



Draft Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan 2018

9 November 2018

The Local Government Association of Queensland

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) is the peak body for local government in Queensland, and is the collective voice of local government on a range of issues. The LGAQ has been advising, supporting and representing local councils since 1896, allowing them to improve their operations and strengthen relationships with their communities. The LGAQ does this by connecting councils to people and places that count; supporting their drive to innovate and improve service delivery through smart services and sustainable solutions; and delivering them the means to achieve community, professional and political excellence.

Scope of Response

The LGAQ appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the Draft Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan 2018 (the Plan). In preparing this submission, the LGAQ referred to feedback we obtained from 16 councils in 2016, as well as on-going involvement with Queensland's Great Artesian Basin Advisory Council.

The LGAQ acknowledges the value of submissions provided from individual Queensland councils for this review – or regional council organisations like the Remote Area Planning and Development Board. Councils are best placed to provide advice about their individual circumstances. This response provides a general overview of the issues broadly relevant to Queensland local governments.

Summary and Recommendations

The LGAQ supports the continuation of the Plan, and the items described within the Plan .

Additional comments and recommendations regarding the draft Plan include:

- Local government is not just another stakeholder. Much of the on-the-ground management, planning, and community engagement happens through local governments, and this should be better acknowledged in the Plan.
- A large portion of Queensland communities that depend on Great Artesian Basin water are experiencing decreases in population.
- Councils are pro-actively preparing for responding to changing climates through programs like the QCoast 2100 and Queensland Climate Resilient Councils.
- Initiatives such as GABSI (Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative) are excellent and should continue.
- The Queensland Government's water resource planning framework is good and is maturing to provide a better understanding and management of the water resources in the Great Artesian Basin.
- Good progress has been made to ensure that the water needs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities are met – including recent changes to legislation that now requires their consideration in planning.
- Meeting cultural needs must be progressed beyond setting aside water allocations – cultural leaders should be involved at the earliest stages of decision making and greater autonomy should be given to communities in how water allocations are used.
- Greater transparency is needed in the decision-making process for releasing unallocated water. Water that is set aside or stored without justification can prevent reasonable community development.
- Many communities are using infrastructure that is quickly approaching the end of its useful life, which means increasing water losses. A coordinated process for managing and replacing ageing assets is needed.

- Increased funding for monitoring and research is needed.
- The work of organisations like the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment has been good in building the understanding of the Great Artesian Basin, but this work needs to be expanded across the Basin.
- There is a need to assess and supplement a decline in skilled workforces across the Great Artesian Basin.

