

Media Release: Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme and Regional Recovery

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RDA Tropical North Chair David Kempton has welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement of \$10m to take the Lakeland Irrigation Area Project one step closer to fruition and acknowledges Warren Entsch, the member for Leichhardt for his ongoing support.

The proposed 200ML dam on the Palmer River will irrigate up to 10,000 ha in the Lakeland basin providing over 1,000 jobs and generating over \$1b a year to the northern economy.

"This is the most exciting infrastructure project to come out of our region in decades and arose from a discussion with growers years ago about the potential for Lakeland if there was improved water security." David stated.

"The Palmer River Dam, an RDA TN initiative, ticks all the boxes economically and environmentally with enormous opportunity for the community including many Indigenous groups. The project is well positioned to lead the economic recovery of our region post pandemic" David said.

RDA has appointed SMEC as project managers, under the direction of RDA Project Director, Tony Potter and has assembled a stakeholder Advisory Committee including Lakeland growers, Francis Inderbitzin of Red Valley Bananas and Cameron Mackay from Mackay Farms to oversee the project.

"I'm very excited about the project especially for the people in the community and surrounding areas," said Francis. "Services will improve, and many new opportunities will arise for all involved providing for an exciting and secure future".

Cameron Mackay has also welcomed the news saying "This is a long term investment in our regional economy which will enable McKay Farms to expand and diversify its agriculture and horticulture pursuits and employ at least another 100 people in its business alone. Water security is pivotal to the success of the industry in Lakeland."

RDA Board member and FNQ Growers Chair, Joe Moro is also keen to see the project progress "The Lakeland Irrigation Scheme is very important for the long term capacity of the region to continue to grow as a food bowl for Australia and parts of the world".

"It will provide farmers in the region the opportunity to consolidate, expand and diversify their businesses; providing resilience against the economic downturns that can occur with individual commodities," Joe said.

Cook Shire Mayor, Peter Scott is delighted with the announcement. "I want to pay tribute to the local Lakeland growers and RDA Tropical North for the initiative they have shown in getting this project underway," he said.

The Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme is a key part of RDATN strategy for regional recovery post COVID-19.

SMEC is due to deliver the first of 9 project Milestones this week and will be putting the major components of the project out to tender in the coming weeks with the business case and preliminary design due in 2022.

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Background Information

The Lakeland district has been identified in the Northern Australia Infrastructure Audit Report for Infrastructure Australia as having increased potential for suitable agriculture.

Water security for the growers and producers of the Lakeland district has been of concern for a number of years and more particularly in recent times as production expands, placing additional demand on existing water supply.

The Lakeland district, with its rich soils and strong grower presence, has evolved to become one of the premier agricultural areas in the region.

In 2017, Cape York Sustainable Futures (CYSF) received \$825,000 (ex GST) to undertake the Lakeland Irrigation Area feasibility study to explore, identify and assess all aspects of expanding and improving agriculture in the LIA. The LIA feasibility study was part of the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund (NWIDF), an initiative of the Australian Government. CYSF engaged SMEC and the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (DNRME) to undertake a Water Feasibility Assessment.

Following the closure of CYSF in 2018, RDA FNQ&TS entered into an agreement to deliver the draft and final Strategic Business Case.

The report assessed four options and identified the Palmer River as the most favourable site. The Palmer River flows west to the Mitchell catchment and into the Gulf of Carpentaria. It has been highly degraded by mining over the past century and will leave no impact on the Great Barrier Reef.

The water will be pumped from the dam to the top of the Byerstown Range to a holding dam where it will be gravity fed through a hydro plant and distributed to growers by a pipe system. The hydro plant will power the pumps with some potential to return excess to the main grid.

There is presently over 6,000 ha under cropping on freehold land in the Lakeland basin and no further tree clearing is required to achieve maximum utilisation of identified arable land. There is potential for a further 10,000 ha of downstream grazing land to benefit from fodder production.