


Cotton Australia

Qualitative Research Report

March 2007



GA Research is a specialist market research firm with particular expertise in corporate, financial and issues projects. It is a division of Gavin Anderson & Company.

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Findings at a Glance

- Water availability and the related subject of climate change is the primary issue facing the community
 - It has jumped ahead of all other issues – the economy, terrorism, education, health – with surprising rapidity. The full implications of this rapid rise are yet to be seen
- For the overwhelming majority of participants cotton is not on the radar as an issue
- Overall respondents had mildly negative to neutral perceptions of the cotton industry. They know little about cotton. Their default position veers towards negative because of the perceived excessive use of water, but they are not negative towards the cotton industry itself
- Perceptions of the cotton industry are based on very little knowledge – so are lightly held
- Once they are given more information about cotton, nearly all respondents became more positive
 - The strongest messages supporting cotton relate to job creation, contribution to the economy, world's best practice and improved water efficiencies and reduced chemical usage
- There is a widespread view that cotton farming has a long term future in Australia. However, people do want to see evidence of more efficient use of water and investigation into new drought resistant strains of cotton
- Most respondents support some kind of public education campaign to help combat negative perceptions
 - However, the research as a whole shows that this is risky as most people automatically turn negative when they hear that cotton uses a lot of water and it takes focused reading and discussion to educate most of them back to a positive standpoint. In the real world this would be a formidable and very costly task given the complexity of the issue

Research Objectives

- Gauge public perceptions of issues surrounding the cotton industry and water use
- Specifically, gauge perceptions of cotton's water use among metropolitan and rural communities
- Identify where the public gets its information from
- Test the effectiveness of different communication messages
 - Key messages supporting and opposing the cotton industry
 - Possible campaign concepts
- Identify any concerns and information gaps
- Assess the likely impact of any public communications campaign
- Identify changes since previous research was conducted

Research Process

- Ten focus groups were conducted across metropolitan and regional centres in February 2007
- Each group contained a mix of 7-9 men and women of various ages and life stages
- Six metropolitan groups were held in Federal marginal seats in:
 - Sydney (Parramatta, Greenway) on 12 February
 - Adelaide (Kingston, Hindmarsh) on 13 February
 - Brisbane (Bonner, Rankin) on 22 February
- Four of these groups comprised swinging voters who are at least somewhat interested in following debate on issues at a state and national level (two in Brisbane, one in Sydney, one in Adelaide)
- Two groups included people who have a moderate to high interest in following debate on issues at a state and national level – each group contained a mix of conservative and non-conservative voters (one each in Sydney and Adelaide)

Research Process *cont.*

- The four regional groups were held in:
 - Tamworth on 20 February
 - Toowoomba on 21 February

 - These towns were chosen in consultation with Cotton Australia because they are regional centres that are adjacent to cotton growing areas and have mixed farming

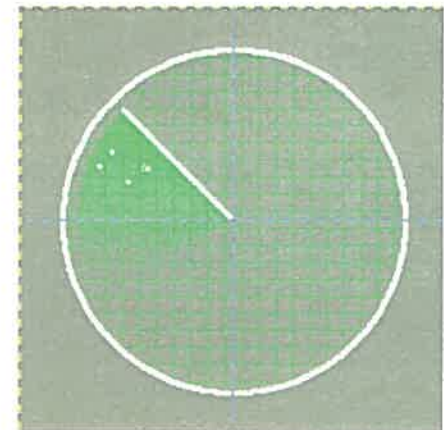
 - In each regional location, there was one group of people from the general community who did not have a farmer in their immediate family and one group comprising a mix of farmers (not cotton) and people who did have a farmer (not cotton) in their immediate family

Key Findings

Awareness of Cotton as an Issue

- For the overwhelming majority of participants cotton is **not** on the radar as an issue
 - The long term future of cotton in Australia was mentioned by an average of one or two people in each group when the topic of cotton came up

- Water is the number one issue in Australia for all groups
 - Many are frustrated by poor or inefficient water usage by individuals and government as well as the lack of long-term planning to address the water issue
 - In the city they talk of climate change and poor water management
 - In the country they talk more of cyclical drought and also refer to poor irrigation practices
 - People in cities as well as regional areas are very sympathetic towards the farmers in the current drought and believe that it is the biggest challenge facing the farming sector
 - Most people feel positive about the general idea of having a healthy farming community in Australia



Awareness of Cotton as an Industry

- There is low awareness of cotton as an agricultural industry
 - Naturally there is far less knowledge in the cities
 - *I just don't know enough about it to comment (Sydney swinging voters)*
 - *I really don't know anything about it (Sydney/Brisbane)*
 - While still not extensive, knowledge is higher in the rural centres
 - *They've done an enormous amount of research into water efficiency. It's been very successful research (Tamworth community)*

- When respondents were asked which were Australia's main agricultural industries, cotton tended to be mentioned well after wheat, beef, dairy, wool and vegetables
 - It is not really seen as a quintessential Australian industry – most think it was introduced in Australia fairly recently
 - *I don't think it's vital. You can eat beef but you can't eat cotton (Brisbane)*
 - *It seems to be lower profile than beef or wool (Sydney swinging voters)*

Knowledge of Cotton Industry

- There is a low level of knowledge about the cotton industry
- Of concern is the automatic and unfavourable link many make with the water issue
- When people mentioned cotton, it was usually accompanied by a remark about its water use
 - *Cotton, yeah they use all the water (Sydney swinging voters)*
 - *There's controversy because it uses too much water (Sydney engaged)*
 - *I really don't know much about the industry apart from the fact that it may consume too much water (Adelaide engaged)*
 - The only other crop which got this type of comment was rice

Knowledge of Cotton Industry *cont.*

- When probed further, other common observations about cotton emerged
- **Farm Ownership:** Many people in metropolitan centres say they think cotton farms are large, typically owned by big corporations and to some extent foreign owned. A minority thought they were mostly family owned
 - In Tamworth, several commented that there was a shift going on, with family farms increasingly being bought out
 - *Small family farms would only be about 20% of them. They are getting bought out by bigger farms who have water licences and are buying more (Tamworth community)*
- **Chemical Use:** The cotton industry's chemical use was raised in all regional groups and a few city groups
 - There was much more negative sentiment about chemical use in Tamworth than Toowoomba
 - *Chemicals are used by all farmers, but the chemicals used by the cotton industry are particularly bad. There are real health problems in some of those cotton towns. One little girl had so many chemicals in her she had to move out of Moree (Tamworth farmers)*
 - *I had to wear a mask when they were spraying their crop aerially. It killed all my butter trees and made the pepper trees' leaves fall off (Tamworth farmers)*
 - In Toowoomba there was a clear shift in opinion since the last Roy Morgan research was conducted there and a feeling that the industry has made significant improvements in terms of its chemical use in recent years
 - However, chemical use was not seen to be exclusive to the cotton industry – some respondents said it is also common in other industries like wool

