



Mary Basin

draft water resource plan

summary

November 2005



Message from the Minister



The Mary Basin in South East Queensland passes a historic milestone with the release of a draft water resource plan that proposes a framework for sustainably managing the area's water resources into the future.

This brochure summarises the draft Mary Basin Water Resource Plan, outlines its key points and explains how anyone with an interest in the area's water resources can have a say on the proposals prior to its finalisation.

In particular, I hope the people of the Mary Basin will acquaint themselves with the proposals and ensure their views are properly aired through the formal submissions process prior to the plan's finalisation.

Henry Palaszczuk
Minister for Natural Resources and Mines
November 2005



A plan for sustainability

The Mary Basin is a naturally diverse catchment that encompasses the Mary, Burrum, Noosa, Maroochy and Mooloolah rivers and their many tributaries. The Mary Basin Water Resource Plan area also contains the coastal streams north of the Noosa River.

The area is noted for its richly wooded hinterland hills, the farmlands and rural communities of its traditional heartland and its burgeoning coastal communities that are becoming increasingly important for the regional economy.

Sustainably securing the water supply needs of these many interests, and the ecological health of the area's rivers and estuaries, is the key aim of the draft Mary Basin Water Resource Plan's proposals.

Urban water use accounts for about half the water used in the plan area, with the remainder used for agriculture. This differs from other parts of Queensland, where irrigated agriculture is the dominant water user. Non-consumptive uses, such as recreation, and other activities like tourism and fisheries associated with a healthy riverine environment, are also important. Balancing the water interests of all sectors, as well as providing for the maintenance of riverine ecosystems, is a major challenge for the plan.

To provide the right framework, the planning process is structured to take stock of these many existing uses, identify likely sources of future demand, and ensure that the needs of all are provided for.

provides for town and country

A holistic approach that provides for town and country

A key challenge for the draft plan has been to develop ways of addressing the surge in urban growth forecast for South East Queensland over the next 20 years while recognising the importance of the rural sector to the region's economy and character.

Irrigated agriculture has for many years been a mainstay of the Mary Basin economy, underscoring the linkages between water resource development and growth, and the plan must strive to provide measures for the rural sector to share in the opportunities that regional change will bring.

Irrigation predominates throughout the Mary River catchment and in western parts of the Sunshine Coast and Burrum catchments. Production focuses on sugarcane, dairy, livestock, fodder and horticulture, with the Sunshine Coast generating more than half the area's agricultural income.

The draft plan's proposals

- Additional water allocations to cater for the water demand associated with predicted population growth.
- The release of any additional water to be contingent on the efficient use of existing and potential supplies.
- Existing water entitlements are recognised and protected from the impacts associated with further water resource development.
- Conversion of supplemented water entitlements, and some unsupplemented entitlements, to water allocations that can be traded separately from land.
- No further water resource development in the Noosa or Burrum rivers, or the coastal streams north of the Noosa River mouth.
- No further allocations for the Mooloolah River, other than for town water supplies.
- Use of the ecologically important Cooloola Sandmass aquifer to be regulated, with groundwater development in other areas and all overland flow water development to be monitored and reported on.



A framework of opportunity for future growth

Water from the Mary Basin is vital for the area's agricultural industries, towns and rural communities. In the early days of modern settlement, when development and population pressures put little strain on our water resources, integrated planning was not a priority.

Now, as we enter an era of advanced growth, forward planning is paramount to ensure our water supplies can sustain our existing needs and those of an expanding population and diversifying economy.

A strategic reserve

With future supply security in mind, the draft Mary Basin Water Resource Plan provides for a strategic reserve to be developed to meet the region's longer-term water requirements. Its volume and location will be contingent on further assessment through the South East Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy and consistency with the final plan's environmental flow and water allocation security objectives.

In this respect, it is important to note that the plan will not endorse or promote any specific water infrastructure project or proposal. Rather, it will provide an allocation framework from which the most efficient supply options can be developed without compromising environmental goals. The viability of any proposed arrangements will be tested through separate assessments to ensure these criteria are met.

