

Increased protections to the river systems of Queensland Lake Eyre Basin

Amendments to the Channel Country Strategic Environmental Area (SEA) and the Regional Planning Interests Regulation 2014

Guidance information on changes

The Kati-Thanda Lake Eyre system is of outstanding ecological and cultural significance from a national and global perspective. The Queensland portion of the Lake Eyre Basin (Qld LEB) contains among the last remaining, largely intact and free-flowing arid river systems in the world. The flows of the Georgina, Diamantina and Cooper support a wide range of unique surface water dependent ecosystems and unique biodiversity along their courses, and are of immense environmental and cultural significance.

Protecting the ecological and cultural values of these sensitive systems, while supporting sustainable economic and other activities in the region, has been under review since 2015. In a formal regulatory context, the Qld LEB is referred to as the Channel Country.

In Queensland, the majority of land use planning activity is assessed under the *Planning Act 2016* (Planning Act). The Planning Act is complemented by the *Regional Planning Interest Act 2014* (RPI Act) which extends the consideration of land use policies contained in regional plans to include resource activities (e.g. mining and petroleum) and other regulated activities (e.g. broadacre cropping and water storage dams) that generally occur outside the jurisdiction of the Planning Act and local government planning schemes.

Section 11 of the RPI Act defines a Strategic Environmental Area (SEA) as an area containing environmental attributes shown on a map or prescribed under a regulation. The Channel Country SEA is shown by a map under Part 3 section 4 of the Regional Planning Interests Regulation 2014 (RPI Regulation) and is published on the website of the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works (DHLGPPW). Part 5, section 15(3)(a) of the RPI Regulation provides for designated precincts within a SEA. Part 5, sections 15 (1) and (2) enable the identification and regulation of certain land uses as 'unacceptable uses' within a designated precinct of an SEA.

On 22 December 2023, the State Government announced [increased protections to the Qld LEB](#). A [Decision Impact Analysis Statement \(DIAS\)](#) was released by the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation on 8 March 2024 that outlined how the Government's decision was to be implemented by changing the published map and amending the RPI Regulation to:

- expand the definition of 'environmental attributes' for the Channel Country SEA listed in the RPI Regulation
- allow operators with existing conventional gas and oil production in the (now called) '2014 Reach' and the new 'Critical Minerals Reach' of the Channel Country SEA to maintain those operations
- allow for consideration of open cut mining activities for critical minerals to occur in the Critical Minerals Reach of the Channel Country SEA through site-specific assessment and approval processes
- provide for a transitional process for certain gas and oil production activities in the Channel Country SEA

- make other future new gas and oil production in the designated precincts of the Channel Country SEA an unacceptable use.

