



Global push to predict weather

Peter Michael

AUSTRALIAN Governor-General Michael Jeffery yesterday revealed he had spoken with the US, Russia and China about developing a joint space-age project which could accurately predict droughts, floods and cyclones.

The Governor-General, on a tour of flood-ravaged Mackay yesterday, said he held talks with George W. Bush, Russia's Vladimir Putin and China's Hu Jintao about the need for a sophisticated long-range weather forecasting system.

"If we can put men into space, imagine what we could do if we could accurately predict the key global question of the weather?," Maj-Gen Jeffery said.

"Imagine if we could tell where the rain was going to fall and how much.

"We could predict drought, floods and extreme climatic events and give farmers and governments and residents time to prepare for both the good times and bad.

"It is particularly relevant given what we've been seeing in Mackay and Emerald.

"It would save a lot of heartburn in the years to come."

Maj-Gen Jeffery said he had raised the prospect of a joint global weather project in discussions with heads of state at the APEC conference in Sydney last year.

"President Hu Jintao, President Bush and President Putin all saw the rationale behind the request," he said.

"We agreed we need to put more research, time, effort and money into accurate, long-range weather forecasting."

Maj-Gen Jeffery praised the spirit of the community of Mackay in fighting back from disaster.

"I've never seen such massive amounts of water moving through dams, and down rivers, and across flat country," he said.

"Wherever I have gone around this country I see Aussies putting their shoulders to the wheel in the face of adversity. Someone who has lost half a house is down the road helping someone who has lost a whole home.

"There is just this great sense of community and of mateship; it was forged in war, and in the war against floods and fire we show the same spirit."

The weather bureau's state regional director, Jim Davidson, welcomed a global superpower weather project.

He said the CSIRO and his agency presently shared a super-computer to predict long-range forecasts.

"There is merit and truth in what the Governor-General is saying and if more resources were available we could likely see an immediate improvement in weather forecasting," he said. "We are doing a lot of work in those areas."