



## Reply to Comment on “Uranium series dating of Great Artesian Basin travertine deposits: Implications for palaeohydrogeology and palaeoclimate” by Uysal et al. (2019).

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### 1. Reply

Tonguc Uysal and co-authors (this issue) propose that at least some of the U-series ages reported by Priestley et al. (2018) and Ring et al. (2016) provide minimum ages of movement at the Norwest Fault Zone in central Australia resulting from significant CO<sub>2</sub> production due to mantle degassing related to active tectonics. We thank Tonguc Uysal and co-authors for their discussion on the role of tectonics and CO<sub>2</sub> degassing in travertine precipitation and note that we had previously published (and agree with) the importance of mantle degassing as a source of CO<sub>2</sub> that closely interacts with palaeohydrogeologic and palaeoclimatic forcings in explaining the rate and distribution of travertine deposition in the southwestern Great Artesian Basin (GAB) of central Australia. Based in part on western U.S. analogues (Crossey et al., 2016; Karlstrom et al., 2013a), we proposed and explored a model for these processes and their implications for the GAB in previous publications (Crossey et al., 2013; Karlstrom et al., 2013b) whereas Priestley et al. (2018) focused more specifically on palaeoclimate implications.

There has been an ongoing discussion linking GAB springs with tectonics and CO<sub>2</sub> degassing, with Sprigg (1957) being one of the first to notice the link between GAB springs and seismicity. Tectonics is likely to be the primary control on spring vent locations along the mound springs line and likely influences spacing of vents at fault intersections that provide spring pipes for upward flow of CO<sub>2</sub> and mixing to create carbonic fluids (Hancock et al., 1999; Keppel, 2013). Mantle degassing and tectonic conduits are needed to explain why GAB groundwater contains high <sup>3</sup>He/<sup>4</sup>He ratios measured in the mound springs and is saturated with respect to CO<sub>2</sub> (Karlstrom et al., 2013b; Uysal et al., 2019). Internationally, there have been numerous studies examining

the relationships between travertine depositing springs and mantle CO<sub>2</sub> flux with many examples using spring travertines to study past neotectonic activity (e.g. Minissale, 1991; Crossey et al., 2009), changes in spring flow (e.g. Clark and Fontes, 1990; Miner et al., 2007; Priewisch et al., 2014), or hydrochemistry to predict earthquake activity (e.g. Mogi et al., 1989; Manga and Rowland, 2009). We agree with Uysal et al. (2019) that there is a link between tectonics and GAB spring travertine deposition. However, Priestley et al. (2018) focused on the important role of climatic influences on travertine accumulation that are superimposed on the longer-term and persistent tectonic influences as discussed further below.

Uysal et al. (2019) suggest that the GAB groundwater system cannot easily be periodically affected by palaeoclimatic conditions because the GAB is entirely under confined conditions, flow rates are slow (1–5 m/yr; Habermehl, 1980) and there is no evidence of palaeoclimatic variations within GAB groundwater. However, groundwater systems, especially confined groundwater systems, have piston flow conditions that respond quickly to changes in climate (for example, Haldorsen et al., 2016; Jasechko et al., 2015; Darling, 2011; Edmunds, 2009). Despite the fact that groundwater flow rates in the GAB are slow, the actual transmission of artesian pressure (hydraulic head) and resulting increased spring discharge is rapid, with pressure transmission times between 0.1 and 1 kyr estimated in Priestley et al. (2018) using the Error function (Kresic, 2007). We disagree there is no evidence of palaeoclimate variations within GAB groundwater. Love et al. (2000) used Cl concentrations and δ<sup>18</sup>O values to show that recharge rates to the main aquifer of the western GAB, where the majority of spring deposits are located, have responded to climatic changes with recharge rates being three times higher 30 kyr ago. Also while Radke et al. (2000) did not discern the expected palaeoclimate δ<sup>18</sup>O signals in GAB

