

Consultation Summary Report

Healthy Waters Management Plan for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine Basins

Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of the South West Queensland region

The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (the department) would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the past and present Traditional Owners of the region and their Nations, and thank the representatives of the Aboriginal communities, including the Elders, who provided their knowledge of natural resource management throughout the consultation process. The department acknowledges that the Traditional Owners of the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins have a deep cultural connection to their lands and waters. The department understands the need for recognition of Traditional Owner knowledge and cultural values in water quality planning.

Prepared by: Healthy Waters Policy, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

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1 Introduction

The development of the Healthy Waters Management Plan (HWMP) for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins involved ongoing consultation in accordance with the requirements of the Environmental Protection (Water) Policy 2009 and the *Basin Plan 2012*.

Engagement with stakeholders and the community was organised through local print media, mail-outs, emails, the South West Natural Resource Management (NRM) Ltd website, Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations and workshops. The consultation was open to participants from local government, natural resource management groups, industry groups, local Aboriginal Nations and the community. The facilitation of workshops was supported by South West NRM Ltd. Where possible, joint consultation was conducted by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. In addition, the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations nominated facilitators to assist meetings with people of Aboriginal Nations across the plan area.

This report provides a record of the comments related to water quality that were received at community and stakeholder meetings throughout the development of the HWMP for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins. Information contained in this document represents the range of feedback received on water quality issues in the plan area and informed the development of the HWMP for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins.

2 Community and stakeholder consultation: First round (2011)

Key water quality matters that were raised at the first round of workshops across the South West NRM region for the HWMP are presented below. The opinions expressed below are those of the workshop participants.

Mungallala

- Controls for weed infestations need to be flexible with the season and subsequently government investment strategies towards control programs need to recognise this practical aspect for implementation.
- Sedimentation was identified as a significant local issue in the area impacting directly on water quality. Development and maintenance of groundcover is fundamental to maximising water quality, and the notion that 'grass holds more sediment than trees' was thought to be affected through current legislation and policy (e.g. Management of woody weeds and dense canopy cover leading to limited grass cover was thought to be a significant management impediment for landholders across the region).
- Inability to maintain thickening vegetation along riparian zones was seen as an issue.
- There needs to be more emphasis on fire management throughout the area to tackle woody weed growth.
- Controlling Carp was seen as a priority as their invasion into local streams and waterways has been widespread.
- Salinity was not thought to be an issue in this area.
- Total Grazing Pressure was an ongoing issue, and becomes more pronounced as drought conditions emerge.
- To revert to the land conditions found in the 1800's where open grassed plains were extensively found, consider reintroduction of aspects of Aboriginal land practices and techniques.
- Concerns were raised in terms of the potential negative impacts of the coal seam gas industry on underground water supplies¹.
- Responsible disposal of unwanted chemicals from properties was raised as an issue. It was suggested that there needs to be more disposal locations / avenues and frequency of 'drum musters' to clean up potential chemical spills and negate pollution entering waterways. Landholders want to do the right thing but they felt there are limited opportunities to do property clean ups in a community wide context.

¹ The framework for addressing risks to water quality as a result of coal seam gas and mining was described at community forums. This included salt and brine management, groundwater impact monitoring and modelling, cumulative impact reports, compliance and 'make good' arrangements. Attendees were directed to the appropriate Queensland Government website for further information.

