

BURDEKIN WATER FUTURES MEDIA RELEASE 4 NOVEMBER 2009

BURDEKIN SCIENCE PLAN OUT

A NEW report on the Burdekin district's massive groundwater system has identified the key research projects needed to ensure good, sustainable management of the resource.

The Lower Burdekin Groundwater Science Plan gives nine project briefs that will fill the gaps in knowledge about the aquifer and how it interacts with other systems, such as agricultural land and the Great Barrier Reef.

Cr Lyn McLaughlin, chair of the Burdekin Water Futures group which put out the report, said the science plan took a broad systems approach to managing the Burdekin groundwater system.

"It is based on a shared view by all of the key stakeholders on what knowledge we actually need," she said.

"The Burdekin Water Futures group then worked with the consultants to come up with specific project briefs that will plug those knowledge gaps and give us the information we need to manage the groundwater system and its impact on other, related systems."

Cr McLaughlin said the lower Burdekin was the biggest irrigation user of groundwater in Australia. It was also the largest irrigation area in northern Australia, with 80,000 hectares of farmland under irrigation, generating about \$400 million in agricultural production each year.

"Water is the lifeblood of the Burdekin district and we need to meet the challenges posed by threats like rising water tables, salinisation and groundwater contamination," she said.

"But this is about much more than protecting the local agricultural industry.

‘It’s about protecting all of the other ecosystems that are connected to the groundwater system, and these include the Great Barrier Reef, internationally-recognised wetlands and important fish habitat areas.’

Cr McLaughlin said one of the priority projects was the development of a conceptual groundwater model which would allow stakeholders to better understand the effects of land and water management decisions.

Other projects include: development of models that predict the flow of water and chemicals through the groundwater system, the identification of ecosystems dependant on groundwater, and the development of farm management practices to minimise salinisation.

The science plan was prepared by consultants Sinclair Knight Merz and funded by NQ Dry Tropics.

Burdekin Water Futures is now working with government agencies to obtain funding for the various projects.

The water futures group is made up of the key organisations responsible for managing water in the Burdekin. It was established in 2007 to facilitate a more collaborative and strategic approach to land and water management in the lower Burdekin.

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