



August 2022

Macquarie-Castlereagh What We Heard Report Aboriginal Cultural Snapshot



Our vision for the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy is to support the delivery of healthy, reliable and resilient water resources for a liveable and prosperous region. To achieve this, we need to position the region so there is the right amount of water of the right quality available to people, Aboriginal communities, towns, industries and the environment.

Overview

One of the objectives of the regional water strategies is to recognise and protect Aboriginal Water rights, interests, and access to water.

Aboriginal community consultation workshops were held throughout the state in 12 regional areas of NSW. Workshops were delivered with independent regional Aboriginal Community Facilitators working in collaboration with the Department of Planning and Environment - Water, Regional Water Strategies.

Information provided within this snapshot describes all feedback received from Aboriginal community workshops held within the Macquarie-Castlereagh regional locations of Dubbo, Coonamble, Bathurst, Orange and Warren.

Aboriginal Engagement Approach

There was strong support for improving the recognition of First Nations/Aboriginal

People's water rights, interests and access to water for the Macquarie-Castlereagh region. The need to protect and maintain healthy waterways and ecosystems was important for many stakeholders.

The consultation and engagement program for the draft strategy highlighted a wide variety of views on a range of themes:

- Aboriginal Knowledge & Cultural Heritage
- Water Security
- Environmental & Ecosystem Health
- Climate change & data modelling
- Groundwater
- New and existing water infrastructure
- Entitlement reliability and risk management

Key Support

Highlighted below are key support points recognised through the consultations with Aboriginal communities.

Macquarie-Castlereagh RWS - engagement outcomes



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- Acknowledgement that genuine consultation with First Nations/Aboriginal People through this process can provide an important step in addressing past disparities and resetting the water agenda with these communities.
- Recognition of the significance of Aboriginal cultural knowledge, protection of cultural heritage and improvement of cultural outcomes was welcomed.
- General support for Aboriginal community options that support people on Country looking after Country – particularly the establishment of a Regional Aboriginal Water Advisory Committee and the River Ranger Program.
- Support to develop and implement mechanisms to support Aboriginal water rights in partnership with First Nations.
- Options that advance employment opportunities and improve outcomes for First Nations/Aboriginal People were supported.
- Involvement of local First Nations/Aboriginal People in the design and implementation of proposed programs in the draft strategy
- Simplifying the application process around applying for Aboriginal cultural water licences and providing clear and transparent information on their use.
- Opportunities to integrate Aboriginal knowledge in the development of other options, including environmental, groundwater and land use options, as well as to assist in their implementation.
- Education in water management, through the proposed River Ranger Program, as

well as through traineeships or curriculum for older secondary school students, was encouraged.

Next Steps

Key support focus areas from all consultations with the Aboriginal communities of the Macquarie-Castlereagh have been incorporated into the priority actions of the draft Macquarie-Castlereagh Strategy. Regional Water Strategies will continue Aboriginal Engagement Consultation during 2022 on the next draft strategy.

Key Concerns

Key Concerns were also identified by the community

- Concern that options relating to programs involving First Nations/Aboriginal People were not detailed enough to provide feedback.
- Complexity of water policy and laws, and the process for water licences, was highlighted, along with the need to develop tailored resources to help empower Aboriginal communities.
- The need for protection of Cultural heritage sites in the region, in particular the carved trees.
- The tension between mapping culturally significant sites for the purpose of protection, versus retaining confidentiality of culturally significant information, was raised.
- The essential need for access to Country, including waterways, was raised as a concern in the region.

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Long list of Options 42-49: Improving the recognition of Aboriginal people's water rights, interests and access to water

Options to protect and strengthen cultural landscapes, practices, knowledge and traditions, as well as to support empowerment, self-determination and economic advancement of First Nations/Aboriginal People and communities, were well supported in the feedback.

Options	Summary of feedback received
42. Culturally appropriate water knowledge program	- There was strong support for all options that improve First Nations peoples' capacity, engagement and employment in water management; which recognise the significance of cultural knowledge; and that improve cultural outcomes.
43. Water-dependent cultural practice and site identification project	- Understanding the water systems from a cultural perspective gives insight into how the water systems provide for communities, and these options were acknowledged in the feedback to support these outcomes.
44. Shared benefit project (environment and cultural outcomes)	- The water-dependent cultural practices and site identification option was suggested to be linked with the option to secure flows to water-dependent cultural sites.
45. Regional Aboriginal Water Advisory Committee	- Feedback encouraged involvement of local First Nations/Aboriginal People in the proposed programs for the Macquarie-Castlereagh region.
46. Water portfolio project for Aboriginal communities	- Options that deliver positive cultural, environmental and economic outcomes for First Nations/Aboriginal People were supported.
47. Aboriginal cultural water access licences review	- Simplified access to cultural water licences was supported.
48. Co-management investigation of Travelling Stock Reserves	
49. Regional cultural water officer employment program	

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Response to Feedback

Since the publication of the first draft Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy, the NSW Water Strategy has been further developed.

Some of the issues that the first draft Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy highlighted and that were raised by communities in the Macquarie-Castlereagh region are challenges across the whole state.

These state-wide issues have been included as priority focus areas in the NSW Water Strategy. Your feedback has been used to refine the key challenges that we need to focus on in the final Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy, and the options that will be shortlisted for further investigation.

Further Consultation

We have heard feedback from across the state requesting more consultation on the regional water strategies, and a greater say in how options are shortlisted and prioritised.

The department remains committed to engaging with First Nations/Aboriginal People in the region as we progress through the options assessment process, and the development of the final Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy and the NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy.

Unlike many other challenges in the region, the fundamental water rights of First Nations/Aboriginal People is still a major gap in water management across NSW.

Addressing this issue will set up a framework for addressing the Aboriginal community options identified in the draft regional water strategies. These options will be progressed through a NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy.

Opportunities to progress region-specific options for Aboriginal communities, in parallel

with this state-level action, will be explored in the final Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy.

We will be undertaking public consultation on a shortlist of actions before the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy is finalised.

Further Information

For more information regarding Aboriginal Communities & Water please see the DPIE Water webpage

[Engaging with Aboriginal Communities¹](#)

For any questions related to your region water strategy and copy of the What We Heard Reports please use link below

[Regional Public Exhibition²](#)

For any other enquiries please email regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au

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¹ <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies/objectives-principles>

² <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies/objectives-principles>