Rural and Regional Adjustment (Irrigation Pricing Rebate Scheme and Other Matters) Amendment Regulation 2025

Explanatory notes for SL 2025 No. 138

made under the

Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994

General Outline

Short title

Rural and Regional Adjustment (Irrigation Pricing Rebate Scheme and Other Matters) Amendment Regulation 2025

Authorising law

Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994

Policy objectives and the reasons for them

Sections 10, 11 and 44 of the *Rural and Regional Adjustment Act 1994* (the Act).

Achievement of policy objectives

This regulatory amendment has the following policy objectives:

- Introduces the new Irrigation Pricing Rebate Scheme (Schedule 64 of the *Rural and Regional Adjustment Regulation 2011*)
- Amends several agriculture related schemes of financial assistance to clarify that the relevant minister, chief executive or department for the purposes of that scheme is the minister, chief executive or department responsible for primary industries.
- Reopens the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Grants Scheme to applications with a closing date of 30 June 2026 (Schedule 15 of the *Rural and Regional Adjustment Regulation 2011*).

Irrigation Pricing Rebate Scheme

The Queensland Government typically sets the price of water for irrigation, which is supplied by Sunwater and Seqwater. The Queensland Government provided an automatic 15 per cent discount on water prices for irrigators that were supplied by Sunwater and Seqwater from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

In place of the blanket discount applied across all accounts (including public companies, multinationals and foreign held entities), the Queensland Government has decided that the 15 per cent rebate will be more targeted to owner-operated type businesses and will be delivered via a rebate scheme administered by the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA).

Accordingly, the Irrigation Pricing Rebate Scheme will provide a 15 per cent rebate on eligible irrigation bills (those issued for one of the quarters in the 2025-26 and 2026−27 financial years). The irrigation rebate applies to: a) irrigation entities (that are listed in the Schedule and hold an allocation from Sunwater and pass on the charges to members or customers of the irrigation entity), and b) qualifying businesses (defined as businesses that grow crops requiring irrigation and at least one of the owners of the business spends labour on the business and the business or one of the owners declares assessable primary production income for tax purposes). To be a qualifying business, the applicant must be a customer of a water supplier or a pass-on entity for the business is a customer of a water supplier. The following entities are excluded from applying namely: entities partly or wholly operated or owned by managed investment schemes, foreign companies, public companies, superannuation entities.

The scheme will close for receipt of applications on 31 December 2027 or earlier if the available assistance funds are exhausted. In addition to the evidence required to demonstrate the business is a qualifying business, an applicant will be required to provide a copy of their eligible irrigation bill and evidence showing that the bill has been paid.

Amendments of several agriculture related schemes of financial assistance

As a result of the Machinery of Government changes in 2024, as contained in *Administrative Arrangements Order (No. 3) 2024,* administration of the Act falls within the portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, Minister for Manufacturing and Minister for Regional and Rural Development. Administration of this Act formerly sat with the minister with oversight of primary industries.

QRIDA administers a considerable suite of schemes of financial assistance aimed primarily at supporting primary producers, particularly in areas like disaster recovery, drought relief and industry support. However, many of these schemes have provisions such as eligibility criteria or opening and closing dates, that refer to a Minister, Chief Executive, or ‘the department’ without clearly identifying which one. This lack of clarity creates confusion, highlighting the need to specify the responsible Minister, Chief Executive, or department in these schemes.

To clarify this issue, the proposed regulatory amendments aim to update the Rural and Regional Adjustment Regulation 2011. These changes will specify that the relevant Minister, Chief Executive, or department for each scheme is the Minister for Primary Industries, the Chief Executive of the Department of Primary Industries, or the Department of Primary Industries. It does this by stating that the minister, chief executive or department referred to is that which administers the *Fisheries Act 1994* which is currently administered by the Minister for Primary Industries, Chief Executive of the Department of Primary Industries or Department of Primary Industries. The citing of the *Fisheries Act 1994* is an administrative link to ensure continuity of responsibility for the relevant Minister. The schemes to be amended to clarify the relevant minister, chief executive or department include the following schedules to the Rural and Regional Adjustment Regulation 2011:

Schedule 2 Disaster Assistance (Primary Producers) Loans Scheme (reference to chief executive in Section 1)
Schedule 4 Drought Carry-on Finance Loan Scheme (reference to department in Section 7)
Schedule 5 Emergency Drought Assistance Loan Scheme (reference to department in Section 7)
Schedule 30 Farm Management grants scheme (reference to minister in Section 4)
Schedule 33 Vessel Tracking Rebate Scheme (reference to department in Section 7)
Schedule 39 Drought Preparedness Grant Scheme (reference to department in Section 7)
Schedule 40 Drought Ready and Recovery Finance Loan Scheme (reference to department in Section 9)
Schedule 59 Fisheries Structural Adjustment Scheme-Stage 3 (reference to chief executive in Section 3)
Schedule 61 Regional Drought Resilience Planning Scheme (reference to chief executive in Section 3)

<u>Extension of the closing date of the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Grants Scheme (WAT Grants Scheme) in Schedule 15 of the *Rural and Regional Adjustment Regulation 2011*</u>

The purpose of the WAT Grants Scheme is to help holders and lessees of particular taxi service licences to meet the cost of acquiring new wheelchair accessible taxis. Section 13(1)(b) of Schedule 15 provided that applications under the scheme must be received no later than 30 June 2025.

The Queensland Government has decided to reopen the WAT Grants Scheme with the scheme to be reopened for applications from the date the regulatory amendment is approved by Governor-in-Council with a new closing date for assistance on 30 June 2026. Accordingly, Section 13(1)(b) is to be amended to replace the closing date with 30 June 2026.

Consistency with policy objectives of authorising law

The amendment regulation is consistent with the policy objectives of the Act. The Act establishes QRIDA primarily to administer assistance schemes that foster the development of a more productive and sustainable rural and regional sector in Queensland including schemes offered by the Australian Government.

QRIDA may also administer approved assistance schemes to assist primary producers, small business and other sectors during periods of temporary difficulty, or to otherwise benefit the Queensland economy.

The new scheme is consistent with the objectives of the Act as it provides assistance with the cost of irrigation water.

Inconsistency with policy objectives of other legislation

This amendment regulation is not inconsistent with the policy objectives of any other legislation.

Benefits and costs of implementation

$25.3 million been made available under the Irrigation Pricing Rebate Scheme and the administration costs will be funded within this allocation.

An additional $6.325 million has been made available for the WAT Grants Scheme and the administration costs will be funded within this allocation.

Consistency with fundamental legislative principles

The amendment regulation has been drafted with regard to, and is consistent with, the fundamental legislative principles as defined in section 4 of the *Legislative Standards Act 1992*.

Consultation

The Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers consulted with Sunwater, Seqwater and Queensland Treasury as well as the irrigation industry with regards to the Irrigation Pricing Rebate Scheme.

Translink consulted with the taxi industry with regards to the provision of additional funding for the WAT Grants Scheme.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines, Manufacturing and Regional and Rural Development (NRMMRRD) has assessed the amendment regulation in accordance with *The Queensland Government Better Regulation Policy* as minor and machinery in nature. The Office of Best Practice Regulation was notified of this assessment. The Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, Minister for Manufacturing and Minister for Regional and Rural Development and the Director−General of NRMMRRD are satisfied that the regulatory review requirements have been met and have approved an Impact Analysis Statement for publication.