

Submission
No 248

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 7 September 2019

Partially
Confidential

Dear Committee,

I am writing in regards to the Legislative Council's Select Committee Inquiry into the Proposal to Raise the Warragamba Dam Wall. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue.

The NSW Government's plan to raise the Warragamba Dam wall by at least 14 metres is unnecessary, expensive, would cause widespread environmental destruction, lacks efficacy and could damage the Blue Mountains' UNESCO World Heritage status, creating adverse publicity and thereby damaging the area's reputation and economy as a tourist destination. If approved, this project would, no doubt, attract international media attention and damage the reputation of NSW as well as the Blue Mountains.

Economic Impacts

- The project would appear to privilege property developers at the expense of the environment, the broader community and other industries that rely on the pristine reputation of the park for their livelihoods. It is not in the public interest and should be rejected. Other cheaper and proven methods of flood mitigation exist which would be more effective, realistic and less destructive. It is concerning that the NSW Government is considering such a proposal given its impacts, risks, cost and lack of efficacy.
- It has been widely reported that experts have warned that the project would not even be successful in mitigating flood impacts; that the proposal is based on questionable reasoning and that other approaches should be investigated which are cheaper and more efficacious. It would be cheaper and less destructive to invest in international best practice flood management for Western Sydney.
- The real driver behind the proposal is clearly a push to increase housing development across the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley floodplain. The Government should abandon plans to double housing on the floodplain, adding at least another 134,000 homes to an area which has a known flood risk.
- The government has acknowledged that overpopulation is now a serious and urgent problem in Sydney. We are experiencing unprecedented crises in overcrowding of hospitals, schools, public transport and traffic congestion and access to resources. To prioritise a further massive increase in population growth in this area at this time is illogical. The area is currently economically sustainable and a population increase will result in further infrastructure problems. The government should be working to reduce population in Sydney, not increase it, and resources should be diverted to solving the current crises in infrastructure as its urgent priority.
- We should not be putting the interests of a handful of property developers ahead of the diversity of other businesses that rely on the Blue Mountains' international reputation as a pristine world-class destination. These businesses are crucial to the Blue Mountains economy over the long term and are essential for its economic sustainability.
- Since the damage to the Barrier Reef has received international media attention, tourism there has been significantly and immediately impacted. The same would likely occur in relation to this World Heritage Area and, as the damage would be unambiguously caused by the NSW Government, and would be yet another example of an Australian World Heritage Area being inadequately protected, this would likely result in even further international coverage and

indignation. Such attention would be very damaging and likely have other repercussions for NSW for the long-term.

- Given the controversial nature of this proposed project, it will likely provoke widespread resistance and negative publicity that would not only damage NSW but also result in a variety of expensive legal challenges and other costly mitigation measures. It is difficult to estimate the cost of this but they would likely be in excess of the Light Rail and other projects due to the contentious nature of the project and its impacts.

Environmental Impacts and Destruction of Aboriginal Heritage

- If this project goes ahead it will flood 4,700 hectares of World Heritage listed National Parks in the Blue Mountains, causing irreversible damage to the Kowmung, Coxs, Nattai, Kedumba and Wollondilly Rivers. At least 48 threatened species that inhabit the area will be put at risk, including the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater (one of Australia's rarest birds) and the Camden White Gums. In July 2019, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee found that raising the dam wall would significantly impact the 'Outstanding Universal Values' of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

- The project will also result in the loss of over 300 sacred Aboriginal sites in the Burratorang Valley, including the last remaining waterholes of the Gundungurra peoples dreaming stories and grave sites. It is unacceptable that the draft cultural assessment undertaken by SMEC Engineering only covered 26% of the entire area that will be submerged by the raised dam.

- The damage to this crucial and unique environment would be significant and irreversible. Thousands of endemic animals, plants and insects would be killed, including endangered and vulnerable species that must be protected.

- Alternative options for flood mitigation for the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley have been identified which are cheaper, less destructive, more effective and should be adopted instead of raising the dam wall. These include:

- Investing in evacuation infrastructure in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley;
- Adopting international best practice floodplain development controls;
- Using flood levees and diversion structures; and
- Managing the existing capacity of Warragamba Dam by lowering its current full storage level to provide additional airspace for floods and investing in water recycling and desalination infrastructure.

For the above-mentioned reasons, I urge the committee to recommend that the NSW Government abandon this destructive, expensive, high-risk proposal. In addition, there is no justification for increasing the population on the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley floodplain on this scale. It is an inappropriate location and the current overpopulation problem in Sydney would be further exacerbated, instead of ameliorated.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Kind regards,