

# Engagement with Surat and Bowen Basin Stakeholders

## Discussion Paper

October 2022



## Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Background .....	4
Context and Purpose.....	4
Commission’s stakeholder forums.....	4
Community Leaders Council .....	5
State-wide Stakeholder Advisory Group.....	6
Pilot Surat Stakeholder Advisory Group (SSAG) .....	6
Discussion.....	7
Form and function of advisory bodies .....	7
Geographic Remit .....	8
Membership.....	9
Group Format and Schedule .....	10
Main forum .....	11
Sub-Regional Forums .....	11
Working groups.....	12
Meeting structure and frequency.....	12
Register your interest .....	13
Have your say.....	13
Feedback .....	13
Next Steps .....	13
Glossary.....	14

## Executive Summary

*Managing and improving the sustainable coexistence of landholders, regional communities and the onshore gas industry* is the core function of the GasFields Commission Queensland (the Commission). Critical to undertaking this role is being informed by and working in partnership with the diverse range of stakeholders. To effectively facilitate sustainable coexistence and carry out its legislative functions, the Commission needs to understand the issues of relevance to stakeholders and to have a means to identify these through active and structured engagement with those stakeholders.

Engaging with the regional communities that host gas activities or may host gas activities in the future is key to identifying issues and opportunities of relevance to stakeholders. This includes the residents of those communities, local governments, businesses, non-government entities, and gas companies. Genuine and productive engagement with these stakeholders across the geographic area of onshore gas development is critical to the Commission's work and ultimately achieving sustainable coexistence.

A successful pilot 'advisory group' has recently concluded in the Dalby area to test the approach for a more structured and focused engagement approach informed by a regional advisory forum. Observations and learnings from the pilot have been applied in developing the proposal for a new reference group outlined in this discussion paper that covers areas of gas development across the Surat and Bowen Basins. The focus on the Surat and Bowen Basins is largely driven by the fact that this area has the majority of gas activity (both exploration and development) in Queensland.

The purpose of the proposed forum is to discuss, share and receive information about coexisting with gas activities, and any associated opportunities or concerns, with and across communities. The Commission will utilise this group to understand the interests and concerns of regional communities and use this information to assist in performing its statutory functions, such as the provision of advice to key stakeholders on best practice. The ability to have a genuine conversation with regional stakeholders is vital for the sustainable coexistence of regional communities and the gas industry.

The forum is intended to complement and enhance the engagement approach of the Commission, which includes the State-Wide Stakeholder Advisory Group and Community Leaders Council.

The Commission seeks to consult with key stakeholders, supported by this discussion paper, on the options for the proposed new engagement forum. It is intended that consultation process will support the establishment of a regionally-based advisory body by the end of 2022.

## Background

### Context and Purpose

The Commission is an independent statutory body established under the *Gasfields Commission Act 2013* (GFCQ Act) to “*manage and improve the sustainable coexistence of landholders, regional communities and the onshore gas industry*”.

The Commission has 14 legislative functions which can be summarised as:

- **facilitate** effective stakeholder relationships, collaborations and partnerships to support information sharing related to the onshore gas industry;
- **review** the effectiveness of government entities in implementing regulatory frameworks related to the onshore gas industry; and
- **advise** agriculture and gas industry peak bodies, government ministers and regulators, and landholders and community groups on matters relating to sustainable coexistence, leading practice and management of the onshore gas industry.

Critical to undertaking this role is being informed by and working in partnership with a diverse range of stakeholders. To effectively facilitate sustainable coexistence and carry out its legislative functions, the Commission needs to understand the issues of relevance to stakeholders and to have a means to identify these through active and structured engagement.

The Commission is seeking to improve and evolve its stakeholder engagement by taking a more strategic and structured approach to engagement with regional communities, landholders and the onshore gas sector. A key element to this approach is this proposal to establish a reference group to represent the interests of regional communities and other key stakeholders across the Surat and Bowen Basins and facilitate discussions to enhance the understanding of coexistence issues within that geographic area.

