

Irrigator ire grows with Wong approach

IRRIGATION communities across the Murray Darling Basin are about to hit boiling point as the Federal Government ramps up its pursuit of agricultural water and buys it for the environment.

Proposed new water trading rules and the insistence by Water Minister Penny Wong to press ahead and buy water before the release of a report looking at the impacts of the buybacks has farmers hopping mad.

Anger over the controversial purchase of Toorale Station at Bourke – for its water and farm land – has still not died down.

As the Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys in NSW look towards a dire summer with little to no general security allocations, there are fears farmers will sell their water to a “predatory” Federal Government at a time of great financial stress.

South Australia’s entry to secure irrigation supplies for its stressed farmers last week has drawn accusations that the water market has been negatively skewed.

In Victoria, farmers fear they will be a buy-back target because there is more high security water available to farmers compared with nearby valleys over the border.

In Queensland and northern and central NSW, farmers are also being targeted for water, but they ask what the benefit will be when many of the rivers have a small impact on flows into the Murray-Darling or don’t reach the Darling River at all.

Now a new problem has emerged because of proposed new changes to water market and trading rules, recently



By **LUCY SKUTHORP**
in Canberra

under the watch of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

The rules, while yet to be finalised, have raised the ire of many farmers involved in the hundreds of private irrigation schemes operating across Australia who see an uncertain future if people can sell water out of those schemes and are not required to pay an appropriate level of termination fees, which is the only way the schemes would remain viable with a reduction in members.

Some schemes are already restructuring their businesses to cope with the changes, and there are whispers of legal action across the eastern States to challenge the trading rules and safeguard the viability of irrigation businesses and schemes.

At least, some argue, farmers are being paid for the water and it is not being taken from them forcibly, with debate raging now over whether the Government should operate in the water market during a drought and potentially exploit the desperate situation, or if it is better to have another cashed-up buyer in the market for cash-strapped farmers to sell to.

The National Farmers Federation water spokesman, Laurie Arthur, also chairs a stakeholder reference group looking at the impacts of the first \$50m buyback, which started in March.

The stakeholder group will meet for the last time next week to consider an external report documenting their findings before handing it to the Government.

Mr Arthur is concerned there will be a “very large number of distressed sellers” going to the market this summer because general security allocations in the Murray Valley are zero, while in the Murrumbidgee it’s five percent.

He said there will be “no summer” in southern NSW, yet the Government saw it as more important to go out buying water than wait for a report which would document these concerns, he added.

Mr Arthur said it appeared the Government did not have a structural adjustment scheme for regions where it bought water and believed there had been a few ad-hoc approaches to the purchases so far. Southern Murray corporations were wondering how they would survive if they lost a big slab of their entitlements permanently.



The top-priced \$60,000 bull, Rockley 2391 (ET), with vendor, Ashley Kirk, Rockley Brahman, Bajool, and buyers, Cameron and Liz Cogill and children, Milly and Corey, Double C Red Brahman, Gogango.

WHAT does \$60,000 buy you at the annual Rockhampton Brahman Week Sale?

By the end of the second day of the three-day sale it would have bought you the top-priced bull – a 29-month-old, 922kg red beauty sold by the Kirk family’s Rockley Brahman, Bajool.

After some heated and frenzied bidding at Gracemere Exhibition Centre, the Landmark auctioneer’s hammer finally hit the stand with the bull, Rockley 2391 (ET) going to an ecstatic Cameron and Liz Cogill, Double C Red Brahman, Gogango.

The repeat buyers were impressed with his looks, thickness and figures which included rib and rump fat scans of 8mm and 6mm respectively, and eye muscle area of 121 square centimetres.

“We couldn’t believe our eyes when we saw him – everything about him is just perfect,” Liz said.

Equally jubilant were vendors Chris, Sally and Ashley Kirk, who had their best Brahman Week sale to date, selling a total of 15 bulls for \$271,000 and average of \$18,066.

Ashley said he believed the strength of their top-priced bull came from his dam, Rockley 1997 (AI) (ET), the stud’s top donor cow and a female who consistently produced good calves. The bull was sired by the

‘PERFECT’ BULL:

Brahman Week: what you get for \$60,000



highly regarded Tartrus Redmount 2365 (ET).

Second top price by the end of day two was \$52,500, paid for 22-month-old grey bull Carinya Acclaim, by repeat buyers Paul and Debbie Herrod, Ponderosa Brahman stud, Katherine, NT.

The bull, a son of JDH Databank Manso (Imp US), was sold by John Kirk and family’s Carinya Brahman stud, Gaydah.

With more than 950 Brahman



bulls going under the hammer during the three days of the sale, more than 500 registered bidders including a swag of repeat buyers from throughout Australia converged on Gracemere to bid for a stake in the biggest Brahman bull sale in the country. – Story: MELISSA MARTIN. Pictures: CRAIG CHAPMAN.

● Full report from day one of Rockhampton Brahman Week Sale, p103.

IN BRIEF

Aramac hospital reprieve

HEALTH Minister Stephen Robertson has announced existing services will continue at Aramac Hospital during the next 12 months. The announcement is likely to put the expected closure of the Aramac hospital off until after the next Queensland election. Mr Robertson said the Blich Government had always been committed to providing safe and sustainable health services to regional communities like Aramac. “Over the next 12 months we will continue to consult with the hospital staff and the Aramac community about the most appropriate mix of services to meet their needs,” Mr Robertson said. “All options remain on the table and I appreciate the Aramac’s community’s willingness to work with the Government to achieve the best outcome.”

Iconic Thylungra sold for \$10.5m

By **HELEN WALKER**

HISTORIC Thylungra Station at Quilpie has sold to Bill Scott and family who plan to convert the premier sheep growing property to a prime steer backgrounding and bullock finishing country.

Thylungra had been earlier passed in at auction in September by Clyde Agriculture for \$10 million. However, although the price is undisclosed, it is believed to be in the vicinity of \$10.5m bare but including plant.

The Scott family has considerable pastoral interests adjoining Thylungra including the Milo and Budgerygar aggregation, which are neighbours, as well as leasing nearby Arleun, also situated between Milo and Thylungra.

According to a delighted Mr Scott,

who is very familiar with property, the purchase is a ‘once in a lifetime opportunity’.

“We will use it as a cattle operation in conjunction with our nearby country, as a background and bullock finishing operation,” Mr Scott said. “However, we will remain flexible with the seasons.

“The opportunity to acquire it is very exciting, not only the quality of the country, but the history as well. It is country that I know very well, having been driving over the property for the past 30 years or more.”

With a delivery date set for January next year, current manager Ian Lilburne is busy lamb marking and shearing.

“We have just surfaced from a severe drought and are enjoying a 96.5pc lamb marking – the best result in seven years.

The quality Thylungra sheep, based on Haddon Rig bloodlines, and classed by noted classer, Andy McLeod, will be sold off-shears through AuctionsPlus during October and November. Thylungra Station, covering 280,000ha was built on the pioneer Patsy Durack’s dream in 1868, and is well documented as one of Queensland largest sheep and cattle stations.

Previous owners include the Australian Estates, and Tom Woods of Goondiwindi, before selling to Clyde Agriculture in 1992.

When property manager Ian Lilburne and his wife Rae leave Thylungra on settlement it will end a 24-year-management regime with the iconic wool-growing factory, known for producing a 1400-bale wool clip.



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