

Draft NSW Water Strategy submission form

The NSW Water Strategy will be the first 20-year water strategy for all of NSW. It will provide a blueprint to help us tackle the key challenges and opportunities for water management across the state.

For more information about the strategy or to download a copy of the strategy, please visit dpie.nsw.gov.au/nswwaterstrategy.

Your voice is important

We would like to hear your views on the draft strategy, including whether you think it identifies the right priorities, challenges, opportunities and actions.

Please provide your feedback in the submission form below and email your completed submission to nsw.waterstrategy@dpie.nsw.gov.au or post to NSW Water Strategy, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124 **by 28 March, 2021**.

The form will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and your response can remain anonymous if you wish (see question 1).

Questions marked with an asterisk (*) require an answer.

If you have any questions about making a submission, please email:

nsw.waterstrategy@dpie.nsw.gov.au

Making your submission public

We collect information about you, which may include personal information, to assess submissions in response to the department's dealings and activities, and to perform other functions required to complete the project. This information must be supplied. If you choose not to provide the requested information we may not be able to assess your submission.

To promote transparency and open government, we intend to make all submissions publicly available on our website, or in reports. Your name or your organisation's name may appear in these reports with your feedback attributed, unless you have chosen to remain anonymous.

If you would like your submission and/or feedback to be kept confidential, please let us know when making your submission. You will be asked for your confidentiality preference at question 1.

If you request that your submission be kept confidential, it will not be published on our website or included in any relevant reports. However, it will still be subject to the *Government Information Public Access Act 2009*.

Your submission will be stored securely consistent with the department's Records Management Policy and you have the right to request access to, and correction of, your personal information held by the department.

Further details can be found in our privacy statement available on our website.

industry.nsw.gov.au/privacy

1. Information on confidentiality and privacy*

I give permission for my submission to be made publicly available on the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment website.

- Yes
 No

I would like my personal details to be kept confidential.

- Yes
 No

2. Your details

Name*

Contact phone number*

Postcode*

Email address*

Do you identify as an Aboriginal person?

- Yes
 No

Are you an individual or representing an organisation?*

- Individual
 Organisation

3. Organisation or business details

Who do you represent?

- Government Please specify
- Peak representative organisation Please specify
- Local Water Utility
- Other (please specify) Water for Rivers

4. Draft vision

The NSW Government has developed the draft NSW Water Strategy as part of a suite of long-term strategies to maintain the resilience of the state's water services and resources over the coming decades.

The proposed vision for the draft NSW Water Strategy is sustainable water resources for thriving people, places and ecosystems, both now and for future generations.

Which aspects of water management are most important to you and your local community?

Water for the environment

Water Rights and Water Justice for Traditional Owners

Restoring rivers and wetlands and sustainability of the Basin

Do you support the proposed vision for the draft NSW Water Strategy?

- Yes
 No

Please tell us more about your response:

Water for Rivers supports the proposed vision in the draft NSW Water Strategy "sustainable water resources for thriving people, places and ecosystems, both now and for future generations" because healthy rivers, aquifers and wetlands are essential for wildlife, plants and people.

We call on the NSW Government to use the NSW Water Strategy, and in all policy decisions, to give greater priority to the health of our rivers and wetlands.

Our laws (the NSW Water Management Act and the Commonwealth Water Act) recognise that repairing the ecological health of NSW Rivers should be of first-order importance.

At the moment too many people are taking too much water from the rivers so there isn't enough left for the environment and to maintain the cultural values of rivers and for downstream communities. Water law in NSW aims to address over-allocation and protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystem services of the Murray-Darling Basin and improve water security for all uses of /Basin water resources. The NSW Water Strategy must match the legislated priorities for water sharing.

First Nations have inherent rights to use and manage waterways. In order to sustain cultural traditions and build sustainable livelihoods for communities, these rights are recognised in international agreements and protocols, as well as in Australia's domestic law and policy. In all water management contexts, Government must address the ongoing denial of First Nations rights and be led by meaningful consultation with, and response to, the needs of Indigenous communities.

