

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Belubula Water Security Project

What We Heard

July 2026



Acknowledgement of Country



The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges 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.

Belubula Water Security Project

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1 Executive summary

The Belubula Water Security Project is focused on enhancing long-term water security for communities, businesses, and the environment across the Central West region of NSW.

In February 2024, the NSW and Australian Governments jointly committed \$7.7 million to develop a Full Business Case (FBC), supported by the National Water Grid Fund.

The Belubula Valley is part of the Lachlan catchment and can experience extreme weather events. The valley has limited storage capacity in Lake Rowlands Dam. The dam fills quickly and frequently overflows, in part due to its limited size and highly variable rainfall. Inefficient water storage and unreliable access to water contribute to making the catchment sensitive to droughts.

The Belubula Water Security Project is investigating a range of solutions to improve water availability and improve drought resilience in the region.

Following stakeholder consultation on the initial project infrastructure options and further analysis, three options have been shortlisted for detailed investigation through the development of a Full Business Case:

- Option 1: a new pipeline between Lake Rowlands Dam and Carcoar Dam to transfer up to 2 GL of water annually, capturing spills and boosting supply.
- Option 2: raising the Lake Rowlands Dam wall to increase storage from 4.5 GL to 8 GL.
- A combination of Options 1 and 2: a new connecting pipeline between Lake Rowlands Dam and Carcoar Dam and raising Lake Rowlands Dam wall.

This report summarises feedback received from the community and key stakeholders on the shortlisted options and includes details of the communications and engagement program, as well as insights captured during engagement activities.

Overall, community and stakeholder feedback has shown strong interest in improving long-term water security in the region. All options are supported subject to consideration of appropriate safeguards, including environmental protections, water modelling, and ecological and downstream impacts.

Feedback on the individual project options has been mixed, with Option 2 viewed as most favourable, provided safeguards are in place.

The key themes raised were:

- economic benefits and cost effectiveness
- environmental impacts
- water quality and safety
- water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities
- community and stakeholder engagement and transparency.

Thank you to all community members and stakeholders who participated, and shared valuable insights and feedback. This feedback and engagement have played a vital role in shaping the direction of the Full Business Case.

2 Introduction

2.1 About this report

The NSW Government is committed to building and maintaining respectful, trusted and collaborative relationships with our communities and stakeholders to ensure water infrastructure projects achieve the best possible outcomes. The department has taken a phased approach to community and stakeholder engagement so that feedback can be shared and integrated progressively.

This report provides an overview of community and stakeholder feedback on the shortlisted options for the Belubula Water Security Project, with feedback received during September 2025 to May 2026.

The report summarises responses from key stakeholders, First Nations groups and the broader community on the 3 shortlisted options being explored as part of the preparation of the Full Business Case.

The report includes:

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

2.2 Background

The Full Business Case for the Belubula Water Security Project involves detailed planning, technical assessments and broad consultation to ensure optimal solutions are put forward for investment decisions.

Consultation on the infrastructure options occurred over two phases from late 2024 to 2026. The first phase of consultation sought feedback on the following four infrastructure options for consideration:

- Option 1: a new pipeline between Lake Rowlands Dam and Carcoar Dam to transfer up to 2 GL of water annually.
- Option 2: raising the Lake Rowlands Dam wall to increase storage capacity from 4.5 to 8 GL.
- Option 3: constructing a new dam 2.5 km downstream of Lake Rowlands.
- Option 4: connecting the Belubula and Macquarie valleys via an interregional pipeline.

Feedback from this consultation phase is published in the [Belubula Water Security Project What We Heard Report \(September 2025\)](#).

The second phase of consultation sought feedback on the following three shortlisted options for detailed investigation:

- Option 1: a new pipeline between Lake Rowlands Dam and Carcoar Dam to transfer up to 2 GL/year, capturing spills and boosting supply
- Option 2: raising the Lake Rowlands Dam wall to increase storage from 4.5 GL to 8 GL, and
- a combination of Options 1 and 2: a new connecting pipeline between Lake Rowlands Dam and Carcoar Dam and raising Lake Rowlands Dam wall.

