

Issue

Water security is a vitally important issue for the Australian cattle feedlot sector with the resource likely to become more important as water availability declines due to climate change and competing uses between industry and the environment. The Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) as the industry's peak body is eager to ensure that the sector has access to a supply of reliable, affordable and good quality water.

Background

- The cattle feedlot industry has a value of production of \$2.7 billion and employs some 9000 people directly and indirectly. Nearly 25% of Australia's total beef supply, 80% of beef sold in domestic supermarkets and the majority of beef industry growth over the last 10 years has been due to the expanding feedlot sector.
- There are approximately 600 accredited feedlots throughout Australia with the majority located in south east QLD; the northern tablelands of NSW and the Riverina area of NSW with expanding numbers in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. It is no coincidence that feedlots are located in areas that are in close proximity to cattle, grain supplies and water.
- Water in feedlots is used for stock drinking purposes, dust suppression, feed processing, cattle washdown, effluent management, general cleaning; and for staff and office amenities. Of these, stock water consumption is by far the most significant with an average of approximately 50-60 litres of water used per head per day. This equates to approximately 24 megalitres (ML) of water per thousand standard stock units per annum for stock water consumption while an additional 20ML is required for other purposes.
- A survey conducted by ALFA in May 2007 concluded that 29% of feedlots across QLD, NSW and VIC are solely dependent on surface water, 49% dependent on groundwater with the remainder able to access a combination of the two. As with other agricultural water users, many feedlots particularly along the Murray Darling Basin have had surface water allocations cut substantially with groundwater recharge rates also impacted. With climate change and increased competition between industry and the environment, the industry is concerned about the potential impacts from an animal welfare and environmental perspective.
- The issue of future climate change (with associated higher temperatures and reduced rainfall) has pressured the industry to reduce and minimise water usage. Initiatives to address this issue include reusing water in cattle wash-down facilities, covering dams to reduce evaporation, only using necessary water requirements for feed milling, using neighbouring coal seam gas development water and reusing effluent water for dust suppression. The industry is also researching other initiatives such as treating effluent water for cattle drinking purposes and more efficient ways to use water collected from rainfall.
- Another water issue that is becoming more prevalent is the impact of Coal Seam Gas (CSG) development on quantity, flow and quality of ground water. ALFA is concerned that Government regulation is insufficient to ensure that independent monitoring, reporting and assessment of CSG impacts with respect to these issues is being undertaken. We are also concerned that insufficient resources are being allocated to ground water planning, the determination of the cumulative impact of CSG activities and the potential impact of hydraulic fracturing.

What we are seeking

- The efficient use of water, recognizing the need for a balanced and properly managed set of environmental entitlements to be assigned.
- Government and the community recognizing the need for livestock producing businesses to have a continual access (and certainty of supply) to water resources.
- The maintenance of water access rights in perpetuity for existing license holders whilst opposing regulatory actions that erode such rights.
- The trade of license entitlements and the equitable transfer of license types, in a clear and nationally harmonized water market.
- Increased Government regulation of CSG development to ensure it does not unduly impact upon ground water quantity, quality and flow.