**STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 (Plan)**

**UPPER NAMOI WATER IN THE LANDSCAPE INITIATIVE (WITLI)**

**February 2025**

**Preamble**

WITLI was launched with a range of Upper Namoi regional community stakeholders in Tamworth on 8 May 2023, at an event hosted by the University of New England, Tamworth Regional Council and Tamworth Regional Landcare.

WITLI is conceived as an inclusive community response to water security and equity in our unique Upper Namoi regional landscapes, informed by future social, economic and environmental imperatives in the face of anticipated [inevitable] increases in local and global climatic variability. WITLI’s mission is to promote, enable and mobilise community resilience around our water in the face of this existential challenge.

As a resolution of the launch meeting and the mandating of an interim WITLI steering committee (Steering Committee), it was agreed that the Steering Committee’s early responsibilities would include facilitating the development, tasking, and timetabling of the initiative.

The University of New England and other founding stakeholders, including Tamworth Regional Council, developed and signed a Statement of Intent (SOI) as a non-binding statement of the basic principles of WITLI. The SOI is still in circulation and currently has [xx] signatories. The SOI is available for viewing and signing at [link]. SOI signatories are expected to make up the majority of stakeholders who endorse and operationalise the Strategic Plan.

This DRAFT Plan, prepared by the Steering Committee with input from a number of representative stakeholders, is presented for further consultation with and endorsement by all WITLI stakeholders at a meeting to be announced in the immediate future .

WITLI is already mobilised and there are a number of initiatives already underway. Once endorsed, this Strategic Plan will steer these initiatives and WITLI into the future.

**Background and Context**

The Upper Namoi is the principal catchment area for the larger Namoi catchment in which it sits, and is framed by its watershed in the Great Dividing Ranges to the east and north east, the Liverpool Ranges to the south and the Nandewar Ranges to the north. Within this catchment, it is essentially defined by three Local Government Areas, including Tamworth Regional Council, Liverpool Plains Shire Council and Gunnedah Shire l Council.



The Upper Namoi water user/management demography includes significant urban and peri-urban areas like Gunnedah and Tamworth, as well as smaller towns and village communities, rich broadacre crops and stocking, intensive agriculture (including irrigators) and major industrial users.

The population of the area is estimated to be [250K], with a [20%] increase expected by 2040. To facilitate regional population expansion, LGA strategic plans ask for increased intensive agriculture and economic growth. All of these trends imply and necessitate sustained and secure access to increased supply of high quality water supply.

While engineered water infrastructure assets such as Chaffey, Keepit, and Quipolly Dams have traditionally supported Upper Namoi communities and stakeholders, the health and viability of Upper Namoi communities and stakeholders is ultimately dependant on groundwater. Land use and the ability of landscapes to absorb rainwater and recharge aquifers impact the availability and quality of this groundwater.

The Upper Namoi hydrological makeup covers high catchment source areas (along the Rangelands watersheds) and upland sponges, mid slopes transfer areas that morph into lowland depositional areas such as the high agricultural value Liverpool and Breeza Plains.

While limited research has been conducted on fractured rock aquifers in watersheds or on mid slopes of the Upper Namoi, the available data and lived experience indicate the deterioration and fragility of regional groundwater supplies under current conditions. Upper headwater areas account for approximately 10% of land area, but they generate up to 80% of the waterflows in the lower Namoi and the Murray Darling Basin (MDB) as a whole.

Historically, downstream allocation and irrigators in the lower Namoi and broader MDB have received greater political, resource, and media attention than our regional waterways and hydrology. This is antithetical to the premise that if the source of the MDB waters is dysfunctional, there will be no sustainable flow to distribute or allocate downstream. This has also resulted in a disproportionately lesser resource commitment to understanding and, by extension, addressing the Upper Namoi's hydrological challenges. The Upper Namoi's hydrological advantages and difficulties as a watershed source are distinctive, as is their growing and ubiquitous impact on the water security of regional stakeholders at all levels. This is already visible in increasingly unreliable aquifers in higher catchments and downstream damage from increased flood velocity and volume, which directly increase risk and cost at the community level, the agricultural and general economy and on already stretched LGA budgets. It can be anticipate that of these critical hydrology challenges will be influenced by social and economic imperatives against a background of forecast local and regional climate changes.