The Full Business Case will assess the benefits and impacts of the shortlisted options before being submitted to Infrastructure NSW for an independent assurance review. This will guide future investment decisions and support the NSW Government in determining the project’s viability and the preferred solution for the region.

2.3 Engagement overview

During this second phase of engagement (from September 2025 to May 2026), we provided a wide range of opportunities for communities and stakeholders, including First Nations communities, to engage with us and provide feedback on the shortlisted options. Over 90 people participated in public webinars, public information sessions, and targeted stakeholder meetings. The department engaged with community members including First Nations communities, residents, businesses, and peak organisations, as well as local councils and water utilities:

2.3.1 Communications and engagement snapshot from September 2025 to May 2026



2.3.2 How and who we engaged from September 2025 to May 2026

Date	Activity	Description	Stakeholders	Key metrics
September	Landholder communication	Letters to landholders	Directly impacted landholders	6 letters distributed
September – October 2025	Meetings	Meetings with First Nations stakeholders	First Nations groups and representatives	18 attendees
October 2025	Meeting	Meeting with local council representative body	Local councils	20 attendees
October 2025	Meeting	Meeting with local water utility	Local water utility	5 attendees
October 2025	Community Information Session	Drop-in session in Orange	All stakeholders	4 attendees
October 2025	Community Information Session	Drop-in session in Blayney	All stakeholders	13 attendees
October 2025	Community Information Session	Drop-in session in Canowindra	All stakeholders	11 attendees
October 2025	Community Information Session	Drop-in session in Condobolin	All stakeholders	2 attendees
November 2025	Community Webinar	Online community webinar with the recording also hosted on webpage	All stakeholders	18 attendees
March 2026	Meeting	Meeting with local water utility	Local water utility	5 attendees

3 What we heard

3.1 First Nations engagement outcomes

A variety of engagement activities including face-to-face meetings, phone calls and emails were used to inform Traditional Owners, the Local Aboriginal Lands Council, and key First Nations stakeholders. Additionally, community members were invited to attend community information sessions and participate in a feedback survey.

Overall, First Nations representatives expressed support for Option 2, or a combined approach of Options 1 and 2, seeing these options as positive outcomes for Country.

A summary of the themes and responses to First Nations engagement is provided in the table below.

First Nations themes and responses

Theme	Feedback / suggestion	Response	Justification
Community engagement and provision of information	Many First Nations representatives requested more information about the options before forming a position or identifying a preferred option. Overall, there is currently a preference for Option 2 as this is seen as more achievable.	We will keep First Nations representatives updated at key stages throughout the business case development process.	Stakeholder consultation is a mandatory component of developing a Full Business Case for major infrastructure investment decisions by the NSW Government. This ensures government decisions are informed by community feedback.
Water allocation	Some community members expressed concern that Option 1 could see more water being allocated to gold mines.	A key objective of this project is to support town water security across the region. This project has not been developed with a focus on supporting the mining industry. Mines must hold water licences and meet environmental conditions. The NSW Government encourages water efficiency across all sectors, including mining, but these arrangements are managed under separate frameworks.	While the NSW Government encourages water efficiency across all sectors, this project does not alter existing allocation arrangements or licensing requirements, nor does it specifically target water supply to mining operations.
Cultural Water	Some community members were concerned that the project options may impact the amount of available Cultural Water downstream.	The project will operate in accordance with existing Water Sharing Plans and water management rules. It will not change current water entitlements or associated access arrangements. Any proposed operational approach will be assessed to ensure it remains consistent with these	The purpose of the project is to address water security within the Belubula Valley and neighbouring regional centres. The options are the result of recommendations within the Lachlan and Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategies. These strategies focus on equitable outcomes and

Theme	Feedback / suggestion	Response	Justification
		established plans and frameworks.	alignment with broader government priorities.

