

Burdekin Basin Water Plan—Summary of consultation on the postponement of expiry

The public notice of intent to postpone the expiry of the Water Plan (Burdekin Basin) 2007 (the plan) from 1 September 2019 to 1 September 2023 was published on 4 June 2019 and the submission period closed on 8 July 2019. Two submissions were received, one from an Australian Government organisation and the other from a conservation organisation.

The notice targeting communities in the plan area was advertised in four local newspapers (Northern Miner, Burdekin Advocate, Mackay Daily Mercury and Central Queensland News), Business Queensland and Get Involved websites, and Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy's (DNRME) Facebook.

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

- an assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the plan in achieving its outcomes
- information on water use and authorisations in the plan area
- summary of 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. One properly made submission supported the proposal to postpone the expiry of the plan for four years. However one was received shortly after the submission period closed. Late submissions generally do not meet the criteria for a 'properly made submission' under the *Water Act 2000* but in this instance was considered for inclusiveness.

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

Issue	Response
<p>It was suggested that a revised Burdekin plan should incorporate new data, information and investigatory work on infrastructure proposals in the Burdekin Basin.</p>	<p>Any future water plan review for the Burdekin Basin plan area would be based on the best available science and information, including those on new or proposed infrastructure. This information would be used to support sustainable water planning management and allocation decisions in the Burdekin Basin.</p> <p>The report highlighted the proposed Hells Gates, Urannah, Big Rocks Weir and raising of the Burdekin Falls Dam in the Minister's foreword and section on emerging issues.</p>
<p>Concerns about the lack of detail about the water market in the Burdekin Basin, including the price of water.</p>	<p>The report provides a link to DNRME's Water Market Information website:</p> <p>https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/mining-energy-water/water/water-markets/market-information</p> <p>This site provides financial year reports for supplemented and unsupplemented surface water allocations which includes a weighted average price per megalitre. Water markets are being reviewed through DNRME's Rural Water Management Program. Improving water market information is an initiative under this program.</p>
<p>Questions on unallocated water volumes particularly in reference to Burdekin Falls Dam.</p>	<p>The demand for unallocated water volumes would be considered as part of any future water plan review for the Burdekin Basin plan.</p>
<p>Questions on how new infrastructure planning will be incorporated i.e. what measures will be implemented to ensure the new information collected is included in the next version of the plan.</p>	<p>The water planning process allows for adapting decisions as new information becomes available. Information about new or proposed infrastructure and any other new information that becomes available would be considered as part of any future water plan review. Furthermore public consultation will be undertaken to ensure that such new information is captured as part of any future water plan review.</p>

Issue	Response
<p>Recommends that the Burdekin Basin water plan undergo a full review and replacement before it expires on 1 September 2019, and does not support the proposed plan extension based on the following concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that general and specific ecological objectives have not been achieved across the entire plan area • that the purpose of the <i>Water Act 2000</i> has not been achieved • that rising groundwater in the Lower Burdekin has not been addressed • about degradation to the reef and consistency with the Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan • about risks to environmental values and existing entitlement users • about consistency with the principles of ecologically sustainable development. 	<p>Appendix A of the Minister’s report provides an assessment of plan outcomes. This risk assessment process found that in general, the plan is performing effectively and most of the plan outcomes were achieved. Any issues identified with the plan outcomes were minor and would be addressed as part of any future water plan review.</p> <p>These issues raised would be considered as part of any future water plan review whereby consultation and review processes would be undertaken in line with the <i>Water Act 2000</i> requirements. The plan expiry needs to be extended to ensure the continuation of water management and protection of environmental flows in the Burdekin Basin, including water allocation and management arrangements for the Burdekin Haughton and the Bowen Broken Water Supply schemes.</p> <p>A comprehensive and separate complementary process to address rising groundwater issues in the Lower Burdekin is being undertaken through the development of the Lower Burdekin Groundwater Strategy. The strategy will identify actions that need to be undertaken to address the issues. Should there be a need for a water planning process to address outcomes or action from the strategy, then this would be incorporated into a future water plan review.</p> <p>The water plan focuses on water quantity and strives to provide the appropriate flow regimes to support water quality objectives and outcomes. Any future water plan review would also consider the relevant Reef water quality targets where appropriate.</p>
<p>Concerns that the recommended actions in the report to address identified and emerging risks will not actually reduce the risk to environmental values and existing water entitlement holders over the proposed extended life of the Burdekin Basin water plan.</p>	<p>Issues identified in the report were described through the risk assessment as having some minor issues that would be considered as part of any future water plan review. The recent 2019 amendment to the plan provided improved water management for the upper Burdekin sub-catchments, reducing risk to the environment and water users in those areas. Future planning processes will continue to reduce or manage risk.</p>