Draft Restoring our Rivers Framework

Take the survey

Climate

Response received at:
4 March 2024, 7:00am

Response ID:
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1 Confirm that you have read and understand this privacy notice.
Yes

2 Please indicate how and if you want your submission published.
Public

3 Published name
Central NSW Joint Organisation

4 Confirm that you have read and understand this declaration.
Yes

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9 Who are you answering on behalf of?

Organisation

10 Organisation name

Central NSW Joint Organisation

11 What sector best describes you or your organisation?

Local government

12 What state or territory do you live in?

New South Wales

13 Postcode

2800

14 What area best describes where you live?

Regional area

15 Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?

Not answered

16 1. Would the opportunity to lease back water entitlements from the Australian Government incentivise you to participate in water recovery programs that contribute to delivering the 450GL of additional environmental water?

Yes

17 2. Would a lease period of three years be attractive?

No

18 2b. If no, what lease period would be preferred and why?

Annually to allow flexibility for businesses depending on climate conditions.

19 3. Would 3 years provide time to implement business adjustments to adapt to less water?

Yes

20 4. Would you consider leasing your allocation to the Commonwealth for a period of up to 3 years?

Yes

21 1. Please provide a description of your idea for a land and water partnership opportunity. What are you proposing?

The Central NSW Joint Organisation represents the interests of its 11 member councils across the areas of strategic planning, prioritisation and advocacy. Water security for the regions towns and cities to enable growth and prosperity is of the highest priority. The CNSWJO does not own any land or water.

22 2. Who are you? (select one option)

Interested party

23 3. What is your catchment/river?

Not answered

24 4. What Water Right type do you hold? (e.g. high security, general security)?

Not answered

25 5. What is the volume of water proposed for consideration (in Megalitres)?

Not answered

26 6. Where is the land located?

Not answered

27 7. What is the current main use of the land?

Not answered

28 8. What is the area of land proposed for consideration for sale (in hectares)?

Not answered

29 What are the values, benefits, and outcomes for constraints relaxation?

Not answered

30 Area available (hectares)

Not answered

31 What are the values, benefits, and outcomes for enhanced environmental and nature positive outcomes?

Not answered

32 Area available (hectares)

Not answered

33 What are the values, benefits, and outcomes for First Nations?

Not answered

34 Area available (hectares)

Not answered

35 What are the values, benefits, and outcomes for Protected Areas?

Not answered

36 Area available (hectares)

Not answered

37 Are there any other values, benefits, and outcomes of packaging as a land and water partnership, or any other matters you would like to comment on?

Not answered

38 Area available (hectares)

Not answered

39 1. Do you have any feedback on the potential criteria we could use to guide land and water purchase or partnership investment decisions?

Land and water purchase or partnership investment decisions need to be considered in a fully integrated, whole of catchment strategic planning approach to water management to ensure sustainable water management for catchments now and into the future inclusive of all areas of water use.

Water is the lifeblood of regional Australia and must be treated as a most valuable resource, however socio-economic factors are also critical and largely overlooked.

In strategic work undertaken by Central NSW Councils over the past two decades, consideration of water resources, specifically town water, is largely missing in most strategic plans and in the state's strategic planning framework in general. In fact, town water is still missing in a number of the Regional Water Strategies developed by the NSW Government and in the Murray Darling Basin Plan.

Currently there is a lack of recognition of the productive value of urban water to the economy at both the local and national level. This has been acknowledged by both the Productivity Commission and Infrastructure Australia where clearly more work is needed to understand the impact of drought on the resilience of urban communities and the social and economic implications of this.

Government water buy-backs, seemingly prioritising environment over socio-economic factors, no apparent wholistic approach between government departments all drive down confidence in what could be growing and thriving regional economies.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics projects that the Australia population in 2017 (24.6 million) will reach between 37.4 and 49.2 million people by 2066, that is, the Australian population is set to potentially double in the next 40 years.

If this is so, then a whole of government approach will be needed for strategic land use and water planning. We will need more food, more homes, more drinking water, our towns need to be protected from flooding, our agricultural products need to be value-added. Water is the quintessential element in every aspect of a growing nation and should not be considered in isolation of these factors.

Where the NSW Treasury Common Planning Assumptions are backwards looking, there is definitely a need to assess projected population growth trends and regional and local development trends, to identify spatial changes in water demand, growth in town water demands and sources of potential future flood risks – such as new developments.

Integration of strategic land-use planning and water planning is logical but it needs a whole of government 50-year strategic plan.

It is only through this level of coordination that a fully integrated, whole of catchment strategic planning approach to water management can be achieved to ensure sustainable water management for catchments across all water uses. We need to move beyond the silos of the past and recognise that stakeholders need to work together to achieve the balance needed in water use in a new climate future.

40 ## 2. Is there any other information you wish to share that might help us in considering a potential land and water purchase program or partnership?

The CNSWJO Board is supportive of what it refers to as "the Dutch Model" as a means of driving innovation in strategic land-use planning and water management.

