

Lake Eyre Basin Communication Plan – An Overview 2008 - 2011



Prepared for the
Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum

May 2009

WHY DO WE NEED A COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR THE LAKE EYRE BASIN INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT?

Communication is a pivotal, strategic strength of the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement (LEBIA). In 2008 the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum endorsed the *Lake Eyre Basin (LEB) Communication Strategy* as an important element of the LEBIA and the twelve high priority Lake Eyre Basin strategies endorsed by the Ministerial Forum in October 2005, in particular:

'To develop and implement a communication strategy to raise public awareness of the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement and the work of the Ministerial Forum, the Community Advisory Committee and the Scientific Advisory Panel.'

'The communication strategy will include annual reporting to the Basin community through the Ministerial Forum on progress in implementing policies, strategies and other activities under the Agreement.'

The LEB Communication Strategy provides a strategic foundation for this inaugural *LEB Communication Plan*. Together these documents will guide activities that will raise community awareness about the Basin's special biodiversity and heritage values and of the work being carried out for the sustainable management of its resources.

The LEB Community Advisory Committee, Scientific Assessment Panel, stakeholder groups and agencies have a history of positive and effective, but somewhat ad-hoc, internal and outreach communications. The dedicated LEB Communication Officer, appointed in October 2008, will oversee the implementation of the three-year Communication Plan, delivering the desired strategic, consistent and coordinated approach to LEB communications.

The Lake Eyre Basin Five-Year Action Plan, endorsed in 2009 by the Ministerial Forum, will give effect to the policies and strategies of the LEBIA. This Plan identifies 'communications' as a high priority for implementation of the LEBIA and states that 'improved communication and sharing of information within and beyond the LEB is needed urgently, and (that) key tasks will take at least three years to implement and evaluate'. As such, High Priority Action #3 of the Action Plan recommends the preparation and submission of a three-year Communication Plan and corresponding budget to the 2009 LEB Ministerial Forum.

WHAT WILL THE COMMUNICATION PLAN DELIVER?

The LEB Communication Strategy defines nine objectives for LEB communications. In this three year Communication Plan these objectives have been categorised into **outcomes** - **two longer-term** (changes expected within 5 years) and **four short-term** (changes expected within 3 years) (Fig.1).

Figure 1: Link between Communication Plan outcomes and Communication Strategy objectives

Longer-term outcomes (changes expected within 5 years)	
<i>Outcome A: Improved public awareness and understanding of the values of the Lake Eyre Basin and the Agreement and the need to protect and properly manage the area.</i>	LEB Communication Strategy Objective 3
<i>Outcome B: A strengthened sense of shared responsibility amongst LEB groups and stakeholders towards the management of the Lake Eyre Basin.</i>	Objective 6
Short-term outcomes (changes expected within 3 years)	
<i>Outcome C: A coordinated and consistent approach to communicating key LEB messages with target stakeholders (initially NRM regional bodies, Aboriginal groups, landholders & tourists) and other stakeholders.</i>	Objectives 1, 7 and 9
<i>Outcome D: A wide range of stakeholder groups have access to LEB information that assists their planning and resource use decisions (this does not encompass data management).</i>	Objectives 2 and 5
<i>Outcome E: Improved communications within and about the LEB has contributed to the maintenance of existing stakeholder relationships and facilitated engagement of some new groups.</i>	Objective 4
<i>Outcome F: A 3-year Communication Plan, supported by all jurisdictions, CAC, SAP & regional NRM bodies, is adequately resourced & is delivering on the priorities annually set by the LEB Communication Strategy.</i>	Objective 8

It is important to note that communication is not a standalone activity under the LEB Intergovernmental Agreement, and as such, factors outside the scope of the Communication Plan may impact on the timing and degree to which these outcomes can be delivered.

Much has already been achieved through communication activities such as biennial LEB Conferences and Aboriginal Forums, through mechanisms such as LEB newsletters and websites, and through the communication efforts of members of LEB Committees, Aboriginal groups, regional NRM bodies and catchment committees who act as ambassadors for sustainable management of the Basin.

As well as building on existing communication activities, the Communication Plan will utilise and reinforce the existing relationships of trust, respect, inclusiveness, cooperation and reciprocal benefits that underpin the success of the LEB arrangements to date.

