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MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIAN TAKES THE HELM ON INTERNATIONAL WATER ISSUES

Improved government policy support and better use of science needed to improve water use efficiency and water productivity

Australian soil and water scientist, Colin Chartres, will shortly take over as Director General of the Sri Lanka-based International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the world's pre-eminent research institution on management of water for food and agriculture. He has voiced a strong commitment to deploy water research knowledge to hasten achievement of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals.

With 30 years' experience in driving research and policy reform in natural resources management, Chartres takes over as countries across the world reflect upon the findings of last year's ground-breaking and authoritative Comprehensive Assessment on Water Management in Agriculture. It found water scarcity to be a stark present day reality, and not a future threat as was widely believed.

Prior to his appointment, Dr Chartres was Chief Science Advisor to Australia's National Water Commission where he led a baseline assessment of Australia's water resources and development of a science framework for the Commission. He also worked in various capacities with the Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Research Organization (CSIRO), and chaired the Global Research Alliance's Water Action Council.

"Governments world wide need to make the hard decisions to improve water productivity and water use efficiency. Some governments are certainly better at this than others," says Chartres.

He questions technology quick-fixes for water problems, given their energy costs.

"I don't think we can contemplate water management issues in the next 50 years without a complementary understanding of the relationship between water and energy."

He noted that whilst technologies exist to desalinate water, treat sewage to drinkable standards and pump water from place to place, they are energy intensive, and thus often costly in terms of money and carbon releases to the atmosphere.

"Future water management whether for agriculture, industry or urban uses will have to consider minimizing energy costs and utilizing green power."

"In keeping with the recommendations of the Comprehensive Assessment, governments need to better plan for rainfall as the primary source of water as opposed to the current practice that only begins managing water when in rivers and ground aquifers."

“Similarly, we need to consider how the environment provides environmental services such as water to agriculture and other users and ensure that management practices integrate agriculture and the environment.”

A believer of the triple – economic, social and environmental – bottom-line approach to water management, Dr Chartres envisions increasing knowledge and understanding on how to determine the real value of water and how markets can help improve water use efficiency.

“While market and price-based approaches may be effective in wealthy countries like Australia, and are rightly the centre of strong debates at the moment, they are unlikely to yield immediate solutions for developing countries, where better information coupled with governance reform may provide more rapid outcomes.”

“I have a strong personal commitment to the fact that most of today’s water issues cannot be solved without a truly integrated triple bottom-line approach. In wealthy and poor countries alike, a key to successful outcomes will be the reflection of sound research in government policies,” he says.

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Notes to Editors:

IWMI is one of the 15 international agriculture research centers supported by the CGIAR, the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research. IWMI’s mission is to improve the management of land and water resources for food, livelihoods and nature.

The Comprehensive Assessment on Water Management in Agriculture was jointly supported by the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) together with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.