

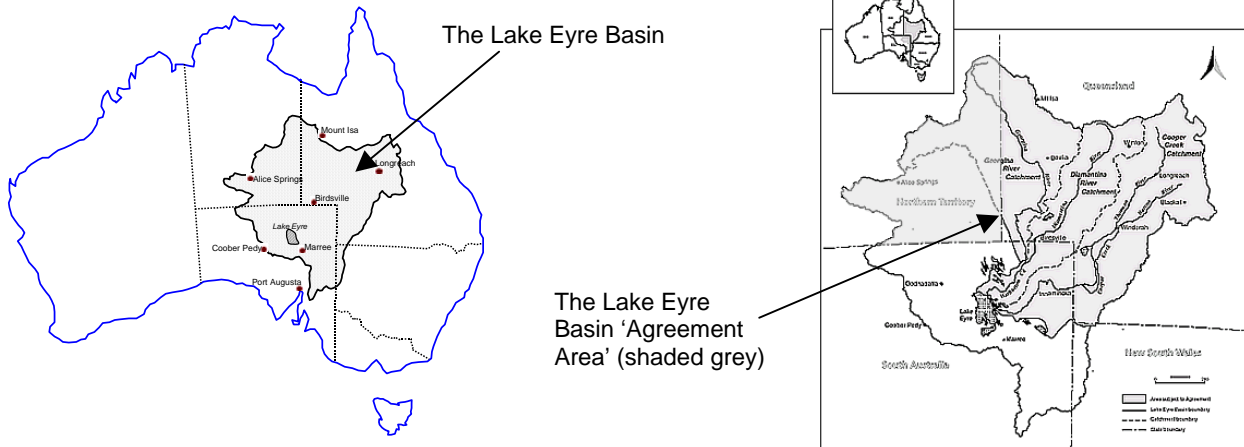
Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment Progress Summary

May 2005



What is the Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment and why are we doing it?

The Lake Eyre Basin (LEB) Rivers Assessment is a monitoring program designed to assess the condition of watercourses and catchments within the LEB 'Agreement Area'. The LEB Agreement requires the assessment to be completed as soon as possible after the commencement of the Agreement, and thereafter every ten years. To enable this formal reporting every ten years, information will need to be collected routinely in the intervening years. The assessment is essential to give us a picture how well we are using and managing the natural resources of the Basin.