5. Draft objectives

The draft NSW Water Strategy sets high level objectives and principles to guide water service delivery and resource management across NSW. We have identified six core objectives which underpin the draft strategy. These are based on the *Water Management Act 2000*. They are:

- protecting public health and safety
- liveable and vibrant towns and cities
- water sources, floodplains and ecosystems protected
- cultural values respected and protected
- orderly, fair and equitable sharing of water
- contribute to a strong economy.

Which objectives are most important to you?

Please rank the objectives from most important to least important (where 1 is most important and 6 is least important).

- 5 Protecting public health and safety
- 4 Liveable and vibrant towns and cities
- 1 Water sources, floodplains and ecosystems protected
- 2 Cultural values respected and protected
- 3 Orderly, fair and equitable sharing of water
- 6 Contribute to a strong economy

Do you have any comments on any of the proposed objectives?

We draw attention to the crisis of mismanagement that has devastated the Baaka/Darling River - a great and complex river system that covers vast tracts of the land that sustains us. We are living through the tragedy of its annihilation. We are losing multifarious ecosystems: the web of life, the network of tributaries, the iconic red river gums by the majestic Darling, the glory of the Menindee Lakes where a myriad water birds used to soar, skim, settle, the throngs of our special native species, our kangaroos, our emus, our Murray cod, that were all sustained by the benevolence of this mighty river system, all shrivelling, withering, desiccated, dying.

The backbone of our nation, the family farmers, who have lived in tune with the fluctuations of the seasons, who have worked to nourish our citizens for decades, are being deprived of the river system's lifeblood. The close-knit communities and First Nations people who call the riverbanks home, who have drawn on this special landscape for sustenance, culture and powerful belief systems stretching back millennia, are being eviscerated.

6. Draft guiding principles

The draft strategy also proposes seven principles to guide the long-term strategic planning for water resource management in NSW. These principles work in tandem with the draft objectives to guide development and implementation of actions.

The guiding principles are:

- healthy environments sustain social and economic outcomes
- water is a limited (although recyclable) resource
- systems thinking to optimise outcomes
- data-enabled planning and decision-making
- transparency and accountability to engender community trust
- forward thinking to build preparedness and resilience
- giving effect to Aboriginal rights and access to water.

Which principles are most important to you?

Please rank the objectives from most important to least important (where 1 is most important and 7 is least important).

- 5 Healthy environments sustain social and economic outcomes
- 4 Water is a limited (although recyclable) resource
- 6 Systems thinking to optimise outcomes
- 5 Data-enabled planning and decision-making
- 1 Transparency and accountability to engender community trust
- 2 Forward thinking to build preparedness and resilience
- 3 Giving effect to Aboriginal rights and access to water

Do you have any comments on any of the guiding principles?

The environment and social devastation wrought by the cascade of criminal mismanagement by successive governments can be remediated. We call on the NSW Government to restore trust in management our river systems and the well-being of her communities, by reclaiming the over-allocation of water to profligate extractors and prosecuting water theft. We call on Government to end the obscenity of water-trading. Water is not a commodity. Water is the vital basis of life, the lifeblood of the natural world, a resource for the productivity of our nation and access to it is a human right for All.

7. Opportunities, challenges and actions for improved state-wide water management

The draft NSW Water Strategy outlines seven strategic priorities for action, focused on meeting the core objectives based on the *NSW Water Management Act 2000*. These strategic priorities are:

1. Build community confidence and capacity through engagement, transparency and accountability
2. Recognise Aboriginal rights and values, and increase access to and ownership of water for cultural and economic purposes
3. Improve river, floodplain and aquifer ecosystem health, and system connectivity
4. Increase resilience to changes in water availability (variability and climate change)
5. Support economic growth and resilient industries within a capped system
6. Support resilient, prosperous and liveable cities and towns
7. Enable a future focused, capable and innovative water sector.

