

# GREAT ARTESIAN BASIN COORDINATING COMMITTEE

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## SUMMARY OF MEETING OUTCOMES - GABCC 37 Canberra 14-15 December 2016

### GAB Strategic Management Plan

Once again at this meeting, the preparation of the GAB Strategic Management Plan (SMP) dominated the agenda. The Committee discussed progress and a changed timeline, and the consultation and communication plans, as well as draft SMP content (in an incomplete draft).

Members expressed concerns about:

- not having a complete draft for the outcomes and actions, governance and implementation sections, which constrained their ability to consider the draft content
- the need to clarify different roles of the SMP and coordinated governance, as members saw coordinated governance as an essential mechanism to implement the SMP successfully, rather than having the same role as the SMP itself
- the need for the proposed short form of the SMP, whilst concise in its content, to be inclusive and to engage all stakeholders so they fully understand the implications and outcomes of the plan
- information collation and sharing having an apparently low priority within the SMP, as many stakeholders consider it essential to have a forum for exchange of sound evidence and critical thinking to enable shared understanding
- reliance on regulation being unlikely to be effective unless users are actively involved in development of policy and plans

Discussion of draft SMP content included expectations of the SMP to:

- be clear on its intended audience
- emphasise near the start of the plan that the Basin is essentially a declining resource
- provide a sense of reliability to existing users
- include links to background information and discussion sufficient to make clear which parts of the SMP are relevant to users, with resources tailored to different types of users
- provide clear linkages to risks based on evidence, e.g. data and conclusions identified in the bore report, including the nature and scale of risks and potential measures to address them
- emphasise the need for adequate resourcing of evidence gathering, data collation, validation and sharing to enable the SMP to deliver
- address adequately issues related to co-produced water and reinjection
- establish a connection with users by development of 'scenarios' to establish a link between policy and process and problems users can relate to, in turn sending strong messages about existing and future risks, based on evidence
- make good use of FAQs as complementary documents, in effect providing a 'smart index' to where/how in the plan specific issues are addressed and answers may be found
- give greater emphasis to biodiversity and broader environmental values (beyond groundwater-dependent ecosystems) as part of 'a healthy resource' and also 'information, knowledge and

understanding', making use of environmental indicators derived from e.g. the WaterSmart program and the SMP review

- encompass two layers of implementation: one in which State/Territory processes deliver what is needed and the other in which collective (whole-of-Basin) strategic level actions are required
- provide for a coordinated governance forum which can give users confidence, in turn requiring strength, resourcing and physical capacity to deliver

In discussion of process, members expressed concerns about:

- the length of time it has taken to develop a draft SMP, since the process commenced in July 2014
- a newly advised delay of two months in providing the final draft to the Steering Committee in mid- to late February at the earliest
- the delay precluding a joint consultation process with the Queensland GAB water planning consultation. Alignment of SMP consultation with that for the Lake Eyre Basin State of the Basin assessment was not considered ideal as the SMP is about a 15 year strategic plan of a groundwater resource and the LEB consultation is about the status of a surface water resource
- a constricted period available for stakeholder consultation, now unlikely to commence until April 2017 (at least). If consultation timelines are short there is a risk that the plan is seen as being imposed without listening to and addressing stakeholder concerns and interests
- the need for more emphasis on face-to-face interactions in the consultation process rather than on-line consultation for regional stakeholders, due to unreliable internet connections in the Basin

#### **Indigenous stakeholder consultation for the SMP**

Alan Holt reported on activities undertaken to contact Indigenous stakeholders in NSW and Queensland to discuss the SMP. Jurisdictional members provided information to satisfy previous requests arising from these activities.

The consultation will now move on to organisations in South Australia and Northern Territory, noting the need to liaise and connect with SA Arid Lands NRM as they embark on imminent consultations.

#### **GABCC Operating Arrangements**

As agreed at GABCC 36, non-government members provided a response to the Australian Government paper tabled at that meeting. In summary, non-government members disagreed with most of the proposed changes as they would weaken the role and effectiveness of the Committee, were not justified by a sound case for change, and were an unhelpful distraction during finalisation of the SMP and the stakeholder consultation period.

Members emphasised the need for jurisdictions to remain members rather than become observers, so that 'bush culture' meets 'jurisdictional culture' (vital in selling messages and in understanding on-ground issues about caring for the resource and providing advice for development of policies).

Members were also concerned about the apparent downgrading of investment in water resource management across the nation, despite the demonstrable and increasing economic value of the resources, as evidenced by the loss of SCEW, WTOG, NWC, the non-reporting of water issues to COAG, and the reduction of the Australian Government contribution for GABCC.

The Chair is to convey to the Chair of Senior Officials Committee the response of non-government members to proposals for changed GABCC Operational Arrangements.

#### **GAB Infrastructure**

The Committee discussed the finalisation of GABSI 4 in June 2017, noting all 44 projects (27-QLD, 11-SA, 6-NSW) must be finalised by 30 June as funding will cease.

The Committee discussed post GABSI 4 maintenance investment options, expressing concerns about: consultation with GABCC of post GABSI 4 program options will not occur until after jurisdictions have

agreement. This will stifle opportunities for jurisdictions and community/industry to work together to define desirable outcomes and possible innovative options for investment post GABSI 4.

There was emphasis of the need to finish capping and piping and then to address infrastructure maintenance, noting that many stakeholders see capping and piping as a priority for their energies, rather than the SMP.

The Committee agreed to draft a scoping paper to state the post-GABSI situation and the extent of the challenge regarding Basin infrastructure and maintenance. The scoping paper will identify goals/outcomes and possible innovative options to address Basin infrastructure maintenance.

### **GAB Research**

The Committee received presentations from its three PhD scholarship recipients:

- Dr Renee Rossini - The ecology of endemic macro-invertebrates in GAB discharge springs
- Dr Krystina Mossop – Little fish, big desert: persistence in a variable arid environment
- Dr Nicholas Moran - Desert Goby (*Chamydogobius eremius*) behaviour in arid Australian waterholes: community level interactions and individual level variability

The Committee received a brief summary of findings of the Geoscience Australia GAB research workshop (April 2016).

The meeting discussed key GAB research questions to be considered and given priority attention in future investment, particularly knowledge gaps which inhibit the ability to manage the GAB resource at a whole-of-basin level and achieve the agreed outcomes.

These matters will help to shape the next GAB Researchers Forum in 2017, to be convened by GABCC.

### **Subcommittee + Finance Committee reports**

The Committee noted the Finance report, and discussed **communication issues** which had been raised at GABCC 36.

### **Jurisdiction, Sector and Technical reports**

Reports and discussion included:

- NSW - a map of pressure recovery in NSW
- Queensland - legislative changes, release of the WRP in 2017 with consultation until April, release of unallocated water, GABSI 4 roll-out, and CSG groundwater modelling
- South Australia - Regional NRM Plan (including spring protection) in a consultation phase; a WAP to be developed after the current compliance round is complete; purchase of Kidman stations in SA; use of scenarios with SAAL NRM for SMP consultation
- conversations with local government regarding support for the SMP. Roderick Gilmour reported that the QGABAC Board is being reconstituted

### **GABCC Annual Report**

The GABCC Annual Report is due by 31 December each year. The Committee accepted a draft Annual Report for 2015-16.

### **Next Meeting**

The Committee will meet for a final opportunity to review the draft SMP before its release for consultation, likely to be in February-March (subject to a draft being available). The focus will be on the final draft plus scenarios to aid stakeholder engagement, and strategies for communication and consultation.