



**LAKE EYRE BASIN
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT**

**FIVE-YEAR ACTION PLAN
2009 to 2014**



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Lake Eyre Basin (LEB)

The LEB has an area of around 1.2 million square kilometres or over 1/6th of the land surface of Australia. It includes significant parts of north-east South Australia, southern Northern Territory and south-west Queensland, together with a small area in the far west of New South Wales. Around 57,000 people live and work in the LEB, with Alice Springs the largest town. Mining and energy (petroleum and gas) is the largest economic activity by value, while pastoral production is the largest land use by area. Service provision and tourism are other important sectors in terms of employment and economic activity. There is a long history of Aboriginal occupation within the LEB and the Basin contains many sites of cultural significance.

The LEB includes five main drainage catchments and its major rivers are the Diamantina, the Georgina and Cooper Creek. These are characterised by extreme flow variability, low gradients and high transmission losses downstream, with Lake Eyre as the terminal lake for the surface system. Much of the LEB is underlain by the Great Artesian Basin (GAB) and includes recharge zones of the GAB as well as surface discharge from underground aquifers occurring at natural springs and artesian bores.

The LEB has been subject to much less disturbance since European settlement than other parts of Australia. Many ecosystems remain largely intact, despite being subject to the effects of pest plants and animals and to continuing development pressure. The LEB is an area of high conservation significance and includes one of the world's last major unregulated semi-arid river systems, RAMSAR-listed wetlands, important grasslands and deserts, as well as endangered and threatened species. Maintaining its current natural condition and cultural heritage values, while also supporting economic activity and Basin communities, is the big challenge in managing the LEB into the future.

Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement (LEBIA)

The LEBIA was signed by the Australian, Queensland and South Australian Governments in October 2000. Legislation giving effect to the LEBIA was passed in 2001. The Northern Territory signed the LEBIA in 2004. The LEBIA does not cover small areas of the LEB lying within New South Wales and South Australia.

The LEBIA promotes a partnership between jurisdictions and key stakeholders, including NRM groups, industry and Aboriginal communities. The primary purpose of the LEBIA is to :

“provide for the development or adoption, and implementation of Policies and Strategies concerning water and related natural resources in the (LEBIA) Area to avoid or eliminate so far as reasonably practicable adverse cross-border impacts.”

LEB Intergovernmental Agreement Five-Year Action Plan (the Action Plan)

The LEB Ministerial Forum (Ministerial Forum), Community Advisory Committee (LEB CAC), Scientific Advisory Panel (LEB SAP) and Senior Officers Group (from jurisdictional agencies) have been established to assist in implementing the LEBIA. In recent years, the Ministerial Forum has adopted a number of Policies and Strategies to implement the objectives of the LEBIA, as shown at Appendix 1.

The Ministerial Forum agreed in April 2008 to develop an Action Plan, which is designed to identify specific Actions under LEBIA Policies and Strategies that should, and could, be achieved over the next five years, with clear responsibilities and reporting arrangements determined for those Actions.

A Draft Action Plan was developed following extensive consultation with stakeholders, proposing 11 Actions dealing with: issues of governance; a periodic audit of natural resource condition and stressors; the availability of data and research findings related to the LEB; communication within and outside the LEB; increased engagement with key stakeholders, including Aboriginal communities; managing tourism impacts; and planning for the future.

The Ministerial Forum then examined the Draft Action Plan, bearing in mind the potential for funding specific Actions under it and the advice given to it by the Senior Officers Group, LEB CAC and LEB SAP. At its seventh meeting, the Ministerial Forum endorsed the following Action Plan (Appendix 2) to implement the LEBIA until 2014. Apart from Action 1 – which is fundamental to the Action Plan – all Actions are of equal importance, although the pace at which they will be implemented may vary.

Resource requirements specified in the Actions are in addition to existing resources provided by the jurisdictions to enable current governance and institutional arrangements to function. Where resource requirements for activities under certain Actions cannot be calculated at the present time, the Ministerial Forum has agreed to further consider these requirements when prerequisite activities have been undertaken.

Therefore, the Action Plan is a ‘living’ document that will be reassessed annually by the Ministerial Forum in relation to monitoring and evaluating progress, determining next steps and considering possible additional funding arrangements.

LEBIA Policies and Strategies

1. River Flows Policy

‘Flow regimes of river systems within the Agreement Area will be managed to protect and maintain the ecological integrity and natural function of in-stream and floodplain ecosystems, and the viability of economic, social, cultural and other activities which do not threaten these environmental values.’

Strategy 1: Scope the need for convergence and/or alignment of legislation, policy and planning for water resource management in different jurisdictions.

