

# Indigenous water values and interests

The Flinders and Gilbert Agricultural Resource Assessment,  
part of the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy

In partnership with the federal government, CSIRO is investigating opportunities for water and agricultural development along the Flinders and Gilbert rivers in North Queensland. One part of this research focuses on Indigenous people.

Indigenous people have lived on the country for many thousands of years. Through that time they have developed knowledge of the landscape and strong connections with it. Ongoing economic development can provide employment and income opportunities for people, but can also put new pressure on the country as the number of people and businesses grow and water use increases. Water management involves deciding how water is shared

between the environment and different human uses, including drinking water, farming, and businesses. Good water management in northern Australia requires understanding Indigenous values and interests in water, and acting to support and protect those interests.

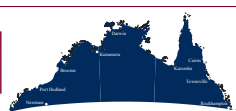
The CSIRO is a research organisation funded by the Federal government. It has been asked by the Federal government to look at water and

agricultural development opportunities in the Flinders River and Gilbert River catchments of the Gulf. One part of this research will involve listening and talking to interested Indigenous people about why water is important to them, what water issues exist in their areas, and what kind of future developments they think are appropriate.

The CSIRO has staff who undertake research across Australia about



Red gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), fringing Flinders River, Richmond, Queensland. Image: Wayne Lawler/AUSCAPE



Indigenous peoples' knowledge, values, and interests in water. Marcus Barber and Sue Jackson have worked in the Daly and Roper Rivers in the Northern Territory, in the Kimberley and Pilbara in Western Australia, with the Kowanyama community in Cape York, and in the Murray-Darling Basin. Their research helps Indigenous people communicate how water is important to them, and helps water planners and the general community better understand Indigenous water interests. This can include the need to protect important or sacred places and to keep enough water in the rivers



**Cobbold Gorge, on Robin Hood Station, near Georgetown, Queensland.** Image: Steven David Miller/AUSCAPE

for Indigenous hunting and fishing. It can also include goals and ideas for Indigenous economic development. This might be an Indigenous-run business that needs a secure water supply or Indigenous employment in businesses run by others, like farms.

This CSIRO project is at the catchment scale, so Marcus is interested in talking to people from anywhere in the catchment. Yet there are some places where people are already talking about dams and irrigation, and Marcus might spend more time in these areas. There may also be important water places that local people want to focus on, and these are good to include because they show issues that matter to everyone. People can choose whether to participate in the research and CSIRO ethics and permission processes will be followed.



**Marcus Barber**



**Sue Jackson**

At the end of the project, Marcus and Sue will write a report and get community feedback about it. This report will help Indigenous people and water managers understand each other. It will also help plan future development that affects Indigenous people.

This Indigenous project is part of a bigger CSIRO

research project which includes other scientists: hydrologists, ecologists, economists, and computer modellers. Their work will be combined together at the end of the project.

The main research area includes towns from Cloncurry to Hughenden in the Flinders River, and Georgetown in the Gilbert River. However the Norman River lies between them and Indigenous people have connections across the country. This may mean that people in the Norman might be included in talking about regional water issues for Indigenous people.

Later in 2012 Marcus will travel to the Flinders and Gilbert to start meeting people, understanding what they think are important water issues, and hearing about what work is already being done. This community input will help focus the research in the areas where it is most needed. Marcus can speak and listen to interested groups in formal meetings, but would also like to talk to people in smaller groups or as individuals. He would also like to visit some water places with people to see and understand the country better. The main research will happen later in 2012 and in 2013. The report will be completed by the end of 2013.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about this research, you can contact Marcus by telephone or email using the contact details below.

The Flinders and Gilbert Agricultural Resource Assessment is conducted for the Office of Northern Australia in the Australian Government Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport under the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy <<http://www.regional.gov.au/regional/ona/nqis.aspx>>. The Strategy is a collaborative initiative between the Office of Northern Australia, the Queensland Government and CSIRO. One part of the Strategy is the Flinders and Gilbert Agricultural Resource Assessment, which is led by CSIRO.

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#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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