

**Submission  
No 91**

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

**Name:** Mr Lachlan Penninkilampi

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# SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE PROPOSAL TO RAISE THE WARRAGAMBA DAM WALL

LACHLAN PENNINKILAMPI, A CONCERNED CITIZEN

Please find my responses particularised to selected terms of reference below.

## **(a) Conflicting reports on the planning height for the dam wall raising and the potential use of the raising for additional storage capacity as well as flood mitigation**

If the NSW Government has a policy to raise the height of the dam wall, it must be clearer on its purpose so the public can scrutinise the plan appropriately.

If raising the dam wall has been for flood mitigation—which has been the Government’s most clearly and repeatedly communicated purpose to date—then the issues are well known. Many of them were canvassed in the Standing Committee on State Development’s Report No 45 in 2018 (‘Report No 45’).

But if the purpose of raising the dam wall is for additional storage capacity, then the consequences are completely different. Permanently raising the water levels of the dam will result in the permanent submersion of sacred sites and some of the most biodiverse land in this region. It also goes directly against what the Government said in Report No 45 (see 2.92) and is contrary to what many members of the public believe is the purpose of this policy.

Either way, the Government should ensure that it is more consistent and transparent about its purposes, lest public scrutiny of its plans be of no real value.

## **(b) Plans for future property development on flood prone land on the Hawkesbury Nepean Floodplain**

In Report No 45, proponents for raising the dam wall spoke at length about how the plan will reduce costs associated with property damage in the valley. It makes little sense for Government to then use the raising of the dam wall as an excuse to allow further urban sprawl, ecological denigration of the floodplain, and increased costs associated with property damage.

The Hawkesbury–Nepean Valley Regional Flood Study released in July 2019 (‘the Flood Study’) paints a picture which shows clearly that property development should be strictly limited in

floodplain. In the Overview Report, for example, Infrastructure NSW reinforced that “flooding can be so much deeper and wider in this valley than in other floodplains” (see p. 12). And given the Flood Study revealed “[a]n increase in rainfall intensities of 9.1% by 2071 under projected medium greenhouse gas emissions would increase the 1 in 100 (1%) chance per year flood level across the floodplain” (see Overview Report, p. 13), further significant development of the floodplain would also directly contradict sound environmental planning principles with respect to climate mitigation and adaptation.

Furthermore, any revenue gains by property developers, insurers, and the government in developing the floodplain are likely to be short-lived. As flood risks increase over the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is not unreasonable to expect an increase in large payouts by insurers and the Government to communities on the floodplain—payouts which would grow significantly with further development of land in outer Western Sydney. Such events would leave communities in the floodplain displaced with much of their property destroyed, and would no doubt provoke questioning as to why they were allowed and encouraged to inhabit new developments when the Government knew the risks were so high.

So even if the dam wall is raised, it should not, in my opinion, be used as an excuse to further develop this precarious floodplain.

**... (d) The adequacy of the Environmental Impact Assessment process to date, including the assessment of impacts on ... (ii) Aboriginal Cultural Heritage**

While I have not paid as much attention to the EIA process as I would have liked to date, I must note in passing that surveying only 26 percent of affected land for Aboriginal cultural heritage is manifestly inadequate and unjust to the Gundungurra people. The Government should recognise and respect their legitimate claims more appropriately than it has done so far.

**... (i) any other related matter.**

I stress in this submission, as I did in my submission to Report No 45, that the concerns raised by this government policy are essentially matters of justice. There is little ecological justice in flooding areas of such high biodiversity value, particularly as it is recognised as important natural heritage on a global scale. There is little climate justice in developing a floodplain which is going to be struck by the impacts of climate change not only in terms of extreme heat and proximity to bushfires, but by devastating (and worsening) flood events. And there is little social justice in the disrespect for Aboriginal cultural heritage to date.

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Extreme floods are going to happen. Raising the dam wall will not only do little to stop them; it will facilitate the destruction of heritage and the overdevelopment of the floodplain. The NSW Government should look at the alternatives to managing the Hawkesbury–Nepean floodplain.