Legend

- Local Governments
- Great Artesian Basin

Water Act Entitlements

- 0
- 1 - 500
- 501 - 1500
- 1501 - 3000
- 3000+

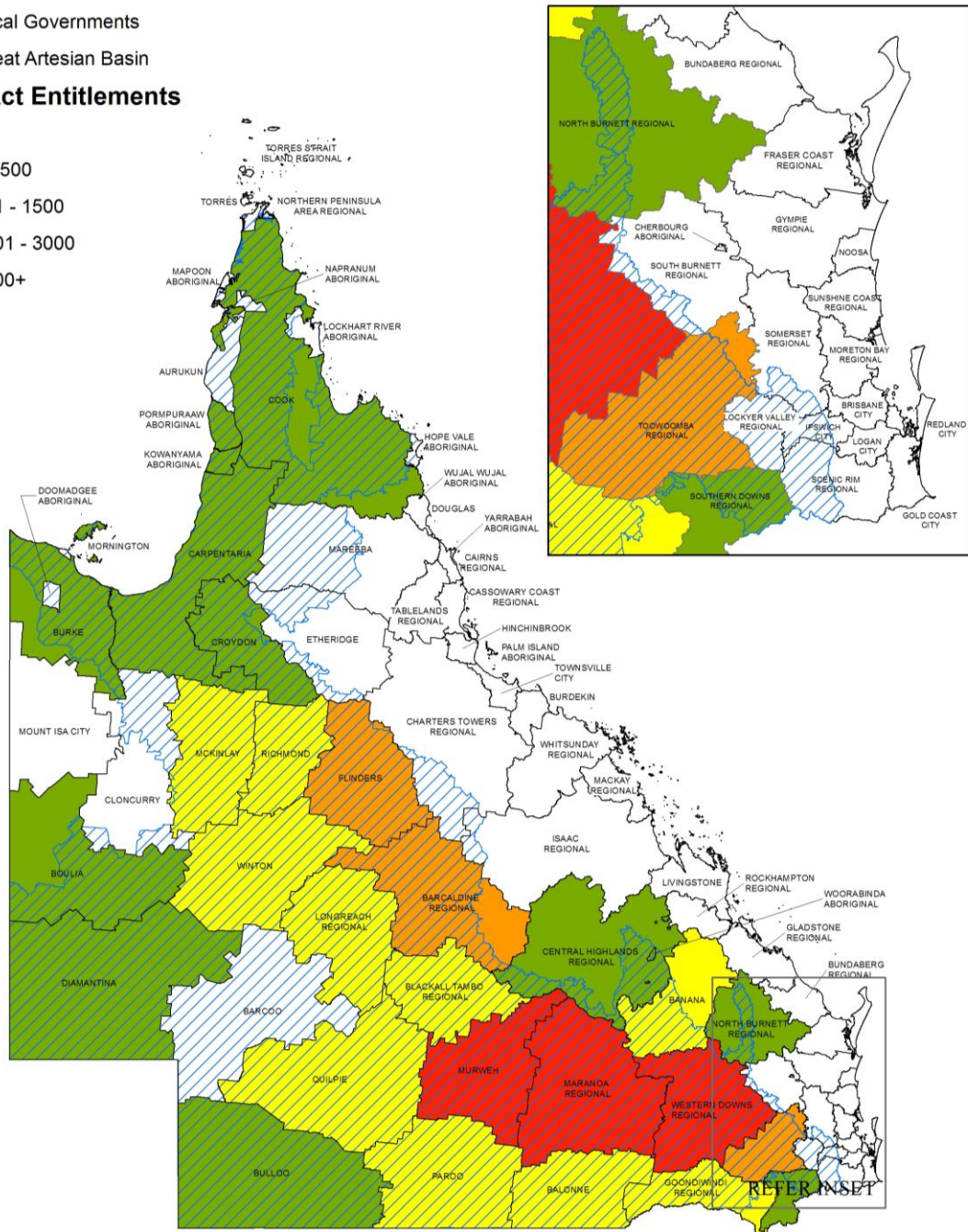


Figure 1 – Water entitlements of Queensland local governments in the Great Artesian Basin

Queensland Local Government Overview

Local government is the tier of government in Australia closest to the community. In Queensland, local governments own and maintain a significant portion of infrastructure and provide many community services. Local government assets include a range of infrastructure, including local roads, gas supply and reticulation networks, drinking water and sewage treatment systems, stormwater management, and parks – among others.

Of relevance to the current inquiry are the urban water and wastewater services that are predominantly the purview of local governments in Queensland. Local governments are either registered water providers or are shareholders in statutory authorities that deliver urban water services to more than 350 communities. Hence, local government is directly responsible for the delivery of potable water and wastewater services to all of Queensland's communities where they are provided, some of which are sourced from the Great Artesian Basin for the councils noted previously. To achieve this local governments manage \$37 billion worth of water and wastewater infrastructure.

The health of water sources has direct impacts on the cost to provide basic services, like water and wastewater. Further, the liveability of a regional community is strongly linked to the availability and quality of water sources. Where water resources are improperly managed or insufficient there is a decline in population, as seen by the prolonged drought that has affected much of regional Queensland. Thus, local governments have a real interest in the appropriate management of water catchments.

About 70% of the Great Artesian Basin – 1,203,920 km² – is within Queensland, which lies beneath 50 out of 77 Queensland councils. Currently 31 councils have a total of 33GL of water allocations from the Basin, which supply potable water to 81 communities. More than 750,000 Queenslanders are either directly sourcing water or indirectly benefiting from water supplied by the Great Artesian Basin. This water also comprises a critical source of urban water supplies and has played a significant role in the development of rural Queensland, especially in the face of recurring and intense droughts. Given the significant importance for Queensland and its councils, the LGAQ supports continuing management of the Great Artesian Basin's water resources.

Feedback on the draft Plan

The LGAQ acknowledges the Australian and Queensland Governments' role in the creation, review, and implementation of the Plan, and the interest in better addressing potential environmental and water security risks in the Great Artesian Basin. The LGAQ supports the continuation of the Plan, but reserves the right to comment further on particular matters not mentioned in this submission.

In general, local governments expressed support for the continuation of the Plan and stronger implementation of it. Local governments also acknowledged their willingness to contribute to the work of the Plan, and wanted greater engagement with the parties to the Plan.

Vision

The LGAQ supports the draft Great Artesian Basin Strategic Management Plan 2018 and its vision as an essential tool for managing water resources provided by the Great Artesian Basin. The principles and objectives in the Plan should ensure equitable allocation for water resources in a manner that is transparent and sustainable.