Bollon

- The point was made of the fundamental interrelationships between overland flows, development and maintenance of groundcover, Total Grazing Pressure impacts and increase / decrease of sedimentation entering the watercourses. However, care in design of this method would have to consider not promoting particular vegetation species through inadvertent flooding, (e.g. poplar box seedlings).
- The Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative (GABSI) has facilitated control of waters on extensive properties.
- Coal seam gas operations were discussed, with the forum suggesting there was a need to be vigilant to maintain the quantity and quality of underground supplies, with concerns expressed in regards to monitoring and compliance.
- Grazing pressures under a Total Grazing Pressure scenario were discussed, whereby participants felt legislative and policy requirements made it difficult to control excessive Macropod numbers on their properties over time and under cyclic seasonal outcomes.
- It would be advantageous to maintain ground cover to spell extensive tracts of country to better manage entire catchments.
- There was recognition that efforts are required at a number of levels to facilitate the promotion and adoption of practice change.
- The current seasonal conditions have favoured an explosion in pig numbers; also cane toads have now been sighted at the Condamine River.
- Increased Noogoora Burr infestations were being observed.
- Participants suggest financial assistance or incentives are required for landholders to help protect waterways (e.g. funding towards establishing further riparian fencing).
- The aesthetics associated with waterways were noted as important for rural communities, (e.g. the riparian area adjacent the Bollon Weir was an attractive area both for locals and the travelling public).
- The Great Artesian Basin is the greatest asset for western Queensland.
- There is potential for an increase in Nature Based Recreation in western Queensland.

Cunnamulla

- Groundwater is essential for sustainability and the operation of western Queensland communities.
- As water flow is cyclic, water quality outcomes will also be cyclic.
- Coal seam gas extraction and mining is causing concern and uncertainty to western Queensland communities.
- Feral pigs were identified as a major pest species.
- Rubbish left at waterholes and washed downstream in a flood situation is of concern.
- Carp are found in large numbers in streams and waterways and require immediate control measures.
- The level of water weeds are impacting on water based recreational activities, (e.g. water lettuce).
- The weed Noogoora Burr was thought to have spread too far into the catchment to be effectively controlled.
- Control of Total Grazing Pressure was thought to be a factor towards maintaining better waters and suitable water quality. Also better management and installation of water infrastructure will assist in managing Total Grazing Pressure.
- The Alan Tannock Weir requires desilting and installation of a fish ladder to enable aquatic species to migrate up / down stream to maintain native fish populations.
- Concern was also raised in terms of the impacts of spraying Water Lettuce and using that same water supply for irrigation on Organically Certified enterprises.
- Community education towards sustainable land management is a priority, and there is a need to obtain funding for development and delivery of a broader range of these programs.

Eulo

- Water quality in the Eulo area is thought to be generally very good.
- Concern was raised as to Yapunyah thickening, creating more frequent 'black floods'.
- Lack of fire use as a management tool has limited woody weed and Yapunyah thickening control options.
- No local reports of anglers catching Murray Cod (none caught for 20 years) or catfish; although plenty of Carp are being caught.
- Parkinsonia has been identified in the upper reaches of the Paroo River. Generally, weeds are found in isolated locations—treatment is still required at these locations.
- Excessive numbers of waterbirds feeding on fingerlings could have an impact on fish numbers in the upper reaches of the Paroo River.
- Producers need to monitor and react to Total Grazing Pressure, particularly as a result of kangaroos. The goat

industry is now considered an economic diversifier for the local community.

- Fencing off dams is problematic due to pressures from kangaroos and pigs. These species damage infrastructure, creating a secondary management problem for landholders.
- There is a real need for landholders to be able to maintain land against woody weed encroachment to allow pasture to grow, trap sediment and subsequently filter overland flows entering streams and waterways.
- Need to maintain bee keeping opportunities within riparian ecosystems.
- Landholders need to maintain areas defined as wetlands, such as gilgai, claypans and small depressions.