WITLI is a local and inclusive grassroots Initiative developed with and for regional stakeholders, including, land users, land owners, water users and water owners, industrial water users, intensive agriculture water users, communities and government at all levels. to collaborate in creating a resilient and sustainable water future for everyone in the Upper Namoi region, particularly future generations, by enabling them to manage water in the landscapes they can control – from backyard to broadacre – and in so doing managing water in our regional landscapes.

WITLI’s principles and operational actions will be based on research, analysis, monitoring and feedback. In short, WITLI will be evidence based.

WITLI recognises our landscapes as the greatest potential storage and management resource we have in achieving regional water resilience and sustainability goals into the future.

WITLI will work with, through and for the regional communities in pursuing its vision and mission. In this task, WITLI will be an enabler at all levels of the regional community and not a principal.

WITLI recognises that we are all connected by the water in our landscapes and so, by extension, we are all responsible to ourselves and our communities for understanding and managing our water. Furthermore, WITLI embraces a fundamental principle of responsibility and agency of self and community around our waters.

WITLI recognises that, with appropriate knowledge and resources, all regional stakeholders can both actively and passively contribute to increasing water in their landscape, and contribute to increasing water and achieving water sustainability and resilience in our Upper Namoi landscapes.

WITLI recognises that no regional stakeholder should be worse off in a water context, subject only to climatic circumstances which are beyond our control.

WITLI recognises that our water management strategy and land use practices have brought us to the decision point on water management in our regional landscapes that we have now reached. This process has taken time, and our water resilience and equity goals will not be achieved over in the short term. Further, WITLI acknowledges that doing nothing is not an option if we wish to achieve future water sustainability and resilience.

**WITLI asks you to take your sustainable water future in your own hands by participating in this initiative. Whilst WITLI recognises that we may need assistance, as individual stakeholders, as communities, as organisations and as a region, the issue of our future water resilience and sustainability is too important to leave to anyone else but you.**

**UPPER NAMOI WATER IN THE LANDSCAPE INITATIVE**

**STRATEGIC PLAN - August 2023 – July 2025**

**A picture containing grass, outdoor, sky, field

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***Our challenge***

*Water does not recognise fences, only landscape management does. These photos, reflecting reality and consequence at the end of the 2015-19 drought in the high Upper Namoi catchment, intend no criticism. They look at a possible future and pose a question for us all – how can each one of us manage ourselves, our communities and our landscapes, wherever and whatever they may be in the Upper Namoi, to create a resilient water future for us all.*



**Vision**

*An Upper Namoi community which understands, embraces and manages for a resilient water future for all [of its stakeholders].*

Water resilience for the Upper Namoi in this context is a dynamic and responsive process which can:

* Inform and enable water security locally and regionally.
* Anticipate and absorb increasing variability and volatility in local and regional climatic conditions – droughts, floods and changing water access and management issues.
* Adapt to this climatic uncertainty in a manner which acknowledges and accommodates the region’s social, economic, cultural and environmental imperatives.
* Transform over time in response to this uncertainty to develop a dynamic local and regional water management framework recognising water access and water security for all stakeholders as fundamental for a viable future for the region.

**Mission**

*To facilitate and enable a dynamic, representative community of practice around current and future water security issues in the Upper Namoi which recognises our landscapes – large and small, urban or agricultural, public or private, recreational or industrial – and the capacity and agency of individuals and communities that live within them as our primary water resilience asset.*

WITLI will seek this by engaging with, empowering and mobilising community at all levels in the Upper Namoi region around managing water in our landscapes as a means to achieve water resilience, water security and water equity through:

* Using the universal language of water as the life force for all that happens and may in future happen in our communities and our catchment thereby creating a virtual space in which our water and water resilience can be freely discussed and debated.
* Engaging in community development, through informed education and advocacy, around local and regional water issues and initiatives.
* Facilitating and promoting education on our local and regional hydrology; both general, to build community awareness and engagement capability, and targeted, to develop resource capacity and promote strategiesthat enable individuals and communities to pursue water resilience in their own individual landscapes and contexts.
* Facilitating the identification, design, measurement principles, dissemination and operationalization of regional water resilience targets against a baseline and over time
* Supporting research to develop, synthesize and disseminate, with community feedback and monitoring loops, a regionally specific water knowledge base which both informs and measures our progress towards local and regional water resilience.
* Advocating both within the region and to external stakeholders on issues which concern our regional water resilience initiative.

