



Steven Miles
DEPUTY PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND

WORKING TOGETHER FOR QUEENSLAND

27 October 2020

Michael Murray
General Manager - Queensland
Cotton Australia
By email: michaelm@cotton.org.au

Dear Mr Murray

Thank you for your letter of 31 July 2020 regarding our policy commitments in the 2020 Queensland election, and your policy proposals. The Palaszczuk Labor Government's strong health response to the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that we can now start to deliver our plan for economic recovery. This plan will support jobs, help small business, invest in Queensland's manufacturing industry, buy local, and bring forward new infrastructure.

Queensland's primary industries are the backbone of the Queensland economy. Contributing nearly \$17 billion to the Queensland economy, the sector is one of the key pillars of the Palaszczuk Labor Government's economic recovery plan.

While rural communities and primary producers have faced countless challenges - bushfires, floods, drought and now COVID-19, a re-elected Palaszczuk Labor Government will continue to support and work closely with the cotton industry to overcome these challenges, recover from the impacts of this worldwide pandemic, and prepare for a brighter future.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government has frozen irrigation water prices for 2020-21, or decreased prices where the Queensland Competition Authority (QCA) recommended it do so. In addition, the Palaszczuk Labor Government has committed to absorbing \$42 million in dam safety costs over the next four years, removing this cost from irrigator water bills. Thousands of Queensland farmers will now see their irrigation water prices remain the same or fall next year. On average, irrigators will be roughly \$400 a year better off in the current financial year than last financial year.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government is determined to see the agriculture sector continue to thrive as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. That is why we are pleased to announce a 15% reduction in irrigation water bills for three years from 1 July 2021. This commitment is a result of listening to extensive feedback from industry and peak bodies including Cotton Australia. We know that this will provide the certainty the agriculture sector needs to grow and create jobs.

This real price reduction is in contrast to the LNP's policy which is merely a change in pricing model. If industry consultation shows that irrigation water customers want to move to a regulated asset base pricing model, then any potential savings will be in addition to this 15% irrigation water price cut.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government is investing in infrastructure to deliver water security to support the growth of agriculture and jobs across Queensland. Since 2017, we have invested more than \$1.2 billion in water infrastructure, including \$176 million for Rookwood Weir, \$13.6 million for Emu Swamp Dam and \$30 million to Big Rocks Weir.

The only action the previous Newman-Frecklington LNP took while in government was to cut Connor River dam and prepare dams for sale with their plans to sell off Sunwater. Deb Frecklington's plan to undertake a state-wide water asset audit is just another opportunity for the LNP to strip away any unused water allocations from farmers and prepare water assets for sale to pay for their \$26 billion-plus in unfunded promises and their irresponsible pursuit of a surplus.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government continued to work collaboratively with Cotton Australia through QCA and Australian Energy Regulator processes to deliver more affordable electricity tariffs for irrigators. Furthermore, Queensland Farmers Federation partnered with the government to implement initiatives such as the Energy Savers programs, to deliver free energy audits and subsidise efficiency upgrades.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government acted swiftly to identify the agriculture sector as an essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic and worked closely with industry to ensure Queensland produce could continue to be grown, harvested and transported for Queensland, nationally and around the world.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government has a strong record of achievement in agriculture, including:

- Investment of \$1 billion in COVID-19 support loans to support over 86,000 jobs and building business confidence, through QRIDA;
- Waiver of land rents for farmers on government leases through to the end of this year due to the economic impacts of COVID-19;
- Support for 1800 jobs through our \$10 million Rural Economic Development Grants throughout regional Queensland;
- Committing more than \$745 million to support drought-affected producers and communities since this drought began in 2013;
- Committing to supporting our farmers with drought support as long as this current drought lasts; and
- Strengthening laws for trespass on agricultural properties, introducing on-the-spot fines and increased penalties.

This is in contrast to the previous Newman-Frecklington LNP Government which sacked 600 DAF workers. They cut Biosecurity Queensland staff by 26% and will need to do it again in their reckless pursuit of a surplus. They spent less on agriculture than the Palaszczuk Labor Government. Deb Frecklington will again take the agriculture sector for granted and cannot be trusted to guide Queensland's agriculture industry.

The Palaszczuk Labor Government's \$500 million Land Restoration Fund (LRF) aims to expand carbon farming in the State by supporting land-sector projects that deliver clear environmental, social, and economic co-benefits. The LRF is empowering farmers, land managers and landholders with the support needed to generate additional, regular, and diverse income streams and protect their businesses in tough times through carbon farming projects. Between January and early March 2020, the LRF partnered with the Queensland Farmers' Federation and NRM Regions Queensland to deliver a series of 17 regional workshops and a digital webinar to support these shared objectives.

The LRF program has an objective to undertake research into emerging carbon farming areas where Queensland has a comparative advantage for the purpose of establishing eligibility as Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs), such as encouraging new methods. The LRF team has always had a focus on reducing barriers to participation in the carbon market for small and medium sized landholders. During the first investment round, this included a rebate of up to \$10,000 for small to medium sized landholders to access advice regarding undertaking a carbon farming project. This work also includes investigating potential solutions for aggregation and 'whole of farm' approaches and will continue to explore ways to reduce these barriers to participation.

Lastly, the Palaszczuk Labor Government will continue to work cooperatively with Cotton Australia on the best approach for agricultural insurance products.

Now is not the time to risk the LNP's cuts. Queensland's ongoing economic and health recovery requires leadership and stability, and Deb Frecklington and the LNP are a risk to our recovery.

I urge you to communicate this message with your members and supporters. Should the Palaszczuk Labor Government be re-elected, we look forward to working with you for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

Yours sincerely



STEVEN MILES MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services