

a future for all

**Strategic Plans for the Lake Eyre Basin**

Summary

a future for all: Strategic Plans for the Lake Eyre Basin - Summary  
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Natural Heritage Trust  
*Helping Communities Helping Australia*

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## JOURNEY TO THE HEART

*Our tales are told where campfires blaze  
At night, when the solemn hush  
Of that vast wonderland, the Bush,  
Hath laid on every heart its spell.*

*A B Paterson, Song of the Future*

*Through sunlight and shade 'neath a water-washed sky  
The river goes drifting and dreaming  
She winds on her way through the heart of the west  
Turning and spreading and slowing,  
This river the furthest out bushmen love best  
Where the southerly blusters are blowing.*

*B Simpson, Packhorse Drover*

## The journey so far...

*It has been, and remains, 'a journey to the heart' in more ways than one: the Lake Eyre Basin is arguably the heart of Australia, geographically and culturally; and for those people involved in the process towards integrated catchment management and beyond, their ongoing passion and commitment ultimately stems from their love for the country.*

*Beginning in the mid-1990s, Basin residents, government representatives and other interest groups began working together to consider the future management of the Basin. Concerned by conflict between different groups and the potential for World Heritage listing, community members wanted to do something constructive and bring together the different interests to work towards sustainable use and management of the natural resources in the Basin. The Lake Eyre Basin Steering Group was therefore initiated at a public meeting in 1995. The Group consulted widely and coordinated production of a Catchment Management Issues Paper (September 1997) and a Catchment Management Options paper (October 1997).*

*"a decisive step towards securing the future for the Basin and its in-*

*At a large public meeting in Birdsville in November 1997 people from all stakeholder groups took a decisive step towards securing the future for the Basin and its inhabitants. They agreed to adopt a catchment management approach for the whole of the Basin, and set in train a process to make it happen. A framework was endorsed involving a Coordinating Group and individual catchment committees. There are five catchments within the Lake Eyre Basin and, so far, two catchment committees have been established, one for Cooper's Creek and the other for Georgina/Diamantina. Each of these groups released a draft strategic plan for public comment in November 1999, and revised plans were launched almost a year later. While these plans are a firm basis for setting priorities and actions, it is important to remember that they remain 'living' documents, responsive to new opportunities and improved knowledge and understanding.*

*"common sense and sheer tenacity have won through"*

*The journey so far has not always been easy and there are likely to be more challenges ahead. Many obstacles have been confronted along the way, including the sheer logistics of a Basin covering over a million square kilometres, sparsely populated, and with myriad State and administrative borders and divergent stakeholder interests. It would have been far simpler, in the short term at least, to go on 'business as usual' and ignore the warning signs, both in terms of threats to livelihoods and the environment. But common sense and sheer tenacity have won through, and the process continues to endure and grow.*

**BASIN  
ISSUES  
NEEDING  
ATTENTION**  
(identified by  
the community  
during a  
three -year  
consultation process)

