

Draft Namoi Regional Water Strategy



What we heard

Public consultation: August - September 2022

Publication date: June 2023





Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Government acknowledges First Nations people as its first Australian people and the traditional owners and custodians of the country's lands and water. First Nations people have lived in NSW for over 60,000 years and have formed significant spiritual, cultural and economic connections with its lands and waters.

Today, they practice the oldest living culture on earth.

The NSW Government acknowledges the First Nations people/ Traditional Owners from the Namoi region as having an intrinsic connection with the lands and waters of the Namoi Regional Water Strategy area. The landscape and its waters provide First Nations people with essential links to their history and help them to maintain and practice their traditional culture and lifestyle.

We recognise that Traditional Owners were the first managers of Country and incorporating their culture and knowledge into the management of water in the region is a significant step toward closing the gap.

Under this regional water strategy, we seek to establish meaningful and collaborative relationships with First Nations people. We will seek to shift our focus to a Country-centred approach, respecting, recognising and empowering cultural and traditional Aboriginal knowledge in water management processes at a strategic level.

We show our respect for Elders past, present and emerging through thoughtful and collaborative approaches to our work, seeking to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing places where First Nations people are included socially, culturally and economically.

As we refine and implement this regional water strategy, we commit to helping to support the health and wellbeing of waterways and Country by valuing, respecting and being guided by First Nations people/Traditional Owners, who know that if we care for Country, it will care for us.

We acknowledge that further work is required under this regional water strategy to inform how we care for Country and ensure First Nations people/Traditional Owners hold a strong voice in shaping the future for Indigenous/Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

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Summary

Background

The NSW Government has developed regional water strategies as part of a broader suite of long-term strategies aimed at improving the security, reliability, quality and resilience of the state's water resources for current and future generations.

The regional water strategies adopt a long-term approach to strengthening and building the reliability and quality of the state's water resources.

They combine climate evidence and economic and ecological analysis with local and regional insights from water service providers, local councils, communities, Aboriginal people, and other stakeholders.

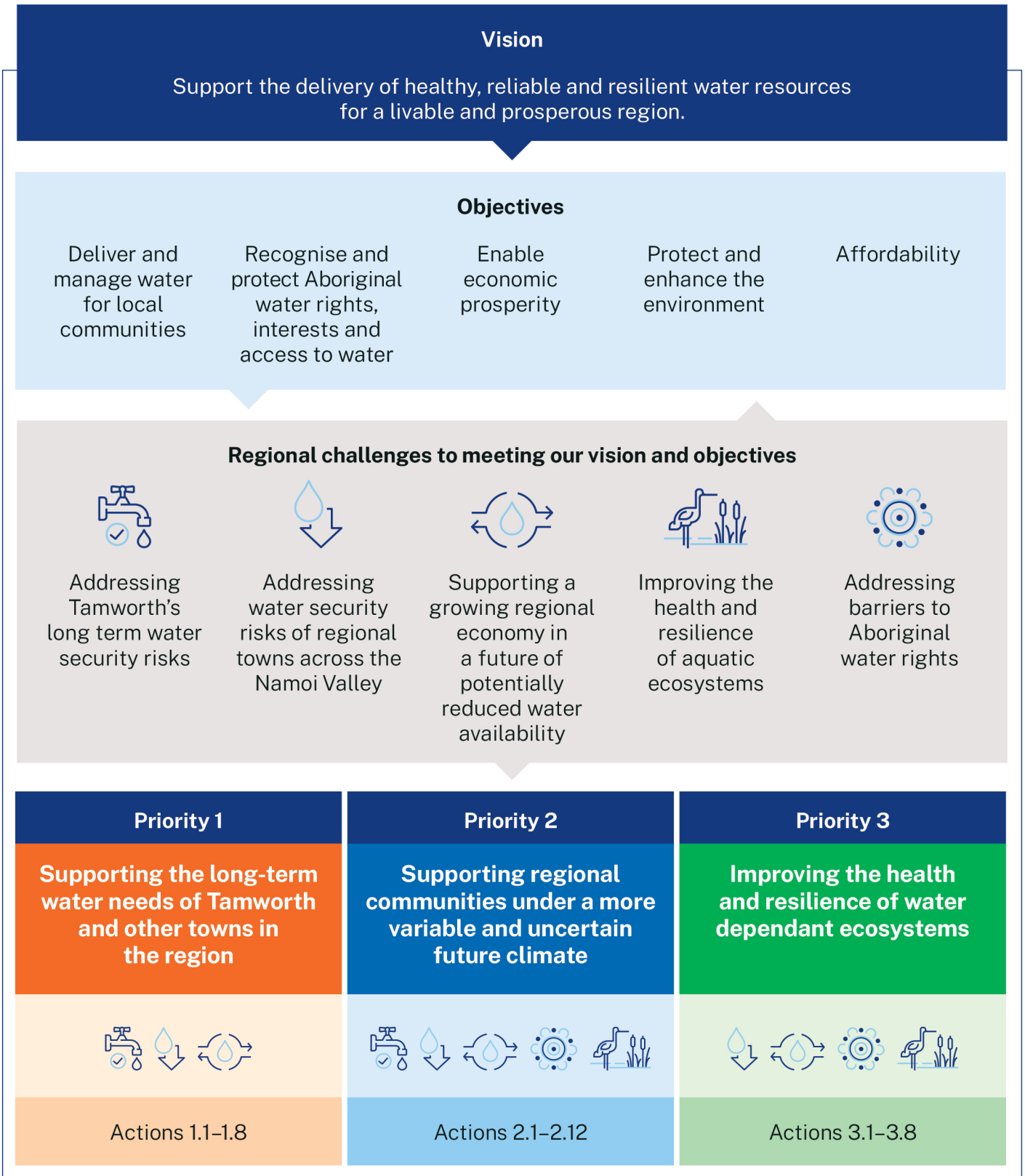
The Namoi Regional Water Strategy (strategy) examines future water related risks and challenges in the region and the actions that need to be taken to manage water availability and security risks.

