



Hon Alannah MacTiernan MLC
Minister for Regional Development; Agriculture and Food; Ports;
Minister Assisting the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade

Our ref: 64-16144
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 19 March 2020, seeking my comments with regard to Petition No.138 – North Wanneroo Water Rights.

The McGowan Government appreciates the importance of, and is committed to, supporting outer metropolitan food production in Western Australia. The Government also acknowledges the challenges faced by industry in North Wanneroo, both in terms of a drying climate and urban sprawl.

I am aware the committee has also requested and received comments, which I support, from my colleague, Hon Dave Kelly MLA, Minister for Water.

Balancing the management of the Gnangara water resource between Perth drinking water, the environment and agriculture is critical to the long term viability of the Gnangara groundwater resource, as too is the need for well-considered long term land use planning.

Many industries, particularly agricultural industries relying on climate dependant water sources, have been facing and adjusting to reduced rain and groundwater due to climate change for many years. To assist the irrigated agricultural industry in North Wanneroo to adapt to the proposed reductions, I have asked the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) to undertake water efficiency assessments and trials in the North Wanneroo area to identify potential water efficiency opportunities. DPIRD recently completed assessments of more than 20 irrigation systems in the area. This work confirmed there are efficiency gains to be made by irrigators. Improvement could come from either system modifications, practice improvement (ie. better water scheduling) or adoption of technology to fine-tune irrigation effectiveness.

One of the structural problems with the industry is that many farmers are leaseholders on relatively short term tenancies. This does not encourage investment in the latest, most efficient technology.

I encourage all users of groundwater to consider how identifying, minimising and managing business risk, including those around water, can lead to significant improvements in business sustainability, viability and competitiveness.

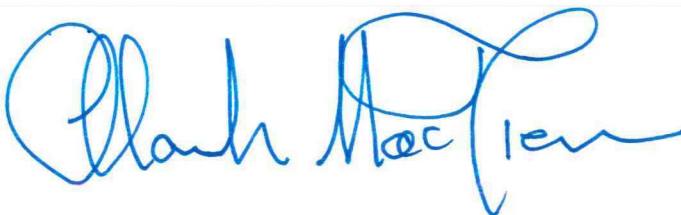
The State Government supports the retention of prime agricultural land in the outer metropolitan area. The recently released, for comment, East Wanneroo District Structure Plan provides for progressive urbanisation of East Wanneroo for the next 50 years. Under the structure plan, an estimated 400 hectares of horticultural land, 352 hectares zoned rural, could be lost through rezoning, resulting in the loss or relocation of horticulture, poultry and other farming businesses from the East Wanneroo locale. With the potential loss of this agricultural land in East Wanneroo the Government considers it necessary to retain and, where feasible, add to rural zoned land in outer metropolitan areas, such as Wanneroo.

To support the retention and possible expansion of agriculture in North Wanneroo, I have asked DPIRD to undertake a business case assessment for a project, as envisioned in the Future of the East Wanneroo Report, utilising treated wastewater from the Alkimos wastewater treatment plant to supply a new agri-precinct in part of State Forest 65. An initial business case assessment concluded that a managed aquifer recharge scheme would result in untenably high water costs. DPIRD is currently reassessing the parameters, assumptions and concept used to determine if a more viable solution can be found. The development of a new agri-precinct using treated wastewater within State Forest 65 is not without its challenges, particularly in terms of achieving the necessary economies of scale to make the project viable. The revised business case and land planning studies are due to be completed in the second half of 2020.

Similar treated wastewater and freshwater irrigation schemes throughout Australia have been funded through a mix of Federal, State and private sector investment, with water users paying both a capital contribution and an annual water use charge. Recognising that a secure water resource is not free, participants in these irrigation schemes see benefits in paying for non-climate dependant water, providing them with long term water security.

The Government supports the retention of a viable and sustainable outer metropolitan food production hub in the Wanneroo area. To do so will require both government and industry working together to meet and adapt to climate change challenges, develop alternative non-climate dependent water sources and well-considered long term land planning and zoning, with appropriate buffers, in the area.

Yours sincerely



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MINISTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT; AGRICULTURE AND FOOD; PORTS;
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7 APR 2020