Natural Resource  
Management

Weeds &  
feral animals

Surface water  
management

Total grazing  
pressure

Vegetation  
management

Biodiversity  
conservation

Salinity

Tourism impacts

Chemical usage  
& pollution risk

Great Artesian Basin

Wildlife use  
& harvesting

Social & economic

Economic viability

Diversification  
of enterprises

Security of tenure

Education  
& awareness

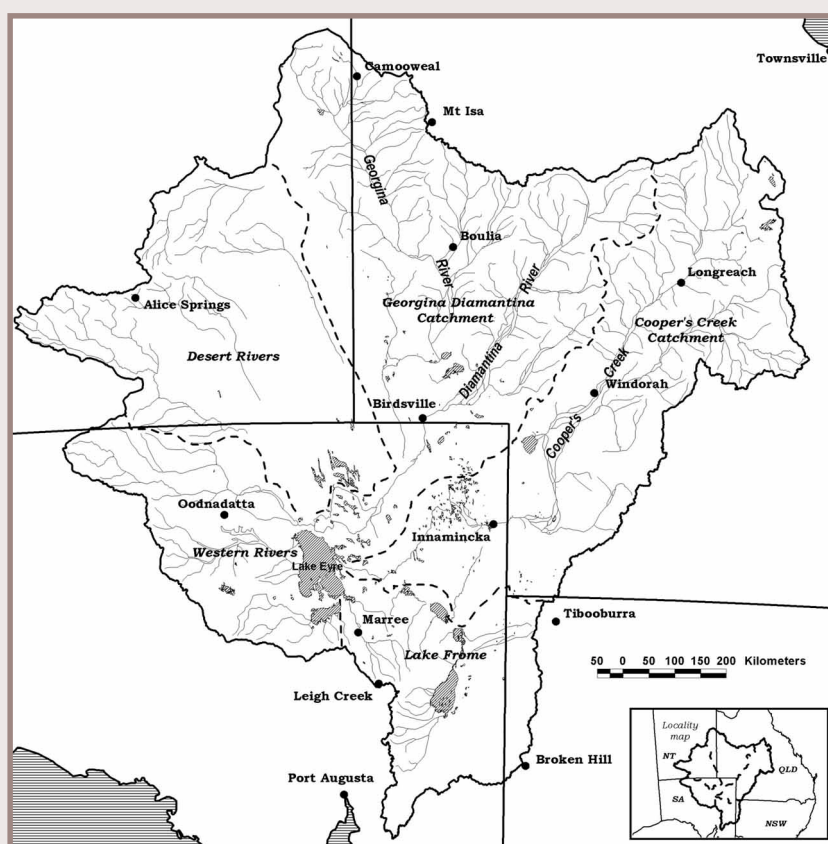
Cultural heritage

## What's so special about Lake Eyre Basin?

The Lake Eyre Basin is a paradox, and therein lies its wonder: the country is arid and semi-arid yet contains some of the world's largest internally-draining rivers. Its essence lies in its extremes and unpredictability. All creeks and rivers are ephemeral: they are mostly dry except for short periods after rain, when floodwaters spread across the country and slowly make their way toward Lake Eyre. Almost overnight, the land is transformed - millions of water birds miraculously descend, billions of fish start breeding, and dormant plants come to life.

The Basin covers 1.2 million square kilometres, almost one-sixth of Australia. It includes large parts of South Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland and some of western New South Wales. There are five major drainage basins within the Basin: Cooper's Creek, Georgina/Diamantina, Desert Rivers, Western Rivers and Lake Frome Region. It is one of the world's last unregulated wild river systems.

The Basin is sparsely populated with vast pastoral properties being the most extensive type of land use. Some properties cover more than 10 000 square kilometres. The Basin also supports petroleum production, mining and tourism, and contains areas of high conservation value including 37 parks and reserves. Aboriginal communities have a long history in the Basin, and this is reflected today in many settlements and areas of high cultural significance.



## A new way, our way

Community-based catchment management for the Lake Eyre Basin began with a recognition that the old, divisive ways were not working and that, for all their differences, the various stakeholders had a fundamental motivation in common - to look after the Basin and in so doing secure their future. A cooperative and imaginative approach was needed. What has evolved is a community driven process, initiated and designed by communities and stakeholders of the Lake Eyre Basin, working across State borders and pulling together stakeholders and governments in partnership across a huge portion of Australia. It has been and remains an immense and groundbreaking effort, one that rests as much on the way we treat each other as it does on the way we as a community treat our land and resources.

*Inclusiveness*

*Accountability*

*Social equity, respect  
for diversity, fairness*

*Transparency*

*Lifelong learning,  
opportunities for  
keeping pace with  
change*

*Guiding principles identified  
by participants at the  
first round of public meet-  
ings, 1995*

## WHAT WE STAND FOR:

*Roles & functions of the Lake Eyre Basin  
Coordinating Group and Catchment Committees*

### Coordinating Group

- To promote ecological and economic sustainability in the Basin
- To develop and communicate a shared strategic vision across the Basin.
- To provide a forum for Basin-wide issues.
- To provide a communication channel with governments.
- To integrate priorities for action plans and funding.
- To facilitate knowledge flow and development for the Basin.
- To represent the catchments on a national level.

### Catchment Committees

- To maintain a focus on the catchment perspective.
- To work for ecological, economic and social sustainability within the catchment.
- To develop and maintain a strategic planning process, including compilation, implementation and monitoring.
- To provide a forum for differing opinions on issues within the catchment, followed by a decision process based on best available information.
- To represent the catchment perspective on a Basin level.
- To involve the catchment community.