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment (department) has taken a staged approach to develop the strategy, with early steps designed to identify a long list of options which, after consultation and analyses, were narrowed down to a shortlist of priority areas and proposed shortlisted actions.

Figure 1 NSW water strategy regions



Figure 2 Namoi Regional Water Strategy: overview of strategy vision, objectives, water security challenges and priorities



Consultation

The strategy was developed over several years in consultation with water users, Aboriginal groups, environmental and local government representatives and government agencies.

This approach has allowed the department to share information and gather feedback as it identifies priorities and action areas.

Public consultation

Public consultation on the draft strategy occurred from early 2021 to late 2022:

Public consultation phase 1 (2021)

The draft strategy was first placed on public exhibition from March to May 2021. It included detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities in the Namoi region as well as a long list of options with the potential to address the challenges and opportunities.

Feedback from this public consultation phase and the department's response is published in the Namoi Region Draft Regional Water Strategy What We Heard (2021) report.

Following the first round of consultation and further technical analysis, the long list of options was distilled into 29 proposed shortlisted actions designed to address water security priorities and challenges specific to the Namoi region.

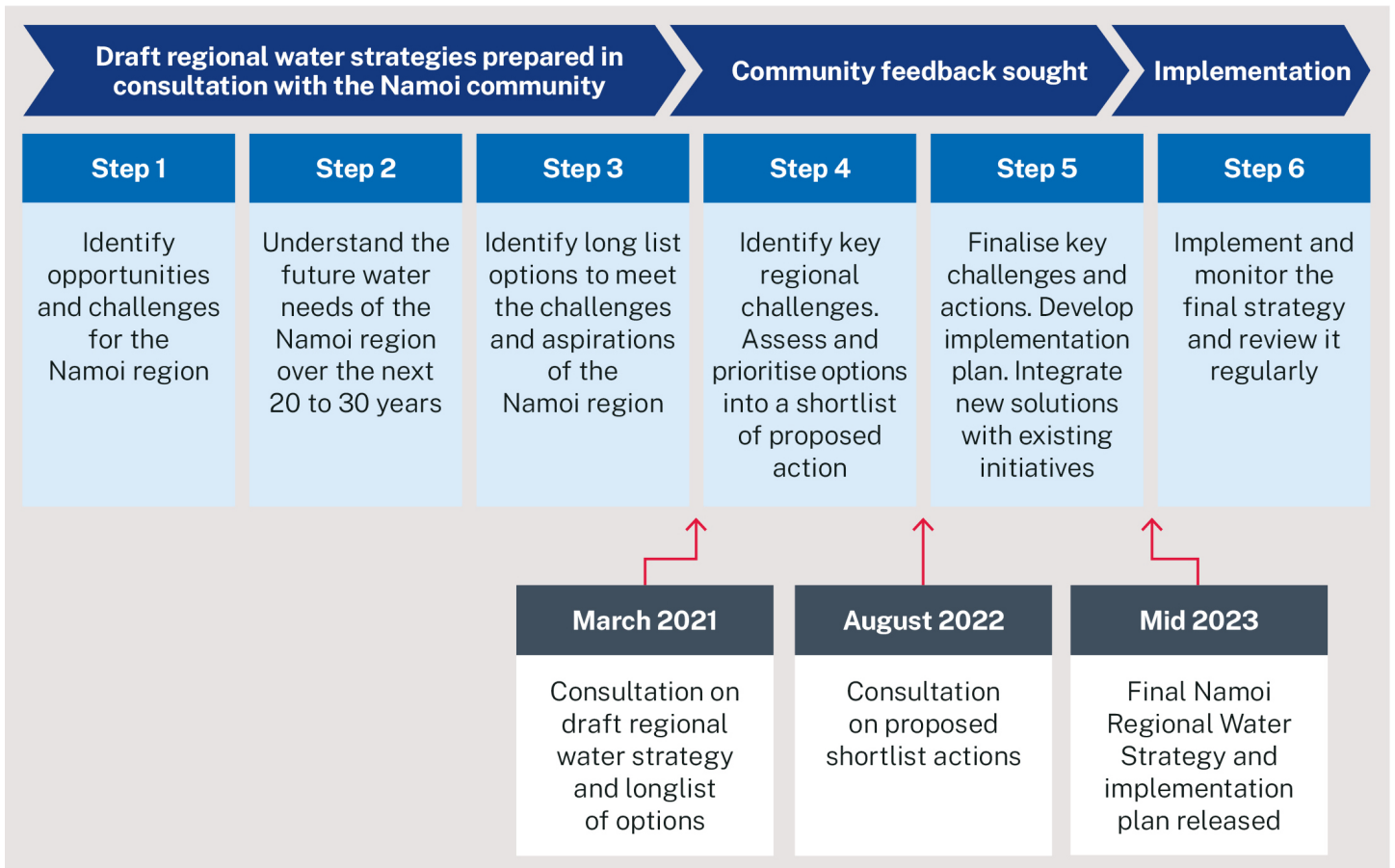
Public consultation phase 2 (2022)

