

Strategy to secure Lachlan's water future on public display

6 October 2022

The community is invited to have its say on the draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy, a plan that will deliver a reliable, sustainable and resilient water supply for towns and communities including Parkes, Cowra, Forbes and Young, and the industries that support the region's economy, over the next two decades and beyond.

Kaia Hodge, Executive Director Water Strategy and Policy for the NSW Department of Planning and Environment, said it is the second time the strategy has been on public exhibition, giving the community an opportunity to provide feedback on the shortlisted options before 1 November.

"We worked closely with Aboriginal groups, local governments, residents, businesses, and all stakeholders to understand the Lachlan's water challenges and needs during the first round of consultation in 2020," Ms Hodge said.

"Their feedback helped refine the Strategy and narrow down the options to a shortlist that will best support communities, industry and the environment and deliver a more secure water future for the Lachlan.

"We're progressing the best mix of infrastructure and non-infrastructure solutions to do this. The Strategy is being developed alongside two major infrastructure business cases in the region, the Wyangala Dam Wall Raising Project and the Belubula Water Security Project.

"These projects aim to improve water security, drive economic growth and support a liveable and prosperous region. As these business cases are still being developed, the Strategy will remain flexible and adaptable so if and when they proceed, Strategy options will work in tandem to achieve the best outcomes."

Ms Hodge said water planning needs to support all water users, including Aboriginal communities, towns, industries and the environment, especially as we face a drier and more variable climate and a higher demand on water resources.

“Residents know first-hand the devastating effects of extreme weather, from the recent prolonged drought to this year’s catastrophic flooding. These events are likely to be more frequent and intense in the future, and we need to prepare now to create more resilient water resources.

“The length of the river system, high evaporation rates and losses from the river into the ground also mean it’s challenging to deliver water to water users, and to key environmental sites like the Booligal Wetlands, Lake Cowal and the Great Cumbung Swamp. These are important environmental assets that provide habitat for many unique species, including aquatic birds, native fish, river red gum forests, blackbox woodlands and lignum vegetation.

“We also need to consider the water needs of new and existing industries, including the thriving agriculture, mining and manufacturing sectors which significantly contribute to the Lachlan’s \$6.73 billion annual economy. Government investment in the Parkes Special Activation Precinct and the Inland Rail Project will bring future jobs and growth and more demand on water resources.

“The shortlisted options address these needs and challenges to get the balance right. We’re proposing solutions to improve system-wide river operations, support groundwater use for town water supply, explore expanding the regional water supply grid, options to enhance water quality and river connectivity, protect and rehabilitate river habitats, support native fish populations, improve water efficiency and improve recognition of Aboriginal people’s water rights.

“This is a Strategy for the whole Lachlan which is why we want to hear your views to help finalise it. Water is our most precious resource, this plan will help ensure we have enough of it, where and when we need it, for the long term.”

The strategy and shortlisted options will be on display until 1 November 2022 and all stakeholders will have the opportunity to have their say.

Due to recent flooding in the area public meetings have been postponed until further notice – please visit our website for the most up to date information: [Draft Lachlan Regional Water Strategy \(https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/plans-and-strategies/regional-water-strategies/public-exhibition/lachlan-regional-water-strategy\)](https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/plans-and-strategies/regional-water-strategies/public-exhibition/lachlan-regional-water-strategy).