

Submission  
No 55

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

**Name:** Mr Christopher Rothwell

**Date Received:** 30 August 2019

---

To the Honourable Members of the Select Committee on the Proposal to Raise the Warragamba Dam Wall,

I am deeply concerned by the state government's plan to raise the wall of Warragamba Dam. I believe that the environmental damage to the World Heritage listed Blue Mountains National Park and the increased development of vulnerable floodplains around Sydney that will result from raising the dam wall is not in the best interest of the people of NSW.

The state government has clearly outlined that raising the dam wall will allow for a major expansion of housing on Sydney basin floodplains, over 134,000 in the next 30 years. I have seen firsthand the immense damage that can result from incautious development on floodplains. I was living in Brisbane during the 2011 floods that caused billions of dollars of damage to property and infrastructure as well as loss of life. Wivenhoe Dam, built after the 1973 floods specifically to prevent flooding, was unable to prevent the disaster. Encouraged by the presence of the dam, areas of floodplain were opened to development on the false assumption that they would be safe from flood damage. A similar catastrophe could occur if such development is allowed in the Sydney basin. There are other ways to cope with the ever-increasing population of the Sydney region, such as improving access to the Southern Highlands with fast rail to allow commuters to work in Sydney but live affordably in adjacent regions to Sydney.

Raising the dam wall will also cause immense environmental damage. I have been bushwalking in the Blue Mountains NP for most of my life, and I have seen firsthand the incredible beauty of this jewel in the crown of our state's national parks. The vast area of the national park provides a refuge for many endangered and threatened species of flora and fauna. Raising the dam wall will irreversibly damage vital areas of untouched wilderness and degrade the value of this park for both the many millions of tourists and bushwalkers that visit it each year and the wildlife that rely on its sanctuary. As a World Heritage listed area, it would be a major embarrassment and stain on our international credibility to degrade such an iconic place. As a founding member of the World Heritage Convention, Australia has a duty to protect wilderness areas such as the Blue Mountains from the destruction that raising the dam would entail. UNESCO has stated publically that it is concerned about the impact that raising the dam wall could have on the Blue Mountains NP's value as a World Heritage site.

Several alternatives are available to the current plan of raising the dam wall to improve flood mitigation. The research review published by Prof. Pittock (2018) of the Australian National University brings together recommendations from previous studies conducted at major Australian universities. Reducing the maximum storage level in combination with water recycling and desalination initiatives would provide flood mitigation capacity in addition to improving Sydney's water security in an economic way without the major ecological damage caused by raising the dam wall. Consideration needs to be given to alternative strategies to prevent the willful destruction of such a vital piece of our national environmental and cultural heritage.

Yours sincerely,  
Christopher Rothwell

References: Pittock, J. (2018), Managing flood risk in the Hawkesbury – Nepean Valley