NSW GOVERNMENT

South Coast Region Draft Regional Water Strategy

What We Heard

Public Consultation

December 2021

Find out more: www.dpie.nsw.gov.au

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Acknowledgments: The NSW Government acknowledges First Nations/Aboriginal People as Australia's first people practicing the oldest living culture on earth and as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters. We acknowledge that the people of the Yuin Nation hold a significant connection to the lands encompassed by the South Coast Regional Water Strategy.

Contents

Introduction

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (the department) is developing 12 regional water strategies to provide long-term tailored water management solutions for NSW's regional communities.

Our vision for the South Coast 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.

The draft South Coast Regional Water Strategy (the draft strategy) is one of six draft regional water strategies that were released for public exhibition during the second half of 2020.

An extensive engagement and consultation program, with targeted stakeholders, the public and First Nations/Aboriginal People, accompanied the release of the draft strategy. This included several face-to-face meetings, an online webinar and opportunities to have a one-on-one phone consultation with the regional water strategies team. Submissions were called for during the public exhibition period.

This report summarises the key issues we heard during the public exhibition and highlights how all feedback received during this period has informed the next steps in the development of the South Coast Regional Water Strategy. Public exhibition is only one phase of the broader engagement program that also includes targeted engagement with councils, water utilities and First Nations/ Aboriginal People during strategy drafting and finalisation.

Figure 1 illustrates the process for developing the regional water strategies.

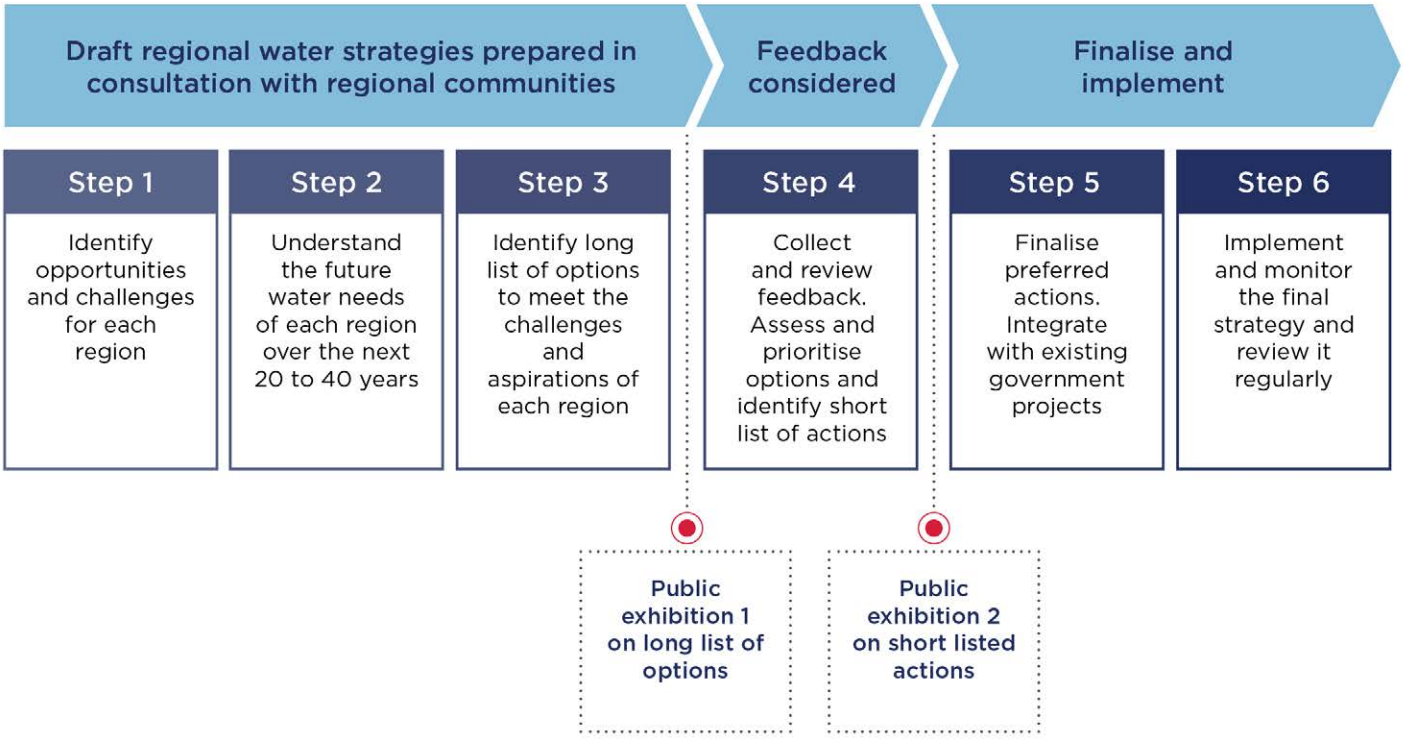


Figure 1: *Approach to the development of the regional water strategies.*

Engagement approach

Our engagement approach for the regional water strategies program is to share information, gather feedback and collaborate with key stakeholders. We took this approach with the South Coast Regional Water Strategy to ensure regional communities can influence its development.

The department is using a phased engagement approach, as illustrated in Figure 2. Figure 3 shows the timeline for engagement activities in Phase 2 - Public exhibition.

How we engaged

The department's engagement program during phases 1 and 2 involved:

- Consultation with councils in the South Coast region prior to the draft strategy being released
- A live webinar for the public on 16 November 2020
- Aboriginal community meetings[1] in Batemans Bay, Bega and Wreck Bay between 25-30 November 2020
- Community meetings in Batemans Bay and Bega on 25-26 November 2020
- Meeting with the Board of the Biamanga and Gulaga Aboriginal communities on 11 December 2020
- One-on-one phone consultations with the regional water strategies team were offered during the exhibition period
- A formal submission process with 12 submissions received.

These methods enabled the department to share information about the regional water strategies program and seek feedback on the draft strategy and the long list of potential options. More targeted and public consultation will be organised in phases 3 and 4 of the engagement program.

Who we engaged

During the exhibition period from 30 October - 13 December 2020, the department communicated and engaged with:

- First Nations/Aboriginal People and Aboriginal peak bodies
- Local government
- Business and industry stakeholders
- Landholders
- Peak representative organisations
- Individual members of the public.

