

Submission  
No 360

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

**Name:** Name suppressed  
**Date Received:** 10 September 2019

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Partially  
Confidential

## Proposal to Raise the Warragamba Dam Wall

Name:

Issues: in this inquiry I have addressed two issues that are relevant to me according to the terms of reference, (a) and (c)

Contents (a) Conflicting reports on the planning height for the dam raising and the potential use of the additional storage capacity as well as flood mitigation

(c) Engagement between the NSW Government and the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in the relation to the project

**Background:** The NSW government plans to raise the wall of Warragamba dam by 14 metres which has triggered concerns with UNESCO and many citizens in the Sydney Area. Their concern is the impact that this would have on the Greater Blue Mountains Area (GBMA), which consists of 1.03 million hectares of land.<sup>1</sup> The area would be, from time to time, ‘temporarily inundated’ with water which has the potential to cause irreversible harm. There is also concern that the damage done to the environment will be done in vain as the increased height of the dam wall will not prevent all flooding.<sup>2</sup> 50% of floodwaters in the Western Sydney area have historically come from catchment areas downstream of Warragamba Dam, so raising the wall will do nothing to change this figure.<sup>3</sup> The Environmental Impact Assessment which began in September 2017, between the NSW and Australian governments,<sup>4</sup> is still not available for review and yet the NSW Government is already putting legislation in place. This legislation would enable part of the GBMA to be flooded, however there needs to be alternatives to this plan, for the benefit of the environment and for the benefit of Aboriginal culture.

**(a) Conflicting reports on the planning height for the dam wall raising and the potential use of the raising for additional storage capacity as well as flood mitigation**

The NSW Government has established that raising the dam wall by 14 metres is the most cost effective way to reduce flooding downstream to the towns and urban growth centres of Western Sydney. This would also allow for more storage of water, however there has been conflicting reports stating that the government is planning to raise the dam abutments by 17 metres, to allow for easy modification in the future. Raising the wall by 14 metres would give an extra 995 gigalitres of airspace for additional storage and flood mitigation. However this would temporarily inundate up to 3700 hectares of Blue Mountains National Parks and 1000 hectares of World Heritage Area with flood waters. Included in this area is 65 kilometres of wilderness streams, at least 40 endangered plant and animal species and 50 irreplaceable

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, *Greater Blue Mountains Area* <<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/917/>>

<sup>2</sup> Infrastructure NSW, *Resilient Valley, Resilient Communities, Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Flood Strategy* <<http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/media/1723/warragamba-dam-raising.pdf>>

<sup>3</sup> NSW SES, *Hawkesbury Nepean flood plan (2015)* <<https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/media/1627/plan-hawkesbury-nepean-flood-plan-sept-2015-endorsed.pdf>>

<sup>4</sup> Water NSW, *Environment* <<https://www.waternsw.com.au/projects/greater-sydney/warragamba-dam-raising/environment>>

Aboriginal Heritage sites. These are burial, ceremonial, camp and art sites and two waterholes, sacred to Aboriginal Creation stories. 11 waterholes have already gone, inundated when the dam was original built.<sup>5</sup> At 17 metres it would mean more environmental damage with, *'tens of kilometres of more inundation'*.<sup>6</sup>

In 2018 a spokesperson for Gabrielle Upton, the then NSW Environment Minister, stated that, *'the raising of the Warragamba Dam wall is not going to permanently increase water levels, therefore any impact on the environment is expected to be minimal and short-lived'*.<sup>7</sup> The water may only be increased temporarily, however this would be enough to drown many species and leave a layer of suffocating silt. The landscape would be left permanently scoured and eroded.<sup>8</sup>

**Recommendation 1** – Lowering the dam by 12 metres: This would reduce the capacity by 40%, freeing up 795 billion litres of airspace and leaving the environment upstream unharmed. However, the NSW Government has stated that this would have a devastating impact on water security for Sydney.<sup>9</sup> The following recommendations would ameliorate the situation.

