

The Geological and Bioregional Assessment (GBA) Program held its second user panel meeting for the Beetaloo GBA region in Darwin, on 23 May 2019.

Presentations to the user panel were made by the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy, the Northern Territory Government (NTG), CSIRO, Geoscience Australia, Pangaea, Santos and Origin Energy.

This communique outlines the key topics discussed by the user panel.

- The Australian Government has committed an additional \$5.022 million in the 2019-20 budget for activities to align the delivery of the Beetaloo GBA region assessment to support the NTG Strategic Regional Environment Baseline Assessment (SREBA) for the Beetaloo Sub-basin, particularly in the areas of ecological and hydrological baseline assessments, geological studies and data delivery.
 - The GBA Program has facilitated the formation of Technical Working Groups (TWG) for ecology, water and risk assessment. The TWGs are formed from technical members of staff drawn from the NTG, CSIRO and academic institutions with the aim of determining approaches for delivering elements of the SREBA that fall within the scope of the GBA assessment.
 - Further Commonwealth support will come from CSIRO and CSIRO GISERA who have already commenced methane monitoring and water chemistry and tracer work in the region.
 - Members of Geoscience Australia and CSIRO provided updates on the work being done to complete the baseline assessment (Stage 2) for the region. This included current understanding of basin geology, ecology and surface & groundwater systems. The Stage 2 synthesis report is undergoing internal review with the expectation it will be published and made available on the Program website by late 2019 (<https://www.bioregionalassessments.gov.au/geological-and-bioregional-assessment-program>).
 - There was discussion on the need for characterisation of cultural and socio-economic values associated with the Beetaloo Sub-basin. It was acknowledged that this is out of scope for the GBA Program, but will be progressed separately by the NTG.
- Members of the gas industry provided an update on planned exploration works for the 2019-20 dry season and beyond. This included the intention to drill exploration wells and undertake fracturing activities should relevant approvals be granted by the NTG.
- Members of CSIRO and Geoscience Australia presented the activities that are planned for Stage 3 of the assessment. Stage 3 will develop a conceptual model of a plausible industry development profile for the region, including estimates of water use to examine the potential impacts of shale and tight gas operations on water resources and protected matters.
 - There was broad support for key aspects of the Stage 3 assessment including the examination of the potential connections between basin aquifers, assessing likely source

flows to the Mataranka Springs Complex and the assessment of potential impacts from industry development and fracturing activities.

- Panellists were keen to see further engagement with key stakeholders on the characterisation of hazards and associated causal pathways related to industry development.
- Members of the user panel raised a need for communications material which explains technical information and scientific findings for a variety of audiences, to help facilitate open discussion in their communities around how aspects of the industry work, potential impacts of development and program progress. The NTG reiterated that there was a high level of focus on getting relevant information to people who needed it and they are more than happy to receive advice on any additional activities or information required by communities in the region.
 - The NTG highlighted its ongoing participation in the User Panel will ensure that any future requests for supporting information are addressed promptly.
 - User panellists were invited to provide frequently asked questions to the program and the NTG to assist in tailoring future presentations and communication products.
- There was broad agreement to incorporate a field trip into the next user panel meeting (late dry season of 2019), if industry have approval for exploration activities.