

# Draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy



What we heard

Public consultation: October – November 2022 and September – November 2023

Publication date: January 2024





# Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Government acknowledges First Nations people as the 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 Nari Nari, Ngiyampaa, Wiradjuri, Barkandji, Maljangapa and Yita Yita people as having an intrinsic connection with the lands and waters of the Lachlan Regional Water Strategy area. The landscape and its waters provide the First Nations people with essential links to their history and help them maintain and practice their traditional culture and lifestyle.

We recognise the Traditional Owners as the first managers of Country. Incorporating their culture and knowledge into management of water in the region is a significant step towards 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 and present 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 the regional water strategy, we commit to helping support the health and wellbeing of waterways and Country by valuing, respecting and being guided by First Nations people, 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 all communities.

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Draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy  
What we heard

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Note: From the time of writing this report the department has changed its name to the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

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# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
Background	5
Consultation	7
<b>Feedback by priority area</b>	<b>14</b>
Priority 1: Build resilience to climate extremes	15
Priority 2: Improve catchment health	20
Priority 3: Supporting a strong and sustainable economy in a capped system	23
Other feedback	26
Suggested additional actions	27
Feedback on options not progressed in consultation draft	27
<b>Next steps</b>	<b>28</b>

# 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.

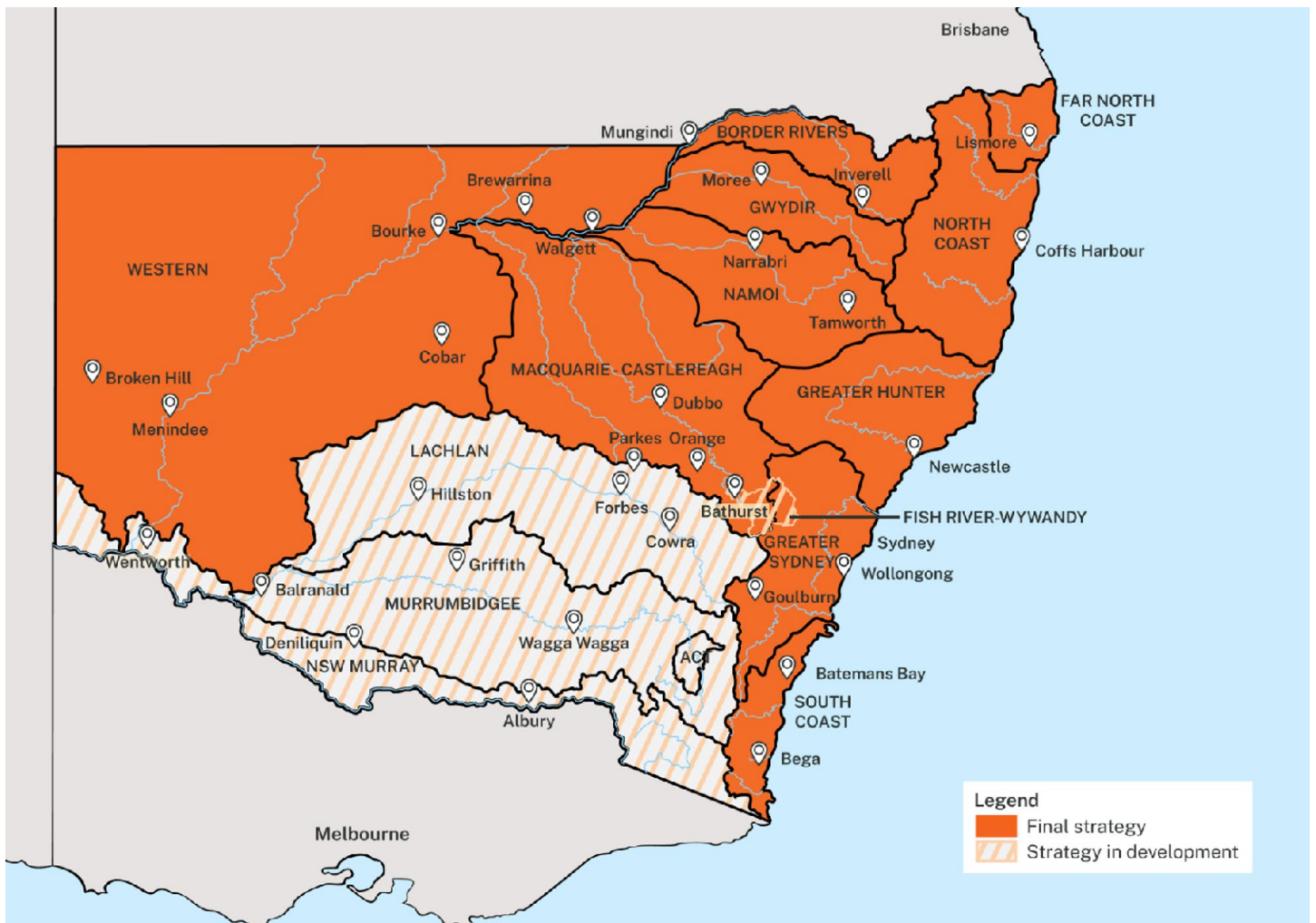
The regional water strategies adopt a long-term approach to strengthening and building the reliability and quality of the state's water resources.

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.