Strategy 2: Encourage best practice in road and other engineering works that have potential to significantly affect the distribution and timing of river flows.

2. Water Quality Policy

‘Water quality in the river systems within the Agreement Area will be managed to protect and maintain the ecological integrity and natural function of in-stream and floodplain ecosystems and the viability of economic, social, cultural and other activities which do not threaten these environmental values.’

Strategy 3: Coordinate water quality monitoring and data management frameworks across jurisdictions to enable data collation, analysis, comparison and reporting at regional, catchment and whole-of-basin scales.

3. Water and Related Natural Resources Policy

‘Water and related natural resources associated with the river systems within the Agreement Area will be managed to protect and maintain the ecological integrity and natural function of in-stream and floodplain ecosystems and the viability of economic, social, cultural and other activities which do not threaten these environmental values.’

Strategy 4: Promote the need for natural resource management decisions to take account of potential impacts on other parts of the system.

Strategy 5: Identify opportunities for improved coordination and consistency of approach to aquatic and terrestrial weed and feral animal management activities.

4. Existing Entitlements and Water Resource Development Policy

‘Water resource planning, allocation and management arrangements, including the management of water entitlements, will be compatible with the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement. Efficient use of water will be a fundamental principle of water entitlements and utilisation. Water resource development proposals will be assessed to determine their potential impact on river flows and water quality, and compatibility with the Agreement and relevant water resource plans. These assessments will be based on the best available scientific information and local knowledge (including information from other regions in Australia and overseas).’

Strategy 6: Develop principles to guide the comprehensive assessment of water resource development proposals in the Agreement Area, in particular their appropriateness for Lake Eyre Basin river systems and catchments.

5. Research and Monitoring Policy

‘Management of water and related natural resources associated with the river systems in the Agreement Area will be guided by the best available scientific information and local knowledge, and by the results of ongoing monitoring and periodic assessment of the condition of these river systems. Targeted research may also be undertaken to address identified knowledge gaps.’

Strategy 7: Promote the integration of the LEB Rivers Assessment outcomes into water and related natural resource management decision-making.

Strategy 8: Engaging non-Indigenous and Indigenous stakeholders to ensure that local knowledge is recognised and utilised in assessment and management of the Basin.

6. Whole of Basin Approach Policy

‘Water and related natural resources in the Lake Eyre Basin Agreement Area will be managed through a whole-of-basin approach so as to achieve complementary outcomes, through the implementation of state/territory legislation and the plans and associated investment strategies of relevant regional bodies in Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory.’

Strategy 9: The Communications 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.

Strategy 10: Develop and implement a communication strategy to raise public awareness of the LEB Agreement and the work of the Ministerial Forum, the CAC and the SAP.

Strategy 11: Scope the need for consistent and complementary data management frameworks across jurisdictions to enable data collation, analysis, comparison and reporting at regional, catchment and whole-of-basin scales.

Strategy 12: Improving community and other stakeholder access to data and information on the economic, social, environmental and heritage values of the Basin, including Internet based systems.

Lake Eyre Basin Five-Year Action Plan 2009 to 2014

What Action is needed	Why is Action needed	How Action will be implemented	When Action will be implemented	Responsibility for Action	Resources required	How progress will be monitored	LEBIA Strategies addressed
HIGHEST PRIORITY ACTION							
1. Re-assess the governance and support arrangements to implement the LEB Intergovernmental Agreement (LEBIA).	<p>Due to the challenges associated with the size of the LEB, its remoteness and the scope of the LEBIA, it is necessary to:</p> <p>a have a body with executive authority to directly implement LEB Ministerial Forum decisions;</p> <p>b ensure all stakeholders are informed about and have opportunity to be fully engaged in the implementation of the LEBIA.</p>	<p>a The LEB Senior Officers Group (SOG) will be reorganised for this purpose, with members sufficiently senior to be able to drive the implementation process within jurisdictions and to commit resources. See also Actions 5 and 7.</p> <p>b SOG to engage with LEB regional NRM bodies (primarily through annual meeting). See also Actions 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11.</p>	<p>a SOG Operating Protocols considered at Ministerial Forum meeting in 2009. See also timelines for specific Actions.</p> <p>b Annually and ongoing. See also timelines for specific Actions.</p>	<p>a Ministerial Forum, SOG.</p> <p>b SOG, NRM bodies. See also responsibilities under specific Actions.</p>	<p>a Nil – achieved under current budgetary arrangements.</p> <p>b Nil – achieved under current budgetary arrangements. See also specific Actions for resource implications.</p>	<p>Annual report back to Ministerial Forum.</p> <p>Also, operation of Action Plan, including revised governance arrangements will be reviewed in 2011.</p>	<p>1, 3, 5, 6, 11</p>

