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SUBMISSION
Draft Gwydir Regional Water Strategy

Healthy Rivers Dubbo (HRD) is a grass roots community network dedicated to providing a strong voice for our local rivers, aquifers and wetlands in the Murray-Darling Basin for the benefit of wildlife, plants and people. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge that this land was never ceded.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft Gwydir Regional Water Strategy (draft strategy).

Objective of the draft strategy

HRD believes the draft strategy's main objective should be to ensure that the water that is available in the Gwydir valley is used in a sustainable manner, and that demand for water is reduced.

It is important that a description of the state of the water source in the valley be included in the final strategy. There is little known about the condition of groundwater sources in the Gwydir valley. This knowledge gap should have been be filled before this draft strategy was presented to the public.

The draft strategy does not acknowledge that the available water in the Gwydir Region is over-allocated and cannot stretch to existing commitments, let alone any projected growth in demand.

Climate Change Predictions

HRD is supportive of the information that has been used to inform the climate predictions in the draft strategy. The combination of new climate data, a review of existing studies and community engagement has been an effective method of producing climate predictions for the Gwydir region.

The use of the stochastic modelling method in order to get a dataset covering up to 10,000 years is supported by HRD. We look forward to NSW releasing the research papers used to arrive at the climate change predictions used in the draft strategy.

Climate change is happening faster than scientists expected. Just one of the many publications by climate scientists in the last year that describe the unexpected speed of the encroachment of a warmer climate is a book *Discerning Experts*, that explains scientists tend to underestimate the severity of threats and the rapidity with which they might unfold.¹ This tendency is of critical significance, as the community's comprehension of the urgency of the climate issue is paramount to creating calls for solutions.

The draft strategy has predicted in 40 years rainfall in the region will reduce by up to 13%, winter rainfall will decrease, and autumn rainfall will increase, while evaporation, average temperatures and the number of hot days will increase.

HRD believes this prediction is more likely to be the actual situation we find ourselves in, and that it's likely that scenario occurs ahead of the 40 year timeline given.

Suggestion: that the climate change scenario presented in the draft strategy be considered the most likely result, not the 'worst case scenario'.

Missing from the draft strategy:

To solve the problem of high evaporation rates from on farm storages, there are Australian products available to cover water surfaces or floating solar farms could provide a double benefit.

Floodplain harvesting in the Gwydir captures 30% of natural surface water flows in the catchment. This has a significant impact on the environment and connectivity to the Barwon-Darling. This volume must be substantially reduced through regulation and can be replaced by water savings through better management of evaporation rates.

¹ <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/scientists-have-been-underestimating-the-pace-of-climate-change/>

Improving First Nations capacity, engagement and employment in water management

HRD strongly supports all options that improve First Nations capacity, engagement and employment in water management, and that recognise the significance of cultural knowledge and improve cultural outcomes. These include:

- Option 19: Aboriginal River Ranger program
- Option 21: Secure flows for cultural sites
- Options 33-40: Recognition of cultural knowledge, water rights and interests

HRD is very supportive of the efforts the NSW Government and Departments have made to consult with First Nations representatives and present a well-considered list of options to the public for comment. We strongly supports moves to create space for First Nations self-determination with water management.

Improved environmental outcomes

HRD strongly supports that the final the Regional Water Strategy achieve improved outcomes for river health, native fish, waterbirds and wetlands.

In particular the options we support are:

- Option 9: removal of constraints to delivery of environmental water. This is a project identified under the Basin Plan Constraints Measures and the Northern Basin toolkit measures. This project should be identified as a commitment.
- Option 10: improved fish passage
- Option 11: existing commitment – directing supplementary environmental flows
- Option 12: fixing cold water pollution
- Option 13: screening pumps to protect fish from being sucked out of the river
- Option 14, 15 & 16: research into groundwater health and sustainable access
- Option 17: existing commitment - active management to protect environmental water
- Option 18: managing structures on floodplains
- Option 20: restore water quality
- Option 24: improve connectivity with Barwon-Darling

Reducing water consumption of industries and towns

Strongly support all options that reduce water consumption in towns and industry. More efficient use of water is critical to achieve sustainable communities into a future with less water. These include:

- Option 3: Reuse, recycle and stormwater harvesting
- Option 22: water efficiency opportunities – this option must include managing high evaporation rates from on farm storage.
- Option 28: review drought of record and allocation process in water sharing plan

Objections

Object to the following options that are counter to environmental outcomes:

- Option 1: enlarging Tarelaroi reregulating weir in mid-Gwydir
- Option 2: new dam at Gravesend

For further information contact



Healthy Rivers Dubbo

