities

Cotton Australia played a key role on behalf of our growers this past year in shaping our industry's research priorities and direction (in line with Cotton Australia's Representative Organisation status under the PIRD Act 1989).

In April 2020, the Grower Research Priority Survey was conducted to provide the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) guidance from growers around research investment.

The Cotton Australia-coordinated forum to discuss the research priorities was held virtually in May, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restricting movement. The November forum was held face-to-face in hubs at Griffith, Narrabri, Dalby and Moura. A review of the research proposals was held during the November forum, and feedback was provided to CRDC on the potential investment opportunities.

It was positive for more growers to be involved in the feedback process to guide research investment.

Over the coming year, Cotton Australia will improve the process for obtaining grower feedback on research investment. This will likely involve more coordinated workshops and grower discussions within all regions. Progress will also be made around including northern Australia in the process, to identify the research needs of those growers in a tropical environment, which will support the continued growth of the industry.

## Biosecurity

Over the past year, Cotton Australia coordinated industry efforts on the identification, diagnosis, and management of new disease Reoccurring Wilt. Our team brought value to growers by facilitating a review of biosecurity practices throughout this incident, to determine areas for improvement and the implementation of a plan featuring key learnings.

### Other areas of focus during 2020/21:

- + As part of Cotton Australia's function on the Consultative Committee Emergency Plant Pests (CCEPP), we played a key function in responding to incursions of khapra beetle.
- + Cotton Australia collaborated on the Tropical Plant Industries Biosecurity Surveillance Strategy, which is aimed at improving biosecurity surveillance and coordination in northern Australia.
- + Over the past year, Cotton Australia worked with the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) to develop its biosecurity policy, which was aimed at ensuring a robust and well-resourced biosecurity system.
- + Cotton Australia obtained permits for key insecticides to control Fall Armyworm in cotton following an incursion in early 2020.
- + Cotton Australia conducted a review of the cotton industry's High Priority Pest (HPP) list. This involved reviewing the status of high priority pests and identifying gaps in knowledge. The process also included representatives of northern Australian growing regions, to ensure the HPP list reflected the risk of incursions across all growing areas.
- + A review was conducted of the industry's biosecurity policy for the transportation of cotton modules from The Ord region of Western Australia and the Northern Territory into Queensland for ginning.

Over the coming year, Cotton Australia will work with the National Farmers' Federation to implement key points in its biosecurity policy, to ensure a well-funded system. Cotton Australia will continue to revise and amend the industry's High Priority Pest list, to improve preparedness in the event of a biosecurity incursion.

## TIMS Committee

The TIMS Committee continued to work with technology providers and the regulator, the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) this past year, to advocate for a stewardship package that adequately manages the risk of dicamba application in cotton, and includes mandatory applicator training and mitigation tactics.

The TIMS Committee remains concerned about the risk presented by dicamba use in cotton. TIMS is not supportive of the introduction of XtendFlex technology unless the risks of unintended off-target spray drift damage can be adequately managed.

During 2020/21, a working group was established in Central Queensland to facilitate an industry discussion around how the Bollgard®3 Resistance Management Plan (RMP) may enable future flexibility in farming systems, while still adequately managing Bt resistance risk.

In the year ahead, TIMS will continue to work closely with the technology provider to annually review resistance data and RMP compliance. This will include providing feedback on issues such as planting window extensions and research trial permits. The research permit approval process had been modified to ensure the applicant demonstrated an understanding of the likely impacts of resistance management and potential mitigation tactics that may be required.

During the past year, TIMS responded to a review of the Australian biotechnology regulatory system, and advocated for the continued need for an independent regulatory body to oversee biotechnology regulation, while enabling future innovation in this space.

Over the coming year, innovative farming systems will continue to be a focus for TIMS in different ways, particularly with the expansion of cotton into new climatic regions. The challenge of mitigating risk through the RMP while enabling innovation will continue. The TIMS Committee will continue to reiterate and communicate with industry the core principles of the RMP in managing resistance in helicoverpa, to protect the longevity of the biotechnology that is vital to the future success of the Australian cotton industry.

## Pesticides

Over the summer of 2020/21, a mice plague broke out across many cropping regions in southern Queensland and New South Wales.

With millions of mice running rampant through fields of summer crops, including cotton, Cotton Australia worked to support growers in managing the issue.

Cotton Australia obtained an emergency-use permit for the use of zinc phosphide in cotton crops to control mice. This step provided great assistance to growers, but, at the time of writing, the mice plague continued to cause issues for farmers.

Over the past year, Cotton Australia responded to the Independent Chemicals Regulatory System Review by advocating for a nationally consistent approach in pesticide access, use and licencing, as well as maintaining a risk base and scientific approach in regulation.

Over the year ahead, Cotton Australia will add value to growers in this space by continuing to advocate for access to safe and appropriate pesticides to maintain and improve productivity. As part of this process, a gap analysis of pesticide access in tropical growing regions will also be conducted.



# Sustainability

## Ensuring our industry's strong future through ambitious sustainability targets.

- + The Australian cotton industry's second sustainability report released.
- + Consultation with stakeholders on sustainability a priority of the Australian cotton industry.
- + Work continuing to set sustainability targets.



## For more than 30 years, the Australian cotton industry has progressively worked towards best practice outcomes, with a priority on its sustainability credentials.

A core focus of this work has been actively running efficient cotton farms that generate significant environmental, economic, and social value for rural communities, and Australia as a whole.

In 2014, the boards of Cotton Australia and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation commissioned the Australian cotton industry's first Sustainability Report. The boards also committed to report on sustainability every five years thereafter.

The first report's themes were determined by growers, and a cross-industry Sustainability Working Group (SWG) was established to oversee the process.

In May 2020, the next step in this commitment was taken, with the launch of the Australian cotton industry's second Sustainability Report. This second Sustainability Report has been able to showcase the industry's sustainability trends over the five-year reporting period.

For example, since 1992, producing a bale of irrigated cotton now takes:

- + 48% less water
- + 34% less land
- + 97% less insecticides

The second Sustainability Report also showed the industry was doing some things well, but can improve in some other areas. For example, over the last sustainability reporting period:

- + **Water:** there was a long-term decrease in the volume of water used to grow a bale of cotton.
- + **Carbon:** carbon emissions increased, mainly from increased nitrogen fertiliser use. The amount of carbon stored on farms is not currently measured.
- + **Biodiversity:** the area of land managed for conservation declined slightly or remained steady.
- + **Pesticides:** the amount of toxic pressure on human health and the environment from pesticides continued to decrease. Work to reduce the hazard and volume of pesticides is ongoing.
- + **Efficiency:** the amount of cotton grown per hectare continued its long-term increase.
- + **Profitability:** increased yields and historically high cotton prices increased profitability.
- + **Quality of work life - safety:** injuries decreased, but fatalities increased.
- + **Quality of work life - diversity and training:** most diversity indicators increased; the proportion of young people decreased.
- + **Wellbeing and social capital:** the wellbeing and social capital of growers and their communities was measured for the first time.

The Australian cotton industry's second Sustainability Report is available for download at Cotton Australia's website.



Photo: Jamie Condon



Photo: Rocco Pirrottina

Over the past year, consultation on the industry's sustainability targets and indicators, using our 'Planet. People. Paddock.' framework, continued.

### The nine priority sustainability topics in this framework are:

- + **Planet:** water; carbon; biodiversity; pesticides.
- + **People:** quality of work life; workplace safety; wellbeing and social capital.
- + **Paddock:** productivity; profitability.

The 'Planet. People. Paddock.' framework will direct the Australian cotton industry's efforts for the next decade and is targeted at on-farm cotton production. The framework recognises sustainability is integral to the industry's future and provides a path for the entire industry to stay in business. Rather than being a compulsory standard or a brand, the framework will be delivered through existing industry structures and programs.

As part of the process of developing the framework, teams of subject matter experts were assembled by theme (taskforce groups) to review each sustainability target and indicator.

During June and July 2020, Cotton Australia, CRDC, and the SWG consulted widely with internal and external stakeholders (including fashion brands, finance and other agricultural industries, and the NGO sector) around our draft sustainability targets.

Feedback from more than 350 stakeholders was collated and subsequently used to refine some of our sustainability targets and indicators. This process will help ensure the targets are still achievable and consistent with the industry's ambition to be a global leader in sustainable cotton production, but will also meet stakeholder expectations.

## > WHERE TO FROM HERE

In recognising cotton growers also farm other crops and livestock, our industry is collaborating across agricultural industries to ensure sustainability metrics and methodologies for broadacre industries are as consistent as possible.

For example, regarding carbon footprint, biodiversity and soil health, common metrics and data collection methodologies for these do not yet exist and need to be agreed before targets can be set for the industry. Because these are complex areas involving several industries, this work is taking time to get right.

Once finalised, the Australian cotton industry's sustainability targets will be formally launched. But in the meantime, our industry is not waiting to get on with the job, with steps already being taken towards reaching and bettering the sustainability targets.

AUSTRALIAN COTTON SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK  
[ PLANET. PEOPLE. Paddock. ]



Photo: Tim Bateup



# Spray Drift

## Advocating for best practice in efforts to reduce off-target spray drift.

- + Enhanced use of mapping program.
- + Extensive awareness campaign launched.
- + Further enhancements of SataCrop planned.

