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Theodore irrigators vote yes to local management

Theodore irrigators will soon have a stake in the future of the region's irrigation scheme following overwhelming support to transition to local ownership and management from October 1 this year.

Theodore irrigation scheme customers representing more than 95 per cent of the scheme's water supply, voted to become shareholders in Theodore Water Pty Ltd, the not-for-profit company that will take over ownership and operation on the irrigation infrastructure.

The vote by irrigators in favour of local management has met the requirements of the agreement with State Government and paves the way for the transfer of the scheme assets from the government-owned company SunWater to Theodore Water.

The agreement includes a \$15.1 million separation payment from the Queensland Government to help fund asset renewals and refurbishments and secure the irrigation scheme's long-term viability.

The vote culminates six years of detailed feasibility studies into local management of the channels, pumps and pipelines within the Theodore Irrigation Scheme which provides water to 44 customers and covers around 3000 hectares along the Dawson River.

Theodore Water chairman Malcolm Finlayson said the company would be overseen by a board elected by local irrigator shareholders, giving irrigators an unprecedented involvement in scheme operations, asset renewal and refurbishment plans and distribution charges.

"One of the greatest benefits of the local management process is customers' increased involvement in the provision of irrigation services. This will lead to a greater say on operational control, improved reporting, transparency and accountability as well as increased influence over distribution prices," Mr Finlayson said.

"Local ownership will ensure that the system is specifically tailored to the needs of the Theodore channel irrigators and provide opportunities for more innovative and flexible ways of operating the water distribution.

"It's expected that this will be primarily achieved through a strategic modernisation plan which will replace and upgrade old and inefficient infrastructure."

Day-to-day operations will be conducted by the current SunWater Theodore staff members who will transfer to Theodore Water on transition to local management.

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“Theodore Water has a strong local focus, particularly when it comes to the procurement and utilisation of services - we’ll source those locally wherever it’s appropriate and possible,” Mr Finlayson said.

The transition to local management only extends to the irrigation distribution network with SunWater continuing to be responsible for all bulk water operations and invoicing as well as operation of the Glebe, Theodore, Gylanda, Orange Creek and Moura weirs and Neville Hewitt weir at Baralaba.

SunWater chief executive officer Nicole Hollows said she looked forward to a positive working relationship with Theodore Water.

“SunWater is pleased to support Theodore Water as it transitions to a local management arrangement,” she said.

“Under the terms of the arrangement SunWater will continue to manage weirs on the Dawson River – including Theodore Weir – and enable Theodore Water to focus fully on achieving improved irrigation efficiencies.

“We look forward to working closely together in the future and achieving positive outcomes for local irrigators.”

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Caption: Theodore Water Board chairman Malcolm Finlayson says local management will give irrigators an unprecedented involvement in scheme operations, asset renewal and refurbishment plans and distribution charges.
