

Submission
No 266

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

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Partially
Confidential

I am writing to express my opposition to the NSW Government proposal to raise the wall of Warragamba Dam as a flood mitigation measure.

It appears that the main reason for the raising of the dam wall is to allow high-density development to go ahead and this is at the expense of the heritage-listed world-famous Blue Mountains National Park.

The Blue Mountains City Council has formally opposed the plan. If the reason is for flood mitigation then why would you want to develop on flood-prone land? That makes no sense at all.

The plan to raise Warragamba Dam wall could threaten the Blue Mountains' world-heritage listing and do irreparable damage to the environment and to indigenous cultural sites and rare rock art. A UNESCO advisory body has warned the world heritage-listed area could be placed on a list of sites "in danger" if the wall is raised.

The valley covers 425 square kilometres of floodplain and includes a property previously owned by Clydesdale Property Development Group. Chinese Australian (a Liberal Party donor) was one of three Clydesdale directors when the company bought the land at Marsden Park in August 2014 for \$45 million. Nearly six months after then-premier Mike Baird announced, in mid-2016, that the wall would be raised, Clydesdale sold the property for \$138.8 million - more than three times the amount originally paid. This could be seen as corrupt behaviour as floodplain developers are set to gain significantly if the dam wall raising goes ahead.

The proposal to raise the dam wall has the potential to flood around 65 kilometres of lowland river environment – environment of this type in its natural state is rare. The flora and fauna which make these valleys their home are often different species from those which inhabit the higher ground. The most obvious example are the critically endangered regent honeyeaters, which rely on such environments for their breeding.

The outstanding natural beauty of the Blue Mountains is a major drawcard for tourists. NSW Government figures indicate that in the year to March 2019 the Blue Mountains received over 4 million visitors, which is a 60% increase in less than 10 years. These same data indicate that visitors are estimated to have contributed around \$772million to the Blue Mountains regional economy. Over half a million of these visitors were Australians visiting the Blue Mountains in that year for the purpose of visiting or walking in national parks, including to walk the iconic Kanangra to Katoomba trail, parts of which will be flooded when the dam at the new and higher level is full. Developments which erode the environmental character and value of the Blue Mountains landscape can only lessen its appeal as a tourist destination.

Raising the Dam wall is only a partial flood mitigation solution – with around 50% of inflows into the Nepean catchment coming from the southern catchments which do not flow through Warragamba Dam.

There are also alternatives to this proposal – the most obvious is not to allow further development in the flood prone areas below the Warragamba Dam. Indeed the proposal to raise the dam wall appears to be part of a broader NSW Government proposal to allow further development in the Nepean floodplain to house an

additional 134,000 people. This is madness when we consider what is being lost to accommodate this measure.

The Nepean plains are also experiencing extremes of heat in summer, and as such are not ideal places to be building more housing. Far better options exist, such as allowing medium density housing development in Sydney's middle ring of 5-10km from the CBD. This measure alone has been estimated to allow for housing an additional 1 million people.

It has been acknowledged that current roads in western Sydney would not allow for the safe evacuation of the existing population from flood prone areas in a major flood event. Given that the raising of the Dam wall is not a failsafe flood mitigation measure, increasing the population of these areas will only exacerbate the problem.

To conclude, to flood a world heritage area, even temporarily, as a partial flood mitigation measure is extremely short sighted. Such areas will inevitably be covered in silt following flood events with their ecological character changed forever. They can never be replaced once lost. Lowland valleys such as exist in the Coxs River and Kowmung River in a near pristine state are extremely valuable and must be preserved for current and future generations.

I implore the NSW Government to consider other options such as those listed above in preference to the proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall by 14 meters.

Yours sincerely

Lani Imhof