## A key priority for Cotton Australia during 2020/21 was preventing spray drift damage on cotton and other crops.

After its successful industry-wide introduction last season, the SataCrop program was once again used by growers to map their fields over a satellite image, so other farmers could be informed around the presence of sensitive crops like cotton when planning their spray activity.

The total area of cotton mapped on SataCrop during the 2020/21 season was nearly 80%. SataCrop usage over the past year included the mapping of a wide range of crops, including grapes, citrus, other permanent tree plantations, winter cereals, chickpeas and summer pulses.

There were seven official spray drift reports notified to Cotton Australia over the season, totalling just over 2,000 hectares. This was less than 1% of the total crop area planted reported as being damaged. In 2019/20, the percentage reported was just over 1%.

Unfortunately, there were some reports of bee hives being affected by agricultural chemicals in cotton growing regions this season. While there was no evidence that cotton farmers were responsible, Cotton Australia continues to work closely with apiarists to improve communication and knowledge around locations of hives, to better protect this important industry.

Cotton Australia activated an extensive awareness campaign over the season to mitigate the risk of off-target spray drift incidents. A series of radio advertisements was aired in cotton growing valleys throughout the season raising awareness of spray best practice, inversions, and the general risk of spray drift.

On behalf of growers, Cotton Australia collaborated with the New South Wales Environment Protection Authority in an ongoing pesticide monitoring project, which aims to better understand off-target spray drift.

## > WHERE TO FROM HERE

Over the year ahead, Cotton Australia will work to ensure SataCrop remains a viable tool in managing spray drift. Our team will investigate ways to incorporate more data, such as weather station information, inversion warning towers, and communication for bee keepers, into the platform.

Cotton Australia will also advocate for enhanced cross-industry collaboration in tackling spray drift, and we will work with other grower groups, the National Farmers' Federation and RDCs to achieve this objective.

Likewise, Cotton Australia will continue to work closely with CRDC on identifying innovative projects with the capacity to deliver changes to pesticide application to reduce spray drift through Business Research Innovation Investment Initiative (BRIII) funding.

Cotton Australia will continue to facilitate training to ensure growers are informed of spray best practice. Planned training opportunities include sustainable spray practices workshops in Queensland, and the AgSkilled-facilitated training for New South Wales growers. Cotton Australia, through the TIMS Committee, has provided guidance toward the content of the Bayer mandatory XtendFlex applicator training that was, at time of writing, being rolled out across the industry.

# Workforce

## Building a skilled and resilient workforce through training programs and targeted advocacy.

- + Funding secured for micro credential training initiatives.
- + AgSkilled provides NSW growers with high-level training opportunities.
- + Engagement with governments on labour shortage issues to continue.

## The Australian cotton industry's people are its most valuable assets, and as such, over the past year Cotton Australia worked to ensure the needs of our industry's workforce were met.

Throughout 2020, Cotton Australia participated in a series of meetings with the National Agricultural Labour Advisory Committee around workforce issues and designing workable, sustainable solutions to the challenges being faced. Cotton Australia made a detailed submission to the committee around these areas of focus. The committee's final report, titled *National Agricultural Workforce Strategy: Learning to Excel* was subsequently released, along with its recommendations. Pleasingly, these recommendations included a roadmap to implement them, which should see improvements in this important area.

Over the past year, Cotton Australia worked to ensure the training needs of our growers were met. One of Cotton Australia's achievements in this space was its successful application for funding under the Queensland Government's micro credential training initiative, which will be used to run a series of sustainable spray practices workshops across Queensland cotton and grain producing regions in 2021 and 2022.

As part of the National Skills Reform Agenda, Cotton Australia was pleased to participate in several roundtable meetings with the NSW Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, Dr Geoff Lee, during the past year to discuss the implementation of micro credential-based learning in the state.

In 2020, the successful AgSkilled program was expanded and continued. AgSkilled is a \$15 million NSW Government-funded and industry-led workforce development strategy that seeks to upskill NSW's cotton, grains, production horticulture, viticulture and rice growing industries to manage the challenges of the future. AgSkilled-funded training is tailored and delivered to suit the specific needs of the industry. Cotton Australia will continue to play an active role in the AgSkilled program over the coming year, to ensure cotton growers capitalise on upskilling opportunities.

While AgSkilled continued to flourish in New South Wales, over the past year Cotton Australia continued its negotiations with the Queensland Government for the establishment of a similar industry-led workforce training initiative called SmartAg Queensland. Cotton Australia remains hopeful the Queensland Government will take-up the proposed initiative in the near future.

## > WHERE TO FROM HERE

Cotton Australia will continue to work with state and federal governments, and other providers, to search for solutions to the labour shortage issues that have arisen due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Over the coming year, Cotton Australia will remain an active member of the National Farmers' Federation's Workforce Committee, and will continue to advocate for our growers around workforce issues at a national level.

# Energy, Mining and CSG

## Advocating for a fair go, as farmers power towards an efficient future.

- + Growers' views heard around controversial planned mining and gas projects.
- + Pushing for affordable electricity tariffs a priority.
- + Microgrids project gets the green light.

## Mining and coal seam gas

### New South Wales

One of the key motivations for Cotton Australia around mining and coal seam gas over the past year was working to protect both the productive capacity of agricultural land and ensuring the sustainability of aquifers from resource extraction activities.

In 2020, two public hearings were convened by the NSW Independent Planning Commission about Whitehaven Coal's Vickery Mine Extension proposal at Boggabri. Cotton Australia advocated for our growers at these hearings by giving detailed and considered evidence on behalf of our industry. Cotton Australia also provided written submissions during each round of consultation held by the planning department. Our other core focus was continuing to support our affected members, and those involved with the Boggabri Farming and Community Group.

Consultation around the Narrabri Gas Project that was proposed by Santos continued throughout 2020. Cotton Australia played an active role in voicing the views of our growers, particularly around impacts on aquifers, leaky wells, the management of salt, and the loss of prime agricultural land.

While both the projects received approval, they were granted with a very detailed list of conditions. Over the coming years, Cotton Australia will continue to track these projects and advocate that the potential economic benefit the projects could bring are not in the absence of proper regulation and enforcement of the resources sector.

In September 2020, Cotton Australia raised similar land conflict concerns with the newly appointed NSW Agricultural Commissioner, Daryl Quinlivan. Our concerns were not just around resource extraction, but also the proposed Renewable Energy Zones and local government planning zone requirements. Direct engagement with Mr Quinlivan during the first few months of his tenure was a priority for Cotton Australia's policy team, so he could be informed of our industry's views and provided with research materials. Our early engagement helped to inform the subsequent public consultation sessions that were held about local government planning conflicts in the state.

### Queensland

Cotton Australia's engagement with the Gasfields Commission Queensland continued during the past year, proving to be a key conduit for our advocacy.

As an active member of the Gasfields Commission's Stakeholder Advisory Group, Cotton Australia was invited to participate in targeted stakeholder consultation concerning the *Regional Planning Interests Act (2014)*, which is associated with coal seam gas (CSG) exploration in Queensland. During this consultation, Cotton Australia expressed the view that the protection of the agricultural capacity of the land was very important. We also called for much greater consultation around how this protection could be achieved, noting there was no real sense around the degree of cumulative impact the Queensland Government is prepared to accept across a region due to CSG.

The issue of farm public liability coverage was another matter dealt with by the Stakeholder Advisory Group and Cotton Australia represented members' interests regarding resource extraction activities. The outcome was successful - that landholders who host gas activities on their properties (including infrastructure) are, and will continue to be, able to access general insurance policies for farm risk and be appropriately protected against loss. Increased CSG activities on the Darling Downs spurred Cotton Australia's other advocacy work in this policy area over the past year. Regarding Arrow Energy's proposal to expand its Hopeland CSG activities, aquifer impacts and the management of potential risks were concerns raised by Cotton Australia.

Cotton Australia's submissions also acknowledged the value our industry places on the Queensland Government's application of rigorous science in its decision-making processes. Cotton Australia will continue to monitor the outcomes of the government's assessment and any potential changes to the project.

## Energy

### National and New South Wales

Advocacy around electricity and energy issues was another core focus of Cotton Australia's policy team over the past year.

Cotton Australia has continued to be a leading contributor to the National Agricultural Energy Taskforce, which is managed by the National Irrigators' Council. The body has had significant success in helping shape national energy reform, and its comments have been cited in numerous government reports and reviews.

Cotton Australia's protracted efforts to ensure affordable electricity tariffs are available for our growers and ginners continued over the past year. It was important for us that we advocated for a fair go around input costs, particularly during the tough economic times induced by drought and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In New South Wales, Cotton Australia was an active member of the Essential Energy Customer Advisory Group, and we were one of the few agricultural representatives in the body. Our participation in this forum allowed us to provide direct feedback early on in the process around the suitability of proposed tariffs.

In other positive news from the past year, Cotton Australia and QFF, in partnership with two renewable energy consultancies, were awarded a Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund grant to assess the advantages of microgrids in New South Wales and Queensland.

The project will run until mid-2022 and will consider whether the linking of on-farm solar infrastructure to share energy in different locations as a 'microgrid' can offer benefits to agricultural electricity consumers as well as the network providers. This project will consider the opportunity for farmers to generate renewable energy and whether it can reduce overall energy costs via a microgrid.

### Queensland

Following sustained advocacy by Cotton Australia and other agricultural groups, a suite of more affordable tariff options for Queensland small users (less than 100 mW/hrs per year) was announced. While welcomed, Cotton Australia will continue to voice our industry's desire for more affordable electricity tariffs for Queensland ginners, and for large energy users, such as water harvesters, who, unless there is significant reform, will be forced to exit the electricity grid and revert to diesel.

