



Office
of Water

Our ref: CW10/236
Your ref: CCC33

Ms Carolyn Littlefair
Committee Manager
Legislative Assembly
Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change)
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Littlefair

Thank you for your letter dated 19 May 2010 concerning a question I took on notice during my appearance before the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change) on 10 May 2010.

Hereunder is my answer to the question on notice. I have also taken the opportunity to clarify the ensuing question from Mr Ray Williams, and my answer, concerning wall heightening and strengthening work undertaken on Warragamba Dam.

Question taken on notice:

Is there a criteria at the moment where the level of the dam in Warragamba is not to exceed 70 per cent?

Answer:

No. Warragamba Dam is kept as full as possible to serve as a water supply dam and can hold its full capacity of water (100%).

Ensuing question:

Did you think it was wise that the opportunity to raise Warragamba Dam back in 1995, which was, I believe rejected by the Carr Government at that time, the dam was not raised and not strengthened, which would have given us temporary capacity in light of where we are now some 15 years later, whether or not that would not have been a good option for water storage and obviously for better flows to the Hawkesbury Nepean area?

Clarification:

In 1995 the NSW Government took a decision to increase the height of the dam wall at Warragamba by five metres, install post-tension anchors and also to build an auxiliary spillway. This would ensure the dam met all contemporary international dam safety standards and provide security for Sydney's major supply of drinking water should there be an extreme flood.

The increase in height of the dam wall and the installation of post-tension anchors allowed the dam to safely withstand 73 per cent of a probable maximum flood event. It was never intended to increase the water supply capacity of the dam.

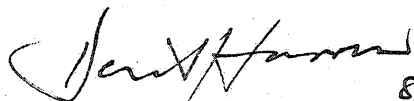
The construction of the auxiliary spillway located on the east bank of Warragamba Dam began in late 1998 and was completed in June 2002. The auxiliary spillway increased the capability of the dam to withstand a probably maximum flood event to 100 per cent.

It should be noted that Warragamba Dam was built for water supply purposes and was not designed as a flood mitigation dam. The construction of the auxiliary spillway diverts excess floodwaters around the dam to prevent possible dam failure. This means it will protect the dam in extreme floods, and areas downstream from the devastating effects of a dam break, and safeguard Sydney's water supply.

To increase the water supply capacity of the dam, even using the existing heightened dam wall, would entail enormous costs in both strengthening the dam and replacing the dam gates and would result in the permanent flooding of vast tracts of world heritage lands upstream. It would also impact on numerous rare and endangered plants and animals, and over 300 Aboriginal heritage items.

Warragamba Dam is being used in the best manner possible, as per its design function, in relation to water supply management and dam safety at all times.

Yours sincerely



8.6.10

David Harriss
Commissioner, NSW Office of Water