Knowledge of Cotton Industry *cont.*

- **Cubbie Station:** Cubbie Station was mentioned by two or three people in most but not all of the groups
 - Nearly all of those who mentioned it had assumed that what they knew of Cubbie Station was typical of the cotton industry as a whole
 - The claim that 'it has the same storage capacity as Sydney Harbour' was the most frequent unprompted comment mentioned
 - There is no doubt that the publicity and bad press surrounding Cubbie Station has contributed to the negative perception of the cotton industry
 - Respondents in the Tamworth groups knew the most and were the most negative
 - *I thought we were short of water not because of the drought, but because of use by big farms like that (Tamworth community)*
 - *When I think of Cubbie Station I think of cotton and water. They do what they want to do (Tamworth farmers)*
 - *They've got lots of money and they have not been regulated by the Government (Tamworth farmers)*
 - *They stopped the river flowing because they diverted it into their dams. The floods that used to go overland get diverted. That was in an article in The Land I read recently (Tamworth farmers)*



Knowledge of Cotton Industry *cont.*

- Most people acknowledge that the cotton industry must directly and indirectly employ people in regional communities. They acknowledge that farmers are struggling and they would like to see rural communities prosper rather than suffer. They want to support their fellow Australians and any industry which contributes to Australia, including the cotton industry
 - *We shouldn't stop growing it. It's some people's livelihoods and they often don't get a say in it. They're just born into cotton farming and that's it (Brisbane)*
- A few people said that the cotton industry makes an important contribution to exports
 - However, even these people were pleasantly surprised when they read the Information Sheet and saw the actual figures of AUD\$1.2 billion export dollars per annum value involved
- In Tamworth there is a perception that the cotton industry is very tightly knit
 - *The cotton industry is powerful because they band together, they're a bit aloof from the rest of the community (Tamworth farmers)*

Perceptions of Cotton Industry

- Overall respondents had mildly negative to neutral perceptions of the cotton industry
 - Their default position veers towards negative because of the perceived excessive use of water, but they are not negative towards the cotton industry itself
- There was, however, a small minority of respondents who had strong negative views about cotton farming
 - This was reflected by one or occasionally two people in some groups
 - *I don't feel sorry for the cotton farmers being hit by the drought – I blame them for the drought (Tamworth community)*
 - Note that we had screened strong environmentalists out of the groups so this proportion could potentially be higher across the population as a whole
- The majority of perceptions are based on very little knowledge – so are lightly held
 - Participants in all city groups would regularly begin a comment with the phrase, *I don't know if it's true, but...*

How People Get Their Information

- Main sources:
 - ABC
 - Radio and television
 - Word of mouth

- Other important sources:
 - *An Inconvenient Truth* – in terms of water usage and climate change
 - While not cotton-specific, this had a significant impact on those who had seen it
 - Regional newspapers
 - State metropolitan dailies
 - *The Australian* was conspicuously absent
 - Local radio
 - eg Nova in Sydney and Adelaide

Responses to Information Sheets

- Most respondents became significantly more positive about cotton once they had read the Information Sheet
 - *I'm surprised at how little water is actually used. They are obviously a lot more productive and efficient than I had realised (Sydney swinging voters)*
 - *It's not as big a user as I previously thought. A big export commodity for Australia and still a large provider of direct and indirect jobs (Adelaide engaged)*
 - *I was surprised that the majority is Australian owned – it doesn't seem right that all the other industries are getting all the water (Sydney swinging voters)*
 - *I was interested to learn that they produce three times as much cotton per hectare vs anywhere else in the world, so they must have done a lot of work in making it more efficient (Sydney swinging voters)*
- However, this could be reflective of a general trend of scepticism about information presented in the public domain

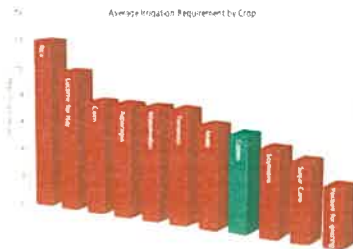
Responses to Information Sheets *cont.*

- The credibility of any information supplied is critical – in each group some questioned the veracity of the data and whether they were 'selective statistics'
 - *Are these facts true? (Toowoomba community)*
 - *Being a cynic from wayback – statistics can always be made to say what you want (Tamworth farmers)*
 - *I would have liked to have seen ABS stats – independent stats always carry more weight (Brisbane)*
 - *I'm not sure about this information (Tamworth community)*
 - *But they've used selective crops in this table (Sydney swinging voters)*
 - *I don't think all the information in the fact sheet is correct (Tamworth farmers)*
 - *It seems like this is being used as propaganda for the cotton industry (Brisbane)*
 - *These figures are rubbery – they need explanation (Tamworth farmers)*

Responses to Information Sheets *cont.*

- Participants responded well to:

- The comparative water use chart showing how much water is used by cotton in relation to other industries - this was particularly effective



- *I was shocked by the amount of water other agricultural industries use. Obviously the cotton industry only use the water they need (Tamworth farmers)*

- However, some questioned the relevance of including crops like watermelon and asparagus in there

- *Why are we seeing watermelons, they're not a big crop (Tamworth farmers)*

- Economic export figures
- Number of jobs generated directly and indirectly
- Fact that most farms are family owned
- Impact on regional communities – eg Wee Waa
- Investment in R & D to reduce water use
- The fact that the Australian cotton industry does not receive government subsidies
 - *It's the nature of things these days that people are always after government handouts. The cotton industry should be proud that it doesn't receive any (Brisbane)*
 - *You can't really compare it to the global figures because the US and all the other countries are heavily subsidised by the government so the figures aren't really fair (Sydney engaged)*
 - *I'm wrong then. I assumed they got government subsidies (Brisbane)*

Message Testing

Respondents were given sheets of messages supporting and opposing the cotton industry. They were asked to give each message a mark out of 10 in terms of how effective it is in motivating them to support or oppose the cotton industry. A mark of 10 means very effective and a mark of 0 means not at all effective.

The messages were updated during the course of the groups following respondent feedback.

The most effective positive and negative messages are outlined on the following slides in order of overall effectiveness.

