



An Australian Government Initiative



Communique

Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme Detailed Business Case

September 2023

The Detailed Business Case for the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme (LIAS) has been lodged with the Queensland State Government Department of Regional Development, Manufacturing and Water for review and comment. This final step in Stage 2 of the LIAS follows three years of work by Regional Development Australia (RDA) Tropical North developing the evidence base for the project which would provide a reliable supply of water to unlock 8,000ha of rich basalt soils in the Lakeland area for high-value and diverse agriculture.

Once the Department has completed the review and delivers its official statement, this will be inserted into the Detailed Business Case and submitted to the Federal Government's National Water Infrastructure Development Fund for further review and final approval for public release.

A proponent will be required to undertake the Detailed Design phase, which will require State Government approval, and to implement construction. The proponent could be Government, private enterprise or a combination of both, subject to Government commitment and funding.

RDA Tropical North (RDATN) will continue to work with Cook Shire Council, the Western Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation and the LIAS Reference Group Members to advocate for Government commitment and funding. Next steps would include the formation of a Mobilisation Group that will include First Nations, RDATN and stakeholders from all levels of Government, as members. The Mobilisation Group will be focussed on items such as advocacy efforts for Government commitment and funding, in addition to providing support to a future proponent of the LIAS.

To date, community and stakeholder engagement has been a project priority and as a result there is widespread Lakeland community support for the irrigation scheme and developing the region for agriculture. This engagement of key stakeholders has included landholders, growers, Cook Shire Council, First Nations groups, mining leaseholders, local business and Government departments, and regular public meetings in Lakeland.

The availability of reliable and plentiful water has the potential to attract additional investment in the region and allow a significant expansion of cropping by existing irrigators as well as opening the opportunity for landowners not currently irrigating to irrigate an additional area of about 4,000ha. The increase in production could make secondary industries such as packing and drying viable, and the addition of transport infrastructure would increase the potential for direct exports.

The project will create opportunities for local Indigenous employment during construction, and once it is operational. Targeted employment and training programs including environmental management, ranger roles, project management and quantity surveying could be offered during construction.

Interest has been expressed in the supply of materials, resources, traffic management, vegetation clearing, weed and pest management, sedimentation and erosion control, rehabilitation, carbon credits and land availability for environmental offsets. There is also the opportunity for a community to be established on Country for the Western Yalanji people.

A growing population provides an increased rate base for Cook Shire Council, thereby providing Council with additional funds to service community needs. Cook Shire Council is planning ahead for the anticipated growth having secured 11.3ha of land adjacent to the Lakeland township to allow for expansion of local government infrastructure, essential services, housing and commercial usage.

The Council is also reviewing its Master Plan for Lakeland to assess likely impacts, as well as addressing strategies for investment, trade and tourism throughout Cook Shire and how an enlarged Lakeland would contribute to these.

The Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme will deliver substantial and transformative socio-economic benefits to Lakeland and the wider Cook Shire area. It will be a game changer for a sparsely populated area and will provide the opportunity to elevate the ailing Closing the Gap report card by providing jobs and increased medical services for the local Indigenous people. The project also aligns with the Federal Government's Developing Northern Australia Policy.

Once received, RDATN will keep all stakeholders informed of the Department's communication and next steps.

CONTACT DETAILS

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