



Report

from the

Second Lake Eyre Basin Aboriginal Forum

23 – 24 August 2006

Mount Serle Station

South Australia



“Together we can understand and look after the Basin”

Report from the Second Lake Eyre Basin Aboriginal Forum, 23 – 24 August 2006, Mount Serle Station South Australia

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Cover photo: Sunrise over Mount Serle Station, northern Flinders Ranges, South Australia (Photograph: Vol Norris)

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SUMMARY

The second Lake Eyre Basin Aboriginal Forum was held on Tuesday 22nd and Wednesday 23rd August 2006 at Mt Serle Station in the northern Flinders Ranges, South Australia. The Aboriginal Forum is part of a program for involving Aboriginal people and interests in the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement.

Approximately 40 people attended the Forum from Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory and western New South Wales.

Purpose

The purposes of the Forum were to:

1. develop an Outreach Strategy to strengthen links with Aboriginal people and groups in the Lake Eyre Basin (LEB)
2. exchange knowledge and discuss Aboriginal priorities for water and related land issues
3. develop collaborations of mutual benefit in implementing the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement.

Discussions at the Forum were a mixture of large group sessions involving all participants, and smaller group sessions where people gathered with others from their State or Territory.

Principles

The following principles provided a foundation to the Forum:

1. **Shared goals** — we are all here for the health of the Lake Eyre Basin
2. **Common ground** — our approach is collaborative, based on finding common ground
3. **Cross-border connections** — an important secondary role of the Forum is to provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to reconnect across borders in the Lake Eyre Basin.

Outcomes

Outcomes of the Forum were a combination of:

- specific recommendations from participants to Government for further work and for future Aboriginal involvement and communication; and
- lists and descriptions of water and land issues in the Lake Eyre Basin that are important to Aboriginal people.

Key recommendations

The key recommendations made to Government by the participants at the 2006 Lake Eyre Basin Aboriginal Forum were:

1. that the **4 additional Aboriginal members** of the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee (approved by the Ministerial Forum in October 2005) be **recruited immediately**.
2. that **Basin-wide Lake Eyre Basin Aboriginal Forums** be held **annually**
3. that **smaller LEB Aboriginal Forums** be held annually in **Queensland, South Australia** and the **Northern Territory**, prior to the annual Basin-wide LEB Aboriginal Forums, and in close conjunction with existing state and regional Indigenous processes.

[The annual State and Territory Aboriginal Forums followed by the annual LEB Aboriginal Forum, would be the primary and most effective component of the Outreach Strategy.]
4. that an **Aboriginal communications strategy** for the LEB should be developed and implemented in conjunction with the whole-of-LEB communications strategy.
5. That an **LEB Aboriginal document** be compiled, containing:
 - a. The history of Aboriginal people and groups in the LEB
 - b. A current social and economic profile of Aboriginal groups and people in the LEB
 - c. A progressive summary of LEB Aboriginal engagement, and Aboriginal priorities for water and land issues in the LEB.

Such a document would provide both a context and a focal record for continuing Aboriginal involvement in the LEB Agreement.

Water and Land Issues

Issues were raised in relation to mining, tourism, pastoralism, roads and infrastructure in the Basin. In discussing these land uses, two broadly different concerns emerged:

- the **impacts** of the above land uses on the environment of the Basin
- the **benefits** that are derived from the above land uses.

The range of natural resource impacts highlighted by the participants for the above land uses in the Basin included erosion, weed invasion, feral animals, grazing pressure and water consumption.

These impacts are seen as widely affecting natural and cultural sites that are important to Aboriginal people. The protection of these sites was seen as a high priority, in particular the monitoring, protection and maintenance of both the quality and quantity of water.

Participants also felt that the current distribution of benefits derived from the natural resources of the Basin is inequitable, given the traditional Aboriginal connections to the country and natural resources that provide those benefits.

They felt that greater equity in the distribution of these outcomes and benefits is desired i.e. some share in those benefits for Aboriginal people in the Basin.

Integration and holistic health were threads that ran through the forum, and a strong emerging theme for Lake Eyre Basin Aboriginal people was the inseparable integration of people, country, culture and health.



Photograph: Vol Norris

PART 1 — BACKGROUND



Photograph: Vol Norris

The Lake Eyre Basin

The Lake Eyre Basin (Figure 1) unlike other drainage basins elsewhere in Australia, does not drain to the sea. All rivers and streams in the Basin flow eventually into Lake Eyre, many of them beginning in Queensland and the Northern Territory before flowing across the border into South Australia. Covering 1.14 million square kilometres, or roughly one seventh of the Australian continent, the Basin is one of the largest internally draining river systems in the world.

It is also considered to be one of the world's last unregulated wild river systems, being without the big dams and weirs found in the more 'regulated' catchments in eastern Australia.

