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Subject: Submission- FNC Water Strategy

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To Whom it May Concern,

Thank you for accepting community consultation on strategic issues of water in the Northern Rivers, and for providing a document that stimulates the discussion.

I hope you receive much constructive feedback.

A little bit about me

I have been increasingly involved in water issues in our area in a voluntary capacity – being a co-proponent of the Northern Rivers Watershed Initiative, the Environmental representative on the Lismore Flood Mitigation Committee, a water spokesperson in a couple of Landcare Groups, engaged in the discussion on the proposed Dunoon Dam, and also recently doing a deep dive into the history of the catchments and cultural heritage.

In my everyday life I am a long term resident in the Wilsons/Leycester Catchment, a rural landholder, an urban landholder, the owner of a small quarry and earthmoving business, and a serial lover of both our waterways and the landscapes of our area.

Northern Rivers Watershed Initiative

One of the things I want to encourage support for is the Northern Rivers Watershed Initiative (NRWI). The NRWI was borne out of the overdue and pressing needs to address the knotty problems of catchment health, and attempt look at holistic/coordinated management of the catchments. Coming from the chair of Rous, Landcare interests, and SCU, it was adopted by the Joint Organisation of Council as a priority for the region.

It is important a future water strategy resources, enables and integrates with NRWI and/or its aims.

One particular approach I push in all my discussions is the need to think first about nature based solutions for water issues. By nature based, we mean solutions which work as much with nature, with natural processes, and support or rehabilitate it rather than ignore, modify or replace its processes with artificial ones.

Nature based approaches to Flood Mitigation

There is enormous potential for nature based approaches to be used in flood mitigation (fits into your climate resilience planning and waterway health planning), and there is work going on now in the Lismore Floodplain Management Committee (LFMC) that the DPIE could support.

Flooding costs Lismore \$64 million per year (figures from 2020 Eugeny LFMC Study). The advantage with nature based approaches is that they typically also have a range of co-benefits to river health, biodiversity, water quality and the like.

As an example, one particular study reported that 20-40% riparian floodplain revegetation strategically employed to de-synchronise sub-catchment flows, had a 19% reduction in peak flood height. The dense plantings lift the water onto the floodplain earlier in the catchment, and slow it down, thus desynchronising peak flows.

Obviously, a lot more examination specific to our catchment characteristics is needed. DPIE please help with funding for this! Funding nature based solutions could also have a regional rural stimulus benefit, and help connect the concepts of healthy environment equally healthier and cheaper cities.

Nature based approaches also need to be considered with water security – for example in water recycling they could at least be used to clean up water as much as possible prior to industrial style treatments.

Stimulating Community and Indigenous Connections to Waterway Health

One of my "side trips" in the river health sphere were ideas for a regional river's festival. The idea was to foster greater custodianship, encourage engagement with river issues, and more interaction around the rivers/creeks/wetlands/waterfalls etc. These are all critical elements of a long term strategic approach to water issues – getting the community to engage and reconnect.

The name of the (proposed) regional festival was RivA Festival (Rivers Alive). Obviously, it would be an open-ended festival – depending on 'drivers'/ capacity/ imagination, but it may for example include. One off river celebrations, clean-ups, wildlife or cultural heritage experiences, plantings, water quality experiences etc. I didn't manage to get it happening (too big for a volunteer) but DPIE – please consider.

In association with this were other longings to hear/raise indigenous voices in the river health sphere. I looked hard for some first nation names for our local rivers. You could acknowledge the river as essentially a sacred space – a pathway, a home, central to food and water, filled with ancient sites such as *Djerubils*, sharpening areas, food prep areas, campsites, crossing sites, birthing sites, burial sites etc. It has been very hard so far to raise these voices (as they have been oppressed), and part of the work on water strategy needs to foster those voices in existing and future first nations people.

Once again, something DPIE could further support.

Recognition and Protection of Remnant wetlands, perched wetlands, scattered soaks and springs

There is still a lot of work that could be done in protecting remnants of our water systems that haven't yet been disturbed beyond recognition. Remnant floodplain wetlands need protection as they are a threatened community.

In my work as an earthmover in the recent short sharp dry of 2019, I realised how important the scattered soaks and springs in the landscape were refuges to birds and animals seeking water. (climate change resilience). They were however increasing eyed by humans who wanted to disturb these as a water resource for their own uses. A project which documented these springs and soaks, and began to regulate access to these would be an important step. There is currently little protection for these areas from human domination.

Landcare

Recognise and support Landcare programs who support volunteers and land managers to better manage in the catchment in a whole range of issues.

Smart Water solutions for the Northern Rivers

Opposition to the Proposed Dunoon Dam has highlighted a lot of critical thinking around water security and the alternatives that should be explored in preference to the dam. I am also not in favour of tapping the aquifers for the sake of being able to not think resourcefully about water.

I believe the style of development that is currently rampaging through coastal areas, and industries which does not recognise its demands on the water cycle needs to be curtailed. Creative definitions and solutions to 'demand' management need exploring and supporting. Greater integration with council controls and planning is needed to ensure new developments/industry have minimal water/catchment impacts.

Smart investment in people to deal with water issues

There is deficit in human resources to deal creatively with catchment health. Investment here is needed.

Long term rural industry diversification

A long-term plan for diversification of rural lifestyles is needed. The dominant industries of macadamias, grazing and cane are typically highly problematic from a catchment health point of view. DPIE could assist in developing new rural industries with a more positive impact on catchment health.

Raise the Stick

We have a lot of laws around waterways, but not a lot of policing and regulation. People to improve responses to regulation are needed, incentive programs to clean up your act are needed. Rules around not polluting waterways need to be extended to agricultural industries such as macadamias, grazing and cane- you can't allow these industries to keep getting away with it as you won't solve the issues.

Funding

There is a lot of awareness about the need to address the challenges but little serious government funding to prioritise it. Prioritise this in your budget/ lobby hard for funding for catchment health- millions are needed to be committed annually.

Good luck!

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