

Proposed amendment to the Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Great Artesian Basin Groundwater Sources 2020

The NSW Government proposes to amend the *Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Great Artesian Basin Groundwater Sources 2020* to correct unintended restrictions on locating new bores.

Background

NSW legislation requires water resources to be managed through water sharing plans. These plans set rules for water access licences, water supply works, such as bores, and where they can be located.

The *Water Sharing Plan for the NSW Great Artesian Basin Groundwater Sources 2020* (the 2020 plan) sets rules for managing water in the NSW portion of the Great Artesian Basin (Attachment A). This plan started 1 July 2020 and replaced the previous plan from 2008.

While implementing the 2020 plan some issues have been identified. These include:

- the current rules for the distance that new bores can be placed from other bores or features do not reflect the intended distances for certain types of bores
- the plan does not consider site-specific considerations when assessing bore applications. In other words, there is no flexibility for the minister to consider a lesser distance if specific conditions are met
- these distance restrictions in the 2020 plan are unintentionally inconsistent with other inland groundwater plans.

The proposed amendment seeks to correct and improve drafting and address unintended restrictions imposed on placement of bores for basic landholder rights and other groundwater users. The proposed amendment would allow the department to place greater focus on local site conditions when processing bore applications. These changes will make the Plan consistent with other inland groundwater sharing plans across the state.

Water sharing plans may be amended if the amendment is in the public interest. The Department of Planning and Environment - Water (the department) proposes to amend the 2020 plan to remove unintended restrictions, which is in the public interest.

Proposed amendments

The department proposes changes to clauses 37 and 41 of the 2020 plan. These changes will impact:

- Central, Surat and Warrego groundwater sources
- Eastern and Southern Recharge groundwater sources.

Central, Surat and Warrego groundwater sources

For all applications for groundwater supply works (bores), allow ministerial discretion to consider a lesser permitted distance from:

- the boundary of another landholding (default is 200 m)
- local water utility and major water utility bores (default is 1,000 m)
- bores located on another landholding used solely for basic landholder rights or nominated by a non-local water utility licence type (default is 500 m)
- government monitoring or observation bores (default is 400 m)

if there is no more than minimal effect on the ability to access water from existing bores.

Eastern and Southern Recharge groundwater sources

For applications for groundwater supply works (bores) **used solely for basic landholder rights**, remove the distance restrictions from:

- the boundary of another landholding (currently 200 m)
- local water utility and major water utility bores (currently 1,000 m)
- bores located on another landholding used solely for basic landholder rights or nominated by a non-local water utility licence type (currently 200 m).

For applications for groundwater supply works (bores) nominating a water access licence, allow ministerial discretion to consider a lesser permitted distance from:

- the boundary of another landholding (default is 200 m)
- local water utility and major water utility bores (default is 1,000 m)
- bores located on another landholding used solely for basic landholder rights or nominated by a non-local water utility licence type (default is 200 m)
- government monitoring or observation bores (default is 400 m)
- if there is no more than minimal effect on the ability to access water from existing bores.

Groundwater source considerations when amending distance rules

The department proposes to recommend removing distance restrictions for basic landholder right bores in the southern and eastern recharge groundwater sources. This approach considers that water taken from these bores is used solely for basic landholder rights and represents a relatively small volume.

The department also proposes to recommend that in the Central, Warrego and Surat groundwater sources, distance restrictions remain in place but that ministerial discretion to consider a lesser distance be allowed in certain circumstances. Approval at a lesser distance would need to make sure there is minimal effects on the ability to access water from existing bores. This approach considers drawdown effects are likely to be greater in these groundwater sources due to:

- higher volume pumps to service multiple landholdings

- pressurised aquifers – meaning impacts could be more widespread.

Intended outcomes

The proposed amendments would enable departmental officers to use local site conditions to assess applications for bores that fall within the distance restrictions specified in the 2020 plan. If a groundwater assessment concludes that the potential impact of a new bore is within acceptable limits and/or could be managed with conditions to ensure minimal negative effects on nearby bore access, then approval of a new bore could be considered.