A benefit of this program for growers will be enhanced understanding of where microgrids work best, as an alternative way energy can be shared, stored and distributed across their farm, their neighbours and local communities.





# Essential grower services

## Supporting our growers to perform at their best.

### Transport

The biggest challenge Cotton Australia was faced with regarding transport was on achieving relatively unrestricted access for cotton industry workers across the New South Wales/Queensland border when the COVID-19 border restrictions were in place.

To tackle this issue, Cotton Australia worked very closely with Queensland's Agriculture and Fisheries Department, Health Department, Transport and Main Roads, and the Premier's office to advocate for and put in place workable solutions. Likewise, over the past year Cotton Australia continued its close working relationship with the NSW Roads and Maritime Services and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator.

In other transport policy developments, feedback from the NSW and Queensland jurisdictions indicated a very high level of compliance by the cotton industry around transportation of cotton modules and other machinery, with no major incidents or breaches reported.

Over past years, Cotton Australia invested much time and energy into the development of the National Harmonised Agricultural Notice. The implementation of the Notice has now occurred, with it appearing to have gone smoothly. The Notice now makes compliance with the rules around the movement of farm machinery much easier for cotton farmers.

In early 2021, Cotton Australia successfully re-negotiated the NSW Easter De-restriction Notice, which largely exempted cotton harvesting equipment from the restrictions placed on the movement of wide loads over Easter. This was an important achievement for our industry, as the Easter period usually marks the widespread start date for cotton picking.

With a growing interest in cotton and a boosted crop size across northern Australia over the past year, Cotton Australia assisted a number of growers and contractors with their enquiries around the movement of cotton and cotton machinery to and from northern Australia. This work will help ensure the continued smooth development of the Australian cotton industry into these fresh parts of the nation

### Workplace Health and Safety (WHS)

Over the past year, Cotton Australia continued its membership of the National Farmers' Federation, and as such, we reaffirmed our support for the ACCC's recommendations to fit Operator Protection Devices (OPD) to all new quad bikes from 11th October 2021. We also continued our support of cotton growers who are transitioning to side-by-side vehicles, and we will continue to lobby governments to provide rebates to all businesses, no matter the state they operate in.

During 2020, Cotton Australia and CRDC established the Australian Cotton Industry WHS Committee, which also included representatives from SafeWork NSW and the Office of Industrial Relations in Queensland. The committee's aim is to collaborate on solving work health and safety issues through increased engagement and producing consistent communications around the critical issues in this space that exist within the Australian cotton industry.

Cotton Australia also participated in the Electrical Safety Forum in Queensland, which brought together government, electricity providers and agricultural industry representatives to reduce unsafe electrical practices. As part of our membership in this forum, Cotton Australia assisted in the further development of the Look Up and Live app.

### Telecommunications

In a pleasing development over the past year, the Regional Tech Hub was established. Cotton Australia played an integral role in the development of this initiative, which will help rural Australians understand the telecommunications options available to them, decide which option best suits their needs, and resolve problems they experience with their phone and internet connections.

In other telecommunications work this past year, Cotton Australia continued to collaborate with Field Solutions Group to establish telecommunications infrastructure across New South Wales and Queensland cotton producing regions.

Cotton Australia was also an active member of the National Farmers' Federation's (NFF) Telecommunications and Social Policy Committee over the past year. During the pandemic, Cotton Australia worked with other NFF members to advocate to all telecommunications providers to ensure regional communities were not disadvantaged.





Adam Kay and 'Landline' journalist Tim Lee filming a story.



Grower Tamara Uebergang was profiled for a story on Cotton Australia's website and Graziher magazine. Photo: Edwina Robertson.

# Communications

## Informing growers and all Australians about developments in our industry.

- + Social media audience experiences significant growth.
- + Proactive media engagement helps share Australian cotton industry's story.
- + Stakeholders regularly consulted with on key industry issues.

Throughout 2020, Cotton Australia's Communications team worked to inform growers, share the industry's story with all Australians, raise awareness of our sustainability credentials, and address misconceptions about Australian cotton.

The year began with the Communications team producing a detailed strategy to guide its work for the coming 12 months, which, once the pandemic took off and restrictions came into force, had to be adjusted, and work priorities were pivoted to reflect what was achievable during lockdown.

Despite the restriction on movement and the cancellation of events, the Communications team recorded many significant achievements over the past year, some of which are highlighted and detailed below. We would like to thank all the growers and industry personnel who participated in the organisation's communications activities over the past year. Your presence in media stories and our digital content, and by sharing our industry's story to your networks, was greatly appreciated.

## Traditional media

Cotton Australia continued to proactively engage with journalists over the past year by pitching stories and providing briefings on industry news and views. Key highlights from our media work included successfully pitching an in-depth, two-part feature story to the ABC's *Landline* program about ground-breaking research underway by CSIRO looking at genetically modifying cotton plants to make it naturally colour its lint.

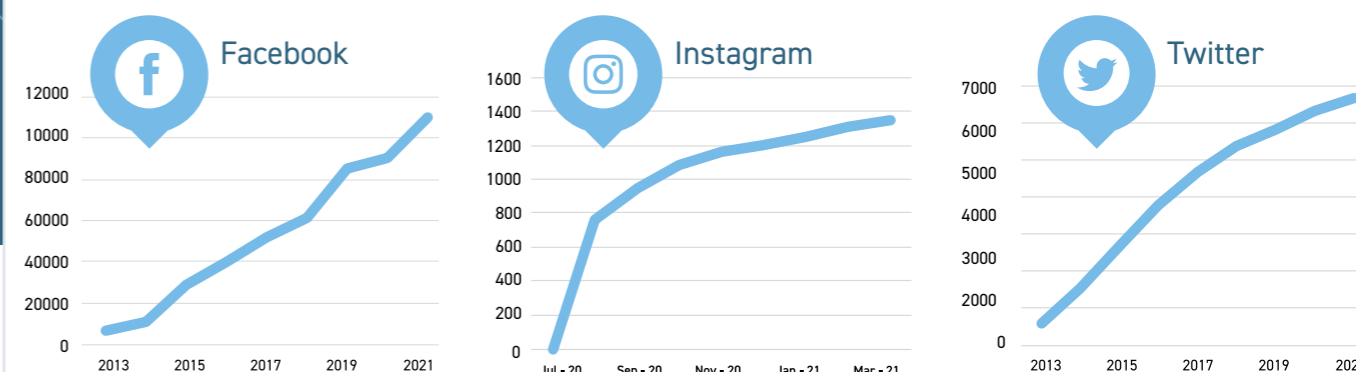
In May, Cotton Australia and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation launched the industry's second sustainability report. The release of this report included targeted media engagement with local, state and national outlets to share the industry's sustainability results and our commitment to, and plans for, continued improvement.

In October, Cotton Australia's communications team successfully managed intense media interest surrounding the news that the Chinese Government had apparently been discouraging their country's spinning mills from using Australian cotton. Cotton Australia proactively shared the industry's views, key information, and our optimism for the future with Australian news organisations and international media outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal* and CNBC in the United States, DE24 in Germany, NHK in Japan, and China's *South China Morning Post*.

Other areas of focus in the media space over the past year included Cotton Australia's advocacy during the Queensland election to media outlets in that state, regular editorial columns in the *Australian Cottongrower* and *Cotton and Grains Outlook* magazines, a coordinated, proactive media campaign around spray best practice, the promotion of training opportunities under the AgSkilled 2.0 program, and the publication of a Cotton Australia-produced feature story on grower Tamara Uebergang in quarterly women's magazine *Graziher*.

Over the past year, Cotton Australia continued to advocate for fair, balanced and accurate reporting from all journalists about our industry and the issues affecting it, and we will continue to do so over the year ahead.

## ANNUAL FOLLOWER GROWTH



## Digital strategy

With parts of the nation locked down during the pandemic and many people relying on virtual platforms to remain connected, Cotton Australia's digital strategy took on extra importance as a key way to continue sharing the industry's story and information to help rebuild trust.

Over the past year, Cotton Australia's social media audience continued its period of stellar growth. Our Facebook audience grew by 22% to 11,005 followers and our Twitter followers increased by 6% to 6,666. This significant growth can be attributed to: our engaging stories, videos and photos resonating with the audience, the enaction of a targeted social media advertising campaign to ensure our content reached metropolitan audiences, and Cotton Australia actively engaging in meaningful dialogue and the provision of industry information to critics of Australian cotton online.

In mid-2020, Cotton Australia launched an official Instagram account (@auscotton) to ensure we reached audiences on that significant platform. Pleasingly, the account garnered a considerable audience in the months after its creation, closing the reporting period with 1,346 followers and more than 13,000 engagements (averaging about 70 engagements per post). Over the past year, Cotton Australia's website accumulated a total of 342,948 page views (an average of 940 page views per day).

A core component of Cotton Australia's digital strategy over the past year was sharing more of the industry's stories on its website and social media channels, including profiles on growers. This strategic initiative was successful in showcasing the 'human' side of the industry and the deep connection our many family farmers have with their regional communities. Particular thanks to growers Gavin Dal Broi, Geoffrey Todd, Kepler Atkinson, Matt Shephard, Nick Beer, Rachael Austin, Sam Heagney, Stewart Denston, and Tamara Uebergang for agreeing to be part of our grower profile series and for sharing their personal stories.