The group is proposed to be called the Surat and Bowen Basins Reference Group (SBBRG). This group is intended to complement the Commission’s existing stakeholder forums, facilitating discussion with people who are living in coexistence with Queensland’s onshore gas industry and experiencing the associated issues and opportunities.

The Commission envisages that this regional forum will be the ‘ear to the ground’ in regional communities, with representatives for communities, local businesses, landholders, chambers of commerce, agricultural peak bodies and the gas industry who understand the interests and concerns across the broader community. The Commission will bring these representatives together to discuss emerging issues and opportunities for collaboration related to the gas activities in the Surat and Bowen Basins.

### Commission’s stakeholder forums

The Commission is only as successful as its relationships and networks, and over the past two years, it has strived to enhance these. A strong focus for the Commission has been nurturing these relationships through facilitating and supporting engagement between the onshore gas sector and the diverse range of stakeholders that interact with it.

A core component of the Commission’s stakeholder engagement and communication strategy has been the established of structured stakeholder forums that bring together the diverse stakeholder cohort that have an interest in coexistence outcomes. These stakeholder forums have provided an opportunity for the Commission to engage with a range of stakeholders to share information, identify opportunities and challenges, seek opinions and advice, and provide a platform for targeted consultation.

The Commission has two established stakeholder forums, the Community Leaders Council and the state-wide Stakeholder Advisory Group. The purpose of this discussion paper is to propose a third engagement forum with a region focus via the SBBRG, which will form the “Regional Reference Group” component described in figure 1 and complement the Commission’s existing forums.

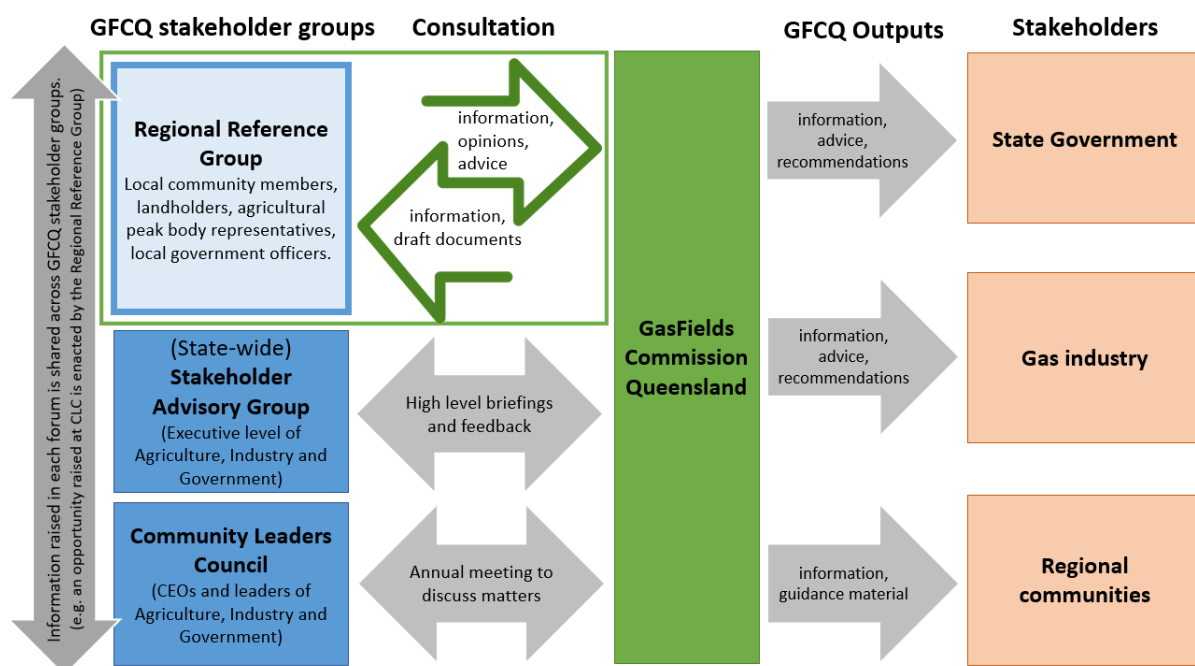


Figure 1 Diagram showing the stakeholder groups formed by the Commission, the consultation undertaken with those groups, and the outputs delivered by the Commission facilitated by the consultation. A rectangle is drawn around the stakeholder group and consultation that is the topic of this discussion paper.

