

Lower Hunter Water Security Plan: at a glance



The Lower Hunter Water Security Plan is a whole-of-government approach to ensuring the region has a resilient and sustainable water future that contributes to regional health and prosperity and is supported by the community.

Water is essential for communities across the Lower Hunter to flourish. It nurtures our natural environment, keeps our households and businesses running, contributes to green and cool spaces in our cities and towns and keeps our industries operating and our regional economies thriving. Water is deeply entwined with the spiritual, cultural, social and economic wellbeing of First Nations and Aboriginal communities across the Lower Hunter region.

The Lower Hunter Water Security Plan aims to ensure water security for the Lower Hunter for the next 40 years.

The Riverlink, Maitland - Image courtesy of Destination NSW

For the last four years we have talked to our community and customers about their values and preferences for our water future, have incorporated new knowledge on our changing climate and the expected growth in the region, and we have analysed a range of demand and supply options to reduce the amount of drinking water we use to supplement our water supplies. We also learnt from our experiences in the recent drought about what we need to do to make sure we are prepared in the future.

We know our climate is changing, but we are also learning more about underlying climate variability. We know we have to continue to find new ways to conserve and recycle water and that when we ask our community to conserve water, they have responded by making smarter water choices.

We know that the system's ability to meet demand is increasingly at risk in times of drought and that we need more water supply from more diverse sources in the future.

We also know we can benefit from the experience of our First Nations and Aboriginal people through incorporating their values and knowledge into our planning. We need to protect and restore the waterways, habitats and ecosystems that support liveable communities and sustain our native plants, fish and wildlife.

To meet the challenges facing the Lower Hunter's water resources, and provide a resilient and sustainable water future for our region, we need to do things differently.

We need to plan differently

The traditional planning approach for drought has too much risk and uncertainty inherent within it. We need to change our approach and bring it into line with community expectations for a secure water supply that can withstand drought.



We need to act now

To ensure we have a reliable water supply in typical conditions and in drought, we need to take steps now to increase our resilience by continuing to invest in water conservation and more recycled water, increasing the capacity of our water supply system and planning for the infrastructure we may need in drought before the next drought.

We need to remain adaptive

The future is uncertain - and we need to be more adaptive so we can respond to these future changes. We need an approach that progressively delivers 'no-regret' actions over time while also allowing us to remain adaptable to changing conditions and respond to risks and opportunities as they arise.

Community engagement and discussions throughout the review of the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan indicated that the community wants:

- A safe and reliable water supply that can withstand drought
- Consideration of all options
- Investments to reduce demand for drinking water
- Investments to minimise the environmental impacts of water supply initiatives
- A collaborative approach with stakeholders and the community
- Continued use of water restrictions to make the most of our water resources in drought
- Up-front investments, as opposed to acting reactively during drought.

To achieve the goals and objectives of the plan — and based on community feedback and technical analysis — four strategic priorities were identified.

PRIORITY 1

Safe drinking water

Safe drinking water is our highest priority. We will continue to provide high-quality drinking water for the health and wellbeing of our community and the future prosperity of the region.

PRIORITY 2

Making the most of what we've got

We will manage our existing water resources wisely, working together with our community and stakeholders to make the most of our existing water resources, particularly before investing in new sources.

PRIORITY 3

Improving the resilience of the system

Our climate is changing and the future is uncertain. We will act to improve our resilience to shocks such as drought as well as remaining adaptive to future risks and opportunities.

PRIORITY 4

Water for life

Water is an essential part of connection to Country for First Nations and Aboriginal people and supports liveable communities. Our plan will work to incorporate the values and participation of First Nations and Aboriginal people. Water supports liveable communities and our plan will seek to protect and restore our environment and ecosystems.

A program of actions has been developed to deliver on the four strategic priorities.

To meet community expectations, ensure a water supply that is resilient to drought, and to service growth requires increased investment. Customer bills will not change before 1 July 2025. Beyond that, the actions proposed are likely to increase annual residential

customer bills by between \$75 to \$120 (a one-off increase of between 6 and 9 per cent for the average residential customer).

The amount will depend on a range of factors such as the timing of major capital works, and the increase may be phased. Hunter Water pension rebate and hardship support measures remain in place.

Lower Hunter Water Security Plan

Our 40-year plan to provide a sustainable and resilient water supply for the Lower Hunter that improves our resilience to drought, increases the diversity of the system, meets the needs of a growing community and keeps us adaptable for the future is summarised below.