Trading and innovation

At another level, an assessment of existing water use indicates that a measure of future demand can be accommodated from the unused parts of existing agricultural entitlements. Under the trading arrangements that will be introduced on the plan's implementation, this water will be free to move to its highest value use under market forces.

Through this innovation, entitlement holders will be able to dispose of surplus water – but only if they are satisfied that prices reflect their assets' true value. Similarly, trading will provide an avenue for innovators to explore new water uses that will add value to the region's diversifying economy.

However, in some parts of the Basin, entitlements are approaching full use. To bring new opportunities to some parts of the plan area where trading may not satisfy demand, the draft plan provides for some unallocated water to be made available to support new 'waterharvesting' entitlements.

These arrangements, including the release of additional water made available through the planning process, are supported by the draft plan's water allocation security objectives and consistent with its environmental flow objectives.

A new market in fluid assets

Implementation of the Mary Basin Water Resource Plan through a resource operations plan will herald a significant change in the way water entitlements are managed. Traditionally, water entitlements have been attached to land could only be bought or sold with the land to which they applied. Under the plan, many entitlements will convert to water allocations that can be traded separately from land. Unlike water licences, water allocations are not subject to periodic renewal and will endure beyond the 10-year life of the plan.

Ownership of tradable water allocations will be recorded on a title registration system similar to the state's Land Titles Register, allowing water to be freely traded in a similar way to other commodities.

This market-based system will promote the movement of water to higher-value uses and allow entitlement holders to sell surpluses for production elsewhere. In addition, because water users will profit from any water they save, trading is expected to be an incentive for higher efficiency.

The rules that will guide water trading, and the areas where trading can occur, will be developed in consultation with the community under the resource operations planning process. Among other things, the rules will be structured to protect the water allocation security and environment flow objectives that will underpin the water resource plan's intended outcomes.

A new deal for the environment

For the first time, environmental flow performance measures and objectives will be specified throughout the Mary Basin.

The draft plan proposes environmental flow objectives through the plan area. Meeting this set of environmental flow objectives will ensure that future decisions made under the water resource plan will provide for the health of natural ecosystems and achieve the plan's ecological outcomes. The environmental flow objectives attempt to mimic the natural flow regime, taking into consideration low, medium and high flows, as well as natural variability.

Any future activities arising through the water resource planning process must be consistent with the water resource plan, and supportive of the stated ecological outcomes for the catchment.

The independent Technical Advisory Panel that assessed the ecological condition of watercourses in the plan area and how it might respond to the draft plan's provisions, concluded that additional entitlements could be provided without any additional threats to species of conservation significance.



A new level of specification and protection

Providing certainty and security for water users are key objectives of the water planning process. These outcomes are achieved through clearly specified water entitlements and defined entitlement performance measures.

The draft plan proposes that under the resource operations plan, many existing water entitlements will convert to tradable water allocations. On conversion, existing supplemented water entitlements will retain their current nominal volume. Unsupplemented entitlements will also be assigned clear volumetric parameters.

Initially, priority will be given to converting existing entitlements in water supply schemes and the

Six Mile Creek sub-catchment within two years of commencement of the plan (see map pg 9). Some area-based and waterharvesting licences in priority unsupplemented areas will convert within four years of plan commencement.

The water allocation security objectives provided by the plan will give an indication of how well a water allocation would have performed over the past 109 years. Therefore they do not represent a prediction or guarantee of future water performance of water allocations in any particular year. Actual performance will be dependent on climatic factors and how water entitlements are used.



Management of groundwater

The draft plan proposes to regulate groundwater taken from the Cooloola Sandmass aquifer.

Elsewhere in the plan area, groundwater is taken for limited agricultural, domestic and town use. Further development of these resources will be monitored and reported on. The *Water Act 2000* provides for the water resource plan to be amended to regulate groundwater if plan outcomes are at risk.