The NSW Government's Lachlan Regional Water Strategy, review of the Lachlan Water Resource and Water Sharing Plans together with the review of the MDB Plan could be the catalyst to ensure policy and water management settings are right to not only solve long-term water security for urban communities, but to drive growth and prosperity by delivering better flood immunity and water security to enable the agricultural sector.

One of the enablers is that "Under normal conditions the Lachlan River is a terminal system with little water flowing past the Great Cumbung Swamp at the end of the river. Only in large flood events does water flow into the Murrumbidgee River (Green et al 2011) ". This presents the opportunity to think differently about how water is managed for productive use in the Lachlan valley.

The Dutch Model

There are real opportunities for a transformational step change in water management to drive innovation and drought resilience in agricultural production and value-adding for agri-business particularly in the Lachlan valley that could be supported through land and water purchase or partnership investment decisions.

Almost two decades ago the Dutch made a commitment to sustainable agriculture with

the aim to produce twice as much food with half as many resources. Since then, farmers have reduced dependence on water for key crops by as much as 90%. They've almost completely eliminated the use of chemical pesticides on plants in greenhouses, and since 2009 Dutch poultry and livestock producers have cut their use of antibiotics by as much as 60%.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are now shipped around the clock. They have also developed agribusiness not only through their own food production but through importing food products in bulk to the port of Rotterdam where they are processed and packaged for consumers and then shipped to markets via air, rail and sea.

The Dutch example shows that when farmers, businesses, government, scientists and the community work collaboratively to develop technological and social innovation to produce good, healthy and safe food that is produced sustainably, the country and the world benefit. This should be the aim of any future land and water partnerships.

Aside from growing food and agribusiness, food knowledge is now also a key export product. The Netherlands is smaller than the Central NSW region, 1/10 the size of NSW and yet it is the second largest food exporter in the world by value.

It is this step change in water management and agricultural practices that we need to encourage through programs that work towards achieving increased productivity with less water. There are real opportunities to leverage the Parkes Special Activation Precinct and the Lachlan River as a terminal system to explore this new way of doing business. https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2017/western-sydney-fresh-food-precinct.pdf

With the right water management settings enabled and the Parkes Special Activation Precinct already underway, the Lachlan valley is well placed to deliver on the Government's aspirations to support the agricultural sector to transition to a low emissions future and foster sustainable climate adaptation practices through high value water use.

Reviewing and changing how water is managed in the Lachlan valley and increasing the proportion of water allocated as high security water, presents the opportunity to increase investment in capital infrastructure and more water efficient crops.

The CNSWJO would be pleased to provide more detail on its thinking in this space including its partnership with Charles Sturt University exploring these opportunities.

41 ## 1. What are key lessons learned from previous water recovery programs that can inform practical approaches to minimising socio-economic impacts in the future?

Enablement of water for critical human need:
A key lesson learned must be the challenges experienced by inland towns through the millennium and 2017-2020 droughts.

Where water for human consumption is recognised as the highest priority in times of shortage, the challenges through the past drought are a testimony to the failure of existing systems including the Water Sharing Plans.
There were significant challenges in delivering the water to towns including the large inland centres of Orange and Bathurst during the 2017-2020 drought. In the 2017-2020 drought, environmental releases and access by irrigators to water in the unregulated Macquarie system seemed incongruous when the cities of Orange and Bathurst came precariously close to running out of drinking water.

It is one thing to say that water for critical human need is the highest priority in times of shortages, however, on the ground this was not the case. In NSW the Water Supply (Critical Needs) Act 2019 was needed as a temporary pathway to secure water supplies for regional towns. This included enabling the Minister to turn off or modify the Water Management Act 2000 to amend water licences and approvals required for critical town water supplies.

In summary:
There is a need for better policy and protocols to underpin the Water Management Act 2000 in a new climate future to ensure water for critical human needs are met as the highest priority.
Mechanisms are needed that enable a swifter response during drought for water for critical human needs under the Water Management Act including linking urban water restrictions to the environment and other users.
Storm water harvesting and other contemporary approaches to water security for urban communities need to be enabled.

The Value of Urban Water:
Currently there is a lack of recognition of the productive value of urban water to the economy at both the local and national level. More work is needed to understand the true socio-economic impact of water recovery programs on the resilience of regional communities.

While we all value water as a vital part of our daily lives, few understand its true value. In part, this is due to a lack of exposure to the full costs of the water we consume – both directly through our taps, and indirectly through our food and other products. Similarly, the value of wastewater services and the role existing systems play in safeguarding the environment are not well appreciated by users.

What has been found in the Central NSW region is that businesses will not establish in a region if continuous water supply is not available and businesses that close as a consequence of a lack of water, potentially will not reopen.
Unreliable and incomplete evidence about the true value of urban water undermines the effectiveness of decisions, and community confidence in water managers.