3.2 Broader community engagement outcomes

A variety of communication styles and engagement opportunities were used to inform and consult key stakeholders and the broader community. This included digital and traditional communication methods, in-person discussions, online briefings and meetings, community information sessions, online webinar, online and paper feedback surveys, and phone calls to seek key stakeholder and community feedback.

The feedback from key stakeholders and the broader community was of mixed sentiment.

Overall, feedback indicated strong support in planning for water security in the region, along with a clear desire for environmental protections, transparency about project benefits, fair outcomes for downstream users, and continued community engagement.

Option 2 is viewed most favourably, provided appropriate safeguards are in place.

A summary of the key themes and responses from the broader community is detailed in the table below.

Themes and responses

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
Environmental impacts	Concerns the project could reduce downstream water volumes impacting water needed for the environment.	The project will maintain environmental flows in accordance with the Lachlan Regulated River Water Sharing Plan. Detailed environmental studies are being conducted to assess the impact of the options on downstream flows.	Water sharing plans are the main tool in a broader framework for managing the water resources of NSW. They are legally binding plans made under the <i>Water Management Act 2000</i> (NSW). The NSW Government also requires a Full Business Case to consider the full range of environmental impacts including environmental flow impacts. Environmental impacts and mitigations are also considered during the planning approvals process, should the project proceed to construction.

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
Environmental impacts	Guaranteed environmental flows should be specified, and any reductions in flow must be considered, along with ensuring measures to safeguard downstream ecosystems are put in place.	Initial hydrological and environmental studies have been completed. These will be expanded with field investigations to confirm any potential impacts on any changes to environmental flows. Biodiversity and aquatic ecology assessments are identifying any potential risks and required safeguards. Further investigations will be completed to inform any impact on environmental flows.	The NSW Government requires a Full Business Case to consider the full range of environmental impacts including environmental flow impacts. Environmental impacts and mitigations are also considered during the planning approvals process, should the project proceed to construction.
Water quality and safety	Increasing concern about the risks from PFAS, heavy metals, or mining contamination.	The NSW Government acknowledges these concerns and is taking a whole of government approach to manage PFAS. The NSW Government is working with the local water utilities to ensure that town water supplies continue to meet the new Australian Drinking Water Guidelines released in June 2025. Additionally, dam owners are responsible for risk assessment, monitoring, and reporting to relevant regulators on raw water quality in their storages. This includes risks such as algal blooms, accumulation of contaminants, and low-level water quality.	The NSW Government requires a Full Business Case to consider the full range of environmental and water quality impacts and risks of any proposal. Environmental impacts and mitigations are also considered during the planning approvals process, should the project proceed to construction.
Environmental impacts	Environmental and heritage assessments must clearly define the extent to which downstream impacts resulting from increased upstream	Detailed hydrological and engineering studies are being carried out to map how far the water would extend when the dam is full. We are studying the hydrologic impacts (and related aquatic impacts) down	The NSW Government requires a Full Business Case to consider the full range of environmental impacts of any proposal. Environmental impacts and mitigations are also

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
	water storage volume will be considered.	to the confluence with the Lachlan.	considered during the planning approvals process, should the project proceed to construction.
Environmental impacts	Construction at Lake Rowlands must be assessed for its potential impact on water quality.	Construction activities will follow strict environmental management measures – including erosion and sediment control, spill prevention, and real-time monitoring – to ensure water quality is protected.	The NSW Government requires a Full Business Case to consider the full range of environmental impacts of any proposal. Environmental impacts and mitigations are also considered during the planning approvals process, should the project proceed to construction.
Environmental impacts	The project needs to demonstrate how climate change and long-term sustainability are being addressed.	The hydrological modelling of the options includes climate projections and growth forecasts to ensure the preferred option remains robust under future conditions. The project will draw on NSW and Australian Regional Climate Modelling (NARCLiM) and scenario analysis to evaluate a range of possible future climate conditions and to ensure alignment with NSW Government climate change and adaptation policies. The Full Business Case will include a carbon assessment, including consideration of energy efficiency opportunities and greenhouse gas emissions over the project lifecycle.	The NSW Government requires that a Full Business Case be prepared to thoroughly assess the environmental impacts of any proposed project. This includes the integration of NARCLiM future climate scenarios into the assessment. Regional climate projections and supporting information are provided by NARCLiM. NARCLiM brings together leading scientific expertise to model climate conditions across south-eastern Australia, delivering data and tools specifically designed to meet the needs of a wide range of users.
Environmental impacts	Interest in whether there will be regenerative work to the Belubula River system when considering new infrastructure.	The Full Business Case will focus on the benefits and impacts of the assessed infrastructure options. Any impacts will be considered and mitigated where appropriate.	The NSW Government requires a Full Business Case to consider the full range of environmental impacts of any proposal. Environmental impacts and mitigations are also

