

**Question on Notice  
No. 1561  
Asked on 30 November 2006**

QUESTION:

MRS MENKENS asked the Minister for Environment and Multiculturalism (Ms Nelson-Carr).

With reference to recent findings regarding salt water intrusion from aquaculture farms into the underground water tables adversely affecting adjacent landowners at Crocodile Creek south Townsville and at Trent Road near Ayr.

Will she clarify the Government's position regarding the adverse effects aquaculture facilities may have on neighbouring properties and respectfully ask what plans her department has to address these concerns in light of the recent findings and in regard to the future management and environmental practices of these particular aquaculture facilities.

ANSWER:

Despite recent reports, it is not factually correct to say that aquaculture facilities are adversely impacting on adjacent landowners in the two cases which you have identified.

In the cases identified, even after extensive scientific investigation, there is not sufficient evidence to make a link between an aquaculture facility and offsite impacts.

Aquaculture farms have the potential to impact upon groundwater if appropriate management practices are not implemented. These effects may include changes to groundwater heights and impacts to groundwater quality. Identifying definitive causes of changes to groundwater is a complex issue and often there are a range of potential or contributing factors.

In the Trent Road case, the area is low lying, in close proximity to the coast, and there are salt water barrages in surrounding creeks which act to change the groundwater dynamics. Farming practices are also likely to have played a part in changing the groundwater hydrology in this instance.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) addresses potential environmental impacts from aquaculture facilities including groundwater impacts through the assessment and conditioning of development approvals. Development approval conditions aim to protect the receiving environment including groundwater and may include groundwater monitoring requirements and pond design standards.

### **Crocodile Creek Aquaculture Farm (Pacific Ocean Fisheries Consultancy)**

The EPA has undertaken a review of two recent groundwater reports regarding changes to groundwater levels adjacent to the Crocodile Creek aquaculture facility. While the reports are not conclusive, they suggest that the water intake channel at the aquaculture facility may be influencing local groundwater movements.

The EPA is liaising with the operator of the aquaculture facility on the impacts recorded in these reports.

### **Trent Road Aquaculture Farm (Pacific Reef Fisheries)**

The EPA has been participating in a whole-of-government committee addressing sugarcane farmers concerns about potential adverse impacts to groundwater from the Trent Road aquaculture farm. The committee includes representatives from the aquaculture farm and affected sugarcane farmers.

A number of reports have been produced which indicate that both the sugar cane farms and the aquaculture facility are likely to be impacting on groundwater in the area. However, evidence identifying the level of impacts caused by the sugar cane farmers or the aquaculture facility is not conclusive.

Consultants acting on behalf of the North Burdekin Water Board and local cane farmers are preparing further information to submit to the EPA.

When this additional information is received the EPA will conduct a technical review of all information available on this issue and decide if there is sufficient evidence to take any statutory action.

### **Improvements to Standards**

The EPA is working with the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, the Department of State Development and Trade, the Department of Natural Resources and Water, the aquaculture industry and consultants, to prepare a guideline for the construction of aquaculture containment structures. The guideline will be based on standard engineering principles developed for the containment of hazardous materials at mine sites. The guideline is being finalised in a format suitable for aquaculture operators.