

**Submission  
No 75**

## **INQUIRY INTO WATER AUGMENTATION**

**Name:** Mr Philip Jeffreys

**Date received:** 14 August 2016

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I write as a private citizen with reference to the Upper House Inquiry into water supply in regional and rural NSW.

I am specifically concerned with the threat of potential dams being located on the Belubula River to the existence of the Cliefden Caves.

The Cliefden Area has previously been recognised as having national significance, with it being listed on the Register of the National Estate. It is an internationally significant caving site with unique Ordovician fossils, limestone caves, a warm spring, a habitat for threatened bat species and historic cultural sites.

It is one of the oldest caving systems on the planet, to be compared with the Jenolan Caves. I have no doubt that any proposal to flood a similar site such as Jenolan would never be allowed to proceed. I fail to see why the Cliefden Caves should be treated any differently. After 450 million years, they are virtually untouched, pristine, and in better condition than some Jenolan Caves. I cannot understand why a cave system can be allowed to be inundated for the sake of a dam with a relatively short lifespan.

Examinations have shown that if the Cranky Rock dam proposals are built, the water level at Needles Gap will be raised by up to 50 metres. Early survey results indicate that any dam that floods above approximately 380 metres ASL will flood Cliefden Caves. Both the proposed Cranky Rock dams would well exceed this height.

It is uncertain if the dams are being proposed for agriculture or for future mine development, with the Australian Federal Government proposing private enterprise funding for a dam on the Belubula River.

I believe the dam proposals should be asked to juxtapose their benefits against those of a cave system which can be developed for scientific exploration and study, tourism, and public educative purposes. I call on the Enquiry and to set guidelines to which any site must adhere before a dam or water project can be approved.

The environmental impacts a dam would have on an already heavily dammed Belubula River and the Cliefden Caves Area need be considered carefully by the Inquiry.

An additional dam on the Belubula River will reduce downstream flows, negatively effecting the ecology of both the Belubula River, and wetlands of the Lachlan River system. With the Lachlan River system already being over allocated, it will cause further degradation of migratory bird habitats in the Lachlan's wetlands including the Booligal Wetlands and Great Cumbung Swamp. Social and economic impacts of an additional dam will stem from the reduction of water for downstream water users. Combined with this, if private enterprise is the beneficiary of the water (as put forward in the Federal Government's Water Infrastructure Ministerial Working Group paper in 2014), it would likely increase water prices for local water users. There is already a similar submission contrasting the inequitable rate at which water users are charged. Will this be another instance?

I realise Central West communities need water, but this should not be the defining reason in placing a dam at this location. The Cranky Rock and Needles Gap dams would harm and degrade the natural and cultural heritage values of the Cliefden Caves, and for this reason alone, I am opposed to their construction.

I entreat that the Inquiry to:

- a) Reject the proposal for any future dam on the Belubula River at the Cranky Rock and Needle Gap sites;
- b) Examine other water sustainability, recycling and augmentation options apart from dam building in the Central West. The heritage and scientific value of the Cliefden Caves Area outweigh the need for any dam proposal that would compromise their protection;
- c) Address the matter of federal and State jurisdiction for dam and water supply projects. I believe it is a State matter, and yet the previous and current Federal members for Calare have each expressed an opinion for the dam project without addressing the effects it would have on the Cliefden Caves

Thanks you for your consideration of these matters,

Philip Jeffreys