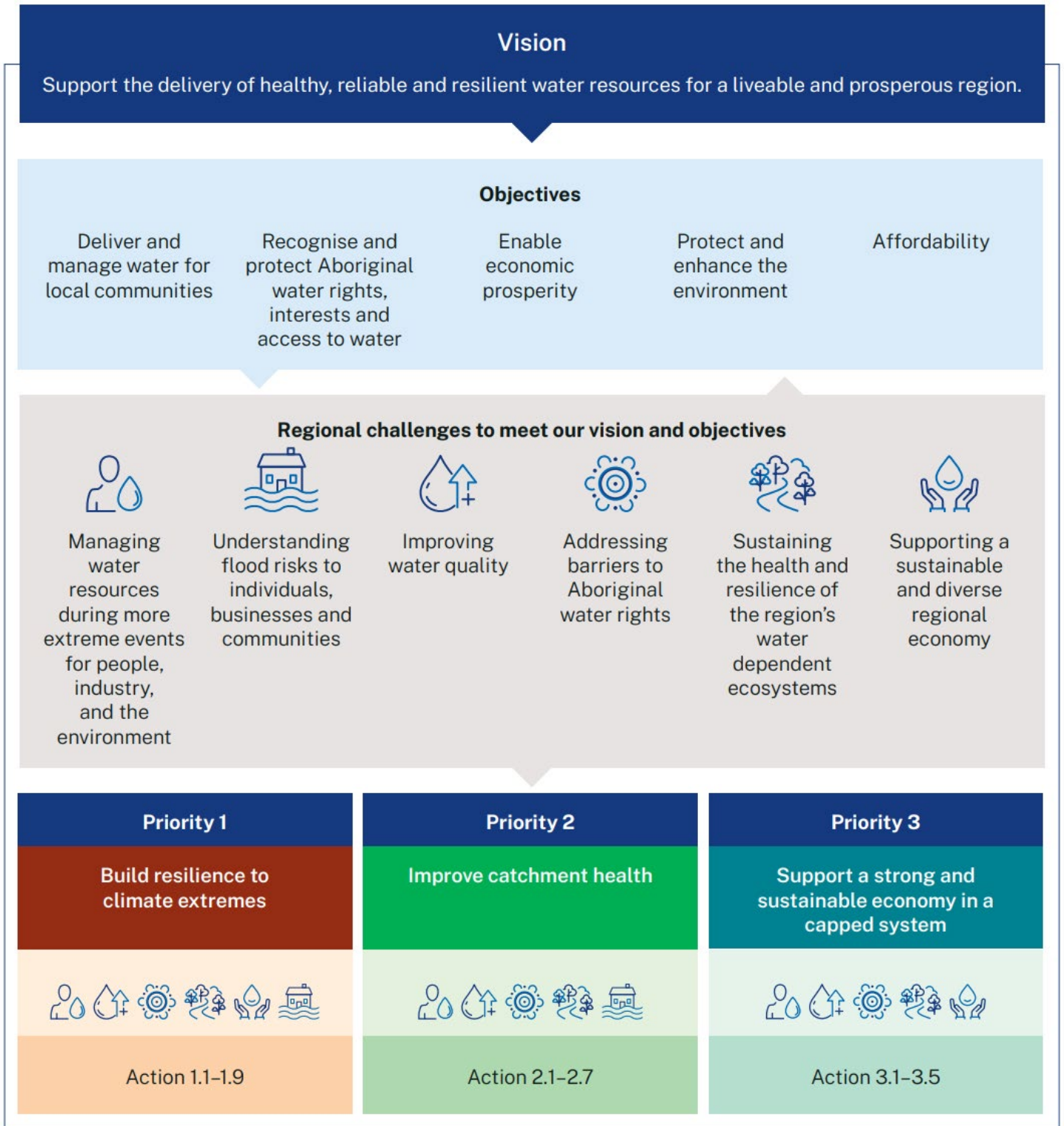
The Lachlan Regional Water Strategy (the draft strategy) examines future water-related risks and challenges in the region and the actions that need to be taken to manage water availability and security risks.

The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) has taken a staged approach to develop the draft 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** Lachlan Regional Water Strategy: overview of strategy vision, objectives, water security challenges and priorities





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# Consultation

The draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy has been 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 over three stages, from late 2020 to late 2023.

### Community consultation on long list of options to address regional challenges (2020)

The [draft strategy](#) was first placed on public exhibition from 25 September to 13 December 2020. It included detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities in the Lachlan region as well as a long list of options with the potential to address challenges and opportunities relating to water supply, reliability, and security in flood and drought.

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

### Community consultation on shortlisted actions to address regional challenges (2022 and 2023)

Following the first round of consultation and further technical analysis, the long list of options was distilled into 20 proposed shortlisted actions designed to address water security priorities and challenges specific to the Lachlan region. The draft strategy was placed on public exhibition from 5 October to 18 November 2022.

Due to the extensive flooding events that impacted communities across the Lachlan region in October and November 2022, a decision was made by the department to re-exhibit the draft strategy in 2023. The further consultation would enable interested stakeholders to engage with, consider, and respond to the draft strategy under more appropriate circumstances.

No actions from the 2022 draft strategy were removed in the 2023 draft. However, a series of updates were made to the draft strategy ahead of the 2023 round of consultation, including:

- minor changes to the wording of some actions
- consolidation of Priority 4 (improving knowledge) into Priorities 1 and 2
- a new proposed action relating to flooding.

The updated draft strategy – comprising an [Executive Summary](#) and [Consultation Paper](#) – was placed on public exhibition from 22 September to 12 November 2023. During public consultation, the department engaged with:

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

See Figures 4, 5 and 6 for a summary of engagement activities and participation.



