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To whom it may Concern

Draft Murrumbidgee Regional Water Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft strategy.

The vision of the Narrandera Shire residents is for a prosperous, diverse and sustainable community, built on a deep sense of trust, care and commitment for each other and the environment. Water is a key feature of that sustainability.

After years of uncertainty surrounding water availability and flows, an apparent flood/famine approach to water management, lack of transparency around water licences and the wildly fluctuating prices of water particularly during the 18/19 drought, any sense of trust, care and commitment has been overtaken by the short-term commercial realities attached to a very valuable and sometimes scarce commodity.

If this strategy is to be successful it has to restore community confidence and protect this regions capacity to produce the nation's food and fibre. Selling water to the highest bidder may not meet either of those expectations

The draft strategy talks about an awareness of issues around sustainability and the challenges and choices for the future – we all face the challenges but who actually has those choices?

Narrandera Shire Council (NSC) supports the vision of the draft strategy and offers the following comments...

- The draft recognises the vulnerability of town water supplies in the light of a hotter, drier future. Resilient, risk free water for local communities is critical and access by water authorities to supply must be guaranteed.
- Economic prosperity should not be defined by the profit margins of large multi-national companies or decisions by traditional farmers to temporarily transfer water entitlements for profit rather than produce food. Industries and indeed communities are built around long-term water use and are not flexible and light-footed.

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- Aboriginal water rights become “window dressing” unless there are mechanisms that allow actual access to the water. At the moment there are very few locations in the Murrumbidgee that provide that access. It is pleasing to see that the draft long list recognises access as a high priority and provides a number of options.
- Balancing water flows between the competing demands of flood mitigation, transport and licence holders and environmental flows appears to have been difficult to achieve in past periods of extremes either high or low availability.

Maximising opportunities for the commercial interests around Wagga Wagga and Griffith (p23) should not come at the expense of the other communities in the Murrumbidgee which survive and prosper on agricultural activities. – such as Narrandera.

The long list - There has been quite a bit of debate recently around the need to again assess the benefits that could be provided by the development of the “Lake Coolah Narrandera” storage. Council welcomes the inclusion of this project on the long list having written to both State and Federal Water Ministers urging them to fund a fresh scientific study of the development of the lake. Council urges the Department to conduct any “evidence-based assessment” of the Lake Coolah option in a comprehensive and transparent manner. Use of the lake could generate an effective additional 900 GL of water available for town, commercial, Indigenous and environmental use and prove invaluable in the management of high-water flows and flood mitigations in the mid-Murrumbidgee.

Construction of Lake Coolah may also negate the need to progress with option 38 at Bundidgerry.

