

Property Planning: The Queensland experience

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It has been nine years since the first Best Management Practices (BMP) manual was released and since that time the cotton industry has been seen as a leader in this voluntary style of property planning. BMP was developed primarily as a pro-active approach to manage risks associated with our industry.

It has been hard work and a fairly lonely road at times but the voluntary path adopted has stood us in good stead and results are now being felt — from maintaining access to chemical inputs through to having BMP recognised by the Queensland Government.

While the cotton industry has paved the way in the area of risk assessment at a property scale, we are now seeing other industries come on board and adopt our vision. These industries are now also realising that property planning is essential if heavy regulation is to be avoided.

Our persistence over the past few years has placed us in a good position to meet the increasing demands of property level planning sought by catchment groups and, more recently, by government agencies. But for this to be the case in the future, the cotton industry must maintain its commitment to the BMP Program.

In Queensland, Cotton Australia has been working through the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) alliance with other key irrigation industries (cane, fruit and vegetables, dairy and production nursery) on a united approach to property planning. We have sought to identify those elements in a property level program that are common across industries, and foster the adoption of these into all programs.

This united approach will help facilitate recognition of voluntary industry programs, reduce the potential duplication of paperwork for landholders who produce multiple commodities and greatly assist the effectiveness of a landscape approach in addressing natural resource issues.

Farm management systems

'Farm management systems' (FMS) is the collective term used to describe different industry programs like the cotton industry's BMP. The cornerstone to the



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FMS approach is the development of a framework identifying the common elements of industry FMS programs. It sets out guiding principles, objectives and functions which provide a basis for shared and effective resourcing and alignment of activities between QFF members, key stakeholders and government.

Recently, the Queensland Premier signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with QFF on the FMS approach. This signals a clear intention of the Queensland Government to support the adoption of voluntary property planning approaches instead of a strong regulatory approach. The MoU outlines strategies for partnership between industry and government in FMS adoption, including alignment of resources and government policy to aid implementation.

The broadacre industries are also recognising the need for property planning, and have finally begun progress in developing similar approaches for their commodities. Both Cotton Australia and the Cotton Research and Development Corporation have had some involvement to date with the various groups, and the cotton industry is determined to further ensure these approaches offer consistency with the BMP approach so as to limit duplication for landholders.

What does this all mean for cotton growers?

The BMP Program is our industry's

FMS. The development of the FMS framework is a positive for the cotton industry. The common elements contained in the FMS framework have been largely modelled on the BMP Program, so growers who are adopting BMP are well placed.

The fact that other industries are now promoting and adopting property planning tools is a benefit to us, as we are no longer the 'only ones doing it'. This gives greater credence to the voluntary approach, and with a greater number of landholders adopting such programs, the pressure for regulation as the only means of achieving a result is minimised. Through the QFF/Queensland Government MoU, government and industry have a clear strategy to work together and align resources.

But we do need to keep up the momentum of the BMP Program. It is only as successful as industry's adoption and commitment to it. While figures are reasonably high for growers who have changed their practices as a result of the BMP Program, audited grower numbers are still hovering around a third of the industry.

There is a genuine need for growers to embrace the revised structure of the BMP Program (that is, the introduction of Pre-Certification Assessments and a random industry surveillance audit program) to demonstrate to governments and communities that we are serious about self-management, and that we do not need further regulation.