Whilst delivery of the Communication Plan will enhance communications about the LEB across a broad range of stakeholders within and outside the LEB, several actions are included that are specifically designed to enhance communications with the four target LEB stakeholder groups prescribed by the LEB Communication Strategy. These groups are:

1. NRM regional bodies
2. Aboriginal groups
3. Landholders
4. Tourists

Years 1 and 2 of the Communication Plan are focussed on outreach and two – way communication between the target LEB stakeholders and LEB partners (LEB CAC, LEB SAP, signatory governments to the LEBIA)

Year 3 of the Communication Plan engages new target stakeholder groups to be determined through the annual evaluation and review of the Communication Plan, and focuses on enhancement of internal communications within and between the key LEB partners.

The *LEB Communication Strategy* defines **key messages** to be delivered through the Communication Plan:

- The Australian, Queensland, South Australian and Northern Territory Governments are working together to protect and manage the Lake Eyre Basin.
- The communities of the Lake Eyre Basin have an important role to play in protecting the culture, biodiversity and environment of this unique region.
- The Lake Eyre Basin is a unique river system which is the home to valuable and diverse flora and fauna.
- The ecological integrity and natural function of in-stream and floodplain ecosystems must be balanced with the viability of economic, social, cultural and other activities in the Basin.
- The LEB Community Advisory Committee (LEB CAC) is responsible for maintaining inclusiveness, trust, openness and reciprocal benefit with the communities and interest groups in the Basin.
- The LEB Scientific Advisory Panel (LEB SAP) is responsible for providing high-quality scientific advice to the Ministerial Forum to support the development of policies and strategies for the Lake Eyre Basin.

The various newsletter articles, media statements, annual reports, displays, presentations, brochures and website updates proposed in the Communication Plan will each deliver some or all of these key messages. Although these key messages are unlikely to become out-dated, annual evaluation of the Communication Plan will assess their relevance and determine appropriate revisions as required.

COMMUNICATION ACTIONS – WHAT SPECIFICALLY WILL BE DONE?

Figure 2: Summary of LEB Communication Plan outcomes and summary of proposed actions (pg. 6) provides a summary of all communication actions proposed over the period 2008 to 2011. It shows how the communication actions will, through a strategic and targeted approach, contribute to the achievement of the four short-term and subsequently the two longer-term outcomes.

Whilst the program of communication actions is quite prescriptive, management of its implementation must enable the Communication Plan to be **responsive and adaptable** to uncertainty, change and emerging opportunities. Facilitating this at the operational level is chiefly the responsibility of the Communications Officer and the project Steering Committee. Research conducted by the 'People, Communities and Economies of the Lake Eyre Basin Project' supports the need for this approach,

*“Opportunities can be unpredictable and infrequent in remote regions.
Like the desert rain, take advantage of circumstances when they
come.”*

*(Measham, T.G. et al (2008) Synthesis of the People, Communities and Economies
of the Lake Eyre Basin Project: Interim Final Report, Desert Knowledge CRC, p.46)*

The annual evaluation of the Communication Plan will assess its responsiveness to changes in the Basin and its ability to accommodate unexpected opportunities that might contribute significantly to achieving the desired outcomes.