Figure 3 Regional water strategy implementation process



Image courtesy of Destination NSW



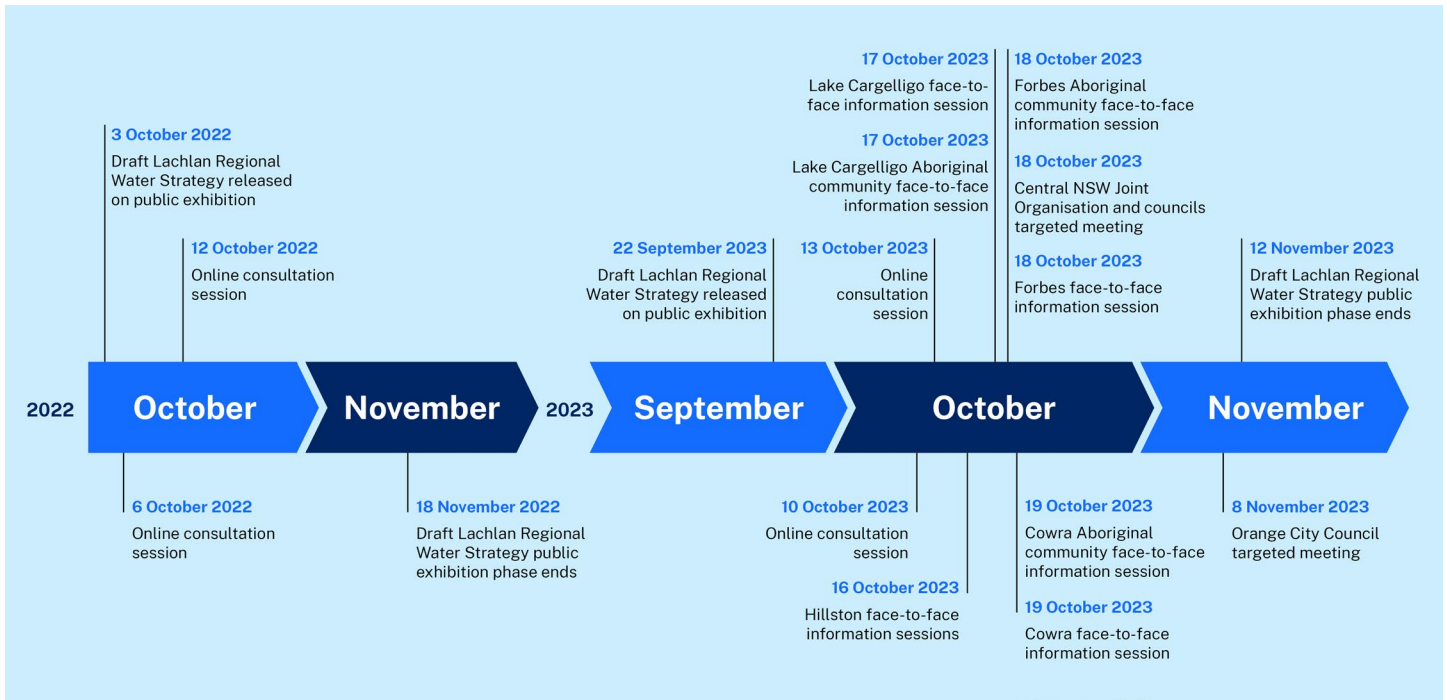
# Feedback

During public consultation in this phase, the department received 25 formal submissions and over 80 people participated in engagement sessions about the draft strategy.

Feedback ranged from general commentary about water-related issues, such as water security, flood mitigation, and supporting catchment and river health, to specific feedback about the proposed shortlisted actions.

This report summarises what we heard during the public consultation on shortlisted actions in both 2022 and 2023. It includes input and analysis from fillable forms and submissions as well as informal feedback and insights from the public and targeted information sessions.

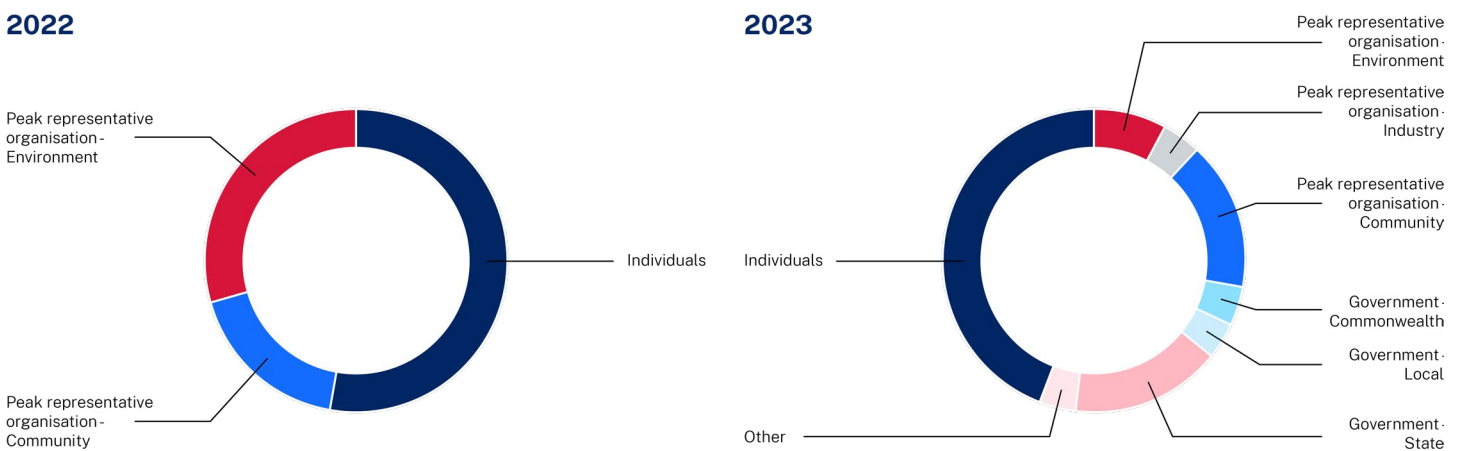
**Figure 4** Lachlan public consultation on shortlisted actions: timeline of activities (2022 and 2023)



**Figure 5** Lachlan public consultation on shortlisted actions: 2022 and 2023 engagement at a glance



**Figure 6** Overview of submissions by stakeholder type





## What we heard: a snapshot

Feedback indicated general support for the priority areas and a majority of proposed actions identified in the draft strategy, with qualified support in response to other areas. Some stakeholders raised concerns about specific actions or requested that certain options which were not shortlisted be reconsidered.

A snapshot of feedback by priority area is provided below and explored throughout this report.

## What we will do

We will use this feedback to shape the final Lachlan Regional Water Strategy and develop its supporting implementation plan. We will undertake targeted engagement with stakeholders before the final strategy is released.

Themes	Key feedback
 <b>Priority 1: Build resilience to climate extremes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Strengthen flood management</b></li><li>• <b>Enhance town water security and improve coordination between state and local government</b></li><li>• <b>Investigate groundwater use and availability</b></li><li>• <b>Develop ongoing arrangements for participation of local Aboriginal people in water management</b></li></ul>	<p>There was widespread concern about flooding across the Lachlan valley, with the role of local councils and state agencies, management of existing infrastructure, and suggestions for further flood mitigation measures, discussed by several stakeholders.</p> <p>Enhancing town water security was widely supported, as was improving understanding and management of groundwater; however, there was concern about ensuring this was done in a sustainable manner.</p> <p>Improved coordination between state government and local councils in relation to drought planning and flood mitigation planning was seen as critical but there were differing views on how this should occur.</p> <p>Adequately acknowledging projected population growth within the draft strategy was also considered important, as was better integrating land use planning processes to consider water management and river health.</p> <p>There was strong support for the development of ongoing arrangements for participation of local Aboriginal people in water management.</p>
 <b>Priority 2: Improve catchment health</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Support catchment and ecosystem health</b></li><li>• <b>Manage the environmental impact of structures</b></li><li>• <b>Support place-based initiatives to deliver cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people</b></li></ul>	<p>The focus on catchment and river health was generally supported. Salinity and erosion, sand slugs, loss of instream pools and streambank habitat, were seen as key issues to be addressed through a multi-agency, community and adjoining landholder approach.</p> <p>Upgrading regulating structures was also supported, but there was concern about the associated cost and funding. The importance of conducting thorough environmental assessment of re-regulating structures before implementation occurs was noted.</p> <p>There was strong support for place-based initiatives to deliver cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people.</p>

