

17 April 2019

Murray-Darling Basin Authority
GPO Box 1801
Canberra ACT 2601
Via email to: engagement@mdba.gov.au

Climate change and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan

Dear Madam or Sir,

Cotton Australia is the key representative body for Australia's cotton growing industry. Our members represent 152 Australian regional communities in NSW, Queensland and now into Victoria. Notably, 90% of cotton growers are small family farms that grow other crops like sorghum, soybeans, wheat and also have livestock.

As an active member of NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC) Cotton Australia endorses the comments they are providing about this discussion paper. If there are any perceived inconsistencies in position between organisation, the position expressed in this submission is that of Cotton Australia.

Cotton Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Authority's "Climate change and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan". We recognise that climate change and other environmental impacts have the potential to reshape the risk profile of agriculture. It is also reflected in the research priorities of the cotton industry's jointly funded research and development corporation (Cotton RDC) in order to build the adaptive capacity of the cotton industry. For example, 'protection from environmental stresses' is one of the priority areas of the CRDC 2018-2023 strategic plan that drive research investment.

Regarding the Murray-Darling Basin Plan we note that current water allocation share of the available resource, from year-to-year and also month-to-month, take into account environmental and climatic conditions. In Cotton Australia's view keeping these principles up to date is important and the Authority collaboratively developing its climate change program's research priorities is sound. However, potential changes such as placing a greater emphasis on climate impacts, should only occur when the full renewal of the Basin Plan occurs. The proposed research should be used to inform debate during the Basin Plan renewal process, and not be used as a "knee-jerk" reaction to the current drought.

Consequently the Authority continuing to engage with expert agencies and researchers to access the latest climate science and understand the management implications, is encouraged. Also that in shaping potential management strategies or policy changes these are done so collaboratively with stakeholders who, after all live in the Basin communities that will be affected.

We note the Authority's discussion paper indicates climate change impacts may be different for the northern basin compared to the southern basin. Also that shorter climate sequences based on the previous 10-20 years weren't used to inform operational planning scenarios. Cotton Australia encourages the Authority to carefully consider the evidence for and against the inclusion of shorter term historical climate sequence. We note entities such as the Reserve Bank of Australia acknowledge climate change is a trend, not as a part of a weather cycle, and that the frequency of climate events, as well as assumptions about their severity and longevity all need reassessment. [Deputy Governor Guy Debelle 12/3/19 speech <https://www.rba.gov.au/speeches/2019/sp-dg-2019-03-12.html>]



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Regarding the reliability of water Cotton Australia notes the discussion paper flags the need for research “into how production and financial risks of irrigators change and how irrigators may then respond to these changing risks (e.g. changing the extent, types and timing of crop plantings)”.

Cotton Australia would support such research and offer to facilitate initial contact with the CRDC so that the Authority can tap into their previous and future lines of inquiry. We would also welcome the opportunity to be further involved in the development of the climate change work plan for the Authority.

I can be contacted via phone 02 9669 5222 or email jenniferb@cotton.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

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