



## Minister for Water; Forestry; Innovation and ICT; Science; Youth

Our ref: 75-11894  
Your Ref: Petition No. 138

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
4 Harvest Terrace  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Mr Swinbourn

### **PETITION NO. 138 – NORTH WANNEROO WATER RIGHTS**

Thank you for your letter dated 14 February 2020 seeking my comments in relation to the above petition.

The McGowan Government strongly supports irrigated agriculture in North Wanneroo. This agricultural precinct is a significant contributor to Western Australia's economic output and it is an important source of seasonal fruit and vegetables for Perth as well as interstate and overseas customers. The greatest threat to the future viability of this important agricultural precinct is the ongoing decline in rainfall due to anthropogenic climate change.

The McGowan Government is committed to supporting the long-term viability of the North Wanneroo agricultural precinct through the sustainable management of the Gngangara groundwater system. The Gngangara system is the resource that provides a large part of Perth's drinking water supply, irrigates parks and gardens, supports bushland and wetland environments and is the water source for large areas of irrigated agriculture. Declining rainfall as a result of climate change means that ongoing action is needed to ensure the ongoing viability of this resource. Since 1998 groundwater levels have significantly reduced with a 1.8 meter drop in aquifer storage since 1998. Without action, groundwater levels in the Gngangara system will continue to decline as the current rate of abstraction is greater than the level of recharge.

The scale and timing of future adjustments to groundwater allocations has been a long-standing concern for water licence holders in North Wanneroo. A cut of 25 per cent to water entitlements was proposed by the former Liberal-National Government in 2016. A potential cut to water entitlements of this magnitude was a source of uncertainty and distress to many growers in the North Wanneroo area. That is why on 30 January 2019, I proposed that groundwater abstraction reductions in North Wanneroo should be limited to 10 per cent and there should be no change to water entitlements in the area until at least 2028.

The McGowan Government is committed to ensuring any changes to water entitlements are limited as much as possible and we are currently working on alternative water supply options

for growers in the North Wanneroo area. The McGowan has sought funding from the Australian Government to support projects that will provide alternative water supply options for the area. A final proposal for groundwater allocations will be outlined in a new Gnambarra groundwater allocation plan.

In respect to the trading of water entitlements, water licence holders are free to enter into water trades with each other to obtain additional groundwater. The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation maintains a publicly available water register which provides the details and location of water licence holders. Trades, transfers and agreements between eligible licence holders are administered using a single form.

The McGowan Government is committed to introducing to Parliament a Water Resources Management Bill. This Bill is currently being drafted.

In response to the Taskforce recommendations, the State Government has committed to developing a business case for a new leasehold horticultural precinct to be supplied with recycled water instead of groundwater. The proposed precinct will occupy a cleared portion of State Forest No. 65 adjacent to the existing agricultural land in North Wanneroo. The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is leading the development of a business case study to determine the economic viability of a waste water recycling scheme as well as prefeasibility studies of how the land could be developed.

Adapting to changing water availability as the climate changes is a significant challenge to all groundwater users in Perth and across the South West. The State Government is calling on all groundwater users to adapt and is seeking Commonwealth Government support to help people transition to using less groundwater by becoming more water efficient and to develop new, more climate independent water supplies.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dave Kelly', is written over a circular blue stamp.

10 MAR 2020

Hon Dave Kelly MLA  
**MINISTER FOR WATER**