

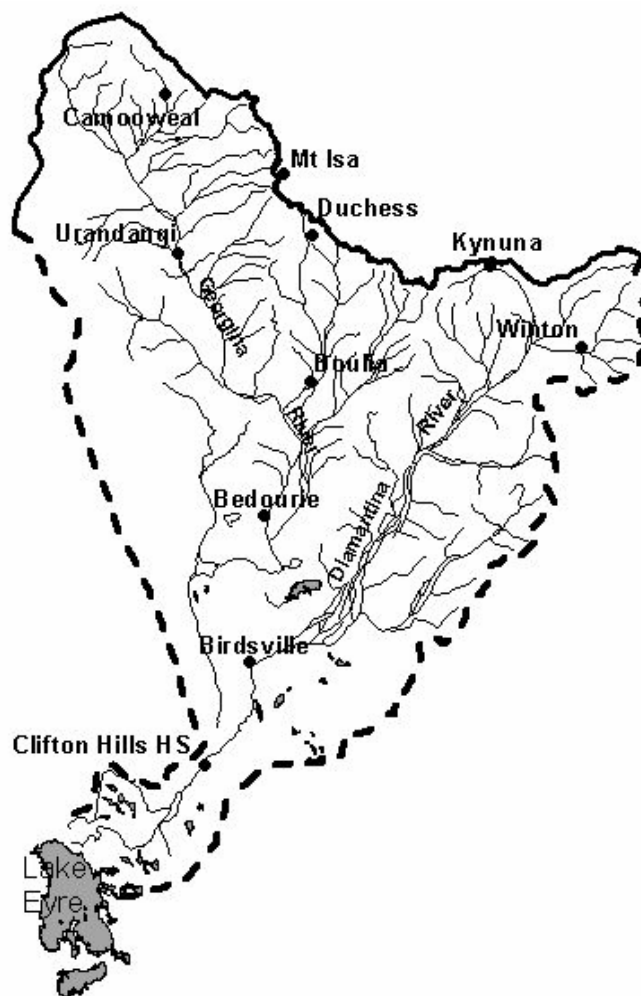
# *Operational Guidelines Paper*

*Prepared for*

## **The Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee**

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*Prepared by: GDCC Review Working Group*



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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The purpose of this paper is to document how the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee (GDCC) carries out its day-to-day business. It will be beneficial to committee members, the GDCC Coordinator and persons external to the committee in understanding how and why the committee functions the way it does.

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## 2 BACKGROUND

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### 2.1 *The Catchment*

The Georgina Diamantina Catchment covers an area of approximately 405,000 km<sup>2</sup> and incorporates parts of the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia. It forms one of five catchments that make up the Lake Eyre Basin.

The catchment area of the Georgina and Diamantina can be classified as semi-arid in the north and northeast, and arid in its southern and western portions. As such, the Georgina and Diamantina rivers are ephemeral with short periods of flow following rain and long periods of no flow.

The Georgina River rises in the north on the Barkly Tableland near the border of Queensland and the Northern Territory, and flows south and southeast to below Boulia where it joins the Hamilton River to become Eyre Creek. Its course then takes it west of Birdsville along the edge of the Simpson Desert and on into South Australia where it joins the Diamantina at Goyder's Lagoon over 1000 km from its point of origin.

The Diamantina River rises in the Finucane Range in central Queensland and first flows northeast. It then swings in an easterly arc to flow southwest to Birdsville, before turning south to meet Eyre Creek at Goyder's Lagoon, 800 kilometres from its point of origin.

These rivers journey over a very low gradient as they flow into the Channel Country in southwest Queensland where they disperse into multiple braided channels, floodplains, waterholes, and wetlands. The water often takes many months to travel from the higher rainfall areas of the north to Goyder's Lagoon. At Goyder's Lagoon, they become an extensive wetland area of over 1,300 km<sup>2</sup>. In times of large flow they fill this expanse of wetland and run out as the Warburton Creek to continue on 250 kilometres to Lake Eyre.

