



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 (the assessment) to provide the science needed to inform the development and protection of Northern Australia's water resources, so that development is ecologically, culturally and economically sustainable.



Yellow Water Lagoon in Kakadu National Park, NT. John Baker and DEWHA

Undertaking the Assessment

A diverse range of organisations currently engage in water research and management across Northern Australia. To avoid duplication, the assessment will thoroughly review existing projects and initiatives. Where a clear need for additional information is identified, new research will be commissioned. Through the *Raising National Water Standards Program under Water for the Future*, the Australian Government will allocate up to \$13 million for projects under the assessment from 2008–09 to 2011–12.

The assessment is a multidisciplinary program being delivered jointly by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) and the National Water Commission (NWC), in close collaboration with relevant state and territory government agencies.

Assessment Scope

The geographical area being considered by the assessment 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. Around two-thirds of Australia's runoff occurs in Northern Australia. Rainfall is highly seasonal, with intense monsoonal rains in summer and little rain through winter. There are three drainage divisions; the Timor Sea, the Gulf of Carpentaria and the North-East Coast.

The assessment will focus on those catchments identified by jurisdictions as likely to experience hydrological change due to water resource development or climate change. The scope of work includes:

- investigation of the extent of water resources across all catchments;
- identification of key water-dependent ecological assets and their watering needs; and
- mapping of social and cultural values relating to water.

The assessment will release work incrementally until its completion in 2012 and will result in a comprehensive and enduring knowledge base, which will make information available to decision-makers and the community.

A context map, showing the range of work being undertaken across the North, is currently under development, and when complete will be available on the DEWHA website.



Water for the Future is a long-term plan to secure the water supply for all Australians. The Government is investing \$12.9 billion over 10 years to address four key priorities:

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



Aerial view of the Kimberley Rangelands, WA. Dragi Markovic and DEWHA

Northern Australia Sustainable Yields project

The first of the assessment projects to commence is the Northern Australia Sustainable Yields (NASY) project. The NASY project is one of three sustainable yields projects taking place in Australia which build on the groundbreaking work of the Murray-Darling Basin Sustainable Yields project, led by the CSIRO for the Australian Government and funded through the *Raising National Water Standards* Program. This \$200 million program offers support for projects that are improving Australia's national capacity to measure, monitor and manage our water resources.

The NASY will provide critical information on current and likely future water availability in Northern Australia. The project will investigate water resources on a catchment-by-catchment basis, using four different climate and development scenarios. This information will help governments, industry and communities consider the environmental, social and economic aspects of the sustainable use and management of the water resources of Northern Australia.

Reports detailing the outcomes of the NASY project will be available at the project's conclusion.

You can find out more about the Northern Australia Sustainable Yields project at www.environment.gov.au/water/action/sustainable-yields.html#north

Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce

The Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce (the taskforce) was established in 2007 to examine the potential for further land and water development in Northern Australia. The taskforce is a high-level independent group of Australian experts, drawn from diverse areas including Indigenous organisations, business, science, conservation, agriculture, and the minerals and energy resource industries. The taskforce will consult with stakeholders to examine the potential for new developments in Northern Australia that rely on significant local or regional water resources. The taskforce is to deliver its report to the Australian Government by December 2009.

The assessment will play an important role in providing a water-focused knowledge base to inform the work of the taskforce.

Further details about the work of Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce are available from the Office of Northern Australia at: www.nalwt.gov.au/

MORE INFORMATION

To join our mailing list, please email:
Northern.Assessment@environment.gov.au

Regular updates about the Northern Australia Water Futures Assessment will be published at:
www.environment.gov.au/nawfa

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

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Mossman River in the Daintree National Park, QLD. Colin Totterdell and DEWHA

