

What we heard summary

North Coast Draft Regional Water Strategy

September 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 North Coast 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 various options.

The following themes emerged during this consultation:



Water quality, river health and ecosystems

The need to protect and maintain healthy rivers and ecosystems was identified as the most important priority in feedback. Related to this was the imperative to improve water quality to achieve better environmental outcomes.

There was general support for options that would protect and enhance healthy waterways and it was suggested that a more sustainable approach should be the priority for future water management and planning.



Climate change

There was strong support for the strategy's long-term vision and its consideration of future climate risks. The inclusion of existing climate studies as well as new climate data and modelling was praised. However, feedback suggested there should be further emphasis on options that could help waterways cope with predicted impacts such as low-flow periods and floods.



Managing increasing demand from different users

Increasing demand for water in the North Coast region was recognised as an important consideration for the strategy. There were concerns that increasing demand from industry as well as predicted population growth would place current water supply under greater pressure.



First Nations / Aboriginal people's water rights, interests and access to water

There was broad support for improving the recognition of First Nations / Aboriginal people's water rights, interests and access to water. Given their understanding and connection with the environment, many stakeholders felt that local First Nations / Aboriginal people had a valuable role to play in long-term water management. Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of involving First Nations / Aboriginal people in the development of the strategy and its implementation.



Water conservation, reuse and recycling

Many comments highlighted the need to conserve water and supported options that facilitated this. The importance of water resilience, reuse and recycling was recognised. However, there were a number of practical challenges raised.



New and existing infrastructure

A number of water infrastructure options are proposed in the strategy with stakeholders raising various opportunities and challenges. There was general concern for infrastructure projects that diverted water from natural waterways and questions relating to staging and environmental impacts. Infrastructure options that allowed for water re-use or promoted sustainable water management were supported.



Data collection and sharing for improved compliance and enforcement

Improved knowledge of water use and data collection was seen by many as essential to water management in the long term. This was specifically linked to concerns around a lack of compliance and confidence in government to regulate water use by industries such as agriculture and horticulture.

Our Response

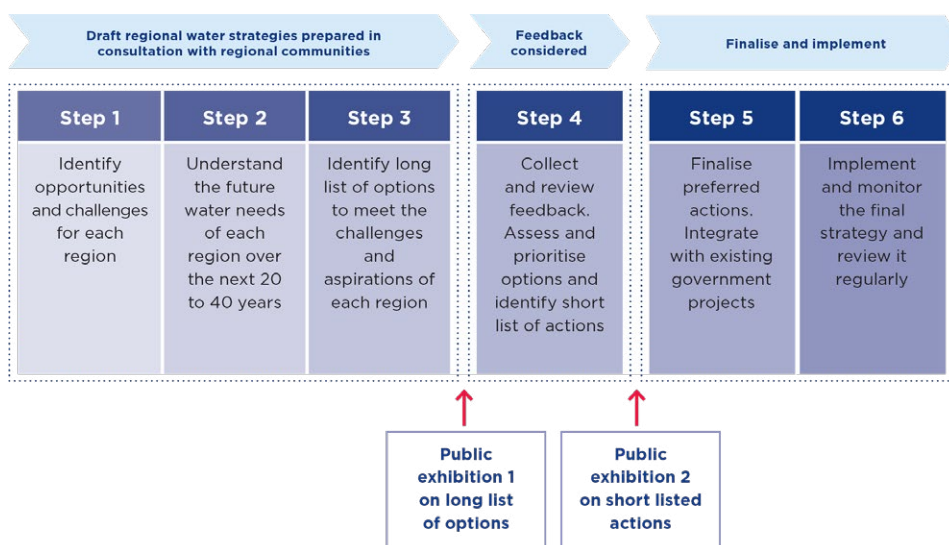
Your feedback has been used to refine and focus the North Coast Regional Water Strategy and the options that will be shortlisted for further investigation. The NSW Water Strategy addresses issues raised in the feedback that are consistent across the state.

Our detailed response, set out in the draft North Coast Regional Water Strategy **What we heard** report, includes the following:

- There is an opportunity to work with the community to detail how *new climate datasets* should be used. Data will be made available to local water utilities and stakeholders to help assess long-term water security in individual towns.
- Opportunities to progress region-specific *Aboriginal community options*, in parallel with state-level actions, will be explored in the final North Coast Regional Water Strategy.
- There is an opportunity to consider *integrating land use and water management* earlier and more strategically through the planning system. Improving water quality is also a focus of the NSW Water Strategy (Action 3.5).
- *Environmental health*, including actions to address existing and emerging risks, will be considered when developing the final North Coast Regional Water Strategy.

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

The draft North Coast Regional Water Strategy was on public exhibition from 3 March – 16 May 2021. The development process for these regional water strategies is illustrated in the diagram below.



Engagement at a glance

940

unique website page visits

52

formal submissions

4

public information sessions

41 attendees

6 Aboriginal community sessions

57 attendees

1 live webinar

10 attendees