A second draft of the strategy – comprising an Executive Summary and Consultation Paper – was placed on public exhibition from 22 August to 18 September 2022. During public consultation, the department engaged with:

- Aboriginal communities
- Local councils
- Landholders
- Business and industry groups
- Peak organisations
- Community members and organisations.

See Figures 2, 3 and 4 for a summary of engagement activities and participation.

Figure 3 Regional water strategy implementation process



Feedback

The department received 23 formal submissions and over 100 people participated in engagement sessions about the strategy (see Figures 3 and 4) during public consultation phase 2.

Feedback ranged from general commentary about water-related issues – such as water security and the need to safeguard future town water supply – to specific feedback about proposed shortlisted actions.

This report summarises ‘what we heard’ during the public consultation phase 2 process. It includes input and analysis from fillable forms and submissions as well as informal feedback and insights from the public and targeted information sessions.

This report presents feedback by:

- Common themes
- Challenges and actions.

The proposed new Dungowan Dam that was presented in the draft strategy has not been carried through the final strategy.

Figure 4 Namoi public consultation phase 2 timeline of activities

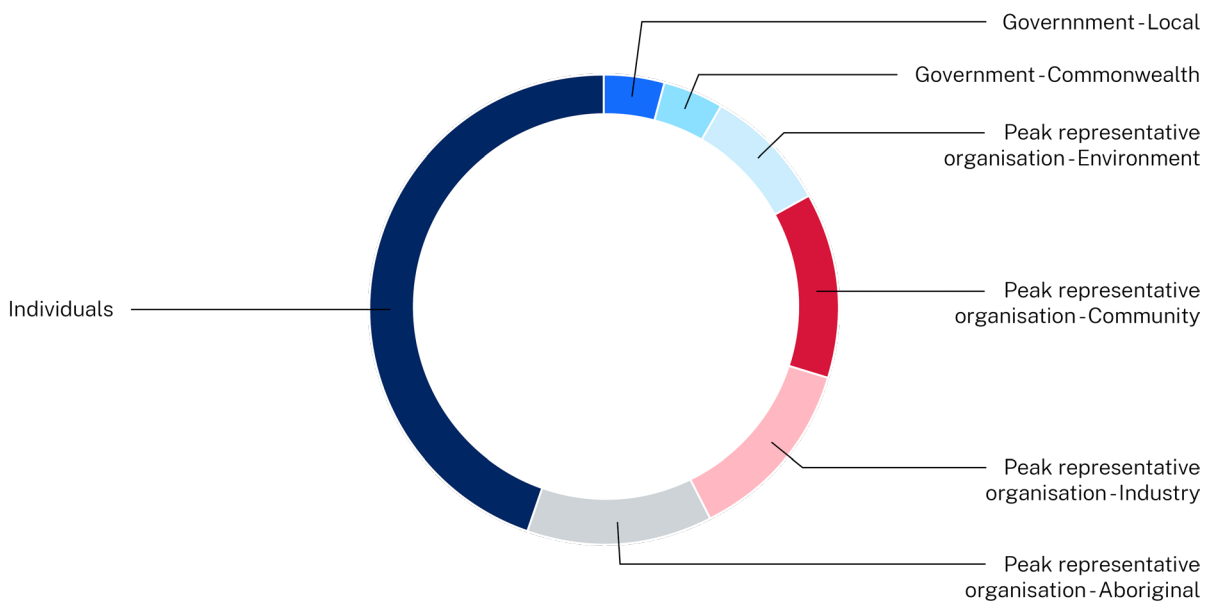


Mount Kaputar National Park

Figure 5 Namoi public consultation phase 2 engagement at a glance



Figure 6 Overview of submissions by stakeholder type



What we heard: a snapshot

Feedback indicated general support for a majority of the priority areas and actions identified in the strategy, with qualified support in other areas.

