

# Draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy



Interim What We Heard report

Publication date: January 2023





# Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Government acknowledges First Nations people as its first Australian people and the traditional owners and custodians of the country's lands and water. First Nations people have lived in NSW for over 60,000 years and have formed significant spiritual, cultural and economic connections with its lands and waters.

Today, they practice the oldest living culture on earth.

The NSW Government acknowledges the First Nations people/ Traditional Owners from the Lachlan region as having an intrinsic connection with the lands and waters of the Lachlan regional water strategy area. The landscape and its waters provide First Nations people with essential links to their history and help them to maintain and practice their traditional culture and lifestyle.

We recognise that Traditional Owners were the first managers of Country and incorporating their culture and knowledge into the management of water in the region is a significant step toward closing the gap.

Under this regional water strategy, we seek to establish meaningful and collaborative relationships with First Nations people. We will seek to shift our focus to a Country-centred approach, respecting, recognising and empowering cultural and traditional Aboriginal knowledge in water management processes at a strategic level.

We show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places where First Nations people are included socially, culturally and economically.

As we refine and implement this regional water strategy, we commit to helping to support the health and well-being of waterways and Country by valuing, respecting and being guided by First Nations people/Traditional Owners, who know that if we care for Country, it will care for us.

We acknowledge that further work is required under this regional water strategy to inform how we care for Country and ensure First Nations people/Traditional Owners hold a strong voice in shaping the future for Indigenous/Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

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# Introduction

The draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy was released for public exhibition and consultation from Wednesday 5 October to Friday 18 November 2022. This version of the draft strategy complemented an earlier version exhibited in late 2020 and included a proposed list of actions to meet regional challenges

Due to the extensive flooding events that impacted communities across the Lachlan region in October and November 2022, a decision was made by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (department) to re-exhibit the draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy in mid-2023. This will allow interested stakeholders to engage with, consider and respond to the draft strategy under more appropriate circumstances.

The submissions and feedback received so far are summarised in this interim report. The department will consider this feedback in the lead-up to the next round of public exhibition in 2023.

The department acknowledges that the limited number of submissions received to date may not represent as diverse a range of stakeholder views as would usually be expected during public exhibition.

Therefore, the feedback presented in this report should be interpreted with caution and not be considered comprehensive or definitive.

The department would also like to assure all stakeholders who have made a submission to date that all submissions, fillable forms and engagement inputs will be further analysed after the public exhibition process in 2023, and a further What We Heard report will be produced to summarise the feedback received as part of that exhibition and respond to the feedback received during both exhibitions.

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## Consultation

The draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy [consultation paper](#), including a shortlist of proposed options to address regional challenges, was originally released for public exhibition from 5 October to 4 November 2022.

Webinars were held on Thursday 6 October and Wednesday 12 October 2022 to provide an overview of the regional water strategies program, Lachlan region-specific opportunities, challenges and shortlisted actions.

The webinars were attended by 22 stakeholders and included question-and-answer sessions.

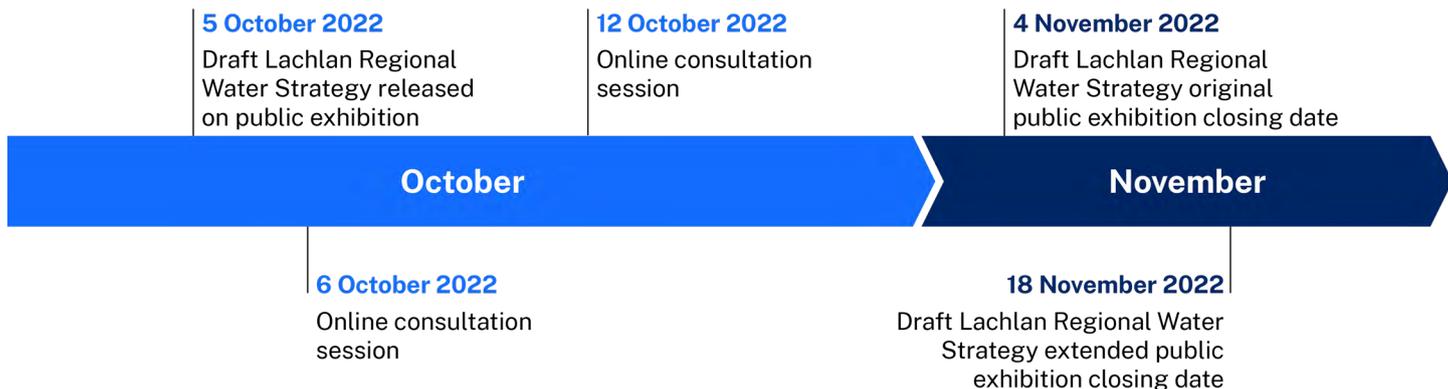
Face-to-face sessions were scheduled in the region for the week of 10 October 2022. However, these sessions were rescheduled for the week of 7 November 2022 and a decision was made to extend the public exhibition submission period to 18 November 2022 due to the impacts of flooding across the region.