The catchment contains a wide variety of ecosystems and biogeographic regions. These include sandy and stony deserts, Mitchell grass downs, Channel Country, floodplains, ephemeral lakes and wetlands. All are dependant on the variable drought and flood cycles of their arid and semi-arid environments.

With such a diversity of land types, the catchment supports a variety of land uses, including: Indigenous, Pastoral, Mining, Petroleum, Tourism, Conservation, Town Commons, and Stock Routes. These land uses and interests have made the Georgina Diamantina Catchment what it is today. They have also contributed to sustainability issues for the natural resources of the catchment.

## 2.2 *History of the GDCC*

An increasing demand for the natural resources of the Lake Eyre Basin in recent years has caused many debates about land use and management issues in the Basin. Perceived conflicts between current and potential use, as highlighted by proposals to list part of the Basin under the World Heritage Convention, emphasise the need for greater cooperation in managing the Basin's resources.

The Lake Eyre Basin Steering Group was formed in 1995 and held meetings and consultations throughout the Basin on possible natural resource management models. Following production of an *Options Paper* in October 1997 and further consultation, stakeholders agreed to adopt a catchment management approach. They designed a framework of an overarching group coordinating Basin-wide issues - the Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group - and individual catchment committees for the major river systems or regions within the Basin.

One such catchment committee was established for the Georgina and Diamantina River systems. The first task of the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee was to develop a catchment management strategy. The "Draft Catchment Management Strategy – Georgina and Diamantina River Systems" was prepared by the committee and released in September 1999 as a basis for consultation with groups and individuals throughout the catchment.

After collating community comments, "The Georgina/Diamantina Catchment Strategic Plan" was prepared and launched in Birdsville, October 2000. This plan set out a broad framework of strategies to address the key issues of concern for the communities and stakeholders of the Georgina and Diamantina Catchments.

A major focus for the committee, at present, is to assist Desert Channels Queensland, the regional Natural Resource Management body for the Queensland portion of the Basin, to progress development of an accredited NRM Plan and Investment Strategy for the region. This Plan draws on the Georgina/Diamantina and Cooper's Creek Strategic Plans together with the Desert Upland Buildup and Development Committee NRM Plan. Once finalised, the committee will work with DCQ to implement target-based projects and activities aimed at addressing the key NRM issues identified in the regional Plan.

### **Vision of the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee**

*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.*

The GDCC requires a sound operational structure to work towards achieving this vision. This has been addressed through the formation of GDCC Working Groups. Working groups have and will continue to progress development of action plans to achieve target-based outcomes for key natural resource management issues (eg. surface water, weeds, tourism, etc).

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## 3 ROLE OF THE GDCC

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The Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee is a community group dedicated to working for the sustainable management of natural resources in the Georgina Diamantina Catchment and wider Lake Eyre Basin.

Shortly after establishment in April 1998, a workshop was held which focused on the committee's roles and guidelines by which it operated. From this workshop came a series of roles falling under five broad headings, which are summarised as follows:

- Develop a Georgina Diamantina Catchment Strategic Plan.
- Seek funding and resources for the implementation of actions/project proposals from the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Strategic Plan.
- Collect and make available information to support capacity building, research, and natural resource management decision-making.
- Provide a forum for all interests within the catchment to come together.
- Provide the link between community, industry, research, and all levels of government, and coordinate the actions of a partnership approach.

The GDCC provides an opportunity for community and special interest members to come together and have their say on issues currently and potentially affecting the natural resources of the catchment. It is a recognised network that can promote issues raised from within the catchment. Through this network, the GDCC seeks to ensure the community is involved in decision-making processes relating to the sustainable management of the catchment's natural resources.

