

Friday, November 25, 2022

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Below is our submission to the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy.

Our family runs a property on the Upper Macquarie Valley. Irrigation allows us to grow high value crops such as lucerne & oats for livestock production.

Firstly, we agree with Submission 46 written by NSW Irrigation Council.

As an irrigator we have the view that water should be shared. We agree with water management prioritizing putting critical human needs, stock & domestic & the environment above irrigators needs. Water security can be achieved by managing the whole resource & not putting one user group in isolation. Agriculture, manufacturing, mining & Council water usage can all share the water & together better manage water security into the future.

In our farming operation we respect this order of prioritization in practical ways such as growing crops in wetter years by storing the produce in haysheds and silos to extend the period of time the hay/silage/grain is nutritionally valuable, and using efficient methods of irrigation. eg pivots

We believe crop production is a vital industry in the Bathurst community providing food security, employment & flow-on investment. Low evaporation rates and a temperate climate allow water irrigation to be more efficient in this area & Bathurst should be utilizing this natural resource to ensure food security & long term prosperity in the region.

Our view is that all water users should be transparent in how they manage water. Water meters have recently been installed on our property allowing our water usage to be monitored and we are open to any ways we can make water usage more efficient & effective such as soil moisture monitoring. Water efficiency is not specific to one industry, together water users can learn techniques to better monitor & manage water. Technology should be adopted to further assist water saving.

We would support a feasibility study to ensure water security for all users that rely on the upper Macquarie, including a review of the way the water sharing was handled in the last drought – 2019/20. We feel we could learn from past mistakes & create a strategy during non critical times that will give every water user more certainty during low rainfall events. Setting predefined trigger points allows businesses to know when to adopt Water Risk Strategy Plans. For example, if the flow rate of the Upper Macquarie falls below a certain level, our water allocation will be reduced by a set percentage and we can adapt our business accordingly. We would also like to be involved in any future meetings with other water users to achieve an outcome representative of all parties.

Going forward, we agree with the statistics that Bathurst will grow in population size. This has become more evident post the pandemic, the population has grown faster than expected in the last 2 years. We would like to see more transparency from Council on the ways they are achieving water security for a larger population. We have seen an investment in storm water harvesting which we agree is an important step in reducing water wastage. We would like to see plans for securing more water as well as managing existing water. Acting soon is imperative due to the population growing faster than expected.

We agree with item 4 & 5 in Table 5 of the Draft Regional Water Strategy:

4. Improving town water security in the upper Macquarie unregulated river system – Conduct a feasibility study to identify options to improve water security for towns that rely on water from the upper Macquarie system, including Bathurst, Orange, Oberon & Lithgow. The study would identify water security deficiencies, potential water sources, delivery mechanisms & preferred options for further development.

5. Drought protocols for Bathurst & Oberon town water supply – Review the water sharing plan for the Macquarie Bogan & Alluvial Water source to identify appropriate drought triggers & responses to protect the water supply for town use & critical needs in Bathurst & Oberon during extreme drought conditions.

We are happy to work with NSW Water, the organization that monitors our meters, to be an overall “governing” body, as they collect the data & ultimately know the water usage on the river. All usage on the river should be measured & clearly defined.

The information NSW Water collects from river flow rates, water meters, town usage, manufacturing & mining usage etc can be used to better manage water releases from dams. The water meters were not available in the last drought so this data source along with other improved data sources could allow water usage decisions to be more transparent & agile.

Because more information is becoming available, we would welcome regular communication & higher levels of collaboration amongst all stakeholders to ensure issues are detected & corrected preferably before a low rainfall event.

Once again, we believe water should be shared & we feel we can work with other water users by being transparent with our water usage, encouraging more communication & using improved information to manage water usage wisely.