

# MEDIA RELEASE

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April 28, 2010

QUEENSLAND  
MURRAY-  
DARLING  
COMMITTEE



## Basin faces significant salinity risk

Parts of the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin are at substantial risk from salinity, a new report prepared for the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee (QMDC) has shown.

QMDC Land and Soils Regional Coordinator Jamie Gorry said the report, *Salinity Risk Assessment for the Queensland Murray-Darling Region*, clearly outlined a number of areas at high risk from salinity in the future.

"We have some considerable areas with salinity levels where water is effectively half seawater and less than 10 metres deep," Mr Gorry said.

"Added to this threat is that some of these areas have been rising up to half a metre a year, even during the drought. This is quite worrying."

Mr Gorry said salinity impacted on every aspect of the landscape.

"Not only do we face a loss of agricultural productivity but also a loss of biodiversity, a decline in surface water quality and damage to infrastructure," he said.

"In 2002, it was estimated up to 80,000 hectares of Queensland were affected by secondary salinity, generally in areas with basalt or granite geology and rainfall of between 400-1200mm per year, which describes significant sections of the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin.

"Queensland is literally the headwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin and water quality here – whether surface or underground – is an asset that it is enormously hard to put a value on.

"While we can quite clearly value the water used for agriculture or industry, what price do we put on the condition of the waterways that sustain our native fish, including the iconic Murray Cod, and are the basis of all our ecosystems, whether here in Queensland or further downstream?"

Mr Gorry said about 10,000ha of secondary salinity already existed in the Border Rivers and Maranoa-Balonne catchments but the report made it clear this was likely to be an under estimate with major landscapes at risk in the Maranoa-Balonne and Border Rivers.

"Salinity can take decades to express itself once land use changes, for example from open grazing country to irrigated cropping, and we need to prepare now for what is likely to be an increasing issue impacting on the water quality at the head of the Murray-Darling Basin," he said.

Mr Gorry said QMDC would use the report, prepared by the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management, to prioritise investment and identify monitoring sites to make early detection possible.

"While appropriate management actions that improve deep drainage can reduce the salinity risk for agricultural land, the report makes it clear little can be done for areas where agricultural development occurred decades ago," Mr Gorry said.

"QMDC has worked with a number of landholders already to carry out salinity mitigation works or to rehabilitate saline areas and we expect this to be a growing area of demand for our services.

"There are solutions available for salinity management and prevention is still possible in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin and QMDC is keen to work with landholders to plan and implement changes to prevent salinity from occurring."

The report is available on the QMDC website - [www.qmdc.org.au](http://www.qmdc.org.au). The Queensland Murray-Darling Committee is a natural resource management organisation that supports communities in within the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin to sustainably manage their natural resources.

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