

## HIPCO's Flinders tender dead in the water



The Hughenden Irrigation Project Corporation has confirmed that the tender for the release of unallocated water in the Flinders River catchment, which began in November 2021 and which HIPCo has been participating in, has been terminated.

The group was notified by the state Water Department and said it was due to the Government's decision to bring forward a review of the Gulf Water Plan, including a \$4 million Regional Water Assessment.

HIPCo chairman Jeff Reid said it was frustrating but unsurprising. In January [he described the review as both good and bad news](#), saying the government had inaccurate computer models and licences in the wrong place, which he hoped a review would fix.

At the same time, Katter's Australian Party leader Robbie Katter described the review as the culmination of a decade of bungling, incompetence and lost opportunities. "HIPCo is unsurprised with this outcome, given the technical issues we have encountered with the terms of sale and the water plan", Mr Reid said on Friday.

"We have repeatedly raised these issues, which were acknowledged in the Minister for Water's performance report.

HIPCo is supportive of the Gulf Water Plan review, providing it clarifies water entitlements for interested parties, develops robust planning frameworks, updates the modelling, and is collaborative and expert based. Overall, the process must support appropriate development within the Flinders River catchment while protecting the environment and traditional owner aspirations."

In a letter to the editor published in the Queensland Country Life on March 28, 2024 Water Minister Glenn Butcher assured readers that the review would look carefully at available water and how the government could facilitate water trading.

“The Member for Traeger (Mr Katter) is right when he says we have a lot of people sitting on water” Mr Butcher wrote. “I want to see available water going to crop production, critical minerals projects, cattle stations and more grapes in Hughenden. I want water helping to develop the north and create more jobs.

“With many agricultural, critical minerals and energy projects in the works, it’s important there’s water available to develop the north in places like Hughenden, Richmond and Julia Creek”.

He said the government had almost doubled water entitlements in the Gulf in 2015 and there was now 220,012 megalitres of annual water entitlements available in the Flinders River, but said there was work to be done in encouraging entitlement holders to make use of these water assets.

“The Gulf Regional Water Assessment is an opportunity to look at current and future demand for water - and the best infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects to meet that demand and deliver water security and unlock economic growth,” Mr Butcher added. “As Water Minister, I want to be clear that I support irrigated agriculture and I support water infrastructure.”

Mr Reid said HIPCo and stakeholders would continue to work with state and local governments to develop an integrated water project for Hughenden, “demonstrating strong alignment with a revised Gulf Water Plan and the needs and goals of the local community.”

He also congratulated Kate Peddle on her election as Flinders Shire Council mayor, along with newly elected councillors, and acknowledged the dedication of former mayor Jane McNamara and outgoing councillors.

“HIPCo is eager to re-align efforts and work collaboratively with the council,” he said. “We have a shared vision of delivering a water project in Hughenden, each through our respective projects. This presents the prime opportunity now to collectively concentrate on the optimal water project model for the region’s needs, integrating projects where appropriate, and maximising HIPCo’s years of extensive research and rigorous testing. We look forward to meeting together with council towards the end of this month to discuss and collaborate.”

[Consultation on the Gulf Water Plan review](#) is open until July 17.