### Community Leaders Council

Section 29 of the *Gasfields Commission Act 2013* requires the Commission to establish a committee (the GasFields Community Leaders Council) for the purpose of assisting the Commission in identifying issues affecting the coexistence of landholders, regional communities and the onshore gas industry in Queensland.

In 2021, the Commission re-established the CLC as a high-level forum focused on driving increased collaboration, strategic problem solving and honest dialogue relating to the most pressing coexistence issues being faced within Queensland’s onshore gas industry. It is comprised of senior leaders of industry, executives from state and local government, regional mayors, representatives from academia and the heads of relevant industry peak bodies and meets on an annual basis.

### State-wide Stakeholder Advisory Group

The State-wide Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) is a consultative forum that the Commission has established to provide a mechanism to undertake targeted consultation on key projects and activities the Commission is involved in, along with providing a forum for stakeholder groups to raised emerging trends and issues. Its membership includes representatives from Industry, state and local government, academia and industry peak bodies. It meets on an 'as needs' basis throughout the year.

The proposed SBBRG is intended to complement and enhance the established forums the Commission has in place.

### Pilot Surat Stakeholder Advisory Group (SSAG)

A key element of the Commission's Stakeholder Engagement Strategy has been the piloting of the Surat Stakeholder Advisory Group (SSAG) to provide a structured mechanism to engage with stakeholders in an area of gas development and to better understand how to approach the potential establishment of a regionally based engagement forum. Under its charter it provided for a review after six months of operation, which was extended for a further 12 months.

The group was established in mid-2020 with the purpose of providing a forum for:

- the identification of concerns/issues for communities interacting with onshore gas development;
- facilitating discussions on issues with key stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the nature and extent of the issues and concerns;
- dissemination of information to the members and the broader community around the onshore gas sector, its operation and regulatory framework; and
- increased engagement with subject matter experts to analyse individual issues and inform possible actions and solutions.

Through the pilot the Commission was able to identify a range of matters which have informed

- a significant proportion of ongoing project work including;
  - the research project into the potential impacts and risks to farming operations resulting from CSG-induced subsidence,
  - review of legislative frameworks in regards to assessing and addressing potential impacts from subsidence,
  - public liability insurance for landholders who host CSG activities.
- advice and recommendations the Commission has provided to relevant agencies and their Ministers
  - review of the *Regional Planning Interests Act 2014* (RPI Act) Assessment Framework
  - seeking action from relevant agencies to conclude compliance matters and clarify exemptions under the RPI Act.
- advice the Commission has provided to onshore gas operators to improve relationships with landholders.

- working with agriculture peak bodies, landholders and industry to support greater transparency in relation to engagement around gas development in intensively farmed areas.

It also provided an important mechanism to facilitate the delivery of key information and advice from department subject matter experts regarding a range of regulatory framework associated with the onshore gas industry.

A review of the SSAG pilot concluded that the pilot overall was a success. In addition to recognising the important contribution from regional stakeholders in informing the Commissions work, the pilot provided observations and learnings which have informed a new format that seeks to increase the diversity of membership and geographic remit.

The SSAG did not have a mechanism in place to ensure a balance of stakeholder groups. Meetings originally included representation from landholders, local businesses, and peak bodies. This representation diminished over time to only landholders and the occasional peak body representative. While these members continued to contribute valuable information, the Commission considers that greater diversity of representation would provide a more complete coverage of coexistence matters. The discussion section of this paper discusses further how the Commission will seek to balance stakeholder representation in this new stakeholder forum while being conscious of managing the size of the group.

