

Dharriwaa Elders Group ("DEG") and Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service ("WAMS") have long been concerned for the health of the Barwon and Namoi rivers and the quality of Walgett's drinking water now that it comes from the Great Artesian Basin.

Our organisations have sought expert advice through our partnership with the University of NSW, "Yuwaya Ngarra-li", and used this advice to advocate for Walgett's short and long-term environmental and public health needs through our long-standing health, government and community networks.

Through Yuwaya Ngarra-li we:

- Arranged for UNSW engineers to measure the sodium levels in Walgett's drinking water. In November 2018, Dr Jacqui Webster of the George Institute for Global Health was invited to comment on the sodium levels (as 300mg/L) and she highlighted that consuming around 2 litres of water a day would be equivalent to an extra 1.5grams of sodium intake a day which is substantial, particularly when diets are already high in salt from foods. She also highlighted that if people do not consume enough water because of the salty taste, they will suffer from dehydration or choose soft drinks instead, both of which have other negative impacts on health.
- Hosted visits to Walgett for UNSW Engineering and the Global Water Institute to scope and install water solutions for the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (WAMS) Community Garden and chilled drinking water kiosks for the township as early projects.
- Worked with NSW Health to advocate for improved communications to the community about the water as well as pushing for longer-term solutions such as a reverse osmosis desalination system for the town's drinking water.

The Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service and Dharriwaa Elders Group were pleased to learn of the commitment made by Deputy Premier Barilaro to the ABC News 22 July 2019<sup>1</sup> to install reverse osmosis desalination for the town's water supply.

Our organisations look forward to written advice from the NSW Government about this commitment, its implementation and on-going support for Walgett Shire Council in the provision of acceptable drinking water and our town's future water security.

We also seek commitments for the installation of chilled drinking water kiosks in high public use areas around the town, reduced waste from drinking water containers, water efficiency infrastructure and responsible management of healthy rivers and groundwaters.

We request that a health guideline for sodium in drinking water be developed and public and environmental health strengthened in order to prevent greater burdens of chronic disease in our already highly-burdened communities.

The Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service and Dharriwaa Elders Group remain strongly committed to Walgett's Public and Environmental Health, and thank all the generous individuals and organisations who have donated drinking water for Walgett.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-07-22/saltwater-solution-for-drought-towns-brackish-drinking-water/11326154>

