

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Bermagui Water Security Project

What We Heard

July 2026



Acknowledgement of Country



Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency – Boss Lady Creative Designs, created the People and Community symbol.

Bermagui Water Security Project

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1 Executive summary

The Bermagui Water Security Project aims to identify sustainable solutions to ensure a reliable water supply for Bermagui, addressing the town's vulnerability during drought conditions.

The department's Water Group is investigating options aligned with the **South Coast Regional Water Strategy**.

The Water Group is currently preparing a Preliminary Business Case assessing the following options:

- Option 1: adjusting Brogo Dam's operational reserve rules to support supply during extreme events.
- Option 2: building a new weir or upgrading the existing weir including updating the offtake and pumping arrangement to help ensure sufficient water reliability during low-flow periods.
- Option 3: upgrading the Brogo Dam wall and spillway to help alleviate town water security risk.
- Option 4: construction of a direct pipeline from Brogo Dam to Brogo Water Treatment Plant to improve water reliability and reduce losses.

Bermagui faces risks of water shortages during severe droughts, with the potential for high or persistent water restrictions. For Bermagui to continue to grow and thrive into the future, communities and businesses need confidence that their water sources are reliable and able to support future demand.

If approved for delivery, the project will benefit the region by:

- building better town water security for Bermagui
- providing sustainable water supplies to support Bermagui's population growth
- increasing economic development and diversification.

The department is committed to developing and maintaining respectful, trusted, and collaborative relationships with stakeholders and communities to ensure the best outcomes for water infrastructure projects.

With multiple options under consideration, we acknowledge the broad interest in and potential impacts of, this project across the region.

We are committed to providing a variety of opportunities for engagement with First Nations communities, local councils and utilities, landowners, residents, businesses and the wider public.

Overall, early engagement and feedback have revealed a diverse range of views and support for potential water-security solutions, with no single option preferred.

The key themes raised were:

- water security
- infrastructure and integration with existing assets
- cost and economic assessment
- environmental protection

- maintenance and restoration of natural systems
- cultural heritage, cultural values & First Nations water perspectives
- water quality
- water equity
- hydrological modelling transparency
- population growth and development impacts.

We thank all community members and stakeholders for your valuable insights, feedback and active participation so far. Your contributions will help inform the project's direction.

The Preliminary Business Case is expected to be finalised in Q3 2026.

2 Introduction

2.1 About this report

This report provides an overview of community and stakeholder feedback on the project and options under consideration for the Bermagui Water Security Project, received throughout the engagement period July 2025 – May 2026.

The purpose of this report is to outline responses from key stakeholders, First Nations and the broader community to the options being explored as part of the preparation of the Preliminary Business Case.

The report includes:

- an overview of the engagement process and participation by community and stakeholders
- a summary of what we heard on key options proposed and our responses to the feedback received.

2.2 Background

The Preliminary Business Case for the Bermagui Water Security Project involves both technical assessments and broad community consultation to ensure optimal infrastructure solutions are put forward for further detailed assessment.

The Preliminary Business Case is a high-level assessment to determine the best options to progress to a Full Business Case – which involves a robust and detailed examination of proposed infrastructure before investment decisions are made.

As part of the Preliminary Business Case, key options being assessed include:

- Option 1: adjusting Brogo Dam's operational reserve rules to support supply during extreme events.
- Option 2: building a new weir or upgrading the existing weir including updating the offtake and pumping arrangement to help ensure sufficient water reliability during low-flow periods.
- Option 3: upgrading the Brogo Dam wall and spillway to help alleviate town water security risk.
- Option 4: construction of a direct pipeline from Brogo Dam to Brogo Water Treatment Plant to improve water reliability and reduce losses.

As the project progresses, ongoing engagement with the community and stakeholders will remain central to the process, and no decisions about future infrastructure will be made without consultation.

2.3 Engagement overview

The department’s Water Group is committed to building and maintaining respectful, trusted and collaborative relationships with our communities and stakeholders. This helps ensure water infrastructure projects achieve the best possible outcomes.