The role of the GDCC was reviewed at a meeting held in April 2004 at Boulia. The review was scheduled to ensure the catchment committee could better position itself to take advantage of new regional natural resource management and funding arrangements. In brief, these new arrangements will see the GDCC assist the regional Natural Resource Management body for the Queensland portion of the Lake Eyre Basin, Desert Channels Queensland, to progress development of an accredited NRM Plan for the region. Once finalised, the committee will work with DCQ to implement target-based projects and activities aimed at addressing the key NRM issues identified in the regional Plan.

From this review the roles of the GDCC were prioritised as follows:

1. Provide a forum for all interests within the catchment to come together.
2. Provide a link between community, industry, research and all levels of government, and coordinate the actions of a partnership approach.
3. Collect and make available information to support relevant capacity building, research and decision-making in the sustainable management of natural resources of the catchment.
4. Provide input and assist with the development and implementation of actions / project proposals supported by the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Strategic Plan and / or identified within the Desert Channels Queensland NRM Plan.

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## 4 COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

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### 4.1 *Committee Structure Overview*

At the initial public meetings to decide upon a structure for community based natural resource management in the Georgina Diamantina Catchment, it was agreed that there will be geographic and interest-based involvement.

On its inception in Boulia, the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee comprised 15 members in total, representing 3 broad geographic areas; southern, central, and northern. As awareness has increased, and the role of the committee expanded, additional members have been sought to ensure inclusive representation of residents and stakeholders in the catchment.

There are now five broad geographic areas, with at least two community geographic representatives per area, each with an active proxy. These representatives bring the issues and opportunities of the catchments residents to the attention of the committee, and share their knowledge and experiences gained on the committee with the wider community.

Complementing the community geographic representatives on the committee, there are representatives from four major stakeholder groups incorporated under the title of Special Interest Groups. These groups include Indigenous, Environment / Conservation, State Government, and Mining, Exploration and Energy. Members representing these special interest groups bring particular knowledge to the committee, providing balance and essential links to the catchments major stakeholders.

Not all stakeholder groups have direct representation on the committee. This isn't to say that their interests are not represented, with many committee members possessing skills and experiences covering multiple land use activities. For example, the interests of local government, town communities and tourism sectors are currently covered through community geographic representatives. If, as community geographic membership changes, it is identified that any one of these stakeholder groups is no longer adequately represented, the committee will move to amend committee structure to ensure inclusive representation is maintained.