Issues, challenges and opportunities

The LGAQ acknowledges the issues, challenges and opportunities identified in the draft Plan. Additional comments on specific issues are included in the discussion about each of the principles that follows.

Principle 1: Coordinated governance

Local government not just another stakeholder.

The language of the Plan combines local governments with other stakeholders regarding the planning and management of the Great Artesian Basin. This characterisation undervalues the significant role councils play. In practice councils are directly involved in management, planning (i.e. land use), information gathering, compliance, and community engagement activities. Thus, local governments play a critical role in the delivery of the Plan that should warrant greater and perhaps specific acknowledgment within it.

Both the Australian and Queensland governments should better utilise their relationship with local governments. Typically, discussions about the Great Artesian Basin occur between the Australian and Basin governments, with no required presence of local governments. The inclusion of local governments in these discussions can better identify and assess risks to the health of the Basin, but also improve the management of those risks. The inclusion of Queensland local governments is particularly relevant given their role in supporting regional communities and understanding of local conditions.

There is also scope to increase the involvement of local governments to provide important insights, feedback, and operational support in the management of water resources. For example, the development of methodologies for risk assessments and the fit-for-purpose approaches to interventions can be enhanced with better local government engagement. In cooperation with other stakeholders, local governments can also identify risks that may not be apparent at a whole-of-Basin scale. There is also a need to not only receive information about risks in the Great Artesian Basin, but also share information with other stakeholders to ensure they do not continue to work in isolation.

The LGAQ supports the statement by Boulia Shire Council, "Local Government has the capacity as elected representatives of stakeholders to make meaningful contributions to discussions about future threats and in the development of management strategies which protect and preserve the Basin's natural values whilst also maintaining the economic, community and cultural values both current and into the future."

Role of Australian Government

One concern raised by local governments is that the Australian Government's involvement in managing the risks associated with the health of the Great Artesian Basin may be duplicative or overly intrusive. The Australian Government is an important party to the Plan and is a valuable contributor/coordinator for the review, education, and improvement of risk mitigation activities. Nonetheless councils do not favour the expansion of the Australian Government's role to assessing compliance. Local governments indicated that the Australian Government should verify that each level of government is operating within its legitimate interests and jurisdiction, but in a manner that does not introduce unnecessary additional administrative burden.

Local governments would also like to see the Australian Government staff managing the Plan permanently located within the Basin to provide more direct access to stakeholders and develop a greater appreciation for local conditions.

Inclusion of other stakeholders

Local governments also indicated that regional groups, such as natural resource management bodies (e.g. Desert Channels) should be included to provide a more balanced perspective and approach to managing the Basin. The inclusion of these stakeholders in the work would offer opportunities to leverage existing efforts and resources that are already engaged in supporting the health of the Basin, albeit at a regional level. Additionally, the inclusion of these groups would build greater confidence in the aims and purpose of the Plan by building on the strong community ties and reputation these organisations have developed.

Relationship to Murray-Darling Basin Plan and Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement

Integrated management among the other water-related plans could provide opportunities for improved efficiency in stakeholder engagement – noting that the stakeholders for these basins do overlap to a large degree. Further, the monitoring activities are likely to engage the same staff and require the similar sample collection and testing. Notwithstanding these benefits, there are stakeholders in one basin that are not represented by the other, and the issues/risks for surface water are often quite different than for groundwater.

There is incomplete, but reasonable understanding that there are connections between the surface and ground waters in this region. However, the commonality of the approach is not enough to justify integrating the governance, engagement, and monitoring. Local governments expressed hesitation about merging the current arrangements, preferring to separately manage the Lake Eyre Basin, Murray-Darling Basin and the Great Artesian Basin. There was support for targeting some research efforts to better understand the connections between the basins.

Principle 2: A healthy resource

Population change

A key issue for councils in the Great Artesian Basin region is the changing population. The 2016 Census showed that 28 councils in the Great Artesian Basin had a decline in population since the 2011 Census (see Figure 3). The resident population of these councils declined by almost 10,000 people, or 6.4% of the population, which has obvious impacts on regional economies. For local governments that must maintain infrastructure and provide community services, a loss of population means a loss of revenue that diminishes their financial sustainability. This reduced financial capacity forces councils to put greater focus on essential services and restricts the ability to undertake additional work or responsibilities.

For Basin management, the loss of local populations in key regional areas means fewer people are affected by resource management issues, but also that there are fewer local staff to manage those resources. In turn the costs are likely to increase since it will mean the transport and deployment of workers outside the region to take on some of the management/monitoring tasks.

