



November 2022

Gwydir Aboriginal Cultural Snapshot



Our vision for the Gwydir Regional Water Strategy is to support the delivery of healthy, reliable and resilient water resources for a liveable and prosperous region. To achieve this, we need to position the region so there is the right amount of water of the right quality available to people, Aboriginal communities, towns, industries and the environment..

Overview

One of the objectives of the regional water strategisis to recognise and protect Aboriginal Water rights, interests, and access to water.

Aboriginal community consultation workshops were held throughout the state in 12 regional areas of NSW. Workshops were delivered with independent regional Aboriginal Community Facilitators working in collaboration with the Department of Planning and Environment - Water, Regional Water Strategies.

Information provided within this snapshot describes all feedback received from Aboriginal community workshops held within the Gwydir regional locations of Moree, Tamworth, Tingha.

Aboriginal Engagement Approach

There was strong support for improving the recognition of First Nations/Aboriginal People's water rights, interests and access to water for the Gwydir region. The need to protect and maintain healthy waterways and ecosystems was important for many stakeholders.

The consultation and engagement program for the draft strategy highlighted a wide variety of views on a range of themes:

- Aboriginal Knowledge & Cultural Heritage
- Water Security
- Environmental & Ecosystem Health
- Climate change & data modelling
- Groundwater
- New and existing water infrastructure
- Entitlement reliability and risk management

Key Support areas

Highlighted below are key support points recognised through the consultations with Aboriginal communities.

- Acknowledgement that genuine consultation with First Nations/Aboriginal People through this process can provide an important step in addressing past disparities and resetting the water agenda with these communities.
- General support for Aboriginal community options that support people on Country looking after Country – particularly the establishment of a Regional Aboriginal Water Advisory Committee and the River Ranger Program. However, there were some concerns that options were not yet developed in detail enough to garner examined feedback.
- Involvement of local First Nations/Aboriginal People in the design and implementation of proposed programs in the draft strategy.
- Need to prioritise and protect environmental flows and establish cultural flows.
- Simplifying the application process for Aboriginal cultural licences and clear and transparent information on their use.
- Options that advance employment opportunities – especially for young people.
- Support for securing flows to cultural sites, recognising cultural knowledge, and reducing barriers to water access for First Nations people.
- Opportunities to integrate Aboriginal knowledge in other options development (including environmental, groundwater and land use options) and help in their implementation.

Next Steps

All Key support focus areas from all consultations with the Aboriginal communities of the Gwydir have been incorporated into the priority actions of the Gwydir Draft Strategy. Regional Water Strategies will continue Aboriginal consultation during 2022.

Key Concerns

Key Concerns were also identified by the community.

- Consultation and engagement with First Nations/Aboriginal People in the region left insufficient time to co-design Aboriginal community options.
- Options in the draft strategy do not adequately address the concerns of First Nations/Aboriginal People in the community – particularly infrastructure options.
- Limited focus on water security for Aboriginal communities and options that would drive economic outcomes for First Nations/Aboriginal People.
- Complexity of water policy and laws and the need to develop tailored educational resources to help empower Aboriginal communities.
- First Nations/Aboriginal People often feel excluded or forgotten in arrangements within their local government area, especially communities that are responsible for providing their own water supplies.
- Concerns that the river is viewed as a water delivery system which is in clear discord with vision and understanding of First Nations/Aboriginal People.

Comments on Options 33 - 40: Improving the recognition of Aboriginal people's water rights, interests and access to water

Options to protect and strengthen cultural landscapes, practices, knowledge and traditions, as well as to support empowerment, self-determination and economic advancement of First Nations/Aboriginal People and communities, were well supported in the feedback.

Options	Summary of feedback received
<p>33. Culturally appropriate water knowledge program</p> <p>34. Water-dependent cultural practice and site identification project</p> <p>35. Shared benefit project (environment and cultural outcomes)</p> <p>36. Co-management investigation of Travelling Stock Reserves</p> <p>37. Regional cultural water officer employment program</p> <p>38. Co-management investigation of Travelling Stock Reserves</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for all options that improve First Nations peoples' capacity, engagement and employment in water management; that recognise the significance of cultural knowledge; and improve cultural outcomes. - First Nations/Aboriginal People should be involved in setting priorities for these proposed options and programs. - Support for the involvement of First Nations/Aboriginal People in sharing and engaging their land and water management knowledge. - In the decision-making process relating to the implementation of options for each region, consider the broader benefits to the overall welfare of the Aboriginal community, not only water-related but those that through their implementation provide other social benefits.
<p>37. Regional Aboriginal water advisory committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for this proposed option, with a focus on representation from the local First Nations/Aboriginal People.
<p>40. Aboriginal cultural water access licence review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acknowledgement that accessing cultural licences can be difficult, and suggestions to support First Nations/Aboriginal People in the application process, or simplify the process.

Response to Feedback

Since the publication of the first draft Gwydir Regional Water Strategy, the NSW Water Strategy has been further developed.

Some of the issues that the Gwydir Regional Water Strategy highlighted and that were raised by communities in the Gwydir region are challenges across the whole state.

These state-wide issues have been included as priority focus areas in the NSW Water Strategy. Your feedback has been used to refine the key challenges that we need to focus on in the final Gwydir Regional Water Strategy, and the options that will be shortlisted for further investigation.

Further Consultation

We have heard and accepted feedback from across the state requesting more consultation on the regional water strategies, and a greater say in how options are shortlisted and prioritised.

The department remains committed to engaging with First Nations/Aboriginal People in the region as we progress through the options assessment process, and the development of the final Gwydir Regional Water Strategy and the NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy.

Unlike many other challenges in the region, the fundamental water rights of First Nations/Aboriginal People is still a major gap in water management across NSW.

Addressing this issue will set up a framework for addressing the Aboriginal community options identified in the draft regional water strategies. These options will be progressed through a NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy.

Opportunities to progress region-specific options for Aboriginal communities, in parallel

with this state-level action, will be explored in the final Gwydir Regional Water Strategy.

We will be undertaking public consultation on a shortlist of actions before the Gwydir Regional Water Strategy is finalised.

Further Information

For more information regarding Aboriginal Communities & Water please see the DPIE Water webpage

[Engaging with Aboriginal Communities¹](#)

For any questions related to your regional water strategy and a copy of the What We Heard Reports please use link below.

[Regional Public Exhibition²](#)

For any other enquiries please email regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au

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¹ <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies/objectives-principles>

² <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies/objectives-principles>