

## Lake Eyre Basin protected under Wild River declarations

**Queensland's iconic 'Channel Country' – the Lake Eyre Basin, one of the world's last great natural wetlands – will be protected from large dams and unsustainable industrial development under proposed Wild River declarations.**



Credit: Queensland Government

Queensland Environment Minister, Vicky Darling, said her government intended to make three Wild River declarations – the Cooper Creek, Georgina and Diamantina catchments – covering a total 11 million acres in western Queensland. The government will also fund 10 Indigenous Wild River ranger positions for patrolling the region.

‘The 1.2 million-square-kilometre Lake Eyre Basin is Australia’s largest inland river system (more than 500 000 square kilometres in Queensland) and does not have any major weirs or dams in Queensland. It contains globally unique and largely intact ecosystems with extensive floodplains and wetland habitats.

‘In addition, it is essential habitat for a rich variety of native wildlife such as the Cooper Creek Catfish, the Cooper Creek Turtle, the Lake Eyre Yellowbelly, the bilby and the dunnart.

‘All three basins have also supported a highly successful grazing industry for more than 150 years.

‘More recently [the region’s] exposure to the threats of industrial expansion has become clear and imminent. In particular the petroleum and gas sector emerged as a common concern throughout the consultation period. Our Government believes the sector has a place in the region, but it must not threaten the very values that have allowed traditional industries, particularly grazing, to thrive and native wildlife to flourish.

‘That is why Wild River declarations for the region will impose buffer zones from watercourses for development within the most sensitive and valuable areas.’

Specifically the new protection will:

1. Prevent open cut mines, large dams, irrigation and gas and petroleum production in areas known as High Preservation Areas (3.6 per cent of the Queensland Lake Eyre Basin)
2. Prevent open cut mines, large dams and irrigation in Special Floodplain Management Areas (6.8 per cent of the Queensland Lake Eyre Basin)
3. Require gas and petroleum production and exploration to be 200 metres away from watercourses in the Special Floodplain Management Area
4. Put strict conditions on limited gas and petroleum activities in the Special Floodplain Management Area to ensure that wild river values are protected.

Ms Darling said a 200-megalitre Indigenous water reserve had also been established under the Cooper Creek Water Resource Plan following extensive consultation with Traditional Owners.

She emphasised that the Wild River declarations have no bearing on native title. 'In fact, the rights of the Indigenous communities who have long standing connections with the wild river area are enshrined in the Wild Rivers Act.

'Day-to-day pastoral activities and traditional Indigenous practices like hunting, fishing and gathering materials such as ochre, bark, traditional medicines and the growing of community gardens for domestic purposes will also continue to occur.'

**Source:** Queensland Government

From ECOS online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC12159>