

AUSTRALIAN[®] WATER

ASSOCIATION

The Australian Water Associations says Northern Australia Paper shows limited consideration beyond dams

The Australian Water Association (AWA) welcomes the release of the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia and notes that \$200 million that has been allocated to investment in dams, and \$20 million has been allocated for feasibility and resource assessment studies.

Australian Water Association Chief Executive, Jonathan McKeown, said sustainable water management is of the highest priority with water being valued as the a significant driver for economic prosperity in Australia.

“The Association agrees with the Government that the sustainable use of land and water resources underpins agricultural production in Australia and that long-term planning and a considered approach should be taken to improving water infrastructure provision in Australia.

“An improved capacity to increase agricultural output to an ever growing population in Asia is a positive outcome. The opportunity to improve our national agricultural output and the associated positive attributes that irrigated agriculture will have to land owners, local regional communities and the Australian economy needs to be carefully assessed in the context of the potential harm that irrigated agriculture and dams may bring to local and regional ecosystems.

However the Association is concerned that the Paper does not give specific detail on how the \$200million will be spent beyond a few dams and the Ord River Scheme, and that only \$20 million has been allocated for the feasibility studies for this investment.

“There needs to be further investment given to improved information of water sources in Northern Australia – both ground and surface. The Government has noted that it will undertake more water resource assessments over the next four years, however provides little detail on how much and when.

“Australians need to be assured that investment is not just spent on large water infrastructure projects, but also looks to address the deficiencies in drinking water quality and capacity to meet the growing populations of our regional areas.

“Further, the Government should look at the interaction between industries and how this may offer opportunities for alternative water sources including managed aquifer recharge.

The Paper also focuses on attracting further investment into the water sector; however for this to be possible the industry believes regulatory reform is critical.

“If we really want Government, private sector and international players to invest then we need to minimise the regulatory burden (in order to lower barriers to entry and compliance costs) under a simplified legal and regulatory framework which is more conducive to business and ensures that regulatory and approval processes are as inexpensive, quick and efficient as practicable.

“The water industry believes that there is the need for harmonisation of regulation between the Commonwealth, States, Territories, local governments and related agencies to the maximum extent practicable in a consistent national framework. The removal of barriers to entry and opening up the water sector to greater competition,’ said Mr McKeown.