Healthy Rivers Dubbo

Dubbo NSW 2830

heathyriversdubbo@gmail.com

NSW Government
Department of Planning Industry and the Environment – Water
Locked Bag 5022
Parramatta, NSW 2124

By email: regionalwater.strategies@dpie.nsw.gov.au

8th November 2020

SUBMISSION
Draft Lachlan 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 Lachlan 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 Lachlan valley is used in a sustainable manner.

It is important that a description of the state of the water source in the valley be included in the final Lachlan regional water strategy. There is little known about the condition of groundwater sources in the Lachlan 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 Lachlan Region is still 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 Lachlan 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 lower rainfall, more hot days and increased evaporation with less runoff into storages. Winter and spring inflows could be much lower.

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'.

Government commitment:

HRD strongly objects to the raising of Wyangala Dam wall being presented as a government commitment rather than an option.

This has caused a bias in the draft strategy. Public funding could be better invested in options that reduce the demand for water, and increase the environmental health of rivers.

Wyangala Dam will capture important natural flows that are essential for the health of the wetlands in the catchment.

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

Missing from the draft strategy:

Fixing the leaky channels in Jemalong Irrigation District would save substantial volumes of water, similar to the predicted annual yield through raising Wyangala Dam wall, at less cost.

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.

Options to improve connectivity to wetlands and waterbird breeding sites should be included in the final regional water strategy.

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 20: Secure flows for cultural sites
- Options 41-48: 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 include options that achieve improved outcomes for river health, native fish, waterbirds and wetlands.

In particular the options we support are:

- Option 11: fixing cold water pollution from Wyangala Dam
- Option 14: more fishways
- Option 15: active management to protect environmental water
- Option 16: restore water quality
- Option 17: managing structures on floodplains
- Option 18: screening pumps to protect fish from being sucked out of the river

- Option 21, 22 & 23: research into groundwater health and sustainable access

Reducing water consumption of industries and towns

HRD strongly supports 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 9: Reuse, recycle and stormwater harvesting
- Option 24: water efficiency opportunities
- Option 34: review drought of record and allocation process in water sharing plan

The final strategy could include non-traditional water infrastructure technologies that provide alternative and delivery models for water, such as those presented by Zero Mass Water[2].
"Hydropanels use a combination of solar energy and materials science to extract pure water vapour from the air and convert it into the highest-quality liquid water. The water then flows into a reservoir where it is mineralised before being delivered to a tap or dispenser. A standard household array - two Hydropanels - has a storage capacity of 60 litres or 120 standard water bottles. Arrays can be scaled to community size, with larger installations providing millions of litres each year to a centralised storage tank and dispenser."

Objections

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

- Option 3: increasing the size of Lake Rowlands Dam
- Option 27: Changes to Lake Cargellico
- Option 31: removing a natural lake above Lake Cargellico
- Option 39: more weirs in Lower Lachlan

For more information contact

Melissa Gray
Convenor
Healthy Rivers Dubbo

[2] https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/submissions/69059/0003%20Zero%20Mass%20Water.pdf