

**Submission on Sunwater's proposal  
Lower Burdekin Riparian Growers (WAH)  
29 February 2024**

Mr & Mrs J Sgarbossa  
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To Whom it may concern,

We are sugarcane farmers in the Lower Burdekin Water area, as Lower Burdekin Water cannot supply all our needs, we also have a SunWater water allocation.

We have had water licences to pump water from the Burdekin River since before Water Boards, namely South Burdekin Water Board and North Burdekin Water Board, now combined to form Lower Burdekin Water. These Water Licences always assisted in our needs to produce water for use, the licences were in existence well before the building of the Burdekin Dam, Lower Burdekin Water and Clare weir.

Our needs and water expenses should not come at an extra expense than the other growers in the area, we are prepared to pay our fair share and not twice as we do now.

The problem is we are in the Lower Burdekin Water management area, and we wish to remain in the Lower Burdekin Water management area and pay their fees, and we also need to pump from the Burdekin River as LBW cannot supply all our water needs, and now pay SunWater as well for water, which is an unnecessary double dip. Not all river pumps, pump from surface water in the river and have bores in the bed sands of the river. Photos attached, photo 1 is the bore pump in the river bed sands and river surface water in the background, photo 2 is the bore pump inside the farm boundaries. While these pumps are similar the pumps have different water makeup, and both pumps have a different water makeup to the river surface water.

There is a need for Burdekin Water Allocation Holders with Water Allocation to have the same costs as all the other farmers in the Lower Burdekin Water area, (not extra costs)

The sale of water is a very clear Queensland Government monopoly and should not allow for two of it's agencies to charge for the same water use.

Wherever this anomaly has arisen, it is needed to be rectified so that all growers in the Lower Burdekin Water area can be treated equally.

Both Lower Burdekin Water and SunWater should be investigated in their operations and pricing.

Lower Burdekin Water and SunWater have been approached on several occasions to resolve this issue, so as all farmers in the Lower Burdekin Water area are not disadvantaged from one another for whatever reason! There has not been a result!

Lower Burdekin Water and SunWater should work together to have a solution where farmers are not disadvantaged by being under both jurisdictions!

Lower Burdekin Water Allocation Holders are paying two organisations for the one commodity, this is an injustice and a resolution should be achieved. Discussions should also include Water Allocation Holders

Please find enclosed two photos and a letter to Hon Glenn Butcher, Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water.

Yours faithfully

Paul Sgarbossa

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23 January 2024

Hon Glenn Butcher  
Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water  
GPO Box 2247  
BRISBANE QLD 4002

Dear Minister Butcher

**Re: Review of Burdekin Basin Water Plan – Structural Overcharging of Water**

#### Background

We are sugar cane farmers in the Burdekin and our farm is situated at 1418 Kirknie Road, Osborne, Qld 4806. We have owned and operated this farm for the last 47 years and it is situated on the banks of the Burdekin River. In the Burdekin, we have Sunwater supplying water to both the Burdekin Haughton Water Supply Scheme (BHWSS) and Lower Burdekin Water.

Due to our farms location, it falls within both the Burdekin Haughton Water Supply Scheme (BHWSS) operated by Sunwater and the Lower Burdekin Water (LBW) area. We can therefore irrigate our farm and draw water from two providers being:

- a) Sunwater - to pump water out of the Burdekin River from which we draw the greater portion of our water needs. Some of us have bores in the river bed sands from which we pump directly when surface water is difficult to acquire, and
- b) LBW - which provides channel infrastructure from which we can draw water.

Both of these Government bodies come under the Water Act 2000 and although they are technically two separately run organisations, they both deal in the one same commodity being water which under the Water Act 2000 is owned by the Queensland Government. Both providers have fixed and variable charges.

#### The Issue

As we can draw water from the Burdekin River, we are Riparian pumpers (Water Allocation Holders) in the Lower Burdekin Water area. This creates an anomaly which we would like to bring to your attention. Given our farm falls under the administration of two different Government agencies, in this case LBW and Sunwater, the imposition of their respective fixed charges effectively results in us (and other similarly placed Riparian pumpers) paying twice to access the same water commodity since 2013 which is when we started to pay twice.

An example we refer to in this case would be for the water we purchase from Sunwater to irrigate our crops in the LBW area, where LBW cannot supply that water. This water is pumped out of the Burdekin River via our own water allocation, infrastructure and cost, for subsequent delivery onto our farm which is within the LBW authority area. We pay Sunwater both the fixed and variable charges to obtain this water, and LBW charge us their fixed rate per hectare even though we did not

use LBW to source the water. Essentially, this results in the Government charging us twice for the same water.

We have raised this double-dipping issue with LBW and Sunwater on numerous occasions for rectification without success. The problem has been handed off, as no one considers it to be their issue and there is no compassion being shown for the farmer who has to pay twice for the same water commodity. We wish to be treated equally just like any other grower and pay once for water used. We are happy to pay our fair share, however we do not want to pay twice.

The Water Act 2000 currently precludes a rebate being offered by either of these two Government agencies to offset the cost of accessing water from either body and we end up paying far more in water costs than we should due to the fixed charges.

#### Solution

We have been advised that the right forum to raise this anomaly is via the Burdekin Basin Water Plan Review and it would be appreciated if you could arrange for this issue to be included in the terms of the review so that it can be properly investigated.

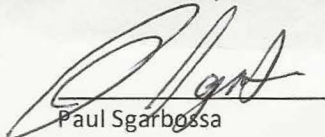
Clause 26 of the Water Act 2000 states that *"all rights to the use, flow and control of all water in Queensland are vested in the State"*. Whether this is then subsequently administered via SunWater or LBW, it is the same water commodity that we purchase from the one owner being the State of Queensland. The State of Queensland should offer reciprocal offsets where positions of overlap exist between customers of statutory authorities and regulated schemes that involve the purchase of the same underlying commodity which is owned by the Government.

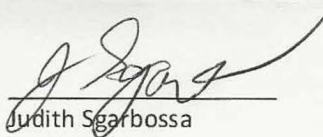
We request that the Queensland Government amend the Water Act 2000 to give a water authority such as LBW the power to provide a rebate/offset for water that a Riparian pumper brings into the authority area from the Burdekin River.

If we can then amend the legislation to this affect, it would enable a water authority such as LBW to provide a rebate/offset to a customer to negate the injustice of paying twice. We would be happy to work with the Government to consider this solution or any other suitable alternative under the Burdekin Basin Water Plan Review.

Should you have any queries in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact Paul Sgarbossa via the contact details listed above.

Yours faithfully

  
Paul Sgarbossa

  
Judith Sgarbossa

CC Mr Patrick Levings  
Manager, Water Planning and Science, North Region  
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