Thargomindah

- Groundcover characteristics are directly linked to water quality.
- Vegetation management influences groundcover and subsequent increases in stream sedimentation if degradation occurs.
- Having access to enough quality water is fundamental to a grazing enterprise.
- People need to read the history of the 1800's as to what people found in western Queensland to determine what was the state of the environment and level of ground cover vs. tree cover. The environment contained more open grass lands.
- Use of fire as a management tool needs to be reintroduced.
- There is a need to manage vegetation, a different approach to tree clearing.
- Good quality water is essential. You can have good groundcover, but if you don't have water you don't have a grazing production system.
- With regards to Organic Certification, concern was raised that any level of pollution / spills from the coal seam gas and mining industry will adversely affect continuing Certification outcomes. This level of concern was specifically raised in light of pollution of underground supplies. The potential pollution of underground water supplies as a result of mining and gas exploration was seen as a 'sleeper issue'.
- Stream pollution was considered a potentially direct consequence of mining activity, (e.g. compromised tailings dams and overland flow from operations entering watercourses in big rains).
- Monitoring and compliance with environmental standards within the coal seam gas and mining sectors was identified as an ongoing issue.
- There was a perception of inconsistency with water management between the mining and grazing sectors.
- No irrigation based enterprises were highlighted for the Bulloo catchment.
- Management of Total Grazing Pressure was considered unmanageable under restrictions enforced under government policy and legislation (e.g. Macropod harvesting legislation and policy limitations need reviewing – producers want to be able to harvest a range of animal sizes and both sexes).
- Quality water supplies support the entire grazing industry.

Quilpie

- There is a direct relationship with maintenance of groundcover and good water quality.
- Producers need the flexibility to manage flood-out country. Overland flow ponding is considered to be advantageous to slow flows, allow a greater element of seepage to enhance groundcover regeneration, and subsequently filter silt from further flows facilitated by vegetative buffers to watercourses.
- It is important to slow the water, which reduces erosion potential – an increase in erosion will result in a decrease in groundcover species available for grazing production.
- Macropod management is an issue especially in dryer times.
- There is an increasing and underlying recognition by producers to look after their country; the Quilpie area has seen property management in some cases spanning up to 7 generations.
- Landholders would like to be able to remove flow obstructions as they feel the increasing siltation is causing secondary issues for aquatic ecosystems.
- Rotational grazing methods, strategic fencing, better ground cover management combined with a good climatic season has resulted in 'crystal clear' water flowing into the Bulloo River system this year.
- Coal seam gas pollution impacts and subsequent issues aligned with long term maintenance of water quality to underground supplies, was identified as a major concern for the region.
- The issue of increasing absentee land owners and reduced practical experience towards land management outcomes was seen as an emerging issue. It was estimated that approximately 20% of the landholders in the Quilpie Shire would be classed as absentee land owners.

Charleville

- Water quality at the moment is very good as it has been a great season.

- The Ward River / Langlo River junction areas have alkaline conditions which rust out fencing materials.
- Increasing sedimentation is seen as a significant issue to the maintenance of water quality.
- Riparian fencing is still being seen as a management tool to retain riparian vegetation and water quality.
- There is limited irrigation on the Warrego River.
- Carp was identified as a feral pest in most rivers and streams in the Warrego catchment, with a significant influx / expansion of this species in 1974.
- There is limited crop spraying in the upper reaches of the catchment.
- Attention to weed and pest animals will assist in the retention / maintenance of ground cover and subsequently water quality. The community would like to see related activities considered across the catchment as a whole.
- It was suggested to consider mechanical disturbance vs. burning (e.g. strip cutter bar treatment running parallel to the watercourse with intervening vegetative strips) to enhance woody weed control, groundcover maintenance, and overland flow water filtering.
- The potential impacts on water quality of the coal seam gas industry was raised as an issue, with chemical effects on cattle production, organic certification and EU status being identified as production outcomes at risk if pollution from coal seam gas occurs.
- The Cuttaburra Creek area is becoming more important as an outflow area of the Warrego River.
- It is important to recognise that aquatic ecosystems and associated watercourses could be the only source of water for kilometres – so they are important locations.
- It was proposed that risks to water resources and water quality are addressed in a holistic framework.
- Focus on small issues before they become larger more expensive issues to fix e.g. control of water lettuce and carp.
- Bores often have an aesthetic appeal and in some situations an educational role, e.g. Thargomindah Bore hydroelectricity interpretive display.

