



An Australian Government Initiative



Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme

Questions and Answers

Media Enquiries

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About the Project

Q: What does the project involve?

A: SMEC has been engaged by RDATN to investigate the viability of building a dam approximately 23 km south-west of Lakeland on the Palmer River and water supply scheme to Lakeland.

There is a unique opportunity to capture a proportion of high-water flows in the upper Palmer River to substantially expand the existing commercially established horticultural industry and generate employment and prosperity throughout the region.

Q: What benefits will the project bring?

A: The LIAS would provide a reliable supply of water to unlock the rich basalt soils of the area for high value agriculture. Benefits to the region include:

- access to a reliable and affordable water supply capable of supporting a majority of soils suitable to horticulture and broadacre cropping in the Lakeland Irrigation Area region
- increased volume of water available for agriculture
- ability to grow higher value and more diverse range crops in suitable areas
- improved confidence of irrigators to invest in long term business operations
- benefits to regional business activity and prosperity through increased agricultural activity.

Q: What are the potential impacts?

A: There are potential environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts and opportunities associated with the water supply scheme. The Detailed Business Case (DBC) seeks to provide a scientific and evidence-based assessment of these potential impacts.

Q: Where is the project up to now?

A: We are preparing the final DBC, which will be finalised in February 2023. The DBC is subject to Government acceptance. An Environmental Assessment report is also being developed for the project.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: Should the Government support the proposal and a proponent is nominated, the successful proponent would carry out an environmental assessment according to legislative requirements. Subject to approval, further investigations, detailed design and detailed environmental assessments may commence from 2023, and project construction potentially from 2027. Consultation would continue throughout each project phase, including opportunities to provide feedback.

About the DBC

Q: What are potential Aboriginal cultural heritage impacts and proposed management measures?

A: In our assessment, we are considering impacts and benefits to Aboriginal corporations with Native Title Determination and land tenure, and Aboriginal communities through a Social Impact Evaluation. While archaeological research in and around the project area is limited, a desktop Cultural Heritage assessment carried out for the project concluded there is high risk that the project area contains Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Should the Government support the proposal, a range of measures must be implemented to mitigate potential impacts of the project on Aboriginal cultural heritage, including early and ongoing engagement with Aboriginal parties, carrying out cultural heritage field assessments, developing a cultural heritage management plan and inductions and unexpected finds protocol.

Where possible, access to places and sites of cultural importance would be maintained, and storylines and songlines would be protected and enhanced. This may include relocating artefacts to a proposed cultural centre, harvesting timber from the inundation area, and utilising heritage entitlements to water.

During construction, the proponent would offer targeted employment and training programs, such as Environmental Management and Ranger roles, and reduce barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers.

Q: How has the Social Impact Evaluation been carried out?

A: The Social Impact Evaluation sought to understand what value the project could bring, identify negative impacts that need to be mitigated, and opportunities to create additional value. The proposal has the potential to bring social benefits and value, but could also generate negative impacts for Palmer River Dam area landholders and Traditional Owner groups. Further consultation and detailed environmental assessments would be carried out should the project receive Government support and approval.

Q: What are potential property impacts, assessment of impacts and proposed management measures for inundation area landholders?

A: The dam and inundation area is likely to result in impacts for several private properties and landholders. Impacts may include inundation of private land, loss of infrastructure, reduced productivity and loss of accessibility. These impacts may be temporary or permanent.

Consultation with potentially affected landholders is ongoing, and inputs will help build an understanding of impacts. If the proposal receives Government support and a proponent for construction is nominated, the proponent would consult and negotiate with affected landholders to identify all potential impacts.

Negotiation would follow a structured process to ensure infrastructure owners can raise issues and discuss mitigation in a fair and transparent way. After negotiating and reaching agreement, landholders would be compensated for property impacts, impacts on land value or business value.

In some instances, partial or full property acquisition would be required. This would be carried out according to a statutory process including negotiation and compensation for landholders. Infrastructure (such as fences, roads and dams) would be replaced on partially acquired properties where necessary to mitigate potential impacts.

Q: What are potential property impacts, assessment of impacts and proposed management measures for scheme infrastructure landholders?

A: The LIAS includes construction of the dam and associated infrastructure such as pipelines, pumping and valve stations, power supply and communications facilities and access roads and tunnel outlets. This infrastructure may be located on private property and is likely to result in impacts for several landholders. Wherever possible, project infrastructure would be located within existing easements and road corridors to reduce landholder impacts.

The proponent may need to establish new easements over infrastructure areas, or partially or fully acquire properties to provide ongoing access and usage rights for land containing project infrastructure. This would be carried out according to a statutory process including negotiation. Negotiation would follow a structured process to ensure landholders can raise issues and discuss mitigation and compensation in a fair and transparent way.

Q: What are the potential impacts to flora and fauna and proposed management measures?

A: Many impacts to terrestrial ecology values can be mitigated through standard industry practices and procedures, however clearing of vegetation for the dam, inundation area and irrigation area remains an unavoidable substantial impact. Palmer River is classed as a major waterway for waterway barrier works, therefore it is essential that the project provides both upstream and downstream fish passage. Discussions with DAF to achieve this are ongoing.

The dam inundation areas are mostly comprising woodlands defined as of 'least concern'; however, the irrigation infrastructure component of the project would impact extensive areas of regulated vegetation, including up to 68 Ha of "of concern" regional ecosystems. Substantial environmental offsets would be required. Further detailed environmental assessments would be carried out should the project receive Government support and approval.

Consultation

Q: Has consultation been carried out for the project?

A: Community and stakeholder engagement is an ongoing project priority. During the development of the DBC we met with key stakeholders, including landholders, growers, Traditional Owner groups, mining leaseholders, local business and Government departments. We've used feedback to inform the development of the DBC. We will continue to engage with stakeholders and the community regarding the project and potential impacts.

Q: How are you engaging with the community?

A: We will continue to use a range of tools to reach, provide information to and liaise with stakeholders, including a project phone and email address, website, letters and meetings. Our project team is committed to engaging early and often with key stakeholders. We will continue to keep key stakeholders informed throughout the project.

Q: Why is the DBC not on public display?

A: We've used feedback from key stakeholders and potentially impacted landholders to inform the development of the DBC. During this draft business case phase, we welcome community and stakeholder feedback at any time via phone (07 4041 1729) or email (lakeland@rdatropicalnorth.org.au) or at our face-to-face community events. Public display of documents and opportunities for formal submissions would occur in future project phases (should the Government choose to proceed) as a statutory planning requirement.