

# Far North Coast Stakeholder Engagement Meeting

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## What We Heard

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Date: 12 August 2022 9.30am–11.30am  
Location: Online (via Microsoft Teams)  
Chair: Jim Bentley, CEO NSW Water Sector

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## Overview

The purpose of this meeting was to initiate a broader conversation and shared understanding of how Far North Coast communities:

- would like to engage with DPE Water and other NSW Government entities throughout the flood recovery process
- preferred methods of communication and collaboration during this time
- insights from the recent flood events
- how we may ensure stakeholders are able to share regional insights and provide input into ongoing and future projects of interest to the region
- any other issues, challenges and opportunities facing the region.

The feedback and learnings from this session will:

- inform how we continue to improve collaboration and engagement with Far North Coast communities, and
- help to clarify roles and responsibilities of department and NSW Government entities involved in the flood response and recovery process.

This meeting was chaired by Jim Bentley, CEO NSW Water Sector, following a commitment made in April 2021. Stakeholders were invited from a diverse range of Far North Coast community, industry, and government groups.

The following stakeholders and organisations participated in the meeting:

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## Attendees

1. Jim Bentley, CEO, NSW Water Sector (Chair)
2. Chris Magner, Chair, Richmond Wilson Combined Tidal Water Users Group
3. Brendan Guiney, Executive Officer, NSW Water Directorate
4. Phillip Rudd, General Manager, Rous County Council
5. Andrew Logan, Group Manager, Planning & Delivery, Rous County Council
6. Phillip Holloway, Director Infrastructure Services, Byron Shire Council
7. Matt Sorenson, Manager, Urban Services, Kyogle Council
8. Jenna Hazelwood, Lead Strategy, Richmond Valley Council
9. David Timms, Manager, Infrastructure Services, Richmond Valley Council

10. Johan Schoonwinkel, Engineer, Water and Sewerage, Richmond Valley Council
11. David Oxenham, Director Engineering, Tweed Valley Council
12. Matt Potter, Coordinator, Water Treatment Trades, Lismore City Council
13. Mark Bulley, Regional Manager, NSW Farmers
14. Jane Laverty, Regional Manager, Business NSW
15. Beth Trevan, Coordinator, Lismore Citizens Flood Committee
16. Richard Trevan, Representative, Lismore Citizens Flood Committee
17. Glen Donnelly, local agricultural business owner
18. Leigh Shearman, local dairy farmer
19. John Edwards, Secretary, Clarence Environment Centre
20. Wayne Clarke, Representative Coastal Valleys Customer Advisory Group
21. Brendan Reeves, Manager, Clarence Cane Growers Association
22. Peter Lalor, Senior Policy Officer, NSW Aboriginal Land Council
23. David Witherdin, CEO, Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation (NRRC)
24. Rowan Howarth, Director, Northern Rivers Infrastructure Coordination Office at NSW Public Works Advisory
25. Lenna Klintworth, Deputy Director, NSW Department Regional Development
26. Graham Attenborough, Chief Operating Officer, NSW Department of Environment and Planning, Water group (DPE Water)
27. Kaia Hodge, Executive Director, Water Strategy and Policy, DPE Water
28. Giselle Howard, Executive Director, Water Planning, DPE Water
29. Mitchell Isaacs, Chief Knowledge Officer, DPE Water
30. Kristanne Andersen, Director, Coastal Regional Water Strategies, DPE Water
31. Beth Overton, Director, Water Policy, DPE Water
32. Anna Bailey, Director, Coastal and Groundwater, DPE Water
33. Alice Campey, Director, State Water Strategy, DPE Water
34. Catherine Parker, Director Water Communications, DPE Water
35. Natalie Sommerville, Acting Director, Office of the CEO NSW Water Sector
36. Andrew Goulstone, Manager, Water Policy and Legislation, DPE Water
37. James Piggott, Manager, Regional Water Strategies, North Coast and Far North Coast

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## Apologies

1. Jolyon Burnett, outgoing CEO, Australian Macadamia Society

2. Les Hellyar, Deputy, Richmond Wilson Combined Water Users Association
3. Florence Dagan, Secretary, Richmond Cane Growers Association
4. Tony Wilson, Director, Norco Dairy
5. Natalie Rotumah, CEO, Native Title Services Corporation
6. Jim Morrison, North Coast Environment Council
7. Louise McMeeking, Acting Executive Director, NSW Department Regional Development
8. Graham Kennett, General Manager, Kyogle Council
9. Rebecca Mathias, Senior Policy Officer, NSW Aboriginal Land Council
10. Bridget Walker, Manager Water & Wastewater, Ballina Shire Council

