

**Submission  
No 264**

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

**Name:** Mr Jeffrey Ray  
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Mr Justin Field, MLC

Chair

Select Committee on the Proposal to Raise the Warragamba Dam Wall

Legislative Council

NSW Parliament House

Macquarie St

SYDNEY NSW 2000

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### **Inquiry into the proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall**

My name is Jeffrey Ray. I am a retired high school HSIE teacher of 45 years who specialised in Geography. This subject of study has always sought to provide an integrated view of the world. It examines human and cultural factors which are inseparable as we manage the planet and ourselves, living upon it.

I have had the opportunity to see a good part of our nation and the world. At 66 years of age, I am old enough to have experienced change and recognise that it is inevitable. I also believe that it can be managed thoughtfully with deference to scientific opinion, an educated population and wise political leadership.

I won't dwell on the scientific, environmental, political or cultural arguments as I expect that they will be better managed by those more qualified than I.

While food mitigation is in itself, a worthwhile cause it's efficacy and the price that we pay for it needs to be carefully evaluated.

I have spent my career teaching young Australians about the environment and in the latter half of it, that included an understanding of an indigenous perspective which I might add, was mandatory in the NSW syllabus. I know that for many people, rock etchings and cave paintings do not amount to much but as a nation we are slowly coming to understand the importance of it to the Aboriginal nations that are part of our community.

My reading of the literature tells me that much of this will be compromised as water levels rise behind the dam. I can accept that as a significant loss to Aboriginal culture.

With respect to the intermittent flooding of the Kowmung and similar valleys upstream, I have no hesitation in accepting scientific opinion that natural environments will be seriously compromised. The idea that a major 1 in a 50-year rain event for example, which triggers a flood above the Warragamba Dam, is then left to be slowly released back downstream when conditions allow, with little impact, is a simplistic notion.

The suggestion is that little will change or indeed, environmental and cultural damage is an acceptable price to pay for Sydney metro's continued growth and sprawl.

The fact is, a considerable contribution to floodwaters comes downstream from the Warragamba and flooding will still occur. The region is after all, a floodplain. Flooding is a natural expectation. Global studies of catchment management show that flood mitigation is an inexact science. Our ability to control floods is limited and that is certainly the case with this proposal.

I've walked with my family and friends in this region, maybe six or seven times over thirty years. It was almost a spiritual experience being down there initially with friends, later with our families. The place is wild, beautiful and inspirational. The fact that this wilderness is so close to Sydney metro is one of the things that makes this city such a wonderful place to live in. Although many of Sydney's residents will never use it or indeed appreciate its value, it is part of a natural and cultural heritage that exists for any enthusiastic person who wishes to take it up now or into the future.

The Blue Mountains National Park has been gazetted as a UNESCO World Heritage Area. Such recognition is due to the fact that previous authorities in this state have recognised its significance and applied to the global community for such status to be conferred upon it. World Heritage listing granted in the year 2000, brings with it considerable responsibilities of environmental stewardship.

That only 19 years later, a state which supported this inclusion on the World Heritage List would be prepared to compromise its values by allowing such change to take place is disturbing. The buses of tourists that arrive at Echo point and support the local tourist economy on a daily basis, do so with the expectation that they are visiting one of the world's great natural wonders. Any reading of the UNESCO description of the Greater Blue Mountains explains why this environment is of exceptional quality.

An area as large as the Greater Blue Mountains will always be under constant pressure for change and development.

Managing such a significant space is a balancing act that requires careful judgement. If the decision to raise the dam wall takes place, the significance of the Blue Mountains Region as a natural wonder will be compromised and significantly diminished.

Such precedents will contribute to further efforts to alter these and other natural environments whenever it is inconvenient or costly to take a decision which protects the environment. The fact is, there are always alternatives, choices which can be taken that are environmentally positive, even if they are not ideal or cheap. The Greater Blue Mountains remains a wonder of the world. The fact that it lies on our doorstep is no reason to take it for granted or succumb to pressure to degrade it further.

The construction of the Warragamba Dam and Lake Burragorang behind it, while taken during a different era in history, already represents a huge encroachment on the Blue Mountains ecosystem.

Securing growing Sydney's water supply into the future was understandable 60 years ago. The proposition to provide flood mitigation for a medium density urban area not yet insitu, across flood prone largely rural land, is not.

This proposal is based on questionable methodologies supported by property developers who understand little and care even less, for the continued destruction of the Cumberland Plain and the Greater Blue Mountains. This is quite a different situation when compared to the construction of the Warragamba all those years ago.

As our metropolitan and national populations grow, we need to stand firm in our commitment to the environment and seek not to renege on agreements which we have entered into with the world community in the past or expectations that we have taught our children during their schooling.

How can we as a wealthy nation, provide any example to our global neighbors if we pursue such developments at the expense of the environment?

Unfortunately, at this time in human history, we are witnessing a global assault upon physical and cultural wonders which we had every right to expect, would be safe into the future, once they were recognised and gazetted, only a few decades ago.

Decision makers who place the environment second to development do a disservice to our nation and set a poor example for our youth who will be responsible for it into the future.

I strongly urge the committee to consider an alternative strategy.

Yours Faithfully,

Jeffrey Ray