

**LOWER BURDEKIN WATER FUTURES  
MEDIA RELEASE  
27 FEBRUARY 2009**

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**PLAN TO PROTECT BURDEKIN GROUNDWATER**

THE Burdekin's massive underground water resource is being put under the microscope to ensure the district doesn't experience some of the problems facing the Murray-Darling basin.

The Lower Burdekin Groundwater Science Plan will bring together existing knowledge about the complex groundwater system with research into lesser-understood aspects.

The aim is to develop a computer model which can simulate the effect of a range of management scenarios on the aquifer – a major source of irrigation water for lower Burdekin farmers.

The science plan is being driven by Lower Burdekin Water Futures, a relatively-new group which brings together the key organisations responsible for managing water in the Burdekin.

Group chairman Lyn McLaughlin said the group's mission was to support a long-term, strategic approach to managing the Lower Burdekin's water resources.

“One of the priorities the group has identified is the need for a science-based management tool for the aquifer,” Cr McLaughlin said.

“The region has done well so far looking after its water resources, but there are still gaps in our knowledge of how the groundwater system works so we cannot be complacent,” she said.

“For example, we don't know what effect pumping from one part of the aquifer will have on other parts.

“There is also no scientific basis for determining optimum water levels, in order to prevent seawater intrusion near the coast, and rising water tables and salinisation in other parts of the system.”

CSIRO scientist and Lower Burdekin Water Futures member, Dr Keith Bristow, said the group was very aware of the salinity and water problems being experienced in the Murray–Darling basin.

“The threat of salinity is increasing in the Burdekin and we want to avoid getting into a situation where we have to fix problems,” he said.

“With good science and good management, we can prevent problems developing, and maintain the Burdekin’s status as one of Australia’s premier agricultural regions.”

Dr Bristow said consultants for the Groundwater Science Plan were working with local stakeholders to identify what specific research needed to be done into the Burdekin aquifer.

The next stage was to obtain funding to carry out that research, then use the findings to finalise a computer model of the groundwater system.

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