



August 2022

Lachlan What We Heard Report Aboriginal Cultural Snapshot



Our vision for the Lachlan 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.

Overview

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 Lachlan regional locations of Parkes, Condobolin, Forbes, Hay, Cowra and Lake Cargelligo.

Aboriginal Engagement Approach

There was strong support for improving the recognition of First Nations/Aboriginal People's water rights, interests and access to water for the Lachlan 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.

- Acknowledgement that genuine consultation with First Nations/Aboriginal People through this process can provide an important step in addressing past disparities and resetting the water agenda with these communities.
- General support for Aboriginal community options that support people on Country looking after Country – particularly the establishment of a Regional Aboriginal Water Advisory Committee and the River Ranger Program. However, there were some concerns that options were not yet developed in detail enough to garner examined feedback.
- The importance of securing flows to cultural sites, recognising cultural knowledge, and reducing barriers to water access for Aboriginal people.
- Involvement of local First Nations/Aboriginal People in the design and implementation of proposed programs in the draft strategy.
- Need to prioritise and protect environmental flows and establish cultural flows.
- Simplifying the application process for Aboriginal cultural licences and clear and transparent information on their use.
- The opportunity to build on existing projects like the Cultural Billabong Restoration Projects (in other regions) and use Lake Cargelligo as a test case for a River Ranger Program.
- The need to develop a 10-year catchment rehabilitation program in collaboration with the Aboriginal communities in the upper Lachlan region.
- Simplifying the application process around applying for Aboriginal cultural licences

and clear and transparent information on their use for First Nations in the Lachlan.

Next Steps

Key support focus areas from all consultations with the Aboriginal communities of the Lachlan have been incorporated into the priority actions of the draft Lachlan Strategy. Regional Water Strategies will continue Aboriginal consultation during 2022 on the next draft strategy.

Key Concerns

Key Concerns were also identified by the community.

- Consultation and engagement with First Nations/Aboriginal People in the region left insufficient time to co-design Aboriginal community options.
- Options in the draft strategies do not adequately address concerns of First Nations/Aboriginal People in the community- particularly infrastructure
- Complexity of water policy and laws makes it difficult for Aboriginal communities to engage in water management discussions.
- The river system is portrayed as a water delivery system which is in clear discord with the vision and understanding of Aboriginal people.
- The need to develop tailored educational resources to help empower Aboriginal communities.
- The strategy does not sufficiently focus on water ownership for First Nations/Aboriginal People and thereby fails to meet the needs and aspirations of First Nations/Aboriginal People in the region.
- Historical and ongoing land-use practices have impacted the landscape across the Lachlan and led to reduced river flows.

- Cost-benefit assessment of options have historically proven inadequate to measure impacts on cultural values and heritage, and the method is perceived as unfair and disadvantaging Aboriginal community options.
- Some options (e.g. Mid Lachlan Efficiency measures) will severely impact upon Aboriginal cultural values.

Long list of Options 41-48: Improving the recognition of Aboriginal people’s water rights, interests and access to water

Options to protect and strengthen cultural landscapes, practices, knowledge and traditions, as well as to support empowerment, self-determination and economic advancement of First Nations/Aboriginal People and communities, were well supported in the feedback.

Options	Summary of feedback received
41.Culturally appropriate water knowledge program 42.Water-dependent cultural practice and site identification project 43.Shared benefit project (environment and cultural outcomes) 46.Co-management investigation of Travelling Stock Reserves 48.Regional cultural water officer employment program	- Suggestions that these options represent important steps in supporting Aboriginal communities to have an active voice in the management of water within the Lachlan. - Feedback encouraged further capacity building of First Nations/Aboriginal People in the Lachlan. - Feedback acknowledged the importance of recognising the significance of cultural knowledge. - Support for initiatives that result in employment opportunities (including for young people) through these programs. - Support for roles and projects to be led by local Aboriginal people, with support and funding from government agencies.
44. Aboriginal cultural water access licence review 45. Water portfolio project for Aboriginal communities	- Feedback encouraged options that resulted in positive environmental, social and cultural outcomes for First Nations/Aboriginal People in the Lachlan region. - Feedback encouraged initiatives that would enable First Nations/Aboriginal People to directly manage water to support their needs and aspirations. - Support for a review of the cultural water access licence application process to ensure it is accessible and did not result in any additional costs.
47. Regional Aboriginal water advisory committee	- Strong support for the formation of an Aboriginal advisory committee to inform water management decisions in the Lachlan. - Feedback stressed the need for the representatives on the committee to have ties and connection to the Lachlan region. - Concerns were expressed that the proposed committee would have no decision-making rights.

Response to Feedback

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

Some of the issues that the first draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy highlighted and that were raised by communities in the Lachlan 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 Lachlan Regional Water Strategy, and the options that will be shortlisted for further investigation.

Further Consultation

We have heard feedback 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 Lachlan 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 Lachlan Regional Water Strategy.

We will be undertaking public consultation on a shortlist of actions before the Lachlan Regional Water Strategy is finalised.

Further Information

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

[Engaging with Aboriginal Communities¹](#)

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

[Regional Public Exhibition²](#)

For any other enquiries please email regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au

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

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