## Themes

## Key feedback



### Priority 3: Supporting a strong and sustainable economy in a capped system

- Understand water use and availability
- Share climate data and information
- Manage water with economic and population growth
- Support employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal people in the Lachlan region

Increasing the understanding of water use and availability through reviewing extraction limits was considered important, as was reclassifying environmental water as high security.

There was support for sharing climate information, data and modelling, and making it more accessible and useful to a variety of stakeholders groups, including councils and businesses.

There was widespread support for employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal people in the Lachlan region.

There was concern that the draft strategy does not do enough to support general security licence holders, and that they may also bear the cost of implementing strategy actions and policy settings through increased user charges.

Investigating certain water infrastructure projects further was considered important by some stakeholders, especially as the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising Project is not proceeding.



### Other feedback

- Engage appropriately and effectively
- Improve engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders
- Align the strategy with other plans and strategies
- Effective governance, transparency and accountability

There was support for ongoing consultation in implementing the final strategy, and for the timing and duration of the consultation and public exhibition periods to be given further consideration.

Appropriate engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders needs to be undertaken before finalisation of the strategy and during implementation.

Better explaining alignment between the draft strategy and other water-related plans and strategies was considered important, as was effective governance, transparency, and accountability in relation to the final strategy and its actions.



Image courtesy of the department



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# Feedback by priority area



Image courtesy of Kevin Roche



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## Feedback by priority area

This section summarises feedback from public consultation by each of the priority areas within the draft strategy.

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

Each area discusses issues as expressed by respondents.

### Aboriginal water management feedback

There was general support for the three Aboriginal water management actions in the draft strategy. However, the department recognises the limited engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders undertaken to date on the draft Lachlan RWS consultation paper (noting that face to face engagement coincided with the post-Voice referendum period).

Further engagement will be undertaken in early 2024 to reach Aboriginal stakeholders and incorporate their perspectives prior to finalisation of the strategy.

### The Wyangala Dam Wall Raising Project

In September 2023, the NSW Government announced that the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising project would not proceed as the Final Business Case and a subsequent review by Infrastructure NSW clearly show that it is not viable economically, financially, or environmentally.

While the NSW Government's decision is final, stakeholder views will be considered in finalising the Lachlan Regional Water Strategy.

There was significant feedback about the project, with mixed views about the decision. Respondents in the lower Lachlan were generally supportive of the government's decision not to proceed with the project, while submitters from the mid and upper Lachlan areas were generally opposed to the decision.

Support for the government's decision was largely based on concerns that water retained in the dam would not flow to communities and critical environmental areas in the lower Lachlan.

Opposition to the government's decision was centred around concerns relating to water security and reduced flood mitigation. There was also concern that the cost of flooding had not been appropriately considered in modelling for the project. Some stakeholders suggested additional actions to address water security and flooding are required, including the further consideration of infrastructure options which were not shortlisted (such as the Lower Lachlan Efficiency Measures and a new Belubula weir).

There were calls for the Wyangala Dam safety upgrades to be progressed despite the decision not to proceed with the project, due to the potentially catastrophic impact of dam failure.





## Priority 1: Build resilience to climate extremes

### Feedback summary

There was widespread concern about flooding across the Lachlan valley, with the role of local councils and state agencies, management of existing infrastructure, and suggestions for further flood mitigation measures discussed by several stakeholders.

Enhancing town water security was widely supported, as was improving understanding and management of groundwater; however, there was concern about ensuring this was done in a sustainable manner.

Improved coordination between state government and local councils in relation to drought planning and flood mitigation planning was seen as critical but there were differing views on how this should occur.

Adequately acknowledging projected population growth within the draft strategy was considered important, as was better integrating land use planning processes to consider water management and river health.

There was strong support for the development of ongoing arrangements for participation of local Aboriginal people in water management.

### Actions shortlisted under this priority will:

- build climate resilience through better integrating regional and local strategic water management activities and improved coordination during extreme events
- improve our hydrological modelling capabilities, including scoping a program of works to build a new model for the Upper Lachlan to investigate water security risks to towns and communities in the Upper Lachlan
- support Aboriginal people to be more involved in water management, by better valuing their traditional knowledge and contributing to decision-making
- improve our understanding of important groundwater sources and investigate opportunities to expand the existing regional water supply grid
- improving our understanding and management of groundwater resources in the Lachlan region
- enhance the existing support provided by various state agencies to local councils with respect to flood risk management planning, through ongoing direct support and improved coordination
- better integrating strategic water and land management planning to protect water resources in the Lachlan region.

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## Priority 1: Consultation feedback by theme

### Strengthen flood management

- There was widespread concern about flooding from stakeholders across the Lachlan valley, with the economic impacts of flooding specifically raised in relation to Hillston, Condobolin, Forbes and Cowra (and surrounding areas).
- There was concern that management of existing infrastructure (including dam operation rules) is contributing to the severity of flood events
- Supporting local councils to improve flood risk management was endorsed by some, while others suggested a 'top-down' approach.
- Improved coordination and decision making across government and support agencies, such as the State Emergency Service and NSW Reconstruction Authority, was considered important to strengthen flood management.
- There was concern that the cost of flooding had not been appropriately considered in modelling for the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising project, and that flood mitigation opportunities will not be realised as the project is not proceeding.
- It was suggested that further flood mitigation measures could include connecting Bundaburra and Jemalong Creek and developing a new flood routing methodology.
- The location and condition of key council infrastructure for flood risk and mitigation planning was considered important, including approval of structures installed during emergencies.