Cooloola Sandmass

In addition to being the plan area's most significant source of groundwater, the Cooloola Sandmass aquifer is in an area of high conservation significance. On this basis, the draft plan proposes to regulate extractions from the aquifer. All existing groundwater use in the area will be

licensed and metered, with the exception of water used for stock or domestic purposes. Licences will be granted to identified existing users when the plan is finalised.

Additional licences will be issued only for town supply or public amenity. Works to take groundwater for these purposes will be assessable development under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

Works to take groundwater for stock or domestic purposes will be self-assessable development under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*, but allowed only in areas without access to reticulated town water supply, or where bores were installed before commencement of the final plan.



Management of overland Flow

Overland flow is water that runs off land following rainfall, either before it enters a watercourse or after it discharges as floodwater from a watercourse or lake.

Intensive overland flow development can affect river flows and the amount of water available for downstream interests—including towns, water entitlement holders and the environment.

However, an assessment conducted in developing the plan concluded that overland flow development in the plan area was limited and unlikely to compromise plan objectives. As a result, the draft plan does not propose to regulate this resource, although monitoring and reporting requirements will ensure that an amendment can be initiated should plan outcomes be at risk.

Implementing the water resource plan

Message from the Director-General



In parallel with the release of the draft water resource plan, I have announced the intention to prepare a draft resource operations plan that will contain proposals for implementing the final Mary Basin Water Resource Plan.

Implementation will chiefly involve developing day-to-day management rules for the catchment's streams and infrastructure that are consistent with the water resource plan's objectives.

I invite anyone with an interest to peruse the issues outlined in this brochure and contribute to the process by preparing a submission on the resource operations planning process.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in white ink, which appears to read 'Bob McCarthy'.

Bob McCarthy
Director-General
Department of Natural Resources and Mines
November 2005



How will the water resource plan be implemented?

On finalisation of the Mary Basin Water Resource Plan, a draft resource operations plan will be developed and published for public consideration. On the draft resource operations plan's release, submissions on its content will be invited prior to finalisation.

Essentially, the resource operations plan will define the water sharing rules that will guide the day-to-day management of stream flows, supplemented water supplies and unsupplemented extractions. The resource operations plan may be progressively amended to include unsupplemented areas. The first of these will be for priority areas where some waterharvesting and area-based licences are to convert to water allocations.

The plan will contain water trading rules that will ensure that the movement of water does not compromise the water resource plan's water allocation security and environmental flow objectives.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines will manage plan development in close consultation with water service providers, water users and other stakeholders.

For water service providers

Water service providers—such as SunWater, and several councils—will play an important part in implementing the water resource plan, initially by submitting proposals for operating their supply infrastructure to comply with water resource plan outcomes and objectives. The draft plan recognises all existing water supply schemes in the plan area and the existing volumetric entitlements associated with the major storages.

Monitoring requirements

A key function for the draft resource operations plan will be to detail how the water resource plan's water and ecosystem monitoring requirements will be implemented.

