

Media Release:

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Darwin Acid Sulfate Soil Mapping Project

A mapping program has commenced in the Darwin region aimed at better understanding our coastal floodplains and mangrove soils to assist in the better management of Darwin Harbour.

Principal Scientist Dave Howe, from the Land and Water Division at the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA) said the project would provide government and private industry with baseline information to manage these soils and to avoid environmental damage.

“The project is jointly funded by the NT and Commonwealth Governments and extends from the mouth of the Finniss River to the Adelaide River, including Bynoe and Darwin Harbours, and the floodplains of the Finniss, Howard and Adelaide Rivers,” Mr Howe said.

“These soils are commonly known as acid sulfate soils.

“These soils occur naturally but when disturbed and exposed to oxygen in the air, they can produce concentrated sulfuric acid and other toxic substances that have been associated with fish kills and costly damage to coastal infrastructure.

“This is the first time this information has been collected across such a large area in the Top End.”

Mr Howe said while no damage had been caused to Darwin Harbour at this stage, if soils aren't identified and managed they have the potential to cause damage to infrastructure and the environment.

“Costly damage has occurred in Queensland and New South Wales and we want to try to gain knowledge to avoid the same thing happening in the Territory,” Mr Howe said.

“In northern New South Wales during the 1980s they were responsible for extensive fish kills.

“They have also been responsible for costly damage to concrete structures such as bridge pylons.

“One local council on the Sunshine Coast reportedly spends several hundred thousand dollars a year rehabilitating damaged environments and infrastructure.”

Mr Howe said high-tech remote sensing and ground sampling would be used to determine the extent and characteristics of the estuarine soils.

“New coring equipment designed to sample to depths in wet mangrove and floodplain environments will be used,” Mr Howe said.

“Soils will then be described and frozen samples sent to a laboratory for testing.”

At the completion of the project a series of maps will be produced outlining where these soils exist, at what depth, and the risk of occurrence of acid sulfate soils to assist in better management of the Darwin Harbour.

The project is due to be completed mid 2008. Maps and reports will be available to the public and available from NRETA's website.

Ends

Media Note – For more information contact Dave Howe on 8999 4579

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