### Enhance town water security and improve coordination between state and local government

- There was widespread support for enhancing town water security, with councils expressing the view that urgent action is needed to address town water security risks, supported by strategic actions to address longer-term risk.
- There were suggestions for the development of education initiatives to shift expectations and attitudes around water use, and use of a range of demand management and efficiency measures.
- There was strong support from local councils for expanding the regional water supply grid and using groundwater to enhance water security. Involving local councils in discussions and decision-making about these measures was considered important. However, some other stakeholders expressed concern that these measures could result in negative impacts on the environment or other water users, especially in dry times.
- There was strong opposition from councils and other stakeholders in the Lachlan region to the transfer of water out of the Lachlan valley. However, some councils in the Macquarie-Castlereagh region expressed interest in exploring such an approach.
- Councils and other stakeholders raised a number of pipeline projects as being important for town and general water security (e.g. water piped into the Lachlan Valley from the Murrumbidgee or extending the Central Tablelands Water pipeline network to enhance Wyangala Dam as a regional water source).
- It was suggested that purified water recycling should be a high priority. Other suggested measures to enhance town water security included mandatory rainwater tanks on all new buildings and replacing evaporative air conditioners with solar powered, reverse cycle air conditioners.
- Introducing policy and triggers to enable water for critical human needs under the *Water Management Act 2000* in times of shortages and renewing the B-Section pipeline (Forbes to Tottenham) to improve town water supply were also suggested.
- There was widespread support for the establishment of a coordination approach involving all levels of government, to address water security and flood related actions in the draft strategy. Local government stakeholders expressed strong views about how this should be implemented and emphasised that the approach should be designed to endure beyond political cycles.
- Some stakeholders suggested a broader coordination approach be established, involving more diverse stakeholders (e.g. residents, water licence holders, community groups, mines).



## Investigate groundwater use and availability

- There was support for improving understanding and management of groundwater. However, there was concern about increasing reliance on groundwater for town water supply on the basis of equity and potential environmental impacts.
- The coordinated use of surface water and groundwater to secure long term water supplies was suggested. This may involve developing a conjunctive use draft strategy that is controlled and supported by water access rules in water sharing plans.
- There was support for research into the impact of extraction and permanent aquifer drawdown on groundwater dependent ecosystems.
- Conducting further investigation into managed aquifer recharge was supported by some.

## Develop ongoing arrangements for participation of local Aboriginal people

- There was strong support for participation of local Aboriginal people in water management.
- Working closely with local Aboriginal communities to recognise their strong connection to the river and their cultural responsibility to care for it, as well as to increase understanding of Aboriginal knowledge and culture, were considered important.
- There was some concern that there has not been real progress on this issue within the recent political term and that the water management system is difficult to navigate.

## Priority 1: Detailed feedback by action

Actions	Summary of feedback
<b>1.1 Establish a coordination approach involving all levels of government, to implement local council and town water-related actions under Priority 1</b>	<p>There was widespread support for a coordinated approach across all levels of government to address water security and flood related actions in the strategy, particularly from councils and Central NSW Joint Organisation of Councils.</p> <p>Councils and Central NSW Joint Organisation of Councils expressed strong views about the potential scope of the coordination approach and how it should operate. This included having an independent chair and direct accountability to the Minister for Water.</p> <p>It was emphasised that drought and flooding issues should be addressed separately and the governance of such an approach must endure beyond the changeable nature of government leadership.</p> <p>The issues faced by the Lachlan region were identified as being complex and multifaceted. As such, some stakeholders suggested a broader coordination approach be established, involving more diverse stakeholders (e.g., residents, water licence holders, community groups, miners) representing various disciplines (environment, public health, engineering).</p> <p>It was suggested that a stakeholder engagement plan be developed to support the implementation of the strategy, recognising the diverse engagement needs of individual strategy actions.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<b>1.2 Support councils to improve flood risk management in the Lachlan region</b>	<p>There was widespread support for helping councils to improve flood risk management. Further detail was requested on how this will be achieved, noting that collaboration between state and local governments, joint organisations and the community is critical.</p> <p>There was strong concern about recent flood events, with suggestions for a new flood routing methodology, assessment of key council infrastructure and recognition of water infrastructure as essential public assets under the NSW Disaster Assistance Arrangements and Australian Government's Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements eligibility list.</p> <p>There was also concern that the management of existing infrastructure (including dam operation rules) may be contributing to the severity of flood events.</p> <p>The location and condition of key council infrastructure for flood risk and mitigation planning were also considered important.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>

Actions	Summary of feedback
<p><b>1.3 Upgrade the existing hydrological models for the Lachlan catchment to better represent river operations and drought contingency measures</b></p>	<p>There was strong support for upgrading existing hydrological models to represent river operations and drought contingency measures better.</p> <p>Engaging with local communities and government regarding data and modelling was considered important, as was expanding modelling to include groundwater connectivity and water quality.</p> <p>It was also noted that when progressing this action, it is important to recognise that the ‘worst case scenario’ modelled may not occur.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>1.4 Develop ongoing arrangements for participation of local Aboriginal people in water management</b></p>	<p>There was strong support for participation of local Aboriginal people in water management.</p> <p>Working closely with local Aboriginal communities to recognise their strong connection to the river and their cultural responsibility to care for it, as well as to increase understanding of Aboriginal knowledge and culture, were considered important.</p> <p>There was support for encouraging participation in water management in accordance with the requirements under the Water Management Act 2000 and broadly in line with Objective 15 of Closing the Gap<sup>1</sup>.</p> <p>There was some concern that there has not been real progress on this issue within the recent political term and that the water management system is difficult to navigate.</p>
<p><b>1.5 Support groundwater use for towns and communities</b></p>	<p>There was general support for using groundwater for towns and communities.</p> <p>Whilst some respondents felt using groundwater is critical for the future of the region, others felt there should not be further reliance on groundwater sources and suggested that the focus should be on demand management and efficiency measures. Others expressed strong concerns about the potential environmental impacts of increased groundwater usage</p> <p>Further modelling and understanding of groundwater were considered important before progressing (proposed action 1.8 was seen as a precursor to this action).</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>1.6 Investigate water security for small and remote communities</b></p>	<p>There was widespread support for investigating water security for small and remote communities.</p> <p>A range of potential solutions were suggested, including large-scale pipelines, as well as more localised, small-scale solutions such as the installation of rainwater tanks. The importance of education initiatives about water usage was also highlighted.</p> <p>Developing sanitation infrastructure and maintenance of existing water infrastructure were also considered important.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters.



