

Submission
No 238

INQUIRY INTO PROPOSAL TO RAISE THE WARRAGAMBA DAM WALL

Organisation: Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc.

Date Received: 10 September 2019

Submission by Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc. (OFF)

Oatley Flora and Fauna Conservation Society Inc. (OFF) has been actively involved in the protection of the environment for over 60 years and advocates for the need to conserve the natural environment and resources, as well as to stimulate interest in Australian flora and fauna. We have a membership of approximately 300 which includes many with qualifications in the natural sciences and engineering.

Our membership is kept well-informed on local and national environmental issues through our monthly newsletter and meetings. Our meetings draw an average attendance of over 50 and are addressed by professionals with expertise in environmental fields.

Our May meeting this year was addressed by a former Office of Environment and Heritage scientist (who has been undertaking faunal surveys in the Warragamba Catchment Area since 1997) on the significant biodiversity values of the Temperate Grassy Box Woodlands of the Burratorang Valley. At the same meeting we screened the video "Give a Dam", which featured informed comment from a range of experts and stakeholders who were familiar with the area that would be affected.

Numerous OFF members have taken part in authorised bird surveys, including bi-annual surveys for the Birdlife Australia National Regent Honeyeater (Critically Endangered) and Swift Parrot (Endangered) Surveys in the Burratorang area within the Warragamba Catchment Area, so we have first-hand experience of the area under consideration. We have seen a wealth of fauna there – platypus, emus, dingos, wombats, sea-eagles, kangaroos and wallabies - that are rare elsewhere in the region; most have been sighted in valleys and often in or close to shallow natural waterways which would be inundated and their ecosystems destroyed, if the dam wall were raised.

OFF made a submission to the Legislative Council Standing Committee on State Development re the Water NSW Amendment (Warragamba Dam) Bill 2018, opposing the proposal to raise the height of the dam wall.

Our organisation objects strongly to raising the Warragamba Dam Wall on grounds relating to the following terms of reference:

1(d) (iii): **In**adequacy of the Environmental Impact Assessment, including the ecological values of the Greater Blue Mountains National Park and the adjacent areas - Yerranderie and Burratorang State Recreation Areas and the Nattai and Blue Mountains National Parks, as well as 65 kilometres of rivers (Lower Kowmung, Nattai, Coxs, Kedumba, Wollondilly and Little Rivers). The accumulated sediments in the river valleys contain more nutrients and support larger and more nutritious tree species than do the ridges. Research has shown that Koalas (Vulnerable) and Regent Honeyeaters (Critically Endangered) prefer the trees in river valleys and the valleys provide a significant refuge for fauna in times of drought, including the current one. On a recent bird survey in the Warragamba Dam Catchment we saw few birds until we encountered large flocks of honeyeaters swirling round the few eucalypts that were flowering – all on the more fertile soils of the Grassy Box Woodlands.

Raising the Dam Wall will cause the flooding of 4700 hectares within those areas.

1(c): We believe the proposal breaches the operational guidelines of the Greater Blue Mountains' World Heritage listing; this much-sought-after listing was awarded to the region due to its biodiversity and range of ecosystems. The scale of damage that would result from the proposal threatens the integrity of the World Heritage Area and has significance on an international level.

1 (d) (ii): Much Aboriginal cultural heritage would be destroyed by the proposal - ancient landscapes, archaeological artefacts and sacred waterholes would be drowned and the Gundungurra people further alienated from their ancestral lands and sites of their songlines.

1 (f): We respect the advice of senior academics such as Professor Jamie Pittock (Australian National University) who have said raising the Warragamba Dam wall won't necessarily protect communities of the Hawkesbury-Nepean floodplains from large flood events. Floodwaters can and have, originated from catchments below the dam (such as the Nepean and Grose valleys) - in fact 45% of recorded floods have done so. Every storm behaves differently and the sequence in which watercourses flood, and the areas they inundate, are difficult to predict in advance.

1 (b): We believe it is unethical to promote future property development on flood-prone land on the Hawkesbury Nepean Floodplain. The Insurance Council of Australia has welcomed the release of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Regional Flood Study because it provides improved [**but note, not absolute**] insights into flood exposure for the owners of more than 21,000 land parcels in the region. It has also said that accurate flood information is essential in helping communities and governments prepare for natural disasters and the likely impact of climate change.

This suggests to us that securing insurance for properties built on flood-prone land is likely to become more difficult and more expensive.

We recommend that the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Regional Flood Study be continued and expanded and that no further development on flood-prone land be allowed until more comprehensive and reliable insights into flood exposure have been gained.