During engagement, communities and stakeholders, including First Nations communities, were invited to provide feedback on the project options as the Preliminary Business Case was developed.

2.3.1 Communications and engagement snapshot, July 2025 to May 2026



2.3.2 How and who we engaged

Date	Activity	Description	Stakeholders	Key metrics
July 2025 – Dec 2025	Briefings	Individual briefings with local MP	Local Members of Parliament	2 meetings

Date	Activity	Description	Stakeholders	Key metrics
July 2025 – May 2026	Meetings	Meetings with local councils – including project governance forum with representation from local council	Local council	11 meetings
Oct 2025 – Dec 2025	Meetings	Meetings and discussions with First Nations organisations, groups and individuals	Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), Traditional owners, Elders and community	6 meetings
Ongoing	Meetings	Meetings with key inter-agency organisations	NSW Government agencies	2 meetings
September 2025	Meeting	Water users	WaterNSW Coastal-Hunter Customer Advisory Group	1 meeting
November 2025	Community webinar	Online webinar	All stakeholders	0 attendees
Nov – Dec 2025	Feedback survey	A widely advertised online survey requesting feedback on the four project options	All stakeholders	1 response
December 2025	Community information session	Drop-in session in Bermagui	All stakeholders	10 attendees
December 2025	Community information session	Drop-in session in Cobargo	All stakeholders	5 attendees

3 What we heard

3.1 First Nations engagement outcomes

We connected with Traditional Owners, the Local Aboriginal Land Council and key First Nations stakeholders through face-to-face meetings, phone calls and emails. Community members were also invited to attend community drop-in information sessions and complete a feedback survey.

Feedback from First Nations stakeholders was mixed, with many representatives expressing a deep interest in the project.

First Nations peoples in Bermagui have stated that consultation should recognise the value of their cultural knowledge and time. Community members and the Local Aboriginal Land Council have indicated that engagement should include fair remuneration, acknowledge their expertise and support respectful partnerships with government.

Overall, there is currently a preference for option 1 and 2 to build a new weir or upgrade the existing weir including updating the offtake and pumping arrangement to help ensure sufficient water reliability during low-flow periods.

A summary of the key themes and responses is provided in the table below.

3.1.1 First Nations themes and responses

Theme	Feedback / suggestion	Response	Justification
Cost effectiveness	There was a strong preference for straightforward solutions, such as a weir and off-stream storage with stated perceptions of lower cost and easier construction.	We acknowledge these preferences and appreciate this feedback. Cost effectiveness analysis will form part of the options assessment and the economic/financial analysis.	NSW Government business case requirements support informed decisions by assessing cost-effectiveness and community and environmental benefits.
Environment	Emphasis of the importance of understanding of natural systems and processes, such as Bermagui water holes. Strong recognition of Aboriginal cultural and ecological knowledge; expertise of Rangers in identifying environmental values, risks and opportunities, and the need	We understand the important connection First Nations peoples have to natural ecological systems. Environmental and cultural assessments are undertaken as part of the Preliminary Business Case.	The NSW Government is committed to sustainable environmental management and requires environmental impacts to be carefully assessed and mitigated in all infrastructure projects.

Theme	Feedback / suggestion	Response	Justification
	to carefully consider regulatory implications when assessing options.		
Community engagement	Aboriginal organisations appreciated the early, dedicated engagement approach, recognising its importance in shaping wider community conversations. Preference for ongoing, face-to-face engagement - including First Nations only sessions was noted. The need for appropriate remuneration when cultural knowledge is shared was also emphasised. Elders offered guidance on who should speak for Country and the importance of culturally informed, respectful engagement practices.	We deeply value the wisdom of Elders and appreciate feedback provided from First Nations communities. We will use this feedback to continue to guide our engagement methods. Remuneration opportunities will also be reviewed.	The NSW Government follows best practices in community engagement and principles emphasising culturally safe, respectful, and sequenced engagement.
Cultural heritage	The importance of cultural heritage being referred to as a living, ongoing practice - deeply connected to water access, management and Country, was emphasised. Opportunities to strengthen Aboriginal knowledge through Ranger programs and expertise was also noted. Stakeholders highlighted cultural uses of water; supporting cultural farming and providing water for bush animals and expressed interest in local communities having more control over natural dams on Country. Governance and stewardship of the land that feeds into Brogo Dam	Further cultural heritage surveys and consultation with knowledge holders to be undertaken. Assessment of cultural values for non-infrastructure options considered.	The NSW Government will ensure it undertakes culturally appropriate engagement in line with best practice and minimises impact on culturally sensitive areas.

