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Media Release

St George 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 St George.

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

"The transfer of these schemes 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 St George to consider the offer which relates to the transfer of all below-dam infrastructure from SunWater to local ownership and includes \$5.1 million to help with the transition.

Chair of the Board of the St George Irrigation Scheme, Mr Luke Stower, said consultation meetings with scheme customers will be held in the coming weeks to assess their support for the offer that takes into account recent upgrades to the scheme and aligns to the Business Proposal that scheme customers put to the government in 2014.

"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," Mr Stower said.

"At this stage we are seeking continuing support from customers to continue with the local management process. If they are supportive, work can commence on further engineering due diligence and financial modelling 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," he said.

The local management of the St George Irrigation Scheme will enable the transfer of irrigation and drainage infrastructure between the Balonne River and Buckinbah pump station that distributes water to around 50 customers, irrigating 10,000 hectares of land.

Scheme customers in Emerald, 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.

Media enquiries: Luke Stower Chair of the Board of Mallowa Irrigation Ltd on 0409 692 404.