DIVING IN FOR REVIEWS

BLAIR JACKSON

The 130,000sq km Burdekin Basin is set to receive an overdue assessment of its crucial water supply to determine how best to make use of the resource.

Federal environment and water Minister Tanya Plibersek was in Townsville on Wednesday to announce federal funding for the action, flanked by her state water Minister counterpart, Glenn Butcher.

The federal government has committed $11.5m for three assessments. The Burdekin Basin will get $5.5m for a regional water assessment, Central Queensland will get $4.5m and the southern Darling Downs gets $1.5m.

Asked if this was another assessment to go along with a water plan for the basin, Ms Plibersek pushed back, saying it was an example of the state and federal governments working together and not undertaking projects haphazardly.

State water Minister Glenn Butcher said the Burdekin was crucial to North Queensland, and a water assessment could take two years.

“There’s been so many proponents coming forward wanting to do large scale projects on the Burdekin River,” he said.

“We want to identify opportunities for agriculture and identify opportunities for water security for hydrogen industries into the future. We want to make sure it’s environmentally secure for future generations to come.”

Every river system in every catchment in Queensland has a water plan which shows how much water is available for use and buying rights.

A regional water assessment looks at who and what uses water, where the gaps are and then how to make the most of the resource.

Water evaporation, water which ran out on to the Reef and traditional owner water allocations were all taken into consideration now, he said.

“I think the people of North Queensland want to hear from two levels of government, that the water that’s been taken or the water that’s been proposed for use is actually good for the river system,” Mr Butcher said.

In March a Burdekin River expert voiced concern for the waterway, saying there was a greater focus on “bamboozling people” with “very thick reports” rather than doing meaningful science.

The federal budget abolished the North Queensland Water Infrastructure Authority, saving $9.5m over four years. The agency’s functions will be transferred into the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

In Townsville on Wednesday, Ms Plibersek said the authority being cut was an administrative decision and its projects were best dealt with by the people doing water infrastructure Australia-wide.

Ms Plibersek was also in Townsville last month, splashing some $300m on the Australian Institute of Marine Science and a grant scheme to limit sediment run-off on to the Great Barrier Reef.