



MEDIA RELEASE

Potential Sustainable Water Supplies for Horticultural Development

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) has recently undertaken extensive regional land and water assessments in the Western Davenport Plains region to identify sustainable water supplies for horticultural development.

The Western Davenport Plains, 100 km south of Tennant Creek, cover an area of more than 9500 sq km of Aboriginal Land and Pastoral properties including Warrabri, Murray Downs and Singleton Station.

NRETA Land and Water Regional Manager Graham Ride said major groundwater investigations have been undertaken in the region since 1990.

“During the past few years field work has been undertaken in soil and groundwater to locate areas where horticultural bores can be located and new farms can be developed,” Mr Ride said.

NRETA has carried out extensive soil, vegetation and groundwater investigations in selected areas across the plains.

The Government drilling rigs have also drilled many investigation bores and conducted a series of pumping tests on production bores to assess aquifer yields.

“The area is about 350km north of Alice Springs and has been found to have a high potential for small scale horticultural development due to its climate, availability of land and sustainable groundwater resources enabling high value crops such as melons, mangoes and a range of vegetables to be grown out of season,” Mr Ride said.

“It’s proximity to the Stuart Highway and potential labour force from residents of Ali Curung and Tennant Creek also add to its suitability”.

Groundwater resources have been located below Warrabri ALT (Aboriginal Land Trust) and adjacent areas which are believed to be capable of sustainable pumping of 5000 mega litres per year.

Mr Ride said there may be several times this volume ultimately available but there is concern that any horticultural development does not significantly impact the environment.

“We are taking a precautionary approach and have commenced a ground and surface water monitoring program that will be expanded once significant horticultural development commences,” Mr Ride said.

“We plan to maintain a watching brief on aquifer behaviour on an annual basis and review extraction volumes in five years time following a detailed evaluation of any impacts of extraction”.

In recent years Land and Water have concentrated their assessments on the Warrabri ALT and adjacent areas and have identified the following five potential commercial horticultural areas:

- Centrefarm block on Warrabri ALT 10 km east of the Stuart Highway
- The area between Ali Curung and the Murray Creek floodout
- Conglomerate bore area on Murray Downs
- Bluebush bore area on Murray Downs
- Area on Singleton station and adjacent Aboriginal Land Trust areas near the Stuart Highway

Mr Ride said Land and Water had recently provided commercial agribusinesses interested in establishing farms in the area with a series of resource maps, technical reports and datasets.

“We have also provided this information to Centrefarm Limited, who work on behalf of the Traditional Owners planning to lease Aboriginal Land to competent agribusinesses wishing to establish farms in the region.

“Three groundwater monitoring bores have just being constructed north of the Warrabri ALT Centrefarm block by the Northern Territory Government drilling rig.

“These and other monitoring bores in our network in the region will monitor groundwater recharge and the effects of extraction from irrigation and other groundwater use”.

At the end of 2006 Land and Water issued a “*Land and Water Resources Atlas*” of the region with 15 large scale maps and a further six water resource maps were added to the series last month.

Mr Ride said they developed the Atlas to assist potential developers and inform landholders, planners and regulators on the land and water resources of the plains.

“We also prepared a technical overview of the land and water resources of the area to provide a technical summary of our current knowledge which is likely to guide the agribusinesses with the development plans and provide technical specialists with a quick look summary of key data from our voluminous datasets and technical reports,” Mr Ride said.

“The summary also includes a map showing the location of the main aquifers and salinity zones.”

A set of notes with background information on field investigations, land and water assessments and previous horticultural operations in the area will soon be released.

Mr Ride said the notes summarise, in layman’s terms, current knowledge and the planned water resource monitoring program.

NRETA will soon be recommending a Declaration of a Water Control District over the region to protect the interest of existing users and facilitate management of the water resources.

This will be followed by a process of developing a Water Resource Management Plan in consultation with the landholders and the community.

Ends

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Media Note – For further information please contact Graham Ride on 89 519203