Feedback was encouraged throughout the consultation period and was captured in each engagement activity as well as in the formal submissions.

[1]The Aboriginal community meeting planned for Wallaga Lake was cancelled due to Sorry business.

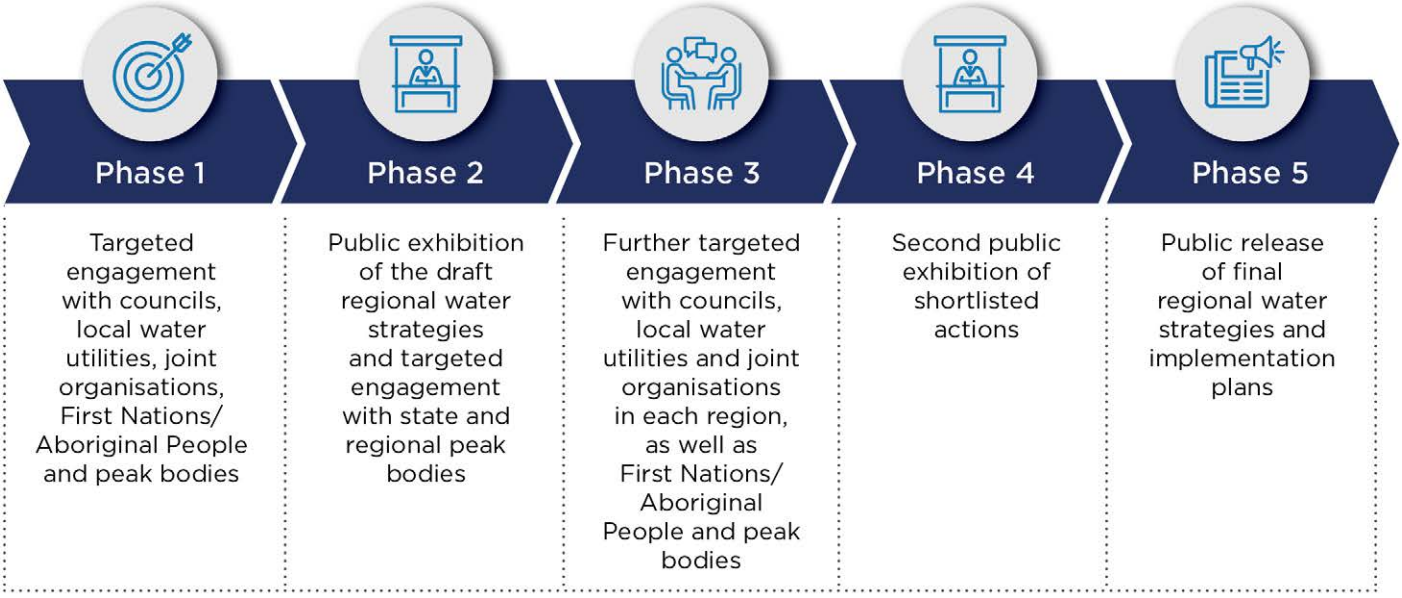


Figure 2: *Phased approach to engagement for the regional water strategies engagement program.*

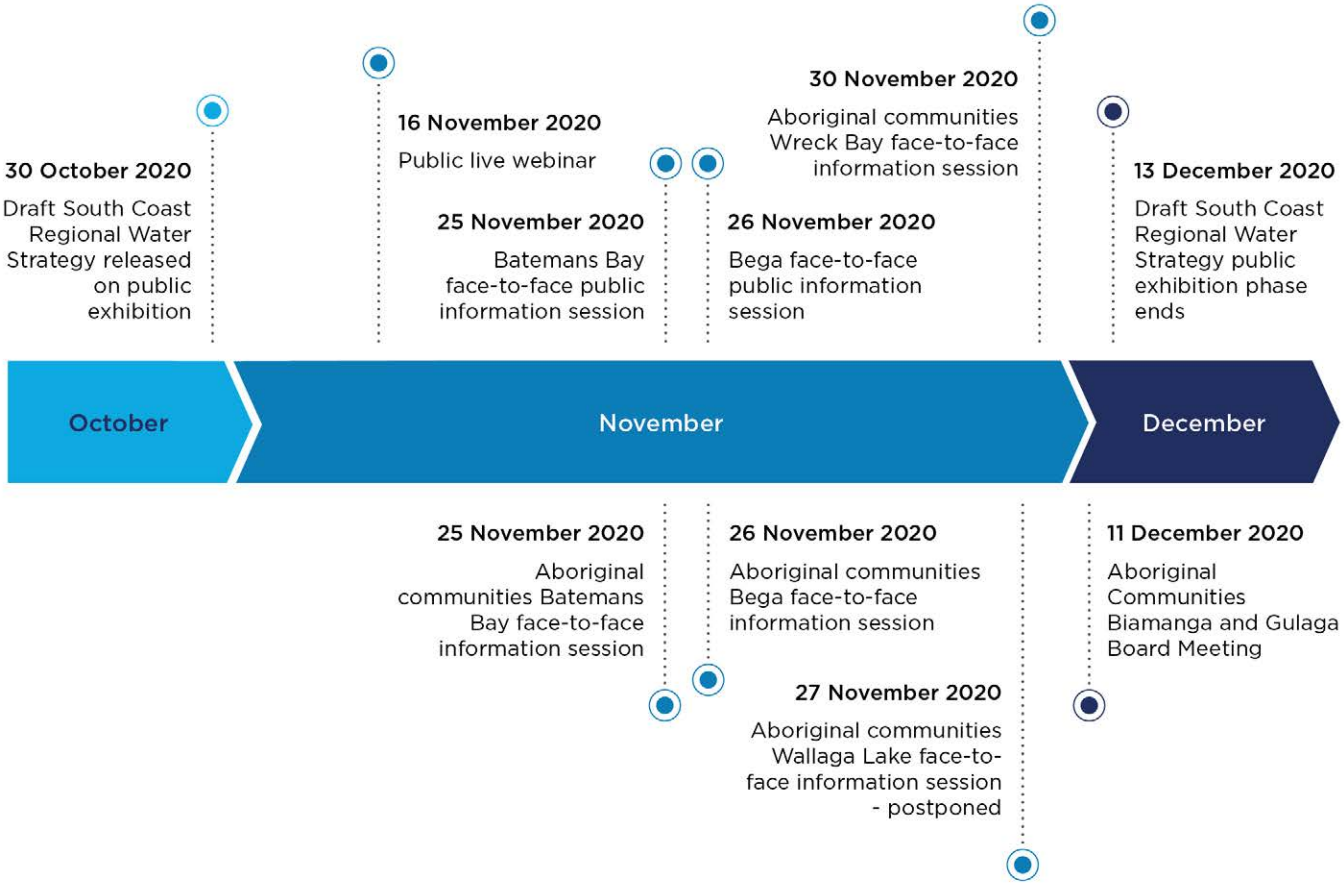


Figure 3: *Timeline for the engagement activities during public exhibition – Stage 2 in the South Coast region.*