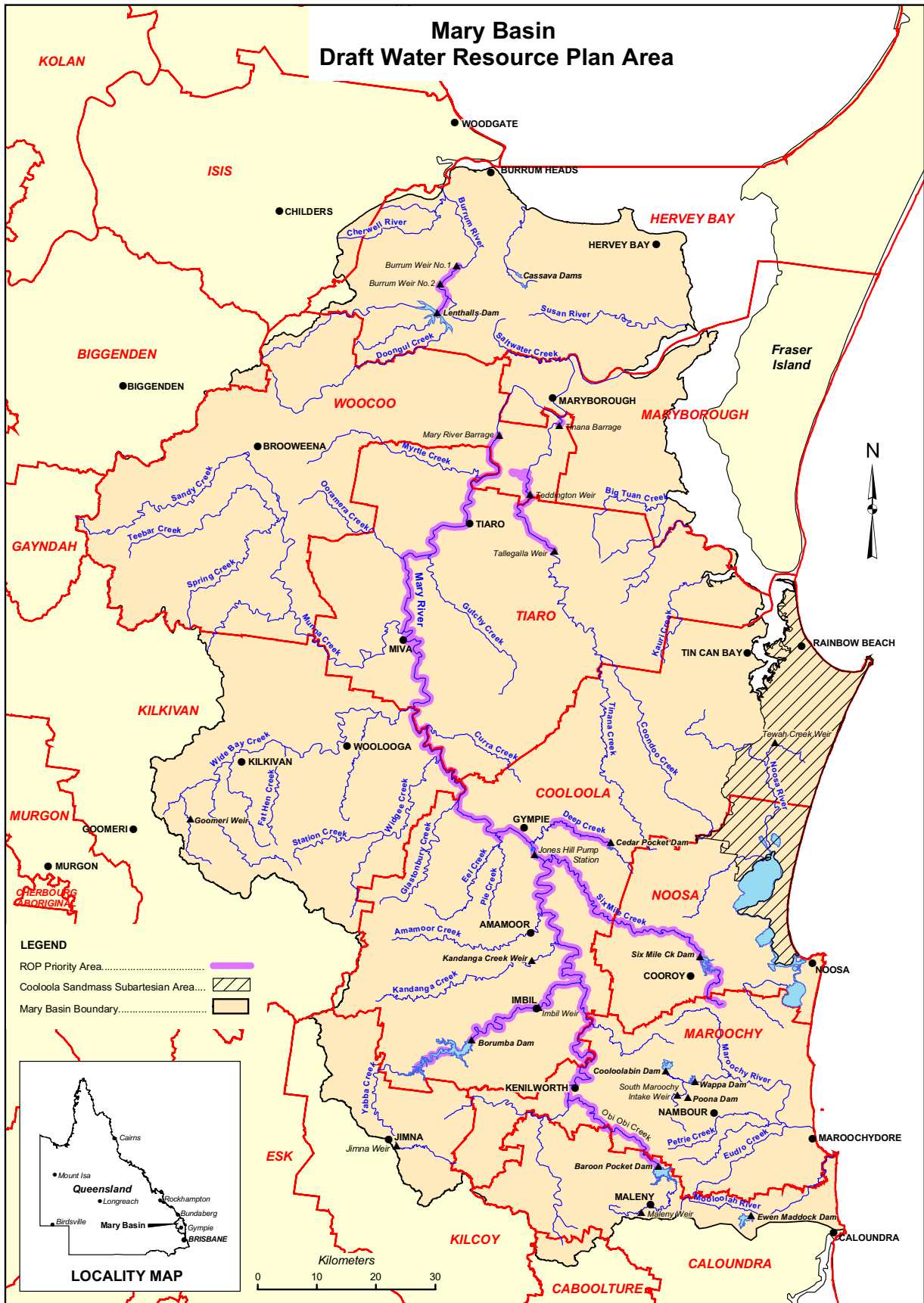
Monitoring and reporting will be important for establishing whether the implemented plan's desired outcomes are being achieved, and that any emerging issues are promptly addressed.

The draft water resource plan proposes that measuring devices (meters) will be installed to assess the volumes taken under all unsupplemented entitlements that convert to water allocations. Implementation of this requirement will be consistent with the state-wide metering regulation prescribed under the *Water Act 2000*. Water taken under existing supplemented water entitlements is already metered. There are no proposals to meter stock or domestic extractions.

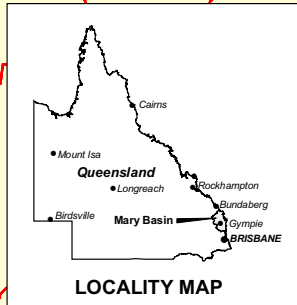
The moratorium on water resource development in the Mary Basin will continue until the resource operations plan has been finalised and the water sharing rules take effect.