SSAG meetings were also hampered by misunderstanding the scope of the group and actions that could be pursued in response to matters raised. This reinforces the need to clearly define the purpose and scope of the group in further, and ensure this is discussed and understood by the group members.

Finally, the SSAG was focussed on issues in the Dalby area and surrounds. This geographic focus was appropriate for the coexistence issues at the time, but the Commission is now seeking to refocus its activities to cover a broader geographic area where there is gas activity – that is across the Surat and Bowen Basins where the majority of gas development is currently occurring.

The Commission acknowledges the value that was provided by this focussed forum and will continue to facilitate smaller working groups similar to the SSAG concept under the SBBRG model as necessary to address issues and opportunities that arise.

## Discussion

This section discusses components of the advisory body, the learnings from the pilot SSAG, and the proposals for the structure and format of a new advisory forum. The Commission is seeking feedback on each of these components.

### Form and function of advisory bodies

Advisory bodies can take on many forms ranging from those that either inform or undertake decision making functions through to more reference-based models for the facilitation of information exchange on a particular topic or project.

An important lesson from the SSAG pilot was that it is critical to clearly articulate the specific function and role of the advisory body from the outset and document it clearly. Establishing a clear scope and remit for the group is essential as is ensuring there is a clear understanding of the remit by group members.

The forum is intended to provide for:

- the identification of concerns/issues for communities interacting with onshore gas development;
- facilitating discussions on current and future issues and opportunities with key stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the nature and extent of the issues and concerns;
- sharing successes in addressing issues and concerns, and partnerships that have been beneficial to communities and landholders, and identifying how they could be built upon or replicated;
- dissemination of information to the members and the broader community around the onshore gas sector, its operation and regulatory framework;
- to streamline consultation process with stakeholders and reduce consultation burden;

The Commission believes that the purpose and associated outcomes of the SBBRG best match a 'reference group' style approach to engagement. An advisory group will typically provide advice and make recommendations, whereas a 'reference group' seeks to exchange information between members and the host. The latter better reflects the outcomes the forum is intended to achieve.

### Geographic Remit

The pilot was formed around and focused on specific co-existence challenges associated within a geographic footprint in and around the Dalby district with a specific focus on gas development on intensively farmed land. The forum provided the Commission the ability to reach a greater proportion of stakeholders than it otherwise would through one-on-one and other interactions across a range of critical issues.

Work undertaken under the Commission's Engagement Planning Framework has identified a diverse range of communities that are experiencing new gas activity for the first time, or the extraction of a new type of gas along with continuing infill development in mature gas production areas. The majority of this activity is occurring across the Surat and Bowen Basins which are the current focus for the Commission's engagement activities. For the Commission's planning processes the area is split into Northern and Southern Surat-Bowen Basin areas.

In addition, regional Queensland is experiencing the emergence of new industries that overlap the onshore gas sector footprint that are likely to create new challenges for co-existence. Engagement with stakeholders in these areas, in addition to those already engaged, is important for the Commission to be able to fulfill its functions and ongoing project work to the benefit of all stakeholders. The regional advisory body is proposed to take in representatives and consider concerns across the wider area, as detailed in **Figure 2**.