In conjunction with sharing the industry's story publicly online and on social media, our team also supported growers and the industry by producing: e-newsletters, including the fortnightly *Cotton Matters* publication, electronic updates featuring industry-specific information about the COVID-19 pandemic, and social media tiles documenting industry facts for growers to use when engaging in digital conversations about Aussie cotton.

Another highlight from our digital work over the past year was our involvement in the National Farmers' Federation's 'We've Got Your Back' campaign. This campaign worked to assure Australians that our country's farmers would continue to provide food and fibre during the pandemic and that panic buying was not necessary. Emerald-based grower Aaron Kiely featured in the video, which was subsequently shared by the Prime Minister on his social media channels.

In October, Cotton Australia joined with other countries in celebrating World Cotton Day. Our team produced a series of videos featuring industry personnel about Australian cotton, which were published on the international website celebrating World Cotton Day.

## Stakeholder engagement

While the COVID-19 pandemic restricted face-to-face engagement with stakeholders for much of the year, Cotton Australia changed how it carried out its work.

Thanks to digital platforms and video calls, virtual meetings with stakeholders occurred throughout the year.

With drought and the pandemic creating uncertainty for many, Cotton Australia engaged with growers and cotton grower associations to ensure our farmers were supported and provided with salient information on a range of topics, like drought support and COVID restrictions, to help them and their operations.

While some events and travelling were cancelled, the team shifted focus to producing resources that would provide significant benefit once face-to-face engagement with stakeholders resumed. As part of this project, the team produced a new credit card-sized fold-out industry guide, a new digital and printed map indicating cotton regions, gins, and ports, as well as a video and infographic about the products and uses of Australian cotton.

As the development of the cotton industry in northern Australia continued throughout 2020, Cotton Australia's communications team also engaged with organisations like the Northern Territory Government and NT Farmers Association to provide industry information and engagement resources and ensure they had the most up-to-date facts about the Australian cotton industry.

# Education

## Engaging with teachers and students to broaden knowledge of Australian cotton.

- + New resources produced to grow interest in cotton.
- + Immersive virtual reality video brings farm to the classroom.
- + Partnerships strengthening cotton education opportunities.

Over the year 2020, Cotton Australia's education program continued to be a central focus of the organisation's work. The program recorded many achievements during a year of challenges for educators.

Due to the restrictions imposed to curtail the spread of COVID-19, most live events were cancelled. This meant our education team had to pivot its work, and it quickly adapted to focus on providing digital education content and resources, which were well suited to the increased multimodal delivery of the curriculum in classrooms across Australia.

The success of this pivot in focus to digital was highlighted by the significant number of pageviews recorded for Cotton Australia's online education resources:

- + **Lessons and units:** more than 9,000 pageviews
- + **How to Grow A Pair of Jeans:** more than 7,000 pageviews
- + **Education Kit:** more than 4,000 pageviews
- + **Education videos:** more than 3,000 pageviews
- + **Posters:** more than 3,000 pageviews
- + **Cotton Classroom:** more than 2,000 pageviews
- + **Cotton 360 YouTube video:** more than 660 views

It was also pleasing to see 350 Australian schools receive free cotton sample packs from Cotton Australia over the past year, which will boost understanding of our industry among school students.



New maps were developed to showcase where Australian cotton is grown.

## New resources produced

With COVID-19 forcing Cotton Australia's education program to evolve its work priorities, the team developed a suite of new informative resources for teachers and students.

A centrepiece resource that was launched was the immersive virtual reality video and accompanying 360-degree version of the film (for viewing on the internet). This new resource starred Emerald-based grower, and Cotton Australia deputy chair, Nigel Burnett and his family. The video, produced using 360-degree cameras and drones, which takes the viewer onto a cotton farm to explore fields and crops and discover key industry information – all without leaving their chair.

Primary school students benefitted from a suite of new cotton activities over the past year. The set of six curriculum-linked, hands-on STEM-inspired activities were designed so they could be completed from home or in the classroom.

In mid-2020, Cotton Australia released a set of new resources that focused on cotton products and uses. Along with a grower's video, an infographic and a challenge activity were produced by the education team to engage students about Australian cotton.

In conjunction with the new resources, the education team launched a new page on Cotton Australia's website for videos. This new portal made it easier for students and teachers to access video material, particularly during a time of home-learning. With more than 3,000 unique views, this new webpage proved very popular.



## Engagement

In 2020, as many school students were forced to learn from home due to the pandemic, digital learning saw significant growth.

To capitalise on this development and ensure the Australian cotton industry was showcased to students, Cotton Australia joined with Queensland's Gateway School to Industry Program (SIPP) in May 2020 to deliver two pre-recorded video lessons for upper-secondary students, which focussed on general industry information and sustainable fashion, and cotton careers.

The University of Southern Queensland's Beyond Year 10 Careers Camp attracted 600 students from regional and remote schools in Queensland. Students navigated a virtual campus and interacted with content to widen their knowledge of agricultural careers. For this project, Cotton Australia and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) worked together, filming walk-through tours of CRDC's research station and crop trials, and interviews with growers talking about careers available in cotton and some of the pathways to get there.

Over the past year, Cotton Australia worked with CRDC to develop a short video for the University of New England (UNE) showcasing the wide range of careers in the cotton industry. The video will be used in future virtual career events hosted by UNE and will sit on that organisation's website.

In other engagement opportunities over the past year, Cotton Australia CEO Adam Kay presented to the NSW Association of Agriculture Teachers meeting in June about the effects of COVID-19 on agriculture and the cotton industry.



Year 5 and year 6 students at Theodore State School buried cotton underpants as part of a 'Soil Your Undies' science experiment.

## Workforce

### Scholarships

In September 2020, Cotton Australia and the Upper Namoi Cotton Growers' Association announced two new scholarships, one each at Charles Sturt University and the University of New England in New South Wales. Both scholarships targeted agriculture, science and business students who will complete their practicums on cotton farms in 2021-22.

The existing Cotton Australia and Upper Namoi Cotton Growers' Association scholarship program at Marcus Oldham College is progressing, with one student now in his third year and the other in his second year who will be completing his on-farm experience in 2021.

### Cotton Gap

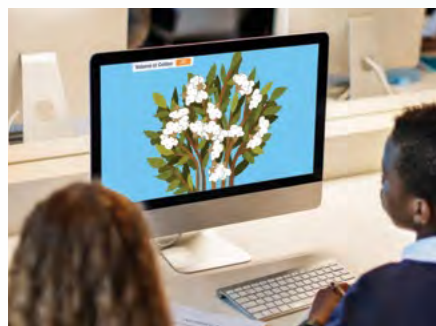
Cotton Gap was launched in July 2020 to attract school leavers looking for opportunities for a gap year. Cotton Australia was pleased to have 14 students express an interest, with six registering for the program. A total of 12 growers considered the opportunity, with four registering. Cotton Australia administered two rounds of communications connecting growers with students, with two students eventually accepting roles from growers.



Cotton Australia facilitated the Cotton Gap program in 2020.



Cotton Australia's Jenny Hughes, Adam Kay, and Brooke Summers shared the cotton industry's story at Hackathon – February 2021.



The Code Club project saw children use technology to learn about cotton.

## Early 2021 brings a return to live events

As the calendar turned from 2020 to 2021, restrictions for gatherings began to ease in most jurisdictions. As such, Cotton Australia swung into action and started delivering live events in a COVID-safe way, including:

- + Emerald Teach the Teacher – February 2021: more than 60 teachers joined with industry professionals to tour a cotton farm, a working gin, and Fairbairn Dam. A further eight Teach the Teacher events were planned for mid-2021.
- + Hackathon – February 2021: Cotton Australia partnered with AWI to support the Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education – Richmond Agricultural College, Western Sydney University and TAFE NSW to coordinate the Hackathon event. Stage one was with 26 secondary school students from four schools, where they learned about the industry and then worked in teams to propose new ideas and business models around sustainable and traceable fashion. Stage two, with tertiary students, will be held in May 2021.
- + Workshops: Cotton Australia presented a series of talks to Narrabri West Public School for Years 1-4, with assistance from CRDC and CottonInfo, and further seminars at AgForce's AgConnect event at Texas Primary School.
- + Excursions: Cotton Australia supported students on a field trip to Gatton, Queensland in March.

## Working with partners

### PIEFA

Cotton Australia continued its close working relationship with the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA) in 2020.

When PIEFA launched its new digital platform, PrimeZone Academy, in July 2020, Cotton Australia was proud to provide the site with its first interactive unit of work.

The benefit of Cotton Australia providing cotton-focussed resources to PrimeZone was highlighted over the past year, with the site recording a tripling of teachers logging on looking for resources during periods of home-schooling and remote learning.

Ahead of National Agriculture Day in November, PIEFA worked with Cotton Australia to deliver two sessions of FarmerTime – in interactive video-call between a farmer and a school classroom. Renee Anderson from Emerald and Tom Quigley from Trangie connected digitally with school students to talk about their typical day on a cotton farm.

### Code Club

Over the past year, Cotton Australia collaborated with the Code Club to produce Cotton Harvester, a step-by-step guide for students around coding using the Scratch software. The release of the guide was followed by a live Q&A session about the Australian cotton industry.

