



Natural
Resources
Commission

*Review of the Water Sharing
Plan for the Central Coast
Unregulated Water Sources 2009
– Report summary*

Our review

- The Natural Resources Commission (the Commission) has a statutory role under s43A of the *Water Management Act 2000* to review water sharing plans approaching expiry
- Our reviews consider if a plan's environmental, social, cultural and economic outcomes have been achieved, and what improvements can be made
- As part of our reviews, we recommend whether a plan should be extended or replaced
- Our reviews consider relevant data and documents, technical advice, stakeholder consultation and public submissions – we received 10 public submissions for this review



Central Coast plan area

- The Plan manages all unregulated water sources in the Central Coast region of NSW, including the Wyong River, Ourimbah Creek, Brisbane Water and Tuggerah Lakes water sources
- Water managed under the Plan provides part of the flows to several nationally important wetlands estuaries and three groundwater dependent ecosystems
- 80 percent of entitlement under the Plan is used for town water supply for the Central Coast, the third largest residential region in NSW
- Waterways in the region hold significant social, economic and cultural values to the Darkinjung, Guringai, and Daruk peoples
- Towns in the Plan area such as Gosford contribute significantly to the NSW economy
- Local communities depend on commercial water extraction (utility and irrigation) and the region's natural environment, including waterways

The Plan should be replaced

The Commission's advice is that the Plan should be:

- **Extended for a further two years until June 2022** to allow for information exchange between the Plan replacement process, and Central Coast Council's *Integrated Water Resource Plan* and the revised *Lower Hunter Water Plan* (both due for completion in 2021)
- **Replaced by June 2022** addressing the recommendations in this report and incorporating (as appropriate) considerations in Central Coast Council's *Integrated Water Resource Plan* and the revised *Lower Hunter Water Plan*

Summary of key findings

Town water supply

- Local utility needs were provided for but there has been significant population growth, which is expected to continue (15 percent over the Plan period with a further 20 percent by 2036)
- Projected demand in 2050 is 29 percent higher than the current water utility long-term average annual extraction limit
- Central Coast Council, Hunter Water Corporation and the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment - Water are addressing future risks to supply security through water resource planning activities – outputs from these activities are expected to be completed in 2021

Long-term average annual extraction limits (LTAAELs)

- The Plan sets overall LTAAEL volumetric limits on water extraction for the local water utility and extraction management units, but these do not consider natural climate variability, the needs of key water dependent assets or appropriate flow regimes

Summary of key findings (cont.)

Environmental flow provisions

- Flow sharing rules were developed for all water sources but these are based on limited hydrological and environmental data, meaning rules may not be delivering desired levels of environmental outcomes

River condition

- River condition is on balance moderate but under stress, with increasing population and climate change likely to place additional pressure on water resources

Social and cultural outcomes

- Basic landholder rights and harvestable rights were adequately provided for in the Plan but climate change and population growth pose future risks

Summary of key findings (cont.)

Aboriginal water values

- There was limited consideration of Aboriginal water values or support for cultural water - barriers include lack of awareness, a complex licensing system and barriers to water access and use
- Native title provisions did not specify timelines for required amendments

Trade and dealing provisions

- There are provisions for trade under specified conditions but some stakeholders would like increased flexibility in trading rules

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

- The Plan does not clearly specify outcomes or have well defined objectives, strategies and performance indicators
- Comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and reporting is not available to assess the extent to which the Plan's outcomes are being met
- The Plan area is well metered relative to other regions but there are other knowledge gaps that need to be addressed for Plan amendments to be made



Summary of key recommendations

The Commission recommends the Plan should be updated as follows:

LTAAELs and environmental flow provisions

- Review and revise LTAAELs and flow sharing rules to incorporate best available information on population growth projections and climate change scenarios
- Revise flow reference points for suitability - this may include additional reference points to support measured cease to pump rules rather than 'no visible flow' access rules
- Define the flow regime and requirements of water dependent assets and identify high priority ecosystems
- Consider future mining activities and their potential impacts to water sources



Summary of key recommendations (cont.)

Aboriginal water values

- Include amendment provisions for native title rights
- Identify Aboriginal values, uses, flow allocations and water access options

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

- Include SMART objectives, strategies and performance indicators
- Improve plan-specific monitoring, evaluation and reporting
- Include clear governance arrangements for monitoring, evaluation and reporting, and timely public reporting of the results of monitoring to support transparency and public awareness