



Australian Government

# WATER for the FUTURE

## Northern Australia Water Futures Assessment

The persistent drought and recognition of potential impacts of climate change on water availability in southern Australia have led to renewed interest in the development of northern Australia. The Australian Government has established the Northern Australia Water Futures Assessment (NAWFA) to inform the development and protection of northern Australia's water resources.

### What is the NAWFA?

The NAWFA is a multidisciplinary program delivered jointly by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and the National Water Commission, in close collaboration with relevant state and territory government agencies. Through the Raising National Water Standards program, under *Water for the Future*, the Australian Government has allocated up to \$13 million for NAWFA projects over the period 2007-08 to 2011-12.

The NAWFA will provide the science needed to inform the development and protection of northern Australia's water resources. It will bring together existing information and commission new work where there is a clear need for additional information. The NAWFA will result in an enduring knowledge base, making information available to decision makers and the community.



Yellow Water Lagoon, Kakadu National Park, NT (J Baker and DSEWPaC)

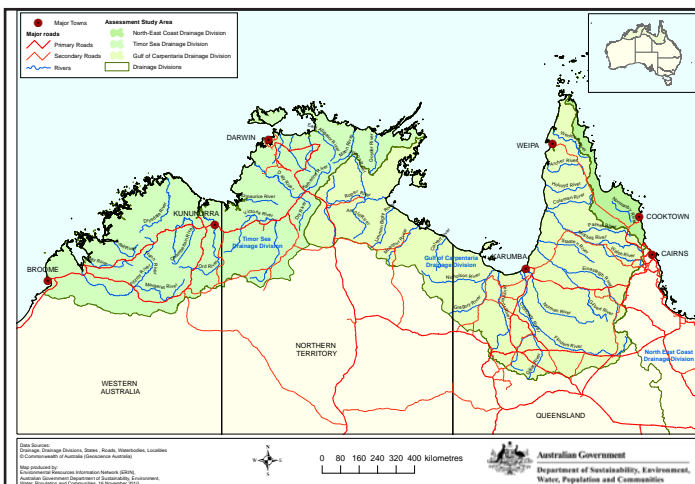
### Assessment scope

The geographical area being considered by the NAWFA stretches more than 3,000 km, from Broome in the west to Cairns in the east, and includes a large proportion of Australia's intact rivers, wetlands, rainforests, eucalypt savannas and native grasslands.

The assessment area includes three drainage divisions; the Timor Sea, the Gulf of Carpentaria and part of the North-East Coast. The NAWFA will focus on catchments identified by jurisdictions as likely to experience hydrological change due to water resource development or climate change.

The NAWFA consists of four components:

- water resources program
- ecological program
- cultural and social program
- knowledge base program.



Water for the Future is preparing Australia for a future with less water. The 10-year initiative is addressing four key priorities:

- Taking action on climate change
- Using water wisely
- Securing water supplies
- Supporting healthy rivers



Kimberley Ranges, WA (D Markovic and DSEWPaC)

### Water resources program

The water resources program was completed in 2009 with the release of the final report from the Northern Australia Sustainable Yields (NASY) project. The NASY project was undertaken by CSIRO and provides the first consistent, robust and transparent assessment of current and likely future water availability across the three jurisdictions of northern Australia, including an assessment of possible future climate implications.

The project found that, despite popular perceptions that northern Australia has a surplus of water, the climate is extremely seasonal and the landscape may be described as annually water-limited. For more information visit: <http://www.csiro.au/partnerships/NASY.html>

### Ecological program

The objectives of the ecological program are to:

- understand the key water-dependent ecological assets across northern Australia
- identify key high ecological value aquatic ecosystems across northern Australia, and
- assess the likely impacts of possible development and climate change on the identified ecological assets of high importance.

### Cultural and social program

The objectives of the cultural and social program are to:

- identify key Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups in the assessment area who hold social and cultural values for water
- identify socio-cultural values, beliefs and practices as related to water in northern Australia and how they may be affected by changes in water availability, and
- identify tools and processes to articulate Indigenous social and economic aspirations with respect to water, and make recommendations for directions and priorities for future research.

### Knowledge base

The knowledge base will provide easy access to information generated from the NAWFA, as well as other information relevant to water resource development in northern Australia. The knowledge base will assist users to plan and make decisions based on the best available knowledge and information on northern Australia's water resources.

### Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce

The NAWFA has also supported the work of the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce (the taskforce), a high level independent group of Australian experts established in 2007 to examine the potential for further land and water development in Northern Australia.

The taskforce's final report, *Sustainable development of northern Australia*, identifies opportunities for development that can proceed in a manner that is ecologically, culturally and economically sustainable. Further details about the work of the taskforce are available online: [www.nalwt.gov.au](http://www.nalwt.gov.au)

The \$6 million *Northern Australia Sustainable Futures* (NASF) program was developed as an initial Australian Government response to the final report of the taskforce. The NASF program is being implemented by the Office of Northern Australia. More information on the NASF program is available online: [www.regional.gov.au/regional/ona/nasf.aspx](http://www.regional.gov.au/regional/ona/nasf.aspx)

### More information

To join our mailing list, please email:

[Northern.Assessment@environment.gov.au](mailto:Northern.Assessment@environment.gov.au)

Regular updates about the NAWFA will be published at:

[www.environment.gov.au/nawfa](http://www.environment.gov.au/nawfa)

For more information you can also phone **1800 218 478**.

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Mossman River, Daintree National Park, Qld (C Totterdell and DSEWPaC)