

What We Heard Summary

Macquarie-Castlereagh Region Draft Regional Water Strategy

December 2021



The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment is developing 12 regional water strategies to provide long-term tailored water management solutions for NSW's regional communities.

A comprehensive consultation program accompanied the release of the draft strategy. The **What We Heard** report summarises the key issues we heard during the public exhibition. It highlights how your feedback has informed the next steps in developing the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy. This consultation summary contains highlights of the [What We Heard](#) report.

We received a range of feedback on the draft strategy, including the individual proposed options. The following themes emerged during this consultation:



Climate and modelling

There was interest in the development of the new climate datasets and updated modelling. However, some concerns were raised about how it would be used in future decision-making processes. Stakeholders requested the release of the final report prepared by the Office of the Chief Scientist and Engineer on the review of the regional water strategies climate risk methodology.



Environmental and ecosystem health

There was focus in the feedback on the preservation and restoration of the Macquarie Marshes, along with the overall ecosystem of the river, through restoration of unhindered natural flows. Feedback encouraged exploration of land management options, maintaining water quality and prioritising the environment in decision making.



Aboriginal knowledge and cultural heritage

There was broad support around improving the recognition of First Nations/Aboriginal People's water rights, interests and access to water, as well as for the proposed options that integrate Aboriginal water management knowledge, protection of cultural heritage and creation of employment for First Nations/Aboriginal People. Suggestions were made for further consultation and improvements to education and support on complex water policy and processes.



New and existing water infrastructure

There were mixed views on some of the proposed new infrastructure options. Some stakeholders expressed the view that infrastructure development should only be undertaken after rigorous assessment and consultation.



Groundwater

There was strong support for increasing knowledge of groundwater sources and the relationship between groundwater and surface water. There was concern that groundwater sources are already permanently damaged from recent periods of drought and could be under further stress during future extreme weather events.



Entitlement reliability and risk management

Stakeholders expressed concern for the over-allocation of water licences given the challenges on water supply in the region during recent drought conditions. Compliance, policing and prosecution for breaches of allocations and licence conditions were raised as an issue in the region. Education and information were supported to enable risk management and improved preparedness.



Water Security

Recent extreme drought conditions in the region were at the forefront of feedback regarding water security. There was acknowledgement of the importance of town water for human consumption and the support of economic growth and prosperity. Support was strong for the exploration of innovative alternate water supplies.



Read the full [What We Heard](#) report at:
www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/regional-water-strategies

PUB21/824

Our Response

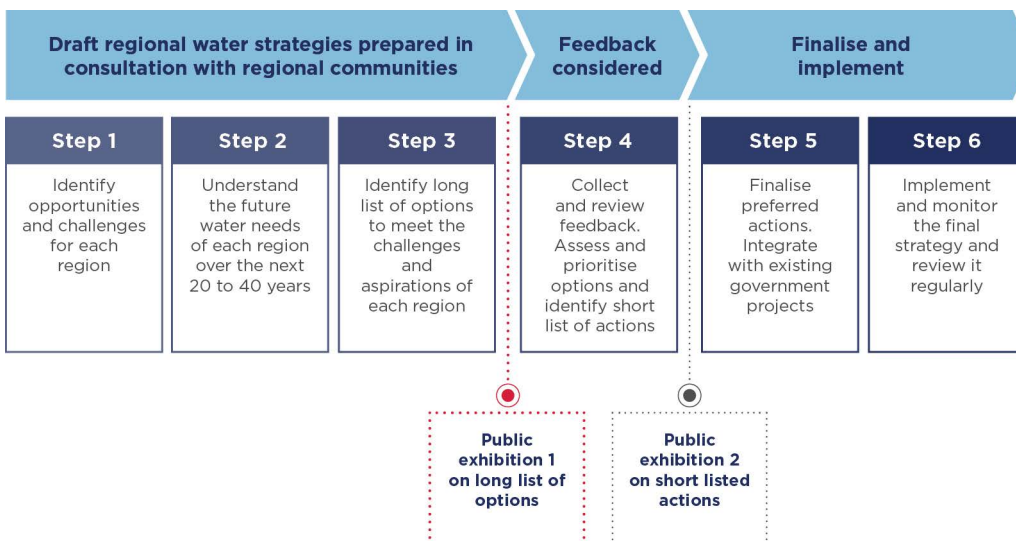
Your feedback has been used to refine and focus the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy and the options that will be shortlisted for further investigation. The NSW Water Strategy addresses issues raised in the feedback that are consistent across the state.

Our detailed response, set out in the draft Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy **What We Heard** Report, includes the following:

- Using *climate and data modelling* to review water allocation frameworks and water sharing plan provisions in response to the extremes in water availability.
- Progressing the application of climate modelling to assess impacts and associated risks to *groundwater* via the Groundwater Strategy.
- Opportunities to progress *region-specific Aboriginal community options*, in parallel with state-level actions, will be explored in the final Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy.
- *Environmental health and connectivity across basins* has been included as a priority in the NSW Water Strategy (Action 3.7).
- There is an opportunity to consider *integrating land use and water management* earlier and more strategically through the planning system.
- Adopting a more intense, state-wide focus on *improving water quality* through the definition of clear roles, accountabilities and frameworks for monitoring, assessing and addressing water quality risks across the state (NSW Water Strategy Action 3.5).
- *Water reliability and infrastructure* projects will be assessed through the rapid cost-benefit analysis process.

We will be undertaking a second round of public consultation on the short listed actions before the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy is finalised.

The draft Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy was on public exhibition from 25 September - 13 December 2020. The development process for these regional water strategies is illustrated in the diagram below.



Engagement at a glance



99

total stakeholders engaged



3

phone consultation



1,042

unique website page visits



56

formal submissions



4

public information sessions

40 attendees



2

Aboriginal community sessions

14 attendees



2

live webinar

39 attendees



Find more information about the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy

www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/regional-water-strategies