The Basin contains areas of national and international ecological significance, and its

creeks and rivers have a 'boom and bust' ecology ... they remain dry for long periods ('bust'), followed by times of high flow or flooding after rain, which bring intense plant and animal reproduction and growth ('boom'). Big floods in the Basin can spread out over thousands of square kilometres

The Basin is rich in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture and heritage, and supports valuable industries:

- sheep and cattle production
- tourism
- mining
- oil and gas production.

The population of the Lake Eyre Basin is about 57,000 people, roughly 27,000 of them living in Alice Springs.

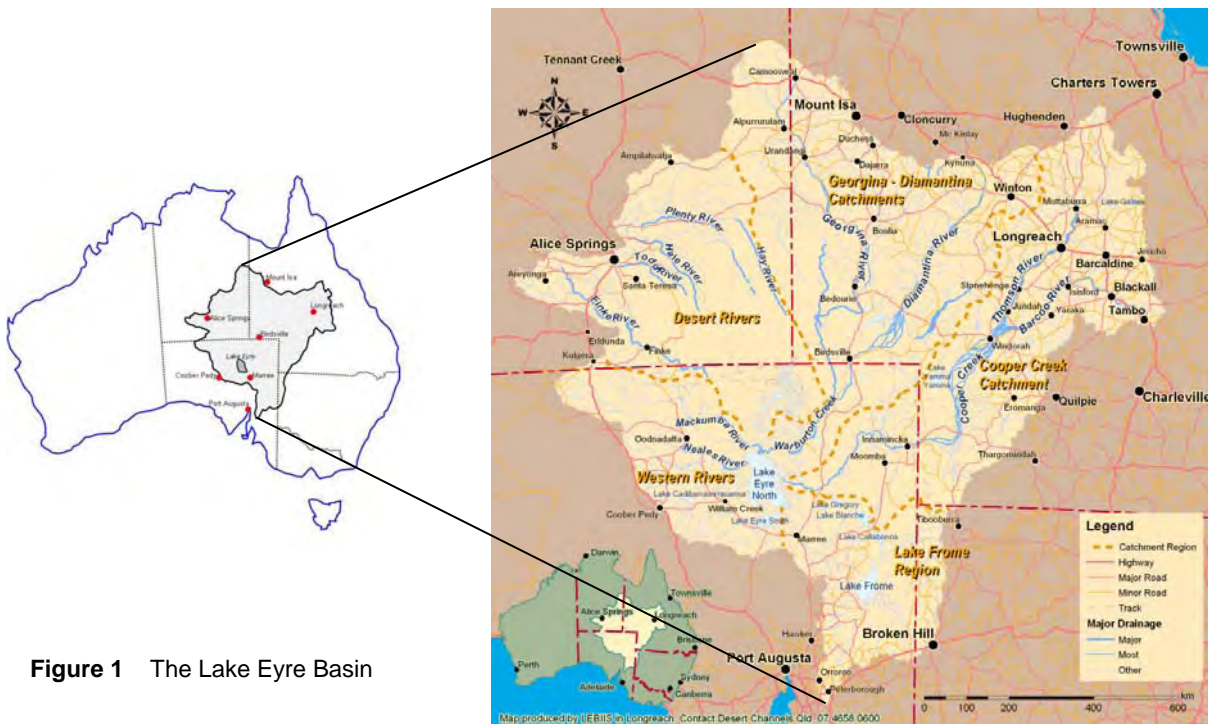


Figure 1 The Lake Eyre Basin

The Lake Eyre Basin Agreement

The Lake Eyre Basin is divided by State and Territory borders; it includes large parts of Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory, and a small part of New South Wales.

The governments of South Australia, Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth have all signed the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement. The Agreement (originally signed in October 2000) says:

- the Lake Eyre Basin has many values (environments, cultures, industries, communities)
- the rivers and catchments in the Basin must stay healthy if we want to maintain these values for the future;
- to keep the rivers and catchments healthy, Governments must work together cooperatively.

Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum

Water and land in the Lake Eyre Basin are managed separately by each different State and Territory. To help them work together, one Minister from each State and Territory Government, plus one Minister from the Commonwealth Government, meet once a year as the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum.

The Ministerial Forum exchanges information about water and land issues in the Lake Eyre Basin. They discuss how these issues are being managed in each State and Territory, and how they can be managed better by working together cooperatively.

The Ministerial Forum has appointed a Community Advisory Committee and a Scientific Advisory Panel to give them advice on water and land issues. They also get advice from Government Departments in each State and Territory and the Commonwealth.

Figure 2 shows the Ministerial Forum, the Advisory Committees and the Departments.

