

Submission:

Draft Regional Water Strategy: Macquarie-Castlereagh

General comments

Climate Change

This draft strategy aims to integrate many diverse needs and views regarding water supply and allocation. The overarching matter that this integration must acknowledge and prioritise is Climate Change. Although the strategy claims it is taking a worst-case scenario view, climate scientists regularly warn that the effects of change are accelerating at a much greater rate than anticipated. This means that **all options within this paper must focus on a more extreme future than suggested**. A key prediction in the document is 'rainfall reducing by up to 12%, spring rainfall decreasing, autumn rainfall increasing, and average temperature and the number of hot days increasing'. With the situation likely to be more serious than this, it is obvious that the core issue to be addressed must be greater efficiency of water use across all government levels, communities, industries and individuals.

Efficient water usage

Efficient water usage begins with holding water in the landscape, capturing water from hard surfaces, and minimising the latter. There are many agricultural systems (eg regenerative agriculture) and urban systems (eg water sensitive cities) designed to do that. Options that address this need for efficiency must be prioritised. Such options have the benefits of being less costly generally, and reducing the focus on infrastructure projects. Built projects often unfortunately remove the imperative for individual/community action, as the project is seen as the solution.

Lack of detail

It is regrettable that the draft does not address the over-allocation of the Macquarie River - which means it cannot supply existing commitments. How this will be addressed in a future with less rainfall and presumed greater demand is not examined. Perhaps Options 33 and 35 would assist.

Final Regional Water Strategy

This document must achieve improved outcomes for a healthy river and its dependent flora and fauna. Our human health and wellbeing rests on a healthy and unpolluted environment. The document must first address the critical need for efficient use of water, and then fully protect environmental flows for the length of the river.

Focus areas

Maintaining and diversifying water supplies: Options 1-13

Note that Option 1 refers to an existing government commitment for a detailed business case only – there is no commitment for the project. This option is counter-productive to water efficiency and is contrary to all river-health dynamics. It also implies more extraction will occur – this is not possible without more water being available, and yet we know rainfall will decrease. The environmental consequences would be disastrous, and the loss of cultural heritage untenable. Option 9 must, by association, be withdrawn.

Option 2 is not supported as the environmental impacts are likely to be significant. Other options must be given priority to answer Dubbo's town water supply need.

Options 3, 4 and 7 are supported as they will reduce water consumption.

Protecting and Enhancing Natural Systems: Options 14-31

Options 14-24 and 31 in this focus area are supported. They are logical, appropriate and necessary steps to protect and enhance the natural systems.

Options 25-28 refer to groundwater. This is of supreme importance and the Precautionary Principle dictates that Option 13 must be delayed. Our knowledge of groundwater processes is limited, and most modelling comes from the mining sector which has a propensity to underestimate the impact of its activity and the consequence of fracturing the layers of rock. Dr Julia Imrie gives an analogy... 'boreholes are like punching holes in a book and reconstructing the plot by studying the confetti'. Understanding groundwater processes, the interaction with surface water, and the recharge rate, are all fundamental to planning for our lower rainfall and hotter future.

Supporting water use, efficiency and conservation: Options 32-34

Option 32 is not supported in the form presented. The environmental consequences are too great.

Options 33 and 34 are supported.

Strengthening community preparedness for climate extremes: Options 35-41

All these Options are supported. They cover a range of investigations, reviews and information products that will require a strong commitment to genuine community consultation. There must be full resourcing of these Options and appropriate, complementary timelines drawn up.

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

All these Options are strongly supported.

Options 29 and 30 are also strongly supported.

Much of the information gained via these Options can be used to inform many other Options within this draft.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

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