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WATER OUTLOOK FOR PAROO RELEASED

The CSIRO report *Water Availability in the Paroo* was released today by the Department of the Environment and Water Resources.

The report is one of a series covering the entire Murray-Darling Basin commissioned by the Prime Minister and Murray-Darling Basin state Premiers at the November 2006 Water Summit.

The Paroo region is in the far north-west of the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB). It is predominantly in southern Queensland and covers 3.4 per cent of the total Basin.

Fewer than 700 people live in the area covered by the CSIRO report, mainly in the settlements of Wanaaring, Hungerford and Eulo. Major land uses are broadacre livestock grazing for beef and wool production.

The region includes some of the most important wetlands in the MDB such as the Currawinya Lakes, a site of international importance (Ramsar wetland), the Paroo River Waterholes and the Paroo Distributary Channels. The Paroo River Wetlands in New South Wales have also been recently listed under the Ramsar Convention.

The CSIRO's 'best' estimate (median) of the likely range of future climate outcomes by 2030 is for a 3 per cent reduction in average surface water availability, which would not affect the volumes or relative level of surface water use. However, there is considerable uncertainty in the climate predictions for 2030 arising from different climate models and different global warming scenarios. Extreme estimates range from a 16 per cent reduction to a 40 per cent increase in long-term average annual runoff.

The ecology of Lake Wyara, part of the Currawinya Lakes Ramsar site, would be likely to be affected by more frequent, smaller floods under the 'best' estimate 2030 scenario, while both the wet and dry extremes for 2030 climate scenarios would be likely to have considerable ecological consequences for the Currawinya Lakes and the Paroo Overflow Lakes.

Information in the report will be used to develop the new sustainable diversion limit for the river systems in the Basin, which is a key responsibility of the new Murray-Darling Basin Authority under the *Water Act 2007*.

The integrated surface water and groundwater sustainable diversion limit will be part of the Basin-wide water plan the Authority will develop. Along with the CSIRO work, other scientific and economic inputs and consultation with stakeholders will be used to determine the limit.

Reports on other Murray-Darling Basin catchments will be provided progressively through to early 2008. More information about the CSIRO Murray-Darling Basin Sustainable Yields project can be found at www.environment.gov.au/water/mdb/yields.html

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