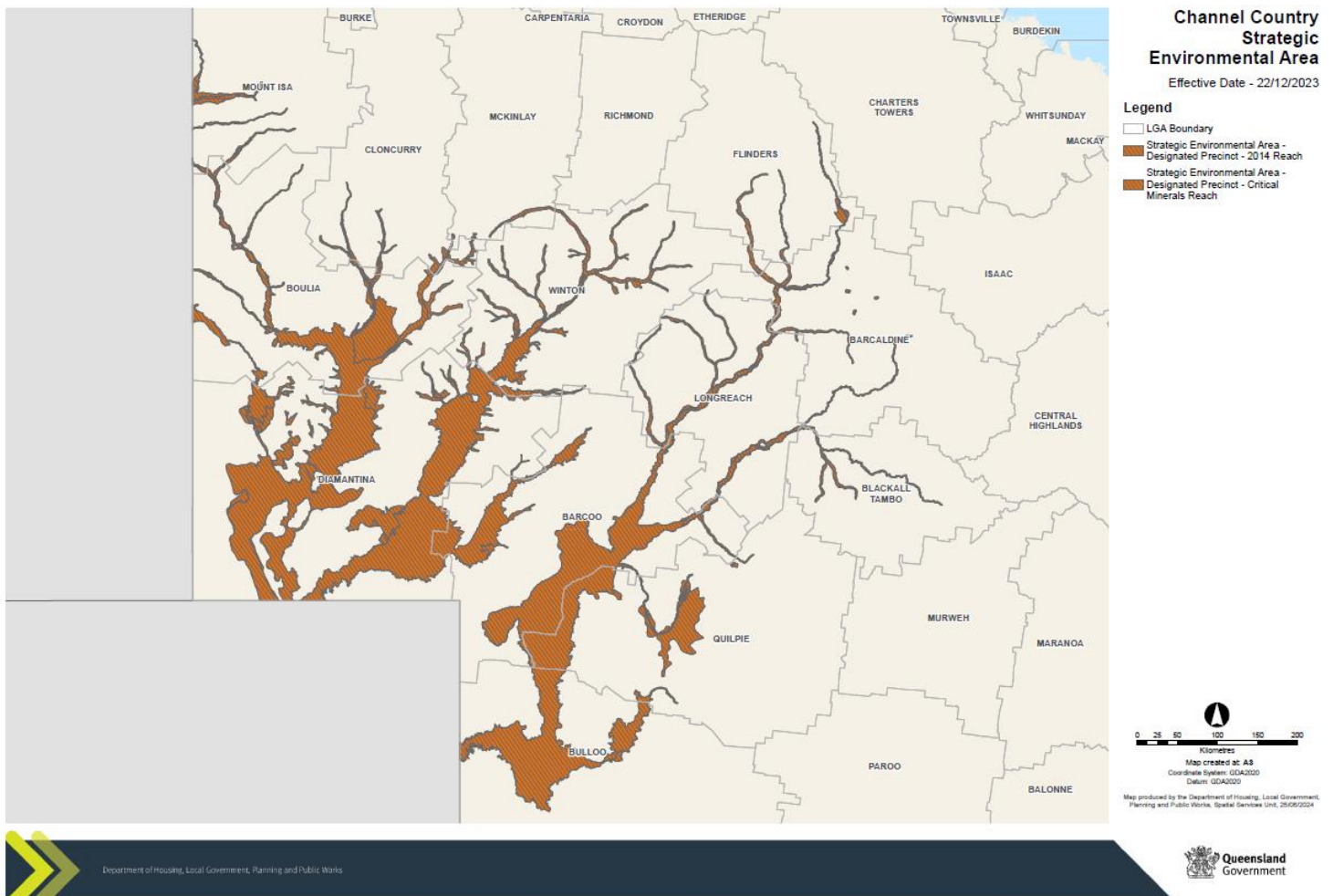
The Regional Planning Interests (Lake Eyre Basin) Amendment Regulation 2024 (Amendment Regulation) made the relevant amendments to the RPI Regulation to implement these changes. No regulatory amendment is necessary to incorporate the remapped SEA, as the relevant statutory map is made available on the DHLGPPW website (as required under the RPI Regulation).

The effective date of the changed spatial extent of the [Channel Country SEA](#) was set as the date of announcement (22 December 2023) of the changes.

The changes to the spatial extent of the Channel Country SEA has expanded the SEA, with two separate 'reaches' (Figure 1) now identified, which have differing regulatory provisions (under the amended RPI Regulation). These reaches are identified as follows:

- *2014 Reach*: area mapped in 2014 with commencement of the RPI Regulation, and
- *Critical Minerals Reach*: additional SEA extent.

Figure 1. Copy of the expanded Channel Country strategic environmental area map published on the department's website.



It is acknowledged that the mapping symbology for SEA (designated precincts) in the amended Channel Country SEA map does not show a clear distinction between the two reaches of the SEA. This is because SEA (designated precincts) are mapped in various locations across Queensland and the symbology distinction within the mapping system only allows for a distinction between the broader SEA and SEA (designated precincts) areas.

Figure 2 is provided to assist in determining where the individual reaches are spatially located within the expanded Channel Country SEA. Furthermore, the spatial layers for the 2014 Reach and the

Critical Minerals Reaches are available on the department's interactive mapping services ([State Planning Policy Interactive Mapping System](#) and [Development Assessment Mapping System](#)).

Figure 2. Colour coded reaches map of Channel Country strategic environmental area.

