Securing the Greater Hunter’s future water needs

The Greater Hunter Regional Water Strategy outlines policy and infrastructure options to manage risks to the region’s water supplies.

To manage these risks, we propose improving the connectivity of the region’s water supply systems so that water can be moved from areas receiving more rain to areas experiencing drought conditions. As rainfall patterns differ across the Greater Hunter region, drought rarely affects all parts of the region to the same extent simultaneously.

The outcome of this strategy is that during extended droughts in the Upper Hunter, water can be transferred from the Lower Hunter, while the short, sharp droughts of the Lower Hunter can be buffered by the Upper Hunter’s storages.

To achieve this, the following infrastructure and policy options are being investigated:

- connecting water supply infrastructure across the Greater Hunter, with a two-way pipeline between Lostock Dam and Glenties Creek Dam and a potable pipeline from Hunter Water Corporation to Singleton, so that water can be transferred to areas of major growth and critical locations in times of drought
- investigating water reuse schemes for industry to increase the amount of water available
- giving greater certainty to industries by preparing plans that set out how water will be shared and managed during severe droughts
- working with AGL to manage the water requirements as they transition from coal-fired power stations
- improving environmental outcomes by placing less stress on rivers and groundwater during times of drought.

It is expected there would be some additional benefits for the Central Coast through its connection to the Lower Hunter, and as water is transferred from the Manning Valley to the Hunter Valley, water security issues in the Manning have also been considered.

To be most effective, the recommended infrastructure options will require adjustments to water sharing arrangements. These changes will be reviewed with the community to optimise the benefits and ensure the rights of existing water users and the environments are recognised.

The strategy builds upon recent changes to water sharing plans, including the Hunter Regulated River Water Sharing Plan, that increased carry-over to give water entitlement holders greater flexibility to manage their drought risk.

The Greater Hunter Regional Water Strategy


The strategy was developed by analysing the current and future water supply and demand for the Greater Hunter. It was based on information from community consultation, catchment needs assessments, and technical studies by NSW and Australian Government agencies, including the CSIRO, universities and industry.

From this analysis, the NSW Department of Industry has recommended options to secure the Greater Hunter’s water needs for the next 20–30 years. The NSW Government has accepted these recommendations.

The Greater Hunter Regional Water Strategy will inform future conversations and decisions about the direction of water management in the region.

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1 Two assessments were completed as part of the State Infrastructure Strategy 2014 Update. The assessments indicated that drought security and flow utilisation were issues within the Upper Hunter, and that many of the region’s local government areas have a high likelihood of water supply deficiency.
The Greater Hunter Region

The Greater Hunter Region lies to the east of the Great Dividing Range from the Manning River Valley in the north, to the Central Coast in the south.

The region is home to over a million urban and rural residents. It’s also Australia's largest regional economy, with local industry contributing over $50 billion to the NSW economy every year.

Much of the region’s economic contribution comes from electricity generation, coal mining and agriculture. All of these industries rely heavily on water. The region is also a popular tourist destination, partly because of its high-quality water environments.

Pressures on the Greater Hunter’s water resources

Drought poses the greatest risk to water-dependent industries in the Greater Hunter. Recent improvements in our understanding of the region’s rainfall patterns suggest that drought may occur more often and be more severe than previously estimated. Ongoing dry spells also pose a serious risk to future water availability for urban and environmental needs.

The risks identified by the regional water strategy make it clear that if water resources aren’t managed, it’s likely that in a severe drought:

- urban centres would undergo long periods of severe water restrictions
- industry might not have access to enough water to operate
- the condition of the region’s rivers, wetlands, and estuaries, in particular internationally recognised environmental assets, will be affected.

The future reliability of water in the Greater Hunter will be affected by:

- continued population growth within the region’s major urban centres
- the planned closure of the region’s two thermal power stations
- reduced river base flows as a result of aquifer and surface runoff interception
- climate variability and change.

The regional water strategy has considered these issues in its proposed options to manage the risks. The strategy aims to maintain the rights of all existing water entitlement holders whilst improving the overall reliability of water.

Next steps

We invite interested stakeholders to comment on the Greater Hunter Regional Water Strategy by emailing strategy.greaterhunter@industry.nsw.gov.au by 28 February 2019. You can be part of the solution.

Acknowledgements

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