Augathella

- Look after the people that look after both the land and water quality throughout the catchment, through both good and bad seasons.
- Feral fish – Carp was identified as an issue. They are now found in Yo Yo Creek.
- Participants noted coal seam gas impacts should be managed in relation to water quality issues over time.
- Water quality indicators need to be cognisant of sedimentation and suspended solids.
- Maintaining a diversity of grass species through strategic grazing systems will assist maintaining a continuation in ground cover.
- There is a real need towards establishing and developing education towards holistic management systems to provide greater management options for landholders.
- Management expertise and successful implementation is a key factor for land management and maintenance of water quality. Economic conditions / constraints are an impediment for young people to enter the industry.

3 Community and stakeholder consultation: Second round (2012)

Key water quality matters that were raised at the second round of workshops across the South West NRM region for the HWMP are presented below. The opinions expressed below are those of the workshop participants.

Morven

- Water quality will vary between seasons.
- Whole area is seen as 'maintain' in terms of ecosystem values.
- Attendees wanted to know what datasets contributed to AquaBAMM and the establishment of High Ecological Value and Slightly Disturbed areas.
- Ensure waterhole out the back of the Morven Pub has been picked up in mapping.
- The community enquired as to what land management measures are landowners meant to implement to improve water quality if the system isn't flowing.
- The community indicated that areas highlighted as High Ecological Value and Slightly Disturbed are not always seen as different from adjacent land.
- The community enquired as to the implications of having High Ecological Value or Slightly Disturbed areas on a landowner's property (In terms of water quality targets and in terms of management actions).

Augathella

- Phosphate issue reported from manure washing into waterways from livestock.
- An explanation was provided as to how Environmental Values are used in the development approval process.
- The community enquired as to what is considered a good range for each of the water quality indicators.
- The community enquired as to what guideline the industry is using for aquifer re-injection at present.

Charleville

- Silted up waterholes – Landowners feel logs and vegetation matter build-up is to blame. The representative from SW NRM Ltd stated that logs in waterways are important for aquatic life.
- The community indicated that the Fisheries department has GPS coordinates of all the waterholes.
- A participant enquired as to whether the gauging stations and data points used for the Ward River numbers include the Langlo River.
- An explanation was provided in response to a question regarding the involvement of the southern States in the HWMP process.

Quilpie

- Irrigation was noted in the Bulloo at Adavale, just outside of Quilpie, and in Lower Paroo (just outside Eulo).
- The community enquired as to the temporal scale of the data and how the locally derived water quality target values compared with neighbouring catchments.

Thargomindah

- One landowner was keen to see measures of silt flows during floods and indicated that this is very important.
- Testing groundwater – there is community concern for drinking water aquifers in relation to mining activities (CSG).
- The community enquired as to whether local councils can supply water quality funding or have current available data/monitoring in place.
- The community requested that the list of permanent waterholes in the consultation report is updated to include the Bulloo.
- The community requested an explanation as to how the HWMP process linked to Basin Plan.

Eulo

- The community identified an irrigation lease in the Bow Creek.
- The condition of the Mud Springs Nature Reserve was discussed.
- It was suggested that inactive springs are removed from the mapping.
- Community enquiry as to whether the Eulo Weir and the two Charleville Weirs were mapped.

Cunnamulla

- Community enquiry as to whether the Queensland Government is undertaking this process in the CSG areas and whether it is having an effect in the areas where water quality issues occur.
- Community enquiry as to whether the Queensland Government will be testing water quality in farm bores.
- Community concerns for potential drop in bore pressure as a result of CSG.
- A landowner enquired as to the impacts of the HWMP in relation to managing stock by the river.

Bollon

- An explanation was provided as to where the water quality samples were collected from for determining local guidelines and the temporal scale of sampling.
- A community member raised the issue of the inability to remove logs from waterholes due to legislation. They indicated that this issue was to blame for siltation and they do not believe the logs are habitats for fish.
- Abbieglassie waterhole had 12 foot of water in 1990, whereas other waterholes went dry for the first time in 1990.

