

Study to find energy solutions for Queensland, NSW farmers

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Three agricultural representative groups have commissioned research into options to provide better access to, and more affordable, energy for farmers in Queensland and New South Wales.

The project is being conducted by NSW Irrigators' Council (NSWIC), Cotton Australia and the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF).

The research will be carried out by the Sydney-based Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney and will combine a desktop study with case studies and interviews with growers. The results of that research will then be taken to network providers with the aim of exploring new ways of providing affordable energy to farmers.

The study has been funded by [Energy Consumers Australia](#) (ECA) as part of its grants process for consumer advocacy and research projects for the benefit of electricity and natural gas consumers.

NSWIC Policy Manager Stefanie Schulte says the study will bring together previous research on energy use and pricing with new investigations on how farmers have tackled the energy challenges, including those who have implemented renewable energy solutions.

"Electricity supply is a complex issue and we need everyone to work together to solve these key issues," Ms Schulte says. "Electricity has become a significant input factor in Australia's food and fibre production and successive price increases have significantly impacted our ability to remain competitive while utilising modern, water-efficient irrigation equipment."

"Finding a solution to the electricity conundrum is not only important for the future of the National Electricity Market but also vital for Australian agriculture to compete internationally."

"It is hoped that by bringing this research and case studies to the table our conversation with energy networks will inform their future strategic planning on regional energy supply."

"We appreciate the ECA's support for this important work and look forward to working with the Institute for Sustainable Futures and energy providers on finding long-term solutions for regional energy supply."

Ms Schulte says the study is important because it will also investigate the potential for renewable technologies to be better integrated with existing grid networks, and complement other energy projects led by the agricultural sector.

"It is vital studies such as this continue to explore alternative energy management strategies and technologies so that agricultural producers have access to what is a critical input in their production process," Ms Schulte says. "The pursuit of mutually beneficial solutions is also important for energy providers, who risk holding stranded assets if energy users such as farmers withdraw from the grid."

The NSWIC, Cotton Australia and QFF expect to deliver the results of the report later in 2018.

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