For the other 22 councils there was an increase in population. This increase includes Southeast Queensland councils (i.e. Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim, Somerset), which account for two-thirds of the increase but do not typically draw water from the Basin. The gain of almost 18,000 people from 2011 to 2016 in councils that do draw water from the Basin reflects an increasing demand on water resources, with comparable challenges in managing the infrastructure the supplies them.

Climate change

Beyond population scenarios, climate change and its impact on water resources should also be further explored. The LGAQ is pleased to see that climate change is now a required consideration for water resource planning with legislative changes to Queensland's *Water Act 2000* in October. The LGAQ has also been working with local governments through the delivery of the QCoast2100¹ and Queensland Climate Resilient Councils² (Q CRC) programs, which are engaging local governments across Queensland to assess and prepare for the impact of climate change.

¹ QCoast2100 will provide the funding, tools and technical support to enable all Queensland coastal local governments to progress the preparation of plans and strategies to address climate change related coastal hazard risks over the long-term. It is intended that QCoast2100 will facilitate the development of high quality information enabling defensible, timely and effective local adaptation decision-making across key areas of planning and operations. <http://www.qcoast2100.com.au/>

² The LGAQ and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) have established a partnership to support local governments in Queensland to plan for and respond to climate change. The Q CRC is a three-year program working with local governments to strengthen internal council decision-making processes to respond to climate change. <http://qcrclgaq.asn.au/home>