4 Community and stakeholder consultation: Third round (2014)

Key water quality matters that were raised at the third round of workshops across the South West region for the HWMP are presented below. The information has been summarised from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines community consultation meeting notes—Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine water plan area (2014). The opinions expressed below are those of the workshop participants.

Bollon

- No further water quality comments, other than what had been raised at previous workshops.

Toompine

- Kangaroo numbers increase in response to rain and result in grazing pressure on groundcover.

Eulo

- Carp and goldfish appear to be increasing in the Paroo and Warrego catchments. It was suggested that trees pushed into streams increases the carp problem.

Cunnamulla

- A community member suggested that seepage from the evaporation ponds of the Cunnamulla Sewage Treatment Plant during very dry periods is occurring. This was reported to the compliance unit at the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection for follow-up.
- The community suggested that the salt load in the Warrego River is increasing and is interested in research to determine the source/effect.
- Local interest for a fish ladder at the Allan Tannock Weir, Cunnamulla.
- Discussion about effects of coal seam gas and associated water on local stock and domestic supplies. Strong community concern about water quality impacts from inter-bed leakage, depending on the type of construction and level of maintenance of CSG/P&G bores. Strong interest in having GABSI extended to cover inter-bed leakage from aging and decommissioned CSG/P&G bores.
- Differing views on level of silt (sand) in Cunnamulla weir:
 - general agreement that at the wall, the sand level is near to the level of the outlet pipe
 - some participants thought de-silting could double capacity
 - concerns that the level of the outlet pipe (high) stops the sediment from flushing away (first weir constructed in 1965, second in 1972).
 - suggestion that sand dredging should be allowed, as per Maranoa Weir.

5 Consultation with Aboriginal Nations

Engaging with the Aboriginal community is an integral part of consultation for the development of Environmental Values, Water Quality Objectives and HWMPs under Queensland environmental legislation, as well as a requirement under Chapter 10, Part 14 of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Workshops were organised to enable people of local Aboriginal Nations to specifically discuss Aboriginal values and uses of water at a series of dedicated forums. The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the past and present Traditional Owners of the region and their Nations, and thank the representatives of the Aboriginal communities, including the Elders, who provided their knowledge of natural resource management throughout the consultation process. It is recognised that there are values and protocols of men's and women's business that relate to water which are culturally sensitive and were not discussed openly. It is acknowledged that only the commonly known places and stories can be discussed openly. It is also understood that places and stories can hold different cultural values and significance between each Aboriginal Nation.

The HWMP for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins was undertaken in consultation with Aboriginal Nations with an expressed interest in water planning for this region. These Aboriginal Nations included:

- Bidjara
- Budjiti
- Gungari/Kungarri
- Kooma (Guwamu)
- Kullilli
- Kunja
- Mardigan
- Murrawarri
- Mandandanji²

Workshops and meetings were held to enable representatives from the local Aboriginal community to identify objectives, outcomes, values and uses of water, risks, and opportunities to strengthen the protection of Aboriginal values and uses, for inclusion in both the HWMP and Queensland water resource plan for Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins.

Initial workshops were organised through the former Far South West Aboriginal Natural Resource Management Group. Representatives from the following Nations comprised the Far South West Aboriginal Natural Resource Management Group: Kooma, Bidjara, Kunja, Mardigan, Budjiti, and Kullilli Nations. Two representatives from each local Aboriginal Nation participated. The representatives were either Native Title claimants or community members nominated by claimants to represent their Nation.

The following workshops and meetings were held to ensure the views of the Aboriginal community in relation to water quality were included in the development of the HWMP for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins.

