



## **MEDIA RELEASE – 16 APRIL 2007**

### **DIVERTING THE CLARENCE – A NATIONAL DISASTER**

OceanWatch Australia is calling on Minister Turnbull to scrap his plans for diverting water from northern NSW rivers to supply ongoing development pressure in south east Queensland.

Anissa Lawrence, CEO of OceanWatch Australia said “Diverting water from these rivers will cause disastrous effects on the estuarine and marine environments of the northern rivers and dramatically affect communities reliant on the rivers, such as towns like Maclean. It is a ludicrous proposition.”

The Clarence River is the biggest seafood producing area in NSW. Seafood from this river feeds people throughout NSW and south east Queensland. “People want to eat seafood. Doctors advise us to eat seafood. Thus it is critical that we understand how important freshwater flows are for rivers and for sustaining healthy fish populations. **Water that flows freely down rivers and out to sea should not be seen as a wasted resource, it is absolutely vital for the health of the whole coastal ecosystem.**” Ms Lawrence said.

Numerous studies have shown the direct correlation between water flows and prawn catches in estuaries, but it’s not only estuarine fish and invertebrate species that need these flows. Studies have also shown that significant rainfall or flood events also cause an increase in abundance of marine species in ocean waters adjacent to these rivers.

Reductions in freshwater flows would reduce the diversity of mangroves and saltmarsh in an estuary and also reduce nutrient input into the estuary, impacting on seagrass productivity. Such changes would have flow on impacts to fishery production, as seagrass, mangroves and saltmarsh are important nursery habitats for over 70% of commercial fish species.

Ms Lawrence said, “Money proposed to be spent on this enormous feat of engineering would be better spent giving every household in south east Queensland a water tank.

The report that has just been released is merely an engineering report stating that it is possible to divert these rivers, but just because something is engineeringly possible, doesn’t mean it should be attempted.

To commission an engineering report like this without also commissioning a social impact report and an environment impact report is irresponsible for someone who is employed to represent the people and who holds the position of Environment Minister.”

And it’s not just NSW people who have an issue with this plan. The Queensland Seafood Industry Association, who has their head office in South East Queensland, also thinks it’s a ridiculous idea. “Natural freshwater flow is the life blood for any river system, it aids in maintaining a healthy balance and is extremely important in the life cycle of many important marine species. Governments must find alternative solutions to the water crisis, that don’t have disastrous effects for a whole catchment area, as has been demonstrated in other areas by similar plans” said Martin Hicks CEO of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association.

“The Prime Minister thinks this is an issue about state rivalries, NSW not wanting to share with Qld, but that really has nothing to do with it. The issue is about draining one of the most environmentally productive rivers on Australia’s east coast. It wouldn’t matter if they were proposing to pump water from the Clarence to Newcastle or another NSW location - we would oppose the proposal just as vigorously.” Ms Lawrence said.

For more information, contact:

Anissa Lawrence – CEO, OceanWatch Australia on 0419 903 800 or 02 9660 2262

*OceanWatch Australia (OWA) is a national environmental, not-for-profit company that works to achieve sustainability in the Australian seafood industry through protecting and enhancing fish habitats, improving water quality and advancing the sustainability of fisheries through action based partnerships with the Australian seafood industry, government, natural resource managers, private enterprise and the community.*



More information....

- Studies by Ruello (1973) and Glaister (1978) found in the Hunter and Clarence Rivers respectively showed that catches of prawns in these systems is correlated with water flow in the river.
- Ruello (1973) found that significant rainfall or flood events enhances the seasonal movement of school prawns (*Metapenaeus macleayi*) and produces an initial increase in the abundance of adults in adjacent ocean waters.
- study by Loneragan and Bunn (1999) research confirms that high river discharge can have a strong positive effect on the production of coastal commercial and recreational fisheries. It also showed that the seasonal pattern of flow is equally, if not more important, than the magnitude of flow.
- The review by Gillanders and Kingsford (2002) also notes that reduced freshwater flows to estuaries would result in increased salinity in estuaries and a change in the species composition and location of saltmarsh, mangroves and seagrass species as some species can tolerate higher levels of salinity than others. This would result in reduced species diversity over time.
- Reductions in freshwater flows would also reduce nutrient input into estuaries, impacting on seagrass productivity.
- Such changes would have flow on impacts to fishery production as seagrass, mangroves and saltmarsh are important nursery habitats for over 70% of commercial fish species.

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