A snapshot of feedback by key theme is provided below and explored throughout this report.

Table 1 Snapshot of feedback by key themes

| Themes | Key Feedback |
|--|---|
|  Theme 1 Supporting the long-term needs of Tamworth and regional towns <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tamworth Regional Council water security• Investigating water efficiency and demand management measures• Improving drought planning for towns | <p>There was mixed feedback about the NSW Government's commitment to a new Dungowan Dam and Pipeline. Increasing the Chaffey Dam reserve was opposed and there were concerns about a pipeline from the Namoi Valley to Tamworth.</p> <p>Investigating water efficiency and demand management measures for towns and industry was widely supported, as was securing more funding and research into water efficiency and demand education programs.</p> |
|  Theme 2 Supporting regional communities in uncertain times <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding surface water and groundwater• Improving participation of Aboriginal people• Supporting equitable and sustainable growth | <p>There was strong support for investing in better information, mapping and modelling, data and training to support decision making and understanding of river and groundwater systems and extraction.</p> <p>The importance of ensuring that Aboriginal communities are involved in local and regional water management was generally supported.</p> |
|  Theme 3 Improving the health and resilience of water-dependent ecosystems <p>Supporting ecological and environmental resilience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving connectivity• Supporting equitable and sustainable growth | <p>There was strong support for protecting and sustaining the health of ecosystems and biodiversity. Prioritising actions that support ecosystem function and health was viewed as especially important.</p> <p>Improving connectivity with the Barwon-Darling River was generally supported.</p> <p>There was mixed feedback about floodplains, with general support for removing unapproved floodplain structures but differing views about fully implementing the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Program.</p> |
|  Theme 4 Implementing the strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engaging appropriately• Implementing the strategy• Aligning the strategy | <p>There was interest in continued engagement with water users, stakeholders and Aboriginal communities about the strategy, both as it is being finalised and during implementation.</p> <p>Some concern was expressed about the approach and structure of engagement that was conducted to support development of the strategy, with a suggestion for future engagement methods and communication materials to be more accessible and inclusive.</p> |

Feedback by theme



Acacia spectabilis, commonly known as Pilliga wattle.

Feedback by theme

This section summarises the feedback from public consultation phase 2 by the common themes and topics of interest raised during consultation.

While some respondents addressed specific elements of the strategy, others provided general commentary or suggestions for consideration.

The diversity of this feedback is captured within the following 4 'theme' areas.

Each area discusses issues as expressed by respondents and concludes with a brief response from the NSW Government.



Theme 1: Supporting the long-term needs of Tamworth and regional towns

Feedback summary

There was mixed feedback about the NSW Government's commitment to a new Dungowan Dam and Pipeline. Increasing the Chaffey Dam reserve was opposed and there were concerns about a pipeline from the Namoi Valley to Tamworth.

Investigating water efficiency and demand management measures for towns and industry was widely supported, as was securing more funding and research into water efficiency and demand education programs.

Consultation feedback

Tamworth Regional Council water security

- Securing a reliable water supply for the region, and Tamworth in particular, was acknowledged as a high priority by most people. There was some concern that the strategy does not go far enough in addressing this, with suggestions to consider developing a Tamworth water security plan and ongoing analysis of factors that support water security.
- There was a perception by some that continued growth in Tamworth, and the investments needed to support the corresponding water security needs, could potentially come at the expense of other smaller regional towns. It was felt that the strategy should address this so that one area is not prioritised over others.
- There were mixed views about the NSW Government's commitment to the proposed new Dungowan Dam and Pipeline, with support from some while others noted that the project lacked confirmed funding.
- It was suggested that the strategy should be updated if funding to the Dungowan Dam and Pipeline are confirmed to ensure it remains regionally relevant.
- There was some concern that the financial costs of building the dam and pipeline may outweigh any long-term water security benefits for Tamworth.
- Increasing Chaffey Dam reserve for Tamworth was opposed by some, in part due to concerns that this may result in a reduction of general security allocations and negatively impact agriculture in the region, but supported by others.
- There were mixed views about a pipeline from Manning Valley to Peel Valley, with qualified support from some pending a better understanding of potential impacts on the Hunter and Manning Valley. Concern focused on potential adverse impacts on the environment and local ecosystems and whether such a measure may result in water being diverted from water users.
- Many stakeholders asked the state government to fast-track community education programs around purified recycled water
- There was concern about a pipeline from Namoi Valley to Tamworth. This focused on whether this would impact Namoi general security water entitlement holders and if diverting water would reduce the amount of water available for cultural purposes and benefit larger Namoi regional centres at the expense of smaller towns.