Actions	Summary of feedback
<p><b>1.7 Investigate the need to further expand the regional water supply grid</b></p>	<p>There were mixed views about further expanding the regional water supply grid, with strong support from local councils but strong opposition from some stakeholders relating to potential environmental impacts.</p> <p>Councils and other stakeholders in the region generally opposed the transfer of water from the Lachlan Valley to other regions, but some councils outside of the region were keen to investigate such transfers. It was also suggested that water could be piped into the Lachlan Valley from the Murrumbidgee.</p> <p>Councils and other stakeholders raised a number of projects for consideration under this action as being important for town and general water security.</p> <p>Some respondents regarded this action as the highest priority within the draft strategy, while others felt this action would not address critical human needs when the region is in drought and instead suggested that the focus should be on demand management and efficiency measures.</p> <p>There was support for improving the efficiency of the grid, reducing leaks, and continued strategic planning, expansion, and upgrades to the grid, and reviewing capacity to meet drought resilience in the long term.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>1.8 Improve the understanding and management of groundwater resources in the Lachlan region</b></p>	<p>There was widespread support for improving understanding and management of groundwater resources, with several stakeholders identifying this action as critical.</p> <p>Undertaking a verification process to understand the level of dependence of groundwater ecosystems was considered important, as was investigating the opportunity for conjunctive use of surface water and groundwater.</p> <p>There was concern about promoting increased consumption of groundwater, particularly in relation to environmental impacts.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>1.9 Better integrate strategic land and water planning</b></p>	<p>There was widespread support for better integrating strategic land and water planning.</p> <p>This action was strongly supported by councils and was seen to assist local water utilities with their strategic planning. Councils raised concerns about discrepancies between local council and NSW Government planning assumptions relating to population growth.</p> <p>It was suggested that land and water management is a community and government issue, with whole of catchment education programs linking water resilience with land use planning deemed necessary.</p> <p>It was suggested that liveability should also be a key consideration in land use and water planning.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>



## Priority 2: Improve catchment health

### Feedback summary

The focus on catchment and river health was generally supported. Salinity and erosion, sand slugs, loss of instream pools and streambank habitat were seen as key issues to be addressed through a multi-agency, community and adjoining landholder approach.

Upgrading regulating structures was also supported, but there was concern about the associated cost and funding. The importance of conducting thorough environmental assessment of re-regulating structures before implementation occurs was noted.

There was strong support for place-based initiatives to deliver cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people.

### Actions shortlisted under this priority focus on:

- supporting natural resource management activities in the upper and lower Lachlan region
- addressing existing water quality issues in the region
- protecting important cultural assets and supporting co-benefit outcomes of the use of environmental water where feasible
- removing constraints and impediments to environmental water delivery
- updating our floodplain management plans and address unapproved and non-compliant structures on floodplains.



Image courtesy of Kevin Roche



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## Priority 2: Consultation feedback by theme

### Support catchment and ecosystem health

- There was support for the draft strategy's strong focus on catchment health; however, some stakeholders felt the draft strategy is unduly weighted towards the environment (over water security and economic prosperity, for example).
- Managing river health was considered critical, with the river identified as central to the catchment.
- Increasing environmental water availability to build river ecosystem resilience and mitigate against a drying climate was supported by some. Understanding how climate change will impact environmental watering requirements was also supported.
- Salinity and erosion were seen as key issues to address, noting the significant cost and time required to resolve these issues.
- It was suggested that a multi-agency, community and adjoining landholder approach is required to manage streambank erosion, sand slugs, loss of native fish habitat (e.g. instream pools) and streambank habitat across the catchment.
- There were suggestions to potentially frame actions to complement the Long Term Water Plan.
- There were additional areas of environmental significance considered important to acknowledge in the draft strategy. These include the old redgum communities along the length of the Lachlan, the Kangaroo-Boyd to Wyangala corridor in the upper Lachlan, and remnant Yellow Box and Blakely's Redgum Communities on rocky outcrops on the floodplain below Cowra.

### Manage the environmental impact of structures

- Conducting thorough environmental assessment of re-regulating structures before installation occurs was considered important by a number of stakeholders.
- There was support for upgrading regulating structures, qualified with concern about the associated cost and how this work would be funded.
- Establishing fish passages and undertaking additional fish monitoring to provide more up-to-date information on native fish populations were supported.
- The importance of ensuring that the flow of water to protected areas is maintained and not inhibited by new or unapproved floodplain structures was noted.
- Some councils also noted that certain infrastructure they constructed during emergencies requires retrospective approval.

### Support place-based initiatives to deliver cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people

- There was strong support for place-based initiatives to deliver cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people. Involving Aboriginal people in decision-making was supported, with sound oversight and governance recommended.
- There was a suggestion to include an action to develop a plan to source water entitlements for cultural flows.



