

## Question and Answers – Daly Protection Continues

### Land Clearing Moratorium 2007-2010

**Why has the NT Government now decided to extend the land clearing moratorium, when over the past few months there has been suggestions it would soon be lifted?**

The Daly region is one of the Territory's final frontiers in terms of its unique environmental values. The decision to extend the land clearing moratorium for a further two years in the Daly region will provide time for:

- the effects of present Territory land clearing policy and practice to be considered and refined
- current research programs to be firmly established
- encourage productive community engagement on connected issues, including options for economic and Indigenous development.

It was always stipulated the placement of the moratorium would be reviewed, not lifted at the end of 2007.

**The moratorium has been in place since 2003. Hasn't sufficient research been conducted in this period on the Daly region to make a decision on lifting the moratorium?**

During the period of the moratorium there has been considerable work undertaken to obtain a greater understanding of the Daly region and its ecosystems, much of which has been done by the Daly Community Reference Group and more recently, the Daly River Management Advisory Committee. However there are still gaps in the water and land management knowledge base of the region.

This moratorium extension, to March 2010, will allow the Northern Territory Government to gain a much broader understanding of the region's two biggest issues - water allocation and native vegetation clearing. The Northern Territory Government wants to get the science right to ensure the Daly region can be protected for future generations and at the same time allow for sustainable development.

**Does the moratorium mean no land clearing can occur in the Daly River catchment at all?**

No. The recent moratorium extension announcement, to March 2010, is a continuation of the same moratorium put in place in 2003 by the Northern Territory Government. The moratorium on land clearing applies to the area, known as the Daly River Community Reference Group Focus Area, which was outlined in 2003. A map of the area the land clearing moratorium applies to is available at [www.nt.gov.au/protectingthedaly](http://www.nt.gov.au/protectingthedaly).

Landowners outside this area known as the Daly River Community Reference Group Focus Area can submit an application for land clearing to the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and The Arts. The Department will then review this application and make a determination for the landholder.

### **What if someone disregards the land clearing moratorium in the Daly River Community Reference Group Focus Area?**

Individuals or Corporations found to be clearing land in the area the moratorium applies to and on land outside the moratorium area that do not have a permit allowing them to clear land face prosecution under the Northern Territory *Planning Act*. Individuals found to be in breach of this Act face fines of up to \$22,000, while Corporations face fines of up to \$110,000.

### **Wasn't the Daly River Management Advisory Committee's role, which was established last year, to advise the Northern Territory Government on whether the moratorium should be lifted?**

The Daly River Management Advisory Committee put recommendations to the Northern Territory Government on what it thought could be a balance between land clearing and sustainable development. The Northern Territory Government is committed to protecting the environment for future Territorians and the extension of this moratorium will allow for the necessary science research to be completed in order to ensure sustainable development in this unique area is undertaken.

### **What are the measures to be implemented to improve this science of the region?**

A research program of the quality and reach of the Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (TRaCK) consortium presents the Northern Territory Government with an opportunity to design development with a powerful understanding of the most significant processes influencing the environmental and socio-economic health of the Daly region. The extension of this land clearing moratorium allows for the Northern Territory Government to strengthen its baseline data, and allow it and the community to make good decisions, monitor and re-assess the outcomes when deciding on development options.

Specific studies include:

- The Daly River Management Advisory Committee (DRMAC) will look closely at the Tindal and Oolloo aquifers to provide more insight into the water allocation planning for the region
- The Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge (TRaCK) consortium will work with the region's landholders, focussing on assisting Indigenous people to work through development options, which is crucial when taking into account the effects of possibly lifting the moratorium.
- TRaCK and DRMAC will work with stakeholders of the region to explore the implications of these groups' visions in social, economic and environmental terms, to provide a sound basis for long term planning. In particular, it will provide important insights for reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous views of desirable developmental paths.
- A greater understanding of the effects of wildlife habitat loss and fragmentation of such areas. The Daly has a continuous ecological coverage, which is home to several threatened plant and animal species.
- A study of flood plain and in-stream interactions will occur. TRaCK research will provide a better understanding of the impacts of harvesting wet season flows on these linkages.
- Water availability and quality studies. More comprehensive monitoring of water availability (surface and groundwater) has recently begun, but will take some years to provide a baseline of the quality desirable for assessment of effects of future change in the catchment. Extending the moratorium will improve the quality of the baseline research.

**Why not fast track water allocation plans for the region, so there can be some finality for the Daly Region in water planning at least?**

The catchment's water planning processes for the Tindal and Ooloo aquifers are in their infant stages. Given that some large proposals for land clearing will involve uses of large volumes of water, there will be a mismatch in timing.

The extension of the moratorium will see the likelihood that these water allocation plans be complete in this period. The Northern Territory Government has committed to integration of resource management law, and ensuring that decisions on land clearing are linked to decisions on water will be an important demonstration of commitment to integrated land and resource management.

**What about the landholders in the Daly who expected the moratorium to be lifted, land clearing would have allowed them to progress their farming industries – now what for them?**

This decision to continue the moratorium will only affect a limited number of people who were anticipating clearing would be allowed to re-commence. It was always stated that the moratorium would be reviewed and at this point in time, the Northern Territory Government believes a two year extension will provide the best avenue for gaining broader knowledge into sustainable development in the region.

**What has been the cost of the process in reviewing the land clearing moratorium through various reference groups since 2003?**

Since 2003, through the Daly River Management Advisory Committee and its predecessor, the Daly Community Reference Group, Territory expenditure to improve management through research and community engagement is more than \$1.5 million. This expenditure has gone to ensure that a region that generates at least \$200 million annually in economic activity can sustain and increase this contribution to the Territory economy, while also looking after the lifestyle and cultural values to which we can't assign a dollar value.