



13 November 2007

WATER OUTLOOK FOR BORDER RIVERS RELEASED

The CSIRO report *Water Availability in the Border Rivers* was released today by the Department of the Environment and Water Resources.

The report is one of a series covering the entire Murray-Darling Basin commissioned by the Prime Minister and Murray-Darling Basin state Premiers at the November 2006 Water Summit.

The Border Rivers region is in southern Queensland and north-eastern New South Wales. It is based on the Macintyre Brook and Dumaresq River which join the Macintyre River and continue to become the Barwon River. The region covers 4 per cent of the total area of the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB).

Around 50,000 people live in the region where the major towns are Glen Innes, Inverell, Tenterfield, Stanthorpe, Inglewood, Mungindi and Goondiwindi. Broad acre livestock grazing is the main land use, with around 75,300 ha of irrigated cropping in the year 2000, more than three-quarters of which was cotton.

The region includes the nationally significant wetland Morella Watercourse/Boobera Lagoon/Pungbougul Lagoon, near Goondiwindi.

The CSIRO's 'best' estimate (median) of the likely range of future climate outcomes by 2030 is for a 9 per cent reduction in average annual runoff leading to a 10 per cent fall in water availability. However, there is considerable uncertainty in the climate predictions for 2030 arising from different climate models and different global warming scenarios. Extreme estimates range from a 28 per cent reduction to a 20 per cent increase in average annual runoff.

The level of surface water use has reduced the reliability of supply in the region and end-of-system flows. The level of groundwater development near the Dumaresq River is expected to reduce groundwater levels and streamflow. Without management changes, projected increases in groundwater use would be unsustainable in the long term, further affecting stream flow.

The 'best' estimate 2030 climate would also increase the average time between beneficial floods into anabranches and billabongs on the Macintyre River.

Information in the report will be used to develop the new sustainable diversion limit for the river systems in the Basin, which is a key responsibility of the new Murray-Darling Basin Authority under the *Water Act 2007*.

The integrated surface water and groundwater sustainable diversion limit will be part of the Basin-wide water plan the Authority will develop. Along with the CSIRO work, other scientific and economic inputs and consultation with stakeholders will be used to determine the limit.

Reports on other Murray-Darling Basin catchments will be provided progressively through to early 2008. More information about the CSIRO Murray-Darling Basin Sustainable Yields project can be found at www.environment.gov.au/water/mdb/yields.html

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