

To: Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Re: Great Artesian Basin Programs Review

20 May 2023

Introduction

AMEC welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Great Artesian Basin Programs Review. Rather than answer the survey questions, AMEC has provided specific comment on issues it would like to see the Commonwealth Government consider in any future priority setting and program design.

We appreciate the grant of an extension so that we may contribute to this review.

About AMEC

The Association of Mining and Exploration Companies (AMEC) is a national industry association representing over 540 member companies across Australia. Our members are mineral explorers, emerging miners, producers, and a wide range of businesses working in and for the industry. Collectively, AMEC's member companies account for over \$100 billion of the mineral exploration and mining sector's capital value.

Mineral exploration and mining make a critical contribution to Australia's economy, directly employing over 274,000 people. In 2020/21 Industry generated a record high \$301 billion in mining exports, invested \$3.2 billion in exploration expenditure to discover the mines of the future, and collectively paid over \$43.2 billion in royalties and taxes.

General Comments

AMEC recognises the immense investment and work that has been done for more than 25 years to improve the health and functioning of the Great Artesian Basin (GAB) through various investment programs with landholders. Moving forward, the Commonwealth Government needs to refresh and modernising its view of the GAB and its various programs and ensure that management of this resource—environmental, economic, and social—are future proofed by considering and addressing key contemporary and projected challenges, including the GAB's role in future water security.

Baseline assessment of the GAB

Opportunity exists for the Commonwealth Government to build on the work that was completed in 2022, namely the *Assessing the status of groundwater in the Great Artesian Basin*¹ and undertake further baseline assessment of the GAB. Namely this assessment could focus and align with some of the work being done through State-Federal baseline assessments, and ultimately frontload groundwater monitoring information into a publicly available database.

¹ [Product catalogue - Geoscience Australia \(ga.gov.au\)](https://www.ga.gov.au/product-catalogue)

Currently, where development occurs that overlays with the GAB, proponents will be required to undertake groundwater monitoring. This data is provided to the assessing department but is then owned by the proponent. If the proponent moves on and another entity comes onto the same ground, they will be required to start from scratch and do the same monitoring.

DCCEW with partner federal and state agencies has the opportunity to pre-emptively lead some of this monitoring and make the data publicly available. This will help better define what is appropriate development for various areas, as well assist in determining water options for proposed development. The ultimate outcome of reducing the time and money for a proponent, will also have immense benefits for industry.

Achieving equity in frameworks

There is currently inconsistency in how the GAB is managed under state-based frameworks. From an economic point of view, this can be an issue for proponents when they are navigating approvals pathways for developments. This was acutely felt in the gas sector by companies undertaking developments that crossed the Queensland and South Australian borders.

Another issue is how within state-based frameworks different economic sectors are managed, which as time has gone on, has led to an environment of inequity. Taking Queensland as an example, currently under section 51 of the *Water Plan (Great Artesian Basin and other Regional Aquifers) 2017*, landholders or other parties who fund work on behalf of the landholder to make a bore watertight are eligible for at least 30% of the water saved as a water licence.

This has largely been considered and implemented as an initiative to support capping and piping for landholders and achieve water security for the gas industry in the Surat Basin. AMEC believes that there may be merit in considering this as a mechanism to achieve broader improvement of GAB management by promoting and incentivising further the implementation of a section 51-like initiative broadly across all GAB jurisdictions and promoting it as an economic agnostic approach, i.e. it clearly articulated that it could also be done by mineral miners for example.

Final Remarks

AMEC appreciates the opportunity to provide comment and would welcome an opportunity to meet with the reviewers if they consider it necessary.

For further information please contact:

Sarah Gooley

Director: QLD

0455 743 329

sarah.gooley@amec.org.au