Key Messages Supporting Cotton Industry

1. Australia's cotton industry is the lifeblood of many regional communities

It directly creates 10,000 jobs and supports significant economic activity in regional areas

2. Australia has the most water efficient cotton farmers in the world, allowing them to produce three times more cotton than the global average



3. The drought has hit cotton farmers just as hard as everybody else. This year's crop will be the smallest for 20 years

Key Messages **Opposing** Cotton Industry

- The most effective messages opposing the cotton industry in descending order of importance are as follows:
 - Cotton is a 'thirsty' crop that we just shouldn't be farming in a dry continent like Australia
 - Cubbie Station can store as much water as Sydney Harbour or 100,000 Olympic size swimming pools
 - Greedy cotton growers upstream deprive those downstream – including the city of Adelaide – of proper drinking water
 - How can we keep irrigating when the Murray River barely flows in places?
 - Cotton farmers use large amounts of pesticides and fertilizers and the run-off pollutes rivers and impacts downstream farmers and communities
 - Note that this is not as effective in regional areas where there is more awareness of progress being made in terms of reducing chemical use in the last five years
 - It takes 1,000 litres of water to produce one t-shirt
 - This message can be effectively refuted by showing a graph of how much water is used to produce other items – but some questioned the credibility and accuracy of it so the data has to be exactly right



Discussions on Public Education Campaign

In the second half of the groups, respondents were asked if they thought it would be appropriate for the cotton industry to undertake a public education campaign.

The groups discussed what the objective of any campaign should be and what the main messages should be.

They also evaluated a number of potential slogans and assessed photographs of different types of cotton images to see what is most appropriate.

Interest in Learning More About Cotton

- Most people were not particularly interested in cotton at the beginning of the group and admit that the fact that it does not affect them much on a day to day basis means they don't worry about it too much
- Despite this, most say that they are quite interested in hearing more about the industry – they feel it's something they should know about
 - *I really haven't thought about it too much before but it was interesting tonight (Sydney swinging voters)*
- Respondents in regional areas were better informed than people in the cities but even they would still like to learn more and appreciated the information they received in the groups

Pros and Cons of Public Campaign

- Overall, most thought it would be in the cotton industry's best interests to run some kind of education campaign. They could see that they had come into the group with neutral to negative perceptions based on limited knowledge and had become more positive once they had received more information. Whether this apparent interest can be sustained should be carefully considered before a public education program is contemplated
 - *The industry needs to stamp out their bad publicity by a very good ad campaign. They must show that the cotton industry is no worse an evil than the other agricultural industries in the same area (Adelaide swinging voters)*
 - *A campaign would be effective in increasing awareness (Sydney swinging voters)*
 - *It's a tough environment at the moment, you don't want to be caught out keeping something from the public (Sydney engaged voters)*
- Some think the cotton industry would be better off staying below the radar – particularly because so many people who think of cotton start out from a fairly negative viewpoint
 - These people also question the purpose of any campaign – is it to address the issue of water or is it to make people feel warm and fuzzy about cotton?
 - *I don't think there's a need to say or do anything like a campaign. Sure there's a lot of stuff about water in the media, but nothing hugely significant has happened or been done to the cotton industry specifically (Brisbane)*

Campaign Options

- There were two views about the types of campaigns that would be appropriate

Option 1: Broad education campaign focussing on the most effective key messages – jobs, economy, community, efficient use of water

- This was the preference of most participants, particularly those who had not previously realised cotton was an issue

Option 2: 'Just the facts about water' – campaign that directly addresses the cotton industry's water use

- This type of campaign should explain what progress the industry has made to address the community's concerns about water use and what it is doing into the future
- This was the preference of a smaller number of respondents – primarily those who had seen the cotton industry's water use as a significant issue when they came into the group and those who still believed it was a big issue at the end of the group. These people say the first type of campaign would be all very nice in terms of raising the profile of the industry but ineffective in addressing the water issue
 - *Are you trying to sell more cotton or what? (Brisbane)*

Campaign Components

- There was a strong support for nationalism in any campaign messaging or slogans
 - *They've got to focus on Australian family farms, not foreign, corporation owned farms (Brisbane)*
- The most popular slogans are:
 1. **Cotton On Australia**
 - Simple, catchy, double meaning
 - Not sure on viability as used by retail chain
 2. **Cotton – Part of Australia's Fabric for 200 Years**
 - Alludes to history and end product
 3. **Cotton – Naturally Australian**
 - End product and simple
 - People really like the word 'natural'
 - Reminds some people of wool campaign



Campaign Images

- Make it earthy, rustic and Australian
- Avoid images of hardship or abundance
 - Don't show green crops or ditches of water
 - Focus on the everyday images of farms, families and the land
- Include images that show cotton families
- Include images that show the 'cycle of cotton'
 - Images of the farm and natural fibers
 - Images focusing on exporting and ginning did not work as well
- Many liked the scientific images
 - *The science stuff is terrific – and we can export it (Tamworth farmers)*
- In terms of spokespeople, Adam Kay tested well with all groups – but he comes across much better in an open collared shirt and possibly a hat rather than a suit
 - *From the land*
 - *Friendly*
 - *Young, smart*
 - *He represents future of cotton*

The Future – What is Expected

- Nearly all respondents believe the cotton industry has a long term future in Australia
- However, they acknowledge that water use is a major issue – in perception as well as fact – and they will be looking to the cotton industry for evidence that it is taking the issue seriously and making progress in terms of water recycling and reducing evaporation
 - *If they can show that they are making a genuine effort to be efficient with their water, I'd back them all the way. People want them to do well, the bush needs them – as long as it isn't a 'churn and burn' attitude (Brisbane)*
 - *If we can get the water issue worked out then cotton should definitely be kept in Aussie land for the economy and jobs it creates. By losing an industry altogether no good can come from relying on other nations for our need (Toowoomba farmers)*
- There is also an expectation that the industry should be investigating new drought resistant strains of cotton

Segmenting the Community:

Virtuous Greens, Aussie Waverers,
Economic Pragmatists and The Disengaged

Segmenting the Community

- During the qualitative research process it became clear that focus group participants could be divided into four broad groups. The segment categories were identified as:
 - Virtuous Greens
 - Aussie Waverers
 - Economic Pragmatists
 - The Disengaged
- By drilling down into the responses of each of the segment categories we are able to provide a richer analysis of how the Australian public may be broken down in regards to their awareness, attitudes and responsiveness to cotton as an issue
- In this section of the report we analyse each segment category according to:
 - Awareness and perceptions of cotton
 - Response to the Information Sheet
 - Effectiveness of messages – for and against cotton
 - Response to possible public campaign elements and
 - Beliefs regarding the future of cotton in Australia
- Note that the profiles outlined in the following pages are the result of a qualitative process – they are not designed to be a statistically valid sample of the community's attitudes to the cotton industry, but rather a descriptive overview of how the community sees the issue

