

**Submission
No 330**

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

Name: Mr Peter Boyd and Ms Alison Clouston

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10th September 2019
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

Inquiry into the proposal to raise the Warragamba Dam wall

Alison Clouston and Peter Boyd

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We would like to make a submission to this parliamentary inquiry.

We are property owners in the Burratorang Valley, with 203.5 hectares (503 acres) that we have managed for environmental conservation for over 30 years. Whilst not on the river frontage we have legal access to the Wollondilly River which will be directly affected by the Dam wall raising proposal.

We have been supportive of additions to the National Park estate. We have collaborated with the many local land management agencies over the years, from the Water Board and the Sydney Catchment Authority, and NPWS to the Rural Fire Service. We've been involved in feral animal control with LPHA. We have been involved in government funded landcare and water monitoring projects on this and adjacent lands. We are engaged in citizen science projects here. We know and care about this country.

We feel the proposed inundation that will be caused by the Dam Wall raising will have a serious and irreversible impact on the places we have been caring for and advocating for over many decades.

1) As landowners disregarded

We have received no communications from Water NSW which does not make us confident. Yet what we have learned is that the proposal will affect the riverine environment that we have enjoyed and cared for for over 30 years. We have walked the Wollondilly River banks from Scabby Flat to Fowlers Flat extensively during these decades. We notice the changes – we see a river in decline, and we are deeply concerned about this latest proposal to challenge the river system. We are concerned that the Authorities have not informed us nor our Landcare Group about the proposal.

2) Risk to ancient trees if flood inundation lasts for weeks as proposed.

We have worked with Landcare, (the Basket Creek Landcare Group) National Parks and Wildlife and the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers to do reparation works along the Wollondilly riverbanks in the Burratorang Valley, doing weed control, planting, fencing and caring for native species along the River banks. We have always been aware of the significant huge and ancient Forest Redgum trees (*E. tereticornis*) along the riverflats. In a 100 year flood, as we witnessed back in the last century, the water

subsides very quickly, by noon the next day after the peak the water was considerably lower. But if the waters are held back by the new dam height for several weeks, as proposed, our young plantings and the venerable old trees will die. With this will come the loss of shade and soil which will change this ecological niche irreversibly. The death of these rare big trees will inevitably result in them falling over, and this would further reduce the available nesting hollows used by threatened species, such as Powerful Owls, Turquoise Parrots, and Glossy Black Cockatoos. Also in the zone for proposed water retention, are endangered White Box communities. On Burnt Flat and other riverflats are stands of Yellow Box which are important sources of nectar for the critically endangered Regent Honeyeater, which we have seen feeding here.

3) Risk to remaining Platypus and Rakali (*Hydromys chrysogaster*)

Flooding caused by the pumping of water during drought from the Shoalhaven River, pumped down the Wingecarribee and Wollondilly Rivers to top up Warragamba Dam have caused long periods of inundation, though not on the scale proposed, so we are able to get an idea of what happens. We have witnessed the degradation of the River by this process. The water was once so clear we could snorkel with platypus and eels with visibility of many metres, but now the river is constantly turbid. Carp appeared and are now in abundance. Weeds have flourished on the damp soil of the riverbanks. Whilst the Authorities were able to halt pumping during the platypus breeding times, no such halt will be possible when the water is now proposed to be held for weeks on end after a major flood; thus breeding burrows will be flooded for extended periods. Platypus and Rakali will have greatly shortened opportunities to breed. We have not seen Platypus lately, and yet they were once common at Burnt Flat, so we know they are already vulnerable to changes to their river system.

4) Cultural heritage of Gandungurra People and early European activities

We are aware of a canoe tree right in the proposed water retention zone. This very old tree, carrying the tool-marks of the Gandungurra culture that thrived here, will not tolerate being submerged in water for weeks at a time. It will rot and fall over. The loss of this tree and many others like it will be devastating to the cultural, historical and archaeological value of the region. We have often found stone cherts, flakes and tools along the river. Long inundation will change the archaeology, shifting sediments around. There are also early European remnants in the flood zone, remains of buildings and stockyards. This part of the River is deeply enfolded in Gandungurra story and heritage, illustrating the Dreaming story of Mirrigan and Gurrancatch. These values are vital to the Gandungurra people today, and are an immeasurable part of the claim to the World Heritage status of the area.

5) Environmental concerns for the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

The proposed Dam wall extension will damage the region's last wild rivers and creeks, including the Kowmung. The World Heritage nomination declared the 'Outstanding Universal Values' in these ecosystems, and could be placed on notice as "at risk". The Australian Federal Government has stated that "the impact of increased flood water levels within the dam is likely to have extensive and significant impacts on listed threatened species and communities and world and national heritage values of the [area]." There are forty eight threatened species within the area of 4,700 hectares that would be affected.