### Kimberlin Education

Cotton Australia worked extensively with Kimberlin Education over 2020 to develop our new Education Kit, with this curriculum-linked, 10-chapter resource to be released in 2021.

Similarly, a selection of Cotton Australia's education resources were uploaded to Kimberlin Education's website, making our materials available to more teachers.

### Australian Farmers (NFF)

Cotton Australia's education resources are now included on the Australian Farmers digital platform, and featured regularly in their monthly newsletters. This once again furthers our industry's reach into different audiences, so they can learn about Australian cotton.

### STEM Connect 2020

In August, about 800 students and teachers from 102 schools across Australia participated in the STEM Connect 2020 event, hosted by the Australian Agricultural Centre and FarmVR. With support from Cotton Australia, students created an avatar to engage in interactive activities in a virtual world, and looked at the production practices and products and uses of cotton.



# Cotton to Market

Supporting brands and supply chain partners as they increasingly make the switch to Aussie cotton.

- + Brand partnerships grow to record high.
- + Biodiversity and circular economy projects underway.
- + Fresh industry storytelling opportunities being explored.



Throughout 2020, stakeholders of the Cotton to Market program were deeply affected by COVID-19, with disrupted supply chains, consumer uncertainty, delays and store closures all having significant impacts.

A positive consequence for Australian cotton was renewed interest in sourcing and making locally, and major global brands wanting to avoid supply chain risks in future by working with trusted partners. The work of the Cotton to Market program continued throughout the past year with a much greater focus on digital engagement, due to the pandemic curtailing travel and face-to-face meetings.

The team worked to inform the supply chain about Australian cotton's benefits, partnered with even more global and Australian brands, collaborated with supply chain influencers and not-for-profit organisations, and participated in projects to future-proof the industry and raise the profile of Australian cotton.

## Continuing to deliver value to growers

Eight years ago, little was known about the needs of our brand customers or the final destinations of Australian cotton, and many global and Australian brands did not even know cotton was grown in Australia.

Through the Cotton to Market program, Australian cotton's global and national reputation for producing high-quality, sustainable cotton fibre has grown significantly among a large and important group of stakeholders who had never heard the industry's story before.

As the program has grown over the years, a significant number of brand partners, including Bonds, Country Road and Rodd and Gunn, have switched more of their cotton product lines to Australian cotton for the long-term.

In 2020, the program continued to drive demand for Australian cotton with brands and retailers, and the benefits were felt by all Australian cotton farmers, as these customer signals are sent back through the supply chain.

A benefit that Cotton to Market brings, that is more difficult to measure, is the value brought to the industry by brand partners telling our stories to millions of global and Australian consumers via paid television advertising, billboards, social media and digital communication, catalogues, and point of sale material.

Over the past year, Cotton to Market connected brands with farming, facilitated the telling of their stories, and ensured our growers are getting the global recognition they deserve from their customers and their communities.

## Re-earning trust

The Cotton to Market program played a pivotal role over the past in year in helping the Australian cotton industry re-earn community trust.

Cotton Australia's most recent market research clearly showed that consumers loved cotton products, but were less positive about the industry, particularly around water issues.

Cotton to Market therefore plays an important role in enacting Cotton Australia's Rebuilding Trust Strategy through closely linking the product to stories from the farm, the industry, and cotton communities.

Over the past year, our brand partners invested in telling these stories to their customers, in an effort to inform them of the benefits of Aussie cotton, and ultimately sell more product. Millions of dollars in advertising value has accrued to Cotton Australia and the industry, free of charge, as a result of these partnerships.

## Brand and retail interest hits all time high

In 2020/21, enquiries to the Cotton to Market team about Australian cotton hit an all-time high, with increased interest from global and Australian brands wanting to make products from Australian cotton across a number of categories.

Enquiries are being fielded from large global brands through to small start-ups that have heard and responded to the call to make their products from Australian cotton.

More than 50 brands and retailers have worked with Cotton Australia to date, many of them converting products to Australian cotton as part of ongoing sustainability or cotton sourcing strategies. Cotton Australia will continue assisting these companies to establish Australian cotton supply chains, put in place the traceability required to use the Australian Cotton Mark, and then sell the story to consumers.

## Goondiwindi Circular Cotton project

Circularity has become a very important issue for brands and retailers wanting to make products that can be recycled and reused to avoid textile waste ending up in landfills. Over the past year, the Cotton to Market program has been involved in an innovative project investigating how cotton textile waste can be converted into a useful farm product.

The project, under the guidance of circular economy specialists Coreo, involved a partnership between Goondiwindi Cotton, Sheridan, Cotton Australia and cotton industry soil scientist Dr Oliver Knox. Phase One of the project involved lab-based testing of cotton fabrics to assess what might happen during the biodegradation process, in terms of potential benefits such as carbon and water retention in soils.

The next step is an on-farm trial that will spread shredded cotton textile waste onto a field at various rates to assess impacts on soil health. This next phase is due to occur later in 2021.

## Country Road-Landcare Australia partnership

Over the past year, Cotton Australia and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC) supported a partnership between iconic Australian brands Country Road and Landcare Australia to improve biodiversity on cotton farms, starting with the Namoi Valley of New South Wales.

Funded by a corporate contribution and money raised via the sale of its famous Verified Australian Cotton Heritage Sweats, Country Road committed a minimum \$600,000 to the partnership over three years. Narrabri-based cotton farmer Daniel Kahl received the first grant, which was used to invest in revegetation, fencing and the installation of off-river stock watering points, all with the help of Landcare Australia.

The partnership drew on a CRDC report that mapped biodiversity in Australian cotton landscapes, which identified threatened and endangered species and recommended ways to protect them.

## Camp Cotton goes virtual in a COVID world

The increasingly popular Camp Cotton field trip has become an important forum for brands and retailers to see the cotton industry first-hand.

However, in 2020, the event was cancelled due to COVID-19

Rather than have the brands miss out altogether, the tour was recorded and made available digitally, and included videos featuring farm footage, interviews with farmers, and presentations from researchers.

The virtual tour was also posted to the Better Cotton Initiative platform so brands from all over the world could take a virtual tour. We look forward to resuming Camp Cotton as a face-to-face event, hopefully in 2022.

## > WHERE TO FROM HERE

Ongoing impacts from COVID-19 in the first half of 2021 meant that international travel and events were unlikely in the near future. As such, Cotton Australia is set to review the processes associated with the Cotton to Market program and renew its communication and marketing content over the coming year.

On the horizon is the development of a new set of animated videos explaining complex industry concepts, such as water and sustainability, new technical fact sheets, and social media content that can be shared by brand partners. With more than 50 brand partnerships in progress, significant effort will be spent maintaining these relationships to ensure the benefits are maximised for our industry.

A number of exciting projects will continue, and the team will engage with and inform supply chain stakeholders such as brands, manufacturers and not-for-profit organisations, about the Australian cotton industry.



One of Trener's new Australian cotton garments.



Improving biodiversity in Cotton landscapes - James Kahl, Daniel Kahl and Dr Shane Norrish, CEO Landcare Australia.



Grower Andrew Watson filmed a video on his farm.



Brands using Australian cotton increased over the past year.



# myBMP & BCI

## Supporting our industry to be the best it can be.

- + New growers join the best practices program.
- + Workshops and farm visits conducted in a COVID-safe manner.
- + Increase in Better Cotton grown after drought eases.

**myBMP is the Australian cotton industry's best management practices program. The program empowers growers to improve their on-farm practices by reducing risk, boosting their business management procedures, and ensuring they are meeting regulatory requirements.**

The program began in 1997 and has developed into a comprehensive online initiative covering 10 modules, including: Water Management, Biosecurity, Pesticide Management, and HR and WHS. Cotton Australia staff, along with CottonInfo's Regional Extension Officers, provide personalised support and technical assistance to myBMP participants.

## myBMP key achievements

Over the past year, the myBMP program continued to record successes, for the betterment of our industry.

In 2020, 62 new growers registered to be part of myBMP, with a total of 970 growers now involved in the program. There were 29 new businesses that registered in myBMP over the past year.

During 2020, it was pleasing to see 14 new businesses achieve myBMP certification, which means they are operating at the highest possible level. A total of 79 farms achieved certification, of which 41 were new farms and 38 were farms that were re-certified. The majority of new certifications were family farms. These developments now mean there is a total of 275 myBMP-certified farms in Australia. In the past season, more than 24% of cotton produced in Australia was myBMP-certified, meaning it was produced with cutting-edge best practice.

Other highlights from the past year for the myBMP program included hosting myBMP Express workshops, attending farms to meet with growers, and remotely supporting growers on their best practices journey across all regions, including the Atherton Tablelands.

The myBMP program also negotiated with Achmea Insurance an incentive for myBMP participants, which was announced in mid-2021.



Photo: Michelle Hutchinson



The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) is an international non-profit organisation that promotes the sustainable, responsible production of cotton worldwide. Cotton Australia actively works with BCI on behalf of our industry. Growers can negotiate a premium for BCI cotton through their merchant.

Over the past season, a total of 69 businesses and 149 farms opted-in to grow Better Cotton, which was more than double the farms doing so last season.

Over the previous year, due to drought and seasonal conditions, many regular growers of Better Cotton could not participate in the program. For example, during 2019-20, a total of 140,339 bales of Better Cotton was traded; however, in 2020-21, it is forecast that 700,000 bales of Better Cotton will be grown – approximately 25% of the Australian cotton lint produced. Pleasingly, there was increased demand for Better Cotton over the past year, with growers being paid a premium of between \$3 and \$5 per bale.