Overview of Segmentation Categories

Segment	Description of recognised 'types' within the community
Virtuous Green	Generally one in each group. Predominantly a swinging voter from an urban community – this includes non-farmers from regional communities. High awareness of water, climate change and environmental issues has changed their personal behaviour with regards to the environment, eg restricted water use, recycling, etc. Strong negative views on cotton, rice and irrigation farming generally. Distrustful of mainstream media (except ABC radio and TV), government and other 'establishment' bodies.
Aussie Waverer	Over a third of each group. Tends to be mostly swinging voters, however farmers and engaged group participants are also strongly represented. Most have a high awareness of water shortages, but low awareness of cotton as a crop and an issue. However, that initial awareness is universally negative. They respond the strongest to the Information Sheet, becoming significantly more positive. Messages emphasising the 'national' impact of the drought, provision of local jobs and the economic benefits of cotton have the greatest impact. Cynical about mainstream media and politicians.
Economic Pragmatist	Just on a third of each group. Tends to be evenly spread across all focus groups with a slightly higher presence in rural communities. Tend to be more engaged in current issues. Perceive water management to be the primary issue facing Australia. Moderate awareness of cotton. Initially less negative about the cotton industry than other segments, usually based on a limited knowledge of some economic benefits or farming practices. Messages supporting the investment made by cotton farmers, cotton's contribution to the local and national economies and improved farming practices have the greatest impact.
The Disengaged	Normally one or two in each group. Mostly found amongst city-based swinging voters. Awareness of current issues in general is low and cotton in particular is extremely low. Initial perceptions of cotton are negative and based on superficial word-of-mouth and TV news. Responsiveness to Information Sheet is positive, however retention of new positive perception is very lightly held.

Changes in Perceptions of Cotton

The table below shows the positive change in the perception of each segment following exposure to the Information Sheet and general discussion. Waverers in particular became significantly more positive.

Segment	Average Perception Prior to Discussion	Average Perception Following Discussion
Virtuous Greens	2.5	3.8
Aussie Waverers	4.8	8.5
Economic Pragmatists	8.1	8.3
The Disengaged	3.8	6.1

This table shows the average rating for each segment type. At the start of each focus group and again at the end participants were asked to rate their overall perception of the Australian cotton industry on a scale of 0 to 10, where the ends of the scale are defined by a frowning face = 0 and a smiling face = 10

Virtuous Greens

Aussie Waverers

Pragmatists

The Disengaged

Virtuous Greens: Perception of Cotton

- The number one issue for Virtuous Greens is water shortage due to 'climate change'. Cotton is not initially a priority issue for them however once they focus on cotton they have very strong views
- Virtuous Greens tend to have issues with any form of irrigation farming – cotton and rice are seen as inappropriate crops. Any form of farming for crops other than food (mainly vegetables) is seen as a waste of water in the current environment
 - *Cotton is killing the future. The focus on 'economic' blinds people to what environment babies being born in 2007 will have to grow up in – they can't eat money or poisoned earth*
 - *This industry is not sustainable any longer in this country due to water usage and environmental degradation. Alternatives to this crop that are less harmful to the environment, such as hemp, are more beneficial*
- Perceptions of cotton are negative and strongly held, but when tested appear to be based on incorrect information
 - *The industry appears to be environmentally detrimental and not particularly competitive*
 - *It has huge political clout because of dollars. Cotton consumes huge amounts of water and chemicals in order to grow. It grows in summer which means the water evaporates quicker, and it wastes more and more water*
- They tend to believe that cotton farms are large properties, owned by corporations and /or foreigners. Cubbie Station was mentioned as an example of 'bad' cotton farming in Australia
 - *Cubbie Station is huge – it diverts water from farmers down river*

Virtuous Greens: Reaction to Information Sheet

- Virtuous Greens did not believe the data contained in the Information Sheet
 - *The way I read this data, I have to say that I think it is propaganda for the cotton industry*
 - *Yeah I thought that too, I'm a bit skeptical*
 - *It's too glowing – too many positives and not many negatives*
 - *\$1.2 billion – compared to what? Could we allocate our resources elsewhere to get a better return on something else?*

- Some felt that using more objective statistical sources could enhance credibility
 - *Use ABS stats rather than Cotton Inc stats – independent stats always weigh heavy*

Virtuous Greens: Effective Messages

Pro-Cotton Messages

- With Virtuous Greens, positive messages had significantly less impact than negative messages

Medium Impact

- ✓ Australia has the most water efficient cotton farmers in the world, allowing them to produce three times more cotton than the global average
- ✓ The drought has hit cotton farmers just as hard as everybody else. This year's crop will be the smallest for 20 years
- ✓ Australia's cotton industry is the lifeblood of many regional communities. It directly creates 10,000 jobs and supports significant economic activity in regional areas

Anti-Cotton Messages

Strongest Impact

- ✗ There are plenty of other profitable and more water-efficient crops that cotton farmers could grow instead of cotton, for example hemp and corn
- ✗ How can we keep irrigating when the Murray River barely flows in places?

Medium Impact

- ✗ Cotton is a 'thirsty' crop that we just shouldn't be farming in a dry continent like Australia
- ✗ Agriculture, including cotton, uses 70% of Australia's water resources – it's just too much
- ✗ Greedy cotton growers upstream deprive those downstream – including the city of Adelaide – of proper drinking water
- ✗ Australia's largest cotton farm – Cubbie Station – can store as much water as Sydney Harbour. Farmers downstream say Cubbie is ruining their businesses

Virtuous Greens: Campaign Images & Future

- Images that Virtuous Greens responded to most positively are ones which focus on the 'science' of cotton production, not the warm and fuzzy 'happy cotton family'

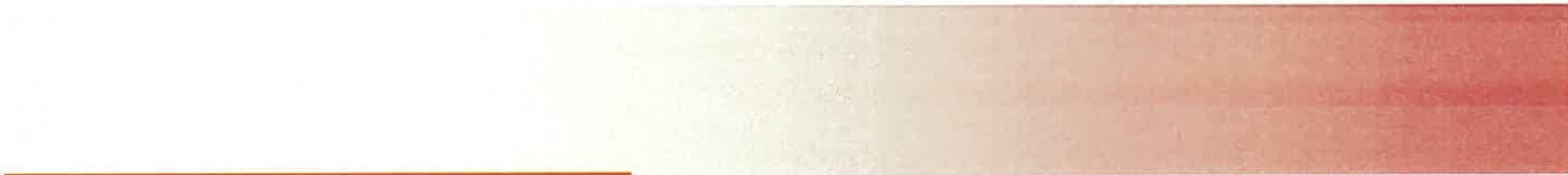


- They were most negative about images displaying large bodies of water and 'green' crops



