

A long wait for dam tax

Smart facts

- ▶ Updated water plan yet to be released
- ▶ Public consultation finished more than 15 months ago
- ▶ Growers delaying investments

By MALCOLM SUTTON

GROWERS in the Adelaide Hills are becoming increasingly frustrated with a delayed water plan proposed for the region.

Despite the draft Western Mount Lofty Ranges Water Allocation Plan being released in October 2010 and a public consultation period ending more than 15 months ago, the amended plan is yet to be announced.

New licensing conditions for water users will be introduced, along with regulations on dam use and water diversions and landholders are delaying infrastructure investments until they know the plan's details.

Apple and Pear Growers Association of South Australia chief executive officer Susie Green, Lenswood, said growers were feeling frustrated with a lack of security in the future.

"Until we know what we're definitely dealing with it's a bit hard to put management plans in place and go forward," she said.

"The benchmark keeps changing, so to speak."

Former APGSA CEO Greg Gramond said it was disappointing that people were being kept in the dark.

He said there had been very little communication from the Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board about individual water allocations and people did not have concrete ideas about what to expect. "We were told the water licences would be rolled out late last year, then it was going to be early this year, and now we're midway through this year and there's no sign it's any closer," he said.

"It would be nice to have some light shed on these things and for growers to get on with their lives."

"From an administration point of view, the whole thing is a bit of a disgrace."

The draft WMLR WAP caused a public backlash following its release in October, 2010, after it proposed licensed meters for commercial irrigation dams and rainwater tanks that held more than 5 megalitres of water.

1700 of the region's 13,000 dams were to be affected.

An initial plan to meter stock and domestic dams with a capacity of 5mG or more was later abandoned by the ALMLR NRMB following a rowdy public meeting at Strathalbyn during March last year.

SAFF Natural Resources Committee chairman Joe Keynes says he encouraged the board to tell people what the delays are, or at least give landholders confidence by knowing what their licence conditions would be.

"The WAP is a valuable tool to manage the water equitably across all water users, but the process needs to ensure it brings the community along with it, by keeping them informed."

An AMLR NRMB spokesperson says the plan has been revised and submitted to Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation Paul Gaica, who was considering it for adoption.

"Developing the water allocation plan has been a complex process and this is the first time a plan of this scale has been developed in SA," she said.

"In parallel with the Minister considering the WAP, a number of processes for managing the water resource are being refined, based on community and industry feedback, before the plan is implemented."

"These processes include securing low



Apple and Pear Growers Association of SA CEO Susie Green (above), Lenswood, says the delayed release of an amended Water Allocation Plan proposed for the region is frustrating growers. A plan for the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges was released for public consultation by the SAMDB NRMB during April last year. It proposed similar metering plans for 500 of the regions 7000 dams.

flows for the environment.
 "The Department for Water, the SA Murray-Darling Basin and WMLR NRM boards are working together on a strategic placement program to determine where low flows need to be secured and the best actions to take in each situation."
 A plan for the Eastern Mount Lofty Ranges was released for public consultation by the SAMDB NRMB during April last year.
 It proposed similar metering plans for 500 of the regions 7000 dams, as well the installation of low flow bypasses in some cases to ensure environmental flows were sustained.
 It did not include stock and domestic dams in its proposal – and the amended EMLR WAP is yet to be released.

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