## > WHERE TO FROM HERE

With interest growing around establishing ongoing cotton production in northern Australia, the myBMP team will focus on ensuring growers in that region are operating with best practice. Part of that process will involve reviewing existing myBMP modules and updating them to specifically suit the northern Australia growing conditions and situation.

A focus for the team will be continuing to grow uptake of myBMP in established cotton regions, and working to support growers in attaining certification in the program.



Cotton Australia's southern NSW regional manager Kylie Edwards with growers Daisy and Matt Toscan.

# AgSkilled

## Ensuring NSW growers were afforded training, to operate at their best.

- + Original AgSkilled program comes to an end.
- + Thousands of grower enrolments highlight program's success.
- + AgSkilled 2.0 launched to support growers.

The original AgSkilled program came to the end of its three-year term on June 30th, 2020. The program was an initiative that worked to upskill cotton and grains growers in New South Wales, and was funded by the NSW Government and led by industry partners Cotton Australia and the GRDC.

Over the three years of the program's run, AgSkilled secured a total of 5,227 enrolments. A total of 849 courses were delivered across 189 locations.

Other key statistics included, 79% of total enrolments were recorded as completed and 8% were still in training at the time writing. Only 1% had failed, and 13% were withdrawn.

Of the course participants that were surveyed, they indicated their primary roles were: on-farm employee (41%), primary producer (27%), other (20%), and agronomist/consultant (12%). Other roles included management/supervisor (4%), contractor (3%), and technician (3%).

## Benefits of AgSkilled

Throughout the course of the AgSkilled program, training was delivered flexibly in regional and remote communities, or on properties to suit the needs of learners. To ensure the successful dissemination of the latest research and best practice, AgSkilled facilitated partnerships and relationships between training organisations and industry, including researchers and subject matter experts.

The development of more than a dozen industry-specific courses across four key training pillars (business, safety, production, and technology) were also key benefits of the original AgSkilled program. Courses that were staged under the program that were specific to the cotton industry included: Precision Agronomy, Cotton Pest Management, Advanced Spray Training, GROW (Generating Regionally Outstanding Women), Corporate Governance, THRIVE (Productivity for Progress), and HR/WHS Fundamentals.

An overall assessment of the program in meeting its objectives found that AgSkilled training resulted in productivity gains, increased technical and safety skills of growers, and contributed to developing the confidence and knowledge of those who undertook training. The assessment also found the program was relevant, current and met industry's needs, given the ongoing two-way communication and consultation between AgSkilled and industry.



Photo: Damian Edwards

## Key successes recorded

The end-of-program evaluation report highlighted some of the many ways AgSkilled had boosted the capacity of New South Wales growers. There was strong evidence that AgSkilled training had successfully contributed to developing a workforce that is meeting industry needs, building networks, and driving productivity and profitability. Similarly, the program was found to be highly effective in delivering relevant, current and flexible training that leveraged industry knowledge and aligned with the needs of the cotton and grains industries.

Most individuals who completed courses indicated they had made practice changes, or were intending to, as a result of their AgSkilled training. Over its original run, AgSkilled played an important role in increasing the availability of training to those in the industry who may not have accessed it otherwise, and provided opportunities for upskilling staff (new and established) and improving businesses.

The quality of the trainers, how well the courses were run, and the relevance of content were consistently mentioned by individuals undertaking AgSkilled training.

## AgSkilled 2.0

After the success of the original AgSkilled program, Cotton Australia played a key role in making the strong case for the extension and expansion of the program for the years ahead.

In late September, New South Wales' Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, Geoff Lee, announced the extension and expansion of AgSkilled. The program was re-badged 'AgSkilled 2.0', and will continue until June 30th, 2023.

Under the new program, training opportunities were expanded to include growers from New South Wales' production horticulture, viticulture, and rice industries.

The NSW Government's funding of the program, \$15 million over three years, will see many of the popular courses from the original AgSkilled program continue to be delivered, and will also provide the opportunity for new courses to be developed. Similarly, a full-time project officer has been employed to coordinate the program.

Cotton Australia will continue to play a key role in guiding the program, as the cotton industry's representative on the AgSkilled 2.0 Steering Committee.

## > WHERE TO FROM HERE

Over the year ahead, fully funded training will be made available to growers in New South Wales, including to support new industry entrants and the existing workforce.

Growers in New South Wales are encouraged to contact Cotton Australia or AgSkilled project officer, Claudia Vicary, over the coming year to advise of a particular course you would like to see run in your region, or if your region has new or emerging training needs.

Cotton Australia has been advocating for a similar program in Queensland, and will continue working with the Queensland Government to ensure the training needs of our growers are met.



# COVID-19 Impact

## A year of forced change for our industry, and the world.

- + Major industry events cancelled.
- + Cotton Australia shifts to working from home to ensure health and safety.
- + Hope remains for a return to normality in 2021.

When the year 2020 began, few people would have foreseen the calamity bearing down on the world in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like most people and industries, the year began full of hope for a successful 12 months ahead, packed with exciting initiatives and projects. But then, in just a few short weeks, plans were torn up and priorities – both professional and personal – were adjusted to suit the times: a period of isolation and lockdown, as well as hypervigilance around health and hygiene, as we collectively worked to stop the spread of the destructive, highly contagious coronavirus. Below is a summary of how the Australian cotton industry and Cotton Australia was impacted by this one in one-hundred-year pandemic.

### Cotton Australia's team

In March 2020, Cotton Australia's staff began working from home, in accordance with public health orders to help stop the spread of the coronavirus.

This working from home model remained in place for most of the year, and at the time of writing, was continuing in a hybrid form as COVID outbreaks continued and the mass vaccination program was rolled-out.

Where possible in late 2020, our Regional Managers visited growers on farm while adhering to social distancing and health protocols once the immediate threat of the existing strains of the pandemic eased.

With the Cotton Australia team working remotely, the use of technology, such as videoconference and cloud-based file sharing systems, ensured the organisation's work could continue, albeit differently.

### Australian Cotton Conference

In early 2020, after the pandemic had taken hold and the prospect of events being held were dashed, the Australian Cotton Conference was postponed to 2021.

It was hoped that by 2021, the pandemic would have been brought under control enough to create surety that the event could be staged safely.

However, it was with deep regret and disappointment that Cotton Australia and the Australian Cotton Shippers Association decided in early 2021 to again postpone the conference for another year.

The Boards of both organisations made the final difficult decision due to the significant exposure to financial risk faced by both not-for-profit organisations, and due to the uncertainty around the type and quality of event that could be conducted, given the restrictions in place at the time.

The Boards decided to facilitate a smaller Cotton Collective in 2021 instead, which bore less risk.

## Australian Cotton Industry Awards

In 2020, the Australian Cotton Industry Awards were cancelled due to COVID-19.

With the pandemic restricting travel, Cotton Australia and the Award program sponsors decided it would not be feasible to conduct a thorough and in-person awards judging tour.

The Awards program returned in 2021, albeit in a scaled-back format, due to lingering limitations presented by the pandemic.

## Leadership programs

The Australian cotton industry's acclaimed leadership programs were another victim of the pandemic's disruption.

Cotton Australia, in consultation with industry personnel, decided to postpone our leadership initiatives, such as the Australian Future Cotton Leaders Program and Cotton 20, due to concerns a virtual-style program would not provide the same quality of outcomes as face-to-face leadership development opportunities.

These respective leadership programs returned in 2021, with participants set to gather in COVID-safe ways.

## Other events

As with many sectors and industries around the world, the pandemic brought most events to a screeching halt.

Our industry was not immune to this, with several local, state, and national events cancelled.

At a local level in our industry, events such as field days, grower gatherings and community engagement events were impacted due to restrictions on gathering sizes and people not being allowed to mingle together.

Regular Cotton Australia activities such as Teach the Teacher, Camp Cotton, and stakeholder farm tours were also cancelled. Some of these events made their return in a scaled-back way in the early part of 2021, with others to return in full later in the year or in 2022, pending the pandemic situation.

The other major casualty for our industry during the pandemic was agricultural shows, including local events and bigger shows such as the Sydney Royal Easter Show and the Ekka. Cotton Australia had planned to have a presence at the 2020 Easter Show to inform the community about our industry, and despite being disappointed, we understood why the decision to cancel the event was made. Our organisation returned to the Sydney Royal Easter Show in 2021 with an engaging static display.

## > WHERE TO FROM HERE

At the time of writing, in mid-2021, Australia had largely brought the COVID-19 pandemic under control within the nation.

With international borders shut, overseas arrivals capped, mandatory quarantine processes in place, and strict social distancing and crowd capacity caps enforced, Australia was recording very low numbers of locally acquired cases of COVID-19. A mass vaccination program was underway, and hope was growing that the country was rounding the corner out of the pandemic. Coupled with this, restrictions had largely been significantly eased, compared to what was in place in 2020.

As such, at the time of writing, Cotton Australia was in the process of reinstating programs and initiatives that had been victims of the pandemic's disruption. Activities such as Teach the Teacher events and face-to-face stakeholder engagement returned in early 2021, and planning was underway for the Australian Cotton Industry Awards and a Cotton Collective event to be staged later in the year.

Cotton Australia, like all in our industry and around the world, hoped for a return to normality as soon as possible, after a year no one will ever forget.

