



## Summary of Outcomes from GABCC 34 Meeting -Sydney 15-16 October 2015

The Great Artesian Basin Coordinating Committee (the Committee) held its thirty-fourth meeting in Sydney on 15-16 October 2015. Ms Juanita Hamparsum is Chair of the Committee. Mr Matt Coulton, water advisor to Mr Niall Blair attended the morning of day 1.

### Strategic Management Plan Review 2015

The review of the current Strategic Management Plan (the Plan) was completed in 2015. The Committee discussed the findings of the review around the topics of:

- Achievements in Basin Management
- Ongoing issues for consideration in the development of the new Plan
- New issues for consideration in the development of a new Plan
- Additional issues not covered or raised within the Review.

The outcome from these discussions will be considered, along with the review document findings, in the development of the new Plan to be completed in 2016. Further information is available at <https://www.environment.gov.au/water/environment/great-artesian-basin/strategic-management-plan>.

### New Strategic Management Plan for the Great Artesian Basin

The Australian government reported that work has commenced on the new Plan for the Great Artesian Basin (the Basin). The new Plan will be developed by the Australian, state and territory governments in consultation with the Committee, national organisations and water users. In developing a new Plan for the Basin outcomes from previous reviews will be considered.

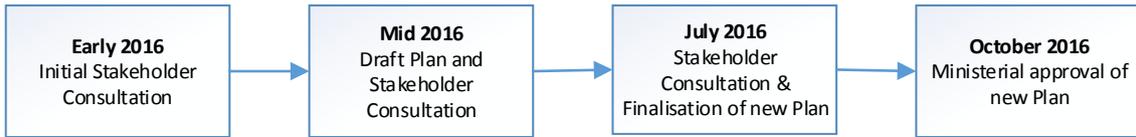
Key issues raised by the committee during discussions were:

- Need for long term maintenance of bores to increase productivity, water use efficiency and property values via secured water access.
- education of water users about bore asset management and long term maintenance of all water infrastructure.
- achievements of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative, particularly in changing the culture of rural communities on water management.
- need to implement and enforce charges for water wastage post an educational program for bore asset management.
- further promotion of Great Artesian Basin Champions.
- an economic value of Great Artesian Basin needs to be determined.
- Need for improved monitoring and data collection.

An initial consultation seeking stakeholder's views on key issues in the GAB will occur in early 2016. Figure 1 below illustrates the timeline for the new Plan's development. Information on the consultation process will be updated on the Committee's website as information becomes available.

[www.gabcc.gov.au](http://www.gabcc.gov.au) or visit <https://www.environment.gov.au/water/environment/great-artesian-basin/strategic-management-plan>.

Figure 1 Strategic Management Plan Timeline



The Committee members will continue to consult with their respective organisations in the Plan's development process. The Plan will identify the key goals and objectives for the whole of basin management of the GAB for the next 15 years.

### **Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative (GABSI)**

The Australian government reported that all basin governments have signed the GABSI Agreement. Jurisdictions advised the Committee of GABSI's progress in their states. It is anticipated that over the coming months New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia will submit projects.

The current GABSI program announced in 2014 has \$14.5mill of remaining funds to spend prior to the programs completion in June 2017.

The Committee noted that the number of GAB bores and water infrastructure is vast with an approximate value of \$3.2 billion. The GABSI programs to date have spent approx. \$168 million to maintain these assets. Since the commencement of GABSI over 800 bores have been controlled (either capped or rehabilitated) and over 22,000km of open bore drains removed.

With only eighteen months of the program remaining it is essential that stakeholders who are interested in participating in capping and piping works apply as soon as possible. This type of infrastructure works take considerable time and involve financial planning for the matching funds required; a difficult task for many landholders currently affected by drought. Currently there is no provision for GABSI 4 being extended as has occurred in the past. For this reason we strongly urge stakeholders to utilise the current funding available by contacting your state government agencies.

Jurisdictions were requested by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to consider other infrastructure projects permissible under the funding agreement.

