

**Submission
No 12**

INQUIRY INTO ADEQUACY OF WATER STORAGES IN NSW

Organisation: Regional Development Australia - Orana
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SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT

Inquiry into the adequacy of water storages in NSW

Please accept this submission on behalf of the Regional Development Australia – Orana committee.

Increased water holding capacity

Storage dams and weirs within our region and beyond require upgrading to increase their water holding capacity.

- The Macquarie river system, the Namoi river system and portions of the Barwon Darling river system form the major river systems within the Orana region.
- The Border river dams Pindari, Glenlyon, Copeton and Split Rock do not directly servicing our region but impact on the Barwon Darling river system.
- Keepit Dam on the Namoi River, as well as Windermere Dam and Burrendong Dam on the Macquarie have a direct impact on the river systems within our region.

Flood Mitigation and Drought Protection

With the uncertainty of climate in our predominately arid environment, there is a need for holistic environment management with flood mitigation and drought protection.

Most river systems in the Orana Region are regulated by the afore mentioned water storage dams and weirs.

The Castlereagh, Bogan, Paroo & Warrego Rivers are unregulated wild rivers. These unregulated wild rivers provide a vital environmental service and benefit floodplain grazing and cropping. This form of agriculture will come under extreme pressure through climate change limiting their ability to achieve efficiencies and productivity gains. A consistent reliable water supply to irrigated agriculture will take out some of the variability for the region.

PROUD OF OUR PEOPLE & OUR REGION



An Australian Government Initiative



A NSW Government Initiative

Reliable water sources for economic growth and development

To provide for the long term economic development and social needs of our region we need a consistent and reliable supply of water for our cities and towns, power generation, irrigated agriculture, our mines and the environment.

We have seen the recent effects of the millennium drought and flooding. The social dislocation from smaller rural towns caused by drought to major centres and to Sydney and Newcastle has put pressure in these centres on housing, health services and schools with an increase in crime, unemployment and anti-social behaviour. These people have not returned after the breaking of the drought. This dislocation has led to a labour shortage in agriculture which is being filled by back-packers from other countries and not by our own unemployed population.

The economic cost of drought is well documented as well as the vast losses caused by the recent floods.

Opportunities in mining and agriculture are there for our people but the lag time for jobs that are semi-skilled or skilled means we may well be back into another drought before these opportunities can be realised.

The mining industries in our region use large amounts of water, mainly ground water which impacts on aquifers and this eventually leads to reduced river flows. The Coal Seam Gas industry will eventually come on stream and this industry will extract and use, safely, a large amount of ground water. This water may provide some opportunity to recycling but most will evaporate in ponds.

The current storages on our river systems are inadequate to meet the future needs of our regions. The use of water into the future will be greater but the supply will be less reliable caused by mining extraction and an uncertain climate. Our region is resilient and our farmers and towns have coped with variability to the present.

Another major drought will cause another social movement to Sydney and the major towns, increasing pressure on services. With our State forecast to grow by 2,000,000 people over the next 10 years having the economic and social infrastructure in our region will supply a relief valve for Sydney, Newcastle and the Mid North Coast and the key to this economic and social infrastructure is reliable water as well as transport, health services etc.

Water Efficiencies

The floods will be larger and the droughts will be longer so our capacity to take out the highs and lows must be increased holistically through the use of water efficiency, clever water saving and some strategic engineering of dams and weirs to prevent our rivers drying up for long periods,

our towns carting water in from outside and our iconic Macquarie Marshes and river systems failing. We may have caused the problem but we are also part of the solution.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends a multidisciplinary study to investigate an increase in water storages for the Orana Region. The Integrative Dam Assessment Modeling (IDAM) tool, designed to integrate biophysical, socioeconomic, and geopolitical perspectives into a single cost/benefit analysis of dam construction is recommended to provide a sound basis for expansion and upgrades.

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