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
			considered during the planning approvals process, should the project proceed to construction.
Economic benefits and cost-effectiveness	Ownership, operation, and maintenance of the pipeline must be clearly defined.	Ownership and operational responsibilities are being determined through the business case process, in consultation with local water utilities and other stakeholders. The final arrangements for funding maintenance and operation are yet to be determined. In general, water infrastructure follows the principle that those who benefit should contribute to the costs. These arrangements will be confirmed once the preferred option and governance model are finalised.	The NSW Government requires that a Full Business Case must consider the options and implications for ownership, operation and maintenance of proposed infrastructure options.
Economic benefits and cost-effectiveness	Any increase in customer water bills should be considered by the project.	The business case will assess costs and benefits to ensure fair outcomes. Any future pricing changes would be reviewed and would need to demonstrate clear community benefit.	The NSW Government requires a Full Business Case to assess the economic impacts to ensure the project demonstrates value-for-money.
Economic benefits and cost-effectiveness	The proposed business benefits of the project must be outlined.	The business case will assess costs and benefits to ensure fair outcomes.	The NSW Government requires a Full Business Case to assess the economic impacts to ensure the project demonstrates value-for-money.
Water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities	Concerns were raised whether the project might benefit regional mines, particularly if a pipeline is built near mining areas or if additional water is allocated to the mines from Carcoar Dam.	The project aims to improve water availability and increased drought resilience for residents, businesses, and the environment. The 3 options being considered as part of the Full Business Case have emerged from, and are supported by, regional water	While the NSW Government encourages water efficiency across all sectors, this project does not alter existing allocation arrangements or licensing requirements, nor does it specifically target water

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
	There are also some perceptions the project is being investigated to benefit water supply to regional mines.	strategies policies including the Lachlan Regional Water Strategy and the Macquarie Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy. This project has not been developed with a focus on supporting the mining industry. Mines must hold water licences and meet environmental conditions. The NSW Government encourages water efficiency across all sectors, including mining, but these arrangements are managed under separate frameworks.	supply to mining operations.
Water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities	Clarification sought on whether a pipeline already exists between Lake Rowlands and Carcoar.	There is currently no pipeline connecting the 2 storages. The project is exploring the feasibility and benefits of creating this connection to improve system reliability as one of the shortlisted options.	The project options align with the Lachlan and Macquarie-Castlereagh regional water strategies. The Full Business Case will provide a detailed analysis of the options so that government can make an investment decision.
Water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities	Clear strategies should be outlined to manage impacts if both Lake Rowlands and Carcoar dams experience low levels.	Transfers would only occur under specific hydrological conditions such as when Lake Rowlands is full and spilling. Operational rules would ensure both storages remain secure and that reliability for towns and irrigators is maintained.	The purpose of the project is to improve water availability and increased drought resilience across the Belubula Valley. The Full Business Case will provide a detailed analysis of the options so that government can make an investment decision.
Water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities	Any changes to local irrigators access to spill water will need to be addressed.	The project will operate in accordance with existing Water Sharing Plans and water management rules. It will not change current water entitlements or associated access arrangements. Any proposed operational approach will be assessed to ensure it remains consistent	The purpose of the project is to improve water availability and increased drought resilience across the Belubula Valley. The Full Business Case will provide a detailed analysis of the options so that government can make an investment decision.

