



Marion Scrymgour

MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES



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WATER INQUIRY WELCOME, BUT WE NEED SCIENCE NOT PANIC

Environment Minister Marion Scrymgour today welcomed the announcement by Prime Minister Howard for an inquiry into water resources in northern Australia.

“The task force into the possible expansion of agriculture and horticulture in northern Australia to be headed up by Senator Bill Heffernan is a logical extension of the partnerships we have formed with the Australian Government already,” said Ms Scrymgour.

“This includes studies in the Daly and Gulf regions.

“However, we must be absolutely certain that the investigations are based on good science, and not on panic.

“We look forward to participating in the development of the terms of reference for the new task force.

“In this, I am already encouraged by Senator Heffernan’s previously announced position on agriculture in the north where he said that the first step should be to establish a database containing all the information needed to judge northern Australia’s potential for dry-land and irrigated farming.

This isn’t a frontier bull dozer operation.

This should be a science-based operation where the wet and dry seasonal conditions for not only crop enterprises but also environmental considerations¹

“I couldn’t agree more.”

Ms Scrymgour said that the Northern Territory Government was already adopting a cautious approach to the issue of water allocation to agricultural and horticultural developments in the north.

“Put simply, *no* Australian—including the farmers down South currently experiencing severe drought—would like the ruinous mistakes of the south to be repeated in the environment of northern Australia.

“For this reason, one of our first moves in Government was to ban cotton growing.

“And of course it is simply delusory to suppose we could simply transplant the Riverina or Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area to the Top End.

“In line with the National Water Initiative, and the work of the National Water Commission, we are establishing water control districts, with representation from local farming and community stakeholders on advisory committees.

“We are actively developing water allocation plans which will indicate the availability of water for consumptive purposes within these control districts, and these are expected to be completed for Alice Springs in 2007; Katherine and Mataranka in 2008; and Darwin Rural area and Daly catchment in 2009.

¹ “Push for inquiry into farming the north”, *Australian Financial Review*, 5 January 2007:3

Minister Scrymgour also welcomed increased resources to the Bureau of Meteorology.

“Our water resources staff work very closely with the Bureau already through a partnership agreement in which we supply them with crucial data,” Ms Scrymgour.

“If the extra allocation to the Bureau increases the capacity and distribution of our remote sensing networks, this will be of great benefit to many thousands of Territorians.”

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