Investigating water efficiency and demand management measures

- There was strong support for actions aimed at improving water efficiency, security and drought management, with some stakeholders suggesting this be progressed as a priority.
- There was widespread support for immediate measures aimed at prioritising water efficiency and managing demand from towns and high water-use industries such as irrigators and meat processing industries.
- Many respondents supported greater funding and research into water efficiency and demand management measures.
- There was support for educational programs aimed at addressing community and industry misconceptions, raise awareness of water recycling and enable informed discussion.

Improving drought planning for towns

- There was support for Integrated Water Cycle Management Plans for regional towns and for prioritising advanced water treatment facilities for water-reliant industries.
- There were concerns about the way that water was managed during recent drought events — reviewing this to better understand ‘lessons learned’ and how to apply them to future scenarios was viewed as important.
- Improving local drought planning was supported, such as providing additional support, data and modelling for local government and increasing transparency around Tamworth’s water usage.



Namoi River NSW



Theme 2: Supporting regional communities in uncertain times

Feedback summary

There was strong support for investing in better information, mapping and modelling, data and training to support decision-making and understanding of river and groundwater systems and extraction.

The importance of ensuring that Aboriginal communities are involved in local and regional water management was generally supported.

Consultation feedback

Understanding surface water and groundwater

- The importance of groundwater for the region was widely noted.
- There was support for mapping and assessing groundwater-dependent ecosystems and groundwater sources to better understand aquifer condition, groundwater use and extraction, and to identify opportunities for managed aquifer recharge.
- Better alignment of groundwater and surface water rules and management was endorsed, including as a means of improving how groundwater is used and extraction is managed.
- Providing public access to reliable data, information and modelling about groundwater and surface water was generally supported, with some people expressing a lack of confidence in current surface and groundwater modelling.
- Some people questioned why groundwater modelling relies on current data, noting that it should consider projected need as well as current for greater accuracy and better long-term management.

Improving participation of Aboriginal people

- There was support for improving the participation of Aboriginal people in water management and as a means of addressing barriers to Aboriginal water rights.
- Acknowledging and respecting Aboriginal people's customs and connection to water and water-related ecosystems was noted.
- Involving Aboriginal people, hearing Aboriginal voices and including Aboriginal communities and groups in engagement about water-related issues was supported.

Supporting equitable and sustainable growth

- Balancing the need for regional growth and development with environmental health, Aboriginal people's rights and access, and equity of access across all of the region's towns and centres were repeatedly raised.
- There was concern that the strategy's emphasis on regional development might prioritise the needs of the upper Namoi, Tamworth and Narrabri at the expense of the lower catchment.
- There was widespread opposition to growth in mining and coal seam gas due to the potential of these industries to affect water sources and supply, climate change impacts, increased competition in water markets and social balance.
- Stimulating growth in smaller towns, as well as larger regional centres, was viewed positively, provided this was not done at the expense of existing industry and business.
- The opportunity for cultural and ecotourism in the region were identified as areas which could have greater focus, with calls for industry, government and local organisations to work together to promote this. There was general concern around options to convert general security licences to high security licences.



Theme 3: Improving the health and resilience of water-dependent ecosystems

Feedback summary

There was strong support for protecting and sustaining the health of ecosystems and biodiversity. Prioritising actions that support ecosystem function and health were viewed as especially important.

Improving connectivity with the Barwon-Darling River was generally supported.

There was mixed feedback about floodplains, with general support for removing unapproved floodplain structures but differing views about fully implementing the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Program.

Consultation feedback

Supporting ecological and environmental resilience

- There was general support for measures in the strategy aimed at protecting and sustaining healthy and resilient ecosystems, native fish and biodiversity.
- Reviewing water sharing plans to ensure they include measures aimed at protecting environmental assets and cultural values was supported.
- Conducting further research and investigation into environmental water management was also supported.
- The role of environmental water advisory groups was raised, including questions around terms of reference, membership and operation.
- Actions and measures aimed at restoring, protecting and conserving ecosystem function and health were supported.
- There was interest in understanding how aquatic life has recovered since previous droughts, and suggestions for key learnings to be applied for future protection and understanding.
- There was general support for investing in the rehabilitation of riparian areas and replanting native vegetation.

Improving connectivity

- There was support for investigating ways to improve connectivity with the Baaka/Barwon-Darling River, with many people noting the region-wide benefits this could bring.
- Some people expressed strong concern about the timing of water releases and the potential negative impacts on the environment.

- Investing in river and flow gauges was proposed as a means of improving connectivity, as was addressing the accuracy and reliability of gauges.
- It was noted that when considering the issue of connectivity, the department should consider connectivity across the entire region and not just as it relates to Tamworth.

