

Communique

Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme – Detailed Business Case

October 2022

Regional Development Australia Tropical North (RDATN) including Interim Chair, Cr Brett Moller and Board Members Carolyn Eagle and Joe Moro, visited Lakeland township again on 26th and 27th October 2022 to continue its engagement with producers, residents and the community regarding the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme Detailed Business Case which is currently investigating the viability of building a dam to expand the Lakeland agricultural area. The draft Detailed Business Case has been completed and submitted to the State Government for comment which have since been received on the 12 October 2022 and once assessed, they will be incorporated into the final DBC. The DBC is scheduled to be finalized and released to the public by March 2023. Several meetings were scheduled:-

LIAS Reference Group (Active since 2020)

Chaired by RDA Tropical North and including contributors from the Lakeland Progress Association, Cook Shire Council and local producers, the group discussed at length the requirements for the next steps, post-DBC in order to further advocate and strengthen the integrity of the project, in particular the facilitation and involvement of a ‘mobilisation committee’.

The conservative approach and perspective of State Government in relation to public infrastructure was acknowledged but also that RDA Tropical North has a great opportunity to facilitate and activate a collaborative approach across Local, State and Federal Governments, key stakeholders and the wider community to position the project positively and identify a potential proponent.

It was acknowledged the enormous potential to leverage road infrastructure improvements, bridge upgrades, and improve digital connectivity if the dam proceeds.

The group also agreed on the importance and significance of carrying out a separate consultative process to engage with the wider community to obtain social benefit/impact data and especially in relation to First Nations peoples.

LIAS Growers Meeting (Active since 2021)

Chaired by RDA Tropical North and including verified local Lakeland producers and landholders, the group received a full briefing and presentation from SMEC and AEC on their most recent activities and findings.

It was clarified that the LIAS is categorized as ‘new water’ by the State Government, and it will be necessary to follow appropriate legislation and resource planning process.

Clarity was provided regarding replenishment of the dam. Current analysis indicates the catchment provides enough supply for the expected uptake and requirement of high, medium and low priority water as indicated by growers and stakeholders. However, the group was reminded of the need for supplementary water from the Mitchell River Catchment (115ML) and the expiry date of the Mitchell Water Plan (2027).

It was also noted the strong desire of the group to identify economic development opportunities for First Nations people from a broader and wider community perspective and all efforts will continue in these final stages.

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The group discussed at length the benefits, impacts and barriers to the community, which will be used to formulate the next stage of community and stakeholder engagement. Points taken from the floor include (but were not limited to):-

- Increased resilience, well-being and personal wealth
- Increased social services and economic development opportunities
- Providing food security for local community, region, the Cape, State, National and overseas exports
- Potential to become a role model for The Cape as a thriving regional hub (Defence and Agriculture)
- Potential to deliver positively on ‘Closing The Gap’ outcomes
- Challenges associated with a growing population
- Policy barriers/red tape
- Unknown timeline for Mitchell Water Plan review
- Potentially unviable due to cost of materials, construction and water uptake
- Potential proponent

LIAS Community Info Session (DBC - Active since 2021)

Since May 2021, RDA Tropical North have been conducting public information sessions in the Lakeland Community Hall to complement the extensive stakeholder engagement conducted by SMEC and AEC of landholders, producers and indigenous groups located in the proposed inundation area and infrastructure zone.

Community sessions are a valuable arena to receive comments and feedback direct from the community and to provide valuable updates and presentations on the DBC progress to all interested parties, community attendees, growers and stakeholders. Sessions for the most part have been well-attended, garner good interest and discussion from the local community, government personnel and landholders.

The purpose of this most recent visit was to obtain feedback from the wider community to discuss the social benefits and impacts of the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme, should it go ahead.

“We have held regular meetings with the growers who will benefit from the water security the dam would provide and now need to hear how other businesses and residents think the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme would affect them,” said Sonja Johnson, CEO, RDA Tropical North.

“As part of our stakeholder engagement we want to know what the aspirations of the wider community are if the Lakeland agricultural area expands.

Attendees received a comprehensive update from Tony Potter, RDATN Project Director for LIAS and an invitation to request additional specific information from the draft DBC.

Some disappointment was raised from two landholders located in the inundation area in particular, who felt they had not been consulted during the process to date. Their concerns have since been addressed and they have been provided copies of the occasions and format in which their consultation(s) had taken place during the last 18 months.

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The process of community consultation and engagement is continually evolving as matters are raised or discovered. RDA Tropical North are committed to an open and transparent process and will continue to consult and liaise closely with impacted landholders.

Other comments raised from the community session reaffirmed those raised during the ‘growers meeting’ along with indicating overall project support. Additional benefit of a growing population in Lakeland could potentially mean an opportunity for sporting teams to be established for both adults and children and thus contributing to overall wellbeing in the community.

RDA Tropical North will now continue to work closely with the Lakeland community and Cook Shire Council and the wider Cape communities to comprehensively articulate community needs, wants and aspirations in relation to the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme.

For further information or comment, please contact, Regional Development Australia Tropical North.

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Further information:

LIAS latest updates and information available here-

<https://www.rdatropicalnorth.org.au/about/initiatives/lakeland-irrigation-scheme/>

Subscribe to the RDA Tropical North monthly e-alert to receive regular LIAS meeting notifications, updates and Communique.

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