

Country Press NSW Inc



Country Press New South Wales Inc.
Australia's oldest newspaper industry association
Founded 1900

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To: regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au

FEEDBACK ON MACQUARIE-CASTLEREAGH DRAFT REGIONAL WATER STRATEGY

The Country Press NSW Inc would like to draw attention to the lack of information provided to the smaller communities across the Macquarie-Castlereagh region throughout the extended consultation process in developing the draft water strategy.

Since the process commenced in 2020, there has been little to no public advertising of the proposed strategy in local news publications within the Macquarie-Castlereagh catchment area.

We are advised by department officials that paid advertising has been restricted to the mastheads of one company who publishes newspapers in Bathurst, Orange and Dubbo in the upper Macquarie area only, as well as The Land newspaper read by some primary producers.

As a result, almost no newspaper advertising has been undertaken in communities along the Castlereagh River or downstream of Dubbo on the Macquarie/Wambuul River.

Independent local publications which enjoy almost saturation readership in towns along the Macquarie/Wambuul, Castlereagh and Bogan Rivers, have instead received unpaid advertorial from the Department which relies on the largesse of each small business proprietor to provide unpaid and unacknowledged sponsorship in order to inform their readership of the proposed strategy and opportunities for community input.

This applies to CPNSW member mastheads in Molong, Wellington, Dubbo, Orange, Narromine, Warren, Gilgandra, Coonabarabran, Coonamble and Nyngan which service many of the areas most highly impacted by policies and actions outlined in the draft plan.

Recent discussions among CPNSW members indicate that most editors will not provide free advertising (complimentary editorial) for agencies who choose not to allocate even a small portion of their marketing budget to their publications.

Our readers rely on their local newspapers to keep them up to date with matters of local importance. Our member publications are a highly valued and most trusted source of information in each locality. In most instances, local newspapers are regarded as leaders in setting the local agenda, providing valuable local context and perspectives, and are highly effective in triggering word-of-mouth 'marketing' to generate community engagement.

We believe local newspapers are a critical component of any genuine effort to inform, educate or engage with regional stakeholders. The majority of local publications have solid print readership,

growing online audiences and followings on social media that far exceed that of local councils. Independent research continually shows that local readers seek out their independent local news publication ahead of local or state government websites or social media.

CPNSW are well aware of legislative changes announced by WaterNSW and NRAR earlier this year which no longer require notices to be advertised in newspapers. We have made representation to the NSW Government on this matter. The view of CPNSW members, along with many of our readers, is that this effectively reduces stakeholder awareness of departmental activities in their respective areas and further reduces community trust in associated processes managed by government agencies.

The decision not to advertise the Draft Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy further supports this perspective and runs counter to DPIE's own statement on page 18 of the consultation document that *"Developing an effective and lasting strategy requires input from communities, towns and industries across the Macquarie-Castlereagh region."*

The CPNSW asks that the uneven spread of information across the Macquarie-Castlereagh catchment be considered and addressed as a matter of urgency before finalising the Strategy.

Our members would welcome any opportunity to assist DPIE in raising awareness and increasing engagement on the important and far-reaching issues dealt with by the proposed Strategy. We can arrange for this to occur in a coordinated, timely and economic manner.

Yours faithfully,