# Valley Reports

## Central Highlands, Queensland

**REGIONAL MANAGER:**  
Renee Anderson

**HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21:**  
6,421 ha total (irrigated)

**BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21:**  
62,935 (estimate)



Regional Manager Renee Anderson with grower Aaron Kiely.

### COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Provided support to growers, particularly around workforce issues and updating growers on developments.
- With the cotton crop being small due to low water allocations, continued to work with growers completing myBMP, including growers new to the program and those who became certified.
- Coordinated a regional tour of the Dawson-Callide valley with growers from Emerald, to share knowledge and boost ideas around enhanced production practices.
- Facilitated a cotton industry tour for councillors with Central Highlands Regional Council, which included a visit to farms, the local cotton gin and Fairbairn Dam.
- Engaged with local educators through the Teach the Teacher event staged in the valley. A total of 65 teachers attended to discover the cotton industry.
- Showcased the local cotton industry through a display at the Emerald Show that highlighted the industry's practices and key achievements.
- Participated in the Facetime a Farmer program with the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia to connect students with growers.
- Interviewed growers as part of an agricultural workforce project to ascertain their needs.

*"The last two seasons have been particularly challenging, as growers started the seasons with zero water allocations due to the fourth year of low rainfall, and the Fairbairn Dam dropping to its lowest levels on record. However, growers still managed to produce some good yields, with some above 12 and 14 bales per hectare."* **Renee Anderson**

## Dawson and Callide Valleys, Queensland

**REGIONAL MANAGER:**  
Kelly Becker

**HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21:** 5,695 ha total (5,160 ha irrigated; 530 ha dryland)

**BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21:**  
53,000 – 55,000 (estimate)



Regional Manager Kelly Becker worked with many local schools this year to inform around Australian cotton.

### COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Supported growers in ensuring on-farm safety by organising a first aid course in July 2020. The course helped growers complete this aspect of their myBMP requirements.
- Joined with Dawson Valley Cotton Growers' Association & Queensland Cotton gin in making a joint donation to Theodore Early Childhood Centre Association, which enabled the purchase of new playground equipment.
- Coordinated a chemical spray best practice course for growers in July 2020 to help them complete their myBMP requirements.
- Worked with teachers and students at schools in Theodore and Moura on their 'Cotton in a Pot' experiment teaching about cotton growing procedures.
- Helped students at Theodore School learn about soil and cotton's biodegradability by conducting a 'Soil Your Undies' experiment.
- Cotton Australia's virtual General Meeting in November saw growers gather in a hub in Moura. This brought growers together to hear important updates on the industry.
- Worked with Theodore high school in early 2021 on a farm tour to showcase the industry's advancements in technology and efficiencies on farm.

*"Over the last year, I put a lot of my time and energy into focusing on getting into the local schools and working with the kids and teachers, to promote the cotton industry as an exciting and rewarding career avenue. At the farm level, growers have been happy with yields to date, with later cotton still to be picked looking impressive. On-farm storages are mostly full after flood events back in April and growers are all ready for another great season next year."* **Kelly Becker**

Darling Downs, Queensland

REGIONAL MANAGER:  
Rob Crothers

HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21: 34,182 ha total (22,363 ha irrigated; 11,819 ha dryland)

BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21: 270,906 (estimate)



Grower Tyson Armitage with Regional Manager Rob Crothers.

COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Supported growers in achieving myBMP certification.
- Assisted other growers in their journey towards myBMP certification. This included working one-on-one with growers in the field and online to navigate challenges and by offering helpful solutions where possible.
- Four new growers, consisting of nine farms, registered in myBMP over the year.
- The Darling Downs now has 58 myBMP-certified farms. Significant levels of interest in the program remain, which bodes well for future certifications in myBMP.
- Hosted a group of University of Queensland students for a day of farm visits to boost their knowledge of cotton. The day included visits to Armitage's cotton field day, Bayer Crop Science's Toowoomba laboratory and Vanderfield machinery.

*"While the area planted in 2020 increased by 452% on the previous year, the continuing drought once again adversely impacted dryland yields, and the total area planted. Isolated storm activity during the growing season reduced the drought impact in some areas, while others missed out altogether. The great news was the region received widespread soaking rain in March 2021, with totals varying from 150mm to 300mm. While this rainfall event was largely too late for many of this season's crops, it has gone a long way to filling the soil profile for next season."* Rob Crothers

Macintyre Valley, Queensland and New South Wales

REGIONAL MANAGER:  
Cate Wild

HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21: 10,680 ha total (9,255 ha irrigated; 1,425 ha dryland)

BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21: 114,389 (estimate)



Regional Manager Cate Wild supported growers through the myBMP program.

COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Successfully staged a Teach the Teacher event in the valley, which included a tour of the Namoi Cotton gin, a visit to Grower of the Year farm 'Fairfield', and a dinner and community conversation about cotton.
- Worked with growers on their myBMP journey, including helping some attain accreditation and re-accreditation.
- Supported growers in Texas who were badly affected by the floods, and advocated for government disaster assistance.
- Helped facilitate the successful Macintyre Valley Field Day, which had to be moved to town due to wet weather.
- Worked with the local council, cotton growers' association and Border Rivers Food and Fibre to advocate on water licensing.
- Played an active role working with the Clontarf Academy at Goondiwindi State High School in involving Indigenous students in an employment forum.
- Brought cotton into the classroom by visiting Texas State Primary School for an information day with students to share our industry's story.
- Supported the Macintyre Valley CGA in successfully attaining a grant for a tour of the northern cotton growing area.

*"The 2020/21 season was still a relatively small one in the Macintyre Valley, but the majority of our growers had planted some cotton. The growing season was going well when in March, the flood that everyone was waiting for arrived. There was some damage in the valley from the flood, but the event importantly strengthened the region's water supply for the 2021/22 season. We have been engaging with the community in many ways this season, and we are all looking forward to a more positive winter crop and summer crop to come."* Cate Wild

St George, Dirranbandi and Mungindi, Queensland and New South Wales

REGIONAL MANAGER: Sally Rigney

HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21: St George – 18,500 ha total; Dirranbandi – 19,000 ha total; Mungindi – 7,000 ha total

BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21: St George – 203,500; Dirranbandi – 240,000; Mungindi – 77,000 (estimate)



Cotton Australia Regional Manager Sally Rigney (right) with Balonne Shire Mayor Samantha O'Toole and 'Kia Ora' Manager Ross Keeley.

COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Supported growers as they worked towards achieving myBMP accreditation.
- Coordinated and promoted training and licencing opportunities for growers to improve their practices and ensure best practice.
- Strategically fostered and promoted links between growers and the available labour force to ensure a strong workforce for future seasons.
- Coordinated a successful Teach the Teacher event and dinner in Mungindi for 30 teachers and community personnel.
- Assisted with the organisation and running of the St George Cotton Dinner and awards.
- Actively worked with the QCWA in the organisation of the Cubbie Cotton Community Day and was the event's guest speaker.
- Produced video content for Cotton Australia's social media channels about the local cotton industry, including a video viewed more than 17,000 times on siphon-less irrigation systems delivering water efficiency gains of up to 20%.

*"In St George and Dirranbandi, growers had a spring in their step this year. The February 2020 flood brought a break to the crushing drought and set up one of the best cotton seasons in a long time. While the February 2021 flood did not have the volume of the previous year, it has seen St George full of water along with Mungindi which had suffered a sub-standard cotton year. Dirranbandi growers may have lost yield and quality due to storm rain, but full water storages have negated the negatives of what was still a cracker crop."* Sally Rigney

Gwydir Valley, New South Wales

REGIONAL MANAGER:  
Alec Macintosh

HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21: 41,779 ha total (18,226 ha irrigated; 23,553 ha dryland)

BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21: 143,028 (estimate)



Alec Macintosh at the Moree High School Careers Day.

COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Continued involvement in the University of New England's GRASS industry placement scholarship. A student spent a week being introduced to the cotton industry with visits to cotton farms, on-farm variety and research trials, Area-wide Management Meetings and visits to CRDC, CSD and ACRI.
- Worked to boost myBMP uptake in the Gwydir Valley with an additional five farms achieving certification over the past year.
- Extensively promoted spray best practice and the use of Satacrop to growers and agronomists, to mitigate the risk of spray drift incidents.
- Promoted AgSkilled training for growers across the region to further enhance the skills of our workforce.
- Engaged with growers at the Irrigation for Profit Field Day at 'Keytah'.