Addressing floodplain management

- There was general support for measures aimed at removing or remediating unapproved floodplain structures, noting that this would also support flows to wetlands, aquifer recharge, and downstream connectivity.
- It was suggested that the removal of unapproved floodplain structures should occur before floodplain harvesting approvals and/or entitlements are issued.
- There was mixed feedback about fully implementing the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Program.
- While there was some support for implementing the program, there were also concerns about some aspects, including:
 - accumulating unused water over a 5 year period
 - potential environmental impacts
 - methodology used to assess entitlements in unregulated areas
 - cumulative environmental, ecological, cultural and social impacts of floodplain harvesting
 - incomplete or inaccurate floodplain mapping and data.



Theme 4: Implementing the strategy

Feedback summary

There was some interest in continued engagement with water users, stakeholders and Aboriginal communities about the strategy, both as it is being finalised and during implementation.

Some concern was expressed about the approach and structure of engagement that was conducted to support development of the strategy, with a suggestion for future engagement methods and communication materials to be more accessible and inclusive.

Consultation feedback

Engaging appropriately

- Some people felt that there should be continued engagement about the strategy, including as it is implemented, to ensure continued dialogue, transparency and accountability.
- There was some concern that engagement approaches did not always meet the needs of different stakeholders. It was suggested that future engagement be more accessible and inclusive.

Aligning the strategy

- It was observed that the strategy should align with other NSW Government water-related policies, frameworks and strategies, such as the NSW Water Strategy, Aboriginal Water Strategy, Town Water Risk Reduction Program and Water Efficiency Framework and Program.

Implementing the strategy

- Securing funding and support to implement the strategy was identified as a priority.
- There was concern from some that the language used in the strategy is unclear and does not promote accountability.
- Stakeholders emphasised that the strategy must specify how it will be monitored, evaluated and reported on to ensure it is delivered efficiently and transparently.

Feedback by actions



Feedback by actions

The strategy identified 5 water-related challenges specific to the Namoi region.

To address these challenges, it proposed a number of shortlisted actions.

This section summarises the feedback that was received during public consultation phase 2 about these actions. It has been collated from submissions, survey-style fillable forms and engagement session inputs.

However, it should be noted that indications of support for priority areas and actions reflect the sentiment of those who explicitly referenced this in their feedback. It does not indicate general support from all who made a submission, completed a fillable form or provided input at engagement sessions.

Namoi regional priority areas:

1. Support the long-term water needs of Tamworth and other towns in the region.
2. Support a growing regional community under a more variable and uncertain future climate.
3. Improve the health and resilience of water-dependent ecosystems.



Priority 1: Support the long-term water needs of Tamworth and other towns in the region

Actions shortlisted under this priority aim to:

- reduce the risk of severe restrictions and costly emergency water supply measures
- focus on a mix of demand management, efficiency, information and infrastructure initiatives
- help towns in the region to make the best use of the available water resources, and better respond to the needs of population growth and the risks associated with climate change.

Table 2 Priority 1 feedback by action

| Actions | | Summary of feedback |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Government commitment | New Dungowan Dam and Pipeline | <p>There were mixed views about the new Dungowan Dam and Pipeline. Stakeholders that support the proposed new dam noted that it could help improve Tamworth's water security and do it in a way that limits impacts on other water users. Concerns revolved around the environmental impacts of the options.</p> <p>Most stakeholders raised concerns about including the dam as a central option in addressing Tamworth's water security given the uncertainties at the time around funding sources for the dam. Since public exhibition has closed, stakeholders have requested to be kept updated on changes to the strategy.</p> |
| 1.1 | Confirming the level of water security needed to support Tamworth | <p>Support for confirming the level of water security needed to support Tamworth.</p> <p>It was suggested that this action consider determining the 'enduring level of supply' on an individual community basis and ensure that supply aligns with relevant water legislation.</p> <p>Improving resourcing for local government drought planning and staffing was also raised.</p> |
| 1.2 | Drought management planning for towns | <p>Support for improving drought management planning for towns.</p> <p>Improving resourcing for local government drought planning and staffing was raised.</p> |
| 1.3 | Stronger focus on water efficiency and demand management for towns | <p>Widespread support for strengthening focus on town water efficiency and demand management. Suggested efficiency and demand management measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – purified water recycling – reuse of storm and wastewater – water restrictions. <p>Support for community education and awareness campaigns aimed at improving water literacy and sustainable water use.</p> <p>Support for local councils to develop and implement Integrated Water Cycle Management Plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| 1.4 | Advanced water treatment facility for industries reliant on town water supplies | <p>Widespread support for developing advanced water treatment facilities for industries reliant on town water.</p> <p>Water recycling for industry were suggested as actions to support town water security.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| 1.5 | Reduce uncertainty in groundwater security for regional towns | <p>Mixed views about reducing uncertainty in groundwater security, with some noting that this must not increase towns' dependency on groundwater.</p> |