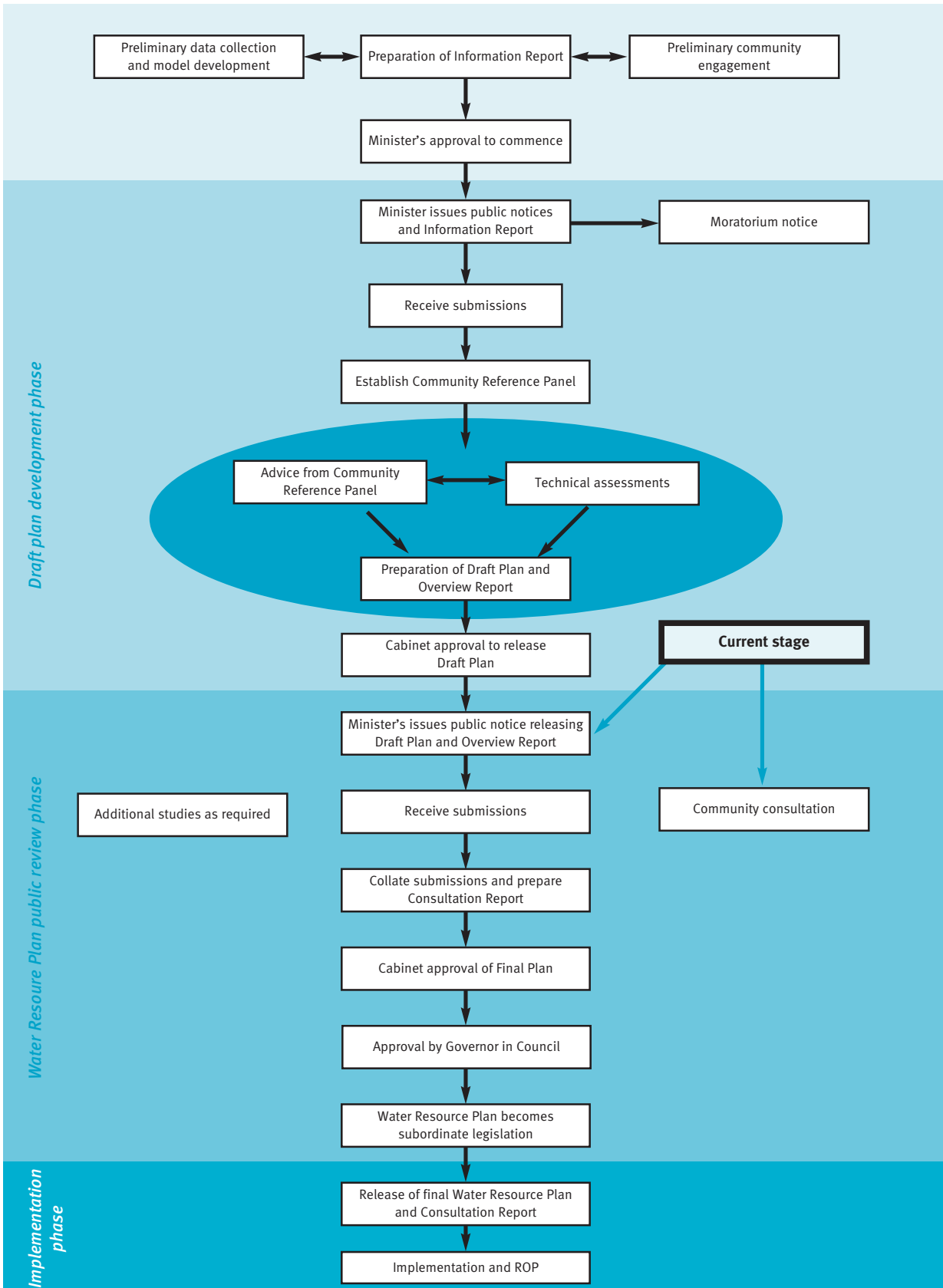


Mary Basin Draft Water Resource Plan Area



- LEGEND**
- ROP Priority Area.....
 - Coooloola Sandmass Subartesian Area.....
 - Mary Basin Boundary.....





Community invited to participate

This brochure introduces the draft Mary Basin Water Resource Plan and some of the key issues to be addressed in the forthcoming resource operations planning process. More information is also available in the overview report about the draft water resource plan.

Copies of the draft plan, overview report and other publications relating to Mary Basin water resource planning can be obtained from Department of Natural Resources and Mines offices or by telephone. They can also be viewed at the department's website. Contact details can be found at the back of this brochure.

