

Developing regional water strategies

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment is working in partnership with WaterNSW, local councils and Aboriginal communities to develop 12 regional water strategies across New South Wales.

The NSW Government is preparing regional water strategies that will bring together the best and latest climate evidence. The government will use a wide range of tools and solutions to plan and manage the water needs in each NSW region over the next 20 to 40 years.

The regional water strategies aim to improve the resilience of our water resources and to balance different water needs, in line with the following objectives:

1. Deliver and manage water for local communities
2. Enable economic prosperity
3. Recognise and protect Aboriginal water rights, interests and access to water
4. Protect and enhance the environment
5. Affordability - Identify least cost policy and infrastructure options.

The strategies will:

- be evidence-based and provide a better understanding of current and future water needs, issues, and risks to water resources
- be based on improved data and knowledge about the risks arising from climate variability and change, improving our ability to deal with extreme events
- draw on recent water reform, water planning and water security work undertaken by the department and WaterNSW.

Work is currently underway on regional water strategies throughout the state. Once we have developed draft strategies, we will release them for public consultation. We aim to have all strategies completed and being implemented by the end of 2022.

Process

Development of the regional water strategies has been prioritised based on need, risk, and alignment to the [NSW State Infrastructure Strategy 2018–38](#).¹ This includes a catchment needs assessment for each region and assessment of current drought impacts. We are also making sure upstream catchments are analysed to inform downstream catchment strategy development.

The department will release the Gwydir, Macquarie–Castlereagh, and Lachlan region draft strategies for public exhibition in mid-2020. Engagement with local councils is underway in the Far North Coast, North Coast, South Coast, Namoi, Border Rivers, Western, Murray and Murrumbidgee regions. We have finalised the [Greater Hunter Regional Water Strategy](#)² and will implement it over the coming years.

The information used to develop and finalise the strategies will include scientific data, existing studies and programs, local and traditional knowledge and community feedback.

The department will engage with key stakeholders in each of the regions to develop an understanding of existing risks and the vision for each region's future. The stakeholders involved

¹ www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/projects-and-initiatives/nsw-state-infrastructure-strategy/

² www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies/greater-hunter-region

during the development phase include councils, joint council organisations, local water utilities, Aboriginal stakeholders, peak groups, as well as the public. The local perspective gained from this preliminary consultation will be combined with historic knowledge to develop options that mitigate the risks and contribute to achieving the vision for that region's future. Options may include a range of infrastructure, management and policy options for each region, or a combination of these.

We will use feedback gathered during previous NSW Government consultations, including during the development of water resource plans, in the development of regional water strategies.

How to have your say

We will actively seek feedback on the draft strategies during a public exhibition phase, which will include public information sessions and targeted consultation. We will use feedback from the public exhibition and targeted consultation to improve our understanding of the economic, environmental and cultural needs of each region and further refine the options for each region.

Information including updates on public exhibition periods will be available on our website www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/regional-water-strategies

The final regional water strategy for each region will include:

- a package of actions approved by government
- an implementation plan, including a clear governance structure for delivery
- opportunities for local and regional partnerships, all of which will be focused on maximising water security.

Review

The NSW Government will manage critical water resources in a way that best serves regional communities, the environment, Aboriginal communities and industry. Each regional water strategy will have a built-in review process. This will allow us to check that the strategy is meeting its intended purpose. It will also allow us to consider further management options and climatic scenarios to ensure that the strategy maximises benefits for the region.

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