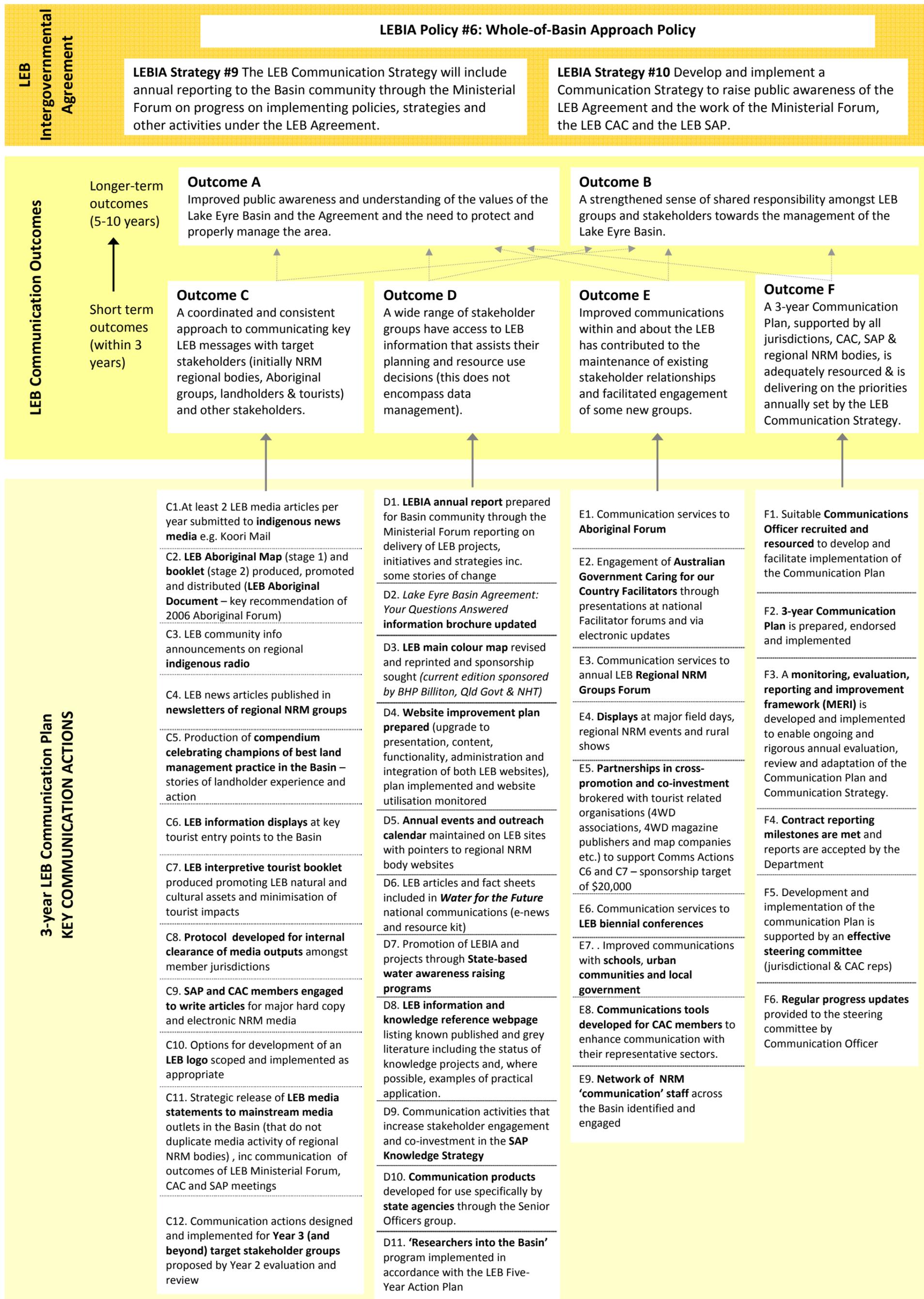
COMMUNICATION PLAN BUDGET

The budget proposes expenditure on LEB communication activities which are consistent with those proposed in the LEB Five Year Action Plan.

The proposed expenditure on communication activities (including continued engagement of a Communication Officer) in 2009-10 and 2010-11 is \$266,000 and \$231,500, respectively. While sufficient funding is available in the Ministerial Forum Budget to cover proposed expenditure in 2009-10, there is uncertainty whether the same source will be able to cover all of the proposed expenditure in 2010-11.

Consequently, other sources of funding will be actively sought over this period.