The proposed amendments would provide more opportunities for bore applications to be assessed according to local site conditions. This would not necessarily result in more approvals being granted. Applications would still be subject to assessment and conditions may be imposed.

Attachment A

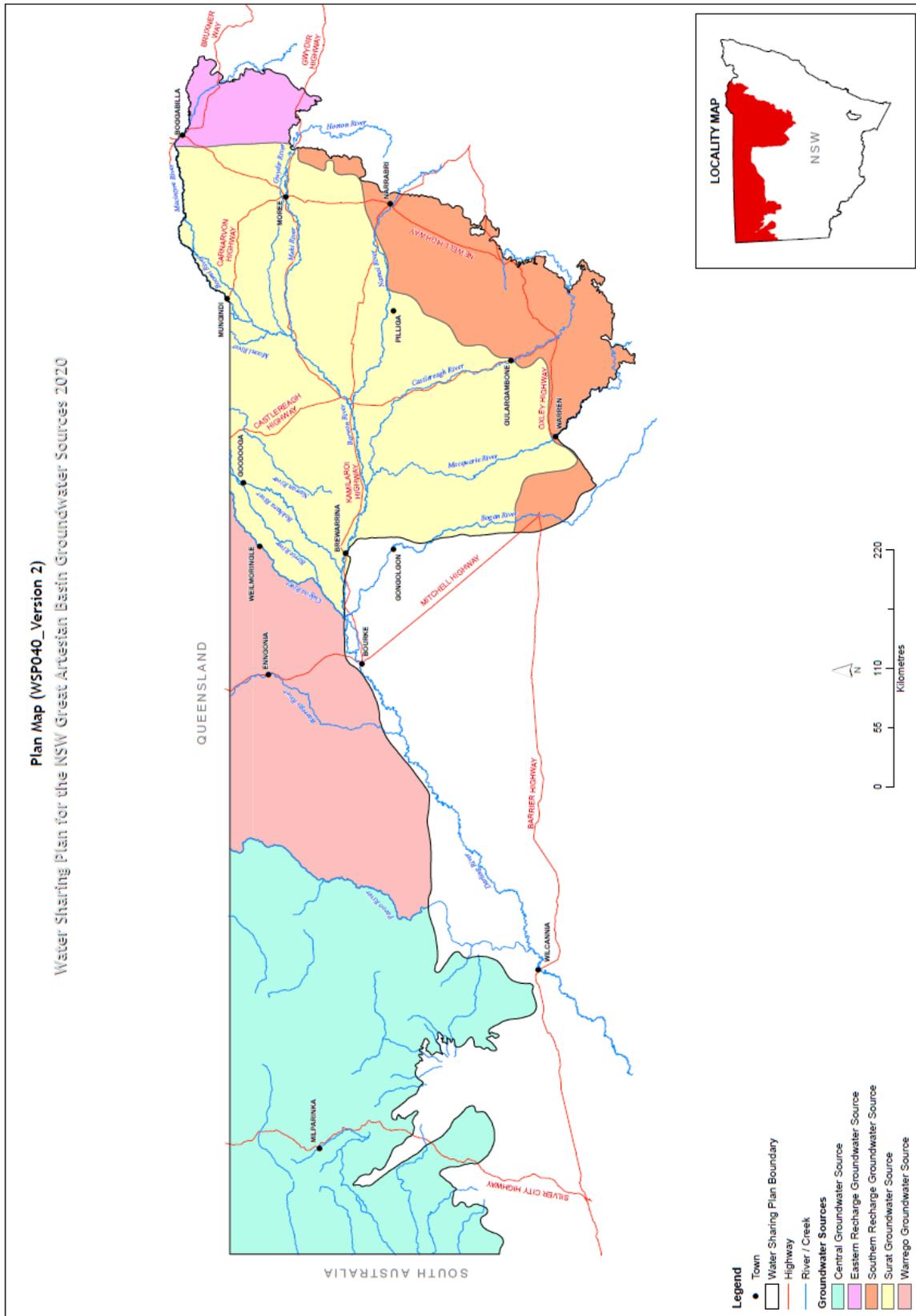


Figure 1. NSW Great Artesian Basin area showing the 5 groundwater sources