

Public information session at Orange: Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy

About the information session

A public information session on the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy was held in Orange on 14 November 2022.

The session focused on the key challenges identified in the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy and actions that have been shortlisted to respond to them.

The session was run by an independent facilitator and provided the department with an opportunity to hear diverse perspectives on the Strategy ahead of its finalisation.

The presentation delivered by the department during the information session is available from https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0003/543324/Macquarie-Castlereagh-RWS_Presentation-from-the-public-information-sessions.pdf

Discussion summary

Comments made by attendees are summarised below.

Challenge: Reducing water supply risks for regional cities, towns and villages

Town water security in the upper Macquarie

- High levels of manganese in Oberon Dam can happen very quickly in wet periods, which requires regular cleaning and maintenance of Oberon's water reticulation pipes.
- Oberon has high raw water supply charges, compared to other local water utilities.
- The recent drought experience shows that the risk for Bathurst is worse than what the modelled data in the Strategy suggests.
- A lot of water is lost due to evaporation and seepage in Chifley Dam.

Develop guidelines for managing extreme events in the upper Macquarie (Action 1.3)

- Concerns raised about triggers for suspending environmental releases from council-owned dams.

Invest in innovative water supply options (Action 1.5)

- One stakeholder suggested that household rainwater tanks are missing from this action and could help alleviate some of Bathurst's water security risk by reducing demand by 30%.
- Lower pressure levels in the water supply reticulation could reduce water wastage and could form part of this action, however there is a need to adhere to minimum pressure requirements for supply and services

- Town water is still cheap, but there are limitations on councils on water charging. Suggestion that there will be an increase in power use to supply potable water from stormwater harvesting.
- Some of the stakeholders in the meeting raised concerns with Orange City Council's stormwater harvesting stage 2 proposal. The concerns revolved around:
 - potential impacts of the Stage 2 Stormwater Harvesting Project on downstream water users – landholders were concerned that the project would intercept flows down to base flow levels in the river, impacting on water available for local landholders and making local businesses unviable
 - limited transparency around how the project was being assessed by the department and avenues for members of the public to make comments or submissions
 - recent changes to the water sharing plan which allows an instream structure to be developed to allow for Orange City Council to progress the stormwater harvesting stage 2 project
 - cumulative impact of infrastructure to support Orange's water security is reducing water availability for the surrounding landholders.
- Some stakeholders noted that the current process of approval of stormwater harvesting projects by the department is unclear.

Plan for the best long-term augmentation solution for the upper Macquarie (Action 1.6)

- Supply of water from the Lachlan Valley to the upper Macquarie: Suggestion that water should be transferred from the Lachlan Valley before critical dry periods to help ensure environment isn't impacted.
- Additional water from the Macquarie River for Orange: Suggestion that Orange City Council could take high flows and put them in existing storages or a new off-stream storage near Suma Park Dam, although this could be costly.
- Some stakeholders in the meeting suggested that progressing recycled water and new dam options jointly would help address long-term town water security challenges.

Reduce uncertainty in groundwater security for the region's towns (Action 1.7)

- Previous groundwater investigations for Bathurst Regional Council haven't shown a high yield. Suggestion that Bathurst Regional Council revisit the groundwater tunnel idea so that groundwater is part of its water supply scheme.
- Stakeholders in the meeting raised concerns about basic landholder rights bores not having to be licensed or measured.
- The NSW groundwater policy framework needs to be reviewed.
- Groundwater is not reliable in the upper Macquarie catchment.