Engagement at a glance

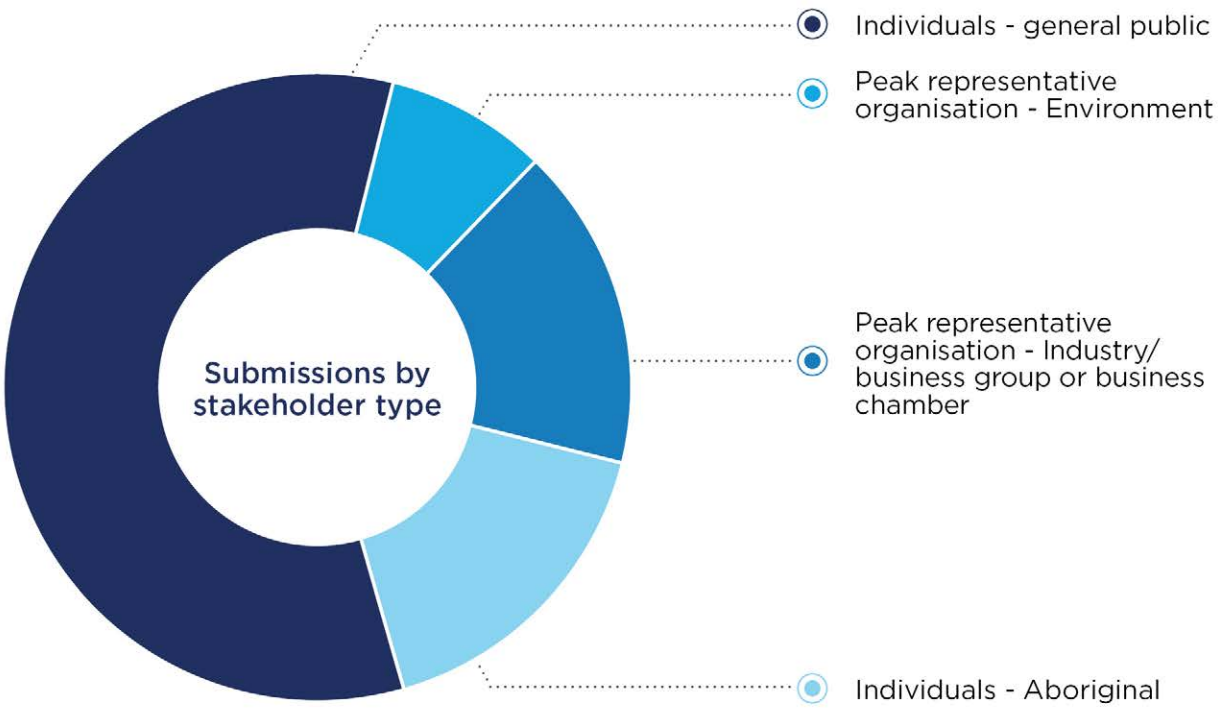
1,476
unique website page visits

12
formal submissions

3
Aboriginal community sessions
- **17** attendees

1
live webinar
- **9** attendees

2
public information sessions
- **8** attendees



Our vision for the South Coast 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.

What we heard

During the public exhibition we received 12 submissions on the draft South Coast Regional Water Strategy and the long list of options. Stakeholders shared many comments on the regional water strategies program, the content of the draft strategy and the long list of proposed options.

There was general support for the regional water strategies program. Stakeholders urged the department to progress the development of the NSW Water Strategy to provide an overarching framework and objectives that would guide the 12 regional water strategies and the associated implementation plans. Since that time, the NSW Water Strategy has been released for public consultation and finalised.

The department also heard that the next phase of regional water strategy development should be accompanied by an open, transparent and broad-scale consultation process to ensure all stakeholder voices are being heard and a broad cross-section of the community is represented in the discussion. We will be undertaking a further round of public consultation on a shortlisted set of actions before the South Coast Regional Water Strategy is finalised.

Many stakeholders appreciated the opportunity to provide feedback to the draft strategy documents and reinforced the need to integrate and align the regional water strategy work with the NSW ongoing work programs and other state water reform processes.

There was strong support for improving the recognition of First Nations/Aboriginal People's water rights, interests and access to water. The need to protect and maintain healthy rivers and ecosystems was important for many stakeholders. There was also support for improved water reliability for agricultural industries to support modern agricultural practices and industry expansion and growth.

The consultation and engagement program for the draft strategy highlighted a wide variety of views on a range of issues. These issues can be categorised under the following themes:

Aboriginal knowledge and connection to Country

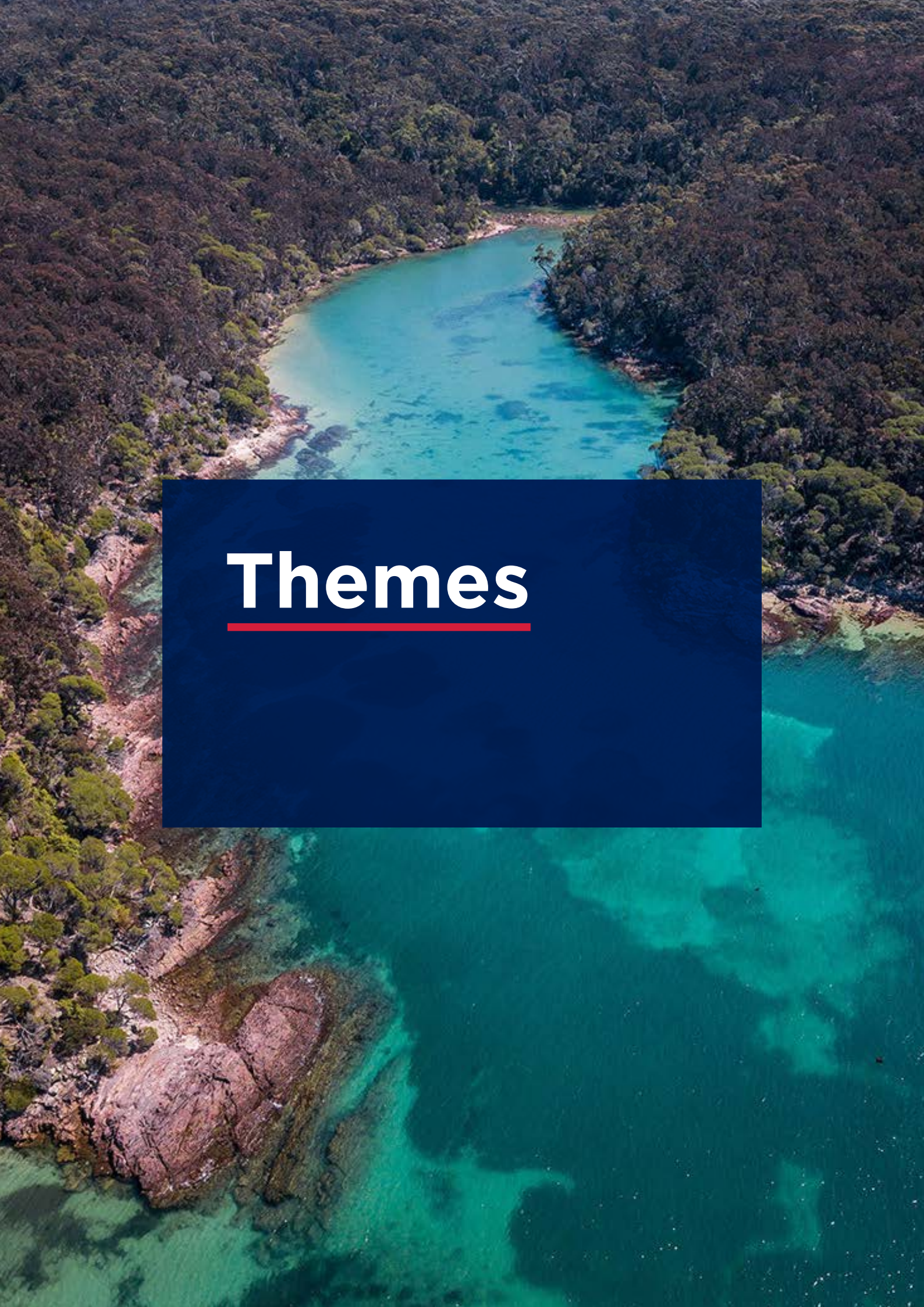
Water security

Environmental and ecosystem health

Climate change and data modelling

The following section summarises the feedback received for each of these themes. Note themes below are not listed in order of importance.

The draft strategy also included a long list of proposed options for the region. This long list is included on page 13. The options section summarises the feedback received on each option.



Themes

1. Aboriginal knowledge and connection to Country

There was broad support for improving the recognition of First Nations/Aboriginal People's water rights, interests and access to water. Water-related programs that consider social and economic benefits, as well as provide employment, were encouraged.

Key support

- There was acknowledgement that genuine consultation with First Nations/Aboriginal People through this process can be an important step in providing a voice for First Nations/Aboriginal People in water matters.
- Integrating Aboriginal knowledge of water management and protection of cultural heritage, was supported.
- Creating employment for local First Nations/Aboriginal People, was supported.
- Support for establishing a regional Aboriginal water advisory committee, a regional cultural water officer employment program, culturally appropriate water knowledge program and water-dependent cultural practice and site identification project.
- A whole of government approach to implementing options that establish programs involving First Nations/Aboriginal People was supported.

Key concerns

- There was concern that there was not enough consultation with the First Nations/Aboriginal People in the region. The department was encouraged to be more comprehensive in the subsequent public exhibition period for the strategy.
- Suggestions were made for options that support handing back land and waters to native title holders, to provide more focus on these issues.
- There was concern that engagement and consultation with the Aboriginal community needs to be ongoing, to facilitate trust building and education of government representatives in culturally appropriate consultation.
- Water management (both fresh and salt water), land management and fire management have to be considered holistically and not managed in silos.

2. Water security

Water security was raised as a concern in the feedback. There was support for increased water efficiency in the local agricultural industries, as well as support for monitoring of water extraction. Concern was raised regarding wastewater being pumped to the ocean and missed opportunities to treat wastewater for appropriate uses.

Key support

- Increasing on-farm storage and developing water-efficient technology and practices for agricultural industries was encouraged.
- Support for the role of the Natural Resources Access Regulator (NRAR) in being able to monitor water use to help restore public confidence that water extraction is being done so equitably.
- Treating wastewater to a safe level for use in such activities as firefighting, watering public spaces and farming, was supported.
- Water reuse and reclamation schemes were supported.

Key concerns

- Water reliability was acknowledged as being crucial to support modern agricultural practice, agricultural industry expansion and growth in agriculture related employment, with feedback indicating that water reliability in the region is not keeping pace.
- The need to retain more water in the catchment and to create opportunities to capture and utilise water from high stream-flows, was raised.
- The current practice of pumping wastewater into the ocean was identified as wasteful and it was recommended to be treated for reuse.
- Impact on the regional water supply from potential population growth and efforts to improve water reliability are not keeping pace with this growth.
- Questions were raised regarding harvestable rights, with concern that there was not enough focus on this in the draft strategy to ensure loss of water to the ocean can be reduced.

3. Environmental and ecosystem health

There was focus in the feedback on support for the river and ecosystem health, through restoration of unhindered natural flows. Concerns were raised about the impacts from rising sea levels and coastal erosion.

Key support

- There was considerable support for options that restore natural flows and improve the ecosystem health in the region.
- Sustainable water use was encouraged to be a focus of the strategy with options to protect the environment, ecosystems and water sources, as well as enable connectivity.
- There was support for more expansive environmental monitoring to improve understanding of environmental dynamism and natural variability, and that this would be to the benefit all water users.