## Feedback

| Theme                                                                          | Comment/Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
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| <b>Support for local representation</b>                                        | <p>Stakeholders expressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the importance of community representation on all flood recovery groups and committees.</li> <li>confusion around who is the local representative on the Infrastructure Coordination Office (ICO) for Lismore City Council.</li> </ul> <p><b>Response:</b> <i>Scott Turner, Manager for Assets is Lismore City Council's representative on the ICO.</i></p> <p>Stakeholders flagged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the need to include rural housing areas that were flood affected for the first time in history in the long-term recovery planning.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Clarify roles and responsibilities, and improve government coordination</b> | <p>Stakeholders shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gratitude for help and support offered following the floods</li> <li>that government organisations were unsure how to coordinate and assist on the ground in the early weeks.</li> <li>a desire to better understand how the machinery of government works and to improve flood response coordination.</li> </ul> <p>Stakeholders value:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clear explanations of the roles and responsibilities of each section of water in emergency management, especially as new flood recovery bodies are being formed such as Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation (NRRC) and Infrastructure Coordination Office (ICO).</li> <li>a streamlined process to access all flood recovery grants through the NRRC.</li> </ul> <p><b>Action:</b> To better define the roles and responsibilities of each agency and organisation, and available funding, in advance of any future emergency incident.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To consider whether all flood recovery grant programs are coordinated with the NRRC.</p> |

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|                                                             | <p><b>Status:</b> Noting the above actions relate to a range of NSW Government agencies. The independent Flood Inquiry (July 2022) makes 28 recommendations across a broad range of areas. The NSW Government Response supports, either in full or in principle, all 28 recommendations of the Inquiry. It includes further work required to implement recommendations on emergency management, planning, and response, including roles and responsibilities, and grants administration (see chapters 3,4 and 5). NSW Government will work with the Commonwealth, local council, and NSW agencies on the best way to achieve the objectives.</p> <p>The Flood Inquiry Full Report, and the NSW Government Response, are published at:<br/> <a href="https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/projects-and-initiatives/floodinginquiry">https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/projects-and-initiatives/floodinginquiry</a></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Integrated approach to infrastructure reconstruction</b> | <p>Stakeholders shared:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a desire for information on the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation (NRRC) Terms of Reference.</li> <li>• a desire to create a new unique vision for the region and local government areas, prior to rebuilding flood affected areas.</li> </ul> <p>Stakeholders stressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the importance of considering the economic, social, and environmental impacts when approving infrastructure in flood affected areas.</li> </ul> <p><b>Response:</b> CEO David Witherdin, CEO NRRC, has committed to discuss the Terms of Reference with any community members and provide any further information (email address supplied during session). The NRRC agreed to work in partnership with local councils to plan visions for the northern rivers' region, local government areas, and their locales.</p> <p><b>Status:</b> A meeting is being set up with Beth Trevan, Coordinator, Lismore Citizens Flood Committee.</p> <p>Stakeholders queried if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consideration has been given to placing power infrastructure underground for regional reconstruction.</li> </ul> <p><b>Response:</b> CEO David Witherdin, CEO NRRC, has committed to discuss any specific questions community members may have (email address supplied during session).</p> |
| <b>Clear guidelines to support riparian recovery</b>        | <p>Stakeholders raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the cost of access right fees/amending works approvals associated with relocating pump sites that have been washed out by floods.</li> <li>• a need to develop clear guidelines around the repair of creek banks for landholders in riparian zones (controlled activity approvals), and who landholders can contact regarding this issue.</li> <li>• whether there is financial support available for riverbank work, including funding through Local Lands Services (LLS).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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|                                                | <p><b>Action:</b> The department to follow up with WaterNSW regarding costs of work approvals to relocate pump sites that have been washed out by floods.</p> <p><b>Status:</b> WaterNSW has advised the cost to relocate a pump site can vary depending on where the pump is being moved to and the reasons for the relocation. For more information, please contact the WaterNSW Customer Service Centre 1300 662 077.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> The department to consider a clear riparian repair guideline and contact for landholders.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> The department to follow up with Local Land Services (LLS) regarding funding for riparian works.</p> <p><b>Status:</b> The North Coast Regional Water Strategy includes actions to deliver a 'riverbank rehabilitation program', and to 'support landholder adoption of best practice land management'. Both these actions include better riparian management to reduce erosion. The full North Coast Regional Water Strategy can be found here:<br/> <a href="#">Draft North Coast Regional Water Strategy</a></p> <p>Local Lands Services (LLS) is leading the <a href="#">Riverbank Rehabilitation Project</a> in response to the 2021 floods. The NSW and Australian governments have committed \$18.46 million to support the long-term rehabilitation and futureproofing of flood damaged riverbanks. If you would like to discuss your riverbank erosion damage, please email the project team at <a href="mailto:riverrehabproject@lls.nsw.gov.au">riverrehabproject@lls.nsw.gov.au</a></p> |
| Customer focused communications and engagement | <p>Stakeholders expressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a desire for clear information on proposed approach to public consultation on the draft Water Sharing Plan changes for Richmond and Tweed WSPs, including specific dates, extended timeframes for comment.</li> <li>• a preference for more detailed feedback requests in writing</li> <li>• thanks for establishing this communication network, and a desire for it to continue.</li> </ul> <p>Stakeholders acknowledged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that public engagement and reaching the silent majority in the northern rivers can be challenging, particularly due to the proliferation of diverse media sources. Feedback in association with an election, or through the NRRC, may be possible for key decisions.</li> <li>• the importance of creating simple communication products, including submission forms, that are not filled with technical jargon.</li> </ul> <p>Stakeholders value:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• easy to digest information, that is customer service centric</li> <li>• face-to-face engagement, where possible</li> <li>• forums, such as this (coastal conversations), where the community can talk to senior water management, and to hear updates.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