Virtuous Greens: Future

- Virtuous Greens do not believe that cotton has a future in Australia due to the dry nature of the continent
 - *I don't support industries that use this much water in a basically dry continent*



Aussie Waverers

Aussie Waverers: Perception of Cotton

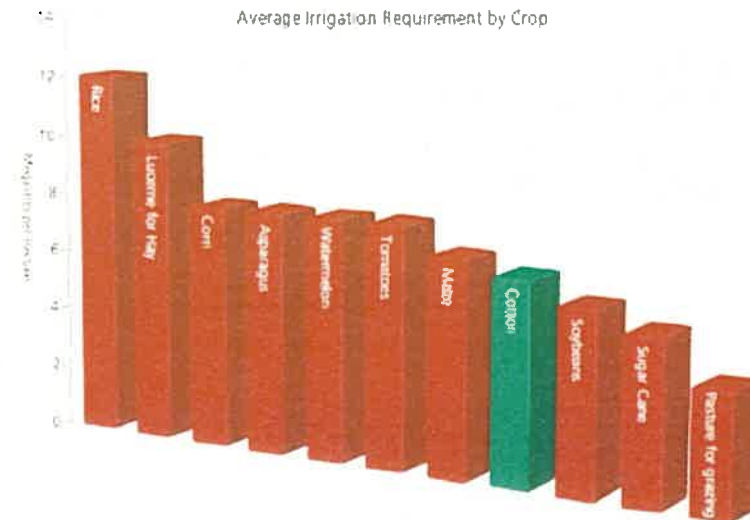
- More than a third of participants fall into the Waverer category. They are distinctive from a) The Disengaged by the order of magnitude of the improvement in their perception of cotton following exposure to the Information Sheet, and b) From Economic Pragmatists by their more negative initial perceptions of cotton
- Waverers have a fairly low awareness of general issues. Water is still the dominant issue, but they usually see it in terms of personal issues around new water restrictions
- The Waverer tends to hold climate change and Government inaction since the 1950s regarding water management responsible for the current water shortages
 - *It should have been taken care of a long time before now – back in the 50s when they first realised we did have years of no rain. They should have looked at ways of diverting water to places or desalinating it.*
- For Waverers, cotton rates very low as an issue and as an agricultural industry at all
- Their initial response to cotton is mostly negative and often coupled with rice farming when mentioned. However, Waverers acknowledge that this is based on very little information
 - *I really don't know much about the industry apart from the fact that it may consume too much water*

Aussie Waverers: Perception of Cotton *cont.*

- When probed, the Waverers' initial perceptions of cotton tend to balance the perceived economic value of the industry against water use practices
 - *I gave it a rating of 5 because it does benefit Australia to save importing it, but it uses a big quantity of our water*
 - *The cotton industry is useful to Australia, but its importance is overestimated when balanced against its costs. Land degradation, water use, chemical residues and falling world usage have it as a declining industry. However, this development is very recent*
- The most positive attribute of cotton for Waverers is the end product as a natural fiber
 - *I don't have anything to do with it – I just wear it, it breathes*
- They believe that cotton farms are owned by big companies, often international entities
 - *A typical cotton farm? Vast, flat plains, usually pretty dry, machinery to harvest it, probably very large and corporate. I have the impression that they're company owned rather than family owned*
- They suggested that organisations most likely to support a campaign against cotton are:
 - The farmers who are competing for the same water
 - People at the bottom end of the Murray-Darling
 - 'Conservationists/Greenies'

Aussie Waverers: Reaction to Information Sheet

- Once exposed to the Information Sheet, Waverers had the strongest positive reaction. Their perceptions of cotton dramatically shifted to the positive
 - *I'm amazed that it's a small, family run business*
 - *Good, efficient water use practices*
 - *It looks like they've been getting a lot of bad press over the years, and looking at the figures there they are getting far more bad press than they actually deserve, especially since they don't seem to use any more water than anyone else*
- However, they still noted some doubt regarding the veracity of the information
 - *The chart showing water use has a lot of impact, but when I looked more closely it didn't seem to be relevant crops*
 - *Where does the data come from?*



Aussie Waverers: Effective messages

Pro-Cotton Messages

Strongest impact

- ✓ The drought has hit cotton farmers just as hard as everybody else. This year's crop will be the smallest for 20 years
- ✓ Australia's cotton industry is the lifeblood of many regional communities. It directly creates 10,000 jobs and supports significant economic activity in regional areas

Medium Impact

- ✓ Forcing Australian farmers out of cotton would reduce our export income
- ✓ Australia has the most water efficient cotton farmers in the world, allowing them to produce three times more cotton than the global average
- ✓ Banning the cotton industry would not save any water. The same water entitlements would be used to produce the next most profitable crops
- ✓ Cotton does not use as much water as many other common crops [combined with *Average Irrigation Requirement by Crop* chart]

Anti-Cotton Messages

Strongest Impact

- ✗ Cotton is a 'thirsty' crop that we just shouldn't be farming in a dry continent like Australia
- ✗ Greedy cotton growers upstream deprive those downstream – including the city of Adelaide – of proper drinking water
- ✗ How can we keep irrigating when the Murray River barely flows in places?

Medium Impact

- ✗ Agriculture, including cotton, uses 70% of Australia's water resources – it's just too much
- ✗ There are plenty of other profitable and more water-efficient crops that cotton farmers could grow instead of cotton, for example hemp and corn
- ✗ Australia's largest cotton farm – Cubbie Station – can store as much water as Sydney Harbour. Farmers downstream say Cubbie is ruining their businesses

Aussie Waverers: Campaign Images

- There is a mixed response for the need for a public campaign amongst Waverers:
 - *Yes, because there are a lot of positives from it, and in the news and media it's all just negative stuff*
 - *If you've got the National Party behind you, you may not need an advertising campaign*
 - *I don't know – cotton growing is not on everyone's mind. Water is, but cotton isn't. I reckon it might draw attention to it*
- Images that worked best for Waverers focused on:
 - The cotton family amongst the crop (but not a green field)
 - Showing the 'from crop to finished product' story of cotton
 - Improved farming practices (R & D and science) and
 - The warm and fuzzy 'happy' shots of cotton kids and end products

Like these



Don't like these

- Waverers responded most strongly to the 'Cotton On Australia' message
 - *It's short and simple and has a nice Aussie tone*

