

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

Organisation: Mulgoa Valley Landcare Group

Date Received: 5 September 2019

Partially
Confidential



Dear Senate committee,

I write to advise of concerns held by the Mulgoa Valley Landcare Group regarding the NSW Government's proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam Wall by 14m for the purpose of Flood Mitigation for the regions of Wallacia, Penrith and the Hawkesbury Valley.

1. Water NSW have failed to engage with local community regarding construction impacts. A meeting was held last week – attended by Infrastructure NSW. This was meeting was co-hosted by Wallacia Progress Association, Mulgoa Progress Association and Mulgoa Landcare Group. None of these key community stakeholder groups have been contacted nor informed by Water NSW regarding construction impacts and Infrastructure NSW advised they were unable to answer any questions relating to construction impacts for our communities (ALL materials, concrete etc for this construction would need to travel along the heritage Mulgoa Rd and/or Park Rd, impacting the amenity of heritage villages of Mulgoa and Wallacia).
2. Infrastructure NSW admitted that the raising of the Dam wall was a direct consequence of poor planning.
3. Infrastructure NSW advised that an additional 134,000 people would be residing on the flood plain in coming years. The NSW government **continues** to place lives at risk, provide inadequate evacuation routes and congest those evacuation routes with more people. Raising the dam wall will not compensate for this lack of vision nor the lack of commitment toward acceptable living standards in Western Sydney.
4. We would like to know why Liberal Party donor and property developer was able to sell his flood prone land for three times its value shortly after the dam wall raising was announced? Claims that this decision is not about development (and keeping developers happy and wealthy) are questionable.
5. We would like to know why only a few years ago that the current Government was promoting an urban development for thousand five homes at Penrith Lakes – when it is a known flood zone. Again, the NSW Government is clearly comfortable with putting people in harm's way to appease their developer cronies whilst now promising a 'lip-stick' measure of raising a dam wall? Sadly, that lip-stick measure brings with it environmental catastrophe but our government doesn't care about environment – they only care about people (according to the Premier). What they

continue to fail to realise is that people and their existence actually relies on environment – but environment continues to suffer at the expense of people.

6. We would like to know why the NSW Government are using a 'scare campaign' to gain public support for the raising of the dam wall? Infrastructure NSW advised our three key community groups that THIS WAS THE ONLY SOLUTION to SAVE LIVES. We know this is not factual when they also revealed the statistics on how poorly informed the communities of flood affected areas are regarding floods, impacts and evacuation routes. We know this is not factual when the NSW government has refused to acknowledge that other flood impacted countries around the world have tried and tested methodologies that would NOT require the raising of the dam wall, flooding of World Heritage Areas and the extinction of species (Regent Honey Eaters). Research from the Netherlands show how improved monitoring of weather and cyclical patterns of drought and flood can allow for releasing of dam water in an effective way. Combined with more desalination, this will save our Regent honey Eaters, save vital habitat and save our world heritage areas and wild rivers.
7. Infrastructure NSW advised our community that only 0.06% of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area would be flooded as a result of the raising of the dam wall. They refused to determine the actual size of the area impacted – which is understood to around 4500 hectares of FORAGING riparian areas (not the steep sandstone areas – but the areas required by threatened species as habitat will be wiped out).
8. Infrastructure NSW could not comment on impacts on the communities of Wallacia and Silverdale on Tourism (as the Dam will not be open for tourism during construction).
9. Infrastructure NSW advised our communities that the inundation of vital habitat for threatened species would only occur for 14 days. This inundation – albeit 'temporary' will still destroy the vegetation in that area permanently. Also, only one inundation will destroy forever the aboriginal heritage sites (the NSW Government claim 300 sites affected – indigenous representatives claim at least TWICE that many sites will be lost).
10. The NSW Government has failed to undertake a Cost Benefit Analysis of improving evacuation routes as opposed to increasing the height of the dam wall. Improving our road systems will be of benefit on a DAILY basis – not just during unprecedented flooding.
11. The interference by Insurance companies in this debate is not welcome. Insurance companies are not driven by construction impacts to communities, not driven by impacted individuals and not driven by saving lives. They are driven by their profit margins and hence have a conflict of interest in making aspersions relating to their support for raising of the dam wall, they are set to benefit from mild to moderate flooding being reduced by the raising of the dam wall. This may well be the case that raising the dam wall might reduce insurance payouts in the instances of mild to

moderate flooding – however it is loss of life that the NSW Government is claiming to protect by this action– according to Infrastructure NSW this is all about saving lives! I implore the senate committee to ignore greedy insurers claiming that this raising of the dam wall should proceed.

In summary, indigenous culture and vital habitat for threatened species will be lost because this government (and previous governments) are beholden to powerful developers and hence allow them to build wherever they wish on a flood plain. Who pays? Future generations who will never see a regent honey eater... Future generations of indigenous people who can no longer connect to their cultural heritage. We will ALL PAY – but the developers will continue to earn. The construction costs of raising the dam wall should be spent on better flood evacuation routes and a better-informed community.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment

Sincerely

Lisa Harrold

Mulgoa Valley Landcare Group

5th September 2019