

**Submission
No 332**

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

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WARRAGAMBA DAM RAISING PROPOSAL

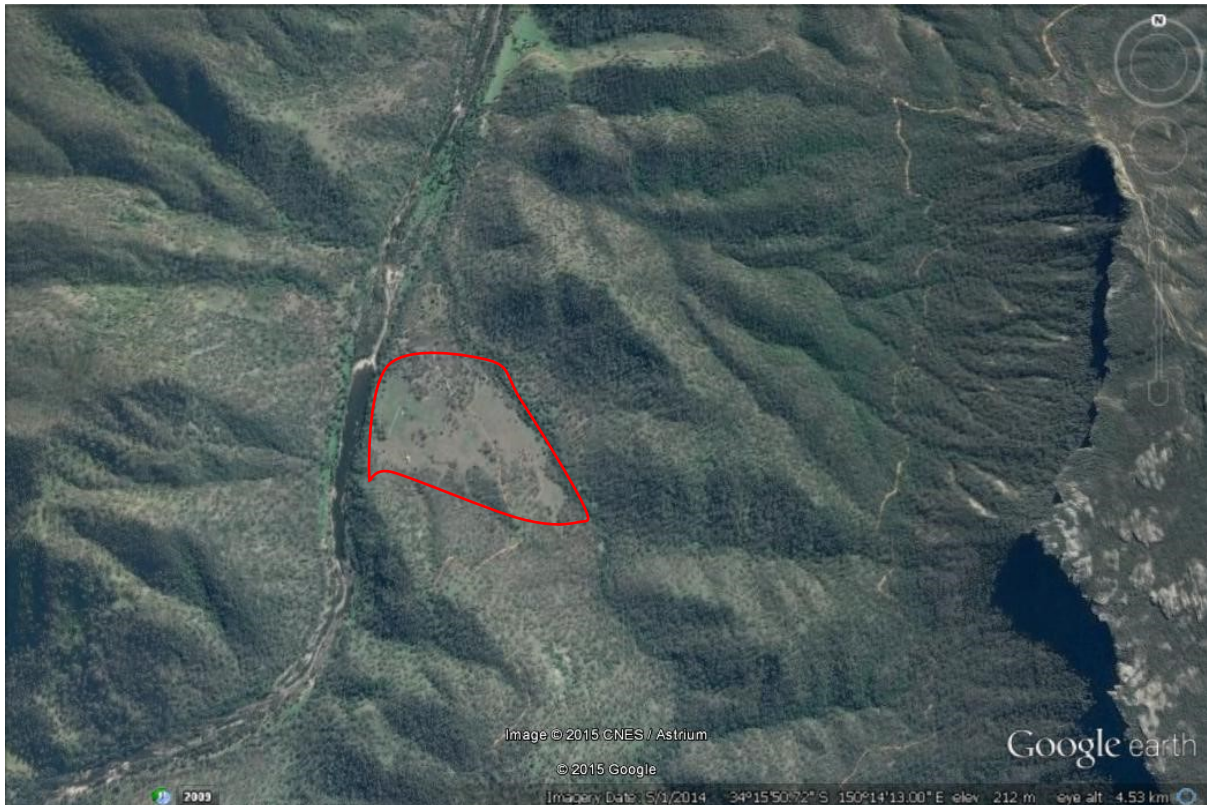
Martin Schulz (PhD in zoology)

I would like to make a submission to this parliamentary inquiry. My submission is in two parts; as an impacted landowner and as an experienced ecologist and zoologist.

Part A: As a Landowner

I own a property at Burnt Flat within the Burratorang Valley. I am very disappointed in the lack of communication WaterNSW has provided to me. This lack of communication has made me highly suspicious about the entire process. Some of my chief concerns with the proposal are as follows:

- a) **Lack of Information:** I have received extremely little information about potential impacts from WaterNSW. Given this it makes me highly suspicious on why this is the case – it appears to be a case of avoiding to inform landholders before it is too late.
- b) **PMF Level:** My property is going to be impacted based on the PMF level (Possible Maximum Flood Level). However, WaterNSW has been extremely cagey in providing details by how much i.e. I was supplied with an A4 map of the impact area for the entire Warragamba Dam area rather than detailed information on how much of the PMF is expected to impact the property. Why is this?
- c) **40% Property Loss:** I have calculated that as a minimum some 40% of my property will be temporarily inundated for some 5 to 6 weeks a year. What impact is this going to have?
- d) **WaterNSW deceptive about amount of dam wall raising proposed:** WaterNSW appears to be being deceptive on how much the dam wall is to be raised and hence the impacts on landholders. Why is this the case? And how much is this going to impact landholders such as me?
- e) **Compensation:** WaterNSW has been extremely cagey regarding compensation with respect to the proposal and has never contacted me directly about this issue.
- f) **Loss of aesthetic value:** The Burnt Flat area is visually stunning and the reason I have invested so much into our plot of land. The proposed inundation and PMF levels are going to impact upon this.



Location of my property at Burnt Flat bordering the Wollondilly River upstream from the current dam.

Part B: As an experienced Zoologist/Ecologist

I have over 25 years' experience undertaking fauna research, monitoring and surveys in the Sydney Basin Bioregion, including threatened species listed under State and/or Federal legislation. I am very concerned about the proposal, in particular:

a) **Temporary Flooding of Habitat:** My understanding is that WaterNSW is suggesting that a band of vegetation bordering the current dam level, plus upstream of the current dam (such as Burnt Flat) will have little impact on existing vegetation. However, from my experience I dispute this assertion and instead feel it will result in:

1. Habitat Loss to Threatened Species: Primary habitat of many threatened species occurring in the Burratorang Valley exist in the lowest parts of the valley, in particular the Critically Endangered Regent Honeyeater. The temporary inundation of River Oak fringing the current river banks as well as White Box woodland and adjoining vegetation associations will result in the loss of important tree species (e.g. White Box) which do not like getting their feet wet. Such losses of primary habitat will place further pressure on this Critically Endangered species whose plight is considered so critical that the government is considering a captive breeding program alongside one that is already in action in Victoria.

2. Weeds: Experience on my property and adjacent properties is that after flooding events a major growth of weed species occurs. Such growth impacts threatened fauna species which rely on native ground vegetation, such as the Diamond Firetail and Turquoise Parrot.

3. Erosion and impacts on soil fertility/structure: The impacts of temporary flooding events will alter current soils which will have an unknown impact on fauna and flora. Species which currently nest or burrow in along the current river banks will be impacted; particularly the Platypus.

b) Fauna Values of the Burratorang Valley: The faunal values of the area was one of my primary original reasons for purchasing a property in the Burratorang Valley (apart from the valley's scenic beauty and remoteness of the area given its proximity to Sydney). My chief concerns in relation to fauna impacts from the proposed dam wall raising are the following:

- impacted vegetation below the PMF level provides important habitat for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater. The majority of sightings are in areas proposed to be flooded (including on my property). This includes all known nesting locations. It is one of only a handful of locations where this very rare honeyeater has been found nesting in recent years, despite extensive targeted surveys across the State. It is also likely that this honeyeater nests in other sections that are very rarely visited by wildlife consultants, naturalists or even DIPE (formerly OEH) biologists, such as the Kedumba Valley. The government is spending a large amount of money on captive breeding yet the area to be flooded supports known and recently used nesting habitat of a species that numbers less than 1000 individuals in the entire world. Such a situation seems very contradictory.

- impacted vegetation below the PMF level provides habitat for a large number of other grassy woodland species that have either become extinct or on the edge of extinction in the Cumberland Plain region of the Sydney Basin. These grassy woodland fauna species include the Turquoise Parrot, Hooded Robin, Brown Treecreeper, Diamond Firetail and Black-chinned Honeyeater.

- is a recognised hotspot for the threatened Large-eared Pied Bat which utilises the woodlands threatened by flooding including vegetation below the PMF level for foraging. The numbers recorded in this area are far higher than in adjacent areas such as the Cumberland Plain.

- the river provides important habitat for a number of threatened species, such as the Fishing Bat or Large-footed Myotis and the White-bellied Sea-Eagle. Temporary flooding of vegetation below the PMF level will result in tree loss which provides roosting and probable maternity sites for the above species.

- Impacted vegetation below the PMF level, includes a band of River Oaks. These Oaks provide habitat for an uncommon and threatened visitor, the Painted Honeyeater as well as the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater.

- The river is also important for the iconic Platypus which is rare in the Greater Sydney region. The temporary inundation of the river banks will result in burrow loss of this species.

- The Valley provides important foraging habitat including impacted vegetation below the PMF level for the threatened Glossy Black-Cockatoo. Nesting locations in the area are unknown but are likely to be in old hollow-bearing trees in riparian forest. Such areas are likely to be flooded by the proposal.

- Potential habitat of the endangered and severely declining Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby may be present within the area proposed to be flooded. For example, further upstream in the Bullio area a remnant population is present. This population was only found due to observant residents of the area. Given that no one lives in the proposed area to be flooded and the presence of suitable habitat it is likely that so far unknown populations are present.

- When in flower, White Box and Forest Red Gums, including below the PMF level, provide important foraging habitat for threatened nectarivorous species. Of key importance is the Regent Honeyeater as mentioned above. However, also other species such as the endangered Swift Parrot and threatened Black-chinned plus Painted Honeyeaters, and Little Lorikeet.
- White Box woodland and other threatened vegetation communities which will be severely reduced in the area proposed for flooding provide important habitat that has all but disappeared in the Greater Sydney region.
- The proposed increase in the dam wall will decrease the connectivity for fauna between Nattai NP and the Blue Mountains NP which will have an unknown impact on fauna diversity and movements between and through these areas.
- Many of the areas proposed for flooding re poorly known with respect to what fauna is present due to a combination of the remoteness of these areas, the lack of residents/regular visitors and the virtual absence of naturalists or other people with good fauna knowledge. It is most likely that as mentioned above the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater nests in some such locations thereby further increasing the value of the area proposed to be flooded in terms of fauna value.
- The areas to be flooded provide important habitat to fauna assemblage no longer present elsewhere within the Greater Sydney area, such as a breeding population of Emus and a population of the Dingo.

Summary

As a land owner and experienced zoologist/ecologist I would appreciate this submission to be taken seriously and would be happy to provide additional information where required.