

I walk, think and feel this river every day  
And, through summers long, have watched it fade.  
A stream that still should glide  
Has struggled on in fits and starts for fifty years.

A vale that should abound and thrive,  
Where only scattered remnants still survive.  
Vanquished 'goora-curra'<sup>i</sup> are bereft of trees  
And winds blow bare soil into great brown clouds.

Lagoons, once sinuous across the plains  
Shrink to stinking scum-fringed puddles.  
Unless it rains. When water scrapes away  
The last, precious, residues of clay.

Bereaved platypus die in muddy holes  
Where once dragon flies were darting filaments of blue.  
Colly, gill, meei, mungle: half-forgotten water words.  
They lie on the map like reproaches.

Reeds. Birds. Water. All are gone.  
Shy denizens of secret places; vanished all.  
High up in the hills the 'recharge zone'  
Is but a flayed, bleached and fractured place of stones.

Your photographs are sleight of hand. The river's  
Corpse propped up on pillows, cosmetics carefully applied.  
Soft focus lets the dead fish disappear.  
Pictures hold no smell of putrefaction.

No spirit, life or soul. A plan of make believe;  
'Flood plain harvesting' is the poacher's friend;  
Where nature gives willingly her bounty unto man.  
'Water rights', where the only rite of water is to run.

Capture the 'supplementary flow'! A wild animal  
That needs control. Foolish humans want to  
Change the world to suit ourselves.  
Instead of changing self to suit the world.

A river that should murmur to the sea  
Pausing in 'noble reaches'<sup>ii</sup> as it chatters down.  
Arteries, veins and beating heart –  
Reduced to forty policies, in draft.

When this river dies, then so shall I.

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<sup>i</sup> Long plains – roughly adapted from Kamilaroi language.

<sup>ii</sup> Mentioned by both Cunningham and Mitchell.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Regional Water Strategies  
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment  
Parramatta, NSW 2124

Dear Sir,

I write in respect of the Regional Water Strategies (Gwydir) draft options.

As identified in a separate letter, the policy document that has informed this options is riddled with errors and misinformation. It is also noticeable that in PUB20/300, section 3.4 does not indicate any consultation with environmental protection agencies, which is why some important options have been ignored. I am happy for any part of this submission to be made public.

- A. The main objective of the Gwydir Regional Water Strategy should be to use available water in a sustainable manner, and the reality is that the amount of available water will decrease significantly in the next 20 years.
- B. The NSW Government is saying that the climate change predictions for the Gwydir region are a worst case scenario, but those predictions are more likely to be what the region will actually experience. They indicate rainfall in the region will reduce by up to 13%, winter rainfall will decrease, and autumn rainfall will increase, while evaporation, average temperatures and the number of hot days will increase. Managing water demand must be the main objective of the Gwydir Regional Water Strategy, especially given the already vastly increased rates of evaporation.
- C. The draft Strategy identifies that river health is under threat but does not provide a description of the current condition of all water sources, especially groundwater and does not acknowledge the lack of baseline information about all aspects of hydrology.
- D. The draft Strategy does not acknowledge that the available water in the Gwydir Region is still over-allocated and cannot stretch to existing commitments, let alone any projected growth in demand.
- E. A key missing option is to solve the problem of high evaporation rates from on farm storages. There are Australian products available to cover water surfaces or floating solar farms could provide a double benefit.
- F. Floodplain harvesting in the Gwydir captures 30% of natural surface water flows in the catchment. This has a significant impact on the environment and connectivity to the Barwon-Darling. This volume must be substantially reduced through regulation and can be replaced by water savings through better management of evaporation rates.
- G. Strongly support that the final the Regional Water Strategy achieve improved outcomes for river health, native fish, waterbirds and wetlands. These include:
  - Option 9: removal of constraints to delivery of environmental water. This is a project identified under the Basin Plan Constraints Measures and the Northern Basin toolkit measures. This project should be identified as a commitment.
  - Option 10: improved fish passage (including the missing option H below)

- Option 11: existing commitment – directing supplementary environmental flows
  - Option 12: fixing cold water pollution
  - Option 13: screening pumps to protect fish from being sucked out of the river
  - Option 14, 15 & 16: research into groundwater health and sustainable access
  - Option 17: existing commitment - active management to protect environmental water
  - Option 18: managing structures on floodplains
  - Option 20: restore water quality – all visual evidence suggests a massive increase in turbidity over the past 20 years
  - Option 24: improve connectivity with Barwon-Darling
- H. Support additional missing options
- increasing the lengths of flowing habitats, needed by native fish in preference to predominantly still habitats that favour carp, by removing any inessential weirs or barriers – this is much better than adding a fish-way which enables essential fish passage but does not improve habitats for native fish to feed and live in
  - Providing incentives to landholders to conserve and rehabilitate riparian, wetland, floodplain and upper catchment vegetation
  - Riparian habitat restoration and re-establishing threatened species
  - Attention to catchment health, including wildlife, erosion and groundcover above Gravesend
  - Examine the long-term sustainability of present levels of water extraction. .
- I. Strongly support all options that improve First Nations capacity, engagement and employment in water management, and that recognise the significance of cultural knowledge and improve cultural outcomes. These include:
- Option 19: Aboriginal River Ranger program
  - Option 21: Secure flows for cultural sites
  - Options 33-40: Recognition of cultural knowledge, water rights and interests
- J. Strongly support all options that reduce water consumption in towns and industry. More efficient use of water is critical to achieve sustainable communities into a future with less water. These include:
- Option 3: Reuse, recycle and stormwater harvesting
  - Option 22: water efficiency opportunities – this option must include managing high evaporation rates from on farm storage.
  - Option 28: review drought of record and allocation process in water sharing plan
- K. Object strongly to options 1 and 2 because they will have adverse environmental outcomes – both would make long sections of river even less suitable for native fish and would be used to trap flows that have natural characteristics, further threatening species and ecosystems downstream that prefer natural flows to regulated flows:
- Option 1: enlarging Tareelaroi reregulating weir in mid-Gwydir
  - Option 2: new dam at Gravesend

Yours faithfully

