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Ser No 03/12

Date of issue: 9 Dec 03

PRESS RELEASE

Sweet Water Canal

On Tuesday 02 December the Sweet Water Canal in Basrah suffered a major breach with structural damage extending over approximately 10m with the bank almost completely washed away on one side. Cracks in the lining had allowed water to seep behind the concrete and, over time, wash away the soil underneath. This left the concrete lining with no means of support causing the collapse. The combination of increasing flow levels and the recent wet weather both helped bring about the spectacular failure.

Pump station 2 was instructed to stop pumping into the canal and Coalition Force engineers and the local irrigation authority visited the site to view the extent of the damage. The irrigation authority devised a plan for the repair, estimating that it would take 3 to 4 days, and quickly moved its equipment to the site. The breach was over 8km from the nearest road and the ground around the breach was completely saturated further hampering the irrigation authority's reconstruction efforts.

The repair was simple but effective, using plant to reconstruct the banks and lining the channel with rocks. The repair was completed on Saturday and pump station 2 resumed pumping on Sunday to refill the canal and the reservoir. The reservoir is currently undergoing repairs conducted by Bechtel. One half of the reservoir has just been cleaned and maintained and will now be refilled as the water levels in the canal rise improving its effectiveness and storage capacity hopefully improving the performance of reverse osmosis and the water situation in Basrah.

ENDS

Images are available from Reuters or AFP. Also, the website www.operations.mod.uk/telic contains a library of images that you can download free of charge.