



28 June 2022

NSW Department of Planning and Environment
Via email: regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Submission on the second draft of the Border Rivers Regional Water Strategy

The Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales (NCC) is the state's peak environment organisation. We represent over 170 environment groups across NSW. Together we are dedicated to protecting and conserving the wildlife, landscapes and natural resources of NSW.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the second phase of consultation for the Border Rivers Regional Water Strategy.

We acknowledge the climate change predictions across the Regional Water Strategies that are under development, and the significant work undertaken to improve modelling and data.

In the Border Rivers, it is predicted that there may be:

- 15% to 25% more cease-to-flow events and fewer overbank flows.
- up to a 40% reduction in flows into the Barwon–Darling River from the Border Rivers catchment.

Effective management and preparation for the future, where water sources along with their ecosystems will be under ever greater stress, has never been more important.

This submission lists options supported and not supported by NCC under the four regional priorities identified by the Department of Planning and Environment.

Priority 1 address knowledge gaps and make information easily accessible

- **Support** actions 1.1 – 1.4

Priority 2 do more with less water

- **Support** actions 2.1 – 2.4



- Regarding action 2.2 - Coordinate the management of irrigation water releases and water for the environment to improve ecological outcomes: This action requires significant local knowledge and expertise and should only be made by an Environmental Water Advisory Group established in the region.
- Regarding action 2.4 - Provide clarity and certainty for environmental needs during drought operations: assessment of the environmental needs of the Border Rivers at any time must be determined with the full involvement of DPE Environment and Heritage Group, and with input from a mandated Environmental Water Advisory Group.

Priority 3 Make the region more resilient to climate variability

- **Support** actions 3.2 – 3.5, 3.7 and 3.8
- Regarding action 3.2: diversification of regional industries should not include permanent plantings, for example nut trees.
- **No support** for action 3.1 - Increase the availability of high security water access licences: this will have a major impact on the environment.
- **No support** for action 3.6 - fully implement the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Policy: the floodplain harvesting policy has key faults that must be addressed before implementation, including that the policy:
 - locks in an environmentally unsustainable level of water diversion from floodplains and downstream
 - allows for 5 years of entitlement to be captured at once
 - excludes rainfall runoff from licences
 - and proposes to licence works prior to the completion of action 3.6, the removal of unapproved floodplain works

The regulation of floodplain harvesting must be preceded by an assessment of its cumulative environmental, cultural, and social impacts.

The regulation of floodplain harvesting must include cease-to-divert flow targets that are scientifically based on environmental sustainability.

Priority 4 - Share water differently to address critical needs of Border Rivers and downstream users

- **Support** actions 4.1, 4.3, 4.5



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- Regarding action 4.5 - Barwon-Darling Connectivity: rule changes are needed before floodplain harvesting licence entitlements are granted. Held environmental water should not be managed to provide base flows in a regulated system, or town water supply in unregulated systems.
- **Conditional support for actions 4.2 and 4.4:** Decisions on groundwater cannot be made before the State Groundwater Strategy is developed.
 - Water sources from non-rainfall dependent water sources for towns must be actively pursued. Groundwater sources across the state are being depleted.
 - No increase in the SDL for groundwater sources should be considered

Your key contact point for further questions and correspondence is [REDACTED]. We welcome further conversation on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

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Nature Conservation Council