Key concerns

- Concern that connectivity of the river systems was not reflected enough in the regional water strategies, including consideration for the impact that each river has on others, within and across regions.
- Impacts of rising sea levels, sand-choking flows and erosion on river health were raised.
- The draft strategy needs to address more strongly the coastal-related impacts and challenges in this region.
- There is a need to increase native vegetation cover throughout all catchments to help improve water quality, restore catchment hydrology, and retain water in the landscape.
- Impacts that existing and potential new water infrastructure has on connectivity to facilitate movement of fish and its contribution to the health of freshwater and saltwater systems as well as cultural and economic fishing practices.

4. Climate change and data modelling

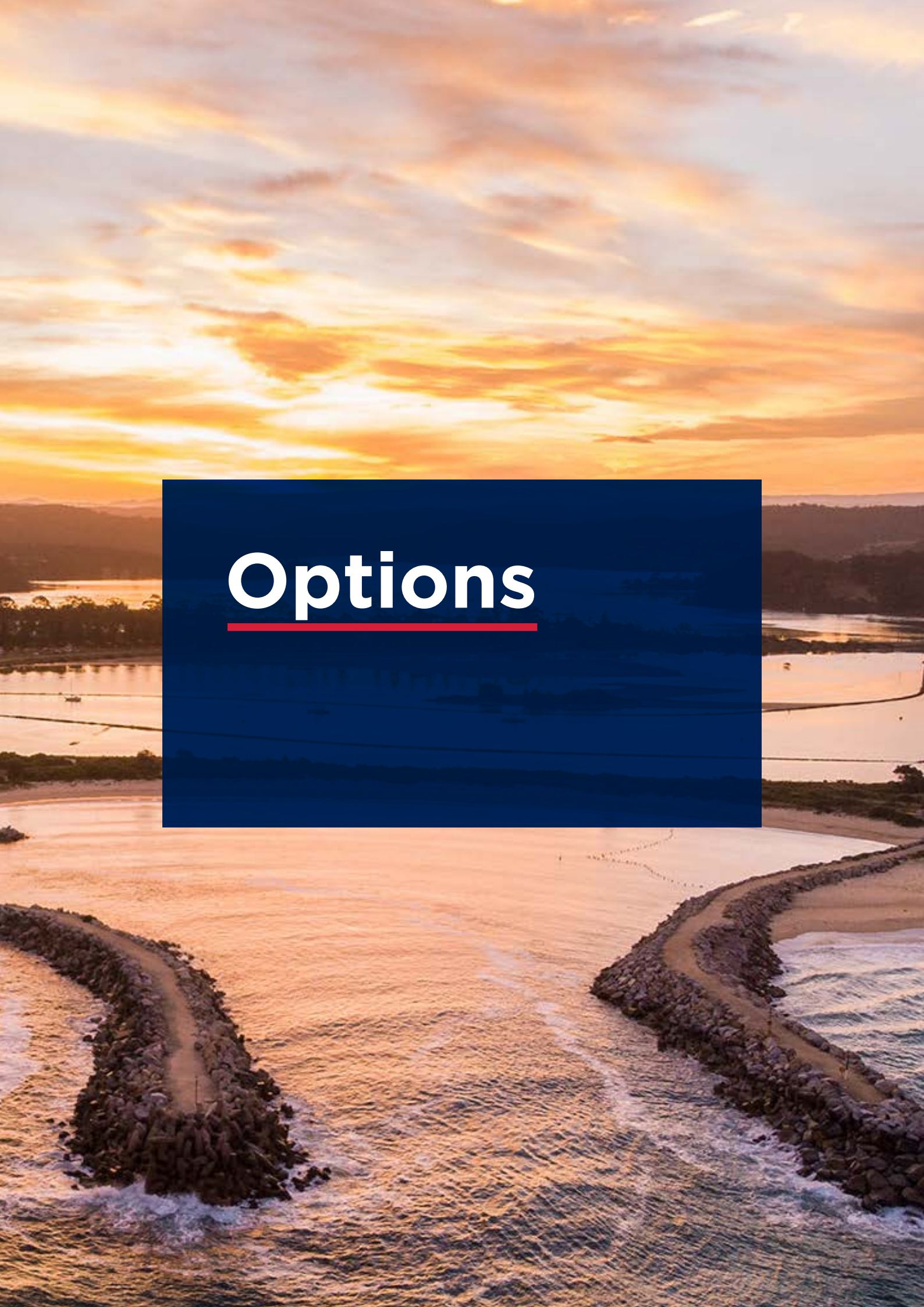
Stakeholders were pleased that the draft strategy acknowledged climate change and its impact. There was support for the data modelling and its future use in decision-making. Stakeholders also recognised and supported the regional water strategy taking action to manage climate change risks.

Key support

- The draft strategy acknowledging climate change and its impacts was recognised and supported in the feedback.
- The modelling, and the transparency and consistency, that it has brought to the strategy, was supported.
- It was suggested that climate data and modelling should be made available to assist communities and councils in their planning.
- The department was encouraged to take responsibility for action in the face of climate change, at individual, council and government level.
- Investigating options that improve demand management, increase water use efficiency and focus on sustainable water use, was supported.

Key concerns

- There was concern that the data modelling using the worst-case scenario of potential future extreme climate events, may skew decision making and planning.
- Clarification was sought on specific data modelling inclusions, source data and parameters used in the modelling that supported the strategy development.



Options

Long list of proposed options identified in the draft South Coast Regional Water Strategy

Maintaining and diversifying water supplies

1. Pipeline from Brogo Dam to Bega-Tathra town water supply system
2. A reserve volume for the Brogo-Bermagui town water supply system
3. Water treatment plant for Brogo-Bermagui town water supply system
4. Water treatment plant for Yellow Pinch Dam
5. Upgrade water main between Bewong and Milton
6. Pipeline connecting Bega Valley Shire Council and Eurobodalla Shire Council town water supply systems
7. Vulnerability of surface water supplies to sea level rise
8. Reuse of reclaimed water
9. Managed aquifer recharge investigations and policy
10. Desalination for supply augmentation
11. Instream dam at Reedy Creek
12. Eurobodalla Southern Storage
13. Increased harvestable rights for coastal draining catchments
14. Improve releases from Cochrane Dam to better match water demands of irrigators
15. Increased industry access to high flows
16. Increased on-farm water storage
17. A grid of off-stream storages in the Bega Valley
18. Tuross River barrage
19. Increase capacity of Brogo Dam
20. Increase capacity of Cochrane Dam
21. Brown Mountain Water Project (pumped hydro scheme)
22. Instream dam at Crystalbrook

