

News from the LEB CAC



LAKE EYRE BASIN MINISTERIAL FORUM

Community Advisory Committee

Number 1

April 2004

Introduction

The Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed six months ago.

The CAC provides community advice, representation and feedback to the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum, on water and related natural resource issues in the Lake Eyre Basin. The CAC represents Aboriginal, pastoral, agricultural, mining, petroleum, conservation and tourism interests, as well as interests related to the Cooper Creek and Georgina-Diamantina River Systems.

The CAC works in cooperation with the Lake Eyre Basin Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP) to provide a balance of community feedback and scientific/technical information to the Ministerial Forum.

This news-sheet outlines some of the issues that the CAC is dealing with in its first six months.

Georgina Diamantina Draft Water Resource Plan

The Queensland Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy released the Georgina Diamantina Draft Water Resource Plan for public comment in November 2003.

The public comment period closed on 9th April 2004.

The CAC and the SAP submitted joint comments on the draft to the LEB Ministerial Forum. The CAC and SAP commended the draft plan as a first attempt at a water management framework for the catchments, but felt that some shortcomings in the plan needed attention.

Key comments in our submission were:

- **Presentation and clarity:** The community were consulted widely before the plan was prepared. However, much of the core information in the draft plan was difficult to understand, and the purposes and intent of the draft plan were in places confusing. The plan was difficult and time consuming to review, which would reduce the feedback that the Minister received from the community.
- **Community consultation:** The Qld Government made a genuine effort to consult the community widely about the draft plan. However, many people who rely on the resources of the catchment or have other interests in the river system were not engaged or have not understood the plan or its relevance well enough to make comment. The CAC and SAP felt that consultation methods should be reviewed to get better feedback from the community.
- **Overland flow and stock and domestic water use:** Stock and domestic water use is potentially the largest user of overland flow in the catchment. This usage was not estimated or addressed in the draft plan. Stock and domestic water use from any source does not fall under the jurisdiction of the draft plan. The CAC and SAP felt that these issues left large gaps in the plan, and cast some doubt on whether the plan could truly define water availability for the catchment and manage water sustainably into the future.
- **Cross-border issues:** The South Australian portions of the catchments were not mentioned in the draft plan, and the plan provided little opportunity for the Queensland Government to consider the needs of water users and the environment in South Australia. The draft plan also included no commitment to cooperate with the South Australian Government in monitoring water flows and water quality, nor any commitment to make use of South Australian monitoring data in implementing and reviewing the plan. The CAC and SAP felt that this oversight was a serious obstacle to

genuine cross-border management of these catchments.

- **Uncertainty of water supply:** The draft plan provided for limited water supplies to proposed future development projects, subject to rigorous assessment. However, it did not explicitly address the challenge of providing reliable, continuous water supply from a highly variable system. The CAC and SAP felt that the demand for reliable water supplies for major, water-dependent projects may jeopardise other water needs in the catchments during the predominant periods of low flow. They felt the draft plan may be giving more prominence to the needs of future major projects than to the need to manage water cautiously in a highly variable system.

To see a full copy of the joint CAC/SAP submission, please contact the CAC Facilitator, Mr Vol Norris on (07) 4658 0617 or email: vol.norris@deh.gov.au.

Petroleum exploration drilling

Environmental concerns in relation to petroleum exploration drilling in the lower basin were raised with the CAC at its November 2003 meeting.

International companies new to the region had recently commenced petroleum exploration drilling in the lower basin, and concerns were raised about the ability of regulatory systems to ensure these companies met environmental requirements.

Petroleum exploration is regulated by the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA (PIRSA) in South Australia, and by the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (DNRME) in Queensland. Representatives from both departments presented information to the CAC at its second meeting in Adelaide on 4 February 2004. From these discussions, it appears that regulation of exploration activity is more or less consistent with the systems that have been set up by state

agencies, and that departures from these regulations are not common and are addressed by agencies when they become known.

However, Queensland and South Australian government representatives welcome feedback from landholders about petroleum exploration activity. They encourage landholders to remain

vigilant of petroleum exploration work on their properties, and to report any activity they believe is inappropriate. Agencies in both states also stress that exploration companies are legally obliged to adequately notify landholders about access to their properties, and that under some circumstances

landholders have rights of negotiation and compensation in regard to petroleum exploration. More information is available from PIRSA in South Australia (08 846 33245) or DNRME in Queensland (07 3225 8207).