### **Great Artesian Basin Bore Data Collection**

At the Committee meeting in December 2014, the long term maintenance requirements of the bore assets in the Great Artesian Basin (the Basin) were discussed. To determine the scale of the issue for consideration in the future Strategic Management Plan state governments were requested to collate bore data on the age of all bore assets and drilling within and through the Basin.

A draft report was provided by state governments at the meeting and includes all bores drilled into and through the Basin, including recharge and non artesian areas.

Members thanked the jurisdictions for compiling the bore data and agreed it was a valuable piece of information that should be regularly updated, every 5 years at a minimum, to align with the Strategic Management Plan review.

A copy of the report will be available on the Committee's website in February 2016.

### **Economic Output of GAB Sectors**

The review of the Strategic Management Plan (the Plan) identified a need to better understand, assess and report on the social and economic values of Basin water resources. Given the significant data gaps for Basin water use, it is currently difficult to accurately determine the contribution of Basin water to the industries that depend on the resource.

On behalf of the Committee, the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has commissioned the development of a report on the economic value of Great Artesian Basin dependent sectors around current and future water use and users in the Basin.

## **GAB State Water Plans**

Jurisdictions advised the committee that:

- New South Wales are starting to collate data for their Water Plan that is due in 2018. New South Wales noted that Irrigators are using more water due to the drought.
- South Australia consulting on their water plan in early 2016 and is being led by the South Australia Arid Lands Natural Resource Management Board.
- Queensland commenced reviewing their water plan and are in the process of holding public meetings. Broader (whole of resource) issues raised from consultations will be forwarded to the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

Chair asked jurisdictions to provide the Committee with key issues for consideration in the Strategic Management Plan that may arise from their consultation processes and that State Water plans need to take into consideration the GAB Strategic Management Plan.

## **Sub Committee reports**

### **Finance Subcommittee reported**

The 2015-16 budget for the Committee has been approved with funding mainly focussed on the development of the new Strategic Management Plan.

Concern was raised by the Committee on the different levels of funding for the Great Artesian Basin and the Lake Eyre Basin. The Committee would like to see funding for the GABCC to be reviewed as part of any governance changes and in developing the new Strategic Management Plan.

### **Communications Subcommittee reported**

A low resolution digital version of the Great Artesian Basin Poster Map will be available on the Committee's website for downloading.

The GABCC 2013-14 Annual Report is now available on the Committee's website.

## **Jurisdiction Reports**

### **Australian Government reported**

In July 2015, the Australian government launched the Agricultural Competitiveness white paper which included the National Water Infrastructure Development Fund to accelerate investment in securing our future water supplies. The process of the fund, including timing, is currently being finalised.

The Australian Government is progressing work on the Bioregional Assessments. Scientific analysis is well advanced in a number of the bioregions with a range of products regularly being released. Those interested in the Assessments are encouraged to subscribe to the Bioregional Assessment quarterly e-newsletter at [www.bioregionalassessments.gov.au/newsletter.shtml](http://www.bioregionalassessments.gov.au/newsletter.shtml).

### **Queensland government reported**

#### **Strategic Review of the Water Legislation – update**

The Water Reform and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2014 (the WROLA Act) was passed in late 2014. It proposed a consistent framework for the petroleum and gas and mining sectors for the management of underground water.

In February this year, Queensland Government deferred the commencement of these provisions to consider its alignment with the government's position.

#### **New Great Artesian Basin Water Plan**

The Water Resource (*Great Artesian Basin*) Plan 2006 (GAB WRP) provides the framework for the sustainable management of Queensland's GAB groundwater. The GAB WRP is due to expire on 1 September 2016 and a replacement plan must be gazetted prior to this date.

#### Statement of Proposals to prepare a new Plan

On 4 September 2015 the Minister for Natural Resources released, for public comment, a Statement of Proposals to prepare a new Great Artesian Basin Water Resource Plan. This is the first public step in the development of a new GAB water resource plan.

#### GABSI Phase 4 Roll out

In late July, Queensland submitted to the Commonwealth its Stage 1 Bilateral Schedule identifying urgent projects that are eligible for Commonwealth funding. Subject to the approval of the bilateral schedule by the Commonwealth Minister, Queensland intends to seek a variation to the Stage 1 Bilateral schedule to include additional priority projects to be completed in 2015-16.