Protecting and enhancing natural systems

23. Establish sustainable extraction limits for South Coast surface water and groundwater sources
24. Shift extractions from low stream flows to high stream flows
25. Extend water and sewer services to southern villages (Shoalhaven Water)
26. Southern Reclaimed Water Management Scheme
27. Merimbula Effluent Management Scheme
28. Fish-friendly water extraction
29. Improved fish passage in South Coast rivers
30. Improve stormwater management
31. Bringing back riverine and estuarine habitats and threatened species
32. Protecting ecosystems that depend on coastal groundwater resources
33. Characterising coastal groundwater resources

Supporting water use efficiency and conservation

34. Active and effective water markets
35. Improved data collection and information sharing
36. Weir at Brogo-Bermagui town water supply off-take
37. Shorten the Bega-Brogo regulated river system
38. Increase general security allocations in the Bega-Brogo regulated river system
39. Regional network efficiency audit

Strengthening community preparedness for climate extremes

40. River Recovery Program for the South Coast: a region-wide program of instream works, riparian vegetation and sediment control
41. Apply the NSW Extreme Events Policy to the South Coast region
42. Quantify the resource potential of South Coast hard rock aquifers
43. Planning for climate change impacts on coastal groundwater resources
44. Planning for land use pressures on coastal groundwater resources.

Table 1: *Long list of proposed options for the South Coast region*

Options 1-22: Maintaining and diversifying water supplies

Water infrastructure, such as pipelines and new water storages, received a mix of support and concern in the feedback. There was considerable support for the water reuse and recycling options with responses welcoming proposed options for wastewater treatment that would avoid ocean outfall.

Options	Summary of feedback received
1. **Pipeline from Brogo Dam to Bega-Tathra town water supply system** 6. **Pipeline connecting Bega Valley Shire Council and Eurobodalla Shire Council town water supply systems**	• Concern expressed for the expense of pipeline infrastructure projects. • Support for the pipelines if they were considered after a proposed increase in the capacity of Brogo Dam (Option 20). • Concern for what happens to the proposed pipelines during wet seasons when they may not be needed.
2. **A reserve volume for the Brogo-Bermagui town water supply system**	• Support for this option if it were considered after a proposed increase in the capacity of Brogo Dam (Option 20).
3. **Water treatment plant for Brogo-Bermagui town water supply system** 4. **Water treatment plant for Yellow Pinch Dam**	• Support for these options but with the use of renewable energy.
5. **Upgrade water main between Bewong and Milton**	• This option was indicated in feedback to be a lower priority.
7. **Vulnerability of surface water supplies to sea level rise**	• This option was supported.
8. **Reuse of reclaimed water**	• Treated water from Merimbula sewage could be utilised to support water reliability for agriculture before being dumped at sea. • This could be implemented in conjunction with improved on-farm water storage. • There was concern expressed for if this resulted in higher extraction was then permitted.
9. **Managed aquifer recharge investigations and policy**	• This option was supported as recharge is important to the rural landscape.
10. **Desalination for supply augmentation**	• Support for this option but with the use of renewable energy.

Options	Summary of feedback received
11. Instream dam at Reedy Creek **22. Instream dam at Crystalbrook**	• Feedback opposed the construction of new dams or off-stream storages because of their financial and environmental costs.
12. Eurobodalla Southern Storage **18. Tuross River barrage**	• Eurobodalla Southern Water Supply Storage is only supported if implemented in conjunction with Tuross River barrage, to supply irrigators on the lower Tuross. • Tuross River barrage supported for security of supply to licence holders on the lower Tuross.
13. Increased harvestable rights for coastal draining catchments **16. Increased on-farm water storage**	• Increased harvestable rights received mixed feedback, with some stakeholders supporting, others opposing. • Support for on-farm water storage increase included: – Enabling water security for irrigators in the Bega Valley – Availability of surface fresh water throughout coastal catchments could make an important contribution to facilitating the response to bushfires – Implementation in conjunction with increased industry access to high flows and with conversion of instream licences through a multiplier to on-farm dam storage licences.
14. Improve releases from Cochrane Dam to better match water demands of irrigators **15. Increased industry access to high flows**	• Support for improved releases from Cochrane Dam as daily releases minimise ecological stress, especially during dry conditions. • Support for increased industry access to high-flows was opposed, although some feedback suggested that it could be implemented in conjunction with on-farm water storage.
17. A grid of off-stream storages in the Bega Valley	• Feedback opposed the construction of new dams or off-stream storages because of their financial and environmental costs.
19. Increase capacity of Brogo Dam	• Support for this option if it results in significant increases in allocation access for active water licence holders. • Opposition was expressed for the possible adverse impact on the South East Forest National Park.
20. Increase capacity of Cochrane Dam	• Improved water reliability achieved through this option was supported.
21. Brown Mountain Water Project (pumped hydro scheme)	• The concept of pumped hydro was supported, as was the potential for additional storage for irrigation needs.

Options 23-33: Protecting and enhancing natural systems

Feedback for the proposed options in this category was supportive of the preservation or restoration of the natural characteristics of the river system, and exploring ways to recycle and reuse wastewater.

Options	Summary of feedback received
23. Establish sustainable extraction limits for South Coast surface water and groundwater sources **24. Shift extractions from low stream flows to high stream flows**	• Feedback suggested that more information was needed to understand the relationship between groundwater and surface water before committing to or encouraging more extraction.
25. Extend water and sewer services to southern villages (Shoalhaven Water)	• This option was supported if it was subject to stringent environmental assessment and requirements. • There was opposition to this option being implemented to enable more subdivision.
26. Southern Reclaimed Water Management Scheme **27. Merimbula Effluent Management Scheme**	• Strong support for these options. • This is a major water source that could improve water reliability for agriculture enterprises. • Disposal of secondary treated sewerage effluent out to sea is wasteful of freshwater and nutrient resources.
28. Fish-friendly water extraction **29. Improved fish passage in South Coast rivers**	• All on-stream storages should have fish ladders or fish elevators installed where there is significant fish habitat upstream. • Any new on-stream storages should be required to have appropriate fish passage. • Care encouraged to ensure fish passage mechanisms do not impede operation or efficiency of the pump system.
30. Improve stormwater management	• Support for this option with the suggestion that each stormwater pipe have nets to prevent rubbish entering the waterways.
32. Protecting ecosystems that depend on coastal groundwater resources **33. Characterising coastal groundwater resources**	• These options were supported.