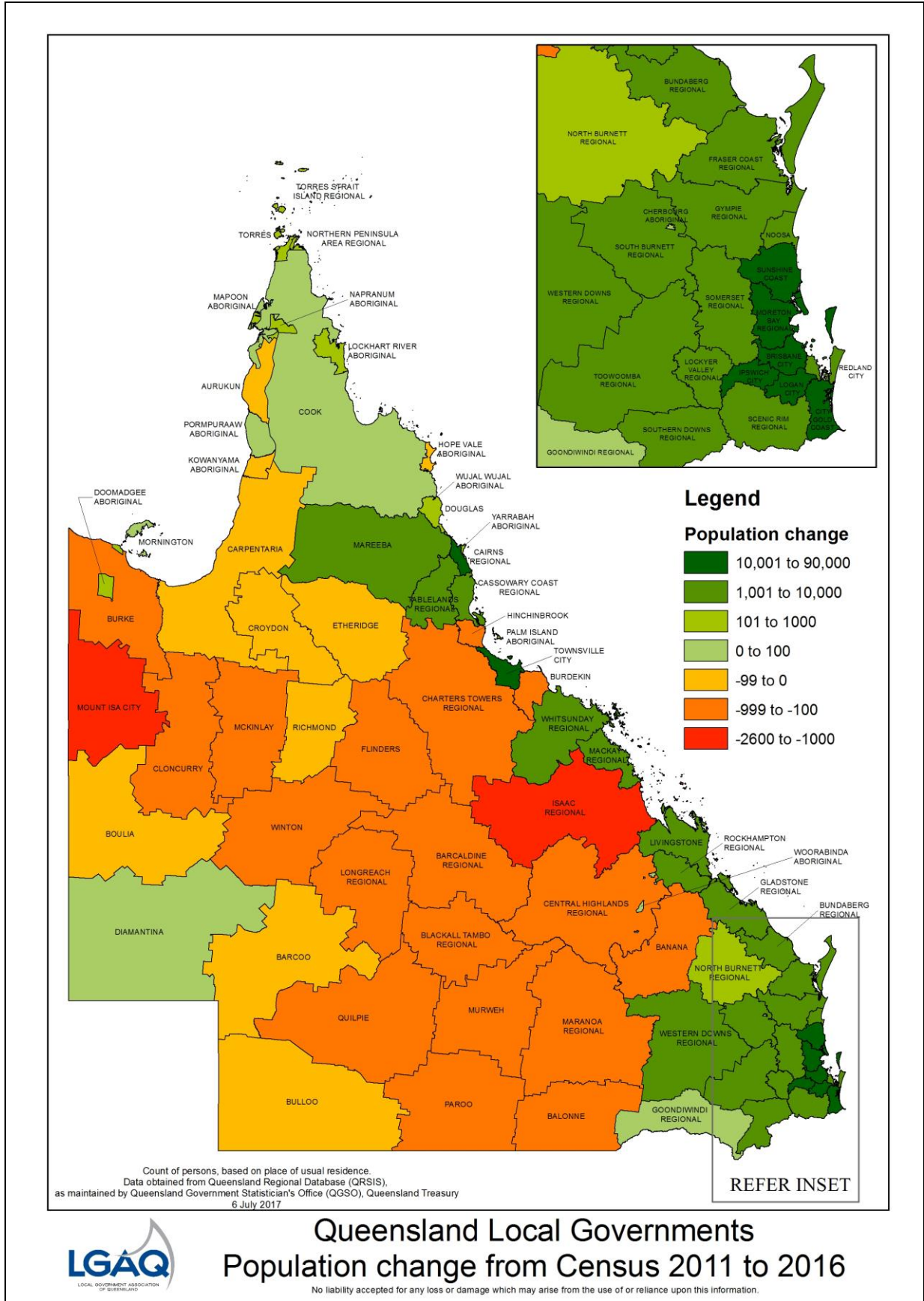


Figure 2 - Population change in Queensland

The Q CRC program is helping local governments understand the implications of climate change, establishing good governance arrangements and providing tools and guidance to support timely and effective decision-making and build internal capacity to plan and act. The program is not funding actual risk assessments or the planning of specific impact mitigation actions. The program includes 14 local governments located within the Great Artesian Basin (i.e. Balonne, Cook, Flinders, Lockyer Valley, Longreach, Maranoa, Mareeba, McKinlay, Murweh, Richmond, Scenic Rim, Somerset, Southern Downs, Torres). Climate change will have an impact on all areas of Australia and should be considered in future scenarios.

Although domestic supplies that are sourced from the Great Artesian Basin effectively protect communities from droughts, these communities exist within environments that continue to be widely impacted by drought. This contrast means that while a community may not be in need of domestic water, the drought has significant impacts on the community itself through other social, environmental, and economic factors. Understanding the implications of leveraging the reliability of the Great Artesian Basin against the more variable water resources affected by more frequent and intense droughts in the future should be better explored to help buffer the impacts from climate change.

Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative (GABSI)

Local governments have been consistent in their praise of this program, calling for its continuation in the several of LGAQ's annual conferences, the most recent in 2017. As noted in the draft Plan, work performed in Queensland has produced the most water savings to date, 139,081 megalitres per annum, through the control of 397 bores, the removal of 12,491 kilometres of open bore drains, and the installation of 16,140 kilometres of piping. A significant amount of water can still be saved with the continuation of programs like GABSI. Queensland local governments continue their call for a continuation of funding for the GABSI or similar program for an additional 10 years.

Social and economic health

The LGAQ would like to see more consideration of the social and economic impacts of water resource management within the Plan. Several of Queensland's regional communities have been significantly affected in other intergovernmental water arrangements, most notably the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. Including social and economic evaluation of water governance is an important means to measure the impacts of the arrangements. Unfortunately, these impacts weren't fully considered until 5 years after the Murray-Darling Basin Plan was first implemented, and by then much damage had been done to several regional communities in Queensland. To avoid this in the context of the Great Artesian Basin these considerations should be made early in all planning and management actions to ensure the potential social and economic impacts are known and acceptable. Thus, local government strongly support the aspects of the water and management goals that sustainably provide for those communities that live within the Great Artesian Basin.

Water for development, agriculture and other industry

Assessing water demands should involve clear, outcomes driven, evidence-based policy that defines appropriate opportunities for sustainable use. This work should align closely with state or territory water planning and demand forecasting, seeking to build upon and not duplicate. In addition, activities that disrupt flows (e.g. ad hoc weirs, land shaping, construction activities, etc.) also have an impact on water availability that in turns affect demand. Effectively disrupting flows both creates and removes water sources and should be considered in demand assessment.

Industries such as mining, renewable energy, tourism, and agriculture should also be considered in future scenarios. As these industries are likely to be localised, individual local governments would be best placed to identify any movement that should be included in strategic planning activities. This would include any industries that are introduced into this region, which would also presumably be known to local governments in very early stages of their development. Thus, the LGAQ strongly encourages the inclusion of local governments in any work involving the evaluation and planning for future scenarios.

Great Artesian Basin and Other Regional Aquifers (GABORA) water plan

The Queensland Government's water resource planning framework is good and continues to mature to provide a better understanding and management of the water resources in the Great Artesian Basin. The recent review and update of the plan involved substantial engagement with stakeholders, including relevant local governments. Although the engagement for the update of the plan was good, there is a need for continuing engagement during the life of the plan. A 'set and forget' approach would mean that meaningful engagement occurs every 5 or 10 years, during which time there is a loss of institutional memory and community understanding that must be rebuilt with each engagement. Continuous engagement would ensure a more adaptive approach that maintains community support and understanding.

An excellent example of good engagement is the Queensland Government's Water Engagement Forum. The Forum coordinated by the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy provides a variety of stakeholders with regular updates and an opportunity to give input on legislative and policy changes to water planning activities in Queensland. The LGAQ as a member of this forum can participate in the very early stages of policy and legislative development and consult with individual local governments as needed. The Forum has enabled stronger engagement, better planned policy, and reduced the frustration of short turn-around times for mandated consultation.

