

20 May 2022

Yass Valley Council Submission – Draft Regional Water Strategy, Murrumbidgee: Strategy

The Draft Regional Water Strategy, Murrumbidgee: Strategy of April 2022 provides as its objective to provide a long-term road map of actions to deliver on five objectives:

1. Deliver and manage water for local communities
2. Enable economic prosperity
3. Recognise and protect Aboriginal water rights, interests and access to water
4. Protect and enhance the environment
5. Affordability

The impact of the ACT and the growth of Canberra and the surrounding communities including the Yass Valley Local Government Area should be a key consideration in the report and be highlighted in the plan. The Snapshot Page does not mention the ACT nor are the half million people living in Nations Capital and their impact on the management of the upper Murrumbidgee. The interlinking of the communities and the need for water security to support the growth of this area and the challenges of interjurisdictional water management and trading in the more densely populated catchment of the Murrumbidgee should be key elements of the strategy. While it is acknowledged that this is a New South Wales document, the ACT being wholly within the catchment necessitates that it be given more consideration, particularly in relation to the impacts of available water for surrounding areas. The strategy should consider more than a single option for strengthening the management of interjurisdictional water trading and security, this is particularly important in the upper catchment with Snowy Hydro, the ACT and NSW Local Governments water utilities all seeking additional water to support regional growth.

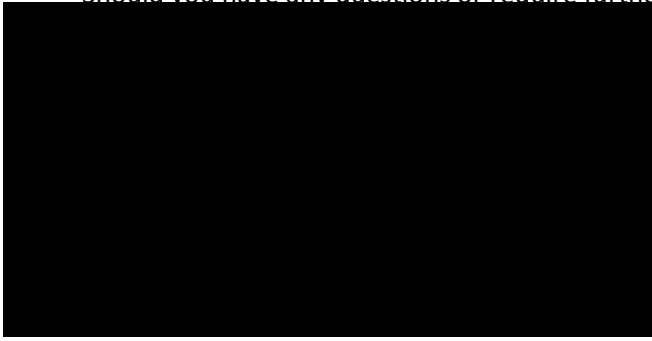
The strategy is also heavily focused on surface water. Groundwater is a key element in the provision of safe and secure water to many small communities and provides a backup for many local water utilities in times of stress. The strategy should consider options for the prioritisation of water allocations and bore locations.

The increased use of onsite sewage management (OSSM) to support growth in many regional areas and small towns and villages of the catchment and the impact on surface water and groundwater needs to be analysed against the location of bores, the catchments for surface water for regional towns, and associated allocations. The administration of bores and OSSM should be included as a key area for future analysis to ensure the long-term viability of the ground water sources in the Upper Murrumbidgee catchment area.

The strategy identifies the need to place an emphasis on adaptation and demand management, but the options presented are overwhelming focused on supply enhancement and management as opposed to practical and legislative actions for demand management. Options for research priorities, technology adaption, land use planning, water recycling and reuse, farming practices, and domestic water reduction and education initiatives should also be included. It may also be worth highlighting demand reduction as a separate section within the options to give it the priority it should have.

Specific comments on the report are highlighted in Attachment A.

Should you have any questions or require further information please contact me.



Attachment A: Highlighted areas (2 pages).

Specific Comments on the Draft Regional Water Strategy, Murrumbidgee: Strategy

Vision (p22-23)

No mention of water supply for to support projected growth in the urban areas or in agriculture in the vision. The vision also excludes any mention of the ACT and the impacts that it has on water management in the region.

Options (p24)

No mention of the challenges projected urban growth in the NSW regions around the ACT or in the ACT as a whole.

Table 1 (page 31)

Under 'liveable and vibrant towns and cities' core objective, Priority 6 should be elevated to the top of the list as all other priorities would be subordinate to this.

Community Engagement (p37)

This is the first mention of water security for projected growth and needs to be highlighted in the final report as outlined above as it is a key risk, noting that the securing of water for critical human water needs will be the priority and the population requirements in the ACT and region growth areas will have a strong impact on water use and demand during drought time.

Building on Existing Commitments (p39)

No reference to the importance of the ACT in the water strategy nor is there any reference to the ACT/NSW MoU on interjurisdictional cooperation

Groundwater Sources (p68)

No mention of large parts of Murrumbateman's reliance on ground water outside of the town water system, this is also common in Gundaroo and Sutton Village.

Snapshot (p121)

Water NSW should be prominent in the development of regional plans, similar to the work done by TfNSW in running parallel development of plans when the SE & Tablelands Regional Strategy is being developed.

Water NSW should then take the lead on the identified actions in the SE & Tablelands Regional Strategy following its endorsement by Cabinet.

People and Towns (p155)

No reference to new primary school in Murrumbateman which will be another driver for growth in the area.

Table 7- Water Risk (p171)

Support recognition that water security for Yass and Murrumbateman is high; however, the water supply for Murrumbateman town water is now from the Yass Dam with the majority of the township not currently connected to the town water system relying on rainwater and private or community title groundwater supplies.

Renewable Energy (p185)

The scale of renewable energy projects is understated for Hilltops/Yass Valley/Upper Lachlan Councils with several windfarms under construction and planned solar farms.

Table 8 (page 200- 207)

Option 21 – Should be ‘secure and reliable water supply’ not just the one option of groundwater or include a separate option similar but for overland flow.

Option 37 – Enlarging Burrinjuck storage may impact on several caravan parks/tourist businesses on the shores of the current dam.

Option 40 – Does this include ACT in the Murrumbidgee region?

Option 52 Water markets and trading needs to include interjurisdictional trading between ACT and NSW.