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MEDIA RELEASE

Climate change and the drought take centre stage at Riversymposium

The impact of climate change, global warming and drought on the world's rivers and waterways are being made worse by human interference according to world experts speaking at the 10th International Riversymposium & Environmental Flows Conference, today.

Professor David Dudgeon from the University of Hong Kong said increasing water temperatures coupled with human pollution and the construction of water infrastructure was putting already threatened marine species under more stress.

"Climate change is real, it's happening and we need to introduce adaptive measures to ensure we don't further exacerbate the current problems facing the world's rivers and waterways, in particular the rivers of South-East Asia," he said.

"Humans play a large role in exacerbating these effects and a prime example is the state of the Yangtze and Mekong River which are suffering directly from climate change and also from the level of human pollution being put into the river.

"In the Yangtze River more than 40 percent of sites in the river have been classified as severely polluted with 26 billion litres of untreated waste water regularly pumped into the river.

"Pollution, habitat degradation and the construction of water infrastructure including dams and spillways at points on both the Yangtze and Mekong River mean migratory fish and other fish which need to travel upstream for both reproduction and for cooler waters are unable to do so and are put under serious ecological pressure.

"In some cases open trade of these animals is also making it worse, in one study it has been revealed 72 species of turtles listed as endangered are being traded in the open market."

Dr. Kev Warburton of The University of Queensland's School of Integrative Biology said the delicate ecological balance of rivers in the time of drought need to be at the front of everyone's minds.

"50 percent of fish species are compromised when water depths fall and studies on the Brisbane creeks particularly Moggill Creek and Enoggera Creek have revealed the drought has led to the creation of separate pools of water which are vulnerable to drying out," Dr Warburton said.

"Our studies have revealed riparian shade covers can actually protect or at least reduce the speed at which water depths decrease but the drought is causing a high level of stress on these local waterways and their inhabitants."

Also discussed during the second day of the Riversymposium was the viability of sourcing water for the environment and the national plan for water management.



Dedicated to a better Brisbane



International Riversymposium is part of Riverfestival, an initiative of Brisbane City Council and the Queensland Government.

Professor Peter Cullen, Commissioner at the Australian National Water Commission said there were many Australian organisations which had their finger in the pie of water management.

“Our goal is to highlight the need for a level of responsibility and structure within each organisation on how regional water is being managed,” he said.

“In the times of drought it is essential water management is done effectively so we don’t have one water manager wetting one area and another water manager trying to keep it dry.

“The management of water resources is one of the most important issues that will face Australia and we need to identify how to preserve the nation’s precious rivers and water ways.”

Other speakers of interest included Patrick McCully from the International Rivers Network who discussed the contribution of dams to global warming and Jackie King from the University of Cape Town who spoke on the fate of developmental change in the Mekong River.

The 10th International Riversymposium & Environmental Flows Conference is held in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and takes place in Brisbane from Monday 3 to Thursday 6 September 2007.

It is part of *Riverfestival* – a 10-day annual celebration of Brisbane’s iconic river, its people, art, culture and environment from 31 August to 9 September, 2007.

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