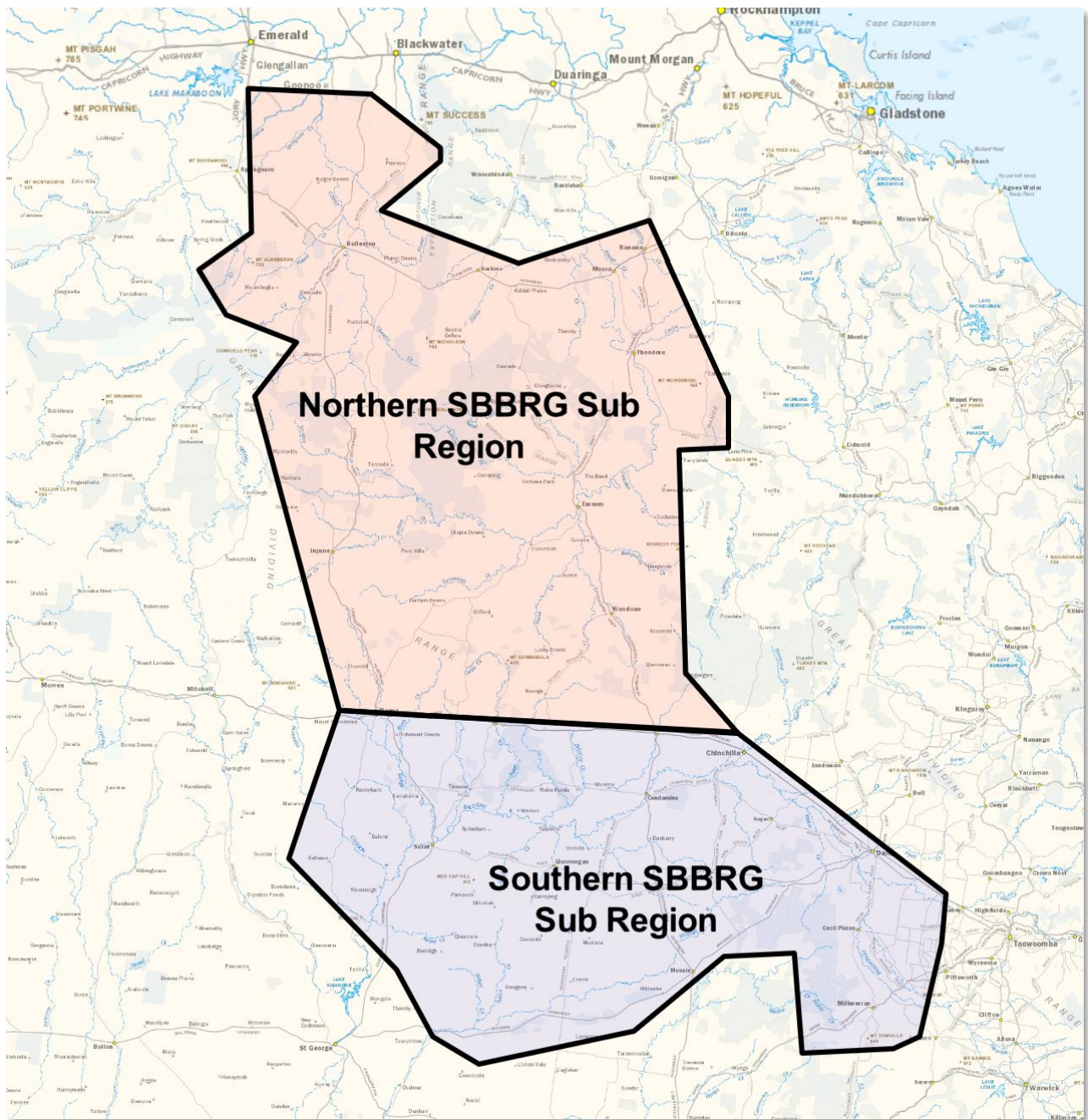


Figure 1 Proposed geographic remit of the Regional Reference Group.

### Seeking Feedback - Geographic Remit

Are there areas outside of those identified that should be included?

### Membership

The membership of the pilot forum was relatively broad initially but at the conclusion of the pilot was attended by mainly landholders interacting with the gas sector. Representation from peak bodies, local government, businesses, and other community members was limited or absent.

Moving forward, the Commission is very keen to engage with a broader cross section of community members and groups with an interest in coexistence outcomes. This will provide a diversity of perspectives and views, so important in understanding the dynamics and issues at play in gas communities.

It is proposed that the regional advisory body will be convened with representatives drawn from:

- residents of regional communities
- regional business groups (i.e. economic development boards, chambers of commerce);
- Local Government authorities
- Non-government organisations
- Landholders with or expected to in the future host gas activity
- Gas companies operating in the region
- Peak bodies from agriculture and gas industry
- State Government agencies

There is a challenge in keeping membership numbers, and more specifically attendance at meetings at a manageable level whilst allowing for appropriate representation across the wider geographic area.

