



## **Submission to Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce**

Flinders Shire Council is located within the Flinders River Catchment in the Gulf of Carpentaria Drainage Division. The Gulf Water Resource Plan determined the Flinders catchment to have an average annual discharge to the Gulf of Carpentaria of 2,028,000 ML/a. Consumptive water use in the Flinders Catchment is very low.

The Mt Beckford Proposal is for a storage capacity of 110,000 ML, yielding 66,000 ML with a maximum surface area of 18.5 km<sup>2</sup>. This proposal develops irrigation production for an area of 91 km<sup>2</sup>, approximately 0.0008% of the Flinders basin area.

The catchment area upstream of Hughenden represents only 2.5% of the total Flinders basin area and several major streams enter the Flinders within a relatively short distance downstream. Harvesting 50% of mean annual runoff at Mt Beckford would result in only a 12% impact on mean annual stream flow at Richmond (112km west) and 1.7% of the runoff into the Gulf.

There is very strong support for the scheme evident in the local community due to the additional farming, business and job opportunities it would bring, resulting in increased population, improved business viability, improved services, diversification of economic base and new recreational and tourism benefits.

Hughenden's social infrastructure, including health, housing, education, public safety and transport infrastructure has a substantial capacity to absorb an increase in population, especially in terms of available buildings. The scheme's proximity to Hughenden will allow efficiencies in construction, maintenance and transport costs.

Three underlying factors would be favorable to irrigation development in the area :-

- There is a small, but growing core of irrigators and of expertise in the field.
- Hughenden is linked by rail to Townsville, the largest general cargo port in Northern Australia.
- Tropical agricultural technology is improving in Northern Australia.

Existing small scale irrigation has been proven socially and economically viable in the Hughenden area. The Draft Gulf Water Resource Plan recognises the potential for irrigation development on the Flinders, however, discounts in-stream dam construction, associating such with large-scale irrigation schemes.

Appropriate studies are required to inform Government and community to make informed decisions with regard to development of infrastructure for increased consumptive use. Flinders Shire Council and the Queensland Government (as documented in the Gulf Draft Water Resource Plan) supports new dams where there is a clear need, measurable community benefit, a sound economic basis and if the environmental outcomes are acceptable and sustainable.

The following reports, held by Flinders Shire Council, may be of interest to the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce.

*A Preliminary Review – Water Resources Development Potential of North-West Queensland*, Irrigation and Water Supply Commission (Queensland Government), August 1978.

*Appraisal Report on Potential for Irrigated Cotton Production – Hughenden Area*, Water Resources Commission (DPI, Queensland), March 1990.

*Preliminary Investigation – Potential Irrigation Scheme at Hughenden*, GHD Pty Ltd (Flinders Shire Council), December 2000.

*Irrigation Project – Alstonvale*, SMEC Australia Pty Ltd (Flinders Shire Council), February 2003.

*Hughenden Irrigation Project (Mt Beckford Scheme) Social and Economic Benefits Study*, Northern Australia Research Group (Flinders Shire Council), July 2004.

*Gulf Draft Water Resource Plan*, Department of Natural Resources and Water (Queensland Government), November 2006.

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