**Mission Principles**

Recognising the comprehensive diversity of regional stakeholder perspectives on future water and the dynamism over time required to deliver its Mission, the principles which will guide WITLI’s decisions and actions will be:

* *Future facing – acknowledging that we manage our regional landscapes for a viable healthy future for the generations which follow us*
* *Collaborative – within and across communities and stakeholders in the region and, where necessary and appropriate, external water stakeholders*
* *Knowledge based – informed by evidence and not by hypothesis or existing practice*
* *Regionality – sourced from or referenced to the communities and landscapes of the Upper Namoi*
* *Inclusivity – acknowledging all individuals, communities and stakeholders in the Upper Namoi and their unique perspectives and imperatives including without limitation social, economic and environmental*
* *Tangibility – encompassing the principle of thinking local and acting local in education and activities*
* *Mutuality – respecting and understanding other water stakeholder perspectives and imperatives*
* *Equity – recognising the interconnectedness of all regional water stakeholders and the human rights embedded in water*
* *Self-reliance – promoting and enable actions starting from the individual, community and individual stakeholder level*
* *Accessibility – clear points of entry and exit for individuals, organisations and community*
* *Holistic – as to issue definition, issue resolution and methodology application*

Whilst there are other themes that may be relevant, like scalability, they are second order considerations for WITLI.

Further, dynamism requires that these Mission Principles be reviewed from time to time.

