

Submission to the Draft NSW Water Strategy

Firstly, many thanks for providing the opportunity to comment on the Draft NSW Water Strategy. It is comprehensive, importantly acknowledges the rights and values of First Nations' peoples, the future impact of climate change and addresses a broad range of water supply issues. I support those inclusions and the strategy generally, however only time will tell whether, and how, it is implemented as this is dependent on further consultation and political support.

I live in the Northern Rivers Region and, whilst I have a good understanding of local water issues, am no expert on many of the options. So, rather than attempting to address all the options and actions, I will comment only on a few that I see as particularly relevant to this Region now.

Diversification of water sources is essential to address the unpredictability of drought. During the 2018-2020 drought this Region fared relatively well in regard to water supply, compared to other places, with water sourced predominantly through Rous County Council's water utilities. Nevertheless, given that the number and length of droughts is expected to increase in this Region due to climate change, rainfall independent sources should be pursued as a priority. State Government support for Research and Development and campaigns to address the lack of understanding of sources such as recycled water would be imperative. Several attempts have been made to introduce purified recycled water in Lismore in the past. These failed because of either ill-informed comment suggesting residents would be drinking toilet water or that it wouldn't meet public health requirements or as part of a deliberate political campaigns.

Over the past 25 years Rous County Council has pursued a number of options to address potential risks and increase water efficiency, including demand management measures. However, it is currently intending to construct a second dam below Rocky Creek Dam as its major priority without further considering purified recycled water which has significant potential across the Region. According to several experts in the field, potable reuse 'may have the potential to meet the projected demand through to 2060'¹ As pointed out in the Draft Strategy, 'the role of water efficiency should have equal standing with additional supply side options ...before imposing costs on the community for additional water infrastructure'².

As mentioned above, there is a huge gap in the community's knowledge and understanding of water issues and, given it is a critical issue with the potential for increasing the financial costs for future water users significantly, I believe it warrants more than the usual communication processes used by governments. What is needed is something that can give residents across the State access to experts who can provide detailed information about all potential water sources, including comparative costs, so they can make informed decisions

¹ TYR Group, 'Feedback to Rous County Council's Future Water Project', September 9, 2020

² Draft NSW Water Strategy, p. 118.

about what is best for their area. Substantial evidence exists from Citizens' Juries and Deliberative Democracy that, having access to experts, being allowed to ask questions and discuss options, individuals can change their minds and support options they previously discounted. I'm not suggesting Citizens Juries but rather the process as a way of educating residents. It would certainly be 'genuine engagement with stakeholders³.'

Finally, I fully support Option 6.10 for resource recovery and the partnerships to foster the circular economy and contribute to a net zero emissions future.

³ Draft NSW Water Strategy, p. 105.