

Queensland Government unfairly picking irrigation water winners

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) has serious concerns the state government is unfairly picking winners within the agriculture sector by further restricting the number of farmers who can access an election commitment to provide a 50 per cent price reduction for horticulture irrigation water users.

While QFF welcomed the government's announcement to reduce water prices for the state's irrigators by at least 15 per cent, the peak agricultural body has questioned the decision to offer different discounts to different commodities and customers of different water providers.

QFF CEO Dr Georgina Davis said it was wrong to favour one agricultural commodity, or regional community over another by selectively providing favourable pricing.

"The Queensland Government is determined to rewrite the accepted definition of horticulture and exclude sugar cane, cotton, nuts, flowers, turf (grass), and nursery growers from receiving the announced price reduction," Dr Davis said.

"While some fruit and vegetable growers will also be prevented from accessing cheaper water because they are not serviced by government water supply corporations Sunwater and Seqwater which could cause competitive disadvantages within the sector and result in market distortions."

"The government's poor decision is exacerbated by expected irrigation water price increases from 1 July 2021, meaning many farmers will be no better off even if they qualify for the 50 per cent discount, as they manage the ongoing effects of drought

and COVID-19.”

“Uncertainty also exists around how the government and its corporations plan to administer two levels of discounts in a transparent and robust manner, which is likely to be extremely difficult and expensive.”

Dr Davis said QFF was calling on the Queensland Government to extend the 50 per cent discount to all horticulture growers and all irrigation customers of Sunwater, Seqwater, Local Management Authorities (LMA) and other water providers.

“While it may have State Budget implications, the greater discount would provide a welcome boost to all of Queensland’s irrigated agricultural industries and achieve the government’s aim of facilitating more crops, more jobs and more value.”

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