



November 2022

## Border Rivers Aboriginal Cultural Snapshot



*Our vision for the Border Rivers 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..*

### Aboriginal Engagement Approach

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 Border Rivers regional locations of Ashford, Inverell, Boggabilla, Glen Innes, Mungindi.

### Aboriginal Engagement Outcomes

There was strong support for improving the recognition of First Nations/Aboriginal People's water rights, interests and access to water for the Border Rivers 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

Highlighted below are key support points recognised through the consultations with Aboriginal communities.

- The need to prioritise and protect environmental flows, and establish cultural flows.
- To simplify the application process around applying for Aboriginal cultural licences and provide clear and transparent information on their uses.
- Options that advance employment opportunities, especially for young people, including requests to help Aboriginal land councils develop the land and water licences they currently own.
- Opportunities to integrate Aboriginal knowledge in development of other options (including environmental, groundwater and land use options), and to help in their implementation.
- Strong support for the River Ranger Program, with people on Country looking after Country.
- Protection of local wetlands that have cultural significance including Boobera Lagoon, Pungbougul Lagoon and the Morella watercourse.
- Aboriginal communities support greater monitoring and compliance as it is seen as critical to ensure water take provisions under current arrangements are not misused.

### Next Steps

All Key support focus areas from all consultations with the Aboriginal communities of the Border Rivers have been incorporated

into the priority actions of the Border Rivers Draft Strategy. Regional Water Strategies will continue Aboriginal consultation during 2022.

### Key Concerns

Key Concerns were also identified by the community.

- Limited and infrequent consultation and engagement with First Nations/Aboriginal People in the Border Rivers which left insufficient time to co-design Aboriginal community options.
- Options in the draft strategy do not adequately address the concerns of First Nations/Aboriginal People in the community – particularly infrastructure options.
- Options in the draft strategy do not adequately address the concerns of First Nations/Aboriginal People in the community – particularly infrastructure options.
- Limited focus on water security for Aboriginal communities and options that would drive economic outcomes for First Nations/Aboriginal People.
- Complexity of water policy and laws, and the need to develop tailored educational resources to help empower Aboriginal communities.
- First Nations/Aboriginal People often feel excluded or forgotten in arrangements within their local government area, especially communities that are responsible for providing their own water supplies.

## Comments on Options 42 - 51: Improving the recognition of Aboriginal people's water rights, interests and access to water

Options to protect and strengthen cultural landscapes, practices, knowledge and traditions, as well as to support empowerment, self-determination and economic advancement of First Nations/Aboriginal People and communities, were well supported in the feedback.

Options	Summary of feedback received
42. Culturally appropriate water knowledge program	- Feedback acknowledged that improved understanding of cultural values and traditional ecological knowledge would improve the ability of environmental water managers and river operators to support cultural values and sites.
43. Water-dependent cultural practices and site identification project	- Comments were supportive of options that promote support and protection for cultural practice and heritage sites.
44. Secure flows for waterdependent cultural sites	- Feedback encouraged options that resulted in shared benefits with positive environmental, social and cultural outcomes.
45. Shared benefit project (environment and cultural outcomes)	
47. Water portfolio project for Aboriginal communities	- Feedback supported options that enable greater participation of Aboriginal communities in water management.
48. Aboriginal cultural water access licence review	
49. Co-management investigation of Travelling Stock Reserves	Active Aboriginal participation in these proposed programs was strongly supported, with particular support for the River Ranger Program.
50. Regional Cultural Water Officer Employment Program	- Suggestions were made to direct resources to existing
51. River Ranger Program	Aboriginal controlled organisations to support these purposes and outcomes, in place of introducing new programs.
46. Establish a regional Aboriginal Water Advisory Committee	- Feedback encouraged options that resulted in positive environmental, social and cultural outcomes for Aboriginal communities.
	- A review of cultural water access licences was supported, with a view to enabling Aboriginal communities to directly manage water in support of their values and cultural sites.
	- Concern was expressed that the proposed Advisory Committee would have no decision-making rights.
	- Concern was also expressed that the proposed Advisory Committee could conflict with existing Aboriginal community management structures.

### Response to Feedback

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

Some of the issues that the Border Rivers Regional Water Strategy highlighted and that were raised by communities in the Border Rivers 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 Border Rivers 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 Border Rivers 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 Border Rivers Regional Water Strategy.

We will be undertaking public consultation on a shortlist of actions before the Border Rivers 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 for Public Exhibition 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>