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| • Longreach 'Salt 2 Dust' workshop | 16 July 2011 |
| • Charleville workshop | 2 December 2011 |
| • Cunnamulla workshop | 17 October 2014 |
| • Warwick, Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations Gathering | 30 April 2014 |
| • Toowoomba, Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations Board Meeting and Gathering | 19–20 May 2015 |
| • Bollon, Cunnamulla, Eulo, Charleville, Quilpie, Augathella | 13 October 2015 – |
| • Toowoomba and Roma meetings | 29 October 2015 |

The workshops involved a mixture of presentations, interactive mapping and water quality discussions. A key outcome from these workshops was the refinement of 'Cultural and Spiritual' Environmental Value to also include 'Ceremonial' values. Cultural, spiritual and ceremonial values cover the whole region, especially groundwater.

In addition to the consultation opportunities listed above, draft versions of the HWMP for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins were available on the South West NRM Ltd website for comment between workshops.

² Note: The Mandandanji Nation was identified in the Murray-Darling Basin Authority map endorsed by NBAN that shows the Aboriginal Nations for each water resource plan area. In further consultation it was noted by Traditional Owners that Mandandanji's interest was in the Condamine-Balonne plan area and no comments were received from the Mandandanji Nation on the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine plan area.

The HWMP for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins was also informed by the outcomes of the 'Caring for Water on Country in South West Queensland' report (South West NRM Ltd, 2012b). This report was based on a workshop attended by representatives from the Kooma, Bidjara, Kunja, Mardigan, Budjiti, Kullilli, Murrawarri and Boonthamurra Nations. The report states:

Every water site located in the landscape was considered as being special to Aboriginal people, and it was not possible to prioritise or select some water sites as having a higher value than others' (South West NRM Ltd, 2012b).

This concept was also reflected in the workshops listed above, resulting in the cultural, spiritual and ceremonial environmental value applying to all surface and groundwaters across the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins.

Water planning information sessions for people of the Aboriginal Nations in the Warrego, Paroo, Nebine and Bulloo catchments were held in Bollon, Cunnamulla, Eulo, Charleville, Quilpie, Augathella, Toowoomba and Roma between 13–29 October 2015. The information sessions were held collaboratively between the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, and were facilitated by representatives nominated by NBAN. The information sessions provided people from the Bidjara, Budjiti, Gunggari/Kungarri, Kooma/Guwamu, Kullilli, Kunja, Mandandanji, Mardigan and Murrawarri Aboriginal Nations with an opportunity to review and comment on the objectives, outcomes, values and uses of water, risks, and opportunities to strengthen the protection of Aboriginal values and uses captured through previous workshops and meetings.

Key water quality matters that were raised at Aboriginal community meetings and workshops are outlined below.

Environmental Values and Healthy Waters Management Plan: Traditional Owner workshops (2011—Longreach and Charleville)

- The environmental values for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins were updated to include 'cultural, spiritual and ceremonial values'.
- The 'cultural, spiritual and ceremonial values' were applied to all surface and groundwater areas in the plan area. Without groundwater, Aboriginal people could not have existed in the area.
- Importance was placed on the economic value of the waterways for the Aboriginal people.
- The HWMP should look after water quality, restore and look after fish traps, look after cultural sites and the flora and fauna associated with the riparian areas/waterholes/streams. South West Traditional Owner Groups should be consulted for waters within the region.
- Recognise interrelationships between environmental and cultural flows.
- As a result of bore capping through the GABSI program, some of the cultural sites of the Budjiti and natural springs are regenerating. Local advice is that the water coming out of the aquifers is much smoother than bore water and comes out cool. It is important to note that all springs are not connected to the Great Artesian Basin – other aquifers provide flows to springs.
- Suggested risks to Aboriginal values and uses, in relation to water quality, included:
 - Weirs and dams form fish barriers - identify priority weirs so remedial works can be considered for funding. There is a need for a fish ladder at the Allan Tannock Weir, Cunnamulla. Weirs were also considered by participants to alter natural processes.
 - Recreational planning and enforcement is required to address environmental degradation and waste in tourist areas.
 - Pollution of waterholes via feral baiting programs
 - Blue green algae
 - Increase in feral animal populations (carp, toads) and decrease in native species
 - Aerial spraying/herbicide runoff is affecting food in the waterways
 - Siltation
- Suggestions to address risks:
 - Carp fertiliser – economic opportunities
 - Increase employment, training or economic opportunities for Aboriginal people in natural resource management
 - Restore fish traps
 - Dredging to reduce siltation of waterholes – economic development
 - Protecting cultural, spiritual, ceremonial and economical values
 - Provide opportunities for involvement and decision making for the Traditional Owners in the region in natural resource management. Natural resource management in each Traditional Owner's area needs to be done in close collaboration with the correct local group.
 - Maintain flows for environmental and cultural outcomes