An overarching principle is that representation is balanced and reflects the remit of the Commission.

An important consideration to note is that part of the new proposed structure of the regional advisory body is the concept that the main forum is intended to be supported by sub forums. These sub forums are intended to be focused on issues such as those that may be specific to a geographic area. This is discussed in more detail further on.

### **Seeking Feedback - Membership**

Do you think the stakeholders listed are adequate, or do you have suggestions for additional stakeholders?

How many members should the main forum be comprised of?

### **Group Format and Schedule**

The SBBRG structure is proposed to be formed by:

- a main forum that meets annually;
- a Northern and Southern sub-regional forum that each meet annually; and
- as needed working groups to support the sub regional and combined forums.

The main and sub-regional forums, along with any working groups, are proposed to incorporate in person meetings, periodic updates via email, and ongoing discussions between stakeholders and the Commission.

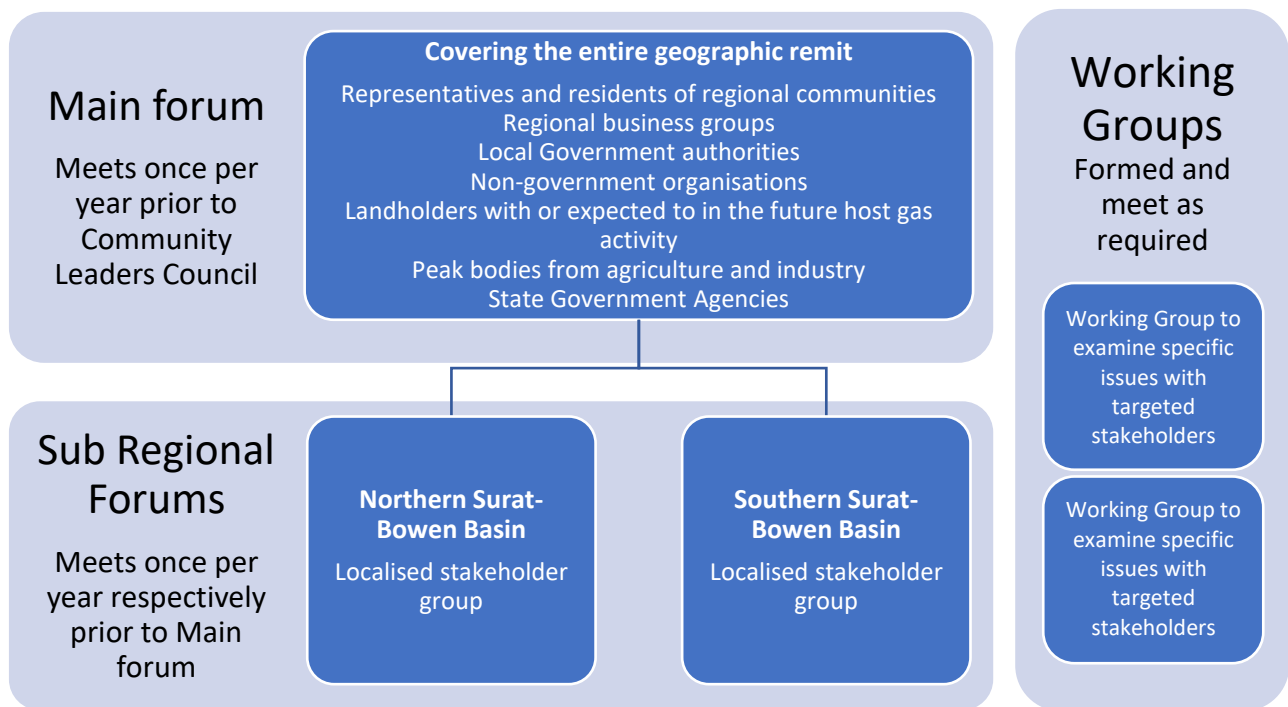


Figure 2 Proposed forum structure

### Main forum

The main forum is intended to incorporate representatives across the Surat and Bowen basins. It is proposed that this body would meet annually, in the lead up to the Commission’s Community Leaders Council (CLC). The matters considered by the Main Forum would be drawn from the sub regional forums and in turn inform the discussions and deliberations of the CLC.

