

The Geological and Bioregional Assessment (GBA) Program held its first User Panel meeting for the Beetaloo Sub-basin in Darwin, on 31 July 2018.

The User Panel consists of representatives from a number of stakeholder groups including local and state government, representatives of the aboriginal community, the gas industry, the pastoral industry, and community and environmental groups.

Presentations to the User Panel were made by the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy, the Northern Territory Government, CSIRO, Origin Energy, the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association and Local Government.

This communique outlines the key topics discussed by the User Panel.

- The Beetaloo Sub-basin assessment follows the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing of Onshore Unconventional Reservoirs in the Northern Territory which produced 135 recommendations for the development and regulation of an onshore shale gas industry in the Northern Territory.
- The Northern Territory Government has lifted the moratorium, stating it will implement the 135 recommendations made by the inquiry. This includes undertaking a Strategic Regional and Environment Baseline Assessments (SREBA) before any production approvals are granted.
- The Beetaloo Sub-basin assessment by the GBA Program will contribute to the SREBA, particularly in the areas of ecological and hydrological baseline assessments and geological studies.
 - Further Commonwealth support will come from CSIRO and CSIRO GISERA who have commenced methane monitoring and water chemistry and tracer work.
- User Panel members agreed that water is an important economic, physical and cultural asset for the region.
- The User Panel noted that effective communication of information is essential. Communication of technical information and results will need to be tailored to meet the needs of various audiences, including the use of appropriate language, supported by interpretive and pictorial material.
- Contextual discussion included current matters of community focus including land access rights, community concerns and how to capture regional and indigenous development opportunities. It was noted that these were outside of the remit of the User Panel.
- There was general agreement to incorporate a field trip into the next User Panel meeting for the Beetaloo Sub-basin in the early dry season of 2019, as long as there was a relevant industry activity for the panel to observe, such as an exploration well being drilled or a frack job being conducted.