## STRATEGIES ALIVE

*‘Strategic planning is visionary, yet realistic; it anticipates a future that is both desirable and achievable. It provides a structure for inspired but practical decision making and follow through.’*

(Managing for results: Arizona’s 1998 Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement Handbook)

### Lake Eyre Basin

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*The Lake Eyre Basin is a healthy system, a region of high ecological integrity with forward-looking, vibrant communities secure in a sustainable and diverse regional economy.*

The Strategic Plan for the Lake Eyre Basin identifies five major programs.

#### *Planning and coordination*

The Coordinating Group has a unique responsibility. It is the only community-based organisation that works across state borders and with all governments and stakeholders. This scale of involvement in planning and coordination helps avoid major problems before they arise and also helps provide a consistent long-term and integrated approach that has community support.

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*Through community-based participation and action we will achieve sustainable and integrated natural resource management outcomes.*

#### *Knowledge*

Communities have identified a need to establish an accessible base of scientific and local knowledge that helps achieve their outcomes and on which to base sound decision-making.

#### *Communication and education*

Improved natural resource management and effective community involvement in regional planning and management requires opportunities that enhance communication and education across the Basin. Stakeholders have also identified the need to educate and inform people outside the Basin about its unique characteristics and issues.

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*Using natural resources sustainably and wisely  
Conserving biodiversity  
Creating economic prosperity  
Respecting and using local knowledge  
Valuing the outback lifestyle*

#### *Building capacity and leadership*

The Coordinating Group will support people to expand their own and others capacity to participate in decision-making. Effective participation requires the ability to: find acceptable solutions, manage conflict, network, interpret complex information, and understand public and private sector institutions. The Group’s community processes encourage and facilitate lifelong learning through improved training and work opportunities. The Group will lead by example and encourage other to do likewise.

#### *Resourcing and management*

As a new and innovative organisation, we are working with stakeholders and governments to create a model for partnerships in integrated natural resource management. It will be necessary for the Coordinating Group to seek and establish resourcing arrangements that protect the investment of time, resources and goodwill already made in this process and that converts this investment into desired outcomes for the Lake Eyre Basin.

## Georgina/Diamantina

The Georgina/Diamantina Catchment Management Strategy identifies six major programs.

### *Getting smarter*

There is frequently inadequate information available to make sound and informed decisions on some issues affecting the Georgina/Diamantina catchment. When information is available it is often widely dispersed and difficult to obtain. Actions have been developed to locate and compile information currently available and identify and address information gaps.

### *Spreading the word*

There is wide variation in the level of awareness amongst catchment communities about the ecological, economic and social issues facing the Lake Eyre Basin and what can be done to address them. There is also a need to educate communities outside the Basin, particularly in urban areas, to increase awareness and understanding about the challenges facing the Basin communities and their efforts to address these.

### *Bringing people together*

The Catchment Committee will encourage input from all interest groups, stakeholders and governments involved with the management of the catchment. It will also encourage and facilitate improved communication and understanding amongst these groups, and a shared problem-solving approach to address catchment management issues. Another important role for the Committee is to provide links between various initiatives happening in the catchment, and encourage cooperation amongst the stakeholders and interest groups involved.

### *Affecting change*

The Catchment Committee will facilitate and support community on-ground actions to address both local and catchment-wide issues.

### *Finding the funds*

It is vital that adequate resources and funds are secured to support both the work of the Catchment Committee and on-ground initiatives.

### *Measuring progress*

The Catchment Committee will regularly monitor, evaluate and measure its effectiveness and progress. This will ensure the committee remains focused on priority issues and continues to improve its performance.

*The Georgina Diamantina catchment is a community that cares for and is proud of our unique and vast inland river systems, which are healthy and diverse through the efforts of responsible people.*

*We are aware and willing to involve and educate others, working together in a growing, vibrant and sustainable economy.*

*With involvement from all communities within the catchment, and regardless of state boundaries, we will achieve this by developing a catchment management strategy, encouraging participation and implementing projects through enriching partnerships.*

*To work for ecological, economic and social sustainability.*

*The Cooper's catchment is inhabited by vibrant communities responsibly managing viable industries while maintaining and protecting the unique environment.*

*Cooper's Creek Catchment committee works with and for all the people and communities of the Cooper's Creek catchment, and involves and informs others outside the catchment.*

The Cooper's Creek Catchment Management Strategy identifies five major programs.

