The Southern Forests region is one of the most significant horticultural areas in Western Australia.

To support the sustainability and expansion of the sector, a new approach is needed to secure local water supplies and ensure reliable, year-round access to good quality water.

The Water for Food Southern Forests Irrigation Scheme will improve water storage and distribution through a new dam, pipeline and pumping infrastructure. This will allow for the movement and trading of water between farms, to ensure water is put to its most productive use. It will be owned and operated by the region’s growers.

The Scheme follows on from the $3.6 million first stage Water for Food Southern Forests Water Futures project, which investigated new water supply options and increasing water availability to meet productivity expansion plans for the Southern Forests region.

The proposed Scheme will cost an estimated $80 million. The State Government has committed $19 million, made possible by Royalties for Regions, with a further $10 million registered by local growers who want to be part of the Scheme.

It has been given priority project status by the State Government and further funding will be sought through the Commonwealth Government’s National Water Infrastructure Development Fund. The Scheme’s design can be scaled and delivered in stages to accommodate available funding.

- Create a whole-of-region approach to reliable water access
- Improve water storage and distribution efficiency
- Boost horticultural production over the next 15 years
- Create more than 200 local jobs
- Attract further investment to the region
Irrigation Scheme

Currently, the Warren-Donnelly and Southern Blackwood regions rely on surface water catchments (some of which are close to fully allocated) with varying water quality.

The proposed irrigation scheme would allow water to be captured in winter and be redistributed year-round via a 250 kilometre pipe network to sites that currently do not have access to high quality water or the capacity to capture water. The distribution infrastructure would enable the efficient trading of water between properties.

The Scheme will be industry-led by a private irrigation cooperative with the State Government supporting the development of governance and financial models. It is based on a successful business model used in Tasmania which has been supported by the Commonwealth Government.

Steering Group

The Southern Forests Water Futures Steering Group provides technical support and practical and operational advice to the State Government on the project.

The Group’s terms of reference include providing input on technical and operational viability of water storage, infrastructure and reticulation options, economic and financial viability, procedural, policy and legislative reforms and the implementation of appropriate governance arrangements.

Elected Grower Group

Representatives of subscribed growers will provide input to the Scheme’s final design. The Scheme will be owned and operated by growers.

Proposed Southern Forests Timeline

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<td>$3.6 million Stage One launched</td>
<td>Community and stakeholder consultation meetings commenced</td>
<td>Conceptual design of infrastructure and reticulation</td>
<td>Letter of Intent process opened</td>
<td>Modelling of current and future supply/allocation scenarios</td>
<td>Preliminary engineering design and costs of preferred options</td>
<td>$19 million Stage Two launched</td>
<td>Approvals and regulatory requirements sought</td>
<td>Design and approval stage completed, construction begins</td>
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<td>Monitoring program established</td>
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<td>Letter of Intent results announced</td>
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Photo: South West Development Commission