

**Submission
No 321**

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

Name: Mr Christopher James Halls

Date Received: 10 September 2019

My name is Christopher James Halls. My Grandfather, Great Uncles and Aunt grew up at the Katoomba Aboriginal Mission in The Gully, which connects me, all my ancestors, my children and future generations to the Burratorang Valley and the Gundungurra people from the valley.

I:

1. am a Gundungurra man
2. am a member of Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association Inc (GAHA)
3. am an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) stakeholder to the Gundungurra Area Agreement (NI2014/001 granted under the *Native Title Act 1993*, Cwlth)
4. have archaeologically surveyed and recorded a significant number of sites within Gundungurra Country for many years
5. am deeply connected with Gundungurra Dreaming stories, including waterholes described in the Mirragan and Gurangatch story (which explains the creation of the Wollondilly River and Wombeyan Caves as told to anthropologist, RH Mathews in the late 1890s, by the Gundungurra tribe 'at Burratorang on the Wollondilly river' and published internationally in 1908 ('Some Mythology of the Gundungurra Tribe, New South Wales' in *Zeitschrift fuer Ethnologie*, Vol. 40, pages 203-206)
6. have, over the last 7 years, shared my knowledge and respect for Gundungurra Country during annual Bunburang Ancestral Pathways walks that are overwhelmingly well received by participants

I find the proposed raising of the dam wall deeply offensive as a Gundungurra man and traditional owner. My Country and many parts of the Dreaming story has already been flooded in the 1950s. My Gundungurra elders were not consulted. I understand this happened long before legislation existed to protect my culture. But I cannot believe or accept it will happen again!

I have been part of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Survey undertaken as part of the raising of the Warragamba Dam wall proposal.

I was at the meeting when Niche first told the ILUA holders of this project and that Niche would be doing the Aboriginal Heritage survey. They told us it would take be a two week survey. I laughed at them and said "are you kidding? Have you ever walked out there (on Country)". They were clueless from the start.

Since the surveying started, I have been a member of the archaeological survey team most of the time. You cannot believe the complexity of sites we have found during recent surveys. The richness of these sites exceeds far beyond anything found anywhere in the Greater Sydney metropolitan area, to date.

Before the Dam was built, no archaeological surveys were done. There were a few anthropological recordings from the 1800 and early 1900s, people's recollections and stories, some early photos and maps. Then it all went under water to secure Sydney's water supply; even burial sites and cemeteries. A huge cultural cost for the Gundungurra.

Over the last 12 years, our organisation has actively mapped our Country. We have come across over 900 sites. I never expected to find what was discovered down in the Nattai, Burratorang Valley and Cox's River locations, during the recent survey for Niche. Stone tool after stone tool, as well as rock shelters and grinding grooves, in great numbers. Many located in ways that showed connection. Sites in these numbers and with such richness simply have not survived on the Cumberland Plains. If this proposal goes ahead we all will lose something great.

Over 230 years ago, the First Fleet landed to take over this country and tried to remove Aboriginal people from it. It never succeeded. Over 230 years later the State Government are still trying to ruin and remove part of the history of this great land.

Have we, as people, not learnt anything about how great is this country's Indigenous history and culture, and how we must care for Country?

You want to protect people living on flood plains? Why was the land released for development? Aboriginal people never lived on the flood plains. They knew what would happen there.

How about you protect the oldest culture in the world!

How about you acknowledge the importance of this history and culture!

How about you listen to the Aboriginal community on how to manage the land and the water which you are supposed to protect, care for and manage!

I challenge you to listen, and thereby ensure the wellbeing of the Gundungurra, the broader Aboriginal communities and the general public. I know from all those who I have taken out on Country, they want and need it protected, too.

As I stated earlier, we have recorded over 900 sites, and with that, we have created an annual guided walk that crosses the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area following Traditional Pathways, visiting sites and land forms that include our creation story of Gurangatch and Mirrigan. September 2019 will be our seventh year of showing the participants these places, telling our stories and sharing our culture.

I do not want more of the Burragorang flooded! But if the State Government is going to destroy the history of this great land and flooding these significant complex of sites, shouldn't we be aware what is going to be destroyed?? At the very least, we need a full and proper survey of the threatened area to be carried out! Did you know that one of the authors at Niche, who wrote the so-called draft report of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Survey, only came out for a day to record sites in the area. And that area isn't even in the impact zone! How can that result in a fair and proper assessment of the significance of sites and their potential impact?

As I mentioned earlier, when we were recording the impact area, we discovered a large number of sites that are very important as they have connection to our Dreaming Story. Some of these are out of the impact area but it is all related and connected to Gundungurra culture. We ended up spending two weeks out there recording these sites and revisiting an area that was previously recorded instead of investigating unrecorded sites in the impacted area!

Also do you know that Niche's archaeologists who were out in the field did not write the assessment report? These are the people who now have seen the landscape and who understand the landscape. These field people know and understand the Gundungurra history of this land and their dreaming stories. But they did not write the report. Why not? I have my suspicions.

Finally, why weren't the ILUA holders given the opportunity to participate in the selection of the archaeologist? It is, after all, their land that they are required to manage under the ILUA. They also have the local knowledge and the deep connections to Country. They have so much knowledge to share.

The State Government, SMEC and Water NSW have done nothing to assist a true assessment of the deep and complex cultural values of the Burratorang or a positive result from the archaeological survey. This has been nothing but a “tick a box” program for these organisations and Niche has responded accordingly. The Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) were not given enough time to survey and were not allowed to camp on site to be in a position to spend more time on surveying the sites. So much time was spent travelling to and from sites; rather than actually walking Country. The ban on camping on-site did not extend to those people surveying the impacted flora and fauna. How can that be just or fair, especially since the Gundungurra hold the ILUA over this area.

This has been nothing but a “tick a box” program for these organisations and Niche has responded accordingly. Again, I find the proposed raising of the dam wall deeply offensive as a Gundungurra man and traditional owner. My Country and many parts of the Dreaming story has already been flooded in the 1950s. My Gundungurra elders were not consulted. I understand this happened long before legislation existed to protect my culture. But I cannot believe or accept it will happen again!

Any Aboriginal cultural heritage assessment that, at this stage, suggests the impacts can be mitigated or are acceptable is flawed, misinformed and deeply offensive. The work completed, to date, is inadequate and ignores the unique, significant and extensive complex of sites that exists in the Burratorang. To ignore that or harm those sites ignores ecological sustainable development, intergenerational equity and the wellbeing of current and future generations of Gundungurra. This is your chance to make right the all-too-many wrongs of the past.

Chris Halls.