



To Whom it May Concern,

**Submission. Re: Draft Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy**

I am writing this submission on behalf of the members of ECCO, the Environmentally Concerned Citizens of Orange. Founded in 2006, ECCO is a strong advocate for sustainable water management. Water management in the Macquarie river system is of concern to us as Orange is located at the headwaters of the river, with many of our streams and tributaries contributing to what should be its health.

Please find below our comments and concerns.

Climate change predictions indicate a significant reduction in rainfall and hence water runoff in the future. This will obviously have a major impact on inflow into existing storages, and hence the availability of water for irrigation. In order to adapt to the future warming climate and the anticipated reduced rainfall and increased evaporation due to rising temperatures, the strategy urgently needs to review the current allocations. There are frequent reports that the system is already over allocated. The policy needs to provide acknowledgement of this and should include provision for a review of allocations with a commitment to adjusting them in accordance with future climate and rainfall pattern predictions.

The draft strategy refers to the enlargement of the capacity of the Gin Gin Weir. References suggest that the enlargement of the Weir is a foregone conclusion. This cannot be the case as the project has yet to be approved. Also there has been no assessment of the environmental impacts of the Weir enlargement. Based on the modelling that predicts less rainfall and less stored water, such a project is impractical and environmentally unsound as increased storage suggests increased extraction. Research indicates that there is a need for less rather than more if the river is to have a sustainable future. Any new regulating system installed on the river will have the capacity to extract extra water that would otherwise be needed for the continued survival of threatened and vulnerable native species, migratory birds and internationally listed wetlands downstream.

Top priority needs to be given to the environment, and town and stock water use. The thirty million dollars that is the cost of the Weir could be put to better use exploring more sustainable options designed to reduce the demand for water, and to increase the environmental health of the system.

The draft strategy section involving the improvement of Aboriginal people's water rights, interests and access to water should be implemented in full. Many of the options contained therein are long overdue. Users other than the extractive industries have a right to the water.

The delivery constraints for the Cudgegong, Macquarie and the Macquarie Marshes have been well documented. It is essential that these be addressed for the ongoing health of the system. It is also of vital importance that connectivity with downstream tributaries, wetlands and the

Darling River, be maintained if the river is to support healthy riverine biodiversity.

As is well known, our inland river systems have been traumatised through one of the worst droughts on record. As previously mentioned, it is predicted that there will be less water available for both the health of the river, irrigation, town water and cultural use. Users other than the irrigation industry have a right to their share. It is therefore incumbent on any water strategy to get the sharing right and to get it right in the context of current conditions and the scenarios that have been predicted by our scientists. It is therefore vital that storages such as the Gin Gin Re-regulating Weir be abandoned in favour of more sustainable alternatives.



ECCO