

From: [REDACTED]
To: [DPIE W Regional Water Strategies Mailbox](#)
Subject: Namoi draft regional water strategy
Date: [REDACTED]

Dear RWS team,

I am pleased that you are attempting to take a strategic approach to water management covering a wide range of water issues and considering all the people and ecosystems affected by management and use of water and rivers in the Namoi Region. Water management has been unsustainable for a long time. Efforts to improve it have had limited success with many problems getting worse not better overall, such as the grossly inadequate pattern of outflow to the Barwon River, very poor fish health and unsustainable use of groundwater. The adopted Strategy should have ecological sustainability as its principal objective. Overuse of water resources and expectations of associated economic gains at unacceptable cost to ecosystems, people downstream and wider community values should end.

Some of the 'Options' should be considered unquestionably essential, notably 22 – improved connection with the Barwon-Darling. This should involve connecting flows almost as much of the time as would naturally have occurred without diversions for irrigation and other human uses: frequency and duration of dry periods when no flow reach the lower half of the Barwon should be restored as close as possible to natural, recognizing that climate change is not natural but is going to make restoration impossible. Connectivity also needs to involve more periods of moderately high connecting flows and more of the high and flood flows that naturally sustained the Barwon and Darling – connecting to the river banks and billabongs of the Barwon not just to the bottom of the channel. The targets in the Interim North West Unregulated Flow Management Plan should be reviewed and augmented with additional targets so that flows in the Namoi can be managed to enable restoration of the health of both the Namoi and the Barwon below Walgett.

There should be an **additional option** of improving connectivity of the Namoi River with its effluents and billabongs and the remaining bits of wetland and flood-dependent ecosystems – longer periods of connectivity and more frequent connectivity so that fish larvae can hatch, develop then get back to the river, and so ecosystems stay wet long enough or are rewetted soon enough for plants and invertebrates and frogs and birds to grow and survive – not germinate or hatch then die.

Option 21, restoring water quality, and 20, removing floodplain structures that cause adverse impacts, are also essential.

The amount of water diverted by floodplain harvesting should be greatly reduced, rather than issuing licences to divert the volumes currently proposed. The floodplain harvesters do not have a "right" to this amount of water and should not be given one. They have profited at the expense of people and ecosystems downstream by taking water for free in many of the last 40 or so years. The government claims that most of the volumes harvested could be harvested with the 1993-4 level of development – in other words they've had 3 decades to recoup their investment in those works. The priorities set in the Water Management Act should now be applied – by putting the environment of the Barwon-Darling ahead of the profits of floodplain harvesters – by licencing only a much smaller set of works to divert only runoff from irrigated land and limit harvesting of other floodplain flows to rare times when all of the wetlands along the Darling (such as the Talyawalka lakes) are full and Namoi groundwater has recharged. This should have been shown as an option but is missing. I strongly support include getting on with 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 before our remaining fish and riverine ecosystems go extinct waiting.

I strongly support 23, 24 and 25 because the Water Sharing Plans do not protect enough flows for environmental needs and we therefore need to find the most ecologically effective and reasonably fair ways to get big improvements in environmental benefits from whatever flows occur in unregulated and regulated parts of the system. Revision of water sharing plans should include a focus on not letting climate change reduce the environments share of flows.

The groundwater options 26-29 and 35 are all important, both for what remains of our groundwater-dependent ecosystems and for the people who use groundwater, notably in droughts, and the consumers of the food grown with groundwater remember discussions about unsustainable practices in the 1990s. It is crazy that over-extraction has been permitted to get worse.

There should be an **additional option** of trying to ensure that the areas where alluvial groundwater can be most readily recharged actually do receive plenty of high or flood flows – identify the locations and do some on-ground floodplain management, if necessary removing works that block flow to them, and ensuring that flows that could reach and recharge these sites actually get there – are not pumped out or diverted.

In this context I am appalled that the Government is considering building another dam because big dams reduce some of the floods that are needed to recharge groundwater. The best place to store water is in the soil and under places where it is to be used – not up in open dams where some evaporates. The proposed **new larger Dungowan dam should not be on the list at all**. I strongly object to option 1.

What Tamworth and other towns need is Options 5, 6, 10 and 31 – I know what it was like having level 5 water restrictions so I strongly support these. Focus on reducing use more rather than going back to wasteful practices, then on reuse and recycling. This would be far cheaper than building a dam. The dam will have ongoing management costs so users will have to pay more for their water, whereas once people have got used to a more water-efficient way to achieve something their cost are lower. Tamworth people and industries should not take so much water that the environmental flow provisions in the Peel have to be suspended – they should be restored and retained through future droughts.

The small towns throughout the region deserve a lot more support to get through future droughts, along with rural landholders who need to stay on their properties and have water at home even if they have to destock or cant grow crops. So I support Option 14 and helping these people be more water-efficient. If more storage really is needed for some communities this should be off-river, not dams block stream flows and fish passage and may get silted up.

An additional option for some people who can't easily get enough tank water and don't have town water or high-quality groundwater is installation of directly solar-powered water condensers – I think they are called 'Source panels' – they take water out of the air when the sun is shining and put it in a small tank which supplies a tap used to get pure drinking water. Good for people who can use filtered river or groundwater for other purposes

I don't support the idea of desalinating groundwater for industry because it takes a lot of energy and the salts have to be disposed of safely. Better to work out how to do more with less water.

I strongly object to the idea of piping water from the east into the Namoi – Option 2. We have to learn to better manage and make do with the water within our inland catchments not wreck another river and its ecosystems. The water in the Macleay and Barnard is not going to waste – it is all needed there.

I also object to Option 13 – focus effort on better managing the water we have access to and reducing demand for water rather than on wishful thinking that yet more 'exploration' will find

another supply.

I strongly support the options to enable First Nations people to meet their cultural and economic needs through water access – options 46 to 56.

Another missing option is to rehydrate landscapes throughout the region by improving soil organic matter and groundcover so that more storm rain soaks in rather than running off – the excess can then seep aout gradually keeping streams flowing longer. Put more Government funds into supporting this form of regenerative agriculture.

Regards

