



# UPPER NAMOI WATER IN THE LANDSCAPE INITIATIVE

RETHINKING OUR WATER STEWARDSHIP

## CONTACT

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## SOCIAL COVENANT

### UPPER NAMOI WATER IN THE LANDSCAPE INITIATIVE (WILI)

Tuesday, June 25, 2024

This social covenant sets down the core commitments and principles intended to guide those individuals and organisations who join WILI as members or collaborators, or those who simply wish to engage with WILI over time. Recognising that the environmental, social and economic context in which WILI is set is dynamic, so must this social covenant be.

#### *Our Challenge – Water Resilience And Sustainability For All In The Upper Namoi*



*Water does not recognise fences, nor does it recognise urban or commercial areas; 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 illustrate one 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 and sustainable water future for us all.*



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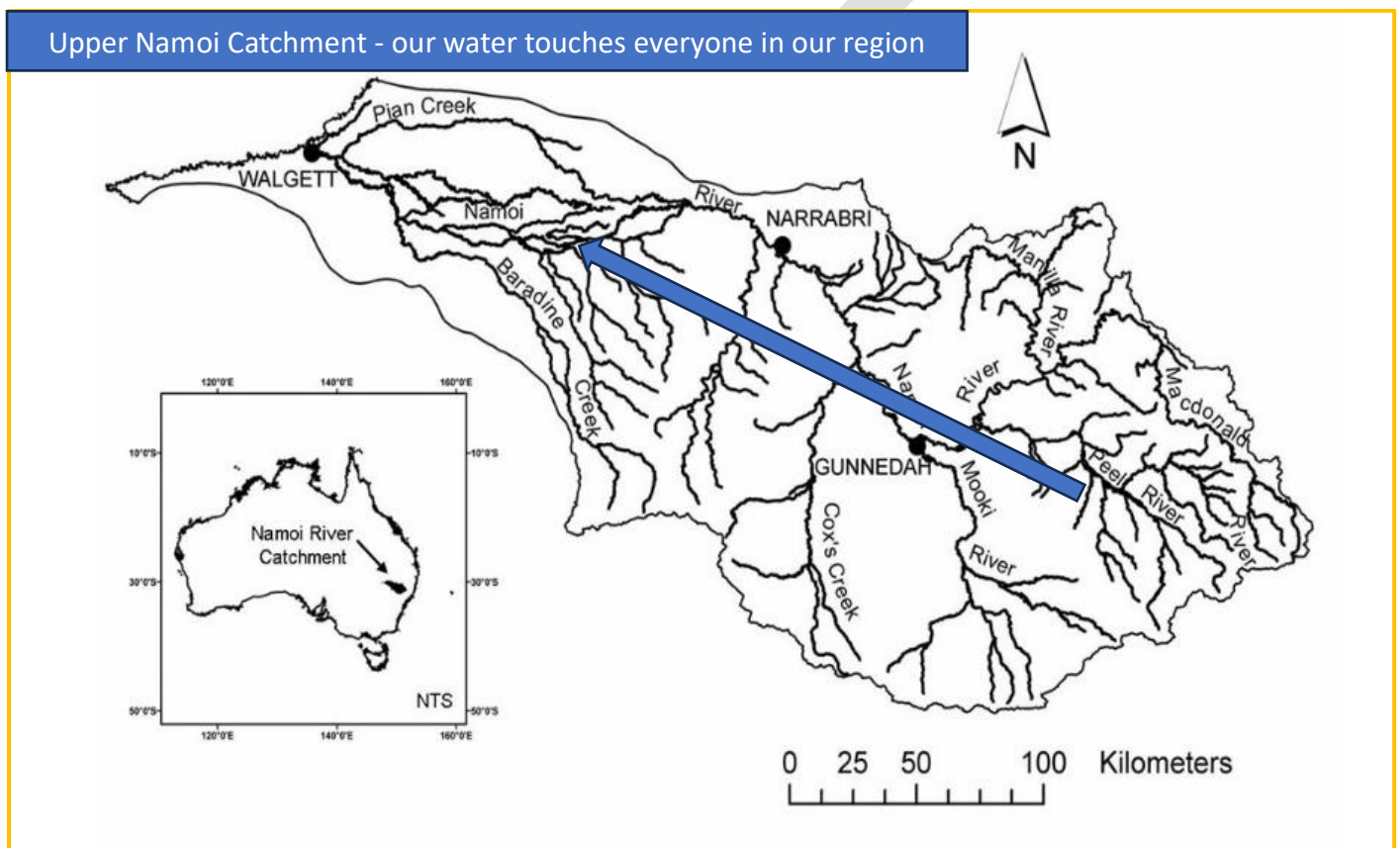
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## Background and Context

WILI 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.

Members, partners and collaborators now number over 30 across individuals, organisations, landholders, land managers, educational bodies and institutions, local government and State government departments and extension services across a broad geographic and interest spectrum within the Upper Namoi catchment.



