



Media Release



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South East drains ‘in limbo’ with lack of funding for upkeep

Livestock SA President Geoff Power says the lack of funding in the State Budget for repair and maintenance of the South East drains leaves the future effective operation of the network in limbo.

Mr Power said the additional funds required for the drains’ ongoing upkeep had not been addressed.

“The State Budget papers show an allocation of \$2.293 million for the South East Water Conservation & Drainage Board – which has previously been committed by Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation Ian Hunter,” Mr Power said.

“However, the question is how much of that will be used for drains maintenance. Livestock SA’s understanding is that majority of the funds will be used for the board’s administration costs and that only one-quarter, or about \$600,000 a year, will actually go to drains repair and maintenance.

“The government has long known that more funding than the \$2.2m committed was required to meet maintenance expectations and requirements. In 2015-16, there was a \$1.639m investment in maintenance of the SE drainage system but there is no allocation for 2016-17.

“In March 2015, the community panel – assembled by the government – rejected that the SE community be directly charged to fund the ongoing maintenance and operation of the drainage network. They argued the drains provided benefits to the whole state and, since it was a state-owned asset, the government should fund its ongoing maintenance and operation.

“The drains will deteriorate and all that hard work and effort of previous years will be lost if there is no commitment.”

Mr Power said the budget showed there were funds allocated to the SE Flows Restoration Project, but this was a completely separate project to the maintenance issue.

“The project will construct new drains that connect the Blackford Drain with the Coorong to help with salinity management in the Coorong South Lagoon, enhance flows to wetlands in the Upper SE and reduce drainage outflow at Kingston beach,” he said.

“There are some concerns with this project as well in terms of how effective it will be in achieving its goal, the quality and quantity of water that can be diverted to the Coorong, and that maintenance of these new drains will be handed over to SE landholders to fund.



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“Some landholders are concerned there could be major flooding of the drains over pastures and that some smaller farmers will lose productive land that they cannot replace, impacting their longer term profitability.

“South East livestock producers really need to see some leadership and commitment from the SA Government to work with them to achieve the common goal of an effective and efficient drains network supporting an extremely productive area of our state – a significant contributor to the state’s economy.”

ENDS

For media interviews: Geoff Power, Livestock SA President, 0428 581 067.