

Baffle Creek Basin Water Plan – Summary of consultation on the postponement of expiry

The public notice of intent to postpone the expiry of the Water Plan (Baffle Creek Basin) 2010 (plan) from 1 September 2021 to 1 September 2030 was published on 1 February 2019. The submission period closed on 29 March 2019. Eleven submissions were received from stakeholders on the proposal to postpone the expiry of the plan.

The public notice of intent to postpone the expiry of the plan was published on the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy's (DNRME) website and in the local newspapers (Bundaberg News-Mail, Gladstone Observer and Coastal Rag). The notice was also posted to the Water Queensland facebook to targeted communities in the plan area including the catchments of Littabella, Baffle, Broadwater, Eurimbula and Worthington Creek. In addition to this, DNRME sent over 100 letters to stakeholders with an interest in the plan, including:

- current water entitlement holders
- community reference panel members involved in the development of the plan
- submitters on the draft planning documents
- property owners who have overland flow works notified under the plan
- the local member and regional councils.

The Minister's Performance Assessment Report (Minister's report) was also published providing information about the implementation and effectiveness of the plan to support submitters when considering the proposal including:

- the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan in achieving outcomes
- information on water authorisations in the plan area
- the findings of research and monitoring
- any identified risks to the plan's outcomes
- any amendments made since its commencement.

In deciding whether to postpone the expiry of the plan, the Minister considered all properly made submissions on the proposal. Eleven properly made submissions were received, although five of those submissions focused on issues outside the scope of the water plan such as the regulation of the commercial and recreational fishing sectors. Of the six submissions raising issues relating to the proposed plan extension, four of these supported the plan extension. A fifth submission supported extension but sought inclusion of groundwater into the plan. The remaining sixth submission did not support the extension on the basis that they felt the environmental flow provisions were too restrictive to development.

A summary of the key issues raised in the submissions and our responses are provided in the table below.

Submission Issue	Response from Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy
<p>All irrigation licences should be volumetric and metered.</p>	<p>Currently 56 water licences state a maximum volume of water that can be taken each year. Although three water licences do not state a volume, water taken under these entitlements are restricted by a draw-down (water level) limits to protect environmental values of the lagoons where the water is taken from. All future water licences granted from the unallocated water reserves must state a volume.</p> <p>The Water Regulation 2016 sets the framework for metering policies. Under the Rural Water Management Program the non-urban water measurement policy is currently being reviewed. More information about the Rural Water Management Program here.</p>
<p>Install new streamflow gauging stations.</p>	<p>The surface water gauging station network across Queensland was reviewed in 2018 to ensure that the network is capable of effectively assessing and managing the surface water resource. The review concluded that two gauging stations in the Baffle Creek Basin is appropriate to understand the resource and support future decision-making. Further only a small percentage of the water resource has been allocated and there are few water resource management rules. Strategic reviews of the suitability of Queensland's gauging station network are conducted periodically and the installation of new streamflow gauging stations may be recommended in the future if deemed necessary.</p>
<p>Include an unallocated water reserve to support the economic aspirations of Aboriginal people.</p>	<p>The Minister's report identified the need to re-engage with Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders to better understand and report on cultural values for the next Minister's report due in 2023. This consultation will cover current and emerging cultural water needs and economic aspirations. This is important information and context to gather and understand for consideration in the 2023 Minister's report to guide any way forward.</p>
<p>Groundwater management needs to address water availability and quality issues.</p>	<p>Groundwater in the Baffle Creek Basin is currently not actively managed under the plan.</p> <p>Groundwater in the Baffle Creek Basin plan area is considered naturally low-yielding and the extent of development of the resource is limited. This is likely due to the region's highly variable geology and a lack of connectivity between water bearing formations. Irrigators use a combination of surface water, overland flow and groundwater supplies, particularly for permanent crops requiring regular watering.</p> <p>Gladstone Regional Council and Bundaberg Regional Council routinely monitor water quality and chemistry of the groundwater supplying towns within the Baffle Creek Basin plan area, as well as assessing water availability and future demands. Data from the councils does not indicate any water quality or water security issues that could be managed under the plan.</p>

<p>The basin-wide environmental flow objectives are not justified and affect the sustainable and productive use of available water resources.</p>	<p>The current plan provides a framework to balance general and ecological outcomes in the plan area. The plan includes specific environmental flows objectives at five locations throughout the Basin.</p> <p>However, the Baffle Creek Basin has undulating topography with a multitude of separated coastal streams that either flow directly to the ocean or aggregate in one of the many estuaries which each have important environmental and hydrological functions.</p> <p>Therefore the plan also adopts the use of basin-wide environmental flow objectives to provide consistency in assessing localised impact of proposed developments. This approach ensures that all parts of a sub-catchment continue to support the flow requirements of the environment as well as other water users.</p>
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