

Cotton Australia in Canberra

By Adam Kay, Cotton Australia CEO

With the Federal Election due later this year, Cotton Australia has been particularly active in lobbying on behalf of growers and the industry to ensure our issues are heard and considered by politicians and decision-makers on all sides of politics.

Many top level issues which will be a focus during this election are also of importance to the cotton industry — for example water and climate change, as well as future spending on drought relief and research and development.

Cotton Australia has therefore developed a Federal Election Position Paper (see below), which outlines Cotton Australia's position and also what we are calling on the next government to deliver. This has been sent to key politicians and will be a handy tool for industry to use at meetings with these politicians and their advisors in the lead-up to the election.

Furthermore, with the major parties holding differing views on some crucial issues, it is important for growers and the whole cotton industry to know which party stands where on the issues most relevant to them. For that reason, the Position Paper includes links to the major parties' policies on issues relevant to cotton.

The Federal Election Position Paper can be downloaded at www.cottonaustralia.com.au.

COTTON AUSTRALIA FEDERAL ELECTION POSITION PAPER

WATER

Cotton Australia's position

- The cotton industry supports a national approach to water policy, particularly through the delivery of the principles outlined in the 2004 National Water Initiative and reflected in the announcement of the National Plan for Water Security.
- The cotton industry supports a catchment-based approach to establishing and implementing plans associated with sharing of water resources.
- The cotton industry supports the delivery of water access rights in perpetuity.
- The cotton industry supports the establishment of a clearly defined open market that allows water licenses to be traded, including the enablement of the Environment Water Manager to have a role in the water market.



Adam Kay in Canberra.

- The cotton industry has set itself the bold target of doubling its water use efficiency (per bale) in the next 10 years.
- The cotton industry believes governments should ensure the best available science is used to establish environmentally sustainable levels of extractions that account for the social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of planning decisions.
- The cotton industry believes governments should allow for a legislative framework that does not impede industry abilities to improve water use efficiency, such as the use of drought-tolerant cotton varieties derived through the use of biotechnology.

Cotton Australia calls for

- A separate dedicated Federal Department for Water Resources, to reflect the importance of water to the nation.
- Sound scientific principles to be used to determine environmental objectives associated with the management of environmental water, with dedicated funding for 'good science', developed and communicated through transparent processes.
- That under any new national water policy setting, all previous arrangements that

have been put in place in good faith are recognised, including the National Water Initiative, Water Sharing Plans (NSW) and Water Resource Plans (Qld) and these plans should be allowed to run to their full term unimpeded.

- Any acquisition of water rights must be from willing sellers via the market place.

Information on the Federal Government's current water security policy can be found at: www.pm.gov.au/government/water.cfm

"Labor's Solution to the Water Crisis" Policy/ media statement can be found at: www.alp.org.au/policy/index.php

DROUGHT

Cotton Australia's position

- Farmers should, as far as possible, implement sound risk management strategies in order to safeguard their business through times of drought.
- Where drought becomes a prolonged disaster, Governments should assist farmers and the communities that rely upon them to ensure they remain viable.

Cotton Australia calls for

- Greater investment into research that

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adequately provides farmers with detailed advice on drought preparedness at a relevant scale — for example catchment based tools.

- Continued drought relief funding and social support services for struggling rural families and growers through Exceptional Circumstances programs.
- Assistance in establishing mechanisms designed to keep skilled workers in the industry (eg farm wages subsidies).
- An improved centralised system for reporting and monitoring long term weather patterns.
- An increase in the amount that can be placed in Income Equalisation Deposits from \$300,000 to \$400,000 per annum.

Information on the Federal Government's Drought Assistance and Exceptional Circumstances Program can be found at: www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/drought

ALP Drought Policy can be found at: www.alp.org.au/policy/index.php

CLIMATE CHANGE

Cotton Australia's position

- Accepts that the best available science indicates that our climate is changing and that preparedness is required to deal with greater climate variability.

- Is committed to researching its own impact on climate change and determining its greenhouse gas footprint, with a view to providing best practice guidelines for growers to establish appropriate mitigation and adaptation techniques.
- Believes that farmers will be the first to be impacted by climate change and therefore must be included in discussions as they will also be a major contributor to solutions.

Cotton Australia calls for

- Crop and regionally-specific research data that will allow cotton growers to be in a position to adapt to an increased level of variability in the climate.
- A doubling of funding to the extension effort to assist growers utilise research to make decisions about how to deal with greater climate variability.
- Agriculture to be included in any discussion of market based mechanisms to manage carbon sequestration, given that farmers are custodians of 60 per cent of Australia's land.

Information on the Federal Government's current climate change position can be found at: www.pm.gov.au/government/sustainable_environment.cfm

The ALP's "Approach to Agriculture and Climate Change" position can be found at: www.alp.org.au/media/0607/msloopi130.php

R&D

Cotton Australia's position

- Investment in industry based research as the backbone to the industry's future sustainability.
- Research should be responsive to industry issues such as water and climate change.
- Research priorities should be guided by the growers who will ultimately use it (for example, via ACGRA).
- Research funding should be underpinned by a sound and well-funded extension network.
- Research funding structures should be flexible enough to encourage private investment and stakeholder involvement.

Cotton Australia calls for

- The continued investment in the current co-funding arrangements of research and development corporations and Co-operative Research Centres.
- Government policies should avoid impeding investment in legitimate research and development (such as biotechnology).

Coalition Science Policies can be found at: www.science.gov.au/Pages/Policy.aspx?view=Discipline

ALP R&D Policy can be found: www.alp.org.au/policy/index.php

LABOUR AND SKILLS

Cotton Australia's position

- Acknowledges that a highly productive and sustainable cotton industry relies on highly skilled people.
- A focus on providing appropriate knowledge and skill to trainers and teachers will deliver a better outcome for training participants over the long term.
- Training providers should be brought together to learn from each other and this network of providers should be advised by industry in setting priorities and establishing good training performance indicators.

Cotton Australia calls for

- On-going flexible labour policies that allow people to move around within industries and across states.
- Tax incentives to encourage people to own property in rural towns, to ensure a stable social basis that will encourage professional services to be established in the community.
- Establishment of a network of rural and regional professionals supported by Government with a view to provide support that will encourage service to remain in the bush.

Information on the Federal Government's industrial relations program can be found at: www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Category/PolicyReviews/WorkplaceRelationsReforms/

The ALP's "Industrial Relations – Forward With Fairness" Policy can be found at: www.alp.org.au/download/now/fwf_final.pdf

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