| Actions | Summary of feedback |
|---|--|
| <p>1.6 Plan for the next long-term water supply augmentation as Tamworth grows</p> | <p>Mixed views about proposed options to plan for the next long-term water supply augmentation, plus:</p> <p>Water treatment facilities</p> <p>Strong support for water recycling and reuse of storm and wastewater as well as calls for government to fast-track community engagement and educational programs to support this.</p> <p>Pipeline from Namoi Valley dams to Tamworth with an increased storage reserve</p> <p>Mixed views about transferring water from the Namoi catchment to the Peel catchment, with concerns about potential impacts on Namoi general security licence holders and that transferring water from Namoi to the Peel Valley may result in declining populations and economic activity in smaller regional towns in the Namoi. Support for this action stemmed from its ability to increase water security for Manilla and Tamworth.</p> <p>Pipeline from Manning Valley to Peel Valley</p> <p>Mixed views about this action, with suggestions that the economic and environmental costs and benefits of such pipelines needed careful evaluation, as did the potential impacts on surface and groundwater systems.</p> <p>Support for this action centred on its potential to help address water security challenges in the Peel Valley without impacting the broader Namoi. Concerns focused on the potential for adverse environmental and local ecosystem impacts and whether this may result in water being diverted from existing water users.</p> <p>Increase the water reserved for Tamworth in Chaffey Dam</p> <p>Wide opposition to this action; in part due to concerns that it will result in a reduction of general security allocations and negatively impact water users in the region.</p> <p>It was suggested that reduced water from general security allocations could not be offset by additional water from off-allocation licences. Additional water during high flows would require larger on-farm storages which may not be physically feasible in the Peel catchment. Others raised that impacts on environmental water holders and planned environmental water would need to be carefully considered. There were suggestions that this option could be pursued through a flexible and innovative approach.</p> <p>Additional options</p> <p>It was suggested that the strategy could explore options to use the Chaffey Dam pipeline, including increasing the use of the pipeline in wetter years.</p> |
| <p>1.7 Addressing water-related skills shortages in small councils</p> | <p>Support for addressing water-related skills shortages in small councils. Improving resourcing for local government drought planning and staffing was again raised.</p> |

Priority 2: Support a growing regional economy under a more variable and uncertain future climate

Actions shortlisted under this priority aim to:

- improve the evidence and information base to support decision-making, risk management and innovation
- explore opportunities to make sure the water entitlement and access framework can cater to the development of emerging industries, facilitating access to higher-security water while observing legislated limits to take
- support Aboriginal people to be more involved in water management, by sharing their traditional knowledge and contributing to decision-making.

Based on feedback from consultation, the wording of Priority 2 has been updated in the Namoi Regional Water Strategy to recognise the actions listed under this priority have broader applications and benefits across different parts of the community.

Table 3 Priority 2 feedback by action

| Actions | Summary of feedback |
|---|--|
| 2.1 Invest in continuous improvement to surface water system modelling in the Namoi region | <p>Support for improved modelling and information sharing and for installing additional river flow gauges is also supported.</p> <p>Some stakeholders noted that there was limited trust in the Namoi River system model and requested additional information on how it was being developed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| 2.2 Accelerate investment in groundwater modelling in the Namoi region | <p>General support for accelerating investment in groundwater modelling to improve understanding of groundwater.</p> <p>Stakeholders in the Peel Valley requested that the Peel Alluvium groundwater model be ‘ground-truthed’ based on consultation with licence holders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| 2.3 Improve the participation of Aboriginal people in water management in the Namoi region | <p>General support for improving the involvement of Aboriginal people in water management and increasing Aboriginal people’s access to water.</p> <p>General agreement that understanding and respecting Aboriginal knowledge is important.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| 2.4 Improve public access to climate information and water availability forecasts | <p>Support for improving public access to climate information and water availability forecasts.</p> <p>Agreement that increasing information sharing and improving modelling is important.</p> <p>Some requests for an early indication of water allocations ahead of the 1 July start of the water year. Other people requested more sophisticated methods of notifying licence holders when ‘commence to pump’ and ‘cease to pump’ thresholds were triggered in unregulated rivers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| 2.5 Undertake research to inform reviews of groundwater extraction limits | <p>General support for undertaking research and improving the accuracy of modelling to inform reviews.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| 2.6 Review the water allocation rules for licences in the Peel Alluvium | <p>Mixed views about reviewing water allocation rules for licences in the Peel Alluvium, with some stakeholders suggesting the level of connectivity between the Peel Alluvium and Peel river needs to be further investigated before rule changes are considered.</p> |