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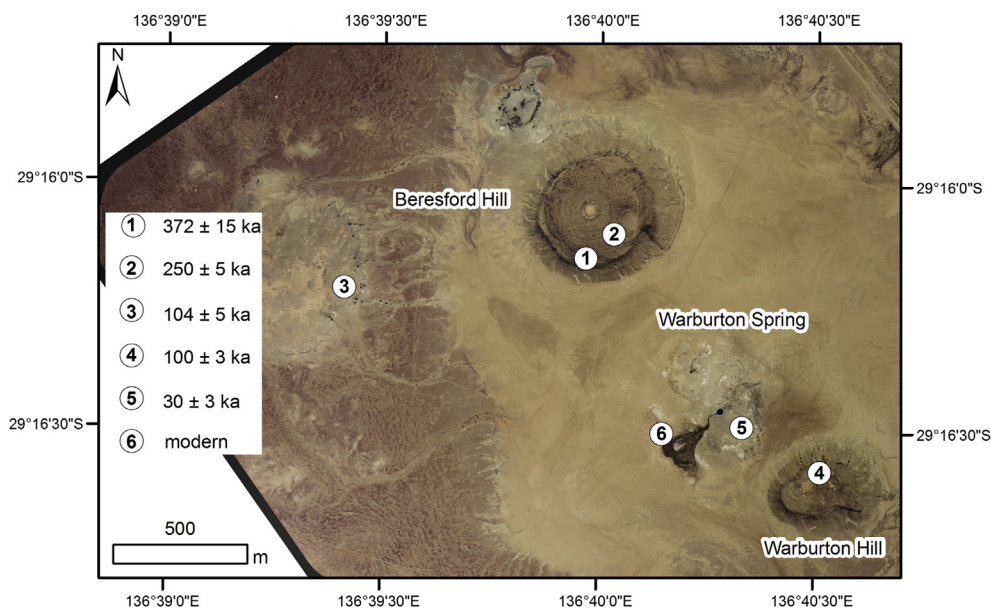


Fig. 1. Adapted from Keppel, 2013 Beresford Hill Spring system aerial photograph with locations of age samples and results listed in table in bottom left hand corner.

Tables 1

$^{234}\text{U}$ – $^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibrium dating results.  $\delta^{234}\text{U}$  measured is the ICP result from U and Th analysis,  $^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$  is calculated using the ICP raw results and  $\delta^{234}\text{U}_{\text{initial}}$  was estimated by averaging the ICP results for the different areas; Beresford and Warburton group; Dalhousie group and Elizabeth, Jersey and Kewson Hill group.

Ref # for paper	Sample area	$\delta^{234}\text{U}$	$^{234}\text{U}/^{238}\text{U}$	$\delta^{234}\text{U}_{\text{initial}}$	$^{234}\text{U}$ – $^{238}\text{U}$ disequilibrium age range
		measured	calculated	estimated	ka
63	Beresford Hill	132 (64)	62.2 (1.1)	1532 (459)	743–961
64	Warburton Hill	32 (6)	56.6 (1.0)	1532 (459)	1258–1476
66	Beresford Hill	88 (15)	59.7 (1.1)	1532 (459)	890–1109
69	Warburton Hill	77 (3)	59.1 (1.1)	1532 (459)	935–1154
71	Dalhousie Springs	165 (4)	63.9 (1.2)	1039 (255)	553–731
72	Kewson Hill	138 (3)	62.5 (1.1)	1806 (1193)	529–1092
73	Beresford Hill	206 (1)	66.2 (1.2)	1532 (459)	586–805

groundwater, they attributed hydrochemical anomalies in the Eulo-Nebine Ridge area to periods of aridity during the Pleistocene. Given this evidence for a response to palaeoclimate variability, and the fact that travertine deposits are known to record palaeoclimate conditions globally (e.g. Sierralta et al., 2010; Zentmyer et al., 2008), it would seem plausible to look for evidence of palaeoclimate variability in GAB spring deposits as an explanation for observed travertine episodicity.

