

Turnbull lets funds flow for rural projects



Malcolm Turnbull chats to Kerry Morton at the famous Birdsville Hotel yesterday. Picture: Peter Wallis

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Malcolm Turnbull will step up the case for more dams and water projects across northern Australia, promising \$440 million today during a tour across Queensland. One day after sharing a beer with locals at the Birdsville Hotel, the Prime Minister will release the guidelines for a new water infrastructure fund aimed at boosting agriculture.

While the funds were first promised during the election campaign, today's announcement will act on the commitment to help build projects such as the Rookwood Weir on the Fitzroy River. But the scale of the initiative will depend on state and territory ambitions, amid a push by the Greens against the idea of building new dams.

Mr Turnbull will be in Rockhampton today after a sweep through rural Queensland, including a visit to Winton yesterday to commit \$8m to rebuild the Waltzing Matilda Centre that celebrates the song.

The Queensland government is pressing ahead with the \$495m project for Eden Bann and Rookwood weirs, saying the projects could capture 76,000 megalitres of water each year to help supply homes and industries around Rockhampton and Gladstone.

World Wildlife Fund Australia warned against some of the projects earlier this year, saying it would oppose at least six of 14 water projects in Queensland on the grounds they were in Great Barrier Reef catchment areas.

“The additional farm run-off, as a result of these new dams, would cast extreme doubt that Australia could meet pollution reduction targets,” WWF spokesman Nick Heath said in May. While the federal money will help build some dams, the Turnbull government is also counting on political will from the Queensland Labor government to proceed with major projects despite the pressure from the Greens.