As these flooding events intensified over the course of the public exhibition period, a subsequent decision was made by the department, in consultation with key stakeholders in the region, to cancel all face-to-face information sessions and re-exhibit the draft strategy in 2023.

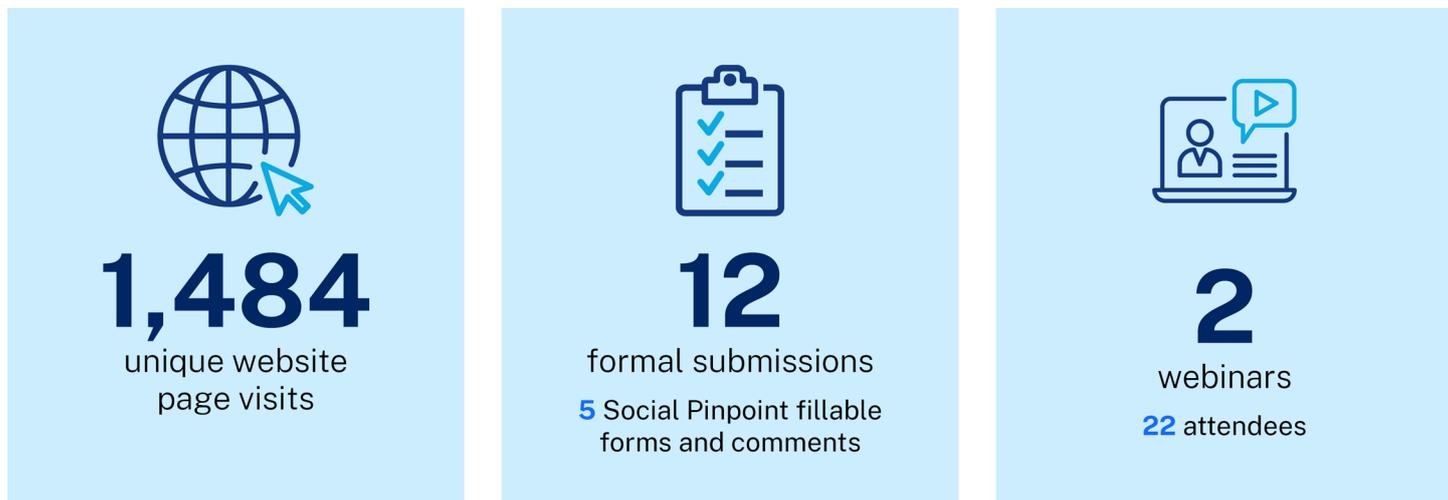
A total of 12 submissions and five online comments were received by the end of the extended closing date; this feedback is summarised below.

The department would like to thank those who attended a webinar or made a submission under extremely challenging circumstances.

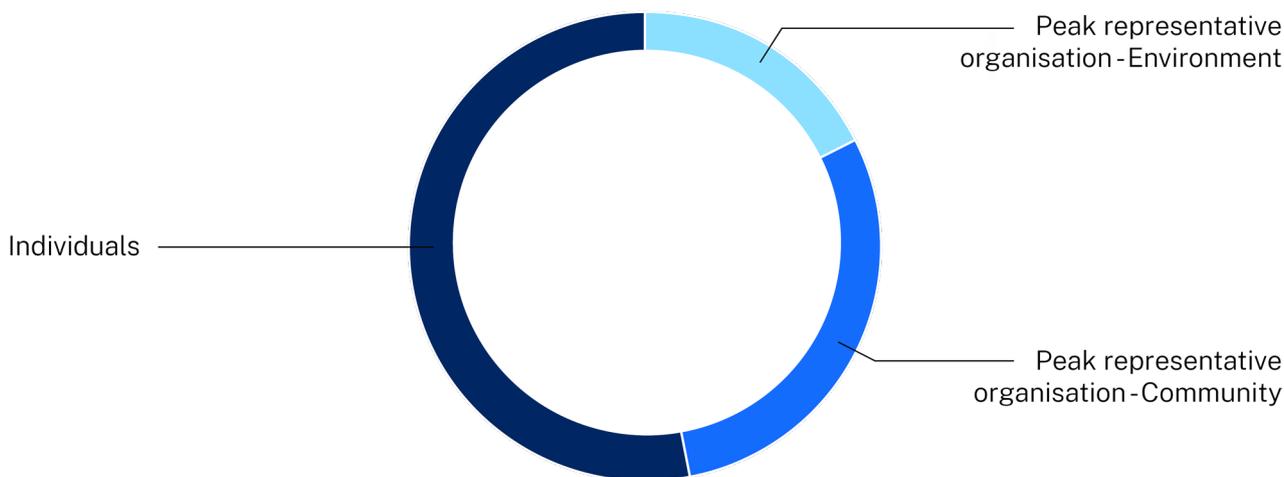
**Figure 1** Public exhibition timeline of activities