Options 34-39: Supporting water use efficiency and conservation

Feedback supported these proposed options, with a particular focus on using telemetry and improving data capture and information sharing on water use.

Options	Summary of feedback received
34. Active and effective water markets **35. Improved data collection and information sharing** **39. Regional network efficiency audit**	• Support expressed for all of these options. • The use of telemetry and remote data to improve compliance and water management was encouraged.
36. Weir at Brogo-Bermagui town water supply off-take **37. Shorten the Bega-Brogo regulated river system** **38. Increase general security allocations in the Bega-Brogo regulated river system**	• There was mixed support and concern for these options due to potential impacts on water entitlements and over-allocation.

Options 40-44: Strengthening community preparedness for climate extremes

Feedback supported the proposed options to enable resilient communities to be built and ecological areas to be protected, with the provision of keeping environmental and ecological health at the forefront.

Options	Summary of feedback received
31. Bringing back riverine and estuarine habitats and threatened species **40. River Recovery Program for the South Coast: a region-wide program of instream works, riparian vegetation and sediment control**	• These options were supported. • Some support was specific to the aim of these options being to restore the hydrological regime to its natural state.
41. Apply the NSW Extreme Events Policy to the South Coast region	• Supported as the South Coast is one of the last pristine areas of our country and we need to protect what little is left.
42. Quantify the resource potential of South Coast hard rock aquifers	• Concern that this may result in more extraction.
43. Planning for climate change impacts on coastal groundwater resources **44. Planning for land use pressures on coastal groundwater resources**	• Support for planning but only if there will be no longer term negative impacts on the quantity or quality of the groundwater.

Suggested additional options

Respondents suggested a range of new options that related to a variety of topics as set out in the following. A number of these suggestions will be integrated into existing options. In some cases, new options will be created and displayed in the next public exhibition.

Topics	Suggestions
Development projects	• Establish a research centre for agricultural water productivity, efficiency and management.
Technologies	• Identify water efficiency options that maximise agricultural water productivity, without reducing agriculture's share of water.
Infrastructure	• Upgrading council owned sewage treatment plants to recycle water for allowable land use. • Construction of storage facilities such as dams and wetlands for water to be used by agricultural enterprises, for firefighting and recreation. • Locate storages as high as practicable in the landscape; fill these storages by the interception of stormflow runoff with feeder drains; manage the flow in feeder drains using smart culverts and utilise the water stored as soon as economically opportune using gravity-fed irrigation. • Construction of a barrage at Bottleneck Reach as an economical option. • Construct a much larger storage at the Crystalbrook site and use excess variable renewable energy to pump from this dam to the Cochrane dam, then generate power at the optimal price using existing infrastructure.
Education	• Increase the education and motivation of the public on water consumption and conservation, for example home visits by assessors with ideas and products to conserve water at home.
Policy alternatives	• Alternative options available to water managers that would allow intervention and adaptive management if an extreme event equivalent to a drought of record occurred (such as through the Extreme Events Policy and Incident Response Guides), without carrying significant opportunity cost every single year. • Conduct a review of water management practices and policies preceding and during the most recent drought to identify learnings, including the design and delivery of the Incident Response Guide and Extreme Events Policy; this analysis could inform decision-making on drought of record.

Response

Response to feedback

Since the publication of the draft South Coast Regional Water Strategy, the NSW Water Strategy has been developed. Some of the issues that the South Coast Regional Water Strategy highlighted and that were raised by communities in the South Coast region are challenges across the whole state. These state-wide issues have been included as priority focus areas in the NSW Water Strategy and are outlined below.

Your feedback has been used to refine the key challenges that we need to focus on in the final South Coast 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.

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

New climate data

The new climate datasets and updated modelling that underpin the draft South Coast Regional Water Strategy are an important advance on previous climate work. We can now better assess the likelihood of a range of drought conditions, and the impacts on surface water security and reliability over a much wider range of climate conditions. This is a major improvement from our previous reliance on the observed historical records only.

The key next step is to work with the community to detail how this climate data should be used. This may include establishing the risk appetite of the community and identifying which historical droughts should be used as the basis for water management.

A priority action in the NSW Water Strategy is for the NSW Government to review water allocation frameworks and water sharing plan provisions in response to new extremes in water availability. This will include exploring risk management approaches for a more adaptive water allocation and accounting framework, as well as understanding how the new climate data can inform this work. Progressing this requires detailed and focused engagement with the community. It cannot happen overnight. It also depends on communities having a workable understanding of these risks and having conversations about the level of risk they are willing to accept.

The new climate data is already being used in business cases to assess the impacts and benefits of proposed major state water infrastructure. This information will be useful for local water utilities and other stakeholders in assessing the long-term water security of individual towns. Making this data available in a useable format is a priority under the Town Water Risk Reduction Program.

As with all types of science, we need to continually improve the data. The next steps in continuing to improve the climate data and modelling method will be to apply it to assess climate impacts on groundwater and associated risks. This is being progressed through the Groundwater Strategy.

Aboriginal water rights

One of the primary objectives of the draft South Coast Regional Water Strategy is to recognise and protect Aboriginal water rights, interests and access to water. It is also priority number 2 in the NSW Water Strategy.

While there were unfortunately limited opportunities to engage with First Nations/Aboriginal People in the South Coast region prior to the release of the draft strategy, additional engagement meetings were held after public exhibition. 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 South Coast 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 South Coast Regional Water Strategy.

Water infrastructure

Individual infrastructure options will be assessed as part of the rapid cost benefit analysis when shortlisting the options. Each infrastructure option has separate benefits, costs and impacts localised to the area and the catchment.

Environmental and ecosystem health

The feedback on the draft South Coast Regional Water Strategy was supportive of the options to improve environmental health and connectivity. When developing the final South Coast Regional Water Strategy, we have considered ideas that were raised by stakeholders during public exhibition.