**Recommendation 2** – Water restrictions: Citizens of Sydney do not need to be washing their cars, hosing their driveways and irrigating their lawns. There are alternatives for all of these,

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<sup>5</sup> Naaman Zhou, 'So much that will be lost, concerns grow over plan to raise Warragamba Dam wall', *The Guardian* (Online) 2 July 2019 < <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jul/02/so-much-that-will-be-lost-concerns-grow-over-plan-to-raise-warragamba-dam-wall>>

<sup>6</sup> Dominica Sanda, 'Secret plan to raise Warragamba dam wall by 17m', *The Canberra Times* (online) 4 July 2019 <<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/5956617/secret-plan-to-raise-warragamba-wall-17m/?cs=14231>>

<sup>7</sup> Peter Hannan, 'Greens warn of 'Franklin' campaign against Warragamba dam wall raising', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (online) 18 October 2018 <<https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/greens-franklin-campaign-warragamba-dam-wall-20181018-p50ae2.html>>

<sup>8</sup> Tim Vollmer, 'Raising level of Warragamba Dam is an act of environmental vandalism', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Online) 27 September 2018 < <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/conservation/raising-level-of-warragamba-dam-is-an-act-of-environmental-vandalism-20180926-p5064v.html>>

<sup>9</sup> Infrastructure NSW, above n 2.

and other water using activities, with the use of the water restriction levels. Water could also be utilised through the use of desalination plants and recycling.

**Recommendation 3** – Improve evacuation times: Building flood evacuation roads would improve the time it would take people to get out of the area, if there was a flood. In addition this would not only serve as flood evacuation, but also serve as improved infrastructure, decreasing travel times and increasing road safety.<sup>10</sup>

**Recommendation 4** – Do not settle more people in the area: Currently the NSW government plans to settle an additional 134, 000 people in the area. More people would mean more congestion and more time taken to get out when it floods. As flooding in the area cannot be stopped by raising the wall alone it would make sense not to develop any more of the land. In fact it has been stated that not only should the flood prone land be left undeveloped, but that the people currently most at risk be relocated. This is a trend that is happening in Europe, the United States and China so that people can live in harmony with the environment.<sup>11</sup>

**(c) Engagement between the NSW Government and the World Heritage Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in relation to the project.**

Currently there seems to be little engagement between the NSW Government and UNESCO in relation to the project. In 2018 legislation was passed amending the *Water NSW Act 2014* to add the following;

*Part 5A Special Provisions relating to Warragamba Dam*

*64B Temporary inundation of national park land*

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<sup>10</sup> James Pittock, *Managing flood risk in the Hawkesbury – Nepean Valley* (September 2018) Australian National University 4 <  
[https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/wildrivers/pages/87/attachments/original/1544355960/Professor\\_Jamie\\_Pittock\\_-\\_A\\_report\\_on\\_the\\_alternative\\_flood\\_management\\_measures.pdf?1544355960](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/wildrivers/pages/87/attachments/original/1544355960/Professor_Jamie_Pittock_-_A_report_on_the_alternative_flood_management_measures.pdf?1544355960)>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 9.

*A lease, license, easement or right of way under the NPW (National Parks and Wildlife) Act is not required for or in respect of the temporary inundation of national park land resulting from the Warragamba Dam project*

There are 12 areas managed under the NPW act, adjoining the GBMA, which comprises of 165,000 hectares of land.<sup>12</sup> The Environmental Impact Assessment is yet to be completed, but clearly the government has made up its mind to push ahead with raising the dam wall. This has made a travesty out of the government's due process to conduct business. Policies, principles and procedures designed to be democratic to the people of NSW have clearly been violated. Any assessment of the alternatives to raising the dam as well as the environmental, social or economic impact, or adequate consultation with UNESCO has all been avoided.

Having a World Heritage listing affords international recognition and as such the NSW Government should be listening to UNESCO. Instead of stating their intentions to UNESCO, the organisation found out about the NSW Government's desire to raise the dam wall through third parties who were voicing their concerns. UNESCO stated that states should, *'ensure that the impacts from dams that could affect properties located upstream or downstream within the same river basin are rigorously assessed in order to avoid impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value'*.<sup>13</sup> To date the NSW government does not appear to have done anything 'rigorously' to assess the situation, other than to state they intend to increase the height of the dam wall. The impact of this on the GBMA will be ecologically and culturally devastating.

### **Conclusion:**

The emphasis for the GBMA should be one of protection, not destruction. The biodiversity and the Aboriginal sacred sites of the area are irreplaceable and once destroyed would result in a permanently changed landscape. Future development of the flood plane at the expense

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<sup>12</sup> Above n 1.

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO, *State of Conservation – Greater Blue Mountains Area (Australia)* 2019  
<<http://www.who.unesco.org/en/soc/38994>>

of a world heritage site is not only catastrophic, it is reckless. The GBMA is protected for its ecological and cultural value and this needs to be upheld by researching and implementing alternatives to raising the dam wall. Any increase in the height of the dam wall which causes 'temporary inundation' of flood waters should be avoided so that the environment and Aboriginal culture is preserved.

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