Where the Murray Darling Basin Plan has also shown a lack of recognition for the true social and economic value of town water, the development of MDBP 2 and programs under the Restoring our Rivers Framework presents an opportunity for the relatively small amount of water needed for towns and productive use and the socio-economic impact of investment decisions to be considered.

With turnover of $24 billion, the urban water sector is many times larger than the rural water sector and underpins the future of cities and regional communities.

Based on our experience in Central NSW, there needs to be change in how the MDB Plan is administered to sustain growth, particularly in the context of drought for inland communities. There is a need for a sustainable, apolitical, ethical, evidence-based suite of solutions to ensure the optimal use of water across the Murray Darling Basin.

It is crucial that any business case decision making must be evidence based and transparent, in particular for biodiversity offsets.

If there are no changes to infrastructure, policy, or demand management practices, future droughts could have severe consequences for cities and towns in the region.

42 ## 2. How can local knowledge be captured and applied to develop practical approaches to minimising socio-economic impacts in program design and delivery?

There needs to be discussion within regions about achieving the balance that is needed for all water users across the catchment in a new climate future. This includes for cultural needs, urban communities, agriculture, industry and the environment. It is in our communities' interests to ensure that the right balance is struck in water management

across all these areas with better inter-governmental collaboration and frameworks to support coordination and decision-making around the planning and management of water resources.

This region continues to advocate for what it refers to as the 'missing piece' being effective inter-governmental collaboration at the regional level in strategic water planning and management.

In line with the findings of the Productivity Commission and NSW Auditor General (report Sept 2020) future reform should ensure effective collaboration on water management at the regional level between multiple government agencies, Councils and Joint Organisations, Local Water Utilities and local and regional stakeholders, including in water reliant industries.

Whether this be through the formation of Strategic Regional Water Committees or some other protocol, the opportunity exists to codesign a fit-for-purpose arrangement that will see an improved means of managing water for critical human need, particularly in times of shortages and for flood management. With predictions of a future with more frequent climate extremes, the sharing of data, the management of water quality issues, improved water efficiencies and the initiation of forums for better communication and collaboration, the better prepared we will be for managing the challenges ahead for regional communities.

We see mutually beneficial outcomes for all levels of government but most importantly the people of regional NSW from a more collaborative working partnership.

It is critical that the need for the 'missing piece' is addressed. This was no more clearly seen than through the last drought, where LG LWUs in regional NSW saw the need for a Critical Water Supply Act to be enacted and the redeployment of the Cross Border Commissioner to the role of Town Water Supply Coordinator. This served to highlight just how poorly neglected the concept of water for critical human need has been in regional NSW.

43 ## 1. Do you have any feedback on the draft program principles?

The CNSWJO supports all the principles outlined.

44 ## 2. What are key lessons learned from previous community adjustment assistance programs that can inform the delivery of the proposed

Sustainable Communities Program?

The key lessons are the need to really understand the true value of urban water. This is needed to inform evidence-based decision making on any programming. Second is the need for genuine consultation with communities on their needs and the socio-economic implications of programs.

For regional communities to grow and prosper they need to:

- have ambitious plans to generate economic growth
- prioritise local needs with a context of nationally significant reform, including actions that drive productivity and competition
- take a long-term approach to achieve transformative change
- identify the 'game-changers' and catalyst actions that will deliver a step-change in growth outcomes
- prioritise delivery
- deliver action and reform that are additional to governments' usual operations and finally
- always be mindful to our changing environment.

To enable this growth and prosperity, the CNSWJO Board advocates for regional empowerment.
Regional communities should be empowered to become more independent and resilient. To enable this programming needs to be above all fit-for-purpose and codesigned with communities through their local representatives drawing on local experience and knowledge. It needs to:

- Support and build on the Community Strategic Planning process and grant Local Government access to relevant data to enable informed decision making.
- Support pragmatic place-based planning and service delivery and the setting of aspirational targets.
- Ensure there is sufficient delegation in region to support local decision making and program implementation.
- Increase Local Government's influence over plans including funding program design at other levels of government that affect them.
- Enable collaboration to inform the development of fit-for-purpose policy including input to policy, program design, scoping documents, Terms of Reference and the ground-truthing of methodologies

45 ## 3. What kind of investments in communities do you believe would mitigate potential impacts of water purchasing?

Refer to responses above where investment needs to be made in firstly understanding the true value of urban water to the economy. It is crucial that any decision making around investments is evidence based and transparent, in particular for biodiversity offsets.

Investment is also needed in genuine engagement with communities to ensure the impacts of water purchasing is understood and mitigating investments targeted where they are most needed. Investments need to draw on local experience and knowledge and be fit-for-purpose depending on local circumstances and conditions.

Flexibility is needed in the system to adjust depending on climatic conditions.

46 1. Do you have any other feedback on the draft framework to support delivery of the 450 GL target by 2027?

No

47 Have you removed any identifying from your attachments?

Not answered

48 Upload supporting file

Not answered

49 Upload supporting file

Not answered

50 Upload supporting file

Not answered