**Figure 2** Public exhibition engagement at a glance



**Figure 3** Public exhibition overview of submissions by stakeholder type



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# Summary of key themes raised in feedback to date

A snapshot of feedback from the public exhibition process conducted between 5 October and 18 November 2022 is summarised below. This has been collated from responses provided through submissions and fillable forms and at two webinars held on 6 and 12 October 2022. For ease of reference, this feedback is presented in line with the four priority areas outlined in the draft strategy.

## Priority 1: Building resilience to climate extremes

There was general support for priority 1 and actions aimed at building resilience to climate extremes through a more holistic, inclusive and transparent regional and local approach.

There was support for the following actions:

- encouraging the participation and involvement of Aboriginal people in water management and place-based cultural initiatives
- upgrading existing hydrological models for the Lachlan catchment
- using data and modelling to help improve water security for small and remote communities
- establishing a governance framework to support the coordination of water-related activities under priority 1, with comments noting the importance of actions being supported by funded education campaigns (e.g. water recycling) and developing local and catchment-focused actions and strategies.

Some concerns were raised about actions aimed at supporting groundwater use for towns and communities and expanding the regional water supply grid, with calls for more efficient use of existing water (e.g. water management and education) to take precedence over expanding the grid or using groundwater.

## Priority 2: Ensure the best use of existing water for the environment

There was general support for priority 2 and actions aimed at ensuring the best use of existing water for the environment.

There was support for the following actions, with people particularly noting the widespread benefits that will come from addressing the impacts of salinity and soil erosion:

- reducing salinity and soil erosion in the upper Lachlan and Belubula catchments
- protecting and rehabilitating regionally significant riparian and instream habitats in the regulated Lachlan River
- reviewing and evaluating the Lake Brewster Water Efficiency Project
- actions aimed at reviewing water infrastructure and re-regulating structures. This was accompanied by calls to identify and remove weirs that impede natural flows and for rehabilitation of a 'sand slug' between Forbes and Wyangala that is impacting fish habitat.

## Priority 3: Support economic prosperity in a capped system

There was general support for priority 3 and actions aimed at supporting economic prosperity within a capped system.

There was support for the following actions, with people noting the need for improved access to climate-related information, modelling and data and actions aimed at supporting Aboriginal business development opportunities:

- improving public access to climate information and water availability forecasts
- undertaking a climate impact study
- supporting employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal people
- supporting system water efficiency measures – with suggestions by some that this should also include the Jemalong Irrigation District.

While there was broad support for actions focused on improving access to and understanding of water and water efficiency measures, there was some concern that actions do not currently include water uses such as groundwater and water used for irrigation purposes. It was cautioned that system water efficiency measures could risk cultural, biodiversity and ecological values.

## Priority 4: Improve our knowledge of water resources

There was general support for priority 4 and actions aimed at improving our knowledge of water resources.

There was support and no concerns noted for all three actions:

- improving the understanding and management of groundwater resources in the Lachlan region
- updating southern inland floodplain management plans and audit floodplain structures, which was also viewed as critical to improving the overall management of the Lachlan floodplain
- better integrating strategic land and water planning.

General comments in relation to this priority area noted that:

- actions aimed at assessing and understanding groundwater use and management should be a priority for the strategy, as should better management of floodplain development and structures
- adopting a sustainable and integrated approach to understanding, managing and protecting water resources for current and future generations was advised.

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## Other issues raised

The following issues were also raised:

- Requests for information about the timing and delivery of the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising project business case, noting that Water Infrastructure NSW is undertaking this.
- Concerns about the potential environmental impacts of the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising project and Belubula Water Security Project, including, with respect to the former, on endangered ecological communities within the Wyangala Dam headwaters.
- Desire for more information about the process involved in moving from a long list of options in the strategy to a shortlist of proposed actions, including how data, modelling and expert advice was incorporated.

## Next steps

The Lachlan Regional Water Strategy will be finalised in 2023, following further consultation through a public exhibition process. The department will continue to collect feedback and submissions at this time.

Further information about expected timeframes will be made available on the [Lachlan Regional Water Strategy public exhibition webpage](#).

If you have any questions or would like more information about this document, please email [regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au](mailto:regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au).

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