



AgForce Urges Federal Reinvestment to Protect Great Artesian Basin

FAILURE of the Federal Government to continue funding of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative (GABSI) could jeopardise the work already completed and limit primary producers' ability to implement efficient land management.

Under GABSI, assistance is provided to landholders to cap free-flowing groundwater bores and to replace high-evaporation bore drains with piped systems. These simple measures are two of the most effective ways to promote sustainable groundwater management, reduce negative environmental impacts and to give primary producers tools to manage land in a way that is both responsible and productive.

AgForce General President, Ian Burnett, said he urged the Federal Government to extend its current Phase Three of GABSI, due to expire on June 30 2014, for a further period of at least two to three years, particularly given GABSI was one of the few collaborative initiatives which united government, agriculture, conservation and the resources sector in Queensland.

"GABSI is one of the simplest and most effective ways of achieving more responsible water management and has proven to be of enormous success over previous years," Mr Burnett said.

"Under GABSI and its predecessor programs, 674 bores have been capped and more than 14,000km of bore drain replaced with more than 16,000km of piping in Queensland.

"To not continue to support such an important initiative and finish the job puts at risk the water savings previously secured and defies common sense."

Across the state, GABSI has also resulted in more than 78 per cent of eligible uncontrolled bores being rehabilitated and more than 70pc of bore drains replaced with piping. Nationally GABSI has led to an estimated water saving within the Great Artesian Basin of approximately 200,000 million litres each year. Under the initiative, landholders contribute between 20 and 40pc of the cost of projects with the remainder met by government-contributed funds.

Chairman of the Remote Area Planning and Development Board, Rob Chandler, which represents the seven councils of Central Western Queensland that collectively covers 23 per cent of the State, echoed AgForce's concerns.

"This has been one of the most significant programs in our region, delivering both environmental and economic outcomes." Cr Chandler said.

Mr Burnett said much work critical to ensuring efficient water management still remained.

“Phase Three will soon expire but much work remains to be done to further improve sustainability and efficiencies with the Great Artesian Basin system,” Mr Burnett said.

“Approximately 215 bores still require rehabilitation and around 5,500km of associated bored drains need to be replaced with pipe in Queensland.

“In total this would equate to approximately \$84 million and seven years of work and represents what we believe to be a sensible and value-for-money investment in the state’s future. Completing the work in Queensland would cost about \$1050 per million litres saved, well under the Commonwealth Government’s cost-effectiveness benchmark of \$1682.

“AgForce understands the Queensland Government remains committed to providing its portion of the collaborative funds for the program and we are certainly supportive of these efforts from Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, Andrew Cripps.

“However, we now implore the Minister’s federal counterparts to also recommit to the initiative and invest in the sustainability of the basin and resilience of the rural sector.”

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Who is AgForce? AgForce represents thousands of Queensland broadacre producers who recognise the value in having a strong voice. AgForce leads the way to ensure agriculture’s social, economic and environmental contribution is recognised by all levels of government. AgForce works alongside landholders, encourages and supports the next generation, builds industry partnerships and skills and promotes agriculture - for secure, sustainable, progressive and profitable food and fibre into the future.