

## **Emerald irrigators consider State Government offer to own and operate irrigation channels**

Irrigators will consider a State Government offer to own and operate SunWater's irrigation channels in Emerald.

Announcing the formal offer this week, the Minister for Energy, Biofuels and Water Supply Mr Mark Bailey said the local management of water assets presents a major opportunity for local Queensland communities to determine the future of their irrigation schemes.

"The transfer of these water assets from SunWater to local management demonstrates the government's commitment to agriculture and regional Queensland," he said. "Local management will give greater transparency, while giving water users greater control of their water pricing and future changes to the scheme."

Mr Bailey encouraged scheme customers in Emerald to consider the offer which relates to the transfer all below-dam water assets from SunWater to local ownership and comes with a \$2.5 million to help with the transition.

Chair of the Board of Fairbairn Irrigation Network Pty Ltd, a company set up to represent the interest of Emerald's scheme customers, Ms Annette Smith, said customers met last week to discuss the transition process that would occur if customers supported a move to local management in light of the offer.

Ms Smith said while the offer contains a smaller separation payment than that contained in the Business Proposal put to the government in 2014, the move provides irrigators with the opportunity to access Federal funding to modernise the scheme to achieve greater efficiency and generate water savings.

"Moving away from Government ownership gives locals control over an asset that is important to our regional economy. The board believes locals are best placed to efficiently manage and sustainably grow the scheme over the long-term. A very strong level of support was received from customers for the Business proposal during the consultation process in Stage 2," Ms Smith said.

"At this stage we will be consulting with and seeking support from customers to continue with the local management process and now we can provide more detail about the offer and its impacts. If they are supportive, work can commence on further engineering due diligence and financial modeling which will assist in finalising the terms of the transition."

"The process the government has established shows that it is serious about empowering local people and we will be seeking the support of scheme customers to continue on that path," she said.

The local management of the Emerald Irrigation Scheme will enable the transfer of irrigation and drainage infrastructure that currently distributes water to around 150 customers, irrigating 15,000 hectares of land.

Scheme customers in St George, Theodore and Eton are also considering offers from the State government while government-appointed boards in the Burdekin-Haughton, Bundaberg, Mareeba-Dimbulah and the Lower Mary are conducting further investigations into the local management option.

More information about Local Management Arrangements (LMA) for SunWater's irrigation channels is available at [www.lmairrigation.com.au](http://www.lmairrigation.com.au).

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