



# Trusted Environmental and Geological Information Program

## Basin Reference Group — Communique Meeting 3 (Roadshow) | 8 - 12 May 2023

The Trusted Environmental and Geological Information program held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Basin Reference Group meeting in the form of a roadshow between 8 and 12 May 2023.

The roadshow meetings were held in-person in Longreach, Charleville and Rockhampton in Queensland and were focussed on providing examples of the program's data, information and maps with the Basin Reference Group, prior to public release.

Over 30 members attended, including representatives from local, state and federal government, First Nations Australians, natural resource management bodies and industry. This communique outlines key topics discussed across all three of the meetings.

The morning sessions provided an overview of the program's scope, a discussion around the program's goals, a look back at what the Basin Reference Group wanted to gain from the program and an update on the program's progress and the future of the program. The remainder of the day focussed on group-led discussion and pre-release look at a selection of the program's key findings. The demonstration of pre-release information across the three meetings was guided by what issues and regions were of most importance to the Basin Reference Group members in each meeting. These included:

- Groundwater observations such as quantity, salinity, availability and aquifer distribution
- Ecological assets (e.g. threatened species, vegetation communities and landscapes) and the approach used to identify them
- Surface water systems (e.g. rivers and water bodies) and how data and climatic variability are communicated in the results
- Hydrogen production potential within the regions and the method used to generate the results
- Geology and geological models
- Known mineral resources and how other datasets delivered by the program can be used to support understanding of risk.

The roadshow meetings were designed to foster inclusive and free discussion. All attendees were encouraged to discuss the matters that are most important to them, their region and their communities. The program then identified how the data and information being delivered can support attendees when considering these matters. Discussions included:

- The importance of groundwater and surface water monitoring before, during and after unconventional gas development. Water data is critical to inform the level of risk that unconventional gas developments pose to water resources and without good baseline information it is difficult to determine the consequences for water. Concerns about industry developments, in particular those requiring hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking', exist within the community and easier access to water data would be welcomed.
- The difficulties around engaging in regulatory processes for community, particularly for First Nations Australians. A broad outline of the proposed new goals for Australian environmental protections - as outlined in the Australian Government's '[Nature Positive Plan](#)' - were provided to the group. These goals include improvements to consultation and engagement processes with all community, but specifically First Nations People. The group heard that the involvement of First Nations Australians in any regulatory process needs to be

at the beginning and is not a 'tick-a-box' exercise. Early engagement and co-design with the Traditional Owners of Country needs to appropriately integrate their knowledge of Country.

- Ensuring that the knowledge of Australia's First Peoples is included in scientific programs that study Country across Australia. The group heard that the process of learning from the Traditional Owners of Country should begin before commencement of western science and include taking time to be guided by Traditional Owners, to listen and learn about the tens-of-thousands of years-long knowledge that they have of their Country.
- The importance of groundwater for the environment, communities and industry within the regions. Of specific note were the Great Artesian Basin aquifers and aquifers that support farming families. Similarly to previous Basin Reference Group meetings, the responsible management of the Great Artesian Basin and groundwater more generally was noted as being crucial, particularly for major developments which need to understand, monitor and manage any impacts to this important source of groundwater.
- Where the various resource types identified by the program are located across the region, and how the data to be released can be used to analyse associated groundwater, surface water and ecological assets that co-exist in those locations. Of specific interest were vanadium deposits located in the Galilee Basin region.
- Uncertainty around the renewable energy generation potential across the studied basin regions. Concerns were raised about the fledgling renewable energy industry in these regions, what the impact of renewable energy infrastructure would be and how such developments would be regulated. Large scale developments within the region to support a move to net zero by 2050 would have affect communities and First Nations Australians. More communication from governments about the opportunities and impacts is needed.
- How changing the land use to support renewable energy and carbon reduction measures can cause unforeseen changes in communities. The group heard about how large-scale carbon sequestration is locking up land and is resulting in some farming families moving away from the regions. Government needs to assess and manage the social and economic risks associated with the any potential future opportunities that would result in land use change.

Following the formal part of each meeting, the group were provided the option to go on a short excursion. Each excursion was an opportunity to build relationships and discuss any matters of interest outside of the formality of the meeting. The group at Charleville were given a guided cultural tour of the Warrego River by a Bidjara guide.

Feedback was sought from meeting attendees about their experience engaging through the Basin Reference Group model. Each group was asked to provide their thoughts on the style of engagement (online, in-person or a hybrid of both), whether the content was delivered in a way that was easy to understand and whether there were any specific requirements for delivery of the program's results. Feedback received will be used by the program to inform future program engagement and broader government communication and engagement techniques.

The Basin Reference Group were informed that program funding will not continue beyond the completion of the baseline information collation and therefore detailed field investigations within the basin regions would not occur. Group members noted concerns about this decision, however the program is confident that the baseline information being will provide an important publicly available legacy as being the largest existing data and information compendium for the four basin regions. The program informed the group of how the results will support work that is happening in the Australian Government to improve data, regulatory decision making and engagement.

The program committed to notify the Basin Reference Group as soon as the data, information and webpage are made publicly accessible. Program staff remain contactable to support the Basin Reference Group members in accessing and understanding the program's results.

The program team can be contacted by email at [TEGI@ga.gov.au](mailto:TEGI@ga.gov.au). For more information on the program see <https://www.ga.gov.au/about/projects/resources/trusted-environmental-and-geological-information-program>.