



Media release

17 September, 2008

River health requires a closer look

Leading central Queensland natural resource management group, the Fitzroy Basin Association Inc. (FBA), says long-term monitoring is required to measure and improve the health of the Fitzroy River.

FBA Chief Executive Officer Suzie Christensen said that while the organisation was concerned about the health of the river, recent claims by a University of Queensland professor seemed to be based on a cursory examination, rather than actual local data.

Is the Fitzroy River dying?

Ms Christensen said information presented recently in the media on mangrove die back and fish health in the river was vague and there could be many potential causes.

“The mangrove die back could have been caused by flood inundation, sediment, the impact of freshwater, and a reduced ability to photosynthesise. It is unlikely you would see such a severe result from chemicals unless there was a massive injection of undiluted pollutant and there is no evidence of that.”

“In addition:

- Fisherman reported very large catches directly after the flooding in Jan & Feb 08
- There is no real indication of whether fish numbers have suddenly dropped
- Extended low water temperatures this winter may have affected fish
- Fish naturally move through estuaries and out to sea as a result of flooding
- Flooding aids fish breeding and numbers are expected to boom in coming years.

“The Fitzroy is a large and complex river system, and experiences periodic big flows rather than regular smaller floods. We haven’t seen a flow of this size for 17 years, and the causes of the short term ecological impacts require a sound scientific basis for action.”

Work to improve the Fitzroy is underway

Ms Christensen said lots of good research and on-ground work was being done to improve catchment health, our knowledge and our ability to manage our precious river resource.

“FBA recognises the need to improve the health of the Fitzroy and had been working with the community for more than 10 years to enhance the management of creeks and rivers.

“We work directly with local landholders to improve land management to reduce erosion and run-off into waterways, and also to collect water quality data. Evidence exists that we have had a positive impact” she said.

“We support the development of a long-term monitoring plan and local water quality guidelines to get a clearer picture of river health. Specific investigations into the impacts of recent events are required and already underway.

Fitzroy Basin Association Inc.

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“FBA also organised a large community forum in August this year to discuss the impact of recent flooding on our region, where issues including water quality, the impact of mining, mangrove health and fish stocks were discussed.”

More information and support is needed

Ms Christensen said central Queensland said a collaborative approach was needed to fully understand and protect our region’s important natural resources.

“Our region has undergone strong agricultural development and more recently the mining and heavy industry boom, which has seen lots of development over a short time period,” she said.

“We need to be mindful of the collective impact these activities can have over time and not jump to unjustified conclusions.”

She said it was also important that there was recognition of the region’s role as the engine room of the Queensland economy and support for efforts to manage resources sustainably.

“CQ is the economic powerhouse of the state and FBA calls on the Queensland government to return some of that revenue to the area to ensure we can effectively manage the impacts of development.”

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