The Main forum allows for all regional communities to discuss and examine issues common to all across the basins and understand how gas operators and host communities approach challenges and opportunities sharing their learned experiences.

### Sub-Regional Forums

The sub-regional forums are intended to allow representatives from the Northern and Southern Surat-Bowen Basins to consider and discuss matters within those areas. The proposal to split into sub regional forums is intended to:

- avoid having representatives travel unreasonable distances;
- allow for greater focus on matters specific to the areas; and
- broaden and increase the representation of stakeholders within that area.

Each of the sub regional forums is proposed to meet in person annually prior to the main forum.

### Working groups

There may be some matters raised during the Main or Sub regional forums that the Commission would like to work through at a more granular level. These matters may be region or stakeholder specific. A good example of this is the work around potential CSG induced subsidence that was raised and a focus of the SSAG Pilot.

Under the SBBRG the Commission may form working groups to undertake more focused consultation on these types of matters. These groups would meet as required in a format guided by the participants needs and availability. The Chief Executive Officer of the Commission is proposed to be the chair of the main forum. The chair of sub-regional forums is intended to be filled by a relevant senior officer of the Commission.

### Meeting structure and frequency

The frequency of meetings needs to strike a balance between being frequent enough to ensure relevancy against respecting stakeholders time and avoiding clashes with important events and times of heightened activities within communities. The Commission is initially proposing that each forum, the main and two sub regional forums, meet annually noting the busy schedules of stakeholders and the potential travel requirements (Figure 4).

