



### Environmental investigations

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# NSW has failed to properly assess impact on wildlife of Warragamba dam changes, federal government says

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impact statement for the proposal, contained in a leaked federal environment department document.

The department found the New South Wales government had failed to properly assess how its proposal to **raise the wall of the dam** by 17 metres to mitigate flood risk in western Sydney would affect endangered wildlife.

The document obtained by Guardian Australia is the federal environment department's assessment of the analysis carried out for the developer, the state government-owned **WaterNSW**, of the project's likely effects on flora and fauna listed as nationally significant under federal environmental law.

WaterNSW is required to produce such an analysis as part of its environmental impact statement, which the federal government will use to determine if it should approve the raising of the dam wall.

The federal department found:

WaterNSW made only a "low" effort to survey the area for koalas before concluding they would not be significantly affected by the project.

It conducted no targeted surveys for the swift parrot before concluding they would not be significantly affected, a view the federal department rejected.

WaterNSW's EIS concluded the project would mean the minimum loss of 5%-7% of the total remaining regent honeyeater population, which numbers only a few hundred.

The EIS found several threatened ecological communities would be put at risk of extinction, and it was unclear whether WaterNSW could mitigate that risk.

### **'Significant negative impact'**

The environment department found several flaws in the water agency's wildlife analysis.

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WaterNSW told a state parliamentary hearing at the end of June it was not planning any further field work.

In the case of the critically endangered swift parrot, the department said WaterNSW had conducted no targeted surveys, yet had concluded raising the dam wall would not significantly affect the species.

“The EIS states no significant impact to swift parrot, however the department considers the project could have a significant impact on this species,” officials wrote.

In the upstream area where flood waters would be held, the department noted the project would likely “modify, destroy, remove or decrease” foraging habitat used by swift parrots by up to 3,035 hectares - a reduction of 49% - and downstream there could be a loss of 962 hectares.

“Loss of foraging habitat on the mainland is threatening the breeding cycle of the species due to loss of foraging resources necessary to result in a successful migration to Tasmania,” the department wrote.

“The project could have a significant negative impact on the recovery of this critically endangered species.”

The department also said WaterNSW’s EIS concluded the project would have serious ramifications for the critically endangered regent honeyeater in the upstream area of the Burratorang Valley.

It said this included the loss of a minimum 21 to 25 birds (an estimated 5%-7% of the total remaining population, according to the document) but up to 200 birds could be affected (an estimated 50%).

The department said WaterNSW had failed to conduct any surveys for the bird

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But Harry Burkitt, a campaign manager at the Colong Foundation for Wilderness, said the federal government should be doing more.

“It’s now clear the WaterNSW environmental assessment is critically flawed,” he said.

“The federal government must ensure the environmental assessment complies with Australian law and our Unesco obligations before it goes anywhere near public exhibition.”

WaterNSW did not provide responses to specific questions about the problems identified in the leaked document.

A NSW government spokeswoman said the draft EIS was being prepared for public consultation.

“Feedback from the state and commonwealth departments on the draft EIS is an important component in developing the final document for public exhibition,” she said.

“The NSW government looks forward to public exhibition of the EIS, which will allow for the proposal to be assessed on its merits and for all interested stakeholders to provide comment.”

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## [MNES Review](#) by [The Guardian](#) on Scribd

Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment  
 Comments on Warragamba Dam Raising Draft EIS  
 MNES (Chapter 12 and Appendix F5)

### 1 MNES ASSESSMENT (CHAPTER 12 AND APPENDIX F5)

#### 1.1 General Requirements

The stated extent of occurrence and extent of impact on threatened species and ecological communities is inconsistent across various chapters and appendices of the EIS. The MNES Chapter (12) or appendix (F5) needs to **provide a clear table outlining the following information for each species and ecological community occurring in the upstream, construction and downstream area**

- extent in the construction area, upstream and downstream (for the 1 in 5 year, 1 in 100 year and PMF event)
- area (hectares) impacted in the construction area, upstream and downstream (for the 1 in 5 year, 1 in 100 year and PMF event)
- Proposed mitigation measures
- Proposed offset for any residual impacts (see separate comments provided on offsets)
- PCT's need to be converted to the equivalent ecological community and the corresponding hectares impacted by the project needs to be provided. The basis for determining equivalence also needs to be outlined in the MNES chapter/appendix i.e. based on Conservation Advice, or dominant species etc.
- A conclusion should be provided at the end of the MNES chapter to summarise significant impacts to species proposed mitigation, residual impacts and offsets
- The table at the start of each chapter which references where the SEARs requirements are addressed in the EIS - in some cases refers to entire Appendices (100's of pages). Can this be refined so that it is easier to check which sections have addressed the specific SEARs?

#### 1.2 Reference to Commonwealth Guidelines and Policy Statements

The Assessment of Significance in Appendix F5 refers to Commonwealth Conservation Advice, National Recovery Plans and Threat Abatement Plans, for only some species. These documents need to be discussed in relation to all species in this section. The EIS also needs to clarify if Commonwealth survey guidelines have been used where no relevant NSW survey guidelines for certain species exists as required by the SEARs Attachment A, requirement 15b. Further relevant guidelines and policy documents can be found on the Department's website: <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/policy-statements>.

**Relevant Commonwealth policy documents should be discussed in relation to all EPBC Act ecological communities and threatened species in the Assessment of Significance Section.**

#### 1.3 Survey methodology

Section 4.4 of Appendix F5 needs to clearly state which threatened species (particularly fauna) were surveyed and if the above survey guidelines were used (see point 2 above). The EIS states only Threatened Biodiversity Survey and Assessment: Guidelines for Developments and Activities - Working Draft (DEC, 2004) were used for fauna surveys.

The EIS needs to provide justification for why species were not surveyed, particularly if suitable breeding or foraging habitat is known to occur in the project area, and an unlikely significant

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Samantha Vine, the head of conservation at Birdlife Australia, said the organisation estimated just 250-300 regent honeyeaters remained in the wild and the Burratorang Valley was one of only five known contemporary core breeding sites for

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