Under each priority the draft strategy identifies several opportunities and challenges, and a total of 41 proposed actions to improve water management across the state.

Do you have any comments on the seven strategic priorities identified?

We support improved connectivity between rivers, especially flows to the Baaka-Darling River. Connected rivers define a river basin. Rivers must connect for native fish survival and drought resilience. There needs to be end of system flow targets in the rules that establish how water is shared.

We support water management using most recent drought of record to assist in climate adaptation. Climate change is impacting our rivers and wetlands now. We can only work out how to increase our resilience if we use the most up to date scientific data about our water. The Government needs to include data from the most recent droughts when working out how much water to sell to irrigation and incorporate climate predictions into all Water Sharing Plans and Long Term Watering Plans.

We support investment in purified recycled water for all urban water supplies. As water becomes scarcer our communities must be able to re-use what we have, reducing the demand for water.

Do you have any comments on any of the proposed actions identified?

We oppose the unjust handout of floodplain harvesting licences which privatise rainfall in private corporate dams capturing overland flows from our rivers and wetlands and the people who depend on them. We support metering, modelling and good management rules. Locking in brand new floodplain harvesting property rights could expose the public purse to multi-million-dollar compensation claims.

We oppose fast tracked new dams and new weirs that destroy river, floodplain and wetland health. Dams are backwards looking technology. Rather than make new water, they deny water to the environment and people downstream.

We do not support exemptions for water use by mining and irrigation industries. A recent Independent Commission Against Corruption report into water management in NSW found the Government favoured irrigation over the environment and First Nations concerns to the point where they were breaking their own laws. It is time for the NSW Government to honour the priorities of the NSW and Commonwealth Water Acts and stop allowing exemptions to the big end of town when it comes to water use.

Are there any additional opportunities, risks and challenges that should be considered in the draft strategy?

Water policy in NSW requires better communication, because everyone has a stake in water. Water policy and the plight of the Murray Darling Basin is complex and difficult to engage with. More of the community, particularly in Sydney, needs to have a better understanding of what the NSW Water Strategy aims to do, and the present status of our rivers. This Water Strategy is an opportunity to explain water management better, in more places and spaces and in plain English.

What actions should be prioritised for immediate implementation and how should they be implemented?

At the moment too many people are taking too much water from the rivers so there isn't enough left for the environment and to maintain the cultural values of rivers and for downstream communities. Water law in NSW aims to address over-allocation and protect, restore and provide for the ecological values and ecosystem services of the Murray-Darling Basin and improve water security for all uses of /Basin water resources. The NSW Water Strategy must match the legislated priorities for water sharing.

First Nations have inherent rights to use and manage waterways, in order to sustain cultural traditions and build sustainable livelihoods for communities. These rights are recognised in international agreements and protocols, as well as in Australia's domestic law and policy. In all water management contexts, Government must address the ongoing denial of First Nations rights and be led by meaningful consultation with, and response to, the needs of Indigenous communities.

We support improved connectivity between rivers, especially flows to the Baaka-Darling River. Connected rivers define a river basin. Rivers must connect for native fish survival and drought resilience. There needs to be end of system flow targets in the rules that establish how water is shared.

8. Other comments

Do you have any other comments on the draft NSW Water Strategy?

Water for Rivers supports the proposed vision in the draft NSW Water Strategy: "sustainable water resources for thriving people, places and ecosystems, both now and for future generations" because healthy rivers, aquifers and wetlands are essential for wildlife, plants and people.

We call on the NSW Government to use the NSW Water Strategy, and in all policy decisions, to give greater priority to the health of our rivers and wetlands.

Our laws (the NSW Water Management Act and the Commonwealth Water Act) recognise that repairing the ecological health of NSW Rivers should be of first-order importance.

9. How did you hear about the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft NSW Water Strategy?

Please select all that apply from the list below:

- Newspaper
- Radio
- Department of Planning, Industry and Environment website
- Direct email
- Social media
- Have your say NSW website
- Word of mouth
- Other (please describe)

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