



Western Weirs

Client: WaterNSW/Water Infrastructure NSW

Date: 2019 - 2021

Value: \$4.2 million

Description

Water Infrastructure NSW is developing a Strategic Business Case (SBC) to examine the benefits of taking a holistic approach to improving the management of the weirs in the Barwon-Darling and Lower Darling systems, from Mungindi to Wentworth. The SBC is the second of a three-stage process in their Western Weirs program that aims to identify a range of potential options, their benefits and risks for enhanced water delivery efficiency, improvements to river connectivity, long-term water availability and access for far west regional communities.

Approach

WaterNSW originally engaged Comacon to assist with developing and implementing the community and stakeholder engagement plan and provide on-the-ground stakeholder and community relations expertise. As several projects are happening in the same region, we worked closely with both WaterNSW and WINSW to plan a unique approach that allowed engagement to happen concurrently.

In July 2021, the project transferred to WINSW and we continued to write the engagement outcomes report for the SBC.

As part of the project team, we undertook extensive stakeholder engagement, analysis and design, and implemented a four-stage approach to consult with a broad cross-section of people across a wide geographic region. Stakeholders included Government agencies; major water users including Councils, private weir owners and irrigators; First Nations communities and the broader community.

Highlights

Having a continuous approach to identifying stakeholders and proactively engaging with them was critical. We worked with the project team and key regional contacts on the ground including staff with expertise in First Nations engagement and Native Title, Aboriginal Land Councils, the National Indigenous Australians Agency, independent First Nations facilitators and Indigenous Liaison officers at each council to consult widely and continue to build stakeholder contact lists.

While meaningful and respectful engagement with First Nations communities typically requires face-to-face consultation on Country, prolonged COVID-19 restrictions often meant this wasn't possible. The project team developed an Aboriginal Engagement Strategy incorporating culturally appropriate practices and a range of opportunities for stakeholders to have input into identifying and assessing options. We based the strategy on feedback from First Nations communities, local First Nations organisations and Native Title holders on how, where and when they would like to be engaged.

Stakeholders expressed their appreciation for having open channels for dialogue and feedback. Most stakeholders engaged, expressed strong interest in the project and a desire to continue receiving project updates to stay informed as the project develops.

Contacts

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