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
		with these established plans and frameworks. Project operations will be reviewed as Water Sharing Plans are updated.	
Water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities	Whether the absence of direct benefits for irrigators downstream of the dam could create future liabilities for the NSW Government, including potential class-action risks as new planning and environmental protection laws are tested in the courts.	The project will operate in accordance with existing Water Sharing Plans and water management rules. It will not change current water entitlements or associated access arrangements. Any proposed operational approach will be assessed to ensure it remains consistent with these established plans and frameworks.	The NSW Government requires a Full Business Case to assess value for money and to identify any material economic or distributional impacts on other water users, including downstream irrigators.
Water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities	The project should outline whether raising Lake Rowlands Dam enables the local water utility to expand its current network.	The project is exploring options for improving water security for town water customers. Any network expansion would require separate planning, funding, and regulatory approvals.	The purpose of the project is to improve water availability and increased drought resilience across the Belubula Valley and Orange. The Full Business Case will provide a detailed analysis of the options so that government can make an investment decision.
Water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities	Interest in the average water supply needs for Orange.	The NSW Government requires all major water infrastructure projects to demonstrate public and regional benefit, and to maintain equitable outcomes for towns, industry, agriculture, and the environment. The options considered would supply Orange in addition to the Belubula valley and give Orange a portfolio of supply. Orange demand is 5.1 GL/year.	The options have been shaped by the Lachlan and Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategies to ensure equitable outcomes. The options also align with broader government priorities.
Water allocation, equity and sharing	More information is required on any studies that have assessed the	Studies assessing current and future water needs of Central West communities have informed the development of	NSW Government requires that the Full Business Case use an evidence-based planning approach founded

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
including between users and localities	water needs of Central West communities.	this project. These include regional water security analyses undertaken as part of the Lachlan and the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategies, as well as long-term demand forecasting and drought resilience assessments. Further detailed analysis is being progressed as part of the Full Business Case to refine demand assumptions and confirm community water supply needs.	on region-wide studies that assess population growth, climate variability, drought risk, and water demand across the relevant Central West communities.
Water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities	Any increase in water releases due to raising the dam wall should be clearly outlined.	Any potential changes to water releases associated with raising the dam wall will be clearly identified and assessed as part of the Full Business Case. This will include analysis of how increased storage capacity could affect operational rules, release patterns, and downstream flows, while remaining consistent with existing Water Sharing Plans. No decisions have been made regarding changes to water releases at this stage.	The NSW Government requires that the Full Business Case assess and document the extent to which any infrastructure option may change water management and quantify any impacts on downstream users and localities. It also requires confirmation that outcomes remain equitable and within the existing regulatory framework.
Water allocation, equity and sharing including between users and localities	Clear measures are required to ensure urban water is prioritised over industry, farming, and irrigation.	Urban water supply will continue to be prioritised under existing water security and drought response frameworks. The Full Business Case will consider how each option supports urban water reliability, particularly during drought, without changing water entitlements or access priorities.	The NSW Government requires that the Full Business Case consider the options within the established regulatory framework.
Community and stakeholder engagement and transparency	Concern expressed by some stakeholders that the second phase of engagement did not sufficiently focus on the	Engagement with the broader Bathurst community occurred early in the process through on-the-ground consultation and has continued using a	Meaningful and appropriately targeted engagement should inform each stage of the business case development in