## Priority 2: Detailed feedback by action

Actions	Summary of feedback
<p><b>2.1 Reduce salinity and soil erosion in the Upper Lachlan and Belubula catchment</b></p>	<p>There was widespread support for reducing salinity and soil erosion throughout the catchment.</p> <p>Organisations such as Hovells Creek Landcare were recognised for their work coordinating soil erosion control programs. Existing land management stewardship programs managed by the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust were also highlighted.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>2.2 Protect and rehabilitate regionally significant riparian and instream habitats in the regulated Lachlan River</b></p>	<p>There was widespread support for protecting and rehabilitating regionally significant riparian and instream habitats.</p> <p>It was suggested that this action include fencing off riparian areas and considers detailed hydrological and ecological studies of the river corridor as a first step. Developing an aerial map to indicate projects was also recommended.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>2.3 Upgrade and automate existing public re-regulating structures in the mid- and lower Lachlan to build the functional resilience of critical ecosystems</b></p>	<p>There was general support for upgrading and automating public re-regulating structures.</p> <p>Conducting a thorough environmental assessment prior to installation, upgrade or automation was considered critical.</p> <p>There was concern about the cost and funding for this action and concern about the potential installation of new structures.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>2.4 Mitigate the impact of water infrastructure and disruption of natural flows on native fish</b></p>	<p>There was widespread support for mitigating the impact of water infrastructure and disruption of natural flows on native fish.</p> <p>Removal of unnecessary weirs was considered important, as was establishing a balance between allowing the river to run and delivery of water and fish habitat.</p> <p>There was a suggestion that one of the benefits to raising Wyangala Dam was improved cold water pollution mitigation.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>2.5 Review and evaluate the Lake Brewster Water Efficiency Project</b></p>	<p>There was widespread support for reviewing and evaluating the Lake Brewster Water Efficiency Project.</p> <p>Understanding the trade-off between wetland values, delivering customer services, and the impact of carp was considered important. It was suggested that this action may be more suited to Priority 1 or 3, as the contribution of the project to water efficiency is in facilitating extractive uses.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>2.6 Support place-based initiatives to deliver cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people</b></p>	<p>There was strong support for place-based initiatives to deliver cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people. Involving Aboriginal people in decision-making was supported, with sound oversight and governance recommended.</p> <p>There was a suggestion to include an action to develop a plan to source water entitlements for cultural flows.</p>
<p><b>2.7 Support the development and implementation of the Lachlan Floodplain Management Plan and address floodplain structures</b></p>	<p>There was strong support for development and implementation of the Lachlan Floodplain Management Plan and addressing floodplain structures.</p> <p>An audit of structures was considered critical for identifying flood mitigation measures and understanding changes to flood behaviours.</p> <p>It was suggested that this action should ensure that flows to protected areas are maintained.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>



## Priority 3: Supporting a strong and sustainable economy in a capped system

### Feedback summary

Increasing understanding of water use and availability through reviewing extraction limits was considered important, as was reclassifying environmental water as high security.

There was support for sharing climate information, data and modelling and making it more accessible and useful to a variety of stakeholder groups, including councils and businesses.

There was concern that the draft strategy does not do enough to support general security licence holders, and that they may also bear the cost of implementing strategy actions and policy settings through increased user charges.

Investigating certain water infrastructure projects further was considered important by some stakeholders, especially as the Wyangala Dam wall raise is not proceeding.

There was widespread support for employment and business opportunities for local Aboriginal people.

### Actions shortlisted under this priority focus on:

- facilitating access to data and information to assist industry to better assess the risks and develop mitigating strategies
- exploring water use and water demand on the region's industries and their resilience to a more variable and changing climate
- advancing economic opportunities for Aboriginal people and developing culturally appropriate place-based initiatives
- improving our hydrological modelling capabilities to pursue further analysis on a range of infrastructure options that could improve system efficiencies and enhance reliability in the region.



Image courtesy of Destination NSW



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## Priority 3: Consultation feedback by theme

### Understand water use and availability

- The need to explain more clearly what underuse means in the context of an investigation of water usage in the region was highlighted by several stakeholders.
- It was suggested that the Lachlan Water Sharing Plan extraction limits be reviewed to ensure they provide a realistic estimate of water availability.
- Using available water in a sustainable manner through better management of water demand was considered important.
- It was suggested that environmental water be classified as high security and uncoupled from general security water constraints. It was noted that any actions that reduce environmental water could create additional demand on water held by environmental water managers.

### Share climate data and information

- There was support for sharing climate information, data and modelling tailored to the needs of different stakeholder groups.
- Improving the quality and range of information was considered important, as was increasing the usefulness of the information (i.e., communicating what is significant to the user, in plain language/format). There was also a desire for this information to be presented in a way that can be effectively used by councils.
- Recognising in the final strategy that the worst case climate scenario presented may not occur was considered important.
- It was suggested that a climate impact study should also consider the impact of climate change on groundwater and groundwater quality.
- There were suggestions to consider additional actions for climate change mitigation impacts, which could also deliver economic benefit to the region.

### Manage water with economic and population growth

- There was concern that the draft strategy does not adequately acknowledge projected population growth for the region.
- It was noted that to ensure water security for food and communities, there is a need to think differently about water planning and management.
- It was highlighted that demands for water are likely to become more complex, and this should be considered in the draft strategy.

- There was support for integrated land use planning processes to consider water availability and river health.
- It was suggested that the final strategy should further consider climate mitigation measures with economic benefits, such as carbon sequestration or the Blue Carbon and Teal Carbon programs.
- Understanding the economic contribution of agricultural sectors and water resource utilisation by these industries was considered important.

### Support general water security

- There was concern about conversion of general security to high security licences due to risk to ecological and cultural values and the impacts on landholders and councils.
- There was concern, especially in the upper Lachlan region, that the draft strategy does not do enough to support general security licence holders, particularly in the context of the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising Project not proceeding.
- There were also concerns that general security licence holders may bear the cost of implementing many of the actions and related policy settings in the draft strategy by way of increased water user charges.
- Some stakeholders expressed the view that the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising Project not proceeding highlights the need for other infrastructure-related options to be further considered.
- The Belubula Water Security Project was identified as an important project, with concern from some that it may not proceed.
- It was suggested that the regional water strategy options assessment process be revisited for certain infrastructure options, including the Lower Lachlan efficiency measures and a new weir in Belubula.
- While the transfer of water to other regions was widely opposed, it was suggested that additional water could be piped into the Lachlan Valley from the Murrumbidgee.

### Support employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal people in the Lachlan region

- There was widespread support for employment and business opportunities for local Aboriginal people.
- Conducting deep engagement with the community to understand desirable options and outcomes was considered important, as was establishing a strong governance and accountability framework.