*Information Program*

The Information Program aims to make up to date natural resource management information readily available to the catchment communities and stakeholders providing a sound base for decision making. This program has two elements - information management, and networking and learning opportunities.

*Natural Resources Program*

The Natural Resources Program aims to have sustainable, integrated management of natural resources meet current and future environmental and development needs. The three elements of this program are: soil; native vegetation; and water.

*Industry Viability Program*

The goal of the Industry Viability Program is enhancing or continuing viability of existing industries and the development and growth of new industries based on environmental and economic sustainability. Elements are diversification, mining and petroleum, primary production and tourism.

*Environment Program*

The Environment Program aims to conserve the natural environment to meet continuing human and ecological requirements. The elements of this program are: biodiversity conservation; contamination and waste management; and pest management.

*Monitoring and Evaluation*

The programs of the Cooper's Creek Strategic Plan will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that the Plan is achieving its objectives.

## THE FUTURE HAS BEGUN

*“Glad they had the vision to look to the future.”*

*“Thank goodness they got past looking at State boundaries.”*

*“They had the foresight to preempt problems and to think in the long term.”*

*“They gave us a voice.”*

*“Our previous generations were working together towards better land management.”*

*“We’ve learned the lessons from the mistakes of other places.”*

*“The Cooper is still flowing - thank you.”*

*“We can still drink the river water.”*

*“Aboriginal heritage places are still here for people and the stories that go with them are still in the community.”*

*“Good on them for preserving the artesian pressure.”*

*“It is through their actions that I am able to be on the land.”*

*“They moved beyond the rhetoric of sustainability and made it something meaningful for people on the ground.”*

*(Comments from participants in the LEB consultation process in response to the question, ‘In 25 years time what would you like your children or grandchildren to be saying about what we are doing here and now?’)*

## CROSS-CATCHMENTS WEEDS INITIATIVE

*This is one initiative already underway in the Lake Eyre Basin.*

*Weeds are a major problem in the Cooper's Creek and Georgina/Diamantina catchments, causing heavy losses to both production and biodiversity.*

*There has been some good weed management work done to date, but the catchment committees realised that these results could be improved and resources used more efficiently with greater collaboration.*

*The Cross-Catchments Weed Initiative is based on this premise: that a collaborative approach, including all stakeholders across the catchments, will achieve more gains for fewer pains.*

*The initiative has two primary objectives:*

- to develop and implement strategies for collaboration between councils, government departments, and other stakeholders*
- to attract funding assistance from state and Commonwealth governments.*

*At the first workshop in December 1999 it was agreed that the Initiative would focus on controlling and preventing further spread of Prickly Acacia, Parkinsonia, Mesquite, Parthenium and Rubber Vine. Other actions to date include surveying land holders regarding the value of weed control work, producing education and awareness materials and briefing relevant ministers.*

## Steady progress

Catchment management of the Lake Eyre Basin does not miraculously begin on a certain day. It is an evolving process, with the first glimpses appearing back in the mid-1990s when stakeholders got together to share concerns and look for collaborative solutions. Since then, planning and doing have gone hand in hand. As individuals and groups became involved in thinking and talking about catchment management, they were establishing networks and new ways of thinking that would change the future of the Lake Eyre Basin. In more tangible ways, many strategies and actions proposed as part of the planning process are already being implemented, including:

- the Cross-catchments Weeds Initiative
- establishing a Basin web site
- providing a Basin perspective to relevant planners and policy makers
- facilitating cooperation between stakeholders, governments and other organisations with an interest in the Basin
- producing catchment and Basin newsletters.

## The next major step

Based on extensive community consultation and input, individual Strategic Plans have been developed for the Lake Eyre Basin and the catchments of Georgina/Diamantina and Cooper's Creek. While some strategies are already underway, the next step will see a major change of focus from planning to implementation. Proposed strategies and actions will be sorted in terms of short and long term, and to identify major priorities. The result will be Action Plans for key issues that will be implemented over the next 12 months. These will include responsibilities and timeframes, and will form the basis for future evaluation and improvement.

## To find out more

If you would like more information about the work going on in the Lake Eyre Basin, please contact:

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