

SECTION 5  
WATER  
MATTERS

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# Getting the balance right about water

**C**otton Australia has called on the Federal Government to urgently implement its promised \$300 million to support on-farm infrastructure improvements to enable water savings to be delivered to the Murray-Darling Basin.

Commenting on the decision by cotton producer Cubbie Station to put its property on the market, Cotton Australia CEO Mr Adam Kay said the debate on water licence buyback had distracted from the importance of achieving real on-farm water savings across the whole basin.

“The discussion on how Australia’s water resource should efficiently and sustainably be used is clearly too important to our national economy, not to mention hundreds of regional communities, to be reduced to symbolic gestures,” Adam said.

“Australian cotton farmers have been consistent in their support for the Government’s response to the challenges of water – including the purchase of water licences from willing sellers. But we have consistently said the buybacks – that often fail to deliver any ‘real’ returns – must not be the only active element of the policy response to water.

“Greater priority must be given to the social impacts of the water buyback scheme as well as the necessary support for on-farm infrastructure improvements that will deliver greater water use efficiency. The Federal Government has promised \$300 million to support such improvements but so far none of this money has been spent.”

Adam said that in a debate with so many strongly held views, it was easy to forget that everyone is after the same outcome – the balanced and sustainable distribution of a limited resource that allows our towns and cities to drink, our food and fibre to be grown, the survival of regional industry and the health of our environment.

“There remains a lot of misunderstanding within



the broader community about how the Murray-Darling system functions,” Adam said.

“It is not simply a matter of turning a tap off at one point to generate a flow somewhere else. It is a complex system where the overwhelming majority of water within the system evaporates from natural lakes at Menindee and other areas before it reaches the mouth of the Murray.

“Drought too has had an enormous impact on water flow. Cubbie Station is only on the market because of the ongoing drought that stretches from Queensland to South Australia. The fact remains that if Cubbie Station didn’t exist there would be no guarantee that the river system would benefit, even in a wet year because the water would most likely be used by downstream properties or evaporate in areas such as the Menindee Lakes.”

### Suitable crop

Adam said expert scientists recognised annual crops such as cotton as being much more suitable to be grown in the Murray-Darling Basin than perennial crops due to the fact that they would only be grown in years where there was sufficient water available.

“Australia should also be proud of its cotton industry which is easily the most water efficient cotton industry in the world, and which is already well on its way to doubling water use efficiency within the next 10 years,” Adam said.



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