In terms of the urban water portion of the GABORA plan, there are several areas that could be further refined. For some communities the Great Artesian Basin operates as a backup supply for their main supply that comes from another source – surface water or shallow groundwater. The preference for other sources is a result of the expense and in some instances hardness or other water quality issues that make it unpalatable. In these communities the use of the Basin water is for short periods, but license conditions are typically for the full time take for all 10 years. Thus, a portion of this water is held in reserve but not used. Options such as seasonal assignment of water allocations could be an option for other interested water users in the region. Better managing this variable demand will likely require a re-evaluation of some of the mechanisms within the current framework.

Another area that would worth exploring is the potential for the Great Artesian Basin to store water – managed aquifer recharge. For the large semi-arid and drought prone portion of Queensland that happens to be co-located over most of the Basin, aquifer storage would provide significant improvements in water efficiency by reducing evaporation losses typical of surface storage. Generally, evaporation rates are in the order of 50% in much of Queensland. Although there are clear technical challenges and concerns, Queensland's water planning is typically more concerned with withdrawal of water from systems (i.e. allocations) rather than addition of water to them. Incentives and clear legislative provisions that could encourage innovation and investment into storage options would be useful.

The Queensland Government has a well-developed water planning framework that appears to be working for the Queensland portion of Great Artesian Basin catchments. Continuing this work, but with greater engagement and resourcing, should be a primary mechanism for managing these catchments.

Principle 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values, cultural heritage and other community values

The Plan should continue to make efforts to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities and residents in the planning and management of waters in the Great Artesian Basin. The Queensland portion of the Basin includes nearly 55,000³ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island residents, all of which have cultural rights to the water and geological aspects of the Basin that should be considered by the Plan and included as a necessary component of strategic planning. Of note is the recent addition⁴ to Queensland's *Water Act 2000* that requires consideration of "the interests of any Aboriginal parties or Torres Strait Islander parties in relation to the water resources for the plan area" in the making of water plans. The LGAQ strongly supports

³ 2075.0 - Census of Population and Housing - Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2016

⁴ Mineral, Water and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2018, clause 243

the principles for participation outlined in the Plan.

Whilst engagement with these residents and communities is improving, more needs to be done. Allocating water for cultural purposes should also include greater autonomy in how that water is used. Simply setting aside an allocation of water does not fully empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to use the water. Further, the use of water for cultural purposes is not just to protect historic cultural heritage, but should also be used to enable current cultural practices.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island elders and leaders should be involved in the earliest stages of decision making to ensure their needs are fully considered. The LGAQ is encouraged by increasing efforts along these lines. With a water resource planning process that now requires consideration of interests of Aboriginal parties or Torres Strait Islander parties there is reasonable expectations that improved engagement will occur in the future.

Principle 4: Secure and managed access

Release of water

A key issue voiced by local governments is the transparency of decision making by the Queensland Government (or other Basin governments) as it relates to releasing stored allocations. This process should more explicitly describe how decisions are made about allocations and in managing existing water resources. This clarity about the decision process is even more important with the addition of associated water⁵ in Queensland, increasingly larger scale interests, and water trading options that will impact the quantum of water available. Local governments should be consulted in these decisions, not only to ensure the allocations for town water supplies are sufficient, but also to allow for comment regarding the broader impacts on communities and services that are under the custodianship of councils.

Ensuring the availability of water, not just the current allocations, but also those in the future is important for economic development and growth. The enduring importance of water, especially in areas of drought that are currently affecting large portions of Queensland, means that allocations can be a critical factor in the success or failure for business, industry, agriculture, and communities that depend on them. As the State has previously released unallocated water mainly in response to the drought, it should also regularly release water to enable growth as appropriate. Local governments support further releases where they can be made without negatively impacting existing allocations or environmental resources.

Principle 5: Judicious use

Ageing Infrastructure/leakage

As noted previously, local governments collectively manage \$37 billion in water and wastewater infrastructure, some which is connected to the Great Artesian Basin. A large portion of this infrastructure was installed post World War II and is reaching the end of its useful life. This 'infrastructure cliff' is the point at which an equally significant investment in renewal or replacement of these assets is needed.