Theme	Feedback / suggestion	Response	Justification
	identified as an important issue.		
Water allocation/ equity	Desire that water equity expands beyond water users and volumes to include quality, cultural suitability and health impacts. Concern was raised over access to natural, additive (treatment) free water and consideration for cultural use during periods of drought.	We acknowledge concerns and appreciate this feedback. The refined options will be shared with First Nations stakeholders for discussion during any future engagement phases.	The NSW Government requires water infrastructure proposals to demonstrate public benefit. The project will assess all potential impacts on existing water users.
Governance and decision making	First Nations stakeholders clearly expressed a desire for LALCs to move beyond an advisory role to be involved in decision-making, with strong interest in co-partnership arrangements and governance structures. This includes where LALCs are embedded in project governance, reflecting shared responsibility, accountability over outcomes.	Should any of the options progress to an investment decision and through to delivery, the project would be subject to NSW Aboriginal Participation Plan requirements.	The NSW Government follows best practices in community engagement and principles to support inclusive and culturally informed governance.

3.2 Broader community engagement outcomes

The department consulted with key stakeholders and the broader community using a range of digital and traditional communication methods. These included in-person meetings and discussions, online briefings and meetings, community information sessions, online webinar, online feedback survey and phone calls to seek key stakeholder and community feedback during the engagement period.

Overall, the community demonstrated strong interest in transparent, evidence-based water security planning that responds to both current pressures and future regional needs.

Community engagement revealed strong and consistent expectations for improved regional water security, clearer alignment between water planning and population growth, and transparency in modelling and decision-making.

Overall, views on the shortlisted options were mixed.

- Option 1 feedback was generally neutral.

- Option 2 was favoured by some as a simpler, lower-impact way to improve low-flow reliability.
- Option 3 had some strong stakeholder support as a way to strengthen long-term water security and support future growth.
- Option 4 feedback was mixed, with many requesting more detailed hydrological, environmental and cost information before expressing a preference.

A summary of the themes and responses is detailed in the table below.

3.2.1 Themes and responses

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
Water security and reliability of long-term water supply	Strong concern that water restrictions are ongoing rather than temporary, highlighting the need for reliable long-term water security.	We acknowledge and understand these concerns. Hydrological modelling and long-term climate and rainfall variability analysis will continue to guide assessment of options.	Hydrological assessment ensures evidence-based decisions to ensure long-term operational resilience and future water security.
Water storage	A desire to capture more water with stakeholders noting that large rainfall events occur in cycles and substantial volumes spill to the ocean.	Opportunities to capture water will be considered through hydrological assessment and options analysis.	Hydrological assessment ensures storage options contribute to long-term resilience and water security.
Water restriction triggers	Feedback was provided regarding Brogo Dam level triggers used to determine water restriction levels for the Brogo–Bermagui water supply system.	Water restriction settings and their relationship to dam levels are managed through local government policies and operational planning. Information to support community understanding can be provided through future engagement if the project progresses.	Enhances transparency to help the public better understand key system operations.
Infrastructure upgrades	Strong interest in raising the Brogo Dam wall, weir options, expanding storage, improving firefighting supply, and reducing leakage. Preferences varied, with support for a weir at the offtake or pump site and for combined solutions such as raising the spillway, constructing a	All options will be assessed against feasibility, cost and environmental requirements.	Infrastructure planning must be informed by technical studies and statutory assessments.