Integrating land use and water management

There is an important link between land use and water management. How land is used determines water management needs – whether water is servicing urban developments or being provided to other uses (including industry, environmental, cultural or recreational needs). Land use planning decisions and development control also have a key role to play in protecting water sources for supply, on the health and stability of waterbodies, and on receiving water quality.

Future water reliability and security in a changing climate will be critical to land use, urban development planning decisions and industry development initiatives in regional NSW. There is an opportunity to consider water availability and impacts much earlier and more strategically through the planning system. We have begun this work by using the evidence in the regional water strategies to inform:

- the next generation of regional plans
- special activation precincts
- regional job precincts.

The NSW Water Strategy has committed to better integrate land use planning, development approvals and water management (NSW Water Strategy Action 4.4) across the state. In addition, the NSW Water Strategy commits to adopting a more intense, state-wide focus on improving water quality (NSW Water Strategy Action 3.5) through the definition of clear roles, accountabilities and frameworks for monitoring, assessing and addressing water quality risks across the state.

The Department of Primary Industries – Agriculture is undertaking a three-year program to identify and map important agricultural land. Knowing where this land is situated and understanding value and contribution to the state's economy and food security will assist in making decisions about current and future land uses and their water needs. A comprehensive and consistent approach to collecting water statistics and related information will greatly help this process.

Groundwater

The NSW government has placed an enhanced state-wide focus on sustainable groundwater management and will consult with the community on a draft NSW Groundwater Strategy and publish the final strategy in 2021-22.

Opportunities to progress region-specific groundwater options in addition to state-level actions will be explored in the final *South Coast Regional Water Strategy.*

Economic prosperity and resilience

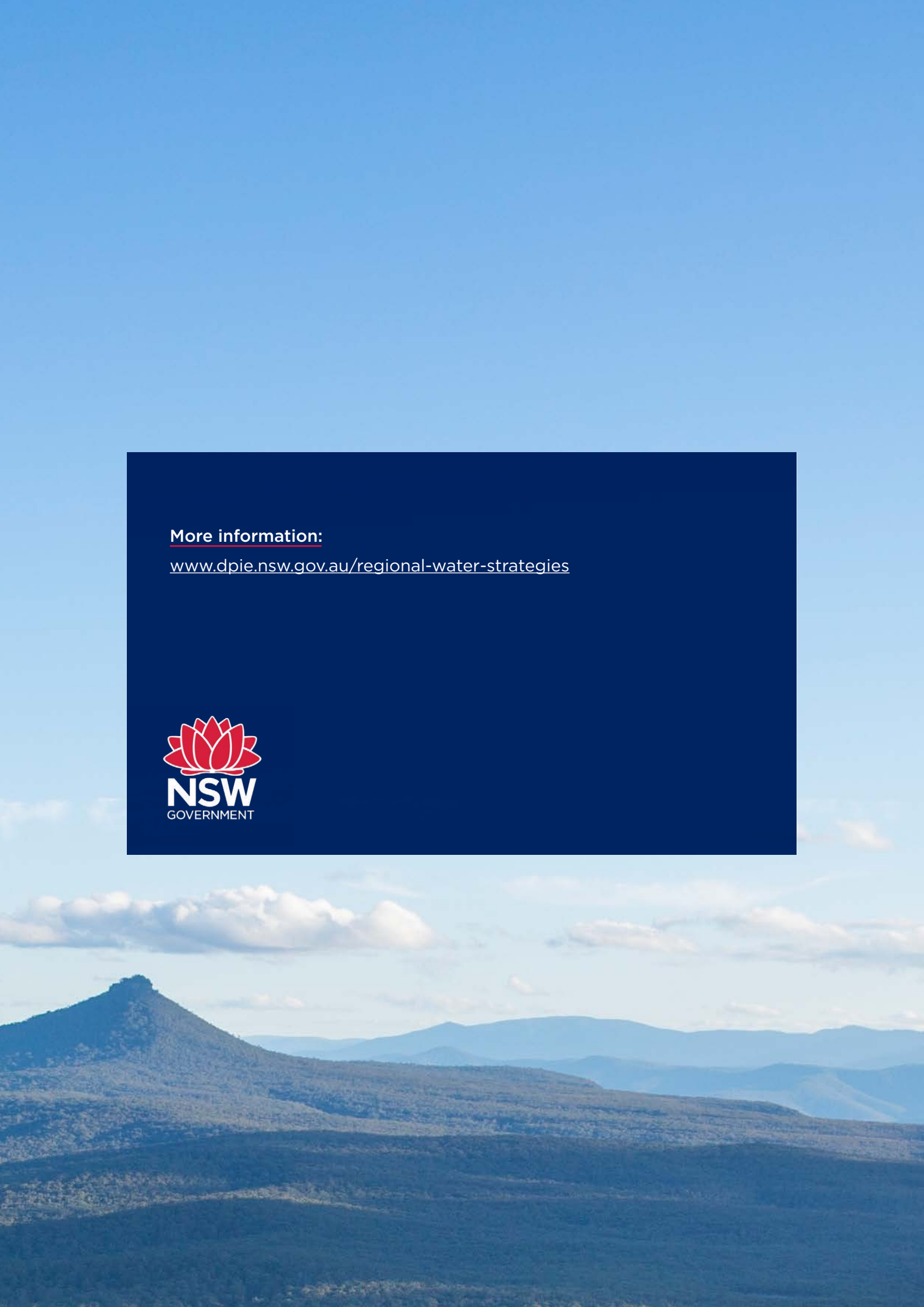
We are also working on additional options to address feedback we received during the public exhibition about ways we can support economic growth and resilient industries within capped systems (NSW Water Strategy Action 5.4) and align with the commitments made under the *Future Ready Regions Strategy.*

Next steps

Your feedback during the public exhibition has helped us refine the key challenges that the strategy needs to focus on improving. It has also helped us identify which of the 44 proposed options listed in the draft South Coast Regional Water Strategy should be shortlisted to help address these challenges. Your feedback has also suggested several new options that have been assessed.

The next steps in our engagement will be to seek your views on the newly shortlisted actions before the South Coast Regional Water Strategy is finalised. Your ongoing engagement is important to ensure we are identifying the right solutions for the South Coast region that meets the vision and needs of communities, the environment and industries.

A final package of actions will be presented as part of the final South Coast Regional Water Strategy and associated implementation plan which is scheduled for release in 2022.



More information:

www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/regional-water-strategies

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