Factors important to the formation of GAB spring travertine mounds have been extensively investigated by Keppel et al. (2011) and Keppel et al. (2012) using GAB spring water hydrochemistry, a microcosm experiment, as well as petrological and Scanning Electron Microscopy techniques. While the carbonate hydrochemistry of spring water and by extension the rate-limited degassing of  $\text{CO}_2$  upon groundwater emergence from a spring is the primary control on gross mound morphology, the flow rate of the spring also has an important relationship to the resultant spring wetland depth, which does appear to be relevant to controlling the size of the mound footprint (Keppel et al., 2018). In other words, water volume (discharge) is a major control on spring mound travertine volume as long as  $\text{CO}_2$  oversaturation at a given location remains the same. Travertine deposition in central Australia occurs in the current arid climate; however, modern travertine precipitation is generally downstream of spring orifices, with precipitation concentrated in spring tail delta environments rather than the spring mound (where channels form today), and may be much younger than the mound immediately around the vent (Keppel et al., 2011, 2012).

In contrast,  $\text{CO}_2$  flux from the mantle is a consequence of longer-term processes of mantle flow and degassing (Crossey et al., 2016;

Karlstrom et al., 2013a). The conduit system is complex, but involves magmatic processes at deep levels and seismic processes above the brittle ductile transition (Crossey et al., 2016) and results in exceptionally high alkalinity that is extensive within the GAB aquifer (Crossey et al., 2013; Italiano et al., 2014; Shand et al., 2016). We agree that  $\text{CO}_2$  – rich fluids both promote and respond to upper crustal seismicity and that there is an association of  $\text{CO}_2$  flux to microseismicity within the overall system. However, without large water discharge volumes, the  $\text{CO}_2$  flux alone cannot precipitate large volumes of travertine. Thus, travertine volumes are likely dominantly controlled by water volumes (water limited) rather than being  $\text{CO}_2$  limited. And the volume of travertine being deposited is likely to increase with high spring water discharge rates (i.e. high volume flow = high volume travertine deposition).

An increase in past spring water discharge rates, relatively to today's, is suggested by the size of older preserved travertine mounds and platforms within the landscape. For example, at Beresford the larger spring travertine mounds preserved at higher elevations in the landscape are > 100 ka, whereas the smaller currently active spring mound preserved at ground level is < 30 ka, with modern travertine precipitation restricted to the spring tail environment (Fig. 1). This reduction in the size of travertine deposits is consistent with a pronounced increase in aridity from ~130 ka (Ayliffe et al., 1998; Magee et al., 2004; Radke et al., 2000).

Uysal et al. (2019) queried why older travertine deposits are not more widely preserved if travertine deposition is related to wetter climates. However, our data do show large travertine deposits preserved