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| <b>Consideration of consultation timing and alignment</b> | <p>Stakeholders expressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>frustration that the standard public consultation period (40 days) is too short and does not allow enough time for councils and community groups to workshop submissions. Stakeholders from councils noted the timeframe for council approval of submissions prior to lodging with the department are very tight and often not possible</li> <li>thanks for extending the Richmond Water Sharing Plan public consultation period to 60 days.</li> </ul> <p><b>Action:</b> The department to contact Tweed Valley Council, to discuss how council could be better supported in the submission process, including meeting consultation timeframes.</p> <p><b>Status:</b> Tweed Council has been contacted. The Water Planning team will meet with Tweed Council prior to and during public exhibition.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> The department to consider a longer public consultation period for the upcoming Tweed Water Sharing Plan, and the upcoming Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy.</p> <p><b>Status:</b> The Tweed Water Sharing Plan consultation period will be extended to 50 days. The Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy consultation period is likely to commence on 31 October for six weeks.</p> <p>Stakeholders value:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consideration of flood affected communities, school holidays and other major calendar events e.g. harvest period</li> <li>more time to consider projects or new policies, and to make submissions</li> <li>planned engagement to be flagged well in advance, a schedule of upcoming events available online</li> <li>engagements to be co-ordinated to avoid fatigue.</li> </ul> <p><b>Action:</b> The department's Regional Water Strategy and Water Planning teams will aim to align the engagement schedules, particularly face to face engagement sessions.</p> <p><b>Status:</b> The Regional Water Strategies and Water Planning teams are finalising plans to align engagement locations and times as much as possible subject to staffing and venue availability.</p> |
| <b>Population growth</b>                                  | <p>Stakeholders expressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>concern about population growth affecting the environment and sustainable water use.</li> </ul> <p>Stakeholders queried if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>population capping has been considered as a long-term option.</li> </ul> <p><b>Status:</b> The Regional Water Strategies use the NSW common planning assumptions which includes population projections. Consideration of policy mechanisms such as population capping are outside the scope of the Regional Water Strategies.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Farm dams</b>                                          | <p>Stakeholders raised:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving policy to allow the building of new farm dams on the coast with new water allocations</li> <li>• the impact of new farm dams on reducing downstream flows.</li> </ul> |
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## Web links and stakeholder information provided

NSW Water Strategy: <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-and-programs/nsw-water-strategy>

Far North Coast Regional Water Strategy: <https://www.dpie.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-and-programs/regional-water-strategies/upcoming-public-exhibition/far-north-coast-regional-water-strategy>

Water Engagement Roundup monthly webinar: <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/what-we-do/stakeholder-engagement/roundup>

Water monthly eNewsletter – sign up here:  
<https://share.hsforms.com/1VvXqbDL3QjiHYsTQia2Bgg1a20b>

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## Next Steps

- Publish the “What we Heard” from North Coast stakeholders on our website, and email direct to attendees.

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## Stay in touch

Water is one of our most valuable natural assets. We have a responsibility to the people of NSW to ensure we manage water equitably and transparently now and into the future. Our stakeholders include any community, group or individual who could be interested or affected by our activities.

We recognise that the most effective way to successfully manage water is by collaborating with our stakeholders and the greater community. Our [Community Engagement Policy](#) describes how we will complete this engagement.

An overview of upcoming meetings, exhibitions, and other public engagement activities, including registration links, can be found here – [Upcoming consultation and engagement events](#).

We also hold a monthly Water Engagement Roundup webinar that provides updates on all current and upcoming consultation and engagement on important water policy and programs, including opportunities for Q&A. To register or learn more please visit the [Water Engagement Roundup](#) website.

Sign up to our [Water News newsletter](#) to keep up to date with information on upcoming engagements and programs.

Contact us by emailing [water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au](mailto:water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au) or calling us on 1300 081 047