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## Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of the Information Report

This Information Report has been prepared to facilitate public understanding of the amendment process proposed for the Pioneer Valley Water Resource Plan (the Plan). It is also intended to encourage public involvement in the process and to assist individuals and groups with preparation of submissions on the proposal.

The Information Report details:

- the purpose of a water resource plan and reasons for amending the Plan to include groundwater;
- the proposed Plan area and water to which the amended Plan is intended to apply;
- groundwater allocation and management issues in the Plan area;
- surface water management issues in the Alligator and Sandringham creek catchments;
- proposed arrangements for community consultation, including formation of a Community Reference Panel;
- proposed arrangements for technical assessments to support development of the Plan amendment, and;
- arrangements for making submissions.

Submissions received will be used to guide the technical and consultation process components of the planning process. They will also be considered in the development of the draft Plan amendment. Once the draft Plan amendment has been prepared, it will be advertised for public comment.

The *Water Act 2000* provides that an information report must be prepared prior to the Public Notice by the Minister of his intention to prepare a draft water resource plan (Appendix A). This Information Report has been prepared to promote public understanding of the consultation process and water management issues, to encourage public involvement in the process and for interested parties to prepare submissions on the issues and the proposal to amend the Plan.

The Plan amendment will include extending the existing Plan area to include the Alligator and Sandringham creek catchments. This proposed extension better aligns with the area's groundwater resources. The amended Plan will address groundwater resources in the new area as well as the surface water resources in the Alligator and Sandringham creek catchments.

#### ***This Information Report:***

- *explains the importance of water resource planning;*
- *describes why the Pioneer Valley Water Resource Plan is being extended;*
- *details the water and the area proposed to be covered by the Plan;*
- *discusses some of the main issues related to water;*
- *outlines future water allocation and management considerations; and*
- *invites submissions on the proposals.*

### **Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems**

*These are ecosystems that depend on groundwater for all or part of their existence. They can include caves, wetlands, waterholes, woodlands, springs and riverine ecosystems. Of interest in the Pioneer Valley are microscopic organisms found in aquifers and groundwater-fed streams as well as deep-rooted plants.*

### **Key outcomes of the Water Resource Plan include:**

- *sustainable groundwater resource management*
- *planning for future needs*
- *establishing secure water entitlements*
- *environmental flow provisions*
- *tradeable water allocations*
- *defining monitoring requirements*

## **1.2 Purpose of a Water Resource Plan**

The availability of secure and reliable water supplies is essential to the wellbeing of our communities and the stability and growth of many of our industries. However, it is now recognised that water is also needed to maintain the health of the riverine environment and aquatic ecosystems, including groundwater dependent ecosystems.

Under the *Water Act 2000* the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines (the Minister) must plan for the allocation and sustainable management of water to meet Queensland's future water requirements, including water for the protection of natural ecosystems and the security of supply to water users. The Minister may achieve this by preparing a water resource plan or by amending a water resource plan to include additional resources such as overland flow water or groundwater.

A water resource plan provides a framework for sustainable allocation of water for domestic, agricultural, irrigation, industrial and recreational uses as well as providing for water necessary to sustain water dependent ecosystems. The framework defines water availability, priorities of water use, management strategies and monitoring requirements that will apply over the 10-year life of a plan.

Providing for ecologically sustainable levels of water extraction is a key objective of the water resource planning process. This objective recognises not only the importance of maintaining ecosystem health, including riverine systems dependent on groundwater, but also the objective that water users can access adequate supplies of good quality water in the long term.

A chief outcome of the amendment process will be the objectives, performance measures and standards that will provide the basis for deciding groundwater management and allocation strategies.

This includes setting objectives for groundwater allocation security, which are a critical precursor to specifying tradable water allocations, and providing greater certainty for water users and enhanced confidence on which business planning decisions can be made.

Also central to the process is the requirement to set environmental flow objectives necessary to promote riverine and groundwater dependent ecosystem health.

A water resource plan can provide the basis for a framework that allows water allocations to be traded separately from the land, allowing water users to sell or buy allocations within defined constraints. This is particularly important where water resources are becoming scarce and further opportunity for water resource development is sought.

### ***1.3 Why the Draft Pioneer Valley Water Resource Plan amendment is being prepared***

The groundwater resources of the Pioneer River Valley have contributed significantly to the social and economic wellbeing of the region's communities. However, current usage patterns, particularly during dry periods, have highlighted concerns about the capacity of the alluvial aquifer to meet demand and the seawater intrusion into the aquifer's coastal margin that results from this usage.

There are also shortcomings in the current licensing and aquifer management approach (Section 3.3.3). The current regulatory arrangements for managing the groundwater resources need improved flexibility to deal with the impacts of overuse. The maintenance of water for groundwater dependent ecosystems and baseflow in streams is important for the health of other water dependent ecosystems. The current regulatory arrangements are not able to provide for these interests.

The existing Plan area is to be extended to cover the aquifers of the Alligator and Sandringham creek catchments. Because of the interaction between surface water and groundwater, it is also necessary to include these creeks' surface water resources in the extended Plan area.

The key issues driving the need to amend the Water Resource Plan are:

- management of current groundwater demand and sources;
- the need for water resource regulatory arrangements so that there is:
  - more consistent specification for water entitlements;
  - specification of water for groundwater dependent ecosystems;
  - a mechanism for creating tradable water allocations relevant to groundwater systems;
  - improved monitoring and reporting of basin water management and use;
- dewatering bores to lower seasonal water tables in some areas;
- management of pumping capacity and water restrictions;
- managing future groundwater demand;

- water quality and irrigation with poor quality water;
- improved water use efficiency;
- rising watertables and salinity in some areas;
- impacts of full use of existing entitlements; and
- surface water resources – Alligator and Sandringham creek catchments.

#### **1.4 Proposed Plan Area**

The plan area (Figure 1) for the amended Water Resource (Pioneer Valley) Plan is the Pioneer River drainage basin and the areas drained by the Bakers, Sandy, Alligator and Sandringham creek catchments.

*The Pioneer Valley Plan area comprises the following drainage basins:*

- Pioneer River;
- Bakers Creek;
- Sandy Creek;
- Sandringham Creek; and
- Alligator Creek.

#### **1.5 Water provided for in amendments to the Plan**

It is proposed that amendments to the water resource plan will apply to subartesian groundwater within the proposed Plan area (Figure 1) and will provide for the establishment of tradable groundwater allocations where this is appropriate.

It is also proposed that amendments to the Plan will apply to surface water in watercourses, lakes or springs and collected in dams or weirs associated with a watercourse, lake or spring in the Alligator and Sandringham creek catchments (Figure 1).

Surface water (except for overland flow water) in the Pioneer River and Sandy and Bakers creek catchments is already included in the current Plan. It is not proposed that the amended Plan will address overland flow water within the foreseeable future.