LEB Rivers Assessment

The Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment is required under the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement, signed in October 2000.

It is intended to be an assessment of the condition of all watercourses and catchments within the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement Area, and must be done as soon as possible after the date of the Agreement, and thereafter every ten years.

The LEB Ministerial Forum has commissioned the Centre for Riverine Landscapes at Griffith University (through Land and Water Australia) to compile a methodology for carrying out the first LEB Rivers Assessment. The methodology will be completed in May, and planning will begin for the Rivers Assessment soon afterwards. This assessment will provide a benchmark against which changes in the basin can be measured in future.



The Barcoo River 65 km NE of Windorah, on 22 March 2004, after flood-producing rain in the upper basin in January 2004. The LEB Rivers Assessment will provide a basin-wide indication of the health of rivers and related natural resources such as the Barcoo.

The LEB Rivers Assessment faces challenges similar to some of the difficulties faced by regional NRM Groups throughout the Australian rangelands. Rangeland systems are large and complex, time lags between human activities and their impacts can be long, and it is difficult to separate impacts caused by human activity from those caused by natural variations such as drought and flood. The Rivers Assessment methodology will address these difficulties, and will allow a best possible attempt at measuring the condition of the basin.

Background to the Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment can be viewed at <http://www.deh.gov.au/water/basins/lake-eyre/assessment.html>.

LEB Ministerial Forum Policies and Strategies

Under the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement, the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum is responsible for developing or adopting policies and strategies about water and related natural resources, to avoid adverse cross-border impacts.

On 25 October 2002 in Birdsville the Ministerial Forum approved five policies on:

- river flows
- water quality
- water and related natural resources
- existing entitlements and water resource development
- research and monitoring

These policies focus on achieving a balance between protecting the ecological integrity/natural function of in-stream and floodplain systems, and maintaining the viability of economic, social and cultural activities.

On 25 and 26 March, the LEB Ministerial Forum Secretariat met in Brisbane with representatives of the CAC, the SAP, Desert Channels Queensland, the SA Interim Rangelands Integrated Natural Resource Management Group, the SA Arid Areas Catchment Water Management Board and government officials from the Commonwealth, Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory, to discuss the development of strategies under the above policy areas.

A key question for the meeting was how best to coordinate policy and strategy development under the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement with natural resource planning and implementation by Regional NRM groups under NHT2, and with water resource planning institutions in state jurisdictions. Attendees proposed that strategies be developed that focus on widely agreed areas of greatest risk which may be difficult to address through regional or state arrangements.

The Ministerial Forum Secretariat plans to table this approach to strategy development with the Ministerial Forum at its next meeting in Alice Springs on 10 June 2004.

CAC meetings

The last CAC meeting (meeting no. 2) was held in Adelaide on 4 February 2004.

The next CAC meeting (meeting no. 3) will be in Alice Springs on Friday 11th June 2004, after the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum Meeting on 10th June. Issues to be discussed will include:

- heritage tourism in the basin, including review of the recently completed report 'Lake Eyre Basin Heritage Tourism—Future Directions'
- appropriateness of timing of NHT funds for projects whose implementation, timing and outcomes are determined by unpredictable environmental events, such as flood, drought and related ecological cycles
- Aboriginal engagement in Lake Eyre Basin discussions and consultations
- cross-border water resource planning.



Members of the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee—clockwise from rear left: Mick Roche (Qld), Joslin Eatts (Qld), Paul Woodland (SA), Rob Palmer (SA) (in place of Declan Andrews), George Cooley (SA), Angus Emmott (Qld) (Chair), Lesley Marshall (Qld), Vol Norris (Facilitator), David Brook (SA), Peter Douglas (Qld), Lynn Brake (SA), Maree Morton (SA), Denis Kenny (Qld). (Members absent from the photo: Declan Andrews, Sharon Oldfield)

CAC meetings are open to interested observers, with provision for closed sessions for discussion of sensitive or confidential matters.

For more information about the next CAC meeting, or to raise any issues to be included in the agenda, please contact the CAC Chair, Mr Angus Emmott, on 07 4658 5953 (akemmott@bigpond.com) or the CAC Facilitator, Mr Vol Norris, on 07 4658 4435 (vol.norris@deh.gov.au). Minutes of previous CAC meetings and advice to the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum are available from the CAC Facilitator.