You are invited to participate in this important planning process by using the Submission Form enclosed to register your views on the draft water resource plan and the

resource operations planning process. Forms are also available from the department's website: <www.nrm.qld.gov.au/wrp/mary>.

To ensure that your submission is properly made, follow the five steps outlined in the form.

Public information sessions on the draft plan will be held in the catchment to provide an opportunity for people to discuss the draft plan and water planning issues with departmental officers and share their views with other members of the community. They will also be a source of additional information that may prove useful for those making submissions.

The information sessions are being organised at Gympie, Maryborough and Nambour.

2 December 2005	Gympie Civic Centre, Mellor Street, Gympie	10:00am–12:30pm
5 December 2005	Maryborough City Hall, Kent Street, Maryborough	10:00am–12:30pm
6 December 2005	Nambour Civic Centre, Centenary Square, Currie Street, Nambour	10:00am–12:30pm

To register your interest in attending one of these sessions, please contact the Department of Natural Resources and Mines on (07) 5480 6225 or email <mary.wrp@nrm.qld.gov.au>.

Everyone who registers to participate in an information session will be sent an information kit and confirmation of the venue and date/time of the meeting

How to make a submission

Submissions are invited on the draft Mary Basin Water Resource Plan. Anyone may make a submission about the draft Water Resource Plan.

Submission Form

To make a written submission, please use the submission form enclosed. Please complete the five steps on the first page of the form to make a properly made submission. Internet submissions will also be accepted.

Posting Submissions

Submissions can be made by completing a submission form and forwarding it to the following address:

Submissions
Mary Basin Water Resource Planning
Attention: Belinda Wedlock
Department of Natural Resources and Mines
PO Box 383
Gympie Qld 4570

Submissions lodged via the Internet

Submissions can also be made by completing a submission form on the internet at the following address:

<www.nrm.qld.gov.au/wrp/mary>

Submission Form–Mary Basin draft Water Resource Plan

Submissions are being sought from interested individuals and groups about:

- A) The content of the draft Mary Basin Water Resource Plan.
- B) The intention to prepare a draft Mary Basin Resource Operations Plan

Surname (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr):

First Name:

Address:

.....Postcode:Fax No:

Organisation:Position:

Phone No: Mobile No: Email:

Signature(s): Date:

Office Use Only	
Submission No:
Date Received:
Issue Category:

Which interest group do you primarily represent (you may tick more than one box):

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Riparian landholder | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental interests | <input type="checkbox"/> State/Commonwealth dept or agency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> User of overland flow | <input type="checkbox"/> Intensive stock industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry representative body |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irrigator (supplemented surface water) | <input type="checkbox"/> Mining/petroleum industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial fisher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irrigator (unsupplemented surface water) | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban water user | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational fisher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irrigator (groundwater) | <input type="checkbox"/> General industry/business | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dryland farmer | <input type="checkbox"/> Horticultural interests | <input type="checkbox"/> Water Service Provider |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grazier | <input type="checkbox"/> Tourism industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stock and Domestic water user | <input type="checkbox"/> Community group (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

A) Draft Water Resource Plan – What features of the draft Mary Basin Water Resource Plan do you think are worthwhile? What issues concern you? How do you think the draft Mary Basin Water Resource Plan could be improved to address these issues?

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B) Commencement of resource operations planning process – What suggestions do you have about how the draft Mary Basin Water Resource Plan might be implemented through the resource operations planning process?

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Need more information?

Post or fax this form and any attachments to:

Mary Basin Water Resource Planning
Attention: Belinda Wedlock
Department of Natural Resources and Mines
Locked Bag 383
Gympie QLD 4570

Ph: (07) 5480 6226 Fax: (07) 5482 8105

Submissions close: 5:00pm 10 February 2006.

NOTE: You must state the grounds of the submission, and the facts and circumstances relied on in support of these grounds. If there is insufficient space on this form, attach a more detailed statement. You must also ensure each person making the submission has signed it.