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
	weir, and on-farm storage investigations.		
Population growth and development impacts	Feedback that significant population growth and large developments impact water quality and demand, associated with greywater systems, topsoil disturbance, runoff, and pressure on council planning. Strong desire for developer contributions to fund infrastructure.	Growth projections and water demand modelling are being incorporated into the Preliminary Business Case assessments.	Demand forecasts are a core component of business case modelling.
Water quality and environmental impacts	Concerns about water quality near greywater systems, runoff from developments, and impacts to ecological and heritage species. Interest in greater visibility of environmental and hydrological modelling, as well as understanding ecological and heritage species impacts.	Preliminary environmental, ecological and hydrological assessments have been completed as part of the Preliminary Business Case. Further environmental ecological and hydrological assessments, including any impacts on water quality, will be undertaken if the project progresses to a Full Business Case. Further assessment in line with statutory requirements will be undertaken as part of the environmental impact assessment should an option progress to delivery.	Environmental assessments identify and reduce or mitigate environmental and water quality impacts.
Fish health	Stakeholders highlighted past reports of native Bass fish deaths near Brogo Dam and requested the options consider and support ongoing fish health.	We appreciate this concern and the design of any infrastructure will be informed by further assessments prepared by aquatic specialists if the project progresses to a Full Business Case. Further assessment in line with statutory requirements will be undertaken as part of the environmental impact assessment should an option progress to delivery.	Ensures design considers aquatic health and complies with all regulatory requirements.

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
Hydrological modelling	Stakeholders expressed interest in hydrological modelling including flow impacts, rainfall cycles, spill behaviour, and system-wide performance of options.	We understand that people want to have confidence in this important area. Hydrological assessments have been completed and are also peer reviewed. They are submitted to Infrastructure NSW as part of the business case assurance review.	Hydrological modelling is a critical part of investment business cases for water infrastructure projects because it provides the scientific evidence needed to understand how water behaves in a system - both now and in the future.
Cost and economic factors	Concerns about rising water rates and cost impacts. Clarity sought on economic implications of options, including potential transfer impacts.	Economic analysis, cost-benefit, and pricing impacts form core aspects of the Preliminary Business Case development.	Major infrastructure projects must demonstrate affordability, value for money and financial sustainability.
Associated infrastructure	Suggested opportunities to align bridge upgrades and road corridor planning with infrastructure improvements.	We appreciate this feedback and ideas around associated infrastructure to bring wider value. This feedback will inform cross-agency discussions where relevant.	Integrated planning can maximise public value when aligned with scope and funding requirements.
Local water rights	Questions raised about water-take rights, access to rivers, and reliance on domestic tanks especially regarding property considerations.	Water access under current and any proposed water supply option will follow NSW legislative frameworks.	Water rights and allocations must comply with statutory frameworks.
Construction considerations	Interest in dam height, pump station requirements, and construction materials. Suggestion to widen the rocky crossing to redirect flows. Questions were asked about predicted spillway behaviour and storage capacity changes for the dam wall and weir options.	If the project progresses to a Full Business Case, further engineering work will be undertaken to refine project designs.	Option design and engineering have been developed to a level for preliminary assessment and costing. Further refinement occurs during a Full Business Case.

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
Aquatic impacts	Emphasis that any proposed options comply with environmental assessment and approval requirements, including the protection of sensitive or threatened species.	If the project progresses to a Full Business Case detailed aquatic assessments prepared in collaboration with NSW Government agencies will assess ecological impacts and identify mitigation measures.	Aquatic assessments ensure compliance with important biodiversity and water legislation.

3.3 Next steps

The next phase of the Bermagui Water Security Project involves finalising the Preliminary Business Case and identifying a preferred option or set of options for more detailed analysis via a Full Business Case. A Full Business Case would be the next stage of project development.

As the project progresses, ongoing engagement with the community and stakeholders will remain central to the process, and no decisions about future infrastructure will be made without consultation.

We thank community members and stakeholders for the insights, feedback, and participation shared to date. Your contributions have been instrumental in shaping the project's direction, and we look forward to continuing this collaboration on the Bermagui Water Security Project.

The Preliminary Business Case is expected to be finalised in 2026, and this will guide future investment decisions.