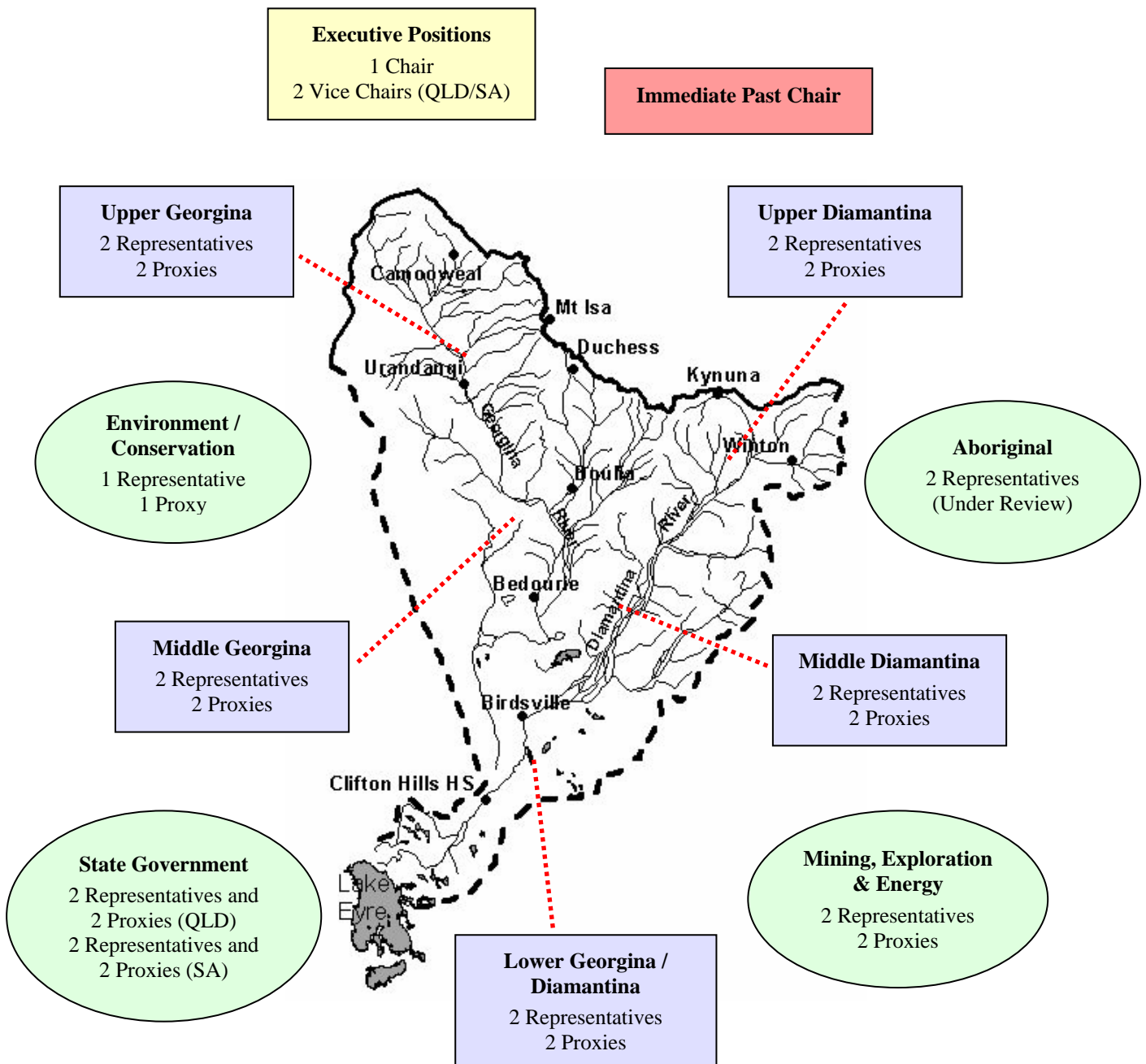
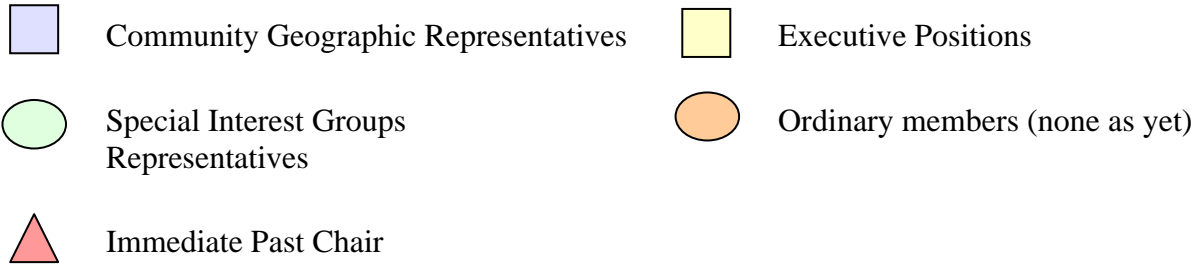
The Chair is drawn from Community Geographic representatives. Both Vice Chair positions, one each from Queensland and South Australia, are also drawn from community representatives. The position of Immediate Past Chair is available to the Chair upon their stepping down from this role.

In total, there are currently twenty one representative positions on the committee, each with nominated proxies with the ability to directly participate in the activities of the committee.

To encourage participation of the wider community in the activities of the GDCC, an additional category of membership has been created, titled Ordinary member. This category will enable ordinary members to participate in committee business and activities on a more flexible or 'as needs' basis whilst still allowing the GDCC to meet operating requirements.