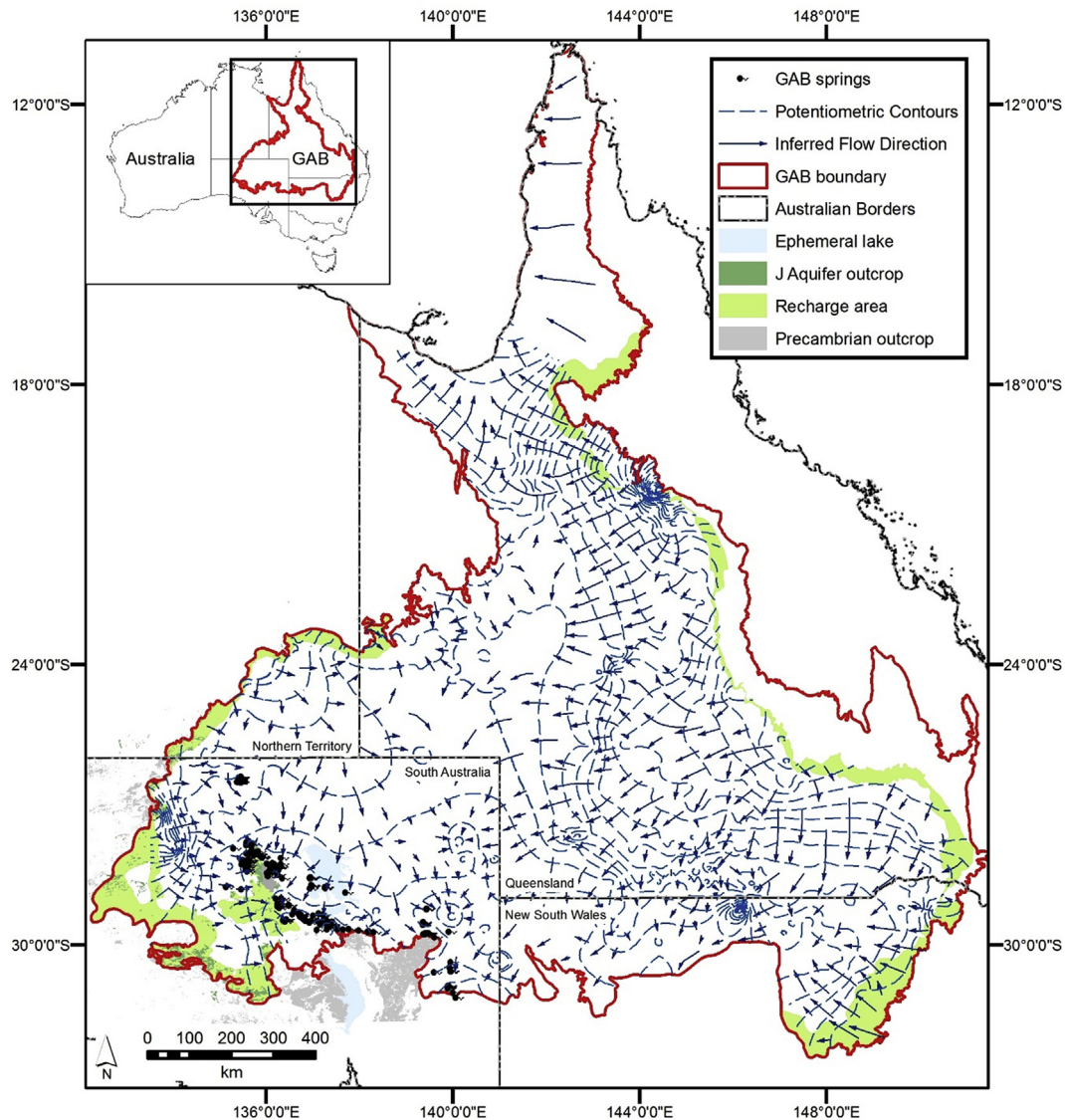


Fig. 2. Great Artesian Basin extent, potentiometric surface and potential recharge areas adapted from Love et al. (2013) and Ransley et al. (2015).

in the landscape, such as Beresford Hill and Hamilton Hill as examples (Priestley et al., 2018). Our sampling emphasized stratigraphic bracketing with, at best, three ages from an individual mound location. For the larger palaeo-mounds, all we know is that they are outside of U-series range (Priestley et al., 2018) with  $^{234}\text{U}$ - $^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibrium model ages suggesting that travertine may have been deposited in these locations episodically since approximately 1 Ma (Table 1).

The travertine samples presented in Ring et al. (2016) are vein carbonates at the surface of young travertine platforms and we agree with Ring et al. (2016) and Uysal et al. (2019) that these most likely represent periods of tectonic activity. For some of these vein dates, it may be permissible to use U-series travertine dates to constrain individual fault slip or crack-seal events as vein carbonates often record cycles of fluid overpressure and stress release (Ricketts et al., 2014). But much more systematic dating of veins, combined with kinematic studies, would be needed to infer any seismic episodicity and fault slip history. The majority of U-series dated samples presented in Priestley et al. (2018) are from the 'tufa' deposition environment (Keppel et al., 2011). Further work is certainly needed to date multiple travertine samples from all facies: spring mounds, platforms, and veins to gain a better understanding of the individual or combined controls and drivers of spring travertine deposition. Nevertheless, the U-series dated spring

mound travertine samples presented in Priestley et al. (2018) suggest synchronous deposition of travertine across the region with some clear groupings of the ages that suggest more regional control than slip on individual faults.

