

MEDIA RELEASE

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Halting the decline of river health

Data from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission's State of the Rivers Audit, released last week, has found the Condamine-Balonne and Border Rivers catchments to be in moderate health.

However, local natural resource management group, the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee (QMDC), has warned that this state may be harder to maintain into the future.

QMDC Water Projects Officer, Paul Webb, has been collating recent and historic river health data from community members and government agencies, some of which was used in the State of the Rivers Audit.

"Our data for 2008 seems to indicate that most of our region's rivers have regained a level of health consistent with 1990s benchmarks, which supports the findings of the Audit," he said.

"But in the previous years, 2006/07, we saw a significant decline in the health of a number of rivers." Paul said that this may have been largely due to a lack of flows in the region's rivers over that time.

"So, although the rivers seem to have made some recovery this year, changing climatic conditions may make this only temporary," he said.

Paul said that even though landholders and regional communities can't control the climate, they can reduce and even halt river health decline by minimising industry and community impacts on water quality and river health.

A number of activities to reduce the impacts of agriculture on river health have already begun, said Paul, thanks to landholder initiatives and past federal and Queensland government support.

"When the 2006/07 data had been collated, QMDC was supporting more than 800 landholders to undertake wide scale projects that should have significantly reduced agricultural impacts on our river systems," he said.

"Yet, the data for that year showed a decrease in river health, with the dry conditions at the time apparently masking any benefits we should have been seeing."

QMDC's CEO, Geoff Penton, said that it was good to see a degree of recovery in river health. "We just need to be aware that climatic predictions for southern Queensland have been indicating that drier weather could be more common in the future," he said.

"This means that, although communities are already doing a great deal to halt river health decline, a great deal more may be necessary to maintain this into the future," said Geoff.

He said that the federal government's Caring for our Country initiative, the National Water Initiative, and the Queensland government's recent funding commitments, would go part way to supporting this.

"We will also be waiting to see how the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) will be addressing water use efficiency at their meeting this week," he said.

"We still urgently need a much longer-term commitment from both levels of government to ensure the long-term health of our extensive river systems, though."

"It is critical that we continue to support improved agricultural practices with incentives for change, ongoing research into best practice, and ongoing resource condition monitoring."

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Media contact/s

Written and released by: Amelia Radford, Communication Officer, QMDC, 07 4637 6234
More information: Paul Webb, Riverine and Water Regional Coordinator, QMDC, 0429 644 421
Geoff Penton, CEO, QMDC, 0408 871 978

Images



QMDC staff and community members have been monitoring the health of the rivers throughout much of the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin.



Although the rivers of the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin recently received a “moderate” bill of health, QMDC has said that communities will have to work hard to keep it that way.

For electronic versions of these images, please contact Amelia Radford on ameliar@qmdc.org.au, of 07 4637 6234.