The composition of the committee is open to change. As issues and opportunities change over time, and consequently so does the stakeholder base, there will be a need to adjust the current structure to ensure the committee remains inclusive.

## 4.2 Committee Structure Diagram



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## 5 MEMBERSHIP

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### 5.1 *Requirements of GDCC Representatives*

#### **Meeting attendance:**

- As a representative on the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee, members are required to attend meetings of the GDCC.
- There are normally 3 or 4 meetings per year held in various locations around the catchment. This ensures that members of the committee are aware of the issues and opportunities present throughout the catchment. Meetings are usually held over a two-day period.
- The GDCC is well aware of time and other constraints on members and respects the decisions of those who are unable to attend all meetings.
- However, members who fail to attend all meetings in a calendar year will be required to explain their position to the Chair.

#### **At meetings, members are encouraged to:**

- Pay attention to and be involved in the business of the committee. It is important to be well prepared, attend and be part of the meetings that are arranged.
- Fairly and objectively represent the community in their area (i.e. present issues raised, and the differing views and opinions held, by members of the stakeholder group they are representing).
- Work as a team member with other people on the GDCC to bring together the different communities of the catchment to address catchment issues.

#### **If members are unable to attend meetings, they are encouraged to:**

- Contribute comment on the papers distributed with an agenda, which will be tabled by their proxy or GDCC Coordinator on their behalf.

#### **GDCC working groups:**

- To progress actions decided at meetings, members of the GDCC are required to participate in working groups structured around the key issues and opportunities relevant to the catchment.
- Much of this work is carried out via correspondence (i.e. phone, fax or e-mail) thus allowing work to progress without the need for working group members to come together.

**As a member of one or more of these working groups, members are encouraged to:**

- Provide comment and input into the development of action plans, project proposals and discussion papers in a timely manner.
- Participate in working group teleconferences if and when required.

**Outside of committee meetings and working group commitments, members are required to:**

- Establish and maintain a communication channel between the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee and stakeholder group the member represents.
- Ensure the stakeholders they represent are kept informed of the activities of the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee in addition to those of Desert Channels Queensland and wider Lake Eyre Basin.
- Assist the community develop an understanding and appreciation of catchment issues and opportunities by sharing skills and knowledge gained as a member of the GDCC.
- Keep the GDCC Coordinator informed of issues and opportunities pertinent to the geographic area or special interest they represent.
- Community geographic representatives are encouraged to talk to local groups, attend meetings and host (with assistance from the Coordinator) small local public meetings / field days to exchange information and seek community feedback on catchment issues and committee activities.

## 5.2 Committee Membership Process

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### 5.2.1 Inaugural Membership

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#### Advertising

On the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1998, a public meeting was called at Boulia to decide upon the composition of the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee.

#### Appointing

The process of nominating and appointing inaugural representatives on the committee was as follows.

- Community geographic representatives were appointed first.
- The group then identified the need for state government involvement in the process, establishing positions for four state government representatives, two each from Queensland and South Australia.
- With the basis of the committee formed, the group then identified other groups with an interest in the Georgina Diamantina Catchment. These groups included: mining, petroleum, local government, conservation, and Indigenous interests.

The final check was to then consider if a geographic representative could legitimately cover a special interest. If so this would not require an additional member. Upon reviewing the skills and interests of the geographic representatives, it was decided that town communities, local government, tourism, and petroleum interests were sufficiently covered and did not warrant additional special interest positions for the initial committee composition.

#### Number of Members

In reality most persons in attendance at the Boulia were appointed to the committee, about 15 members in total. Elected members were distributed throughout the catchment representing 3 broad areas, southern, central, and northern, with a nominal 5 representatives per area. The decision to appoint two Community Geographic representatives per area was proposed at this meeting.

In 2004, the category of Ordinary Member and position of Immediate Past Chair was added whilst the number of representatives appointed to community geographic positions was revised to comprise *at least* two members.