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Subject: SUBMISSION - FNC Water Strategy

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Thank you for taking the time to read and consider the many submissions you will undoubtedly receive regarding the Far North Coast (FNC) Water Strategy.

I have been a resident of the FNC since 2004, when I chose to move to this naturally beautiful regional area from Sydney with my family. This region is full of ecological and cultural treasures, and its peoples are very passionate about maintaining its diversity, beauty and heritage value.

There has been significant work and consideration undertaken to date by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, with regard to the FNC Water Strategy. The Draft Strategy provides a variety of options and solutions to develop sustainable, reliable and quality water supply, now and into the future. Now we are at the turning point in Community consultation, and this is where Government has the responsibility and opportunity to understand and embrace the local knowledge and wishes of its constituents, before deciding on the most appropriate strategies to move forward with.

Reviewing the Draft Regional Water Strategy FNC, it is clear there are many options proposed and to be considered. The way forward to providing a secure water supply for the region that is climate-independent, and would become beneficial during the increasing and prolonged droughts, will obviously become a strategic plan of multiple options delivered and developed over many years. Many options presented in the Department of Planning Industry and Environment – Long List of Options, will require further extensive investigation and input from other interested parties such as local indigenous elders and the local communities, as well as consideration of the environmental and cultural heritage impacts of the options.

It is very pleasing to see the range of options being considered includes climate-resistant strategies such as re-use and desalination, decentralised and regional strategies for water management, and collaborative sharing across local and state boundaries. These strategies make the most of financial and community strengths. 2020 has highlighted the Earth's heightened ecological state, and the 2020 Climate Ambition Summit identifies Australia is not currently pulling its weight to be a world leader in climate change strategies. NSW and the Far North Coast can be a leader in this area with long term sustainable water strategies, that considers not only the needs of industry, but also the needs of community, culture and the environment.

There are a number of dam options in the Draft Strategy. Dams are old-school thinking! The impact from flooding a valley to create a dam reaches across all facets of a community. The Far North Coast is an area of rich indigenous culture. Unlike some indigenous cultures, Australia's First Nations peoples are connected as one to the land that they walk and live on. It is not possible to move sacred artifacts to another place, as they lose the spiritual significance and connection to Country. There has been considerable criticism of the blatant disrespect of Rio Tinto with the Juukan Gorge caves debacle in Western Australia. Flooding a new valley, or even raising the wall to an existing dam, will have the same significant outcomes, and will be considered yet again, another insult and lack of respect for our First Nations peoples and their connection to land. We should be asking and learning from cultural elders – not blowing them up.

Many of the flora and fauna in the proposed dam flooding areas are already listed as threatened or endangered status. After being ravaged by the Black Summer bushfires of 2020, the koala population of the FNC is in great danger, and with still 70% of Australia not burnt by the fires, a lot of their habitat and populations are at risk again this summer. The unique Platypus is a regular inhabitant along rivers and streams in the FNC. Flooding their habitat will further stress these limited populations, and place this amazing monotreme into the endangered list. There are also many endangered native fish species in our rivers. They are the victims of poor river management, pollution and over licencing the available waterflow. Our native fish are vital to the health of our aquatic ecology. The Big Scrub along Rocky Creek, the proposed site for the Dunoon Dam, is now confined to this area, now with only 1% of this habitat remaining. Originally this rainforest covered 75,000ha in Australia. The Big Scrub is unique. It is internationally significant and is a very important part of Australia's rich biodiversity heritage. There are too many threatened species to mention in these proposed flooding areas, including frogs, insects, mammals, birds, marsupials, aquatic life and significant flora.

Dams also fail to cater to a country and planet that is becoming drier. A dam can only collect and hold water that is captured from rainwater. If there is no significant rain, there is not enough water in the catchment area to capture, and the dam runs dry. Consider the Leslie dam at Warwick. The effect of drought on this dam, was that in 2020 it ran dry. This dam is almost 30m high! Slightly raising dam walls or building new dams is an inefficient option in our higher temperature climate, and is also inefficient due to significant evaporation experienced when holding large bodies of open water. There are many better, more effective options from an environmental, cultural and financial standpoint, than to dam a river.

Good water management crosses all levels of the system. It must be well maintained; it must be well managed; it must be well supported by the community. There are significant water savings to be made through audit and maintenance of current water networks, pipes and facilities. There are significant water savings to be made through consumer harvested rainwater, reuse of wastewater and shared, regional desalination facilities. There are significant water savings to be made through sharing of resources to meet identified needs, as and where they are. Working together collaboratively with our local councils and communities, and across state borders, to reduce resistance and barriers, and to develop strategies as one region that can lead the way for Australia and the World, to develop appropriate water-resource strategies, is the only viable option in our current climate catastrophe.

I thank you for your consideration of the concerns I have raised with some proposal options, and for the great forward-thinking options also included in this Draft Far North Coast Water Strategy. I believe the NSW Government will take appropriate advice and consideration of the ecological, cultural, community and financial implications of each of these strategies, to determine a 22nd Century approach to securing our water future in the Far North Coast of New South Wales.

Kind regards
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