The delivery model for the new program is similar to a grants program based on submissions from landholders. While landholders have welcomed the new GABSI Phase 4 funding, many Queensland landholders are being impacted by severe drought conditions and have expressed concern about being able to participate in the Phase Four program due to cash flow constraints.

Further information can be found on the Department of Natural Resource and Mines website at [www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/water/catchments-planning/catchments/great-artesian-basin](http://www.dnrm.qld.gov.au/water/catchments-planning/catchments/great-artesian-basin).

#### South Australian government reported

South Australia has completed its planned program works under the GABSI 3 National Partnership Agreement which concluded in June 2015. Combined State and Commonwealth contribution was \$6.2 million.

DEWNR is continuing to monitor the flowing and non-flowing monitoring wells that form the South Australian portion of the national network.

DEWNR has made a decision to revert back to a twice yearly manual monitoring program as the data logging/instrument packages that were installed under the original program have had problems despite best efforts to overcome these issues.

#### Guide for 'Sustainable Water Management and Mining Development in South Australia'

A draft guideline is being developed to provide a base level framework for how the South Australian Government manages the mining and water interface. This project is the culmination of over two years work to develop a state-wide policy for managing the interaction of mining with water resources. It is expected that the guideline will be released in late 2015.

#### Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Water Knowledge Program

DEWNR has lead a suite of projects which aim to improve the knowledge of water resources, water-dependent ecosystems and the potential impacts of coal seam gas and coal mining. These projects are part of the Australian Government's Lake Eyre Basin (LEB) Bioregional Assessment. Two of the three projects were completed in June 2015 delivering to the Commonwealth Office of Water Science substantial additional knowledge on the Arckaringa and Pedirka groundwater basins, the western LEB rivers surface water systems and the ecosystems that depend on these resources.

#### Desert Jewels Project

The Desert Jewels project is developing and implementing management actions to restore and maintain spring habitat critical for the survival of the GAB springs ecological community. The project's primary focus is on the Dalhousie and Lake Eyre supergroups. In recognition of the critical role of Aboriginal traditional knowledge, the project has extended a grant to the Arabana Aboriginal Corporation to build their natural

resource management capacity and support their participation in spring management. Arabana community members have been trained in spring monitoring and participated in installing a network of remote cameras and data loggers on springs.

### Review of the South Australian Arid Lands (SAAL) Natural Resources Management (NRM) Plan

The SAAL NRM Board's review of its Regional NRM Plan and Water Allocation Plan (WAP) for the Far North Prescribed Wells Area corresponds well with the development of the SMP and its associated communication and engagement activities. The Regional NRM Plan is expected to be completed by 30 June 2016, with statutory consultation occurring between February and April 2016 at the same time as the GAB SMP.

#### New South Wales government reported

New South Wales government coordinated and provided the GAB bore data report on behalf of the jurisdictions.

New South Wales advised the committee that the NSW government was going through a review which included the Department of Primary Industries and Water, in particular the service delivery in the state. When the Committee meets next they should be in a better position to advise the Committee of the outcome of the review.

#### Northern Territory government reported

Northern Territory advised that there was no GAB activity currently happening in the Territory.

## Sector Reports

#### Community Environment representative reported

The Committee was advised that parts of Queensland are experiencing a serious drought and that little agricultural activity was happening in these areas with no stock sales for the last couple of years. Access to GAB water has been crucial for landholders at this time.

#### South Australian Community representative reported

After extensive discussions and development the SMP Review and revision paper has highlighted many of the key issues that have been discussed by the GABCC since the decision was made to review and revise the SMP. It will provide a very useful framework within which to develop a new SMP. However, in terms of extraction of water for stock and domestic use it misses the mark on some issues of real concern to the community of users that I represent.

Any perception that extraction rates for stock and domestic use in the GAB has been addressed and is not an issue for the new SMP is not at all helpful. A short paper "Do God Given Rights include God Given Responsibilities" summarises some of the issues that still remain and should be addressed within the new SMP. A copy of the paper is available on the Committee's website.