Ideally spring travertine deposition ages should be compared with palaeoclimate proxies from the groundwater source recharge area. However, GAB recharge areas extend over three major climatic regions of Australia (Keywood, 1995; Radke et al., 2000), and these can experience wetter or drier conditions somewhat independently (Reeves et al., 2013). Water discharging from the GAB springs are predominantly sourced from within the western GAB with complex flow paths due to some localised recharge locations (e.g. Finke River, Marla; Love et al., 2013) and unconfined areas, with short flow paths compared to the eastern GAB (Fig. 2). Comparison of the travertine deposition episodes with published independent palaeoclimate records are presented in Priestley et al., (2018) suggesting a correlation between the times of regional travertine deposition and wetter periods consistent with an important palaeohydrogeology/palaeoclimate control on spring mound travertine deposition.

Uysal et al. (2019) argue that while there is good correlation with a number of central Australian records there is no unique climate control on travertine deposition because some travertine deposition times are



not related to wet periods. They point specifically to the 285–240 ka, the 160–150 ka, and the < 30 ka intervals and highlight palaeoclimate proxies that have not recorded wet periods during these intervals. But, whereas no speleothem growth has been recorded in southern Australia for the 280–200 ka period (Ayliffe et al., 1998; Uysal et al., 2019), there is evidence of increased fluvial activity in northern Australia during this time (Jansen et al., 2013; Nanson et al., 2008). Thus it is possible that precipitation within northern Australia, where several recharge areas are located, caused groundwater recharge and spring deposition at this time. Secondly, although Magee et al. (2004) did find pronounced aridity in the latter half of MIS 6 (i.e. 150–130 ka), this was likely preceded by a wetter period as there is also evidence of fluvial activity throughout central Australia between 150 and 140 ka (Herczeg and Chapman, 1991; Nanson et al., 2008), as well as a period of effective precipitation up to 155 ka in southern Australia (Ayliffe et al., 1998), which potentially drove travertine precipitation during the 160–150 ka period. Thirdly, the absence of a travertine age in our study that correlates with a wetter period before 26 ka (Uysal et al., 2019), does not mean there was no travertine deposition during that period. Although ours was the first extensive regional sampling ( $n = 21$  samples), it was not comprehensive and we don't attempt to interpret periods of aridity from a lack of ages (Priestley et al., 2018). Magee et al. (2004) did not find evidence of wet episodes between 34–12 ka; however, other proxies throughout Australia (e.g. Bowler et al., 1986; Fitzsimmons et al., 2013; Gliganic et al., 2015) and nearby Lake Mega-Frome (Cohen et al., 2011) do show evidence of high lake levels at this time highlighting that there were localised wetter areas during this period.

In our view, travertine formation has both tectonic controls for CO<sub>2</sub> flux and palaeohydrologic controls on water volumes (e.g. Prieuwisch et al., 2014). The mound springs lineaments, and the resulting locations of the main discharge areas of the GAB are seen as a product of different interacting scales of active tectonism in central Australia (Karlstrom et al., 2013b) with important climatic influences, due to complex recharge timing and processes, superimposed on travertine deposition (the focus in Priestley et al., 2018). This conclusion is similar to the observation of regionally synchronous times of spring discharge that appear to be linked to palaeoclimate (De Filippis et al., 2013, referenced by Uysal et al., 2019; Minissale et al., 2002). In fact, it is possible that increased artesian pressure during wetter periods may also lead to an increase in tectonic activity (Faccenna et al., 2008). Thus, climate, tectonics, mantle CO<sub>2</sub> flux, and travertine deposition may all be interconnected in a circular feedback system. More dating of travertine deposits is certainly needed to test multiple forcings, both at regional and local scales.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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