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
	broader Bathurst community.	range of methods aligned with the evolving scope of the project. A potential link to Bathurst was investigated during the initial stages of the project; however, this option was found to be unviable due to technical, hydrological, and environmental constraints. As a result, the current business case is focused on the Belubula Valley and Orange and targeted in-person engagement has therefore been undertaken in these areas. Bathurst community members are still able to participate through these sessions, as well as via webinars and the online survey. Feedback regarding engagement methods is also appreciated and helps to shape future engagement efforts.	accordance with NSW Government guidelines.
Community and stakeholder engagement and transparency	Interest in whether government agencies are sharing environmental data and reports	Government agencies are collaborating and sharing relevant data. The data portal on the Water Group website provides water related data and reports for NSW.	The NSW Government is committed to increasing water sector transparency by providing open access to relevant data, information products and data models to the community, the sector and industry.
Community and stakeholder engagement and transparency	Suggestion that the maps used in community engagement exercises should show the entire Central Tablelands Water network and further downstream.	The NSW Government is open to suggestions on how options are presented. This valuable feedback informs how materials are developed for community information.	The NSW Government is committed to providing accessible communications materials to support project engagement activities.
Community and stakeholder engagement	Concern that local knowledge and lived experience within the community are not being adequately	This concerns is acknowledged by the NSW Government.	Stakeholder consultation is a mandatory component of developing a Full Business Case for major infrastructure investment

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
and transparency	acknowledged or reflected in the decision-making process.	Engaging directly with residents – listening to those who live in and understand the area – is a vital part of shaping this project. That is why there was a wide range of ways for people to get involved and have their say. The NSW Government welcomes feedback that helps shape these methods.	decisions by the NSW Government. This ensures government decisions are informed by community feedback.
Alternatives	A broader, more integrated approach should be considered, such as connecting Wyangala to Cowra or making rainwater tanks mandatory.	This business case focuses on a set of options to secure water for Belubula Valley communities and potentially Orange and Bathurst which were recommended in the Lachlan Regional Water Strategy and the Macquarie-Castlereagh Regional Water Strategy . Current BASIX legislation mandates water efficiency such as rainwater tanks for all new residential buildings and major renovations. Further details can be found on the department's website - BASIX water review Water .	The NSW Government requires that significant infrastructure proposals be considered through a Full Business Case to ensure the investment represents value for money and delivers the expected policy outcomes.
Alternatives	Another water storage option should be built above Canowindra.	This has been noted as a community suggestion, however this is outside the scope of this project.	The NSW Government requires that significant infrastructure proposals be considered through a Full Business Case to ensure the investment represents value for money and delivers the expected policy outcomes.
Alternatives	Subsidising the cost of rainwater tanks for towns and villages.	This business case focuses on a set of options to secure water for Belubula Valley communities and potentially Orange and Bathurst. There is an existing NSW water efficiency program for regional NSW focused on	The NSW Government requires that significant infrastructure proposals be considered through a Full Business Case to ensure the investment represents value for money and

Theme	Feedback/ suggestion	Response	Justification
		working with key stakeholders, including the Water Directorate, Local Government NSW, local water utilities, industry leaders, and other government agencies. Further details can be found on the department's website - Water Efficiency Program Water .	delivers the expected policy outcomes.
Alternatives	Dedicated reserves at Wyangala and Burrendong dams should be used to secure critical supply.	This has been noted as a community suggestion, however this is outside the scope of this project. The Minimum Inflows project led by the department is reviewing the record low dam inflows received across NSW during the Tinderbox (2017-2020) drought. The project will review the water that will flow into dams during drought and adjust the storage to meet high priority needs under future climate scenarios. Further details can be found on the department's website - Minimum Inflows Project Water .	The NSW Government requires that significant infrastructure proposals be considered through a Full Business Case to ensure the investment represents value for money and delivers the expected policy outcomes.

3.3 Next steps

Development of the Belubula Water Security Project Full Business Case is a multistep process, and the department has taken a phased approach to community and stakeholder engagement so that feedback can be shared and integrated progressively.

The next step is to submit the Full Business Case to Infrastructure NSW for an independent assurance review before consideration by the NSW Government. Once finalised, key stakeholders will be informed, and a summary of the Full Business Case will be published on the website.

Thank you to all community members and stakeholders for your valuable insights, thoughtful feedback, and active participation. Your contributions have played a vital role in shaping the project's direction and Full Business Case.

More information

For more information on the project:

- visit [Belubula Water Security Project | Water](#)
- Email water.enquiries@dcceew.nsw.gov.au
- Phone 1300 081 047