

Consultation Arrangements

4.1 Introduction

An essential component of the planning process is the consultation that occurs between NR&M, sector and community groups. Under the *Water Act 2000*, the Minister must establish a Community Reference Panel (CRP) that must include representatives of cultural, economic and environmental interests in the plan area. The process for CRP formation and criteria for selection of panel members are discussed in a later section.

The purpose of the CRP is to provide a forum for consultation and communication between NR&M and the community on matters relating to the Water Resource Plan and to ensure transparency. A balanced mix of representation is important to ensure transparency and that the interests and views of the community are considered. The CRP has an advisory role and is not a decision-making group.

4.2 Model proposed

The model proposed for the consultation arrangements involves establishing a CRP under the Water Resource Plan development process. The CRP is a legislative requirement and is a fixed-member panel that provides a two-way communication forum to develop understanding of the technical information, policy options and trade-offs involved. A CRP brings together representatives from diverse interests to develop an understanding of the range of community views in the catchment. CRP selection would be undertaken in consultation with the stakeholder groups and would be formed to represent the diverse water resource issues in the Plan area. The role of a CRP is to provide advice on water resource issues, assist with development of management scenarios and evaluation of their impacts and mitigation and management options for these impacts that are within the scope of the *Water Act 2000*. Its key function is to attempt to develop a consensus and present a consolidated and balanced view of the diverse interests in the region.

4.3 Proposed process for establishing the Community Reference Panel

It is proposed panellists be selected against criteria given in the following section and, although they need not have a technical background, are expected to commit themselves for the duration of the process. This is intended to promote continuity and prevent the need for replacements to be found, familiarised with the process and briefed on progress. Stability can also be expected to

For the Pioneer Valley Water Resource Plan amendment, the proposed consultation framework may include:

- a community reference panel;
- stakeholder groups;
- Indigenous consultation.

help panellists develop an understanding of differing viewpoints within the group and to promote the interpersonal skills helpful for resolving any conflict that may arise.

When forming the CRP, it is planned to select most of the panellists from existing sector groups within the Pioneer River, Bakers and Sandy creeks basins. NR&M is proposing a nomination process for representation on the CRP followed by negotiation of membership with the stakeholder groups. NR&M will consider any submissions made in response to the proposed process during the current submission period.

The following steps will be followed to ensure an open process is used in forming the CRP:

- the Government will advertise for expressions of interest for CRP nominations;
- nominations will be collated by NR&M for preliminary assessment;
- an assessment panel comprising Mackay Whitsunday Regional Strategy Group members, government representation and an independent chair will be formed (members of the selection panel will be ineligible for CRP membership) for advice on membership;
- nominees are recommended to the Minister;
- the Minister will appoint and notify members; and
- NR&M will notify Sector Representative groups and the community through letter and public advertisement.

NR&M may identify representatives of other government agencies to be invited to CRP meetings in a supportive and advisory capacity and to communicate with the agency in question.

4.4 Indigenous Consultation

It is proposed that traditional owners will have representation on the CRP through a limited number of nominated delegates. These nominated delegates would be authorised to speak on behalf of their representative groups or organisations. The representatives would bring forward the issues and concerns of traditional owners in relation to groundwater allocation and management in the Pioneer Plan area. The comments and concerns raised during the consultation process in regard to traditional owners will be documented and considered as key inputs during the development of the draft Water Resource Plan amendment.

4.5 Additional Consultation

It is recognised that there will be individuals and groups who will not be included in this process, yet would like to be kept informed of the progress of the Draft Water Resource Plan. Departmental officers will make themselves available to meet with interested groups or individuals to provide information and to answer questions.

The Department will arrange public meetings at the release of the amending Draft Water Resource Plan to facilitate a wider understanding of the implications of the management options.

NR&M recognises that there may be other planning processes in progress and that these have a bearing on water planning and involve community representative groups, eg, the Pioneer Integrated Catchment Management Group, Mackay Whitsunday Regional Strategy Group. During the consultation process, NR&M will endeavour to keep any groups informed and seek advice on all relevant aspects.

4.6 Call for Nominations

Advertisements will be placed by NR&M in major local newspapers within the Pioneer River, Bakers, Sandy, Alligator and Sandringham creeks catchments. A media release to coincide with the call for nominations will also be made.

4.7 Criteria for Selection

The CRP must include representatives of cultural, economic and environmental interests in the Plan area and will include representation from across the various geographic areas of the Pioneer Valley.

Ideally, CRP nominees should:

- have an interest in the basin and its long-term health and the livelihoods of its people;
- have the support and trust of the stakeholders they represent;
- possess good communication skills and ability to disseminate information;
- have a demonstrated ability to think strategically and work with others;
- be willing to commit the time necessary to meet regularly over the period of development and implementation of the plan;
- possess a willingness to recognise, and discuss positively, the many and sometimes conflicting issues involved in water allocation and management; and

- be able to develop an appreciation of how the catchment works but would not necessarily have technical skills.