#### New South Wales Community Report

The NSW GABAG has met and discussed the continuation of the GABCC, the Cap & Pipe the Bores Scheme and CSG issues within the Basin. NSW GABAG is pleased with the outcomes of the continuation of GABCC and the Cap & Pipe the Bores Scheme at the present time. GABSI must continue until all bores are done, with no exceptions and all wastage is stopped.

A short meeting with the Hon Mark Coulton MP and Parliamentary Secretary Bob Baldwin MP occurred in July to discuss the future of the GABCC and the Cap & Pipe the Bores Scheme while they were on a Murray – Darling tour. Both expressed enthusiasm and acknowledged the importance of the scheme.

#### Queensland Community representative reported

Since the last Committee meeting QGABAC we have held two meetings with another scheduled to be held on November 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> 2015. The June Brisbane meeting covered a range of topics. Mark

Foreman with Mary Horton conducted a further workshop session on the GAB WRP. Mr Vern Rudwick (DAF) provided a presentation on tax deductible water infrastructure policy. Other speakers include Michael Jamison, Steven Flook & Craig Walton conducted a workshop re new water allocations.

Mr Randall Cox provided an update on the Groundwater Impact Assessment activities. The next meeting is scheduled for the 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> October in Brisbane.

#### Agriculture representative reported

The NFF has welcomed the renewal of Commonwealth Funding for a further 3 years as announced last year. It provides certainty for many farmers reliant on Bores. The NFF is interested in the progress that has occurred in resolving any issues regarding administration arrangements so that capping and piping projects that have been waiting for a green light are progressed.

The NFF maintains its support for the 15 year SMP review. The NFF and its members will engage in the review process to a greater extent once the documents have been approved by the Co-ordinating Committee and released for public comment.

#### Community Agriculture Sector representative reported

The agricultural sector sees GABSI as a valuable programme and welcomes its extension until 2017. The agriculture sector is also looking forward to engaging in the development of a new Strategic Management Plan as it will be a valuable document in the management of the GAB.

#### Mining Sector representative reported

In 2011 the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) commenced establishing a nationally consistent water accounting and reporting framework for the minerals industry that incorporates measures for both water quality and quantity. The MCA has recently completed a stocktake of framework implementation illustrating a positive result of widespread use of the framework within the industry. Furthermore, its use has facilitated benchmarking within companies, improved water management and improved communication between internal and external stakeholders.

The National Water Commission (NWC) has released its triennial assessment. The report makes a number of recommendations relevant to the mining industry. In addition the NWC released a paper on the NWI and extractive industries, including mining and unconventional gas. The paper comments on a range of issues to improve the implementation of the NWI principles in terms of water planning, project approval processes, adaptive management measures and better coordination with industry in terms of regulations, scientific understanding of groundwater and planning structures for multiple water management units.

#### Indigenous Sector representative reported

The Indigenous Sector Representative attended a “no Fracking in NT” rally at Katherine NT March 2015. Concerns on Indigenous, Pastoral, Environmental and water table damage with the process of Fracking were expressed.

The Indigenous community still has some concerns regarding the water source for the Carmichael Coal Mining Project and the effects to Cultural flows and environment in the area.

#### APPEA representative reported

APPEA CSG industry data for Q2 in Queensland and NSW were provided along with the progress of Queensland LNG exports from Gladstone which has totalled almost \$1.4 billion in the first eight months of operation. The GLNG project is at the commissioning stage, and the APLNG project is expected to commence commissioning in coming months.

#### Environment Sector representative reported

Mining and unconventional gas continue to dominate the environment sector's concerns about the GAB. The sector is appalled by the federal government's support for mega-mines in the Galilee Basin.

Major concern also exists around the impacts of the Linc Energy underground coal gasification (UCG) pilot project at Hopeland near Chinchilla which may have contaminated more than 300 square kilometres of strategic cropping land. Landholders activities have been restricted and further urgent investigations is required regarding the extent of contamination, status of the Springbok aquifer and the continuation of CSG company's activities within the area.

### **More Information**

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