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Background.

NSW is preparing a number of regional water strategies across the state that focus on bringing together the best and latest climate evidence in order to plan and manage the water needs in each NSW region over the next 20 years. Each strategy will deliver on long term actions including 'Water for Local Communities.'

Recommendations.

1. The NSW Government expedite regional water strategies for communities identified within the Murray Darling Basin with a focus on essential town water supplies.
2. Town water supplies for communities that are geographically located within the Murray Darling Basin and supported by water entitlements within a dam storage facility be entitled and prioritised a minimum two year water supply quarantined for critical human need. This will require a review of each water sharing plan and trigger points for environmental, industry, stock and riparian landholder needs.
3. Specifically in terms of the Peel Valley Regulated, Unregulated, Alluvium and Fractured Rock Water Sources 2010 Water Sharing Plan, which is currently due for review, not be extended and that issues raised by the Overview of the Bill - Water Management Amendment (Water Allocations-Drought Information Bill 2020) be dealt with now. I.e. the removal of Schedule 37 which refers to Departmental historical flow information becomes redundant through the review.

(it is noted that in some water sharing plans such as the Peel River, the priority on environmental releases is specifically identified whilst the human critical needs of some 40,000 residents is not - this was not the intention of water sharing plans and needs rectifying in terms of acknowledged recent extended drought.)

4. Where essential town water supply storage; located within the Murray Darling Basin falls below the two year rolling average threshold, the Minister(s) put in place an Order via Section 49 B of the NSW Water Management Act 2000, to suspend the relevant water sharing plan with priority given to maintaining essential community needs. For e The Peel Water Sharing Plan would be suspended at 20% of Chaffey Dam's capacity of 20,000 mega litres. Environmental flows would cease with priority given to critical human need and essential industries including stock.

(It should be noted that environmental flows would still be evident via releases for critical human need purposes).