



## Media Release

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# Threat to Australian Food Bowl

One of Australia's richest agricultural regions is under threat.

Goulburn Broken Catchment's natural assets and the services provided by its ecosystems are in decline and threaten the region's buoyant economy, according to a Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and CSIRO report.

Victoria's Governor, John Landy AC, MBE launched the report, an outcome of the Ecosystem Services project, today in Shepparton, Victoria. The report highlights threats to the Catchment's key economic drivers - agriculture, horticulture and tourism. It also identifies important ecosystem services – nature's free services like pollination, water filtration and nutrient recycling – and the opportunities to sustain these natural benefits.

The Ecosystem Services Project is a collaboration between CSIRO, catchment groups and other research institutes. The Goulburn Broken Catchment is one of seven case studies around Australia that are aiming to describe and value Australia's ecosystem services.

"Natural assets are being forgotten or ignored in decision making and as a result they are degrading," says CSIRO's Dr Steve Cork, Leader of the Ecosystem Services Project.

"High on the list is the living creatures that fertilise soils and filter water. These creatures carry the economic prosperity of the Catchment on their backs, yet they are rarely considered and are at risk of being lost or their numbers being seriously reduced," says Dr Cork.

"We need to start recognising these natural assets or we risk losing them.

"The Ecosystem Services Project moves beyond simply pointing out problems in our landscapes. The project identifies solutions to these very real, and serious issues.

"Our ultimate aim is for scientists and communities to learn together how to deliver the right information to policy developers and decision makers to move towards more sustainable land management practices," he says.

Governor Landy, who launched the report today at the Shepparton Art Gallery says, "This report is a thorough and well written account of our ecosystems and how important they are to the future economic, social and cultural prosperity of Australia. I congratulate the authors of this report and commend their work."



Bill O’Kane, CEO of the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority acknowledges that various social and economic trends in the Catchment are placing extreme pressure on our natural assets.

“If we want to keep enjoying the kind of economic growth we are seeing, then we have to look after what is supporting this growth,” he says.

“Bees and other insects pollinate fruit trees, and critters in the soil maintain a healthy environment for crops to grow. These free services support the production of goods such as fruit and grain.

“But market pressures are forcing industries to intensify their practices. This places even more stress on the ecosystem services that underpin the production of goods.

“One of the key questions that this report identifies is how far can land use intensification proceed before environmental thresholds are crossed and systems start to collapse? This would have not only environmental repercussions, but it would also have serious impacts on our society and our economy.

“We also need to start thinking seriously about the value of ‘non-productive’ land that is important for recreation, tourism and our cultural heritage.

“There are many other important issues that this report identifies such as considering the whole range of services that vegetation provides from pollination to water filtration to salinity mitigation and carbon sequestration,” he says.

The Ecosystem Services Project is a collaborative effort between CSIRO, The Myer Foundation, Land and Water Australia, Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, the Rainforest Cooperative Research Centre, The University of New England, the Cotton Cooperative Research Centre and other institutions and agencies around Australia.

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