

Media Release:

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Spotlight on Central Australian Wetlands

Participants from around the country have recently taken part in a two day workshop hosted by the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and The Arts (NRETA) with assistance from the Australian Government to discuss the future of wetlands in the Alice Springs region.

NRETA's Biodiversity Wetlands Research Scientist Angus Duguid said more than 30 managers and scientists from across the Territory and other states participated in the workshop.

"Wetlands in Central Australia can suffer from the 'out of sight, out of mind syndrome', as most are in remote places and are dry most of the time, however when big rains come, waterholes, swamps, clay pans and salt lakes are dotted across the landscape and brimming with life, so the purpose of the workshop was to establish a strategic approach to conserving natural values of the regions wetlands," Mr Duguid said.

"At this stage we still don't know how important each wetland is for biodiversity as it can be difficult to measure, but collectively we do know that they have great significance and support many species of dependent plants and animals."

NRETA conducted a preliminary inventory during the wet years of 2000 and 2001 which started the huge task of mapping the wetlands and documenting their ecological characteristics.

Mr Duguid said some natural wetlands have very small but very precious permanent or near permanent surface water, with the majority fed by springs.

"Plants and animals that rely on these desert wetlands are under considerable pressure from introduced herbivores and introduced plant species," Mr Duguid said.

"While the natural and cultural values of wetlands are well appreciated by landholders and Indigenous people, the vastness of the area combined with the small number of people living on the land make conservation management a real challenge.

"Looking after these wetlands requires people from many sectors of the community to work together and it is hoped that the recent workshop will generate a clearer understanding of the way forward, setting priorities for both scientific research and management as well as leading to even more effective collaborations."

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts is working with the Australian Government, Greening Australia and CSIRO in developing a strategy for conserving the arid and semi-arid wetlands of the Northern Territory.

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Angus Duguid 08 8951 8793

Image – Ormiston Gorge waterhole in flood

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