

**Submission  
No 13**

**INQUIRY INTO PROPOSAL TO RAISE THE  
WARRAGAMBA DAM WALL**

**Organisation:** Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

**Date Received:** 20 August 2019

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# Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc

Web Site: [www.bluemountains.org.au](http://www.bluemountains.org.au)

## Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

20 August 2019

Mr Justin Field MLC  
Committee Chair  
Select Committee on the Proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam Wall,  
Parliament House,  
Macquarie Street,  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Field

### **Upper House Inquiry into the Proposal to Raise the Warragamba Dam Wall**

#### **Preamble**

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a community based volunteer organisation with over 800 members. Its mission is to help conserve the natural environment of the Greater Blue Mountains, and to increase awareness of the natural environment in general.

The Society is especially concerned to conserve the environment of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (GBMWhA) and its surrounds. The GBMWhA consists of a chain of eight connected conservation areas covering an area of 10,000 square kms and includes the Blue Mountains and Nattai National Parks. The Burragorang, Nattai and Yerranderie State Conservation Areas abut the GBMWhA. Portions of each of these areas will be inundated if the proposal to increase the height of the Warragamba Dam proceeds.

The Society welcomes your invitation of 31 July 2019 to make a submission to the Inquiry. The Society intends to address only some of the items listed in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference (Ts/R).

#### **Engagement between NSW Government and World Heritage Committee in relation to the project (item 1 (c) Ts/R)**

The initiative for nominating areas for World Heritage listing lies with the Commonwealth Government. In 2000, the Commonwealth Government nominated the Greater Blue Mountains for World Heritage listing and the area was inscribed on the World Heritage List in recognition of its universally outstanding natural value. In nominating the Greater Blue Mountains, the Australian Government, as a signatory to the World Heritage

Convention, has accepted an obligation to ensure the identification, protection, conservation, rehabilitation and presentation of the GBMWHa and its transmission to future generations. The responsibility for the day-to-day management of the GBMWHa lies primarily with the NSW Government. Thus, the State Government also bears a weighty responsibility to ensure that the World Heritage listed values of the GBMWHa are not jeopardised. This association of the responsibilities of both Commonwealth and State Governments is borne out by the decision of the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO in July 2019 to request that Australia submits the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Dam Wall raising to it for review before any final approvals are made. The World Heritage Committee, at their meeting in July 2019, has indicated that the proposed raising of Warragamba Dam wall and intermittent flooding of large areas of the GBMWHa would likely adversely impact on the World Heritage Area's outstanding universal value. Blue Mountains Conservation Society has concerns as to whether this advice is being heeded by the NSW Government.

Blue Mountains Conservation Society would like assurance that the completed EIS will be sent to the World Heritage Committee. Blue Mountains Conservation Society asks that, in addition to the EIS documents, copies of all public submissions made in response to the EIS are also sent to the World Heritage Committee. We further ask that any subsequent advice received from the World Heritage Committee in regard to the proposal be made publicly available.

#### **Adequacy of EIS process to date (item 1 (d))**

As the EIS has not been published and the Society has no access to or knowledge of the processes applied, results obtained and conclusions reached to date, it is not possible to address the matters referred to in this item in the manner the Society would wish. However, the Society offers comments on sub paragraphs (i) to (iii) as follows:

#### **World Heritage (item 1 (d) (i))**

The Society observes that the raising of the Dam wall by 14 metres will periodically flood 1400 hectares of the GBMWHa and 65 km of wilderness streams upstream of the raised Dam wall. This flooding will have serious and lasting impacts on the World Heritage listed biodiversity, which includes many threatened species and ecological communities. The periodic flooding will also increase erosion, weed infestation and significantly impact water quality due to increased sedimentation and silt runoff. In short, the Society considers that the Wall raising proposal threatens the status of the World Heritage listing itself.

See comments at (item 1 (c)) above also.

