

Security of Water a Necessity

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The expression “water security” is a concept increasingly coming to the fore of national and international consciousness. But what is “water security”, and how is it relevant to the agricultural industry in Australia?

Whilst there are many definitions of “water security”, the UN-Water working definition is:

“The capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.”

As this working definition demonstrates, the concept of “water security” is not simple and consists of competing political, social and economic factors.

From the perspective of the Australian agricultural industry in Australia, water security balances the requirements of current production with the long-term need for quality water resources.

In 2007, then Prime Minister John Howard announced “A National Plan for Water Security” which aimed to increase agricultural production with less water use and the improvement of environmental outcomes. Practical measures identified in the Plan to achieve water security included the modernisation of irrigation and the addressing of over allocation of water resources, particularly in the Murray-Darling Basin.

In July this year the Federal Government released its “Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper”. The White Paper announced the establishment of the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund aimed at developing water infrastructure, such as dams, “to give Australia greater certainty around future water security.”

Despite this commitment at the federal level, however, it has been reported that the current Queensland Government does not plan to build any agricultural dams.

Water security is not only a major challenge facing the agricultural industry both in Australia and internationally, it is also a key goal central to its long-term viability.

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