- Recommend installation of a fish ladder at the Allan Tannock Weir
- Bollards restricting vehicle access, in place at Currawinya, provide an example of a potential solution to minimising tourist impacts at important sites.

Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations Gathering (2014—Warwick)

A presentation on the HWMP for Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins was conducted to representatives from the Northern Murray-Darling Basin Aboriginal Nations (NBAN) in Warwick, 30 April 2014, by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. NBAN representatives were provided with the opportunity to comment on the draft Aboriginal values and uses determined through previous workshops. Participants were supportive of the recommendation that the cultural, spiritual and ceremonial environmental value applies to all surface and groundwaters within the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine plan area. This is reflected in the objective and outcome for Aboriginal cultural, spiritual and ceremonial values and uses of water included in the Healthy Waters Management Plan. The intent of the objective is that the quality of water in the South West region will be suitable to support cultural, spiritual and ceremonial values and uses across all surface and groundwaters, with the outcome that water quality will be fit-for-purpose for Aboriginal people. Opportunities to strengthen the protection of Aboriginal values and uses were also presented to the NBAN Gathering for comment.

Environmental Values and Healthy Waters Management Plan: Traditional Owner workshops (2014—Cunnamulla)

Representatives from Traditional Owner groups were provided a further opportunity to comment on the draft HWMP and water resource planning in Cunnamulla on 17 October 2014. The participants re-affirmed the statements that were raised in previous workshops (as listed above), as well as the following:

- Ensure Cuttaburra waterhole is included in the High Ecological Value mapping.
- Participants raised the issue of aquatic weeds in the Allan Tannock Weir pool.
- Concern about salt loads in the river due to:
 - establishment of the weir
 - water take upstream (irrigation and industrial)
- Sand build-up in the Warrego River (both upstream and downstream from the Allan Tannock Weir). It was suggested that sand extraction would benefit Cuttaburra Creek and the sacred waterholes contained within.
- Participants noted development within the bed and banks has significantly altered the depth and characteristics of the Warrego River.
- Aboriginal fishermen are inclined to cross over to the Paroo catchment due to reduced stocks/conditions in the Warrego catchment.
- 'Sandy Point' (part way between town and the weir) had been a great, deep waterhole for fishing, but has changed and is no longer a good place to teach the younger generation to fish.

This information has been summarised from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines community consultation for the Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine water plan area.

Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations Board Meeting and Gathering (2015—Toowoomba)

A hardcopy of the draft HWMP for Warrego, Paroo, Bulloo and Nebine basins was provided to the NBAN Board for comment at the Board Meeting in Toowoomba on 19th May 2015. A presentation on the approach of the HWMP to address the requirements of Chapter 10, Part 14 of the Basin Plan was conducted to the NBAN Board, as well as at the NBAN Gathering on 20th May 2015. Participants stressed the importance of the connectivity in the landscape as a factor that applies throughout the plan area. The management of surface water and groundwater in one part of the plan area can have impacts on values and uses in another part of the country.

Water planning information sessions for people of the Aboriginal Nations in the Warrego, Paroo, Nebine and Bulloo catchments (2015)

Bollon

- There are important ceremonial sites in the Nebine that require protection.
- Mound spring to claypan grass recovery is important.
- Photographs of cultural sites down the river should occur.

