



COMMUNIQUE

Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce

29 June 2007

FIRST MEETING OF THE TASKFORCE

The Australian Government's Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce met today for the first time. At their meeting in Canberra, members welcomed the opportunity to take forward this important component of the Prime Minister's *A National Plan for Water Security*.

In considering its Terms of Reference, the Taskforce confirmed the central role good science will play in informing its deliberations. The Taskforce also agreed that the southern limit of its area of interest in the North East Coastal Drainage Division would be Queensland's Fitzroy River Catchment.

One of first priorities identified by the Taskforce was the need to engage closely with communities in the north and with the West Australian, Northern Territory and Queensland Governments. The Taskforce will travel to Darwin and the Northern Territory in the week of 23 July; to Perth and the Kimberley region in the week of 27 August; and to Brisbane and the Queensland Gulf Savannah country a month later.

The Taskforce will call for public submissions, seeking information on catchments of interest to assist in identifying agricultural, economic and indigenous development opportunities in early July. The call will be advertised in the national media.

The Taskforce discussed the Prime Minister's request, made after the 23 February *Water Summit*, to examine options to divert water from rivers in northern Queensland. It agreed to commission a review of Premier Beattie's proposal to move water south from the Tully, Herbert and Burdekin rivers.

The Taskforce discussed the supporting work that will be done by the Northern Australian Land and Water Futures Assessment (a 5 year multi-disciplinary research programme) and considered a presentation by the National Water Commission on its work in Northern Australia. The Taskforce agreed on the need to work closely with the West Australian and Northern Territory Governments to explore and better understand the issues facing the planned expansion of irrigated agriculture in the Ord river region.

Copies of the Taskforce's Terms of Reference are available at www.environment.gov.au/water/action/development/nalwt-tor.html

The membership of the Taskforce is available at : <http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/index.html>