



Wee Waa & District Chamber of Commerce

ABN 44 582 149 302

Submission

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

The Wee Waa & District Chamber of Commerce is a community group which aims to support and promote the economic and social viability of the Wee Waa district. Wee Waa is located on the Namoi River in north-western NSW, and has a population of 2000. It is the original cotton centre of Australia, and is 90% dependent on agriculture. Its continued existence depends very much on the survival of the cotton industry, which, if this proposed Bill were to be passed, would be destroyed. Wee Waa is part of the Narrabri Shire, in which the cotton industry ranked as the third largest employer in the 2016 Australian Census.

Along with many others, Wee Waa is struggling with ongoing severe drought conditions, being currently in the 7th year of an already record-breaking drought. Local irrigators, unlike those in South Australia who still receive 100% of their allocation, have not received any water allocation for more than 2 years, with inflows to the Murray Darling in the last 2 years being the lowest in the last 100 years.

It appears that Senator Patrick's motives in putting forward this Bill are, at best, a mischievous attempt to gain notoriety for his otherwise little known party, given the statement in his explanatory memorandum that "This Bill is intended to trigger a national debate on the future of the cotton industry." In that, he has succeeded. Additionally, by the Centre Alliance's own admission in the Bill's second reading speech, a ban on the export of cotton would be a "drastic step" and a "radical action" - not, we submit, the viable, measured and science based response to the serious and ongoing issue of limited water availability that is needed. Curiously, the suggestion that such a significant, progressive and efficient industry as the Australian cotton industry should be closed down, appears to be at odds with the Centre Alliance's policy statement (<https://centrealiance.org.au/>) that "Agriculture is a vital part, not just of the fabric of rural and regional Australia, but of the entire nation."

The formulation of the Bill is seriously flawed, in that it appears to be based on outdated statistics (mostly from 2005 to 2012) that have since changed significantly, and unfounded assumptions. The explanatory memorandum to the Bill conveniently ignores many facts, including the following:

- Over the last 10 years, no more than 16% of total inflows have been allocated for extractive users in the Murray Darling.
- Under the Water Sharing Plan for the Upper & Lower Namoi Regulated system, for example, priority is given to stock & domestic use, town water supply and the environment. "There needs to be sufficient water in the system to meet these requirements and to provide flows

along the river, before general security customers (such as irrigators) receive an allocation.”
(Drought Fact Sheet – Namoi Valley – water.nsw.gov.au)

- The 2018/19 Australian cotton crop is likely to be around half the size of the 2017/18 crop due to the lack of water. This illustrates the self-regulating nature of the industry in terms of production levels and water availability.
- Northern rivers have always naturally dried out periodically, and, even with the amount of regulation due to our headwater dams, in extreme droughts like the current one, they are going to run dry.
- The Australian cotton industry has made significant advancements in water efficiency in recent years, with a 40% increase in cotton water productivity, with continuing year-to-year improvements. It is among the most efficient in the world, with yields 2.5 times the world average.
- The Australian cotton industry has one of the world’s most rigorous farm and environmental management programs, myBMP, which ensures growers are implementing world’s best practice to produce economically, socially and environmentally sustainable cotton.

Senator Patrick has also incorrectly ascertained that the current water shortages are due largely to the cotton industry. There is no acknowledgment of the seriousness of the drought which, to date, is already worse than any we have seen before, and that, if decent rainfall were to be received, the issues he refers to would be largely rectified. The cotton industry did not cause this drought and it, like many others, is a victim of it. To target the cotton industry because of issues caused by the drought displays a high level of ignorance, and is simply unfair.

We submit that this Bill must be rejected as out of hand. It will do nothing to achieve its stated objective of ensuring food and water security. Its proponents have clearly given little thought to the full ramifications if it is passed, which will include the death of the world-leading Australian cotton industry, and the death of many towns which rely on it, including ours.

Ann-Maree Galagher – President
Wee Waa & District Chamber of Commerce