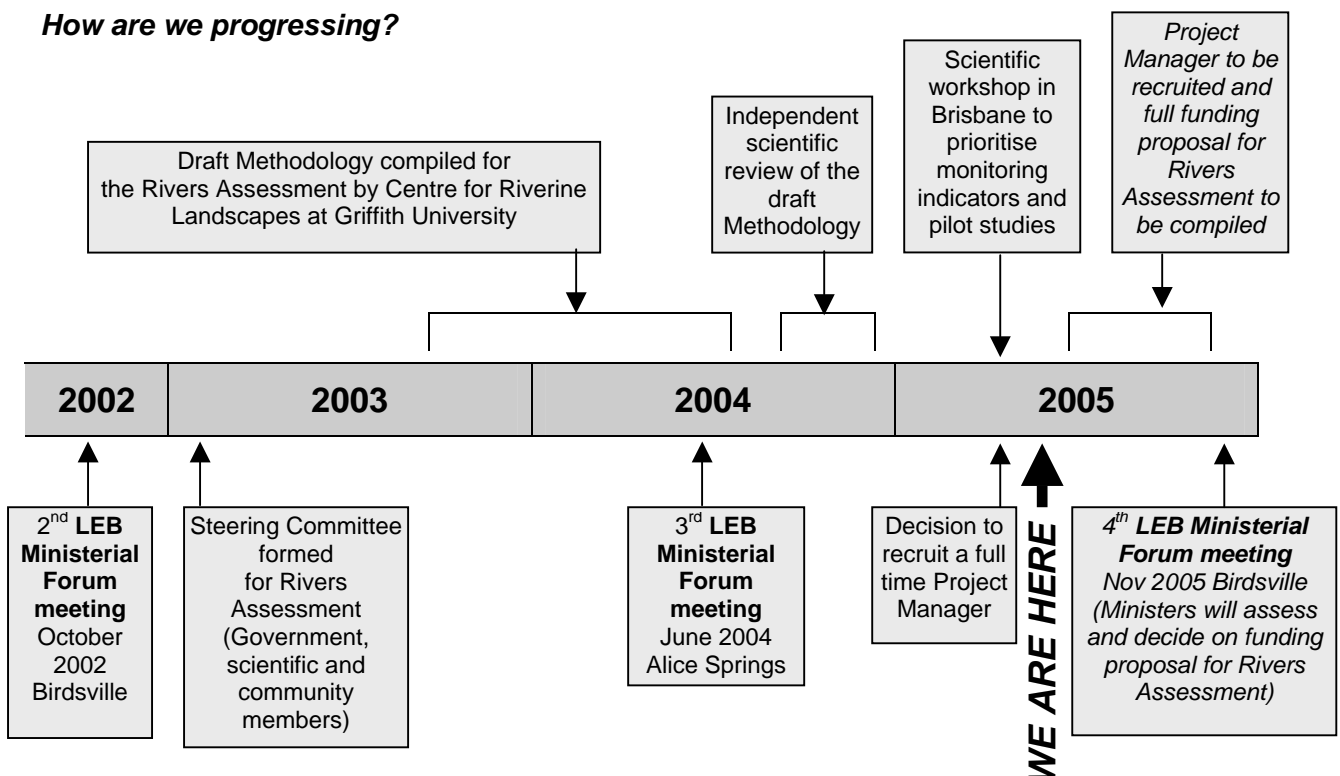


The Lake Eyre Basin

The Lake Eyre Basin, occupying almost one sixth of Australia, is among the world's largest internally draining river systems. The rivers of the Basin are unique on a world scale, with highly variable and unpredictable flow regimes creating a distinctive 'boom and bust' ecology. Both high and low flows have important ecological functions, and overall flow patterns, rather than just individual floods, are important to maintain the ecology of the Basin.

Methodologies for assessing rivers and catchments elsewhere in Australia and the world have limited application to the ephemeral rivers of a large, internal basin spanning multiple jurisdictions such as the LEB. In this regard, the Rivers Assessment is the first of its kind in the world, and designing a monitoring and assessment program for this purpose is a major challenge.

How are we progressing?



Developing a methodology for monitoring

A draft methodology for the Rivers Assessment was developed in 2004 by the Centre for Riverine Landscapes at Griffith University, and has been reviewed by independent scientists.

In March this year, a workshop of scientists, technicians, government officers and community representatives was held in Brisbane to discuss the recommendations in the methodology and some further questions posed by it, and to plan the initial monitoring work for the assessment.

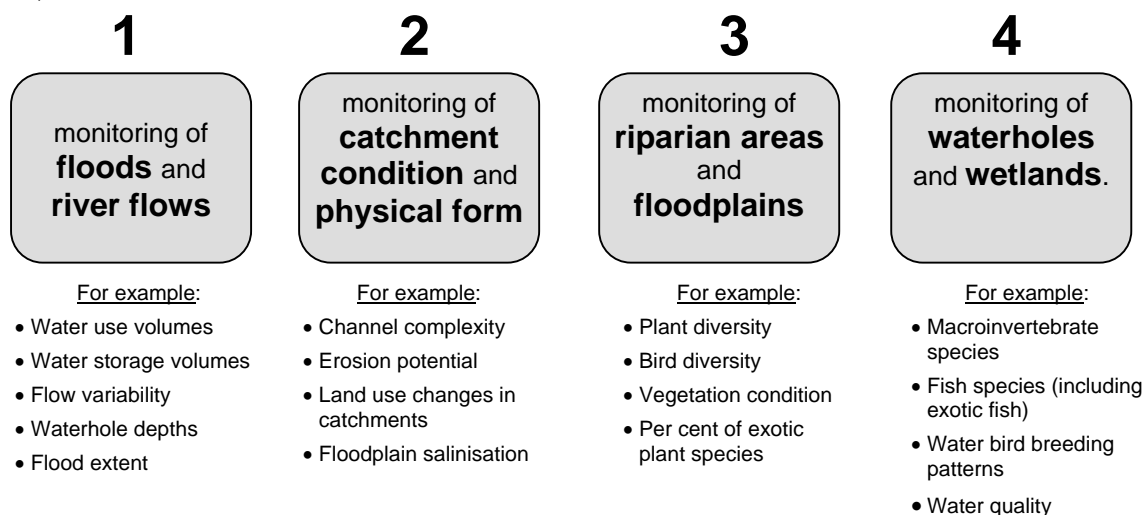
What kind of monitoring will be done?

In compiling the assessment methodology, Griffith University focused on:

Values of the Basin already identified under the LEB Agreement and in community plans (such as the Cooper's Creek and Georgina and Diamantina Catchment Strategic Plans)

Issues or threats in the Basin already identified by the Basin community, governments and scientists in earlier planning.

They divided the basin into an upper region of **Headwaters**, a middle region of **Channels and Waterholes**, and a lower region of **Terminating Wetlands** (salt lakes) and recommended that in order to get a reliable picture of the health of the Basin, four different sorts of monitoring will be needed, with different attributes to be monitored for each one:



Some of this monitoring can be started **immediately**, e.g. water licensing volumes, waterhole depths, riparian vegetation cover and diversity, and basic water quality. For some, **pilot studies** will be needed e.g. using satellite imagery to estimate off-stream storage volumes, measuring long-term flow variability, measuring floodplain salinisation and bird diversity. Other monitoring will require **further research** before it can be carried out reliably, such as erosion potential and landscape change.

Next Steps

Recruiting a Project Manager

A full-time Project Manager will be appointed for three years to coordinate the Rivers Assessment. We hope to fill that position soon with a temporary secondee while we recruit a longer-term appointee.

Funding proposal

Funding for the Rivers Assessment so far has been devoted to developing the methodology, which has proved a difficult and time consuming task. A fully costed funding proposal will now be compiled and submitted to the Ministerial Forum at its fourth meeting in November this year, seeking government funding under the LEB Agreement for the monitoring work required over the next several years. Compiling this proposal will be an important initial task of the Project Manager.

The results of the Rivers Assessment will be made available to the Basin community. For more information about the Lake Eyre Basin Rivers Assessment, please contact:

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