

The Geological and Bioregional Assessment (GBA) Program held its fourth Cooper GBA region user panel meeting on 08 July 2020. This meeting was held virtually because of COVID-19 travel restrictions. It followed the release of the Stage 2 - Geological and environmental baseline assessment for the Cooper GBA region by the Minister for the Environment on 15 May 2020.

Prior to the meeting, the GBA Program distributed a short report summarising the results of the Stage 2 - Geological and environmental baseline assessment to user panel members. 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/cooper-basin/cooper-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 fourth panel meeting to be held. The meeting scheduled in March 2020 was delayed due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.
- CSIRO and Geoscience Australia presented the published results of the Stage 2 - Geological and environmental baseline assessment for the Cooper GBA region and how the baseline synthesis facilitates the program's third stage.
- Traditional owners reiterated the importance of "Before Cook" sites of cultural significance within the Cooper GBA region. The Program noted the cultural significance of the entire region for traditional custodians and highlighted how the landscape scale assessment applied in Stage 3 can consider these matters.
- Panellists were keen to see the results from the hydrodynamic flood inundation model being developed by the GBA Program and the release of the LIDAR data collected by the program.
  - The GBA Program provided an update on the data's progress. It has passed through collection and is undergoing testing for accuracy.
  - The GBA Program highlighted its enthusiasm for publicly releasing the dataset once it has been thoroughly assessed for accuracy and the correct agreements are reached on its suitability for release.

- Information on the extent of the LiDAR survey is already publicly available at <https://data.gov.au/dataset/ds-dga-801320f9-901a-4482-a8e8-9029c55a472c/details>
- The user panel discussed the value of the GBA Program in capturing the likelihood and consequence of potential impacts as part of the Stage 3 assessment, and welcomed the inclusion of low likelihood events, such as compromised well integrity for further assessment in response to community concern.
- Members of the oil and gas industry expressed their willingness to contribute to the development of mitigation measures being examined as part of the Stage 3 impact assessment.
- Panellists highlighted the importance of shallow groundwater systems for livestock watering. Panellists were interested in further understanding the use of shallow and deeper aquifers as water sources for industry development as part of the Stage 3 assessment given the importance of its use in the region.
- The panel queried how the GBA Program's products would take account of changing regulations and how it would affect future assessments in the region. The GBA Program outlined the targeted engagement processes with State and Commonwealth regulators to ensure that regulatory changes are addressed and integrated into the assessment. Panellists were given assurance that these engagements would continue throughout the Program as it continues in Stage 3.
- Panellists sought information outlining the similarities and differences between conventional and unconventional drilling operations, including differences at the surface and the impacts from the chemicals used in both past and present operations.
- 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.