What Action is needed	Why is Action needed	How Action will be implemented	When Action will be implemented	Responsibility for Action	Resources required	How progress will be monitored	LEBIA Strategies addressed
PRIORITY ACTIONS							
2. Published Audit with data about condition of LEB natural resources and factors likely to affect them.	Risk of resource degradation through many individual decisions taken in the LEB. Stakeholders need to be aware of changes (including both biophysical and socioeconomic changes) taking place in the LEB that may affect the condition of water and related natural resources	a Design Study to be undertaken to determine appropriate scope of Audit, having regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - possibility of reporting on LEB within other existing auditing approaches (e.g. Australian Collaborative Rangelands Information System or Bureau of Meteorology requirements) - how Audit might 'fit' with Actions 4, 5 & 8 - the optimal reporting period. 	a Design study following consideration of initial phases of Actions 4, 5 and 8.	a External contractor with SAP oversight, CAC/SAP advice on publication.	a \$75 000 for design study from Min Forum Budget.	a Min Forum to consider outcomes of Design Study in 2011-12.	2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12
		b Subject to the findings of the Design Study and the attendant resourcing implications, Ministerial Forum will decide on the parameters for a regular Audit.	b To be determined. (TBD)	b TBD.	b TBD.	b TBD	
3. Prepare and deliver a LEB Communication Plan for the three years 2008-09 to 2010-2011.	Need for improved communication and sharing of information within and beyond the LEB.	a 3-year Communications Plan adopted.	a By June 2009.	a Ministerial Forum.	a Nil.	a Draft Plan adopted by Ministerial Forum.	4, 9, 10, 12
		b Activities under Plan will be carried out under the direction of the LEB Communications Officer (LEB CO).	b Extension of LEB CO position (to 30 June 2011) to be finalised by August 2009.	b LEB CO, in consultation with LEB Facilitator, CAC, SAP, NRM bodies, SOG and others.	b \$162,500 in 2008-09, \$266,000 in 2009-10 & \$236,500 in 2010-11, from Min Forum Budget.	b A monitoring and evaluation report will be prepared in June 2009 and 2010	

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4. Establish a LEB Regional Resource Information System	Make LEB data widely available to guide NRM and other investment decisions.	<p>a Design Study will be undertaken as part of the Northern Australia Water Futures Assessment (NAWFA) Program.</p> <p>b Results of Design Study to be considered by Ministerial Forum in light of scope, management and funding implications</p>	<p>a By December 2009.</p> <p>b In 2009-10.</p>	<p>a NAWFA, in conjunction with SOG.</p> <p>b Ministerial Forum, following advice from SOG, SAP, CAC, LEB Facilitator, industry sectors & NRM bodies.</p>	<p>a \$100,000 from NAWFA Program.</p> <p>b TBD.</p>	<p>a. Design Study assessed by Ministerial Forum in 2010.</p> <p>b TBD, following consideration of Design Study.</p>	3, 4, 5, 11, 12
5. Implement the LEB Rivers Assessment (LEBRA).	Data required to support adaptive management and measure change and trends in LEB riverine systems	<p>a Consultant to develop Draft LEBRA Implementation Plan.</p> <p>b Draft Plan to be considered by Ministerial Forum.</p>	<p>a Draft Plan prepared by 30 June 2009.</p> <p>b In 2009-10.</p>	<p>a SOG</p> <p>b Ministerial Forum, following advice from SOG, SAP, CAC and NRM bodies.</p>	<p>a \$118,000, from Min Forum Budget.</p> <p>b TBD.</p>	<p>a Draft Plan assessed by Min Forum in 2010.</p> <p>b TBD, following consideration of Draft Plan.</p>	3, 6, 7