- South West NRM has been electrofishing in the area to reduce carp numbers.
- Litter at Bollon in the waterways was noted.
- Aquaculture water quality targets developed under the HWMP will help inform economic opportunities for local Aboriginal groups.
- Investigate feasibility of a fishway at the Bollon weir.

Cunnamulla

- Community is seeking Aboriginal involvement in water monitoring.
- Erosion issues were reported in relation to important cultural sites of the Kunya Nation.
- Participants noted that cultural sites have been drying up, fish are unhealthy, trees and birdlife are dying, galahs, pelicans and black swans have reduced in number.
- Carp are in significant numbers in the Warrego River.
- Participants are seeking deposited sediment to be removed from the Cuttaburra flowpath through a desilting project.
- Sandy point waterhole used to be a good swimming location.
- The ability of Aboriginal people to access waterholes on private land was discussed.
- Bore drain capping has both positive and negative impacts for cultural values and uses.
- Vegetation removal – cutting to feed stock.
- The Cuttaburra is a very spiritual waterway and links back to the Warrego downstream.
- Reports of a Murray Cod dying as a result of Fisheries interference.
- Rare Cunnamulla longneck turtle – at Sandy Point and in Cunnamulla Weir.
- Litter and nappies in the Cunnamulla Weir.
- Reports of illegal fish netting.
- Water lettuce was a previous problem in the Cunnamulla Weir, the Azolla is new infestation.
- Weirs have been built and are obstructing flows.
- Request that fishing is banned at Murray-Cod spawning time or signs are displayed to show when Murray-Cod spawning is occurring.
- Aboriginal Rangers are required in South West Queensland.

Eulo

- Ensure Dynevor Lakes (1 saline and 1 freshwater lake) in between Thargomindah and Eulo are included on mapping of High Ecological Value sites.

Charleville

- Request for Local Council to be present at future meetings.
- Important for Traditional Owners to be at the meetings to determine management actions for their lands.
- Grants are required to provide opportunities for natural resource management by local youth.
- Boosting native fish stocks should occur.
- In the Ward River – people are riding bikes, boats and waterskis through the rivers.
- Rubbish in the waterways from recreational use.
- Community waits for a ‘flush’ to wash sediment in order to swim.
- Algae and vines are present in the Warrego River.
- Berries used to occur by the river – participants feel the ecosystem balance has been lost.
- Native vegetation is important for yellowbelly recruitment.
- Signs are needed to display the value of birds – particularly pelicans who have been getting killed in the Ward River.
- Carp are suspected of eating the yabbies and mussels – which used to filter the water.
- Education on natural resource management issues is important.

Quilpie

- A participant was interested in sharing photos of spring sites in the Upper Warrego.
- Cultural heritage mapping is important.
- Shale and CSG development is occurring at Eromanga.
- It was reported that bores are drying up from mining and that evaporation ponds are causing salinity impacts to nearby vegetation.

Augathella

- No further comments.

Toowoomba

- Participant noted mining is occurring at Adavale.
- Information is available at the Indigenous Knowledge Centre at the State Library.
- Recommend future flyers for community meetings are uploaded to the Deadly Stories Facebook page.
- Turbidity impacts fishing practices.
- Flows impact Native Title if flows are not sufficient to provide for fish and the environment, which affects cultural practices. It is important to provide flows to enable Aboriginal people to practice their cultural rights.
- Cultural Heritage bodies are also an important link in knowledge and can help get the message out about future meetings.
- Protect waterholes of ceremonial importance.
- Cunnamulla Museum has videos and books that may be useful for water planning.
- Angellala Creek is of spiritual importance.
- Artefacts are present, of significant cultural value, in the Nebine.
- There needs to be opportunities for economic development for Aboriginal people in terms of accessing water.
- Building skills, capacity and knowledge within the Aboriginal community.
- Many Nations have a Facebook page – e.g. 'Proud to be Gunggari' Facebook page.

Roma

- Comments were relevant to the Maranoa region only.