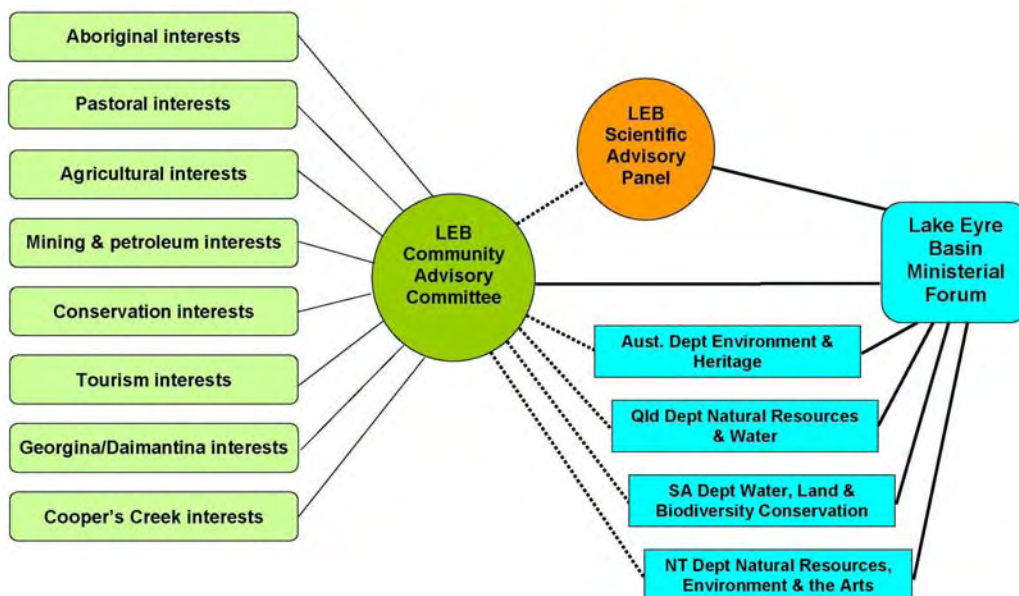


Figure 2 The Ministerial Forum, Advisory Committees and Departments under the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement

The Community Advisory Committee

The job of the Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee is to:

- provide community advice to the Ministerial Forum on water and related land issues in the Basin
- seek out community views on water and related land issues in the Basin
- inform the Basin community of the decisions and work of the Ministerial Forum.

The Committee must represent a range of community interests, including Aboriginal interests (see Figure 2).

Aboriginal Involvement

To help represent Aboriginal interests, the Community Advisory Committee currently includes two Aboriginal members. The Ministerial Forum has agreed that this should increase to six Aboriginal members, two from each State and Territory.

The Committee also communicates with Aboriginal people, groups and communities in the Basin. Six core principles guide this communication:

1. **Sustained effort**—Aboriginal involvement should be a long-term program, not a short-term project.
2. **Face to face contact** with Aboriginal people is essential—regular consultation and gatherings
3. **Coordination with other groups**—other groups in the Basin are also talking to Aboriginal people. We need to work with them.
4. **Local protocols**—the best ways to involve Aboriginal people will vary across the basin. We need to be sensitive to these differences and conform with local protocols.
5. **Mutual cultural learning**—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (including governments) need to understand each other better.
6. **Provide regular feedback**—regular communication with Aboriginal groups and communities should keep them informed of how their concerns are being acted upon.

The Ministerial Forum endorsed these six principles at its third meeting in June 2004.

Previous LEB Aboriginal Forum 2004

This year's LEB Aboriginal Forum was the second Aboriginal Forum held since the LEB Agreement was signed. The first was in October 2004 at Hamilton Downs Youth Camp, near Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

The objectives of the 2004 Forum were to build relationships among Aboriginal people from different parts of the Basin, talk about Aboriginal visions for natural resources in the Basin, introduce and discuss the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement, and discuss Aboriginal involvement in the LEB Agreement.

Five main issues emerged from the 2004 forum:

- partnerships, governance and communication
- Aboriginal membership on the LEB Community Advisory Committee (CAC)
- Aboriginal cultural awareness for non-Aboriginal people
- the need for a social and community profile of Aboriginal people in the Basin
- the importance of educating children and passing on knowledge.

The recommendations from the 2004 LEB Aboriginal Forum were conveyed to the CAC and passed on as recommendations to the LEB Ministerial Forum in December 2004. The Ministerial Forum, at its fourth meeting in October 2005, agreed to expand the Aboriginal membership of the CAC from two to six (two from each State and Territory). The majority of CAC members and several Government Officers attended an Aboriginal cultural awareness session in Alice Springs in April 2006, and a brief social and community profile of Aboriginal people in the Basin has been included as a component of the LEB Social Atlas, funded by the Australian Government under the Natural Heritage Trust.