

## MOTION

## Mullumbimby Water Supply Strategy

We move that the Committee advise Council to:

1. thank Hydrosphere for preparing the report 'Mullumbimby Water Supply Strategy, final draft December 2021', which was discussed at the meeting of this Committee on 28 September 2022, and not adopt its recommendations.
2. recognise that Mullumbimby's current water source at Lavertys Gap may not supply adequate volumes of water during drought for the supply area (Mullumbimby), but that an emergency supply is secured in the medium term via an option to draw on Rous Water.
3. recognise that the current treatment system is near or has passed its use-by date.
4. recognise that the weir at Lavertys Gap blocks fish passage and operates under a licence that does not require release of environmental flows to water the downstream environment.
5. recognise that the weir is aging and in need of repair, and is heritage listed along with other connected water supply infrastructure (such as the race).
6. investigate matters that will enable a strategy for Mullumbimby's long term water supply based on the following concept:
  - (a) Lavertys Gap as the source during flows in excess of environmental requirements;
  - (b) water stored off-stream between the source and Mullumbimby;
  - (c) water treated at a new location between the storage and Mullumbimby;
  - (d) water delivered to Mullumbimby and possibly beyond; and
  - (e) maximising demand management, including the harvesting of roof water.
7. include investigations into:
  - (a) the topography of the terrain between Lavertys Gap and Mullumbimby, to identify potential dam sites;
  - (b) the hydrology of Wilsons Creek and its capacity to supply, including seasonality;
  - (c) the impact of climate change on supply and on demand (using CC data and methodologies in the pilot phase for local water supply through DPE, and applied in Regional Water Strategies);
  - (d) infrastructure needs including offtake, storage, treatment and linkages to the town's reservoirs;
  - (e) environmental assessments for the creation and operation of that infrastructure, including greenhouse gas emissions;
  - (f) assessment of the weir at Lavertys Gap including (i) structural integrity; (ii) means of creating fish passage; and (iii) how this proposal enhances its heritage and preservation; and
  - (g) economic assessment.

## BACKGROUND

In 2021 the predecessor of this Advisory Committee of Byron Council examined a draft of the Hydrosphere report and sought further information, especially on factors other than the economics of various options presented in the report.

On 20 May 2021 the Committee recommended in relation to Report 4.1 "Mullumbimby Future Water Strategy" that Council:

1. Recognises that for the Mullumbimby township there are 2 water supply issues being considered at the moment, one being a potential drought next summer and the other being the long term future water supply strategy.
2. Undertakes works to complete the connection of the emergency supply to the rest of Mullumbimby.
3. In relation to a long term strategy, firms up the management options including recognising the environmental impacts of each option, inclusive of impacts of Rous's own options (for options that use Rous water).
4. Aims to produce a draft long term strategy to go to a Strategic Planning Workshop with a view to putting the strategy on public exhibition.

In 2022 the report came back to the Committee without the information sought under Part 3 above. The Committee recommended on 28 September in relation to Report 4.1 "Safe and Secure Yield" that Council a) notes the report; and b) defers the report to next committee meeting and invite the Rous representatives to discuss regarding future water supply. Council adopted the advice on 27 October.

The matter has not proceeded since then but must be given urgent attention. The motion above aims to steer this matter in a direction that considers all aspects of water supply, rather than just economy. In particular, we value the autonomy and economy of this source of clean water, very close to its supply area. We also acknowledge that less demand for water from the centralised Rous regional supply gives Rous less incentive to construct a new dam and more time to recognise other ways of doing business.

The Agenda for our Committee meeting on 28 September 2022 included written notes, questions and requests for information by community members. Most of these were not addressed. In particular the following points were made which have in part given rise to this Motion:

- a. The Hydrosphere report was completed before the new Rous County Councillors took office, following the December 2021 elections, and therefore makes no mention of a possible Dunoon Dam being included in the RCC Future Water Project 2060. With the projected new dam now under consideration again, RCC's future strategy is in considerable doubt, with significant environmental and social impacts, which are likely to influence community acceptance of any recommended strategy for Mullumbimby's future water supply.
- b. The cost of Scenario S3, permanent connection to RCC regional supply, as recommended by the Hydrosphere report, is highly dependent on the future, uncertain cost of water from RCC, spread over the 25 years to 2050. A small percentage increase in this cost could greatly change the NPV of this scenario.
- c. The Triple Bottom Line Assessment which has resulted in the recommendation of Scenario 3, is based on highly contestable weighting and scores.
- d. The Hydrosphere report adjusts secure yield from Wilsons Creek for climate change using a simplistic and outdated method. The Office of Environment (2013) guideline, which has been historically used by local water utilities to estimate the impacts of climate change, is demonstrably inadequate in 2023. The Department of Planning and Environment [DPE] developed updated hydrological models, adjusted using CSIRO NarClim data, and applied this in recent Regional Water Strategies. DPE are in the process of making this updated modelling available for local water utilities to use for integrated water cycle management planning.