PRIORITY 1: Safe drinking water

Protecting drinking water catchments

Continuing to invest in catchment management and protection and maintaining a multiple-barrier approach to the supply of safe drinking water.

- ✓ Protects water quality at the source and makes the most of existing resources.



PRIORITY 2: Making the most of what we've got

Water conservation

Increasing investment to support the Lower Hunter community to reduce water use by an ambitious 17% compared to expected, and continuing to invest in reducing network leaks.

- ✓ Saves precious drinking water, more time to respond to drought and defers investment to service growth.



Recycled water

Increasing recycled water use for non-drinking by 1.3 billion litres through new and expanded industrial schemes, more public open space irrigation schemes, and continuing to explore viable opportunities for recycling in new residential developments.

Engaging with the Lower Hunter community about purified recycled water and building a purified recycled water for drinking demonstration plant in the region.

- ✓ Reduces demand for precious drinking water, rainfall independent water supply and defers investment to service growth.



Central Coast connection

Continuing to share water with the Central Coast via the Hunter-Central Coast connection.

- ✓ Optimises use of existing infrastructure and allows water to be transferred to where it is needed most.



PRIORITY 3: Improving the resilience of the system

Belmont desalination plant

Building a permanent desalination plant at Belmont to supply up to 30 million litres of water per day.

- ✓ A new rainfall independent supply and extends the time for reaching critical water storage levels in severe drought.



A Hunter Water connection to the Lostock Dam - Glennies Creek Dam pipeline scheme

Preparing to connect to the proposed Lostock Dam - Glennies Creek Dam pipeline scheme including new offtake infrastructure to supply up to 50 million litres of water per day.

- ✓ Optimises use of existing infrastructure, increases water supply diversity to the Lower Hunter, and improves water security for the Upper Hunter, Lower Hunter and Central Coast.



Drought management plan

Continuing use of water restrictions in times of drought and water sharing with the Central Coast and implementing readiness activities for a drought response desalination plant at Walsh Point.

- ✓ Being prepared to ensure we can meet our community water needs through a long and severe drought.



Research and development

Continuing to investigate the Hunter River paleochannel and evaporation reduction options.

- ✓ Identify new ways to reduce demand for water and increase supply.



Monitoring, evaluation and review

Establishing actions and measures to assess the delivery of the plan.

- ✓ Helps us to be adaptable to change.

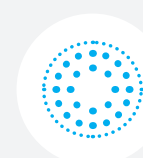


PRIORITY 4: Water for life

Cultural values

Improving knowledge sharing and increasing involvement of First Nations and Aboriginal people in strategic water planning.

- ✓ Increased participation and water values reflected in future planning.



Water for liveable communities

Improving the integration of land use and water planning to contribute to liveable communities.

- ✓ Green spaces, healthy waterways and a more sustainable lifestyle for the Lower Hunter community.

