

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

Organisation: Coast and Mountain Walkers of NSW

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TO: Proposal to Raise Warragamba Dam Wall <warragamba.dam@parliament.nsw.gov.au>

Don't Raise the Warragamba Dam Wall

Members of our bushwalking club - Coast and Mountain Walkers of NSW (CMW) - have been walking continuously in the Blue Mountains / Kanangra-Boyd areas since 1934. Our membership at present is around 300 people.

Some of the best and now remote walking country in the Greater Blue Mountains (at least since the construction of Warragamba Dam) is to be found in the lower valleys of the Kowmung and Coxs Rivers. The vegetation and animal / bird communities there are special - remnants of what used to exist in abundance before the flooding of the Burratorang valley in the late 1950s.

Lower river valleys in a pristine state, with their fertile alluvial flats, are a rarity in NSW. They have been cleared and farmed or settled upon everywhere else. This particular piece of country has been set aside in one of the world's great National Parks AND listed as World Heritage by UNESCO. For this reason alone, the intermittent flooding of the lower Kowmung, Coxs and other rivers should not be allowed, especially when there are cost effective alternatives to solve Western Sydney's long term flooding issues. Other people will, no doubt, detail the loss of aboriginal cultural sites should this project ever see the light of day.

A few points to add to our submission:

- * The raising of the Warragamba dam wall proposed by Infrastructure NSW will cause environmentally unacceptable damages above and below the dam at a cost that is likely to exceed \$750 million.
- * The proposed dam wall raising will smother with sediment the lower Kowmung River and other wild rivers in the Blue Mountains. The largest remaining stand of the endangered Camden white gum will be affected by the flooding.
- * Even with the proposed dam wall raising, the other half of Hawkesbury-Nepean's catchment south of Sydney can still produce major floods. People residing on the floodplain would still suffer big floods from the Grose, Colo and Macdonald Rivers and the South Metropolitan Catchments, for example over 100 residential properties would be flooded in a 1 in 5 year flood. **Consider the consequences of what will happen if the Dam Wall was raised; 134,000 extra people live in the lower parts of Penrith, Windsor and NW Sydney; the storage is now full after a week or two of torrential rain across greater Sydney; the lower Kowmung and Coxs River valleys are under metres of floodwater - and an intense low has just started to appear in the Tasman Sea off the South Coast ?**

* The dam raising proposal will simply encourage urban sprawl over currently flood prone areas, putting more people at risk of the floods arising from the other half of the catchment. The dam wall raising proposal is a half measure and certain to produce no net gain in public safety. Further, urban development on previously flood prone land will cause the death of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River from addition urban runoff and sewage discharges. Oyster farmers will also be badly hit by extended fresh water floods from mitigation discharges killing off oyster farms and causing economic ruin.

In conclusion, we think that these alternative solutions have merit:

* The better solution is to use the capacity of the existing dam for flood mitigation and rely on the auxiliary spillway on the eastern side of the dam wall to carry extreme floods past the dam with safety. The proposed alternative design incorporates new gates to regulate small and medium flood flows and could take advantage of the five metres added to the existing dam wall in 1989.

* Lowering the full storage level by 12m would free 795 billion litres of airspace for flood control. Combined with flood forecasting to manage the level of the dam, this would have no upstream environmental impacts, and would increase Sydney's water security when consolidated with operating desalination plants and water recycling. UTS research shows this would likely be a cheaper option than raising the dam wall (see Jamie Pittock (2018) Managing Flood Risk in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley, Australian National University).

* Ensuring people don't live on flood-prone lands will save lives and property damage when floods occur. As no dam can stop all floods, placing people in flood-prone areas is dangerous. NSW planning regulations still allow people to be housed in extremely flood prone areas below the 1:500 year flood limit. This is far from international best-practice, with the Netherlands adopting a 1:1250 year flood planning limit, and the USA a 1:500 year limit. Remember, these numbers and regulations do not take Climate Change into account.

* Improve Evacuation Routes and Flood Forecasting.

Effective evacuation is the only measure which guarantees reduced risk to life in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley during flood events. Flood evacuation roads would also solve congestion problems in western Sydney during normal (dry) times.

* Engaging in a buyback program of the 5000 houses which lie under the 1:100 year flood level is important option. The government's \$3.3 billion price-tag for relocation is a misleading figure, as it does not properly consider the potential figure saved in flood events, as well as economic benefits that 'freeing up' the floodplain can bring.

Thanks for reading this submission.

Yours faithfully,

Jeff Howard

CMW President.