| Actions | Summary of feedback |
|--|---|
| <p>2.7 Address risks associated with potential future activation of underused licences in the Peel Valley</p> | <p>Mixed views about addressing risks associated with potential future activation of underused licences in the Peel Valley.</p> <p>While there was support for this action, as it could improve the management of water usage in the Peel Valley, others felt that the risks are small. It was suggested that the department focus on developing trigger points for when/if review of licences is necessary.</p> <p>Note that this action has been removed from the strategy following further analysis suggesting that the risk of activation of underused licences in the Peel Valley is small in the medium term.</p> |
| <p>2.8 Make provision for voluntary licence conversions</p> | <p>Concern about voluntary licence conversions due to potential impacts on General Security Licence holders.</p> <p>It was noted that this action requires further investigation and consultation with the community and licence holders before progressing.</p> <p>Note that this action has been removed from the strategy based on stakeholder consultation.</p> |
| <p>2.9 Support the development of new Aboriginal business opportunities in the Namoi region</p> | <p>General support for developing new Aboriginal business opportunities and increasing opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in water management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| <p>2.10 Improve outcomes for Aboriginal people through place-based initiatives</p> | <p>Support for improving outcomes for Aboriginal people through place-based initiatives.</p> <p>Support for creating opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in training and employment programs (e.g. River Rangers Program) and recognising and respecting Aboriginal knowledge and culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| <p>2.11 Support increased investment and research into industry climate adaptation</p> | <p>Support for increased investment and research into industry climate adaptation, including improving industry water efficiency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| <p>2.12 Increase transparency in the management of groundwater resources in the Namoi region</p> | <p>General support for increased transparency and improvements to the way that groundwater resources are managed in the Namoi.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| <p>2.13 Investigate managed aquifer recharge in the Namoi region</p> | <p>Mixed views about investigating managed aquifer recharge, with suggestions that the cost, benefits and environmental impacts should be carefully considered before investigations proceed.</p> |
| <p>2.14 Ensure water can support sustainable economic diversification and transitioning economies</p> | <p>Mixed views about sustainable economic diversification and transitioning economies.</p> <p>General concern/opposition to coal seam gas and mining projects and other water-intensive industries. However, there was support for implementing measures aimed at improving the water-use efficiency of industries.</p> |

Priority 3: Improve the health and resilience of water-dependent ecosystems

Actions shortlisted under this priority aim to:

- achieve shared benefits from water delivery and maximise environmental, social, cultural, and economic outcomes when water is used
- limit or remove pressures and impacts directly related to water infrastructure
- improve the health of water resources through better land management
- build knowledge and understanding of the region's surface water-dependent and groundwater-dependent ecosystems and assets and the impacts of climate change on their health and resilience
- improve connectivity with the Barwon-Darling River on a multi-valley scale.

Table 4 Priority 3 feedback by action

| Actions | Summary of feedback |
|--|--|
| 3.1 Assess gaps in the flow regime that are preventing achievement of environmental watering objectives and identify cooperative actions to improve ecological outcomes | Support for assessing gaps in the flow regime and identifying cooperative actions to improve ecological outcomes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| 3.2 Identify regionally significant riparian, wetland and floodplain areas to protect or rehabilitate | General support for identifying regionally significant riparian, wetland and floodplain areas to protect or rehabilitate. Protecting fish habitat and migration was also supported. |
| 3.3 Mitigate the impacts of water infrastructure on native fish | General support for mitigating the impacts of water infrastructure on native fish. Support for protecting fish habitat, fish migration and the health of rivers. |
| 3.4 Fully implement the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Program | Concern about fully implementing the NSW Floodplain Harvesting Program, including the potential for negative impacts on the environment and water availability. Stakeholders noted the importance of assessing the cumulative environmental, cultural and socio-economic impacts of floodplain harvesting. |
| 3.5 Remediate unapproved floodplain structures | General support for remediating unapproved floodplain structures, particularly before floodplain harvesting entitlements and/or approvals are granted. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |
| 3.6 Improve understanding of water use and water quality at priority locations in the Namoi | General support for improving understanding of water use and quality at priority locations. Support for protecting fish habitat and fish migration. |
| 3.7 Investigate ways to improve connectivity with the Barwon-Darling River on a multi-valley scale | Support for investigating ways to improve connectivity with the Barwon-Darling River on a multi-valley scale. However, concern was raised that the focus on regional development and growth may concentrate water use and demand in the upper Namoi catchment at the expense of the lower catchment. Stakeholders felt it was important for there to be an adequate end-of-system flow target and a rules-based approach in the strategy to support fair access when possible. |
| 3.8 Increase our knowledge of groundwater in the Namoi region | General support for increasing groundwater knowledge. The importance of investing in greater research and mapping about groundwater dependent ecosystems was noted. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i> |

Suggested additional actions

Some respondents suggested additional actions that they felt could be considered as part of the feedback process:

Table 5 Suggested additional actions

| Actions | Feedback |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Water and climate trigger | Suggestion for a 'water and climate trigger alert' for industries that impact the community and environmental wellbeing and/or exacerbate climate change. |
| Review of environmental management | Suggestion to review the environmental management of floodplains and plateaus in the upper Namoi. |
| Growth of Tamworth | Suggestion to provide a cap on the growth of Tamworth. |



Horse in water, Namoi region.



More information:

water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/plans-and-programs/regional-water-strategies