**Functional Elements of WITLI Required to Deliver its Mission**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Function/Operation** | **Potential WITLI Resources** | **Potential Targets/Issues/Actions/Timetable** |
| **Community Engagement**  When we see things in a different light. his quote sums it up.  *“The way we see the world shapes the way we treat it. If a mountain is a deity, not a pile of ore; if a river is one of the veins of the land, not potential irrigation water; if a forest is a sacred grove, not timber; if other species are biological kin, not resources; or if the planet is our mother, not an opportunity -- then we will treat each other with greater respect. This is the challenge, to look at the world from a different perspective.” ― David Suzuki* | WITLI/UNE/Local Government/Peak Bodies/TRLA/local media/ focus groups or communities of interest | **Targets**  A multi-layered reach including   * schools * community groups * local government * commercial / corporate organisations * industry * farmers andbroadacre landholders   and how they impact on water in the valley.  Targets should Include a flexible definition and strategy that defines regional, with no hard-firm boundary. Regional can be an ecosystem or geological country as opposed to urban and includes the opportunities in that.  **Issues**  Consideration of the following issues:   * *Resourcing/recruiting* – SOI or social compact sign on to WITLI (what do people get and why would they do it). * *Stewardship and connectivity* between generations and personal responsibility, including contribution to a larger story and create a bigger impact. * *Galvanising community* - It’s in our space as opposed not in my frame of reference. * *Education* - If stakeholders can understand things, they can value them.   **Actions**  Actions deployed through collaboration and co-design with stakeholders including UNE and schools, private presentations, public meetings, regional roadshow, communications strategy including advertising, social media, podcasts.  Actions should:   * Have a view on targets. Without a view to targets, WITLI won’t deliver sustainable results that impact on everyone. * Work with irrigators and other stakeholders to encourage and support individual choice and support recognisable differences. * Have relevance, are timely and give people meaning. * Tap into activities that consider the generational element. This is the fundamental evolution. *Every one of us can do something.* * Develop a multi social compact, mutuality, define community and stakeholders and contributions. * Ensure UNE is deeply imbedded in regional communities who are able to identify with it and know it’s a source of knowledge, expertise and teaching and learning. * Must ensure trust, respect and confidence in UNE as a regional University delivering on state wide issues. * Give the community ownership so the politicians can’t change it. * Build a strong cohesive voice in education, research and advocacy. and we take on small issues and we take on big issues. * Create knowledge brokers with a focus on research and training needs. * Support activities conducted without resources and that contribute to the WITLI mission and values. * Support social engineering, including a communications and advocacy strategy for a shared vision and clear goals how everyone can contribute – a social compact. * Support a communications and advocacy strategy that prioritises the *third space* – what WITLI does to build our own community of practice (*third space*) and communicate to other policy people etc   *(E. Soja (1996) proposes a different way of thinking about space and spatiality. First and second spaces are two different, and possibly conflicting, spatial groupings where people interact physically and socially: such as home (everyday knowledge) and school (academic knowledge). Third spaces are the in-between, or hybrid, spaces, where the first and second spaces work together to generate a new third space).*  **Timing**   * Building from WITLI commencement * Identify no cost activities and timetable for deployment of these activities to keep WITLI presence front facing. |
| Education | UNE/Local School network/Local Government | **Targets**  A multi-layered reach including   * Schools * UNE * community groups * local government * commercial / corporate organisations * industry * farmers and landholders   and how they impact on water in the valley Schools.  Education that prioritises lifelong learners, educators and mentors to help people change practice for overall community benefit. Education that prioritises think local, act global (think beyond ‘our’ block) so we can contribute to a larger story and create a bigger impact.  **Issues**   * Education practice that is seen as place -based; multiple subject areas being dealt with across an area or geography. * Education innovation should address silo thinking and silo pedagogy, therefore projects that encourage collaboration, co-design and those that have meaning and relevance to the places people live. * WATERDROP details a school’s project that addresses these issues. * Education projects should focus on the disconnect between education and place and projects that bring a balance btw the two. * Education projects should define regional, with no hard-firm boundary. Regional can be an ecosystem or geological country as opposed to urban and includes the opportunities in that.   **Actions** resourcing/content/reactive or proactive?   * Activities and action must articulate benefits for everyone, recognising it’s different for everyone. * Education should communicate benefits of having water and a resilient resource in a changing climate. * Community education campaign - water is not going to be plentiful, actions impact on how well supply is going to be available where they live. * Community education campaign can create opportunity to make changes to ensure communities don’t run out of water. * Education points to the idea that people need a crisis to mobilise and understand the urgency. Can be achieved by comms strategy detailing where the WATERDROP goes/travels/ becomes. * Education needs to value local environmental challenges and build solutions for the future. Use local projects to facilitate knowledge building about local natural resources. * Agriculture and Geography study in stage 6 HSC – possibility of student’s projects based where they live and connectivity to the place where they are studying. * WITLI Education priorities should start from an early age. Achieved through building WITLI projects with schools and in collaboration with WITLI Stakeholders. * Can this be achieved through NAMOI Workforce and Retention Strategy – ie. Working strategy at this level. Pilot with Farrer or Calrossy as a model for others. * WITLI projects need to focus on a ***two-way education*** process. * Education – sites for research – local sites – people involved in WITLI and because its local, makes it real and enhances engagement * Southpole project – ready to be activated. * UNE - Micro credentials to PhD and you can do it with pre-schoolers, play groups if resources there via sites - digital, virtual and demonstration in place. * Everything related to [Elinor Ostrom](https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Ostrom.html) * It is imperative that the hydrology of the Peel catchment be understood. We do not know where the water flows. * The concept of evidence is an essential component of the monitoring process. UNE plays a critical role forming evidence base and data collection and analysis. Includes provision of robust data to back up arguments and decision making * UNE has to play a role in “future-proofing “ towards future prosperity > this defines resilience. * Type of research - hydrology use, attitudes, behaviours and the education we do so we occupy and influence decisions about our water resources in the region. Can only do that through a true collaborative model. Knowledge brokers are critical.   **Timing**   * Current - Low hanging fruit first (Southpole, WATERDROP, community education at Tamworth campus, demonstration sites via partnerships) * Mid – research projects, education projects – seek funding * Approach to Government for BHAG – project for the valley which is a linking up of smaller projects evolved from communities of interest. |
| Advocacy | WITLI/Local Government/peak bodies/TRLA | **Targets**   * Regional water stakeholders * Local, Regional, State and Federal Government * MDBA * DPIE and LLS government * Industry and commercial organisations * Representing big corporate water users such as Bective ([AAM](https://www.aamig.com.au/)) and [Baiada](https://www.baiada.com.au/our-commitment) – strategy has to be inclusive of irrigators needs to ensure it’s a broad reaching and inclusive strategy (keep everyone in the tent). WITLI supports water saving with all stakeholders and is innovative and diverse in its approach. * If WITLI aligns with industries that aren’t protecting water we have a problem. This creates ethical issues that have a significant impact on the aim, goals of WITLI and this must be considered. (Note JM discussion re thresholds – ethics are a threshold).   **Issues**   * Future proofing the region * 5 and 6 policy framework – in line with best practice and location. Whatever it is will inform design, funding and priorities and support the science behind it all. * Broad view about policy – has to be good policy for our region. And the modifications in our region. * Mutuality and regionality – water, regional water, input into MBDA review and plan. * Regionality – what we do to prevent mission drift is critical and has to have a benefit for the region. * Funding – engage corporate interests, philanthropic. * Crude measure of claw back will increase conflict btw water users in the valley. WITLI enable people in the Namoi have greater say in what we are doing. MT talk to some irrigators, can argue they are doing water recovery measures – urban, industry and farming people are activating off their own back and should be counted as water recovery, environmental modelling. MT wants to see them measured, modelled and counted against water recovery. * WITLI as a lobby group to talk to MDBA * WITLI needs a bigger alliance with state bodies. * Irrigators will be more interested in WITLI if it is about MDBA review and * WITLI platform for irrigators to have a seat and a voice at the table. * Advocacy should prioritise how to bring everyone on the journey. Greatest risk is these such a diverse range in the group who have different expectations on water needs to be massaged properly.   **Actions** – resourcing/content/reactive or proactive?   * Access to UNE student expertise across a whole lot of disciplines – media, tech, PhD students etc * Advocacy actions should prioritise how to bring everyone on the journey. * Quadruple bottom-line - economic, social, environmental and cultural. If we just focus on environmental we will leave regional communities behind. Any strategy must include all. Especially social relevance to living in regional communities. * A very visual method of conveying to other people that we are in trouble is to model some of the potential crisis scenarios.   **Timing**  Actions ow that incur no additional Cost, though activities still need to be developed and managed. |
| Research |  | **Targets**   * Regional water stakeholders * Local, Regional, State and Federal Government * MDBA * DPIE and LLS government * Industry and commercial organisations   **Issues**   * Research gives credibility and brings monitoring and evidence based. Our mission is evidence based. * WITLI is a research project in of itself. * Whole systems approach to research so people understand the dominoes effects and how my actions impact on others in the valley.   **Actions**   * Science to support what people are doing have done and will do * UNE - Micro credentials to PhD and you can do it with pre-schoolers, play groups if resources there via sites - digital, virtual and demonstration in place. * Research data/results * Developing and applying a knowledge base to our specific problems. * Modelling critical. Modelling best practice providing the evidence and best practice and showing response. * Demonstrate the practices/ changes/ actions/ ideas we need to do to be successful. * Monitoring must be included * Options to solve the problems that we are currently facing – perhaps WITLI and hydrology, as well as understanding how water functions in the environment, should be the starting point. * Everything related to [Elinor Ostrom](https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/bios/Ostrom.html) * It is imperative that the hydrology of the Peel catchment be understood. * The concept of evidence is an essential component of the monitoring process. * Water metering – mine field for farmers to meet metering requirements, telemetres are expensive and don’t always work. * Gov timeframes not met with huge impact on irrigators. Waiting for regulators to do something before they do. irrigators have short term needs not a 20 year view; research to support this different and other approach. * Develop a good water model for Namoi that can look at changes in surface and ground water – we don’t – answer some of the important questions for PVWU. * Provision of robust data to back up arguments and decision making * UNE has to play a role in “future-proofing “ towards future prosperity > this defines resilience. * Type of research - hydrology use, attitudes, behaviours and the education we do so we occupy and influence decisions about our water resources in the region. Can only do that through a true collaborative model * Knowledge brokers are really important for the above. That role is so valuable in both research and training aspect.   Timing – |
| Governance and Structure |  | Issues –  Actions -  Timing – |

**Community Development – Functions and Targets** **within Current SP**

**Education – Functions and Targets within Current SP**

**Research – Functions and Targets within Current SP**

**Advocacy – Functions and Targets within Current SP**

**Governance and Structure Establishment - Functions and Targets within Current SP**

**Year 1 –** **Key Operational Tasks and Milestones**

**Year 2 – Key Operational Tasks and Milestones**

**Budget Parameters and Assumptions**

**Budget**