



An Australian Government Initiative



# Media release

## Step forward for Lakeland to develop as food bowl

22 May 2024

Lakeland’s potential as a horticultural powerhouse for Northern Australia has been cemented with the delivery of the Detailed Business Case for the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme in Far North Queensland.

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Tropical North led the development of the proposal in consultation with Cook Shire Council, the Western Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation and Lakeland growers. It was supported by funding from the Federal Government’s National Water Infrastructure Development Fund, an initiative of the Northern Australia and Agricultural Competitiveness White Papers.

RDA Tropical North Chair Professor Hurriyet Babacan said the Scheme had involved extensive stakeholder consultation over the past four years and the search could now begin for a proponent to undertake the Detailed Design phase necessary for State Government approval before construction could start.

“This exciting project was borne from the Lakeland growers whose entrepreneurial nature and best practice environmental methods led to the vision for agricultural expansion to develop new industries in Cape York Peninsula.

“One of the major success stories will be direct Indigenous involvement for the Western Yalanji people resulting in the development of Indigenous-led businesses across agricultural supply chains on Indigenous land.”

Cook Shire Mayor Robyn Homes said the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme would be a game-changer for a sparsely populated and under-resourced region by allowing growers to cultivate diverse, higher value crops that would lead to improved investor confidence in the region.

“Studies unequivocally demonstrate that the project will provide substantial social and economic benefits to the broader Cape and Torres region by accelerating population growth which is necessary for the region to become self-sustaining and economically viable.”

Western Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation Chief Executive Officer Brad Grogan said the project would bring immense potential and benefit to Traditional Owners as well as the wider community of Cook Shire and Cape York.

“We firmly stand behind this transformative initiative which will enable our people to build a strong, prosperous future that facilitates the preservation of our cultural heritage while embracing modern advancements.

“It will not only enhance our economic well-being but will also improve overall living conditions, foster social

cohesion and community development with better access to essential services such as healthcare, education and transportation.”

Kureen Farming grower Paul Inderbitzen, whose family pioneered banana growing in Lakeland and has diversified into crops including avocados and broadacre seed cropping, said the region was well poised for expansion of further agricultural and horticultural crops.

“With the skills and land already available, we just need to add water to create greater opportunity to expand into a diverse range of high-value crops,” he said.

Professor Babacan said RDA Tropical North would lobby the Queensland Government to establish an independently chaired Mobilisation Taskforce consisting of State and Federal representatives, Cook Shire Council, Western Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation, growers, and RDA Tropical North.

“This taskforce would identify a proponent, such as Sunwater, and determine the policy foundations for developing the project appropriately which could mean making it a Coordinated Project,” she said.

“It would also put impact assessment arrangements in place, negotiate final cost estimates and cost sharing arrangements between governments and the private sector, and ensure all ancillary planning is in place to maximise social, economic and environmental benefits.

“The State Government also needs to support Cook Shire Council in planning for the expansion of Lakeland, amend the Mitchell Catchment Water Resource Plan to accommodate the Scheme, and seek funding support through the National Water Grid Authority.

“Acting now means that water could flow by 2031 to bring much needed industry, jobs and infrastructure to the communities of Cape York Peninsula.”

Download the Detailed Business Case for the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme:

<https://www.rdatropicalnorth.org.au/our-projects/lakeland-irrigation-area-scheme/>

**Regional Development Australia Tropical North Inc is an independent organisation driven by community leaders to broker regional development solutions that will create jobs and grow the Far North Queensland economy.**

**ENDS**

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Visit [www.rdatropicalnorth.org.au](http://www.rdatropicalnorth.org.au) for more information about Regional Development Australia Tropical North.



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# Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme Fast Facts

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## What is the proposal?

The Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme would provide a reliable supply of water to unlock up to 10,000ha of rich basalt soils in the Lakeland area for high-value and diverse agriculture. The climate and soil can support the growth of diverse crops, but a reliable water supply is needed.

The scheme involves building a 296,000ML dam about 23km south-west of Lakeland on the Palmer River and the construction of a 12km gravity-fed water supply scheme to Lakeland.

Community consultation has been ongoing since March 2017 with widespread support in Lakeland and Cook Shire for water security to increase the agricultural potential of Lakeland.

Developing the Lakeland region for agriculture aligns with the Federal Government's Developing Northern Australia Policy.

## What is the agricultural potential?

Lakeland has 17,115ha of good quality agricultural soil and 55% of this soil is already cleared, but only 10% is irrigated for crops due to limited water supply.

The rich volcanic soil and ideal climate for growing allows farmers to adopt more sustainable farm practices with methods such as composting to reduce costs and lessen the impact on the environment.

Reliable water will provide the confidence required for investment in long-term business operations and enable the region to develop as a food bowl.

## What are the benefits of the Lakeland Irrigation Area Scheme?

The scheme will create 923 direct jobs and 1556 indirect jobs at peak construction. At full operation it will create 1418 direct jobs and 414 indirect jobs.

During the five-year construction period it will boost the Gross Regional Product by more than \$1 billion. At full water uptake it will bring in an additional \$213 million per annum.

Lakeland's population would grow from 314 to 3150 leading to additional community infrastructure and social services for the Lakeland community. Support industries and trades such as mechanics, transport companies, childcare providers and additional retail opportunities from cafes to hairdressers will be needed to service the growing population.