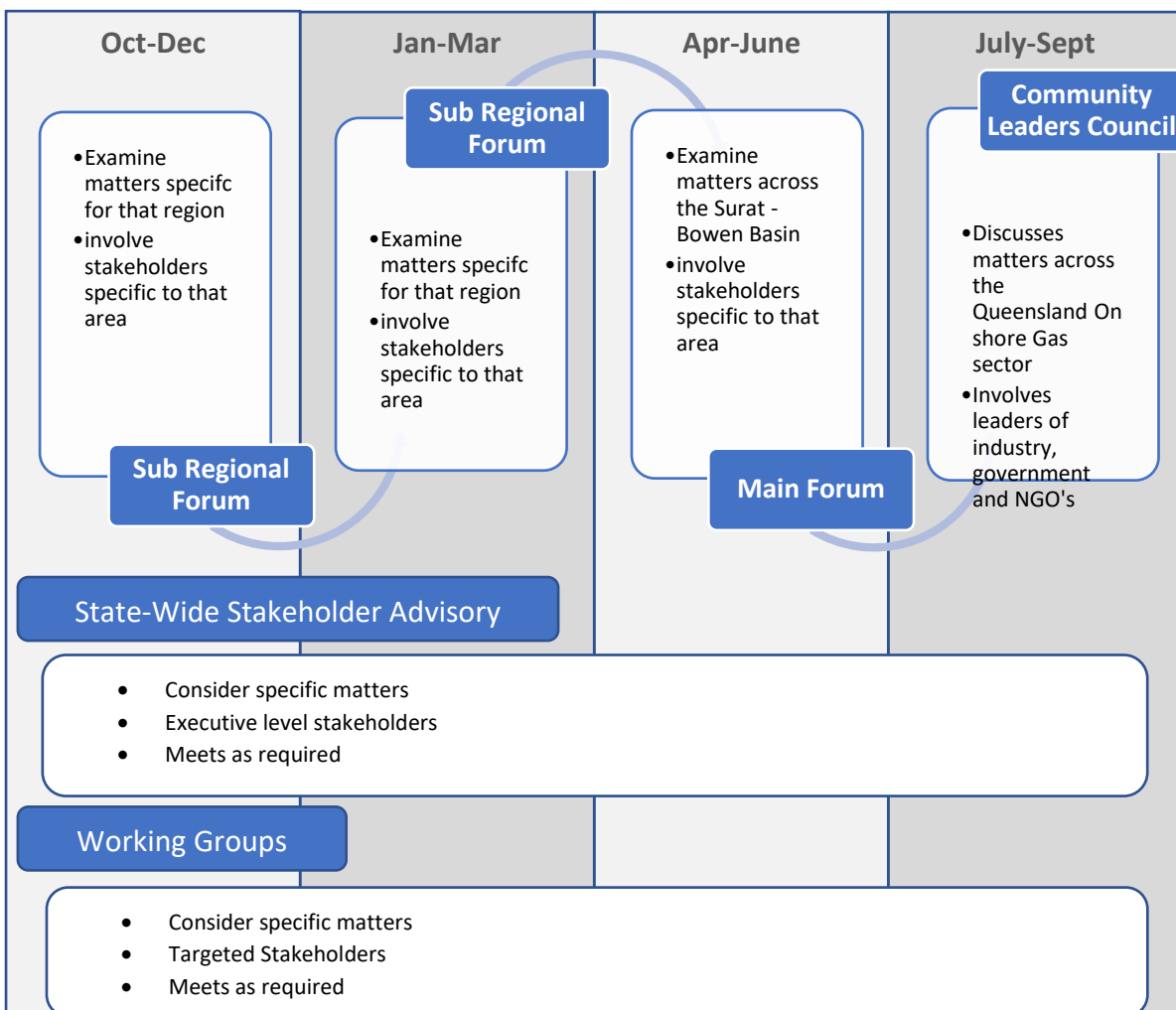


Figure 4 Proposed Schedule for Commission stakeholder forums

## Seeking Feedback – Group Structure

How many times a year should the main forum hold meetings?  
Where should these meetings be held?

### Register your interest

The Commission is interested to hear from individuals or groups that have a desire to be included in future discussions about the group and potentially be a representative on the group.

If you are interested in further engagement around the future of the group, please register your interest through email at [enquiries@gfcq.org.au](mailto:enquiries@gfcq.org.au) by 4 November 2022.

### Have your say

#### Feedback

The questions within the paper have been provided to prompt a discussion with stakeholders. Feedback is sought on these as well as any other observations that stakeholders may have.

#### Geographic Remit

1. Are there areas outside of those identified that should be included?

#### Membership

2. Do you think the stakeholders listed are adequate, or do you have suggestions for additional stakeholders?
3. How many members should the main forum be comprised of?

#### Group Structure

4. How many times a year should the main forum hold meetings?
5. Where should these meetings be held?

Please send your feedback through to [enquiries@gfcq.org.au](mailto:enquiries@gfcq.org.au) by 4 November 2022.

### Next Steps

The Commission will consider the feedback received on this discussion paper, consult with key stakeholders and finalise the format of the group. The final concept will be presented to all stakeholders.

Once finalised, the Commission will establish an appropriate nomination process and intends to publish a schedule of meetings by the end of 2022.

## Glossary

<b>CSG</b>	Coal Seam Gas
<b>CSG-Induced</b>	Coal Seam Gas Induced Subsidence
<b>DAF</b>	Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
<b>DES</b>	Department of Environment and Science
<b>EA</b>	Environmental Authority
<b>EIS</b>	Environmental Impact Statement
<b>GFCQ</b>	Gasfields Commission Queensland
<b>OGIA</b>	Office of Groundwater Impact Assessment
<b>SAG</b>	Stakeholder Advisory Group
<b>SBBRG</b>	Surat-Bowen Basin Reference Group
<b>SSAG</b>	Surat Stakeholder Advisory Group
<b>Surat CMA</b>	Surat Cumulative Management Area
<b>UWIR 2021</b>	Underground Water Impact Report 2021 for the Surat Cumulative Management Area – Consultation Draft

