

SOUTHERN FORESTS WATER FUTURES PROJECT

Statement by Minister for Water

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Minister for Water) [2.08 pm]: I rise to inform the house of the interest producers and farmers in the Warren–Donnelly and southern Blackwood areas have taken in the prospect of an irrigated agricultural scheme in the region. The \$3.6 million southern forests water futures project is one of 11 projects currently underway across regional Western Australia as part of the \$40 million royalties for regions–funded Water for Food program. Targeting an additional 12 gigalitres of sustainable irrigation water a year, the proposed scheme will follow a business model used by Tasmanian Irrigation. Using that model, a proportional commitment of private capital is sought from farmers to assist implementation of commercial water sharing.

Last month, two Tasmanian famers visited Manjimup to present their experiences of joining Tasmanian Irrigation’s scheme to local producers as part of a Department of Water workshop. They and another six presenters addressed more than 70 people at that workshop. Feedback from attendees was very positive. They discussed the benefits of a water share scheme and how it could introduce opportunities to transform production across a range of growing contexts. The scheme would comprise a network of pipelines and pumping infrastructure to connect existing and new dams across the region. This would create a whole-of-region approach to commercial water security for existing producers and would open the door for developing new irrigated areas within the scheme’s reach. Farmers can register their interest in participating in a potential scheme by submitting a letter of intent to purchase and sell water entitlements. They would then have the opportunity to subscribe to the scheme to buy and sell water. This model has proved extremely successful in Tasmania, where access to reliable water has transformed production. Interest is being gauged right now through the volume and distribution of water sought by interested farmers. Landowners can register their interest by submitting letters of intent to the Department of Water by 31 March.

This Thursday, another community briefing workshop is being held in Manjimup for anyone interested in learning more about the scheme. The Water for Food team will be again joined by Tasmanian Irrigation farmers, who will speak to participants about how irrigated agriculture has transformed their farming experience.

It is an exciting time for the agricultural sector in WA. WA’s lower south west is one of the state’s key production zones with its own unique reputation and a growing presence in the fresh food market. Addressing water constraints has the ability to boost horticultural production in the district even further. Water for Food is at the forefront of an agricultural renaissance, providing new opportunities through innovation and science, market development, infrastructure rollouts, and irrigation precincts. I look forward to updating the house on the outcome of the southern forests project letters of intent process in the near future.