

Ms. Juanita Hamparsum  
Chair Great Artesian Basin Coordinating Committee  
Great Artesian Basin Secretariat  
Water Division  
GPO Box 858  
CANBERRA ACT 2601



Via email: [gabsecretariat@agriculture.gov.au](mailto:gabsecretariat@agriculture.gov.au)

Dear Ms. Hamparsum,

**Re: NSW Aboriginal Land Council response to the *Draft* Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan 2018.**

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the *Draft* Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan (GABSMP).

NSWALC is concerned with ensuring the sound use and management of this natural resource for the benefit of all Australians, including the Aboriginal communities in NSW that rely on Great Artesian Basin waters. NSWALC is of the view that the Draft GABSMP falls short in this and other important regards. NSWALC is the peak body representing Aboriginal peoples in NSW and with over 23,000 members, is the largest Aboriginal member-based organisation in Australia. NSWALC is a self-funded statutory corporation under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW)*, and has a legislative objective to improve, protect and foster the best interests of Aboriginal peoples in NSW.

The Draft GABSMP follows the 2015 Strategic Management Plan. NSWALC notes that the Review of the 2015 Strategic Management Plan found that management was not ensuring that the social, economic and environmental values of the Basin were being maintained. The review called for major improvements including in relation to governance arrangements, accountability and compliance, coordination, management and decision making. NSWALC's submission addresses these and other points, in the context of protecting the Basin's resource for critical human need.

I thank the GAB Secretariat for the opportunity to provide comment on this matter. NSWALC wishes to work with the GABCC and Basin Governments to ensure the strategic management of this critical natural resource. NSWALC would welcome the opportunity to discuss these important issues further.

Should you wish to discuss the contents of this submission, please contact Mr. Andrew Stanton, [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,



Cr. Roy Ah-See  
Chair  
NSW Aboriginal Land Council  
Date: 8 November 2018

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# NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) Submission

## Draft Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan

### KEY ISSUES

1. Secure water for critical human use
2. Governance and Management
3. Monitoring and Compliance
4. Funding and Resources

#### 1. Secure water for critical human use

Many Aboriginal people in northern NSW do not have reliable and secure access to water for critical human use. However, access to safe, secure water is the most fundamental of all human needs and in times of drought, many Aboriginal communities in northern NSW rely heavily on Great Artesian Basin (GAB) water for essential human purposes.

#### **Recommendation:**

Ensure all communities, including Aboriginal communities, have access to GAB water for critical human use.

#### 2. Governance and Management

The GAB Coordinating Committee is insufficient as a governing and management institution, for such an important critical natural resource. Ground water regulation is complex and requires appropriate organisational arrangements, and this becomes more important with a body as large as the GAB.

**Recommendation:** Consider legislating for a new GAB management authority, with power to regulate the use of GAB resources.

A function of the lack of appropriate arrangements is the lack of Aboriginal representation on the Committee. Due to the importance of the GAB for Aboriginal people, appropriate Aboriginal representation must be included in the governing and management arrangements for the GAB.

NSWALC notes that the GAB Coordinating Committee does not include Aboriginal representation from NSW. The GAB cuts across 4 NSWALC Regions which includes various Local Aboriginal Land Councils. For this reason; we seek a position on the GAB Coordinating Committee to provide a voice for the Aboriginal people of NSW. This request is linked to Principles 1 and 3 of the *Draft* GABSMP and our inclusion will assist the GABCC to meet various Outcomes identified in the GABSMP.

**Recommendation:** A NSWALC representative is included on the GAB Coordinating Committee.

#### 3. Monitoring and Compliance

NSWALC notes the primary role of the GAB Coordinating Committee is to provide advice from organisations to Government Agencies. However, this is not an adequate arrangement for the better management of this strategic and critical resource. NSWALC welcomes accountability of Government Agencies to meet the Principles, Objectives and Outcomes in the GABSMP and encourages stronger powers for an inter-jurisdictional body to require users to limit extraction for non-human use, as well as a requirement for jurisdictions to publicly report on compliance and management work.

**Recommendation:** Extraction limits for non-critical human use are set and enforced.

**Recommendation:** Implement reporting and other accountability arrangements with agencies, including increased reporting on Outcomes, with information available to the public.

#### **4. Funding and Resources**

To support the abovementioned arrangements, adequate funding and resources should be made available. Of particular import are funding and resources for adequate organisational infrastructure. However, long term investment for the modelling of ground water systems to better understand volumes, extraction and recharge is required.

**Recommendation:** Seek adequate private sector and government funding.

Climate change is likely to place even greater stress on surface water and ground water systems. Most communities in the north west of NSW rely on these water bodies for potable water supplies. More needs to be understood about the likely effects of climate change on surface and ground water supplies, so that adequate planning can take place.

More should be done to understand the dynamics of GAB water systems, including sustainable extraction limits, so that GAB water can be preserved for critical human use in the climate change affected future.

**Recommendation:** Better plan for climate change and preserve GAB water for critical human use, including by continuing bore capping programs.