

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

17-7-2019

ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Re: Murray-Darling Basin Commission of Inquiry Bill 2019

Cotton Australia is the peak body that represents the interests of Australia's 1400 cotton growers, the majority of who farm within the Murray-Darling Basin.

While our production varies significantly year-to-year, dependent on rainfall and water availability, it is worth on average \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion in annual export earnings.

The cotton industry is proud of the efforts we make to be environmentally sustainable, while striving to achieve the highest levels of production efficiency.

Cotton Australia has been closely involved with water reform in Australia for over 40 years, including the development and implementation of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

To be very clear our position on the Basin Plan is as follows:

Cotton Australia supports the delivery of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, as written in 2012 and agreed to at the December 2018 Ministerial Council Meeting.

We strongly believe the focus should be on finalising implementation of the Plan and shifting the focus from debating the plan, to working on ways to leverage greater environmental outcomes out of the available environmental water pool.

Cotton Australia believes there is a strong case for investment in complementary measures, over and above the commitments made as part of the Northern Basin Review, that offer real opportunities to increase environmental outcomes.

Cotton Australia and other organisations, have previously identified many examples of complementary measures, and it will not provide a comprehensive list here, but it includes opening up fish passage, ameliorating cold water pollution and ridding our water ways of European Carp.

In terms of this proposed Inquiry, Cotton Australia submits it would be unnecessary, costly and generally unproductive.

On Cotton Australia's count there have been in excess of 37 governmental and/or external studies/inquiries/reviews of the Basin Plan over the past decade.

We believe it is unlikely that another Inquiry will provide anything new of relevance, and if anything is likely to distract from the successful implementation of the Basin Plan.



Advancing Australian Cotton

While Cotton Australia does not agree with the Productivity Commissions Five Year Review of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan Report in its entirety, it does believe it largely provides a sound roadmap for the final implementation of the Plan.

In addition, the Vertessy Report into the Menindee Fish Deaths earlier this year makes some sound recommendations, and the recently commissioned independent expert panel investigating social and economic conditions affecting communities across the Murray–Darling Basin is likely to offer some valuable insights into finalising the implementation in a manner that minimises negative social and economic impacts.

Finally, should this Inquiry receive the necessary support of Parliament, Cotton Australia submits that the Terms of Reference should specifically seek information on the many positive aspects of the Plan to date, which is delivering real environmental outcomes during a severe drought that is affecting the entire Basin.

Cotton Australia does not believe the Basin Plan or its implementation is perfect, but it does recognise that it is a world leading initiative, and it should be recognised as such.

If the Committee would like to hear directly from Cotton Australia, it would be delighted to appear as a witness.

For further information please contact: Michael Murray – michaelm@cotton.org.au or 0427 707 868.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Murray,
General Manager,
Cotton Australia