

Indigenous water values, rights and development goals in the Mitchell catchment

An activity within the Northern Australian Water Resource Assessment

The Northern Australia Water Resource Assessment (NAWRA) is a large research project being led by the CSIRO in partnership with the Australian Government. Scientists from the CSIRO are investigating opportunities for water, agricultural, and other related development in three priority regions of Northern Australia. One of these is the Mitchell catchment in Queensland. The work includes research focused on Indigenous people – the water values they have, the rights they hold, and the development goals that are important to them.

Indigenous people have lived on the country for many thousands of years. Throughout that time they have developed knowledge of the landscape and strong connections with it. Ongoing economic development can provide jobs and income opportunities for people. However, it can also put new pressure on the country as the number of people and businesses grow and water use increases.

The CSIRO is looking at development possibilities, but the CSIRO is not a developer and it is not advocating for water development. Its role is to provide better information for the government and communities when considering future water, agricultural and other related development options. One part of this role is listening to interested Indigenous people about what water issues exist and what kind of future development path they want for themselves and their communities.

Indigenous views might include the need to protect important or sacred places and to keep enough water in the rivers for Indigenous hunting and fishing. It might also include goals and ideas for Indigenous economic development. This could be an Indigenous-run business that needs a secure water supply or Indigenous employment in businesses run by others that also need water. This valuable information will provide foundations for better future communication between Indigenous people, government planners, and private developers in the future.

Marcus Barber and Pethie Lyons are the CSIRO researchers who will be gathering these vital Indigenous views, interests, and ideas. They are currently working on other projects with Indigenous people in the Mitchell catchment and in wider Cape York. Marcus and Pethie are interested in talking to Indigenous people with cultural connections to the Mitchell catchment or who are living in and around towns like Atherton, Mareeba, Chillagoe, Palmer River, and Kowanyama. The main research will happen from late 2016 and in 2017, with results shared in early 2018.



As part of their work, Marcus and Pethie will consult with local Indigenous leaders, organisations and land councils about the best way for local people to communicate with them. Marcus and Pethie have CSIRO ethics approval and will follow free, prior and informed consent processes at all times. They can meet with interested people in formal meetings, smaller groups, or as individuals. Visits with Indigenous people to important places are also valuable as they will assist in better understanding the country and its people.

Near the end of the project, the Indigenous research project team will write a report about the Mitchell catchment and hold community workshops to share the information and invite feedback. They will also share what other CSIRO staff have learnt through their studies of soil, water, and agriculture. If you are interested in participating or have any questions about this research, you can contact Marcus using the contact details at the bottom of this factsheet.

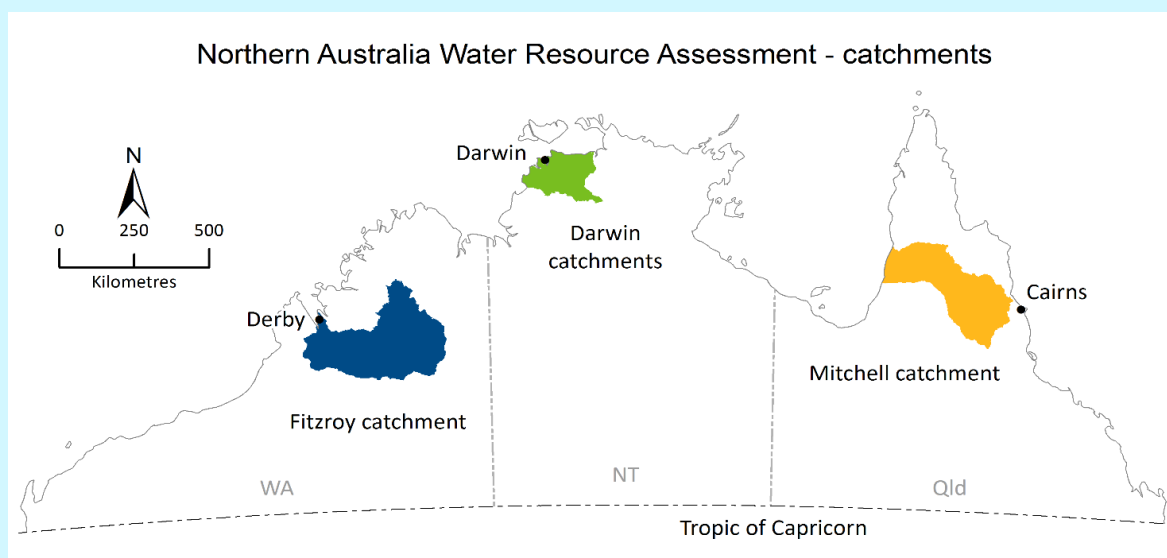


Marcus Barber



Pethie Lyons

The CSIRO team will conduct similar work in all three priority areas. These are the Mitchell catchment, catchments surrounding Darwin in the Northern Territory (the Adelaide, Finniss, Mary and Wildman catchments), and the Fitzroy catchment in Western Australia.



In each area, the CSIRO will investigate soil and water resources, water capture and storage options, agriculture, aquaculture, and other possibilities, and the risks and impacts of development. The Assessment will not assume any particular development pathway or recommend one form of development over another. It does not seek to replace any planning processes, and will not recommend changes to existing plans or planning processes. The results, however, can be used to inform planning decisions by citizens, communities, councils, investors and state and federal governments.

The Northern Australia Water Resource Assessment is part of the Australian Government's Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper, the government's plan for stronger farmers and a stronger economy.

CONTACT CSIRO

t 1300 363 400

e csiroenquiries@csiro.au

w www.csiro.au

CONTACT CSIRO ETHICS

t 07 3833 5693

e csshrec@csiro.au

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

CSIRO Land and Water

Marcus Barber

t 07 3833 5519

m 0407 867 445

e marcus.barber@csiro.au

w www.csiro.au/nawra