

MEDIA RELEASE

DORSET EDG SAYS NEW IRRIGATION SCHEME SHOULD BE BUILT IN NORTH EAST TASMANIA

The Chairman of the Dorset Economic Development Group (Dorset EDG), Mr Tas Rainbow, today said that a package of credible, independent reports confirm that a new irrigation scheme in the North East of Tasmania has the potential to secure over \$300 million in new investment and over 500 new jobs in the Dorset municipality.

“After more than eighteen months research, Dorset EDG has concluded that a new irrigation scheme costing \$90-100M is viable and should be developed in the Dorset municipality in North East Tasmania” said Tas Rainbow.

The first phase of new irrigation scheme being advocated by Dorset EDG envisages the construction of new dams at or near the Brid, St Patricks, Great Forester, Boobyalla, Tomahawk Great Musselroe and Oxberry Rivers. The water captured through these dams would be distributed through an environmentally responsible and efficient water distribution system to more than 50 farms in the North East – mainly on the coastal strip between Bridport and Gladstone.

“Dorset EDG has considered for some years that a major new irrigation scheme might offer substantial benefits but we wanted independent and expert assessments that would establish the facts” said Mr Rainbow.

“Evidence from a number of experts suggests that a major new irrigation scheme in North East Tasmania is not only feasible but will bring substantial benefits to the Region”.

Mr Rainbow said that independent assessments from respected economists show that there would be construction of a \$100M new irrigation scheme delivering 80,000 ML of irrigation water per year when fully operational.

In addition to contributions from local farmers and Government, Dorset EDG is aware that large Australian dairy co-operatives may be willing to make a substantial investment, including a new milk processing facility - if this new irrigation scheme goes ahead.

“Independent assessments reveal that the key benefits from the proposed scheme include:

- an injection of investment funds totalling more than \$300M;
- a 25% increase in Tasmania’s milk production;
- over 500 new jobs would be created; and
- an increase in Tasmania’s exports of more than \$100M per year.

Tas Rainbow said that the fact that the State and Australian Governments had allocated \$220 million towards new irrigation infrastructure in Tasmania was a step towards achieving Tasmania’s economic potential.

With an appropriate level of government support, the cost of irrigation water to farmers should be comparable to that being paid for water from the newly constructed Meander Dam.

The various reports have been forwarded to the Tasmanian Irrigation Development Board (TIDB) who will be responsible for undertaking further detailed analysis of the projects with a view to submitting a package for statutory approval and government funding.

“Whilst Dorset EDG has examined many issues and impacts, there are still some more to be undertaken – as well as some more detailed environmental assessments. While we know that there are no short-cuts, we hope that these additional assessments can be progressed quickly” said Mr Rainbow.

Mr Rainbow said that Dorset EDG recognised that there will be some negative environmental impacts from the proposal but this needs to be balanced against:

- (a) the fact that the Dorset Region is suffering as a result of closure of businesses and is losing population;
- (b) the fact that it is beyond doubt that very substantial economic and social benefits will arise from implementation of this new irrigation scheme – which will be sustainable into the long term.

He also said that the Dorset EDG proposed irrigation project in the North East had many positive features.

“It utilises existing resources that are under-utilised, it is sustainable, it helps feed the world, it involves adaption to climate change, it will stimulate the depressed North East community and also achieve a substantial increase in investment, employment, downstream processing and exports” he said.

Mr Rainbow said he looked forward to the outcome of the IDB’s review.

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