

# Indigenous water values, rights and development goals in the Fitzroy catchment

## An activity within the Northern Australian Water Resource Assessment

The Northern Australia Water Resource Assessment (NAWRA) is a large research project, led by CSIRO in partnership with the Australian Government. Scientists from CSIRO are investigating opportunities for water, agricultural and other related development in three priority regions of Northern Australia. One of these is the Fitzroy catchment in Western Australia. 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.

CSIRO is looking at the different development possibilities, but CSIRO is not a developer and 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. Marcus has worked on Indigenous water projects across Northern Australia and Pethie is working on a National Environmental Science Project with Indigenous people that is also focused on the Fitzroy catchment. Marcus and Pethie are interested in talking to Indigenous people with cultural connections to the Fitzroy catchment and/or who are living in and around towns like Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. 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 Fitzroy 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.

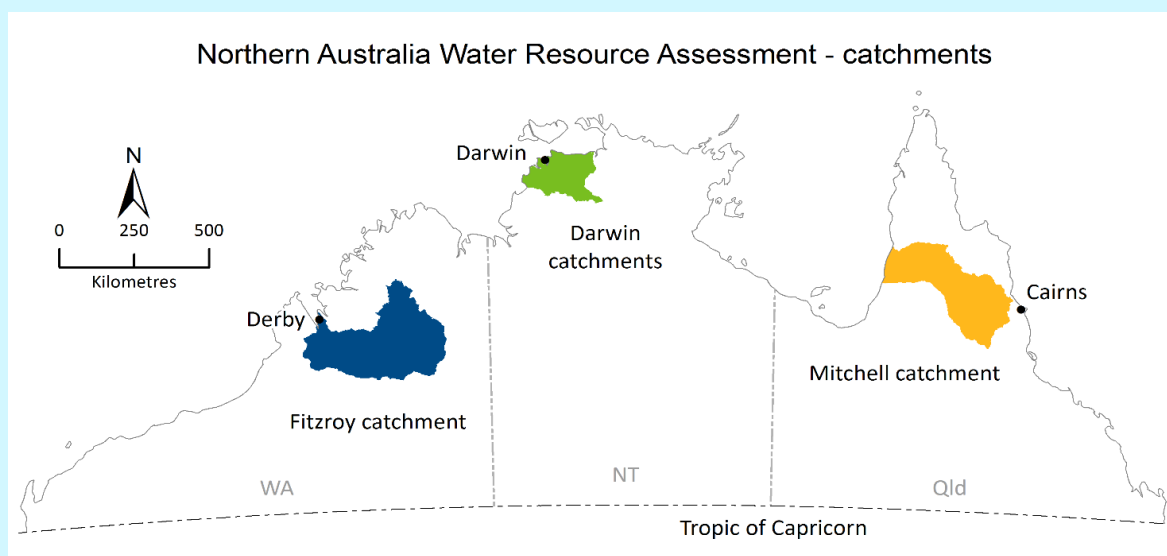


Marcus Barber



Pethie Lyons

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



In each area, 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.*

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We imagine. We collaborate. We innovate.

#### FOR FURTHER PROJECT INFORMATION

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