

GREAT ARTESIAN BASIN COORDINATING COMMITTEE

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SUMMARY OF MEETING OUTCOMES - GABCC 36, Sydney 20-21 October 2016

GAB Strategic Management Plan

The Committee NOTED a paper circulated by the Australian Government outlining the process of drafting the SMP.

The Chair led a series of conversations about principles and content, to serve as a basis for feedback and guidance at the half-way point in drafting.

The Committee developed a summary of over-arching expectations of the SMP, based on available knowledge of stakeholder issues and needs, to underpin its style and tone. This included:

- recognising divergent expectations for the SMP, as a policy document for governments, to which governments will 'sign up' and be accountable, and a strategic plan for the whole of the Basin for all users and managers, which will include community and stakeholder views
- need for management at both whole-of-Basin level and at State/Territory level
- what has been achieved through previous collaborative effort
- a framework to guide water use and management by defining: high-level Basin-wide outcomes and targets (*what*); and high-level principles which underpin achievement of those outcomes (*why*); which in turn will shape specific actions (*how*) in State/Territory plans
- consistency in policy and outcomes across the Basin, while respecting differences in jurisdictional frameworks and plans
- transparency in decision-making, based on best available science and understanding
- clear commitment and accountabilities for taking action to pursue outcomes and targets, in accordance with the principles
- dependence on GAB water of arid zone communities and socio-economic structures
- non-use values in biodiversity and cultural heritage resources which rely on GAB water
- the Basin as a declining and finite resource which requires judicious use and stewardship of remaining pressure, temperature and water quality if we are to ensure that its benefits continue to be available for as long as possible
- a compartmentalised resource, with only certain parts of the Basin accessible; a resource defined by reliability and costs of access (beyond which use may become uneconomic)
- clear expectations for all water user sectors into the future, including anticipated changes in management practices
- a basis for certainty and confidence in how Basin resources are managed and used, in order to attract investment
- guidance in responsible planning and management for growing use of Basin resources, including management of third party impacts on users
- incorporation of State/Territory cultural heritage legislation, and the value of jurisdictional plans making a distinct cultural water allocation for Indigenous cultural and economic purposes (noting that some plans do have these provisions)

- shared need for collection, validation, and regular reporting of data and information on use of Basin resources
- need for continuing technical advice to develop 'dashboard' indicators of resource condition to enable monitoring of, and responses to, impacts of use
- limited applicability of water trading.

The Committee developed a summary of 'drivers'/incentives for coordinated whole-of-Basin management, including:

- State/Territory boundaries having no effect on the function of the Basin or on intrinsic values, including biodiversity and cultural heritage connections
- pressure being shared, so solutions to problems need to be shared
- pressure losses in one part being transferred very quickly to elsewhere in the system
- need for management across jurisdictions to be consistent, towards shared outcomes and targets
- shared obligation of all jurisdictions and stakeholders to enable the Basin to provide benefits for as long as possible, by avoiding/mitigating unacceptable impacts
- needs for monitoring, reporting and data sharing to be consistent across jurisdictions to enable coordinated evaluation of impacts and responses
- cooperative and collaborative management to enable collation, validation and sharing of information and understanding, and building of trust (all required for coordinated responses to issues)

The Committee developed outcomes and targets for some areas of shared concern, to indicate an appropriate level of guidance in the SMP. These included: accounting and metering, monitoring and reporting, and water rights and responsibilities.

GAB Economic Report

The Chair welcomed the report arising from this initiative of the GABCC and funded by the GABCC budget, and noted that the report had been brought to the attention of Minister Joyce as a GABCC initiative. The final report from Frontier Economics was made available to the public in August 2016. The website contains background information and a report summary, with a link to the report.

Comments included: reinforcement of the case that it is worth caring for the GAB; media interest resulting in requests for interviews; and the need for caution around potential inaccuracies and assumptions about uses which may be drawing on GAB water.

The Committee is to develop a factsheet about the GAB Economic Report, to communicate to stakeholders the main findings and implications for management.

GABCC Operating Arrangements

The Australian Government tabled a paper at the meeting proposing changes to GABCC Operating Arrangements.

Discussion included concerns about: ambiguities, inconsistencies or inaccuracies in the paper; pre-empting changes which would be discussed widely in the context of developing the SMP; downgrading government agency representation to observer status; removal of technical advice for the Committee; and incorrect representation of the existing link between the Chair and GAB Ministers. Non-government members are to prepare a response to the proposed changes for the next meeting.

GAB Bore Audit report

A near-final draft of the GAB bore audit report (*Summary of past drilling activity within the Great Artesian Basin*) was tabled. This GABCC initiative, which comprised the first real idea of what has been installed across the Basin, would plug a significant knowledge gap and contribute to a sensible approach to long-term asset maintenance.

Non-government members are to compile views on principles for, and a desired form of, a future asset maintenance program, to form the basis of formal advice and request to all Ministers.

Subcommittees and Finance Committee

The Committee noted the Finance report, and discussed aspects of Communication, including: the GABCC website; access to archival material and images; the factsheet on whole-of-Basin monitoring; and effectiveness of the toll-free number.

Jurisdiction and Sector reports

Indigenous sector - a report prepared by Alan Holt about Indigenous sector SMP consultation to be circulated to members, seeking responses to questions from Indigenous stakeholders

South Australian government- release of the plan for SA Arid Lands; provision of the SA wells booklet

Australian Government- Office of Water Science Bioregional Assessments update; springs work in the Barcaldine, Springvale, Flinders River and Springsure areas; inclusion of GAB water in the Northern Australia Water Resource Assessments (Mitchell River), taken into account in the Qld water resource plan; allocation of all GABSI4 funds, with no roll-over after Jun 2017

Queensland government- release of the report by KCB (Klohn Crippen Berger) and the Qld GAB water resource plan in Dec 2016, to have a 120-day consultation period

Next Meeting

GABCC 37 is scheduled for 15-16 Dec 2016 in Canberra, to include a research-focused session to: update members on significant knowledge development since the last GAB Researchers Forum in 2013; and enable a strategic discussion of the application of science to policy in the context of developing the SMP.