

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

**Name:** Name suppressed  
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Partially  
Confidential

Dear Committee,

Please accept this submission to the Legislative Council's Select Committee Inquiry into the Proposal to Raise the Warragamba Dam Wall. I consent to this submission being published in full.

The NSW Government's environmental assessment for raising Warragamba Dam wall is being completed by the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corps (SMEC), which has an established history of abusing Indigenous rights across the globe. These abuses have taken place as part of environmental and cultural assessments for other dam projects, notably in South East Asia. These instances of abuses call into question how the firm has been chosen as the lead consultant for the Warragamba Dam project by the NSW Government.

I urge the committee to recommend that the NSW Government abandon this short-sighted dam proposal, and further summon the CEO of SMEC Engineering, James Phyliss, to give evidence as to why his company has been ignoring the concerns of Blue Mountains Indigenous people and not following UNESCO World Heritage (IUCN & ICOMOS) Assessment Guidelines.

Raising Warragamba Dam will result in the loss of over 300 sacred Aboriginal sites within the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, including the last remaining waterholes of the Gundungurra peoples dreaming stories and grave sites. It is unacceptable that the draft cultural assessment undertaken by SMEC Engineering and its consultants only covered 26% of the entire area that will be submerged by the raised dam.

Blue Mountains Traditional Owners have labelled SMEC's report "insulting" and "an attempt to justify the destruction of hundreds of sites" in favour of the government. When Traditional Owners invited SMEC and Water NSW to attend a public meeting to discuss their concerns last month, they simply didn't show up.

Even when SMEC Engineering held their first consultation meeting about Warragamba Dam wall raising project in 2018, Traditional Owners were given just four days' warning by SMEC of a consultation meeting being held in northern Sydney, more than a three-hour drive in peak-hour traffic from the Blue Mountains.

To get to the bottom of how this happened, all documents and correspondence relating to the cultural and environmental assessment should be summoned to the Parliamentary inquiry so there can be full transparency surrounding the project.

But this is not the first time SMEC Engineering has been up to this sort of cultural white washing.

In 2013 SMEC faced extensive criticism from the scientific community for their involvement in the Don Sahong Dam project in Laos. SMEC refused the Cambodian, Vietnamese and Thai governments calls for them to submit the project and the proposal to intergovernmental assessment. The construction of the Don Sahong Dam project is set to threaten the main source of livelihood, fishing, for those living downstream of the dam in the Cambodian-Mekong. This has further driven poverty and environmental degradation in an area where this is already rife. SMEC reportedly did not consult the parties involved in the Mekong River Commission, as required under the 1995 Mekong Agreement.

Further to this, in 2015 SMEC Engineering faced controversy for undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment and a Social Impact Assessment for the Mong Ton (or Tasang) Dam in Myanmar, which will eventually displace as many as 300,000 indigenous people - with over 100 villages and towns to be flooded. This dam has also threatened the existence of 104 migratory species of fish which are crucial to the livelihoods of groups living along the Salween River. Large amounts of funding for this dam came from Chinese state-owned companies.

Local villagers reported “SMEC’s consultations are entirely insufficient. The first consultation was only two hours. You cannot discuss anything in two hours. And they announced this consultation via a tiny ad in one of the last pages of the newspaper”. The activist also reported that military authorities in Shan State sent a tank through the villages “to remind them to participate in the consultations” run by SMEC.

These appalling tactics are the same as how SMEC Engineering has treated Blue Mountains Traditional Owners to date.

The committee must call on SMEC CEO, James Phyliss, to give evidence at the Parliamentary inquiry to explain how his company was chosen by the NSW Government to undertake this project given its appalling record. The inquiry must ask him why SMEC Engineering are not abiding by IUCN and ICOMOS World Heritage Assessment Guidelines in writing their assessment on the flooding of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.