## Priority 3: Detailed feedback by action

Actions	Summary of feedback
<b>3.1 Improve public access to climate information and water availability forecasts</b>	<p>There was strong support for improving public access to climate information and water availability forecasts.</p> <p>It was suggested that data be provided in a way that is accessible, useful, and meaningful to a range of users, including councils, irrigators, businesses, and the community, and tailored to their respective needs.</p>
<b>3.2 Investigate water use in the Lachlan region</b>	<p>There were mixed views in relation to investigating water use in the Lachlan region. While some stakeholders expressed support for this action, others were concerned that its intent is not clear. Some stakeholders expressed concern about how information from this investigation would be used (e.g., to justify the expansion of industry/mining to the detriment of the environment). It was suggested that the term “underuse” be more clearly explained in the context of this investigation.</p> <p>It was suggested that this action consider that the utilisation rate calculation excludes access to supplementary, uncontrolled flow use, and tagged trading. Publicly reporting the tributary utilisation rate was also recommended.</p> <p>Understanding the use of water by all users (including town water and environmental water) was considered important to better define usage modelling and demand trends for the catchment.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<b>3.3 Undertake a climate impact study</b>	<p>There was widespread support for undertaking a climate impact study.</p> <p>It was suggested that this action consider how changes in the way water moves, is extracted and used might impact groundwater and groundwater quality.</p> <p>It was suggested that innovative approaches like carbon sequestration and Blue and Teal Carbon could be explored in relation to supporting economic transition for industries.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<b>3.4 Support employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal people in the Lachlan region</b>	<p>There was widespread support for employment and business opportunities for local Aboriginal people.</p> <p>Conducting deep engagement with the community to understand desirable options and outcomes was considered important, as was establishing a strong governance and accountability framework.</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>
<b>3.5 Support system water delivery efficiency measures</b>	<p>There was general support for water delivery efficiency measures, but some stakeholders expressed concern that the intent of this action was not clear.</p> <p>It was suggested by several stakeholders that improved efficiency in the Jemalong Irrigation District be covered under this action. There was also support for investigating and implementing water recycling as a demand management strategy, with a state-wide education program needed to support this.</p> <p>There was support for the ability to convert general security licences to high security but some concerns were expressed about the potential impact on general security licence holders</p> <p>It was suggested that some long-list options that were not shortlisted (e.g., Lower Lachlan efficiency measures and a new Belubula Weir) be reconsidered for inclusion in the draft strategy, especially in the context of the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising not proceeding.</p> <p>It was suggested that dredging creek systems could improve water delivery efficiency</p> <p><i>This action was nominated as a priority for implementation.</i></p>

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## Other feedback

### Key feedback

There was support for ongoing consultation opportunities in implementing the final strategy and for the timing and duration of the consultation and public exhibition periods to be given further consideration.

Better explaining alignment between the draft strategy and other water-related plans and strategies was considered important, as was effective governance, transparency and accountability in relation to the final strategy and its actions.

## Consultation feedback

### Engage appropriately and effectively

- There was support for ongoing consultation and feedback opportunities, including face to face engagement, throughout the implementation process.
- It was suggested that a stakeholder engagement plan be developed to support the implementation of the strategy, recognising the diverse engagement needs of individual strategy actions.
- There was concern about the public exhibition duration, the timing of the engagement and communication about the draft strategy, noting some stakeholders were not aware of the consultation and relevant information.
- It was suggested by some Aboriginal stakeholders that Aboriginal engagement sessions should be integrated with the general public information sessions.
- Engagement by Aboriginal stakeholders was very low in the 2022 and 2023 public exhibition processes. The department is working to address this prior to the finalisation of the strategy.

### Align the strategy with other plans and strategies

- It was suggested that the draft strategy better explain how it aligns with other water strategies such as the NSW Water Strategy, NSW Groundwater Strategy, and other plans such as the Long Term Watering Plans and the Murray-Darling Basin Plan. The importance of the various strategies and their interrelationships was noted.

### Effective governance, transparency, accountability

- There were mixed views about the timeframe for delivery of the final strategy, with some stakeholders expressing a desire for prompt action, while others called for a longer-term, more strategic approach.
- There was concern about the time taken to develop the draft strategy, and that many of the actions are long-term, not clearly funded, or propose more studies and investigations rather than offering shorter-term, concrete solutions.
- There was concern about a perceived lack of transparency in relation to WaterNSW decision-making regarding flooding and dam releases.
- The importance of a coordinated council approach for town water, flooding and intergovernmental actions was noted, with strong views on how this approach should be implemented.
- Some stakeholders also suggested that the coordination approach should involve a broader range of stakeholders, and that the final strategy should be supported by a stakeholder engagement plan.



## Suggested additional actions

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

Action	Feedback
Jemalong Irrigation District	Suggestion to include a specific action to improve water use efficiency in the Jemalong Irrigation District.
Water availability for environmental health	Suggestion to include an action to review rules in Lachlan water sharing plans to improve water availability for environmental health.
Purified water recycling	Suggestion to include an action for a state-wide public education program for purified recycled water use.
Water entitlements for cultural flows	Suggestion to include an action to develop a plan to source water entitlements for cultural flows.
Review river operations	Suggestion to include an action to review river operations and remove constraints to natural flow through the system.

## Feedback on options not progressed in consultation draft

Some respondents provided feedback on options that were not progressed from the original long list:

Option	Feedback
Government commitment 3: Lake Rowlands Dam augmentation	Mixed views on progressing this option.
Option 25: Lower Lachlan Efficiency Measures	Some stakeholders expressed concern that this option was not progressed, with support for reconsideration of its inclusion in the draft strategy, to contribute to water security in the Lachlan especially in the context of the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising Project not proceeding.
Option 27: Improvements to the storage effectiveness of Lake Cargelligo	General support for not progressing this option.
Option 31: The 'Sheet of Water' storage	General support for not progressing this option.
Option 35: Investigation of licence conversion (Lachlan and Belubula regulated systems)	Mixed views on this option. Some stakeholders were concerned that this option would be at the expense of General Security Licence holders, while others suggested that this option be reconsidered, especially in light of the Wyangala Dam wall raising not proceeding. It was also suggested that some industries need to adapt more to a highly variable water supply.
Belubula Weir option	Some stakeholders would like to see this reconsidered, especially in the context of the Wyangala Dam wall raising not proceeding.



Image courtesy of the department

## Next steps

The development of the draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy has been a multi-year, multistep process. Consultation with a range of stakeholders has been essential for us to build our understanding of the key water-related challenges facing the region. It has also helped us to identify the actions that are best suited to addressing these challenges.

Feedback received during the public exhibition will now help us to finalise the strategy. Further targeted consultation will also be undertaken to develop an implementation plan for the strategy. It will outline the timing, responsibilities, and funding sources to enable the actions to be carried out.

The final Lachlan Regional Water Strategy and associated implementation plan will be released in 2024.





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**More information:**

[water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/plans-and-programs/regional-water-strategies](http://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/plans-and-programs/regional-water-strategies)