Question: BRS 01

Topic: Murray-Darling Basin

Hansard Page: 28

Senator O'Brien asked:

The PBS says that BRS does work on the Murray-Darling Basin and other catchments. I think the Murray-Darling Basin accounts for about 80 per cent of our agricultural production. Given the agency outcome for the National Water Commission is sustainable management it is not surprised you have such a role. Can you give us an Outline?

Answer:

The Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS) contributes to the sustainable management of natural resources in the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) through work on a number of cross-disciplinary projects.

The Australian Water Availability Project is generating high resolution maps and electronic information on past, present and future levels of all components of the dynamic water balance, from rainfall to soil moisture, in south-eastern Australia including the MDB. A BRS project entitled Water 2010 is expanding on this project and will provide a national water balance from regional to continental scale, with an interactive internet based information system being developed as the final product. Similarly, the Natural Resource Management Irrigation Atlas of the New South Wales Riverina assembled all available data on the region to provide a tool that can be used by policy and resource managers, and the general public.

A number of projects are documenting land use patterns at various temporal and spatial scales in the MDB. In collaboration with the Murray Darling Basin Commission (MDBC), BRS has produced a time series of regional scale land use maps covering the entire MDB. BRS is currently completing catchment scale mapping of the MDB that will provide a full basin-wide coverage of current land use.

As part of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, BRS is delivering a program to promote community based stream salinity sampling and mapping. This complements other salinity mapping projects in the MDB using remotely sensed data. Furthermore, BRS is combining knowledge on forestry and salinity to develop a plantation capability statement for commercial environmental forestry focussing on catchments in the MDB.

BRS provides other forestry initiatives, including broad plantation forest capability and suitability assessments throughout the MDB. BRS has also undertaken a project, 'Plantations and Water: A review' for the Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation contained information on plantations and water use in the MDB.

The Managing Connected Water Resources Project, which is providing advice to other Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Divisions and State Government agencies, is documenting the connections between surface water and groundwater systems in the Border Rivers Catchment of New South Wales and Queensland. BRS has also conducted groundwater resource assessments in the Jerrabomberra Creek Catchment and for the Culcairn town water supply. More broadly across the MDB, BRS has produced a basin scale Groundwater Flow Systems Map to help prioritise future salinity mitigation projects.

In an advisory role BRS represents the Department of Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry on a number of Murray Darling Basin Commission committees, including; Fish Science and Management Committee, Water Trade Salinity Impact Evaluation Panel, Basin Irrigation and Salinity Management Committee, End of Valley Hydrographic Steering Committee, and the Ad-hoc Salt Interception Schemes Working Group.