

WARNOCK Agronomics Pty Limited

A.B.N. 44 001 939 966

March 26th, 2019

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Export Control Amendment (Banning Cotton Exports to Ensure Water Security) Bill 2019

In 1788 Cotton seed was brought to Australia on the First Fleet. Throughout the more than 230 years the Australian Cotton Industry has developed into one of the most successful and innovative agricultural industries in the World. The development of the “modern” industry from the early 1960’s has been based on a world leading Research and Development program involving CSIRO, State Departments of Agriculture and co-operating Universities across this country.

As a result of this Research and Development focus there have been extraordinary advances in water use efficiency, environmental stewardship and advances in fibre quality to meet the demands of the Australian community and world markets. Australia produces the world’s highest average yields and the best quality cotton.

Whether cotton production results from irrigation or rainfall, or both, the resultant productivity is the envy of producers world-wide. The Australian Cotton Industry is viewed as one of the most innovative and successful Agricultural industries in Australia. The industry employs young, well educated and respected people across the whole industry.

The Cotton Industry does not just comprise “cotton growers”, but many, many people engaged in servicing the industry through supplies of seed, fertilizer, crop protection products, fuel and other energy, tractors, harvest equipment and transport and processing sectors. It is a highly specialised industry that relies on the support of these other businesses.

My first contact and involvement with the Cotton Industry came in 1965. My first job in the Cotton Industry was in 1968. For more than 50 years I have been proud to be comprehensively involved in this exciting sector of Australian Agriculture. I trained as an Agronomist and worked for NSW Department of Agriculture at Trangie and Leeton Agricultural Research Centres. In my role as Agronomist-in-Training, I was responsible for evaluations of alternative crops which could be grown in the Northern and Southern Murray Darling Basin.

In May, 1972 I was offered the position of Agronomist with Auscott Limited at Narrabri. I have subsequently lived and worked in this area for the past 47 years. Auscott is a highly respected corporate entity that has provided training and experience to many people who have taken up positions in the industry over the more than 50 years they have operated in this industry. Auscott

is a vertically integrated organisation growing, processing and marketing Australian Cotton over all these years.

In 1978 I was offered a position as Agronomist on an Agricultural Development Project in Sudan. We developed new land for the production of Sorghum, Sesame, Sunflowers, Guar and Cotton. These were considered essential crops for this developing country. I was able to extend my knowledge and experience to the local people and mentor people to continue the development of these essential food and fibre crops following my departure.

I have worked in the Cotton Industry as Technical Manager for a Crop Protection company before establishing an Agronomic Consultancy to Cotton Growers in the Namoi and Gwydir Valleys in Northern New South Wales. I have studied Irrigation Developments in all States of Australia, United States of America and Israel. In 1982/83 I was involved in the evaluation of Drip Irrigation in Cotton in the Namoi Valley. Whilst I have maintained an interest in Drip Irrigation technology since then, it is generally considered an unviable proposition in the Australian environment.

In 1984 my wife and I commenced development of an Irrigation farm South-East of Narrabri. In the 35 years we have been involved in this development we have expanded from the initial 320 hectares to some 1600 hectares of highly developed irrigation. Cotton has always been the principal crop we have produced as it has provided the best returns for the land and water resources we utilise.

From the commencement of our cotton growing enterprise here in the Namoi Valley we have sourced our irrigation water from Groundwater in the Namoi Alluvium. We DO NOT access water directly from the Namoi River or the Murray-Darling river system. We have always been responsible for developing our access to this water, through the establishment of high capacity bores. These bores MUST be licenced and have been metered and monitored since day one!

Over the years we have relied on receiving approximately 50% of our water requirements to grow our cotton crops, from rainfall and the other 50% from irrigation from Groundwater Sources. We grow a range of crops on our farm, apart from the main crop Cotton. We have grown wheat (both Durum for pasta and bread wheat), soybeans for human consumption, Chickpeas and Faba Beans. In recent years we have been producing high yielding, fully irrigated Maize/Corn for human consumption. We are constantly assessing the performance of our cropping program to determine the efficiency of applied irrigation water. As a result we **DO NOT** allocate any irrigation water to crops other than Cotton and Maize/Corn. Water is too valuable to be applying it to these secondary crops. The returns from growing Maize/Corn are well behind those received from growing Cotton. However, the Maize/Corn provides a very valuable disease break for our Cotton crop and assists us in building soil health, which is so important for long-term sustainability. We also incorporate the application of chicken manure as part of this strategy. All crop residue is returned to the soil, so that after so many years of farming here our soils are improving in biological health.

It is a truly ridiculous proposition to ban the export of Cotton – which effectively means a ban on the growing of Cotton. Over my more than 50 years in this Industry we have developed a farming system that is a complex, but important “package”. This “package” allows us to develop our farming systems for sustainable long-term productivity. We employ nine (9) people fulltime on the farm, with four (4) or more casual employees engaged at Cotton Picking time. We also employ Consultant Agronomists, Aerial Operators, Cotton Picking Contractors, transport and logistics operations to move our Cotton grains, and legumes to markets.

If we are “banned” from growing Cotton our farming systems will be jeopardised. Our specialised equipment and people will not be utilised. The supporting businesses in our

community will have to retrench staff. We will have to develop new farming systems and **NEW MARKETS** for the alternative crops we will need to grow. Many alternative crops would flood existing markets causing the collapse of reliable pricing and marketing arrangements.

The wild notion that banning Cotton production will somehow see extra water flowing down the Barwon-Darling is laughable. We are NOT going to pump water from Groundwater Sources to the Namoi River to send to the lower Darling and South Australia. What a disgraceful proposition. We will utilise the water we are entitled to pump for the production of crops for human and animal consumption.

The proposition that the export of Cotton products is “exporting water” highlights the ignorance of the proponents of this Bill. ALL Agriculture relies on water for productive output. The proponents have absolutely no idea of the involvement of Agriculture in feeding and clothing the people of our World. How pathetic to not acknowledge that all crop and animal production requires water, whether this water falls as rainfall or is applied as irrigation water, or a combination of both.

It is annoying in the extreme to realise that South Australian irrigators are entitled to a 100% allocation this season, whilst the majority of irrigators in the New South Wales Northern and Southern basins have 0% allocation of river or surface water. This is water that has flowed to South Australia from upstream catchments and should not be allowed to continue.

I implore you to carefully consider the ramifications of this Bill and ultimately the damage such a Bill would do to ALL Australian Agriculture.

Yours sincerely

WARNOCK Agronomics Pty Limited

John P. (Jack) Warnock
Managing Director