#### **Aboriginal Cultural Heritage (item 1 (d) (ii))**

There has been a growing understanding of the importance of the GBMWHa to the contemporary Aboriginal community. The proposed Dam raising will destroy significant cultural heritage sites of the Gundungurra people, including rock art sites, axe grinding groove sites, ceremonial sites and scar trees. Michael Jackson, an archaeologist who gave evidence on 4 October 2018 to the inquiry into the Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba Dam) Bill 2018, said that there are probably at least 500 archaeological sites with tangible evidence, continuing "but you have to remember that it is all one big site because the whole area is covered by a creation story". Mr Jackson also stated that

“[o]ne flood inundation could destroy archaeological deposits that demonstrate the deep antiquity of Aboriginal connection to this country and to this part of Australia, the Sydney Basin, which would have information about how they managed their land, how they survived through climate change, and all that information”.

These sites are so important that they have been proposed for recognition as an Aboriginal Place.

The Society has recently written to the Hon Sussan Ley MP, the Federal Minister for the Environment, requesting that the Commonwealth seek inclusion in the World Heritage listing for the additional criteria of Aboriginal cultural heritage, (as well as geodiversity and scenic splendour) that these sites possess.

### **Ecological values of the Greater Blue Mountains National Park (item 1 (d) (iii))**

We are presuming that the above item refers to the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area rather than “national park”.

The Society understands that Infrastructure NSW has recently released a draft Cultural Assessment on the likely impacts of the proposed Dam wall raising which interested persons may assess and comment on. We are unaware of the release of any similar draft Ecological Values Assessment nor have we any details as to how the required ecological surveys and assessments for the proposal are being undertaken. It is thus impossible for us to determine if the EIS process to date, in regard to the assessment of impacts on ecological values, is adequate or otherwise.

The Society notes the presence of very restricted ecological communities, for example, *White Box-Yellow Box-Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland*, which is listed as a critically endangered ecological community under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Also, a large number of threatened species, for example, the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, the vulnerable (NSW) Painted Honeyeater and the vulnerable Camden White Gum are known to occur in the area of the GBMWhA likely to be impacted by the proposed Dam wall raising. Both of the bird species have breeding sites, and are not just feeding, in the inundation area. The Society further notes the presence of additional taxa in the area of likely impact, which, though not threatened, are unusual and have restricted distributions in the GBMWhA. Examples of such taxa include ‘Bell’s form’ of the Lace Monitor and birds such as the Buff-rumped Thornbill, Fuscous Honeyeater and Jacky Winter. Any adverse impacts on this biodiversity will impact on the listed values of the GBMWhA.

The Society believes that it is imperative that the biodiversity of the GBMWhA be conserved in situ. We do not believe that it is possible to adequately “offset” impacts on biodiversity in a “like-for like” manner within the GBMWhA, especially when offset measures consist of monetary payments or activities carried out beyond the GBMWhA.

**Implementation of recommendations in inquiry into the Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba Dam) Bill 2018 by Select Committee on State Development in October 2018 (item 1 (h))**

It is not apparent that consultation processes in planning approvals for the Dam project and for the remainder of the EIS process have markedly improved.

Further, it does not appear that Infrastructure NSW has given indigenous groups sufficient time to understand and respond to a 2000 page draft Cultural Assessment on the Dam's impacts. This is unacceptable.

**Any other related matter (item 1 (i))**

The Society notes that it is widely believed that the microclimate in parts of the GBMWSHA is influenced by the surface area inundated by Lake Burragorang at any given time. Any changes to the pattern of inundation could affect the habitats of rare fauna and flora including those at much higher altitudes than the actual area inundated.

The level of water in the Cocks River from its confluence with the Kowmung upstream to its confluence with the Kanangra Creek could be affected by the Dam wall raising. Although parts of that section are off limits to bushwalkers, a couple of popular bushwalking routes do cross that part of the Cocks River, most notably the Katoomba to Kanangra bushwalking route, also known as K2K. That route has a long history involving the Society and other conservation groups and may well be jeopardised by the Wall raising.

The Society asks that it be afforded sufficient time to comment on the EIS when it is released.

The Society requests that its submission be published in full on the website including its name.

Yours sincerely

Lachlan Garland  
President  
Blue Mountains Conservation Society