

Busy time for Cotton Australia

By Adam Kay, CEO, Cotton Australia

The past three months has been an extremely busy period for Cotton Australia staff, who have worked hard to implement the organisation's strategic plan and deliver positive outcomes for growers under a new structure.

Two new faces in the policy team has seen grower representation ramped up at a critical time, with issues of water and climate change firmly on government agendas at state and federal levels. Communication with growers about their new, merged organisation has continued with a series of Advancing Australian Cotton brochures and in-depth background briefings on issues such as water, 2,4-D and the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

The following gives growers an update on the key issues that Cotton Australia has been working on over the past few months.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ON FARM WATER EFFICIENCY PROJECTS

Cotton Australia has continued to lobby the federal government heavily to ensure that funds start to flow at the farm level for this phase of the Water for the Future Plan. In NSW, Cotton Australia is most focused on working with the NSW Department of Primary Industries on the Irrigated



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Farm Modernisation program, with up to \$300 million for projects to increase water use efficiency of irrigated agriculture. In Queensland, we continue to work with individual growers and QFF to achieve a more integrated approach between buybacks and infrastructure upgrades and a more collaborative approach on establishing market value for different water entitlement types.



INFLUENCING THE BASIN WIDE PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Cotton Australia is fully engaged with the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) in the development of the Basin Plan that will in part set and enforce environmentally sustainable limits on water extractions, set Basin-wide environmental water quality and salinity objectives and develop efficient water trading regimes. The next consultation opportunity is a Peak Bodies Forum to be held in December where Cotton Australia will continue to push for fair and reasonable outcomes for growers.

SOCIO ECONOMIC STUDY

Cotton Australia's new NSW Policy Officer, Brad Pfeffer, is working with Mick Keogh of the Australian Farm Institute (AFI) on a project looking at the socio economic impacts of water buyback in the Gwydir Valley.

This information will be critical evidence in Cotton Australia's efforts to have the social impacts of government water buyback and other water reform measures taken into account.

CARBON AND GREENHOUSE

Cotton Australia was pleased with the announcement that a coalition deal on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) would exclude agriculture indefinitely. This follows months of sustained lobbying, alongside the National Farmers Federation in Canberra. With a commitment for agriculture to cooperate in reducing emissions as part of the deal, Cotton Australia will continue working with the Department of Climate Change and our research partners on mitigation and abatement options for cotton.

PHENOXY HERBICIDE

Following over \$9 million in lost production last year, a comprehensive plan to protect the industry from Phenoxy drift is being implemented by the Cotton Australia team. It includes a media and advertising campaign, direct communication with consultants, manufacturers and distributors of Phenoxy products and an interactive cotton awareness map where growers can plot their fields to alert neighbours to potential risk areas. Growers are encouraged to go on-line to map their

fields at www.cottonmap.com.au.

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Acting General Manager Stu Higgins is making the final touches to the new BMP program before its roll-out next year. Rob Cairns is working on the options for auditing and a new BMP Service Officer, Allison Davies, has been employed in Narrabri to answer grower enquiries.

RESEARCH DIRECTION

The Cotton Australia grower panels have met to review the preliminary research proposals received by the Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC). All have been ranked and feedback provided to the CRDC to help guide their Board in determining project funding for the coming year.

Cotton Australia is always keen to hear constructive feedback from growers. Please do not hesitate to contact your Cotton Australia Regional Manager, policy staff or the CEO about any issue of concern.

NEW COTTONMAP WEBSITE

Despite consistent education and warnings at the start of the season, Cotton Australia has already received reports of 2,4-D damage in Central Queensland. In one reported case, over 40 per cent of a grower's crop was damaged, which is clearly unacceptable.

For the second year running Cotton Australia is implementing a comprehensive program, working with spray contractors, retailers and other industries to alert them to the potential risks associated with phenoxy herbicides when not applied correctly.

The latest strategy in this program is the launch of a new website www.cottonmap.com.au that allows growers and consultants to map the placement of this season's cotton fields. This will allow surrounding neighbours to check the placement of sensitive cotton fields before applying phenoxy herbicides that may drift and cause damage to your crop.

Cotton growers and consultants have heeded the call to map their fields, with about 70 per cent (130,000 hectares) of farms mapped to date. This is an overwhelming response and Cotton Australia would like to thank everyone who has participated so far. The site is now being promoted to users of Phenoxy herbicides via a radio advertising campaign in cotton valleys.

Cottonmap is jointly funded by CRDC, GRDC, NuFarm and Cotton Australia and will remain online until 30 April 2010.



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