4.8 Renumeration

Reasonable out-of-pocket expenses incurred by CRP representatives associated with costs of travel to meetings including transport (e.g. vehicle hire, fuel, economy airfares) will be met. Accommodation and meals will be reimbursed by NR&M in accordance with NR&M's corporate standard on reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses, but would not be reimbursed without prior approval by NR&M.

Arrangements for Technical Assessment

Technical assessments provide critical support for development of amendments to the existing Plan. This chapter will be arranged for input to support development of the amending Draft Water Resource Plan.

The main components of the technical assessments involve:

- groundwater flow and seawater intrusion modelling;
- environmental assessments of groundwater dependent ecosystems;
- social and economic assessments; and
- surface water modelling and statistical analysis.

Water Resource Plans are underpinned by:

- *best scientific knowledge;*
- *balancing the competing assessment of competing environmental, social and economic needs;*
- *utilisation of existing data, as well as collation of new data.*

5.1 Groundwater Flow and Seawater Intrusion modelling

An important tool for providing technical information used in the production of the Water Resource Plan amendment is a groundwater flow and seawater intrusion model of the alluvial aquifers within the Pioneer Valley. The model covers the alluvial aquifers of the Pioneer River, Bakers, Cattle and Sandy creeks catchments and the fractured rock aquifers of the Mt Vince area.

The model has been developed using historical water levels and salt concentrations, recorded use, soils and climatic data to simulate the major groundwater flow-related processes within the aquifers on a monthly time step. It has incorporated urban, industrial, stock, domestic and irrigation demands, and includes representations of the stream–aquifer relationships.

Information such as interflow between the aquifer and streams, including weir storages at various points in the system, aquifer water levels in response to various levels of use and movement of the seawater front, can be extracted from the model. The model will be used to simulate a range of different water resource allocation options. The information provided by the model can then be used in technical assessments to determine the possible implications of management options and sharing of water between consumptive and non-consumptive uses.

5.2 Environmental Assessment

A TAP has been formed to provide advice relating to the environmental condition, importance and degree of dependency of groundwater dependent ecosystems within the Plan area. The advice provided by the TAP relates specifically to assessing the current environmental flow condition of groundwater dependent ecosystems and their significance within the Plan area and

advising on environmental implications of various water allocation and management scenarios. It is expected that the assessment will be based on up-to-date available data, current technology and the best scientific knowledge that exists in the relevant fields.

Whereas the focus of the existing Water Resource (Pioneer Valley) Plan was on the river (surface water) systems, the TAP for this amendment is to consider groundwater dependent lagoons/wetlands and floodplain ecosystems, baseflow-dependent riverine systems, coastal/near-shore systems in so far as their interactions with, and the dependencies on, the groundwater flow system are concerned.

Key areas of expertise on the TAP include the following:

- aquatic ecology;
- hydrogeology, groundwater hydrology and isotope hydrology;
- riparian, terrestrial and wetland vegetation ecology or ecophysiology; and
- water quality.

The TAP has undertaken a preliminary assessment to identify groundwater dependent ecosystems, their condition, importance and level of dependence on groundwater and further analysis is in progress.

5.3 Social and Economic Assessments

Social and economic assessments for the existing Water Resource (Pioneer Valley) Plan have already been undertaken concerning surface water supplies. This work will provide the basis for any assessment of the social and economic implications of particular groundwater allocation scenarios. It is not clear at this stage if any additional social or economic analyses will be necessary to supplement the existing work. NR&M will work closely with other government agencies, the CRP and with stakeholders in the Pioneer Valley to identify the scope of any social and economic assessment that may be considered necessary for assessing the implications of the various allocation options.

5.4 Surface Water modelling and Statistical Analysis

A key part of the technical information used to produce the existing Water Resource (Pioneer Valley) Plan is a basin-wide hydrologic computer model of the streamflows developed for the Pioneer catchment. A surface water flow model is to be developed to cover the Alligator and Sandringham creeks catchments.

The model is to be developed using historical gauged flows, irrigation demands and climatic data to simulate the major flow-related processes within the basin on a daily time step. It has incorporated urban and irrigation demands, and storage characteristics.

Information such as streamflow at various points in the system, evaporation or seepage can be extracted from the model. The model will be used to simulate a range of different water resource allocation options, including pre-development (reference) and existing conditions. The information provided by the model can then be used in technical assessments to determine the possible implications of the allocation options and the sharing of water between consumptive and non-consumptive uses.

Abbreviations

ANZECC	Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council
CRP	Community Reference Panel
NR&M	Department of Natural Resources and Mines
TAP	Technical Advisory Panel