



Submission to NSW Department of Planning and Environment

Feedback on the Draft Regional Water Strategy

MOREE PLAINS SHIRE COUNCIL
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1 Importance of water security for Moree Plains

Moree Plains Shire Council would like to acknowledge the work and dedication of the Department of Planning and Environment (**DPE**) in developing the draft Gwydir and Border Rivers Regional Water Strategies.

The Moree Plains Shire is known as *Artesian Water Country*. Water availability is the backbone of our local economy through agriculture, horticulture and the visitor economy such as the Moree Artesian Aquatic Centre (MAAC).

In addition to artesian water tourism, the Moree Plains is founded on agriculture. Agricultural production, together with supporting and dependent businesses, is the core economic driver of the Shire. Over the last 20 years agriculture has continued to increase in productivity with increased outputs and lower demands on labour inputs – droughts have had a detrimental impact on local production and economy. Emerging industries of intensive agriculture, value adding and local processing, and our tourism economy are all dependent on water.

Water reliability will play a central role in creating economic opportunities and new jobs across a range of skill levels for the Moree Shire and wider region for years to come through the Special Activation Precinct (**SAP**).

2 Draft Gwydir Water Strategy feedback

2.1 The importance of the Moree Special Activation Precinct

Moree Plains Shire Council applauds DPE for recognising the importance of the future Moree Special Activation Precinct and incorporating initiatives to support the success of the SAP.

The Moree Plains Shire Council looks forward to working in collaboration with the NSW Government for delivery of the Special Activation Precinct and to unlocking a powerhouse of economic opportunity for North-West NSW.

2.2 Increasing availability of high security water access licences

Council welcomes the intent of *Action 2.4 Increase the availability of high security water access licenses*.

Bolstering availability of high security water access licenses will provide businesses and investors with further certainty and support long-term investments and growth for Moree Special Activation Precinct.

Council looks forward to continuing the conversation on this matter and working with the NSW Government to convert general security water access licences to high security. Water from the Lower Gwydir Aquifer and Great Artesian Basin will be critical for the success of the SAP and future growth of Moree.

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2.3 Supporting urban water efficiency measures in Moree

In reference to proposed *Action 1.2 Support urban water efficiency measure in Moree*, Moree Plains Shire Council strongly supports greater water efficiency measures for our town and Shire more widely, however Council's organisational resourcing challenges are severely impacting on its ability to deliver these initiatives.

Council has engaged NSW Public Works to undertake an Integrated Water Cycle Management Plan for the Moree Plains and is committed to ensuring this plan reflect the optimum social and economic outcomes for our community and supports Council on an environmentally and financially sustainable path.

Council would welcome support to drive initiatives that encourage water conservation within our community, such as through community and industry engagement programs.

Council is undertaking initiatives such as addressing and repairing leaks with the help of leakTech and water operators. Council encourages water saving initiatives.

2.4 Supporting Development and publishing clear policy on how the region's groundwater resources will be managed sustainably into the future

Council supports the proposed action 1.3 Develop and publish clear policy on how the region's groundwater resources will be managed sustainably into the future. It is very concerning for the council to

supply water to the town with increase in water demand with the development of the SAP and decrease in groundwater level.

Council is investigating and considering different options such as, if council can pump out some of the water from the river without harming environment, store it in a closed reservoir, treat it and can use for SAP or town water supply during wet weathers when there is enough flow in the Mehi river.

Council also supports all the actions in the action 1.3 including determining critical needs and high priority uses such as local water utility licenses, restricting the trades, additional bores and lower priority users of water during drought or when groundwater level is declining, and establishing different methods to manage groundwater systems so that the entitlements does not exceed the extraction limit.

2.5 Supporting adoption of on-farm water efficiency measures

Storing water on-farm and adopting different ways to use water effectively can help to save water for future purposes which will create less stress on the groundwater during drought. Thus, council supports this action 2.2 Adoption of on-farm water efficiency measures.

2.6 Supporting place-based initiatives to deliver cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people

Council strongly supports the action 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8 which are Develop ongoing arrangements for participation of local Aboriginal people in water management, Support place-based initiatives to deliver cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people and Support Aboriginal business opportunities in the Gwydir region. However, council is concerned if there is going to be any impacts on town water supply in future or during drought.

Council encourages Aboriginal business development opportunities which will help local Aboriginal youth to develop skills, gain training and to move forward.

2.7 Ensure the water management framework can support sustainable economic diversification

Council supports all the action mentioned in the action 2.9 Ensure the water management framework can support sustainable economic diversification. Understanding the water quality and quantity requirements of emerging industries will help to develop a policy which can fulfill town water supply and help the upcoming industries to grow. Delivering information about water supply and allocations can help both council and industry to work together.

3 Draft Border Rivers Water Strategy feedback

3.1 Supporting improvement in understanding of river flows, water use and water quality at priority locations in the Border Rivers

Moree Plains Shire council is grateful to consider Improving connectivity to support downstream needs and Increased surface water security risks for towns in the region as a priority and working towards it. During droughts, border river's strategy will be very helpful for the security of town water supply.

Council also supports action 1.3 Improve understanding of river flows, water use and water quality at priority locations in the Border Rivers. Metering the water usage can also help to determine total water usage, losses and can help in future water modelling. Improved information about water quality can also help council to determine the treatment of water before supplying to the town.

Council suggests if DPE can include communication between councils as an action. From the past-experience, council wants to make sure that there is no miscommunication between Queensland's council and New south Wales council about extracting water and implementing temporary water restrictions.

3.2 Supporting increase in the availability of high security water access licences

Council supports the action 3.1 Increase the availability of high security water access licences. Council itself is looking for buying some of the general security water licence and then convert it into high security licence. This can help to secure town water supply during hard times.

3.3 Ensure the water management framework can support sustainable economic diversification

Council supports all the action mentioned in the action 2.9 Ensure the water management framework can support sustainable economic diversification. Council appreciates the upcoming economic development in the shire. Moree SAP and Inland Rail gives the region to develop and prosper. Understanding the water quality and quantity requirements of emerging industries will help to develop a policy which can fulfill town water supply and help the upcoming industries to grow.

3.4 Supporting investigating sustainable levels of groundwater extraction in the Border Rivers Alluvium and Great artesian Basin aquifers

Council supports the action 4.4 Investigate sustainable levels of groundwater extraction in the Border Rivers Alluvium and Great Artesian basin aquifers. Having information about the groundwater levels can help council to plan temporary water restrictions and save water for future purpose during drought period.