



November 2022

## Far North Coast What We Heard Report Aboriginal Cultural Snapshot



*Our vision for the Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy is to support the delivery of healthy, reliable and resilient water resources for a liveable and prosperous region. To achieve this, we need to position the region so there is the right amount of water of the right quality available to people, Aboriginal communities, towns, industries and the environment..*

### Aboriginal Engagement Approach

One of the objectives of the regional water strategies is to recognise and protect Aboriginal Water rights, interests, and access to water.

Aboriginal community consultation workshops were held throughout the state in 12 regional areas of NSW. Workshops were delivered with independent regional Aboriginal Community Facilitators working in collaboration with the Department of Planning and Environment - Water, Regional Water Strategies.

Information provided within this snapshot describes all feedback received from Aboriginal community workshops held within the Far North Coast regional locations of Tweed Heads, Woodenbong/Mulli Mulli, Casino, Byron Bay, Kyogle, Lismore.

### Aboriginal Engagement outcomes

There was strong support for improving the recognition of First Nations/Aboriginal People's water rights, interests and access to water for the Far North Coast region. The need to protect and maintain healthy waterways and ecosystems was important for many stakeholders.

The consultation and engagement program for the draft strategy highlighted a wide variety of views on a range of themes:

- Aboriginal Knowledge & Cultural Heritage
- Water Security
- Environmental & Ecosystem Health
- Climate change & data modelling
- Groundwater
- New and existing water infrastructure
- Entitlement reliability and risk management

### Key Support

Highlighted below are key support points recognised through the consultations with Aboriginal communities.

- There was acknowledgement that genuine consultation with First Nations/ Aboriginal People through this process can provide an important step in providing a voice for First Nations/ Aboriginal People in water matters.
- Integration of Aboriginal knowledge of water management and protection of cultural heritage was supported.
- Clear governance and coordination of Aboriginal representative groups, and how they are engaged and funded, for water management issues was encouraged.
- Simplification of the application process for Aboriginal cultural licences and clear and transparent information on their use was requested.
- Pursuit of options that advance employment opportunities for First Nations/Aboriginal People were encouraged.
- Securing flows to cultural sites, recognising cultural knowledge, and reducing barriers to water access for First Nations/Aboriginal People, were supported.
- There was interest in the governance of the proposed advisory panel on water management, along with suggestion that there be one for each of the First Nations encompassed by the draft strategy.
- Communities acknowledged that opportunities exist to integrate Aboriginal ecological knowledge into projects with

shared benefits for environmental and cultural outcomes.

### Key Concerns

Key Concerns were also identified by the community.

- It was noted that the Far North Coast region covered in the draft strategy contains two First Nations, requiring consultation with representatives from both.
- Concerns around the usability of cultural water licences were raised, with a particular focus on cost and accessibility. Feedback encouraged the provision of education and support, as well as streamlining the process to improve licence accessibility.
- It was suggested that the exclusion of cultural water licences from trading is a barrier to economic development by local First Nations/Aboriginal People.
- Managing and monitoring compliance for both cultural and other water licences in the region was a concern.
- Feedback suggested that the draft strategy had a limited focus on water security for Aboriginal communities and options that would drive economic outcomes for Aboriginal people.
- Complexity of water policy and laws and the need to develop tailored educational resources to help empower Aboriginal communities, was raised as a concern.
- Lack of access to water via crown and private land, including via travelling stock reserves, was raised as a concern.

### Response to Feedback

Since the publication of the first draft Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy, the NSW Water Strategy has been further developed.

Some of the issues that the Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy highlighted and that were raised by communities in the Far North

Coast region are challenges across the whole state.

These state-wide issues have been included as priority focus areas in the NSW Water Strategy. Your feedback has been used to refine the key challenges that we need to focus on in the final Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy, and the options that will be shortlisted for further investigation.

### Further Consultation

We have heard from across the state requesting more consultation on the regional water strategies, and a greater say in how options are shortlisted and prioritised.

The department remains committed to engaging with First Nations/Aboriginal People in the region as we progress through the options assessment process, and the development of the final Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy and the NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy.

Unlike many other challenges in the region, the fundamental water rights of First Nations/Aboriginal People is still a major gap in water management across NSW.

Addressing this issue will set up a framework for addressing the Aboriginal community options identified in the draft regional water strategies. These options will be progressed through a NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy.

Opportunities to progress region-specific options for Aboriginal communities, in parallel with this state-level action, will be explored in the final Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy.

We will be undertaking public consultation on a shortlist of actions in late 2022 before the Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy is finalised.

### Further Information

For more information regarding Aboriginal Communities & Water please see the DPIE Water webpage

#### [Engaging with Aboriginal Communities<sup>1</sup>](#)

For any questions related to your region water strategy for Public Exhibition and copy of the What We Heard Reports please use link below

#### [Regional Public Exhibition<sup>2</sup>](#)

For any other enquiries please email [regionalwater.strategies@dpi.e.nsw.gov.au](mailto:regionalwater.strategies@dpi.e.nsw.gov.au)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies/objectives-principles>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies/objectives-principles>