

Media Release

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The Bligh Government would sell off eight Queensland research stations, some of which were paid for by grain growers, under a proposed restructure of grains research and development in Queensland.

Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries (QPIF) staff met with members of the Grains Research Foundation Limited (GRFL) and Ag Force late last week to reveal details of the Government's proposed "Fresh Approach" for grains research and development in Queensland.

Under the "Fresh Approach" plan, the State Government would sell the Leslie Research Centre (Toowoomba), Wellcamp Farm (Toowoomba), Kingsthorpe Farm (Toowoomba), Redvale Farm (Kingaroy), Emerald Research Station, and the land at Kingaroy Research Station, Biloela Research Station and Roma Research Station.

The State Government is proposing to keep the Hermitage Research Station and buy a new property close to Toowoomba for research into irrigation and water use efficiency in broad acre cropping. It may also provide education and training.

GRFL Chairman Damien Scanlan said Primary Industries Minister Tim Mulherin had refused to give an assurance to GRFL and AgForce that grower equity in the Leslie Research Centre would be recognised in any new arrangement.

"The minister is breaking a long standing relationship of trust between his department and growers, by selling off these assets without acknowledging the equity growers hold," he said.

Mr Scanlan said Queensland grain growers paid for the land and buildings and were directly involved in the management of the Leslie Research Centre (formerly known as the Queensland Wheat Research Institute) up until the Queensland Department of Primary Industries created the Farming Systems Institute.

"It's not good enough for the Government to sell off an asset that doesn't even belong to them," he said.

"Grain growers strongly believe that since they paid for the facility their equity should be recognised in any new arrangement."

"It appears that the Minister is arguing that because we paid for the Research Centre 47 years ago we no longer have any claim of ownership which is just ridiculous."

Mr Scanlan said the GRFL had attempted to work with the State Government on the “Fresh Approach” for grains research and development but the proposed model not only failed to address equity issues, it also destroyed the long standing partnership between grain growers and government in research and development.

He said the GRFL supports moves to overhaul grains research and development in Queensland but believes the new model must address fundamental issues of management and stakeholder engagement to redress the decline in grains research capability in Queensland.

“Queensland growers have supported research through direct financial and indirect, in-kind contributions since grain growing began in Queensland and the Government should tone down the spin and deal with the real issues confronting their staff and industry,” he said.

“Even if the State Government keeps its word and the funds from selling the LRC are reinvested in a new facility, that arrangement doesn’t recognise grower equity and the link to grain growers will be broken.”

“Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries management will remain the same - managing declining research budgets, over-inflated overheads and declining staff numbers.”

“The “Fresh Approach” for grains research and development should be an opportunity to strengthen the grower/State Government partnership in grains research in Queensland.”

“However, the Minister’s comments in relation to grower equity do nothing to reassure growers or the wider industry, nor do they re-establish a relationship of trust and respect.”

“We feel we cannot be involved in consultation on a proposal that is purely about rationalising grains research infrastructure and does not address the key points of equity, management and community.”

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