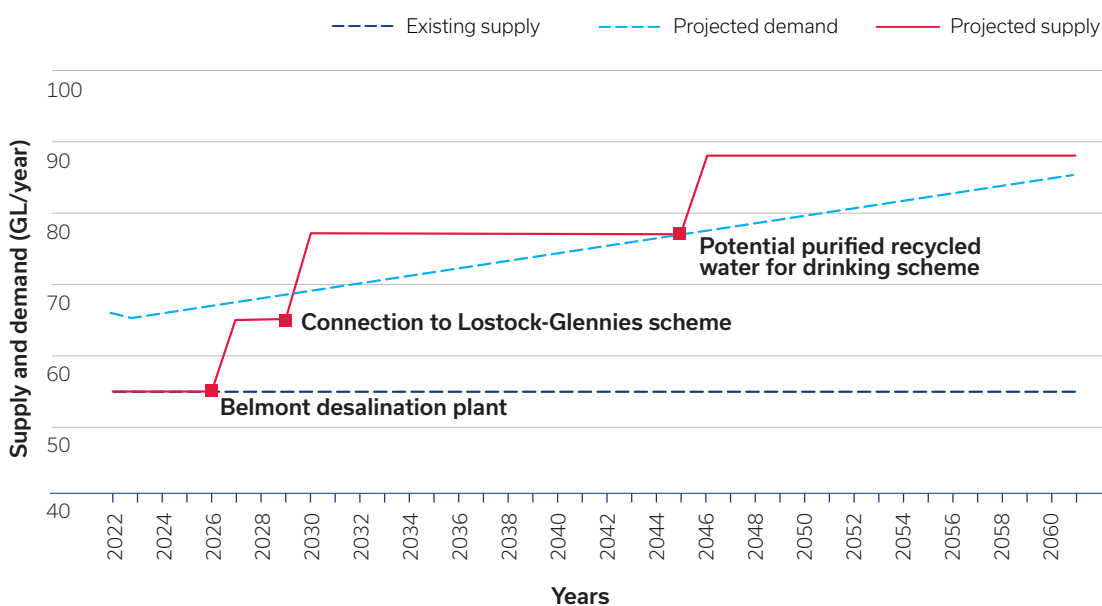


Benefits of the plan

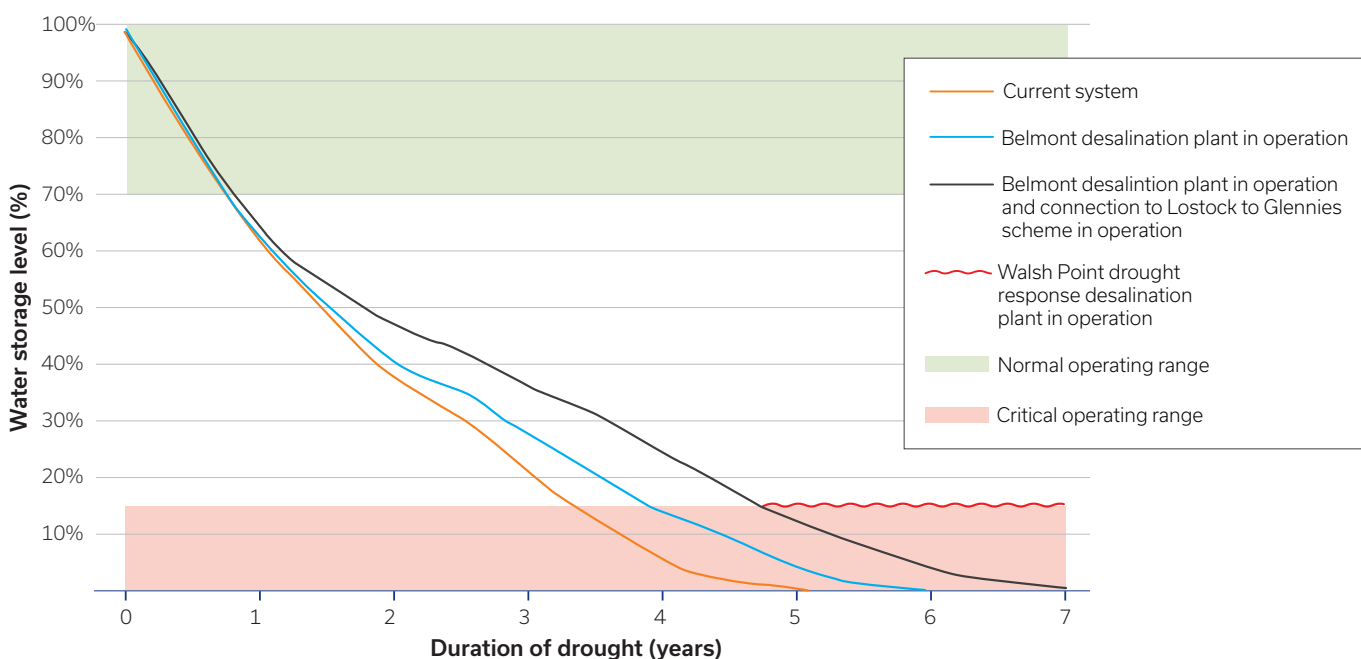
The proposed program of actions included in the Lower Hunter Water Security Plan work together to:

- Make the most of what we've got
- Ensure we can reliably meet the water needs of a growing community
- Improve drought security
- Increase the diversity and resilience of the system
- Provide an affordable approach to achieving a sustainable and resilient water supply.

This figure shows the benefits the program of actions will have on the region's long-term supply and demand balance.



This figure shows how our water supply system responds in a severe drought, with proposed actions slowing the rate of depletion and a drought response desalination plant ensuring we can continue to meet minimum customer demands irrespective of the length of drought.





Photography
Image courtesy of Destination NSW. Sunset across Tomaree National Park, Port Stephens.

Find out more

Visit hunterwater.com.au/waterfuture to read fact sheets about the different actions, watch a video about the plan or learn about the community engagement process for developing the plan.

Find out more at hunterwater.com.au