Aussie Waverers: Future

- Overall, Waverers believe a public education campaign would help cotton by dispelling some of the negative press it receives. They believe the transformation they experienced would be repeated on a large scale
 - *I'm much more positive about cotton now, due to the facts and issues that I have read and what has been discussed as a group*
 - *My view on the cotton industry has shifted because I had no idea of the facts or the impact the industry has on Australia and Australians irrespective of the water situation*

Economic Pragmatists

The Disengaged

Economic Pragmatists: Perception of Cotton

- Economic Pragmatists make up just up a third of each group and were particularly common amongst engaged and farming groups
- As with other segments, water shortage was the dominant issue for Pragmatists. However, many tend to attribute it to cyclical drought rather than long term climate change
- They tend to have a low awareness of cotton as an issue, but a slightly higher awareness of cotton as an industry
 - Those who have contact with the industry are usually found in this segment
 - *The cotton industry is mostly owned by family, is run to efficiency and usually employs two to three helping hands*
- They hold the most positive perception of cotton of any segment
 - *Positive – lots of research. They developed a GM drought tolerant crop available overseas which may become available in the future here in Australia. It suits our soils and climate and it's a large industry to have here*
- They adopt an economic rationalist position when assessing cotton farming
 - *Sustainable farming keeps jobs in rural areas and also down the line (research, manufacturing, sales etc). Anything that keeps rural towns from dying is a good thing*
 - *If we can get the water issue worked out then cotton should definitely be kept in Aussie land for the economy and jobs it creates. By losing an industry altogether no good can come from relying on other nations for our need*
- Pragmatists believe that cotton may be bearing the brunt of decades of political inaction with regards to water management and that its negative image comes from activists and those competing for water use

Economic Pragmatists: Information Sheet

- They tend to get their information from word-of-mouth, their own experiences, local papers, and ABC TV and radio
 - *I listen to ABC Radio all the time and whatever is on Country Hour. I can't live without the ABC*
- Pragmatists did not find the information contained in the Information Sheet to be as much of a revelation as other segments – however, most believed they learnt something new
 - *Second last point [\$17 million] – that is good. Efficiency point – yes I've heard it thousands of times. It's well understood in the country. The exports point, that is interesting. It sounds like a lot of money but guess who got it – the big chemical and seed companies. There is not a lot of profit in cotton for cotton growers*
 - *If the statistics on these pages are correct, cotton is getting the raw deal on the 'country grapevine'*
- Pragmatists applied their own 'logic test' to the credibility of the data included in the chart
 - *Where are all these other farmers? I've never seen wheat irrigators*
 - *They don't grow much watermelon around here*

Economic Pragmatists: Effective Messages

Pro-Cotton Messages

Strongest Impact

- ✓ Australia has the most water efficient cotton farmers in the world, allowing them to produce three-times more cotton than the global average
- ✓ Forcing Australian farmers out of cotton would reduce our export income
- ✓ Cotton does not use as much water as many other common crops [combined with *Average Irrigation Requirement by Crop* chart]
- ✓ Australia's cotton industry is the lifeblood of many regional communities. It directly creates 10,000 jobs and supports significant economic activity in regional areas

Medium Impact

- ✓ Banning the cotton industry would not save any water. The same water entitlements would be used to produce the next most profitable crops
- ✓ The drought has hit cotton farmers just as hard as everybody else. This year's crop will be the smallest for 20 years

Anti-Cotton Messages

Strongest Impact

- ✗ Cotton is a 'thirsty' crop that we just shouldn't be farming in a dry continent like Australia
- ✗ How can we keep irrigating when the Murray River barely flows in places?

Medium Impact

- ✗ Cotton farmers and other irrigators should pay the same price for water as urban users – they get it too cheaply
- ✗ Australia's largest cotton farm – Cubbie Station – can store as much water as Sydney Harbour. Farmers downstream say Cubbie is ruining their businesses
- ✗ Greedy cotton growers upstream deprive those downstream – including the city of Adelaide – of proper drinking water
- ✗ Agriculture, including cotton, uses 70% of Australia's water resources – it's just too much
- ✗ There are plenty of other profitable and more water-efficient crops that cotton farmers could grow instead of cotton, for example hemp and corn

Economic Pragmatists: Campaign Images

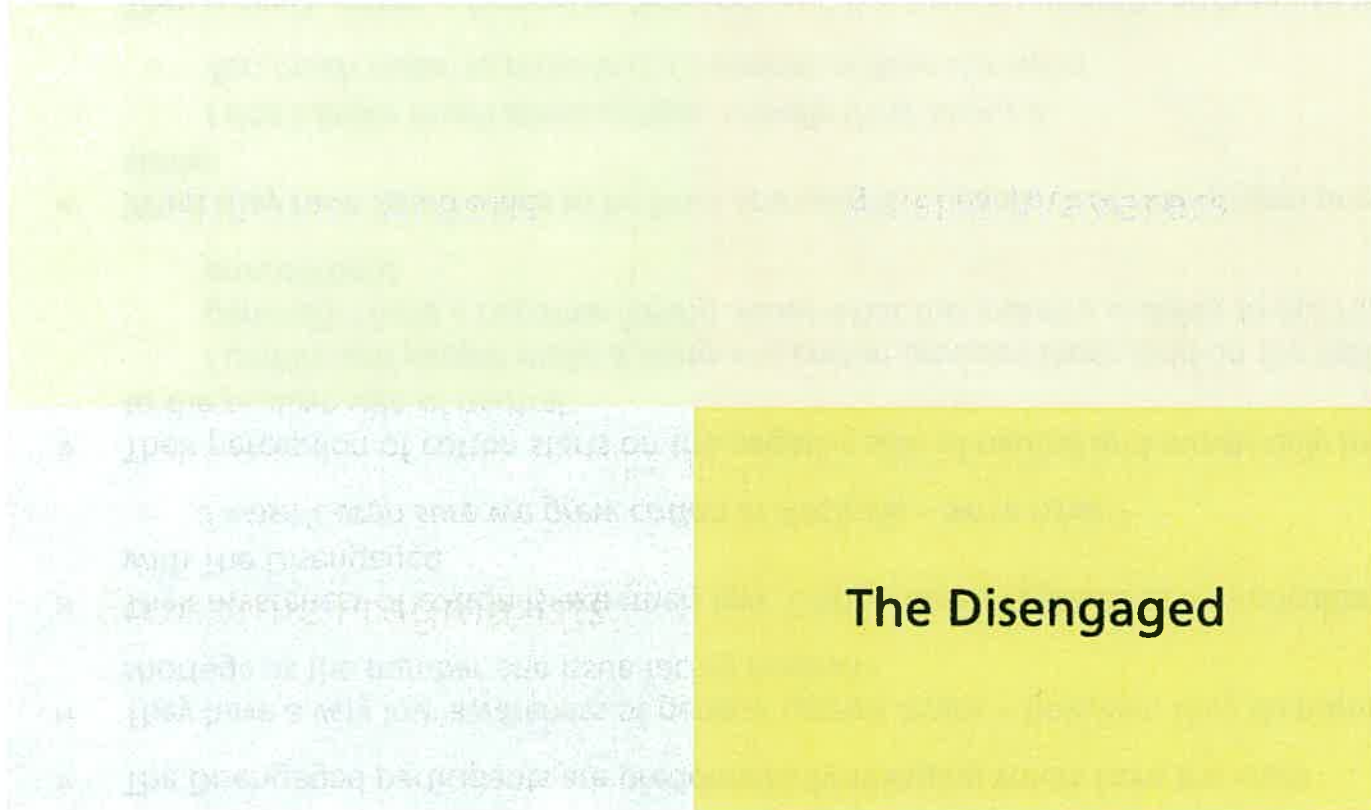
- Pragmatists preferred campaign images which depict the economic contribution that cotton makes to the community and the science used in cotton production



