

The Geological and Bioregional Assessment (GBA) Program held its third Beetaloo GBA region user panel meeting on 12 August 2020. This meeting was held virtually due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. It followed the release of the Stage 2 - Geological and environmental baseline assessment for the Beetaloo GBA region by the Minister for the Environment on 15 May 2020.

Prior to the meeting, the GBA Program distributed a short report to user panel members summarising the results of the Stage 2 - Geological and environmental baseline assessment. The summary report was designed to both support the meeting presentations and provide a plain English guide to help understand the key messages and knowledge presented in the full set of Stage 2 reports and their technical appendices. The full set of Stage 2 reports are available on the GBA website:

<https://www.bioregionalassessments.gov.au/assessments/geological-and-bioregional-assessment-program/beetaloo-sub-basin/beetaloo-gba-region-stage-two-report>

This communique outlines the key topics discussed by user panel members during the meeting.

- The GBA Program thanked panel members for their patience while waiting for the third panel meeting to be held. The program noted it was unfortunate it wasn't possible to conduct a field trip in the region before the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 however remains optimistic to do so in the future.
- CSIRO and Geoscience Australia presented the published results of the Stage 2 - Geological and environmental baseline assessment for the Beetaloo GBA region including how the baseline synthesis facilitates the program's third stage.
- The GBA program provided a brief update on the progress of projects as a result of an additional \$5.022 million committed by the Australia government in the 2019-20 budget to align delivery of the Beetaloo GBA assessment to support the Northern Territory Government's (NTG) Strategic Regional Environmental and Baseline Assessment (SREBA).
 - The ecological survey project is delivering valuable new ecological information across the basin, including expanding the knowledge of protected matters, ground-water dependent ecosystems and updated vegetation mapping.
 - The projects will be delivered by June 2021 with results and associated data to be available through data.gov.au and bioregionalassessments.gov.au
- Members of the panel noted areas of Indigenous cultural significance identified by legislation are located close to the GBA region and it is likely that additional

unidentified sites exist within the Beetaloo GBA region. Land councils highlighted the importance of engaging traditional owner ranger groups when undertaking field studies to ensure the identification of culturally significant sites. There was wide agreement on the importance of appropriate local traditional owner engagement. The NTG noted the commencement of the social, cultural and economic assessments to contribute to the SREBA that will include further engagement with traditional custodians.

- Members of industry highlighted their existing and ongoing commitment to working with Native Title holders and other traditional owners to identify and preserve sites of cultural significance through their existing Exploration Agreements and the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority Certification process, a requirement for proposed works to be assessed and approved.
- The GBA Program was asked how long-term well integrity risks were considered. This is particularly important to traditional owners and pastoralists, who want to know what the potential risks are to water resources over a long period. The GBA Program highlighted the work completed through the Stage 2 baseline assessment and the identified low risk of well integrity impacts. Due to heightened community concerns well integrity impacts will be examined further through the Stage 3 assessment despite the identified low risk.
- Industry were interested in seeing the GBA Program's analyses of the Cambrian Limestone's groundwater flow rates within their leases. The information would be useful to inform the management of potential impacts regardless of their risk profile.
- Industry queried the GBA Program's definition of 'produced water' as a source of water for industry operations in the region. So far, exploration wells in the region have not generated 'produced water'. The Program clarified 'produced water' should be termed recycled water; the re-use of water previously needed for a range of processes such as drilling muds or flowback from hydraulic fracturing activities.
- The user panel was given a look at the GBA Program's Stage 3 impact and risk assessment. Stage 3 will examine the potential impacts identified in Stage 2, address the identified data requirements and consider a range of mitigation measures.
- The user panel agreed the next meeting will occur in the fourth quarter of 2020. The GBA Program will continue to work with the panel members to determine a suitable location.