The LGAQ in collaboration with the Queensland Water Directorate conducted a survey⁶ on the age of water and sewage mains across the state in 2018 to confirm the presence and nature of the infrastructure cliff. Data from this survey suggests that 65% of the water mains in local governments that are within the Great Artesian Basin are more than 40 years old. Accepting that not all these mains distribute water obtained from

⁵ *Associated water* is any underground water that is taken or interfered with while (or as a result of) carrying out an authorised activity on a resource authority (e.g. mine dewatering activities). More information available from:

<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/minerals-coal/reports-notices/water-reporting>

⁶ Infrastructure Cliff? Queensland's ageing Water and Sewerage Assets.- Research Report 5.1: In-ground asset age analysis. Available from: <https://www.qldwater.com.au/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=240188>

the Basin, the concern about the growing challenges in managing these assets should be acknowledged.

The consequences of ageing infrastructure are increasing rates of leakage and water loss. The same research predicted that the ageing cohort of mains would suffer increasing failure rates (i.e. water loss) over the next two decades peaking by the 2040s, at levels potentially six times higher than experienced at present. When compared with recent reporting⁷ of mains breaks and leakage in Queensland that indicates on average reticulation networks lose an average of 10% of the water distributed through them, the potential water loss is significant. For some councils in the Great Artesian Basin this figure is already as high as 53%⁸.

Though local governments in Queensland do have programs for renewing or replacing these mains, the estimated rate of this work, averaging 0.3% per annum, would require over 170 years to replace the cohort of ageing mains. What is clear from this research is that managing ageing water and sewerage assets will become more challenging in the coming decades, and that work should begin as soon as possible to minimise water losses and potential costs to maintain these services.

Trading markets

Another scenario that should be considered in managing water resources is the maturity of water trading markets across the Basin. Both the Australian and Queensland governments have increasingly been promoting the expansion of trading markets, with the Queensland Government recently making changes to legislation to further enable water trading. As the link between land ownership and water rights becomes weaker the intensity of water use will become greater in certain areas, which will introduce another variable in water planning activities. The impact of this on markets is not yet understood, and we suggest greater research into the potential impacts.

Potential economic developments in the Basin

The LGAQ does not take a position on which economic developments should be pursued in specific Queensland regions; but notes that, in addition to agricultural activities, tourism and mining have been a concern (for opposing reasons) of several local governments in the Great Artesian Basin catchment. Again, individual local governments are best placed to identify current and future opportunities and should be consulted in any efforts to encourage or dissuade economic development within their jurisdictions.

Principle 6: Information, knowledge and understanding for good management

An evidence-based approach to making decisions to manage water must continue to be a core principle in managing the Great Artesian Basin. Although the estimated 451GL⁹ of water extracted every year (for comparison Sydney Harbour holds 500GL¹⁰) is a very small fraction of the 87,000,000GL¹¹ of water stored in the Basin, as noted in the Plan the heavy use in localised areas may have drawdown and pressure impacts that could affect the security of supply for nearby allocations. Therefore, a sound understanding of water use and its cumulative impacts should inform management and enforcement activities conducted within the Basin. Monitoring activities should be able to assess or reasonably estimate water take is in line with defined limits and impacts on other allocations can be detected.

Further, an evidence-based approach is important to ensuring the equity of water allocations. To maintain an objective and equitable allocation framework, monitoring should not only increase certainty in the understanding of available water resources, but also ensure that institutional arrangements facilitate efficient resource use. For some areas this may mean increased monitoring is required, and in other areas

⁷ Queensland Water and Sewerage Service Provider Comparative Report 2015–16

⁸ 2017-18 data obtained from Statewide Water Information Management (SWIM). <https://www.qldwater.com.au/SWIM>

⁹ Queensland Government, Minister's Performance Assessment Report, Sept 2015

¹⁰ Bureau of Meteorology, When Dam Size Matters, Oct 2012

¹¹ CSIRO, Background report on the Great Artesian Basin, Sept 2008

existing monitoring may need to be rationalised to minimise the cost. The LGAQ supports a holistic evaluation of current and future monitoring needs, along with the relevant recommendations about monitoring in the Minister's Performance Assessment Report⁸.

Monitoring the Basin

Developing a coordinated approach to monitoring should identify existing practices that can be leveraged to better inform the broader understanding of the Basin's health. The information and experience needed to assess the risk is likely already present in government and non-government agencies. For example, local governments commonly perform many types of risk assessment (e.g. financial, environmental, drinking water quality, etc.) that are likely to be needed to better understand the nature of the risks in the Great Artesian Basin. To this end, the development of guidelines and further support, with consideration of local government's role in the assessments, are recommended.

Priority areas in the Basin – either in terms of location or type of activity – are likely to be more variable than predicted. Thus, while the aims and intent of monitoring may not change, the things that are being monitored often will. Any monitoring efforts should be flexible enough to allow for adaptation to emerging risks or needs within the Basin.