- They recommended avoiding images showing excessive water use, green fields and cotton families who look 'too fat'
- Pragmatists responded most strongly to the 'Cotton On Australia' message
 - *It's short, snappy. Has a double meaning. I like it, it implies Australia has to know more*
- Pragmatists preferred the 'Just the facts about water' style campaign - acknowledge water issue exists, then explain what's been done and what will be done by the cotton industry
 - *Stay away from the fuzzy cotton family – it didn't work for wool*
- Pragmatists believe there should be an education campaign targeting city people rather than country people
 - *You can only sway opinion where people are not fully informed and willing to change*

Economic Pragmatists: The Future

- Pragmatists believe that cotton has a future in Australia mainly due to its economic impact, the investment that the cotton industry has made in their farms and because the regional communities they support are too important to lose
 - *I think that through research and environmental answers, the cotton industry will keep going and people will be more positive*
 - *If we can get the water issue worked out then cotton should definitely be kept in Aussie land for the economy and jobs it creates. By losing an industry altogether no good can come from relying on other nations for our needs*



The Disengaged: Perception of Cotton

- The Disengaged participants are predominantly swinging voters from the cities
- They have a very low awareness of general current issues – however, they do nominate water shortage as the number one issue facing Australia
- Their awareness of cotton is extremely low. Cotton barely registers as an agricultural industry with The Disengaged
 - *I wasn't even sure we grew cotton in Australia – since when?*
- Their perception of cotton starts on the negative side of neutral and moves only moderately to the positive side of neutral
 - *I understand people make a living and cotton provides them food on the table, but generally I have a negative feeling about what this industry is doing to our rural environment*
- What they have heard tends to be from scanning the headlines of mainstream press and TV stories
 - *I don't know much about cotton, I hardly think about it*
 - *Too much water to provide it. Chemicals pollute the water*
- They suspect cotton is farmed by 'big business' but have no direct knowledge of the subject
 - *I don't know, they probably are international firms. They seem big, really big*

The Disengaged: Reactions to Information Sheet

- The Disengaged find the data in the Information Sheet interesting, but not compelling
 - *Cotton farming methods appear to be quite good in Australia*
 - *Employment, not going to go away. Exports, too old to change opinion*
- The Disengaged do not see the need for immediate action on the issue of water shortages and the future of cotton and they tended to defer judgment
 - *My perception has improved but water issues still remain. You should highlight the pros, efficiency of production*
 - *It's an additional industry in Australia. While water is an issue at the moment, the drought will break so is it really a long term issue?*

The Disengaged: Effective Messages

Pro-Cotton Messages

Strongest Impact

- ✓ Australia's cotton industry is the lifeblood of many regional communities. It directly creates 10,000 jobs and supports significant economic activity in regional areas
- ✓ Australia has the most water efficient cotton farmers in the world, allowing them to produce three times more cotton than the global average
- ✓ Forcing Australian farmers out of cotton would reduce our export income
- ✓ Cotton does not use as much water as many other common crops [combined with *Average Irrigation Requirement by Crop* chart]
- ✓ The drought has hit cotton farmers just as hard as everybody else. This year's crop will be the smallest for 20 years

Anti-Cotton Messages

Strongest Impact

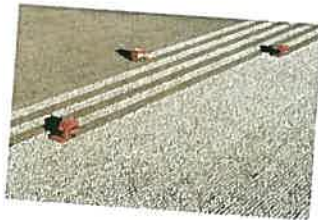
- ✗ Cotton is a 'thirsty' crop that we just shouldn't be farming in a dry continent like Australia

Medium to Low Impact

- ✗ How can we keep irrigating when the Murray River barely flows in places?
- ✗ Cotton farmers and other irrigators should pay the same price for water as urban users – they get it too cheaply
- ✗ Cotton farmers use large amounts of pesticides and fertilizers and the run-off pollutes rivers and impacts downstream farmers and communities
- ✗ Cotton growing depends on irrigation water provided at low cost or at no cost by the government
- ✗ Cotton growers don't pay the true value for their water

The Disengaged: Campaign images & the future

- As an overall campaign, this group believes that cotton should use the slogan 'Cotton – Naturally Australian'
- They should tell the 'cotton from crop to end product story'
 - *People in the city don't know what cotton looks like, maybe they'll like it*
 - *I like cotton as a natural fiber, everyone can understand that*
- The Disengaged support the use of images which show the 'cotton family' and the end products of cotton – the warm and fuzzy campaign style
 - *Lots of Aussie farm families, people like families and kids*
 - *Show the end products, very Aussie*



The Disengaged: The Future

- The Disengaged believe that there is a future for cotton in Australia and that the general community should be educated
 - *Not enough knowledge of industry, city people need to understand*
 - *With good management it could be good for this nation*

Focus Group Profiles

A Summary Outline Reflecting the Unique Feel in Each Group

Sydney Profiles – Two Groups

Engaged

- Believe that only now is it so bad that the city people have realised that there's a serious problem about water – the country people have been on about it for years
- Impression that cotton farming is a high user of water; see water use as being the single determinant as to whether industry will continue
- Have the impression that cotton isn't Australian owned – surprised that most are small, family-owned farms
- Heavily influenced by the media
- Liked images of machinery and how cotton is actually produced rather than the end product of cotton clothing
- See purposes of campaign being for sympathy and education – they were big on education
- Want the industry to tell it like it is – state the positives but come forward with negatives

