

Submission
No 357

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

Name: Mr John Boyle
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Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

I am strongly opposed to the NSW government's proposal to raise the wall of Warragamba dam for downstream flood mitigation on the flood plains below the dam.

Doubtless, the dam's maximum, optimum, wall height would have been determined during the time of the dam's design and construction.

Furthermore, if the dam wall was raised then it would negatively impact, by flood inundation, upstream areas including protected conservation areas, national parks, the habitat of endangered species and breeding site for one of the rarest birds on earth, the Regent Honeyeater, of which only around 400 remain in the wild, pristine natural environment, and around sixty indigenous cultural heritage and sacred sites.

The dam proposal would cause extensive and irreversible damage to the integrity of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, as thousands of hectares of pristine wilderness would likely go underwater for months at a time. Sediment-laden floodwaters would drown many species, coating what remains with layers of silt, leaving behind a desolate landscape, and the internationally recognised wilderness would become little more than seventy kilometres of despoiled landscape. Surely, only a philistine would even consider destroying such a priceless World Heritage environment and Indigenous treasures for such a precarious project?

Moreover, imprudent construction activity on the dam's flood plain seems to corroborate the government's interest in raising the dam wall is not for flood mitigation purposes on the flood plains but is, possibly, a deceitful ploy to open up the flood plains for further overdevelopment, similar to that across the Sydney basin.

Furthermore, instead of a piecemeal, parochial, approach to the State's water supply as exemplified by the proposal to raise the wall of the Warragamba dam, that is known to be situated within a rain shadow, and thus rarely overflows, it seems odd that such a decision was made before consideration of the possibly far more pressing need of renewing the State's leaking water distribution mains pipeline? Further, it's beyond time to consider a national approach to the conservation and reticulation of water across Australia, the driest of continents, but where is the vision and prioritisation to do this, in this inexplicable rush to fix something that is not broken? Where is the prudent, visionary government that acts in the best interests of the country?

Put another way, if the fluid supply lines from a storage tank were leaking would one, first, make the tank larger or renew the leaking fluid lines? Surely, a rational decision would require that the repair of the leaking fluid lines be completed first?

Moreover, Sydney Water, Australia's largest utility with around 4.6 million customers, experiences an average of 120 million litres of water wastage per day through leaks from ancient, water mains (that's almost 44 billion litres per year!), according to its latest water efficiency report. The urgent need to repair and/or replace many of Sydney's water mains should be duly recognised and performed before any consideration of making the dam (tank) larger.

For thousands of years, Aboriginal people would have relied upon local fresh water resources of rivers, creeks and water holes within the Sydney region. More recently, when colonial settlers moved into the Sydney area almost two and a half centuries ago, they tended to build their settlements close to those same natural water supply sites. And, as settlement expanded out, water was reticulated from local dams. However, today, we seem to have lost the ability to plan and provide similar water storage and reticulation to all regional and local communities.

Water conservation storage and reticulation is of such national importance that it should be a federal, government responsibility rather than state responsibility. Cities and towns across Australia are frighteningly running out of water, during this prolonged drought, that shows no sign of breaking. Thus, a national water storage and reticulation scheme should be organised such that water collected at source, generally in Northern Australia, where it is plentiful, could then be piped and distributed across the nation. E.g., although, nearly 2 meters of rain falls each year in Darwin, the city does not have the infrastructure in place to capture enough of it and pump it out, to where it is needed.

Not far from the outback Western Australian town of Kununurra lays a massive man-made body of fresh water, Lake Argyle, which contains the volume of 18 Sydney Harbours!

Also, Tully, near Cairns has a tropical rainforest climate, with an average annual rainfall exceeding 4,000 millimetres (160 in), and lays claim to the highest-ever annual rainfall in a populated area of Australia (7,900 millimetres (310 in) in 1950). Both, Tully and nearby Babinda, are arguably the wettest towns in Australia. Obviously, the need is not about building more dams, rather it is about moving water from where it is, to where it is needed, across Australia.

Furthermore, Sydney's drinking water, our rivers and even our World Heritage areas are all threatened by long wall coal mining in the greater Sydney region. WaterNSW, who manages Sydney's drinking water catchment, regards long wall coal mining as one of the biggest threats to our water supply. And, NSW's Chief Scientist said that our catchment is the only publicly owned drinking water catchment in the world where coal mining is allowed! Surely, such apparent negligent behaviour, by the state government, in placing our drinking water at such risk provides strong grounds that water storage and reticulation must become a national Australian government priority.

Additionally, it is inconceivable that, in this age of lone terrorists, a government would be so imprudent as to 'put all our eggs in the one basket,' by increasing the capacity of the major, water storage dam servicing Sydney. A lone terrorist could launch a missile that breaches the dam wall allowing the stored drinking water for some 5 million residents, to be lost, in one fell swoop. Instead, for our security, it should be mandatory that potable water be stored in many smaller lakes rivers and dams at suitable locations scattered around the continent as an insurance policy to guard against drought, terrorism, and provide permanent water for every community across our nation.

Surely, only a city-centric government could seemingly ignore the urgent need for state and nation wide permanent water reticulation availability. This is exemplified by the harrowing drought and fire fighters hampered, everywhere, by the lack of local permanent water and its knock on affects on people, towns, animals and the environment, and instead priorities the fixing of a dam that is not broken?

In these unprecedented times, the current widespread tragic drought and out-of-control bush fires attest to the dire need for the conservation, storage and reticulation of water across the state and the nation.

I strongly oppose the raising of the Warragamba dam wall.

Sincerely, John Boyle