

**INQUIRY INTO RATIONALE FOR, AND IMPACTS OF,  
NEW DAMS AND OTHER WATER INFRASTRUCTURE IN  
NSW**

**Organisation:** NSW Farmers' Association

**Date Received:** 17 September 2020

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Branch: Upper Lachlan

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The Chair  
 PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 7 – PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT  
 Legislative Council, NSW Parliament  
 Sydney NSW

Honourable Chair,

**Re: Inquiry into the rationale for, and impacts of, new dams and other water infrastructure in NSW**

We recognise the importance of water security to life and livelihoods in our state. Indeed, it underpins our agricultural activities in the Upper Lachlan Shire, which in 2015/16, generated a total value AUD 120 million of agricultural output. The largest commodity produced was grass-fed livestock, which accounted for 64.7% of Upper Lachlan Shire's total agricultural output in value terms.

The NSW Farmers' Upper Lachlan Branch would like to express three major concerns relating to plans to increase the Wyangala Dam wall given that our members live and operate in the catchment area:

- Lack of evidence that raising the dam wall will significantly increase water for downstream use – at the time of writing, the current Wyangala Dam is just over half full after what has been an autumn and winter of reasonable rainfall. Local residents indicate that the dam has rarely been full since it was extended in 1971 and the Bureau of Meteorology indicates that the dam has been at capacity in only two of the past 10 years<sup>1</sup>. Given this situation, a benefit-cost study comparing the long-term benefits of spending AUD 650 million to raise the dam wall or spending significantly less money to reduce siltation (and simultaneously improve land and biodiversity management practices) to extend the useful life of the current dam is surely warranted. Some of the savings could also be used to upgrade access roads in the Shire. For example, the sealing of Reids Flat Road would enable increased use by tourists and freight through Bigga, providing a lifeline to the few remaining businesses in the town;
- Focusing on raising a dam wall alone will not solve pre-existing problems – the quality and productivity of agricultural land in the Shire is being significantly degraded due to the loss of topsoil and associated chronic erosion. This is not a new problem nor is it unique to our Shire. Investing taxpayer money in raising the Wyangala Dam wall without adequately addressing siltation is not a cost-efficient approach. The World Bank recognises that sedimentation poses a significant threat to the longevity, usefulness, and sustainable

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Meteorology. 2020. Water Reporting Summary – Lachlan Catchment. 1 September 2020. Available:

[http://www.bom.gov.au/water/nrtwreporting/documents/1\\_September\\_2020/NSW\\_Lachlan\\_1\\_September\\_2020.pdf](http://www.bom.gov.au/water/nrtwreporting/documents/1_September_2020/NSW_Lachlan_1_September_2020.pdf)

operations of water storage reservoirs.<sup>2</sup> The Lachlan Catchment Action Plan 2013-2023<sup>3</sup> detailed a laudable approach to improving catchment management. However, with the demise of the Catchment Management Authority, the Lachlan catchment is now spread across five Local Land Services with no cohesive plan in place; and

- Lack of respectful, consultative process – landowners directly impacted by this decision were not consulted prior to a public announcement that the project was ‘shovel ready’. Details of the proposal, an environmental impact study and benefit-cost analysis (including the impact on existing infrastructure and current land use practices) have not been made available for comment. This is not how we would expect a democratically elected government to behave and could be a case of misfeasance.

The NSW Farmers Upper Lachlan Branch respectfully requests that the NSW Government engage in good faith with the farmers and producers in our Shire in relation to both the current Wyangala Dam wall proposal and the implementation of an effective catchment-wide soil health program.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,

Robyn Alders, AO  
Chair, Upper Lachlan Branch, NSW Farmers

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<sup>2</sup> Annandale, George W., Gregory L. Morris, and Pravin Karki. 2016. Extending the Life of Reservoirs: Sustainable Sediment Management for Dams and Run-of-River Hydropower. Directions in Development. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-0838-8.

<sup>3</sup> Catchment Management Authority: Lachlan. 2013. NSW Government. Available: [https://archive.ils.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/495486/archive-lachlan-catchment-action-plan-2013-2023.pdf](https://archive.ils.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0009/495486/archive-lachlan-catchment-action-plan-2013-2023.pdf)