Figure 2: LEB Communication Plan outcomes and summary of proposed actions



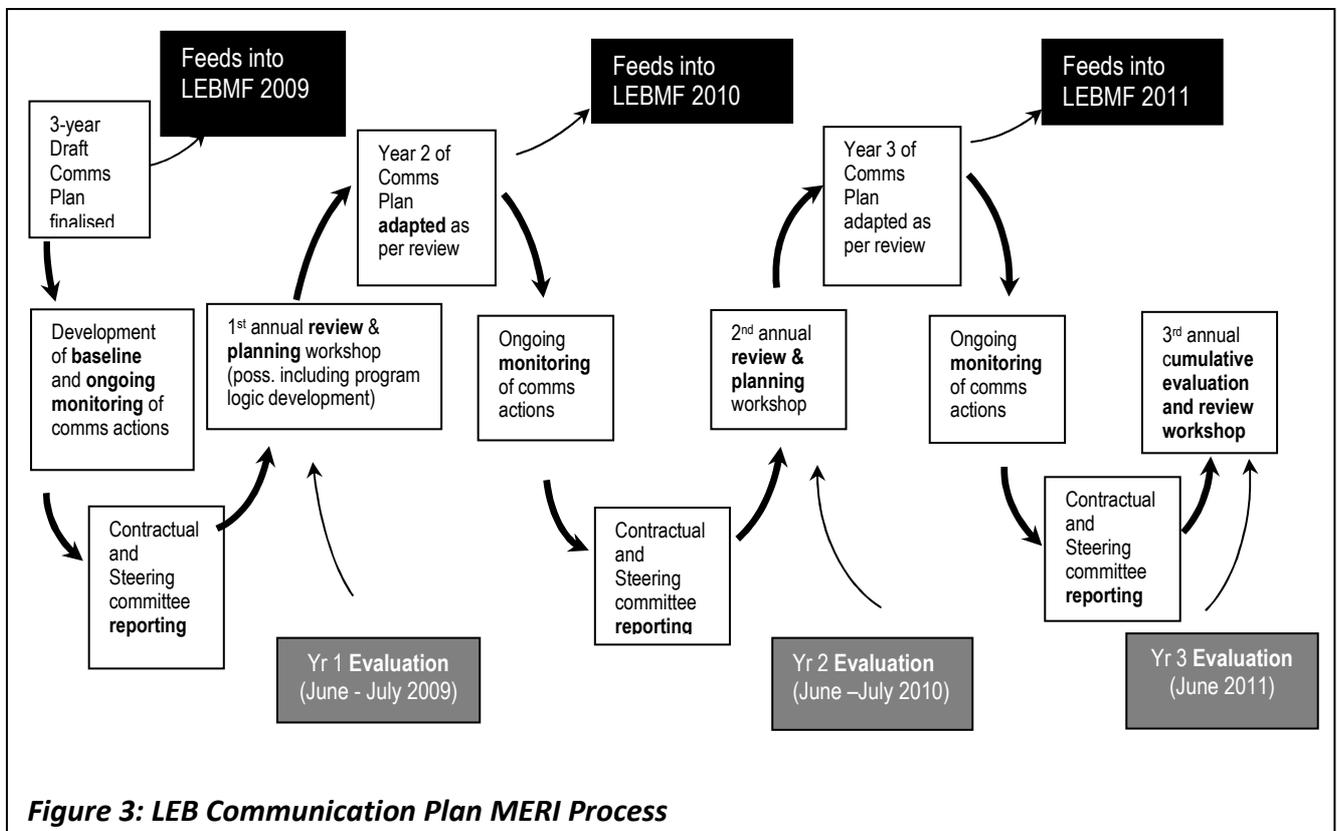
MERI FRAMEWORK – MONITORING, EVALUATION, REPORTING AND IMPROVEMENT OF COMMUNICATION ACTIONS

Accompanying the LEB Communication Plan is a framework within which monitoring and evaluation, reporting and improvement/refocussing of the LEB Communication Plan can be operationalised in both a strategic and practical way. This framework is a working document which will be fully developed in the first year of the Plan.

The purpose of the Communication Plan MERI Framework is to provide a structure and process to assist the LEB partners to:

- monitor the performance of the Communication Plan and steer activities to achieve its intended outcomes;
- coordinate and rationalise data collection and management related to the Communication Plan;
- provide performance information to inform LEB Communications strategic planning, investment and management functions, including effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness;
- be accountable to funders and LEB stakeholders and;
- demonstrate the contribution of LEB communication actions in the longer term towards improvement in the sustainable management of the Basin (including the condition of natural resources and thus contribution to environmental, economic and socio-cultural goals as presented in the LEB 5 Year Action Plan).

Figure 3 below outlines the process and some of the key ways in which M&E information will be used for reporting and improvement – including adaptation, refocussing and prioritising.



REFERENCES

Lake Eyre Basin Communication Strategy (2008), LEB Ministerial Forum

Synthesis of the People, Communities and Economies of the Lake Eyre Basin Project: Interim Final Report (2008), Measham, T.G. et al, Desert Knowledge CRC.

Consultations

The following LEB stakeholders and partners were consulted in the preparation of the LEB Communication Plan. Their contribution has been most appreciated.

- LEB Community Advisory Committee (members and Facilitator)
- LEB Scientific Advisory Panel members
- LEB Secretariat (Dept. Environment, Heritage, Water and the Arts - DEWHA)
- DEWHA Public Affairs staff
- LEB Senior Officers Group (representatives of NT, QLD, SA and Aust Governments)
- Regional NRM Groups – NT NRM Board, Desert Channels Qld and SA Arid Lands NRM Board
- NT Caring for our Country Facilitators

The LEB Communication Plan and Overview were prepared for the LEB Ministerial Forum by:

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