*"With good rainfall commencing in January 2020, the season was looking promising; but with little or no inflows into storages, the season for cotton did not eventuate into a record-breaking one, as occurred with the winter crop. The irrigated cotton area was up from previous years, as some water was captured on farm, but it was not sufficient to allow full production. With a dry period over the winter crop harvest and rain around Christmas, late dryland was planted and should yield well, as the rain continued through the season. The rain during the growing season ensured there was sufficient moisture to finish both dryland and irrigated crops, and now with full storages and an anticipated allocation in the new water year, next season is looking to be the best for many years."* Alec Macintosh

## Namoi Valley, New South Wales

**REGIONAL MANAGER:**  
Alec Macintosh

**HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21:** 63,268 ha total (34,979 ha irrigated; 28,289 ha dryland)

**BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21:** 484,060 (estimate)



Alec Macintosh with UNE GRASS students Matt Tomlinson, Elly Byriell and Harry Page

### COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Worked to drive *myBMP* uptake in the Namoi Valley with an additional farm achieving certification over the past year.
- Extensively promoted spray best practice and the use of Satacrop to growers and agronomists, to mitigate the risk of spray drift incidents.
- Presented at field days across the Namoi, updating growers on Cotton Australia's activities and industry information.
- Continued involvement in the University of New England's GRASS industry placement scholarship. Two students spent a week being introduced to the cotton industry with visits to cotton farms, on-farm variety and research trials, Area-wide Management Meetings and visits to CRDC, CSD and ACRI.
- Presented at Narrabri West Public School and worked with CottonInfo and ACRI to inform students about cotton.
- Promoted AgSkilled training for growers across the region to further enhance the skills of our workforce.
- Engaged with the Future Edu group - a Narrabri Shire community group established by volunteers from across the business, research and wider community to promote the uptake of STEM subjects by Narrabri Shire school students.
- Worked on the Country Road/Landcare biodiversity project by engaging with growers and visiting farms.
- Met with representatives of the Australian Broadband Advisory Council and visited several growers and other industry organisations.
- Coordinated the Narrabri hub for northern NSW growers to gather at for the Cotton Australia general meeting and CRDC research priorities forum.
- Introduced growers and other industry experts to officials from the United States Embassy in Canberra's Office of Agricultural Affairs.

## Macquarie Valley, New South Wales

**REGIONAL MANAGER:**  
Julie Wise

**HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21:** 19,803 ha total (18,711 ha irrigated; 1,092 ha dryland)

**BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21:** 213,801 (estimate)



Julie Wise made regular visits to growers during the year to support them during what was a challenging season.

### COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Key events, including Teach the Teacher, school visits, and a cotton exhibit at the Dubbo Show, were cancelled due to COVID-19, forcing a re-prioritisation of Cotton Australia's initiatives in the valley.
- Worked to support growers in navigating the challenges of COVID-19 by providing them with industry-specific information and updates.
- Made regular farm visits to growers to support them on their *myBMP* journey and provide advice and input.
- Worked with growers and community stakeholders to boost spray best practice awareness and encourage constructive dialogue on the issue.
- Organised and ran a first-aid training course for growers, to boost their skills and ensure farm safety.
- Organised and staged a *myBMP* Express workshop in Trangie in December to further support growers as they complete the industry's best practices program.

## Walgett and Bourke, New South Wales

**REGIONAL MANAGER:** Alec Macintosh

**HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21:** 19,124 ha total (18,332 ha irrigated; 792 ha dryland)

**BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21:** 204,028 (estimate)



Regional Manager Alec Macintosh worked with growers in the Walgett and Bourke areas throughout 2020.

### COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Promoted AgSkilled training for growers across the region to further enhance the skills of our workforce.
- Extensively promoted spray best practice and the use of Satacrop to growers and agronomists, to mitigate the risk of spray drift incidents.
- Worked to promote industry best practice and drive *myBMP* uptake.
- Helped to secure grassroots funding for a research trip to northern Queensland to help growers investigate different times for planting. The funding was approved, but the trip was postponed due to COVID-19.

*"After several years of no production, unlike the Gwydir and Namoi, most irrigators in the region were able to fill their storages during the early part of 2020 and subsequently plant excellent areas of irrigated cotton. With continued good flows and rain, growers should now be able to refill their storages for another good season ahead."* Alec Macintosh

## Southern Valleys (Lachlan, Murrumbidgee, Murray), New South Wales

**REGIONAL MANAGER:**  
Kylie Edwards

**HECTARES GROWN IN 2020-21:** Lachlan Valley: 4,059 ha; Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys: 34,919 ha

**BALES PRODUCED IN 2020-21:** 374,349 (estimate)



Southern NSW Regional Manager Kylie Edwards with grower Joe Briggs.

### COTTON AUSTRALIA ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:

- Worked to drive *myBMP* uptake and supported growers working on the program.
- Promoted spray best practice through involvement in the SOS (Stop Off Target Spray Drift) Riverina, SOS NSW, and the newly formed SOS Lachlan stakeholder groups, and facilitated advanced spray training courses.
- Promoted funded training available through AgSkilled 2.0 to ensure growers had opportunities to upskill around WHS for workers, Cotton Pest Management, Advanced Spray Application, Drones in Agriculture, and Generating Regionally Outstanding Women (GROW) courses.
- Worked with the Clontarf Academy to support Indigenous students plan their pathway into agricultural careers. Conducted mock job interviews with the year 12 students and discussed careers in agriculture and cotton.
- Presented to the Murrumbidgee Irrigation team about Australian cotton and provide important industry information.
- Engaged with students from June High School by organising a farm tour to Commins Enterprises and a tour of Southern Cotton gin and discussion of careers in agriculture.
- Member of the steering committee for the CGA charity golf day, which raised money for the local Can Assist cancer support charity.

*"The cotton season started with the promise of rain, courtesy of the La Nina, and it largely delivered. However, with the rain came a cool, mild summer that resulted in very few days with temperatures of more than 36 degrees Celsius. The upside of the La Nina was, for some growers, timely rainfall which took the pressure off irrigation and also helped set them up for a good winter plant. The rain has meant excellent inflows into the dams and high allocations for growers."* Kylie Edwards

# COTTON AUSTRALIA BOARD



**HAMISH MCINTYRE**  
Chairman  
Cotton grower – St George  
& Dirranbandi, Qld



**NIGEL BURNETT**  
Deputy Chair  
Cotton grower  
– Emerald, Qld



**FLEUR ANDERSON**  
Grower & Community  
relations executive  
– Theodore, Qld



**BERNIE BIERHOFF**  
Cotton grower  
– Rowena, NSW



**BOB DALL'ALBA**  
Executive Director and  
Country Head – Olam



**ROB DUGDALE**  
Industry representative  
– Lower Namoi Cotton  
Growers' Association



**SUSAN MCCUTCHEON**  
Cotton grower  
– Narromine, NSW



**MATT MCVEIGH**  
Cotton grower  
– Dalby, Qld



**ARTHUR SPELLSON**  
Industry representative  
– Auscott Limited



**PETER TUOHY**  
Cotton grower  
– Carrathool, NSW



**ADAM KAY**  
Chief Executive Officer



**MICHAEL MURRAY**  
General Manager



**RENEE ANDERSON**  
Regional Manager  
Central Highlands  
(part-time)



**KELLY BECKER**  
Regional Manager  
Dawson and Callide  
Valleys (part-time)



**JENNIFER BROWN**  
Policy Officer  
(part-time)



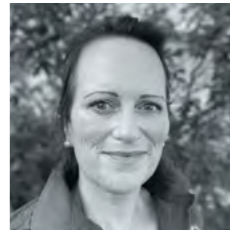
**SALLY CEENEY**  
Policy Officer  
(part-time)



**ROB CROTHERS**  
Regional Manager, Darling Downs  
(part-time)



**DARRIN DAVIES**  
Communications Manager –  
Stakeholder Engagement



**KYLIE EDWARDS**  
Regional Manager, Southern NSW



**JENNY HUGHES**  
Education Coordinator



**RICK KOWITZ**  
myBMP Manager



**ALEC MACINTOSH**  
Regional Manager  
Northern NSW



**SALLY RIGNEY**  
Regional Manager, St George,  
Dirranbandi & Mungindi (part-time)



**NICOLE SCOTT**  
myBMP Customer Service Officer



**PAUL SLOMAN**  
Policy Officer



**BROOKE SUMMERS**  
Supply Chain Consultant  
Cotton to Market Program



**CLAUDIA VICARY**  
Project Officer – AgSkilled



**ROBERT VIRTUE**  
Communications Manager  
– Digital Strategy



**CATE WILD**  
Regional Manager  
Macintyre Valley (part-time)



**JULIE WISE**  
Regional Manager  
Macquarie Valley (part-time)



**THERESE WOODEN**  
Finance Manager



**ROCHELLE ZAKHER**  
Executive Assistant

# Financial summary

INCOME		
YEAR	LEVY	OTHER INCOME
2019/2020	2,432,867	427,606
2020/2021	687,584	811,888
EXPENDITURE		
	OPERATING EXPENDITURE	
2019/2020	3,663,017	
2020/2021	3,306,804	
OPERATING EXPENDITURE BY PROGRAM		
	2020/2021	2019/2020
Board and Executive	496,211	570,330
Policy and Advocacy	512,197	585,410
Affiliations	183,620	141,352
Communications & Engagement	530,229	832,020
Grower Services	422,262	396,965
myBMP	252,161	226,407
Research	109,604	124,041
Education	149,118	99,928
Administration	165,751	156,505
Office Overheads	485,651	530,058
TOTAL	3,306,804	3,663,016
Levy Contribution	78%	74%

\*Cotton Australia's full financial accounts, which were audited by Ernst & Young, have been provided to our Member Organisations.





**COTTON AUSTRALIA LIMITED**

**Head Office** Suite 4.01, 247 Coward St, Mascot NSW 2020 Australia

**Phone** + 61 2 9669 5222 **Fax** +61 2 9669 5511

**Brisbane** Level 3, 183 North Quay, Brisbane QLD 4000

**Toowoomba** Unit 3, 6 Rutledge St, Toowoomba QLD 4350

**Narrabri** Level 2, 2 Lloyd St, Narrabri NSW 2390

[www.cottonaustralia.com.au](http://www.cottonaustralia.com.au)



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AUSTRALIA**