Surface and underground Water Flow ←

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 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), miners and major industrial users.



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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 is unique covering 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, which also provide the context for rich mineral deposits.

Two facts are inescapable. The first is that the hydrology and associated issues which our catchment faces now, and increasingly into the future, are unique. The second is that every single one of us who lives, works and envisages a future is existentially reliant on the same water which falls within the Upper Namoi and flows over and through our landscapes into the greater Murray Darling Basin.

WILI represents an embrace of these realities and the principle that resilience comes from within. It says to us that these issues are too important to leave to someone else from somewhere else.

*The WILI mission is 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.*

Accordingly, WILI seeks to evolve and exist as 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, agricultural, mining and urban communities and government at all levels.

The WILI community exists as a forum for constructive discussion and collaboration which is focused on 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.

WILI recognises that managing our regional landscapes, whatever they be, with a focus on water resilience and sustainability is fundamental to any conceivable future in the Upper Namoi catchment and, further, that achieving mutually acceptable outcomes will only come from an individual and community led bottom up approach.

WILI recognises that its mission is to promote, facilitate and mobilise community engagement around our water in the face of this existential challenge.

**WILI is seeking to expand its community with those who share in, endorse, accept or simply acknowledge the potential value of our Social Covenant.**



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## OUR SOCIAL COVENANT

This set of affirmations represents our compact with each other and the future, as well as providing a guide for engagement with the broader local, regional and external stakeholders. Some of these affirmations are factual. Some are aspirational. Some are specific to community or region. Some are passive. Some are active. Within our WILLI community, all affirmations and their interactions are dynamic and embrace change, as we cannot fail the future.

- WILLI is not an advocate or representative of any individual view or stakeholder; it represents our water, those waters which fall within our Upper Namoi catchment and flow over or through our multitudinous landscapes.
- We seek to facilitate and foster a community of practice around our water in which all members of our community can participate and engage in decisions relating to our water in the context of a general principle – optimising water resilience and sustainability for our whole Upper Namoi community in an uncertain climate future.
- Our primary tools are community consultation and education to create awareness of the issues around our water and, as relevant, the capacity to participate in resolving those issues. It is a truism that unless you understand an issue you cannot address it.
- Recognising the diversity and strength of views regarding management of our water, our currency is inclusion and respect for all stakeholders and views.
- The water which falls in our Upper Namoi catchment is existential for all of us who live, work and play in this region, individuals, organisations and environment alike.
- The future climate impacts on rain fall and water availability in the Upper Namoi are uncertain, with the most current science predicting drying and increasing volatility for our region. WILLI accepts this, and the historical cycle of wet and dry periods, as a baseline for our future water management on the principle that we should not gamble with the rights of future generations in our region.
- Irrespective of climate trends, or individual views on those trends, optimum water management is optimum land management; socially, economically and environmentally.
- Our landscapes have the greatest potential within our means, individually and collectively, to store water and optimise water residence in our catchment, thus promoting resilience and sustainability.
- The impacts of historical land use and land modifications in our region have and continue to impact on water flows over and through our regional landscapes, in terms of velocity, quality, availability and storage of water in our landscapes.
- How each and every one of us uses and manages that water in our landscapes, whether at surface and within our soils, can and does impact on the quantity, quality and security of water available to each and every one of us.
- The water which flows over and through our landscapes is a shared asset belonging to our community and all those who rely on it for existence both now and in the future, whether that water is currently regulated or allocated or not.



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- Social, ecological and economic imperatives and trends into the future will inevitably create changing demands and management issues relating to our water. In and of themselves, these community drivers are natural and need to be weighed against future water resilience and sustainability
- The ongoing and future management of our water is a matter for active engagement and consent to the greatest extent practicable with the Upper Namoi community. Prior and informed community consent is an ideal goal.
- As a general principle, no Upper Namoi regional stakeholder, individual, organisation or community, should be rendered worse off in a water context as a result of ongoing and future management of our water without their consent, subject only to climatic and other imperatives which are beyond our community control.
- Law and practice relating to our water including preexisting personal rights and allocations of or in relation to water are recognised where they are exercised responsibly, within their terms and in the interests and aspirations of the broader Upper Namoi community
- Future laws, practices, and rights relating to and allocations of our water and land use developments impacting on the use, flow or quality of our water are matters for active community engagement and, where practicable, consent.
- Future management decisions and operational actions on our water will be based on research, analysis, monitoring and feedback. In short, WILI will be evidence based.
- Our historical water management strategies and land use practices have brought us to the point on our water management in our regional landscapes that we have now reached. This has taken time, and our water resilience and sustainability goals will not be achieved in the short term.
- Doing nothing in the face of known and unknown future trends and imperatives which may affect our water is not an option if we wish to achieve future water sustainability and resilience.

Acknowledged by: