

29 October 2007

BOURKE HOSTS FREE FORUM ON LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES

Opportunities and potential impacts of climate change in western NSW will be the focus of a free forum in Bourke next month.

The NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) in association with the Western Catchment Management Authority (CMA) will put local issues for key industries and the environment under the spotlight at the Bourke Bowling Club on Wednesday, November 14.

Bourke district residents, business people, primary producers, rural service providers and industry representatives are encouraged to register for the forum by contacting the Western CMA's Bourke office on 02 6872 2144 by Monday, November 12.

NSW DPI climate risk management project leader, Gary Allan, said the forum is one of a series being run by NSW DPI across the State as part of the NSW Greenhouse Plan to provide up-to-date local information on the implications of climate change.

"Climate change has implications for agriculture, natural resource management and the lives of everyone living in western NSW," Mr Allan said.

"We encourage people to come along, hear the latest scientific research and explore how climate change could impact on their future planning and investment decisions."

Speakers will include climate change expert, Dr Roger Stone from the University of Southern Queensland, as well as local producers, Mitch Abbo of Clyde Agriculture and Ben Mannix, who will summarise his experience with Enterprise Based Conservation.

Workshops and panel sessions will consider on-ground planning issues for production and conservation looking at what can be done and what further research needs to be generated.

Participants will also receive a copy of a recently released CSIRO publication summarising research into climate change and its possible impact on the Western Catchment points to increased variability for local communities, industries and ecosystems.

Chair of the Western CMA, Rory Treweeke, says "Land managers in the Western Catchment are used to great variability in both rainfall and temperatures.

"The CSIRO report indicates that this variability is likely to increase with an overall drying tendency over the next twenty to fifty years, coupled with an increase in average temperatures," he said.

"The challenge is to be aware of how this will affect the grazing, dryland farming, irrigation industries, and the natural environment within which they operate, and to have appropriate management strategies in place," Mr Treweeke said.



The Western Catchment is the largest in NSW, spanning approximately 230,000 km sq, and is unique in NSW because it encompasses a whole series of river systems, most of them seasonal, and includes the largest and most diverse areas of natural rangelands within NSW.

The CSIRO research into the Western Catchment was commissioned by the NSW Government in order to gain a clearer picture of potential future impacts on the State's key catchment areas.

In addition, a new round of CSIRO/Bureau of Meteorology projections were released this month at Greenhouse 07. These projections give better clarity to previous information and are available for review at www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au under the resources tab.

Key findings of the CSIRO Regional study include:

- Since 1950, the Western Catchment has experienced warming of around 1.3 degrees;
- Projections suggest increases in evaporation, heat waves, extreme winds and fire risk, as well as potential for seasonal increases in extreme rainfall events;
- Changes in rainfall and higher evaporation rates are likely to lead to less water for streams and rivers in the Western catchment, which will have downstream consequences for storages and place strains on the catchment's water resources;
- Decreases in runoff due to climate change may reduce the extent and function of the catchment's freshwater wetlands, such as the internationally recognised Lake Pinaroo and the Narran Lake Nature Reserve;
- Climate change is likely to heighten the need for conservation efforts to protect the catchment's 125 species, two populations, and six ecological communities that are classified as endangered or threatened; and
- A modest level of warming may threaten the catchment's characteristic woodlands, currently listed as endangered, including the Nelia, Coolibah-Black Box, Myall and Brigalow-Gidgee woodlands.

"The CSIRO found that the catchment faces serious challenges into the future, due to likely accelerating climate change. It is important that we understand what to expect from climate change. I would encourage local people to read the report and attend the forum," Mr Treweeke said.

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Caption: Western CMA staffer, Katrina Hannigan, with a copy of the CSIRO report.

