

# Best soil lost to rivers

THE nation's most fertile soil is being swept into rivers, lakes and the Great Barrier Reef at an unsustainable rate, a new report on Australian agriculture has found.

Released yesterday, the National Land and Water Resources Audit report found that almost 20 million tonnes of dirt was being lost down rivers and streams every year, 12 million tonnes from Queensland farms alone.

Almost 19,000 tonnes of phosphorous is being lost from farms, and

141,000 tonnes of nitrogen – for which farmers are paying to improve the soil – is also being drained away.

The report found soil acidification was the biggest environmental problem facing Australian farms, with about 25 per cent of the country's annual crop production lost because the soils were too acidic.

Agriculture Minister Warren Truss said the report showed the soil loss was not just a problem for farmers. It also affected surrounding communities and downstream industries.