

INQUIRY INTO ADEQUACY OF WATER STORAGES IN NSW

Organisation: The Wilderness Society Newcastle

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The Wilderness Society Newcastle

90 Hunter Street

Newcastle NSW 2300

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Standing Committee on State Development

Parliament House

Macquarie St

Sydney NSW 2000

Re: Wilderness Society submission for the Inquiry into adequacy of water storages in NSW

The Wilderness Society Newcastle (TWSN) welcomes the opportunity to submit comments into this Inquiry into adequacy of water storages in NSW.

The Wilderness Society (TWS) is a national not for profit conservation organisation dedicated to protecting, promoting and restoring wilderness and natural processes across Australia for the survival and ongoing evolution of life on Earth. TWS was established in 1976 to help save the Franklin River and has since played an important role in many of Australia's great conservation campaigns.

Kakadu, the Daintree, South West Tasmanian Wilderness, the forests of Eastern and Western Australia and the wilderness of Antarctica are among the many places TWS has helped protect. TWS has also played a crucial role in the recent campaign to prevent the damming of the Williams River and associated impacts on the Ramsar listed Hunter Estuary Wetland from the unpopular Tillegra Dam proposal in NSW.

Continuing from our work in the Hunter to protect water resources and crucial river, estuary and wetland habitats, TWS is now actively working to ensure the best possible future water storage and conservation outcomes are reached across NSW, with genuine consideration of ecosystem function and health, and community participation.

Adhering to the National Urban Water Planning Principles is critical

Our submission to this enquiry is based on the work compiled for *Beyond Tillegra: A sustainable water strategy for the Lower Hunter* report, especially encouraging the adoption of the Council of Australian Government's National Urban Water Planning Principles¹ (to which Federal government and all state and territory governments are signatories.)

These principles include the commitment to select water sources resulting in the lowest environmental, social and economic costs over the long term. Also, the NSW State Plan (2010) aims to "Protect our native vegetation, biodiversity, land, rivers and coastal waterways, state-wide targets for natural resource management to improve biodiversity and native vegetation, sensitive riverine and coastal ecosystems, soil condition and socio-economic wellbeing." In order to honour these commitments, sustainable alternatives will need to transcend over the current reliance upon rainfall dependent storage systems, especially dams.

Unnecessary, negative impacts of dams should be avoided

Environmentally, dams detrimentally impact rivers physically and biologically by altering the rivers natural flow. This can in turn create potentially devastating effects on surrounding ecosystems; the extinction of many aquatic species such as (but not restricted to) fish, the disappearance of birds in floodplains, huge losses of forest, wetland and farmland, erosion of coastal deltas, and many other immitigable impacts.

For this reason, dams are contrary to the Water Management Act 2000, which places priority on the protection or restoration of water dependent ecosystems as well as protecting, preserving, maintaining or enhancing the important river flow dependent ecosystems of the catchment's water sources.

There is an over reliance on rainfall dependent storage systems, in respect to the exacerbating factors contributing to climate change. With dams' levels of green house gas emissions, they will continue to be the cause of environmental risks associated with climate change.

Regarding socio-economic concerns, large infrastructures such as dams can inflict a hefty financial burden on water rates payers, as well as a debt burden on a State owned enterprise. Community and stakeholder consultation has shown that consumers and industries are prepared to accept water conservation measures and demand management in lieu of creation of more large-scale dams.

¹ Refer to page 23 of enclosed report *Beyond Tillegra: A sustainable water strategy for the Lower Hunter*

There are smart opportunities to conserve water and avoid new dam creation

We maintain that sustainable alternatives in water conservation and demand management strategies are often more cost effective, socially, economically and environmentally. BASIX, recycling and other such sustainable initiatives will reduce the need for large water supply storages in the future. Already, initiatives based on these principles are undermining the assumed necessity of dams, and permanent 'water wise' rules throughout most Australian cities, and surveys around the country have shown that low-level water restrictions have very high levels of community support.

To take these positive indicators further, we suggest industries should be encouraged to use recycled water not potable water, and major water users should be encouraged to create and adhere to a water conservation plan.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of adopting the National Urban Water Planning Principles towards sustainable future water supply planning. The need to commit to selecting water sources with minimal environmental, social and economic costs over the long term is greatly emphasised.

Our Hunter Valley based report on demand management options outlines key recommendations for sustainable water planning

Please accept the enclosed report, *Beyond Tillegra: A sustainable water strategy for the Lower Hunter*, as a key part of our submission into this inquiry. The report clearly outlines the cost benefits and opportunities from implementing popular demand management programs to ensure water is not wasted and unnecessary water storage is avoided.

Yours sincerely,

Naomi Hogan

Campaigner Manager

The Wilderness Society Newcastle