



**SUBMISSION**

**BY**

**BOURKE SHIRE COUNCIL**

**IN RELATION THE**

**Draft Western Regional Water Strategy**

**Contact** 

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed revision of the draft Western Regional Water Strategy (WRWS).

The most recent drought has served to highlight the fragility of the river system and also highlighted the need for a review of the Water Sharing Plans and the policies impacting on the river system with the intent that it provides for both an increased availability of water and the equitable distribution of that water.

The recent floods also show how the Barwon Darling experiences huge variability in its flow and the river in its natural state experiences extended periods of low to nil flow and much shorter periods of high flows.

While there are a number of factors that have been deemed to have impacted on the lack of a flow in the river, the overarching issue has been a lack of any substantive inflows, with such inflows being at record or near record lows. The recent rains have proven when there is rain in the catchment the river will flow.

There is a need for a greater degree of reliability of the flow in the river plus an increase in the availability of water.

Local Councils along the river system are in the main, local water utilities, and dependant on a healthy flowing river to extract water to meet the critical human needs of the various communities located along the river and as such, have a strong interest in management decisions in the operation of the river.

The critical water supply situation faced by Bourke has resulted in a system of bores being constructed which will provide water for critical human needs but will **not provide** the amount of water required to support and protect the long established parks and gardens that dry off at an alarming rate during water restrictions caused by low flows in the Darling River.

These facilities are an essential element of the social, cultural and environmental needs of the community.

Additionally, a sustainable recreational area is an important fact in the mental health of communities in all age groups.

It was noted that the recent drought situation caused significant financial, emotional, and social stress to those living along the Darling /Barwon River system.

I note in the WRWS that there are a number of options in the long list and not all options in the long list will be short listed. Of particular interest to Council is raising the Bourke Weir or a new weir and the proposed decommissioning of the weirs below Bourke.

### **Raising the Bourke Weir – Water security for the town**

1. What are the issues and concerns:

- Water security along the river system
- Securing town water supply for two years
- Health of the river during low flows, fish habitat, cultural and environmental impacts

## 2. What are the problems

- Salinity in the river when low
- Health problem for vulnerable Aboriginal community with high rate of heart kidney disease
- Mental Health – issues for people on the land coming home to a dry space when they are working with stock that are starving has a big impact on them with no green space to go home too
- Access to water to maintain large road network
- Unable to water and maintain gardens and have green spaces in community
- Lack of recreational activities – boating, fishing and cultural
- Fish habitat

## 3. Population and Industry decline

- Industry impact on agriculture and Abattoir
- Tourism – impact brown space – Jandra
- Access to water for riparian rights for stock and domestic
- Population decline sine 2000 by 40% these impacts flow on to education, health, employment, increase in law and order activities

## 4. Weir deficiencies

- The Western Weirs Strategy and Betta Baaka program outcomes needs to be progressed . The issue of lack of water for the Bourke town water has been going on for too long.
- Increase the capacity of the water security for Bourke to two years not the current six months once the water stops flowing over the current weir
- There is a need to utilise the weir strategy including the existing storages to ensure that each community reliant on the system as their primary water source has access to a minimum (2) year's supply of water with such water held in storages quarantined accordingly for that purpose.

## 5. Ground Water and Surface water options

- Current bore water supply secures water when the river runs low/dry
- Current licence for bore 100 megs annual – will provide water for 40 days only for household use – the river stopped flowing for 442 days from 2018, this licence is not adequate to support the community of Bourke when the river runs low
- Salinity issue for the Abattoir

- Salinity issue for vulnerable aboriginal population, and residents with poor health.
6. Increased capacity for Bourke Water supply benefits
- Enhanced water security for all water users, particularly town, irrigation, horticulture and riparian users
  - Improved river health
  - Improved water access is likely to provide flow-on benefits and revitalise the community and economics in the LGA
  - That new weirs that are constructed and designed to allow for the periodic flushing of storages as the opportunity arises
  - That recognition be given to the importance of the social, and recreational benefits to be derived from a permanent water supply including the cultural benefits derived by Aboriginal communities.
  - Fish passage

The provision of a reliable water supply will also provide significant economic benefits not the least being a positive impact on employment and the ecology of the river system.

### **Proposed decommissioning or removal of weirs**

Council is particularly concerned with the removal of Weir 19A and 20A. Both these weirs are between Bourke and Louth.

### **Issues**

- The salt interception scheme is situated at weir 19A. Saline groundwater flows into the Darling River system at this point. Regular surveys of the salinity in the Darling River over a number of years have indicated that there are significant salt accession to the River immediately downstream of Weir 19A.
- The weir structure and flow of the river will be important to be maintained. If Weir 19A was to be removed the salt in a low flow river would come back upstream and impact on stock and domestic users along the river.
- The removal of weir 20A would allow the salt to flow further downstream again impacting the riparian users and villages below including Louth and Tipla.
- The removal of both weirs would have an impact to tourism opportunity's and culturally for aboriginal persons using this part of the river system
- Graziers that live along the river use the river as a boundary to stop stock accessing neighbouring properties
- Toorale National Park would also be impacted with the removal of both Weir 19A and Weir 20A.

## Solution

- If Weir 19A and 20A are identified as coming forward to the short list of recommendations, a solution would be to provide an upgrade for fish passage.

Critical to the revised plan is the need to ensure that the river has the ability to meet the critical human needs of all communities along the river and that the flow in the river is such that the environmental health of the river is able to be protected.

If the plan is able, as is planned, to produce a greater reliability of flow, increased level of flow and be able to meet the needs of water users along the river it would have been deemed to achieve its objective.

We thank you for the opportunity to lodge this submission.