Greater clarity is needed about the review and funding of monitoring activities. Where the need for new monitoring activities are identified, that are not already performed elsewhere, there should be a clear mechanism for how the activities will be funded. A regular review and consultation period for monitoring activities should be conducted.

Local governments are also of the opinion that monitoring activities are not currently funded or resourced adequately. Both proactive and reactive measures should be in place to ensure that strategies and management decisions are well-informed. This may be addressed by improved coordination with stakeholders and better support for existing work that could reasonably be expanded to capture data/information.

Finally, the identification of risks alone is not sufficient to manage them. There will be a substantial cost, not only in obtaining information, but also in implementing any recommendations resulting from investigations. These costs should not be borne solely by regional communities. To this end, greater communication about the work that is being considered or underway would provide benefit to other stakeholders managing portions of the Basin (e.g. reduce duplication, inform planning, identify collaborative opportunities, etc.) The LGAQ received one response that suggested an annual report direct to the relevant local governments would be well received.

Principle 7: Information management, communication and education

Expansion of the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment (OGIA)

Perhaps the best knowledge on groundwater in Queensland has resulted from the work of the Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment¹². This independent entity is tasked primarily to evaluate groundwater in cumulative management areas – declared areas where multiple resource operations are extracting groundwater. For areas in the Surat Basin, this has resulted in massive investment by resource companies in obtaining and providing data to the Queensland Government and OGIA to inform groundwater assessments. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of this area is available.

Without a similar investment into monitoring and reporting on groundwater in other parts of the Great Artesian Basin there is unlikely to be the same level of understanding as within the Surat Basin. Notwithstanding the expertise and capability to evaluate groundwater developed by OGIA can readily be

¹² Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment. <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/resources/environment-water/ogia>

transferred to other geographical areas. Expanding or including OGIA in groundwater monitoring activities throughout the Great Artesian Basin may help to improve the understanding of groundwater.

Local skills and knowledge/workforce

As suggested in the comments on population changes, there is growing concern about local skills and knowledge in regional areas. Local governments are keen to maintain local workforces that are vital to healthy regional communities. With significant decreases in populations in recent years the skills that were once local in regional areas have diminished. This affects not only technical assessments of the Great Artesian Basin's health and management practices, but also efforts to engage with the community. Programs that not only import skills into these areas but build or create capacity in them will likely be needed.

Queensland Local Government Policy

LGAQ's *Policy Statement 2018*¹³ is a definitive statement of the collective voice of local government in Queensland. This statement identifies the position of local government in relation to several key issues, and several points relevant to the current review are included in Box 1.

Box 1 – Extracts from LGAQ Policy Statement

1.4.1 Partnerships will be strengthened by:

- Positive, timely, cooperative, proper and meaningful engagement with and by local government at the local, regional, State and Federal levels to the development of State and Federal policy and programs;
- Rationalisation of the roles and responsibility of the three spheres of government to improve efficiency and avoid duplication of effort;
- Representation by local government on all appropriate State and national bodies and the nomination of those representatives by the LGAQ, taking into consideration intra-state diversity of local governments

1.10.3 The LGAQ should be consulted by the State and Federal governments and their departments, authorities and officers, with adequate time available for response, before taking legislative and administrative actions that affect local governments individually or collectively.

8.5.1.1 Local government recognises that water is a resource that should be shared equitably across each region through institutional arrangements that best facilitate efficient service delivery and resource use.

8.5.1.3 Local government believes that water demand and supply planning across the State, including the establishment of adequate levels of service provision to the community, should be led by the State Government, with active involvement of local government as a key stakeholder. There should be continued engagement with local government in the design and implementation of the State Government's strategy for Queensland's water sector.

8.5.1.4 Where reform of current institutional arrangements is considered necessary to enhance security, sustainability and efficiency of water services, there should be full consultation with the LGAQ and all local governments likely to be affected by any proposed changes.

8.5.1.5 Local government believes that any change in current water institutional arrangements should seek to build on existing roles, responsibilities and relationships reflecting the existing partnership approach between the State and local governments and amongst local governments.

8.5.4.4 Local government is committed to rationalising the system of water information reporting by local governments to reduce inefficiencies, eliminate duplication of reporting mechanisms and improve information for water planning and security.

Contact

Should further information on any aspect of the LGAQ's response be required, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Arron Hieatt, Lead – Water and Sewerage Infrastructure on 3000 2237 or arron_hieatt@lgaq.asn.au

¹³ Available at <http://www.lgaq.asn.au/documents/10136/48c73637-4038-46e1-91a0-535a16e367dd>