What Action is needed	Why is Action needed	How Action will be implemented	When Action will be implemented	Responsibility for Action	Resources required	How progress will be monitored	LEBIA Strategies addressed
6. Reviewing and updating LEB knowledge needs and prioritising efforts to fill those needs.	Improved two-way flow of knowledge between researchers and LEB community to underpin NRM decisions.	<p>a LEB Knowledge Strategy (detailing existing knowledge and knowledge gaps in key biophysical and socioeconomic information) to be developed.</p> <p>b Draft Strategy endorsed by Ministerial Forum.</p> <p>c Specific research theme attached to each biennial LEB Conference.</p> <p>d Include dissemination of Knowledge Strategy into Communications Plan.</p>	<p>a Draft Strategy prepared by 31 March 2009.</p> <p>b 2009</p> <p>c By 2010 LEB Conference & then biennially.</p> <p>d Ongoing.</p>	<p>a SAP, in consultation with CAC & SOG.</p> <p>b Ministerial Forum.</p> <p>c LEB Facilitator & SAP.</p> <p>d LEB CO.</p>	<p>a Nil.</p> <p>b Nil.</p> <p>c \$5,000 biennially.</p> <p>d See Action 3.</p>	<p>a & b Draft Plan assessed by Min Forum in 2009.</p> <p>c Evaluation survey of LEB Conference attendees.</p> <p>d See Action 3.</p>	3, 4, 5, 11,12
7. Increase resources available to implement the LEBIA.	Additional professional support needed if CAC and SAP are to fulfill their LEBIA roles. Additional funds required to implement this Action Plan.	<p>a Additional staffing provided to the LEB Secretariat, thus allowing LEB Facilitator to provide additional support to SAP.</p> <p>b Action Plan resourcing needs to be kept under consideration.</p>	<p>a By 30 June 2009.</p> <p>b Ongoing.</p>	<p>a Australian Government</p> <p>b Min Forum, on advice from SOG, CAC, SAP, NRM bodies and others.</p>	<p>a \$60,000 per annum, from enhanced Min Forum Budget.</p> <p>b TBD.</p>	Funding will be reported on annual basis primarily to the Min Forum, although CAC, SAP and other stakeholders will be advised on relevant funding issues	All strategies

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8. Sectoral and Basin-wide foresighting studies to consider future scenarios in order to better inform integrated decision making across the LEB.	Integrated decision-making across ecosystems, jurisdictions and sectors remains under-developed within the LEB.	<p>a Consultancy on current foresighting work (particularly that done in relation to climate change, mining and petroleum) will be commissioned.</p> <p>b Consider need to undertake specific LEB foresighting studies.</p> <p>c Results published widely.</p>	<p>a 2009-10.</p> <p>b 2010.</p> <p>c Ongoing</p>	<p>a SOG, LEB Secretariat.</p> <p>b Min Forum, on advice from SOG, CAC, SAP, NRM bodies and others.</p> <p>c LEB CO.</p>	<p>a \$50,000 from Min Forum Budget.</p> <p>b TBD.</p> <p>c See Action 3</p>	Results published widely.	1, 4, 5, 12
9. Enhance engagement with Aboriginal people.	Ensure indigenous concerns and knowledge integrated into account in management of LEB resources.	<p>a Initial consideration will be given on how to enhance engagement by Aboriginal representatives.</p> <p>b Agreed proposals will be given further consideration.</p> <p>c Other avenues for better engagement will be examined (e.g. Indigenous Freshwater Forum).</p> <p>d Improve communications with Aboriginal people (see also Action 10).</p>	<p>a May 2009.</p> <p>b 2010.</p> <p>c 2010 & ongoing.</p> <p>d Ongoing.</p>	<p>a Aboriginal Forum.</p> <p>b Min Forum, on advice from SOG, CAC, SAP, NRM bodies and others.</p> <p>c LEB Facilitator, LEB Secretariat.</p> <p>d LEB CO, CAC members.</p>	<p>a Nil.</p> <p>b TBD.</p> <p>c TBD.</p> <p>d See Actions 3 and 10.</p>	<p>Report of 2009 Forum available with any agreed actions to be further considered by Min Forum.</p> <p>Monitoring of progress of other initiatives TBD.</p>	5, 8, 10, 12

What Action is needed	Why is Action needed	How Action will be implemented	When Action will be implemented	Responsibility for Action	Resources required	How progress will be monitored	LEBIA Strategies addressed
10. Increase interaction by CAC with other organizations, within and outside the LEB.	Organisations not formally linked to the LEBIA processes make decisions that affect LEB natural resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a CAC, SAP & SOG to consider how to better engage such ones (incl.. Channel Country Rivers Alliance; Rangelands Alliance).. b Consider what next steps to take. c Report on engagement undertaken between meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a 2009 & ongoing. b 2010 & ongoing. c Immediately & ongoing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a LEB Facilitator & relevant members. b Min Forum. c CAC members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Nil. b Nil. c Nil. 	Ministerial Forum to be advised annually by CAC on outcomes of increased interaction.	2, 4, 10, 12
11. Management of tourism impacts on LEB natural and cultural resources.	Minimize negative impacts of increasing tourism on LEB natural and cultural resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Review and update 2004 Heritage Tourism Report. b Investigate opportunities through the National Landscapes Program. c Determine next steps under Action Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a December 2009. b December 2009. c 2010. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a SOG, LEB Secretariat. b SOG. c Ministerial Forum, on advice from SOG, CAC, SAP, NRM bodies and others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a \$10,000 from Min Forum Budget. b Nil. c TBD. 	Update review report presented to Ministerial Forum. Next steps TBD.	4, 8, 12