Swinging Voters

- Acknowledged complacency of city dwellers about water consumption
- See problem as a combination of climate change and drought
- Confess to not knowing much about it, but see cotton as being lower profile than beef or wool
- Most see cotton as having a long term future in Australia
- Very little knowledge of efficiency of cotton, but assume the industry is trying to improve itself to meet global standards
- No knowledge of where cotton is grown or what sort of chemicals, if any, are used – but all see water as the huge issue
- Fed a lot from the media – think careful planning is in order
- Liked the R & D being put back into cotton
- Saw 'thirsty crop' message as particularly effective
- Generally more positive after receiving more facts, but still a few skeptics about the information
- Found it interesting on the night, but aren't directly impacted by the issue

Adelaide Profiles – Two Groups

Engaged & Swinging Voters

- The Adelaide groups showed little variance in their views on cotton. The only distinguishing factor is that engaged participants had a slightly better awareness of current issues
- Water is the overwhelming issue – neighbours remind each other of restrictions
- They see the problem with water as being largely bureaucratic – lots of talk and no action being taken
- They are very much aware of the water issues regarding the Murray-Darling, but this did not translate into specific negativity towards the cotton industry
- Cotton farms are seen as being run by large multinational firms
- Most don't know anything about cotton – they say this is probably because it is not grown in South Australia. They rate it negatively based on what they hear in the media
- Most think cotton is inefficient
- They are surprised and sympathetic when digesting fact sheets
- They agree with Premier Mike Rann's sentiments – *Adelaide is doing the right thing and are still missing out*
- They think cotton industry should bring facts out into the open a bit more – but believe it is more the government's responsibility than that of the cotton industry
- Unsure about the objectives of any public campaign
- More positive at the end of the group

Tamworth Profiles – Two Groups

Farmers (Non-Cotton)

- Happy that at last everyone has recognised water as the biggest issue
- Very aware of differences between city and country attitudes to water
- Firm belief that drought is cyclical
- High awareness and knowledge of irrigation practices, statistics, licences and water allocation – much higher than city groups
- See the cotton industry as being tightly-knit
- Cynicism and even latent jealousy of cotton farmers
- Disparaging about Cubbie Station – had got most of their info from the media
- Skeptical of fact sheet figures
- Like the natural aspect in a campaign – should refer more to 'farmers' rather than 'cotton' and 'industry'

Community

- Annoyance at Tamworth not being bush or city, and at the bureaucracy in state politics. Generally disgruntled at lack of long-term planning by State and Federal governments
- Population not coping with lack of resources, particularly water. Need more dams
- High knowledge of water restrictions and associated statistics
- Continuously referring negatively to 'the irrigators'
- A lot of negative perceptions about rice
- Cotton industry seen to concentrate too many good things on a tiny percentage of people – very strong perception that cotton farmers are very wealthy and can pull strings
- Generally bitter at the media and the external opinion and treatment of Tamworth
- Lots of transferal of information via word-of-mouth

Toowoomba Profiles – Two Groups

Farmers (Non-Cotton)

- Many say the water problem really stems from lack of planning and foresight
- Knowledgeable about cotton industry's shift to low pesticide use over last five years or so
- Unsure about how much is exported – disappointed we can't add the value here
- Also unsure of corporation versus family owned farms
- A lot of information in the community is spread via word-of-mouth
- Cotton farmers are seen to be good businesspeople who have made investments in equipment and are also doing it tough
- All are skeptical of statistics
- All are in favour of keeping cotton farming – people don't see it as the farmers' fault, instead they blame the politics of it all. They think cotton farmers are doing their bit and trying to be as efficient as possible
- Very low awareness of technicalities involving acquisition of water licences and entitlements
- Nobody wants water prices increased
- Think the problem is agriculture generally, not specifically cotton

Community

- Some negative perceptions of the cotton industry, but a lot of people think it is important in the context of Australian jobs (direct and indirect) and export value
- Quite well informed about cotton growing practices, where it is farmed and who does the farming
- See cotton farms to be a mix of big, corporate owned farms and family owned. Some thought that smaller farms are getting pushed aside for bigger corporations
- Think that cotton farmers are rich but down to earth people
- A lot of people support the local growers – keeps the money in the area
- Most think cotton farming should continue – seen as not Australian to push an industry aside
- No interest in compulsory acquisition – see politicians as acting only in the short term
- See power stations as being worse offenders
- Also aware of reduced use of pesticides in recent years

Brisbane Profiles – Two Groups

Swinging Voters (Group 1)

- Cotton is not really on the radar at all
- People think that cotton requires a lot of water, but that does not mean that it shouldn't be grown
- They see that the cotton industry is struggling like everyone else
- Want to support the cotton industry, as long as the industry is doing all it can to be efficient
- Minimal knowledge of water pricing
- Think that cotton farms are enormous, and that they support entire country towns
- They were surprised and impressed at the amount of export dollars generated
- Nothing specifically to do with the cotton industry had really triggered the need for a public campaign – they should stay below the radar
- Thought that stressing the Australian image of cotton is very important – they want to help their fellow Australians

Swinging Voters (Group 2)

- Confessed to knowing very little to nothing about cotton, but they were all very scathing about the industry – their negative perceptions were based on assumption and no fact
- However, all said that we need it – it comes down to efficiency and responsibility
- Cotton farmers are big users of water, without making a significant enough contribution
- All also think that water prices will go up considering the current situation
- Surprised to hear that the cotton industry does not receive any government subsidies
- They particularly sympathise with those who have been on the land for generations
- Think that most farms are owned by corporations
- Surprised at efficiency in graphs, but some remained sceptical
- All think that cotton farming has a future
- Think the industry needs to appeal to all types of people if it were to launch a campaign
- Can see merit in a campaign to stress positives

Communications Recommendations

Communications Recommendations

- GA Research does not recommend a high-profile, above-the-line public campaign at this stage
 - In the current environment of water shortage concerns it would be unwise to increase the public's awareness of cotton as a water user - good or bad.
 - The paradox is that while the research shows that people do improve their perception of cotton when they receive more information, it would require a significant and on-going budget outlay to overcome initial negative perceptions which may be beyond Cotton Australia's current budget
- We recommend a campaign that is targeted on key decision makers and opinion leaders and influencers - particularly government and media. *[Already initiated]*
- There is also lot of benefit in grassroots campaigning
 - There is clear potential for an education campaign aimed at schools and
 - Using local members of the cotton industry to convey key messages via word of mouth
- A highly credible, fully sourced fact sheet should form an integral part of any communications efforts and should be displayed on the website. *[Already initiated]*
- Any communications activities aimed at the general public – whether indirectly through media or directly through grassroots activity, the website and schools - should target the 'Waverers' segment as it has the strongest response to communications
 - It should also reinforce and consolidate the views of Economic Pragmatists as this group are a natural ally.



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