

30 July 2018

Mr Tyson Lee
Executive Assistant to President
Land Court of Queensland
GPO Box 5266
Brisbane QLD 4001

Procedural Assistance Service Reference Group

Dear Mr Lee,

Introduction

Cotton Australia is the key representative body for Australia's cotton growing industry. While Queensland's cotton production is highly variable, the State's 600 growers often produce between 1 million and 1.5 million bales each year. The value of that production ranges between \$500 million and \$900 million (including the value of cotton seed) farm gate annually. Our growers in Queensland reside throughout the South-West and Central parts of the State.

As a member of the Land Court's Recourse User Group, we welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of cotton growers on the issues raised in Acting President PG Stilgoe's 2 July 2018 correspondence.

1. The challenge of distance/lack of technology

Telecommunications services has been identified by our members as a significant policy priority. This is a reflection of the impact that poor mobile and data services have on our grower's productivity and competitiveness due to an inability to uptake improved technology. These services are also essential to drive efficiency gains for long term sustainability outcomes of the cotton industry and agriculture more broadly.

The inability to convey data can impact farm decision making through issues downloading data from instrumentation. Similarly poor mobile coverage or internet access can restrict access to basic business tools such as phone banking services, cloud based accounting software or online services offered by the MyGov portal. Frustratingly it is an all too common problem, as the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman confirmed in their recent (March 2018) joint report with Community Legal Centres Queensland: almost half of Queensland's community legal sector works hear about phone and internet issues every week.

Cotton Australia has therefore been advocating on behalf of members and in coalition with many other agricultural and regional community groups to for better the availability, reliability and affordability of telecommunications services. Of these, coverage is the primary concern particularly due to health and safety concerns and the ability to make critical calls in the event of an emergency.

In that respect, we would strongly support the Court developing and providing paper-based kits for high volume jurisdictions. In Cotton Australia's view this is a very necessary initiative in the absence of continued investment in the expansion and improvement of existing telecommunications infrastructure in regional areas. While current indications are this will improve the telecommunications industry is going through a very dynamic and challenging time making it particularly important to provide the paper-based kits.

Cotton Australia also wishes to make an additional suggestion regarding online and hardcopy resources. Namely that these are provided in formats that are accessible for those to whom English is their second language, as well as those requiring assistive technology such as readers.

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2. The fine line between procedural and legal advice

Cotton Australia agrees that there is a fine line between procedural and legal advice and that registry staff should be trained in providing procedural advice and staying within that ambit. The only comment that Cotton Australia makes in regards to this topic is that the possible solution of adding external resources to the Land Court web page ignores the issues raised in topic one. The solution needs to circumvent that problem.

3. Standard directions for self-represented parties

In regards to this topic Cotton Australia would like to address the principle of this topic. Cotton Australia submits that administrative matters in the Court should be as simple and concise as possible. This should occur in the first instance regardless of whether the applicant is self-represented.

Conclusion

The court system and legal support networks need to be available to all members of the community regardless of geographical location, finance and technology. When one is not regularly engaged in legal matters as a profession, negotiating one's way through the legal system can be daunting. Cotton Australia supports the Courts proactive approach to addressing these issues. The success of the joint Land Court and GasFields Commission community leader forums held in rural Queensland earlier this year is a case in point. We commend the Land Court for this initiative.

As an industry organisation we support all efforts made to address the topics raised. However, for our members the biggest concern is overcoming the challenge of distance/lack of technology. We strongly support the courts suggested approach with preparing and posting paper-based kits for parties in rural and remote locations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on these matters. Cotton Australia would also like to accept the invitation to meet with President Kingham in mid-August to discuss this submission further. I would be the nominee for this meeting and my contact details are phone 02 9669 5222 or email: jenniferb@cotton.org.au.

Cotton Australia looks forward to continuing its participation in The Land Court's Recourse User's Group.

Yours sincerely,



Jennifer Brown
Policy Officer
Cotton Australia