



November 2022

## North Coast Aboriginal Cultural Snapshot



*Our vision for the North Coast 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 North Coast regional locations of Grafton, Yamba, Nambucca Heads, Armidale, and Kempsey.

### 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 North Coast 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 areas

Key support relates directly to the legislative requirements for Water Management Act, currently under reform within NSW. Highlighted below are key support points recognised through the consultations with Aboriginal communities.

- The importance of water to First Nations / Aboriginal culture, as well as physical access to the river and protecting cultural sites.
- Support for the inclusion of First Nations / Aboriginal people's interests as an objective of the strategy.
- Opportunities to share traditional knowledge were identified through visits to Country and the employment of river rangers and cultural water officers.
- The formation of Aboriginal Water Advisory Committees to achieve greater participation in water management and decision-making.
- Opportunities to improve cultural, economic and environmental outcomes including employment programs, jobs on Country and training in water management.
- Support and interest in improving rights to water, including targeted water licences for First Nations / Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal businesses and cultural use.

### Next Steps

All Key support focus areas from all consultations with the Aboriginal communities of the North Coast have been incorporated into the priority actions of the North Coast Draft Strategy. Regional Water Strategies will continue Aboriginal Engagement Consultation during 2022.

### Key Concerns

Key Concerns were also identified.

- Cultural options included in other regional water strategies should be

incorporated in the North Coast strategy.

- First Nations / Aboriginal rights, interests and access should be given greater focus in the strategy, with opportunities to involve them in long-term water management strengthened and prioritised.
- Greater involvement in the decisionmaking process for finalising the long list of options and greater transparency with First Nations / Aboriginal communities.
- First Nations / Aboriginal people's rights, interest and access should be interwoven throughout the strategy, especially where options have dual objectives.
- There were concerns from First Nations / Aboriginal communities about water quality, river changes and diversions as well as current and legacy industrial land uses.
- The need to acknowledge the diversity within the Aboriginal nations, and to recognise the various uses communities have for water along the rivers as individual groups.

### Response to Feedback

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

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

### Further Consultation

We have heard and accepted 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 North Coast 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 North Coast Regional Water Strategy.

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

### Further Information

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

[Engaging with Aboriginal Communities<sup>1</sup>](#)

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

[Regional Public Exhibition<sup>2</sup>](#)

For any other enquiries please email [regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au](mailto:regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au)

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

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