



## **MEDIA RELEASE – 12 December 2008**

### **Creating free passage for fish at Rita Island**

Construction of a rock ramp fishway is currently underway to enhance migration of native fish within the Burdekin Anabranh. The fishway is a culmination of work by the North Burdekin Water Board, State Government, private consultants and non-government organisations who have joined together over the past year to address fish passage in the lower Burdekin.

The sand dam on the Burdekin Anabranh was identified as a significant barrier to fish movement during certain times of the year, in a report by Alluvium, commissioned by Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM.

Tim Marsden from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries said that during low flows late in the year, many juvenile fish such as mullet attempt to move from the estuary into the freshwater reaches of the Burdekin River to feed and grow. At this time sand dams are in place to assist with irrigation of local farms and these block fish movements. The construction of a fishway at the Rita Island sand dam will help these small fish migrate upstream at this critical time while still allowing the water in the river to be used by local people.

The rock ramp fishway has been specifically designed for the site and the types of fish that need to migrate through the area. The fishway is made up of a series of rock bars much like a set of underwater stairs which allow fish to gradually move upstream or downstream from one pool of water to another, enabling them to rest in between.

The North Burdekin Water Board is undertaking the fishway construction, under the supervision of fish passage experts from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries and Alluvium.

The fishway is one of six projects that have been undertaken this year through the Tide to Table – Burdekin Dry Tropics programme, funded by Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM and implemented by OceanWatch Australia, with commonwealth Government backing.

Carla Wegscheidl, Project Manager of Tide to Table – Burdekin Dry Tropics said that many fish, including barramundi and mangrove jack move between salt and fresh water at different stages of their lives. “By improving fish passage, especially at the interface between salt and freshwater, means that fish can migrate between different habitats in order to shelter, feed, grow and reproduce effectively,” she said.

The project is due for completion before Christmas so that fish can enjoy free passage whenever the sand dams are in place before, during and after this wet season.

#### **Photo opportunity:**

12 noon Friday, 12 December 2008 at fishway construction site, Rita Island off Switchback Road.

#### **Contact details:**

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*OceanWatch Australia (OWA) is a national environmental, not-for-profit company that works to achieve sustainability in the Australian seafood industry through protecting and enhancing fish habitats, improving water quality and advancing the sustainability of fisheries through action based partnerships with the Australian seafood industry, government, natural resource managers, business and the community.*